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# Laowai

## Contested Identity and Imagined Community among Shanghai's Expatriates

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# Abstract

Considering their significance to the globalised economy, expatriate communities have attracted relatively little scholarly scrutiny. Much has been written about non-Western migration to the West, but there has been little attention paid to population transfers in the opposite direction. Shanghai has a long historical and cultural association with the West and, thanks to China's continued economic growth, the city's Western expatriate population has more than tripled since 2001. This research utilises ethnographic methods to examine identity and community within Shanghai's expatriate population. Using data from participant-observation, as well as text gleaned from interviews and personal narrative, I document the construction, by expatriates, of small, tightly bounded networks of support as well as the broader imagined community of "Westernness" from which these fictive kinship groups were typically drawn. Analysing transmigrancy through a ritual lens, I argue that this imagined Western community is best understood as an expression of *communitas* and that expatriates are liminal figures themselves, stalled in the middle phase of the migration ritual. Indeed, expatriates frequently located themselves between China and the West, unable to become Chinese but also unwilling to be seen as just another tourist. Local Chinese constructions of self also position the Western Other on the periphery - entangling "whiteness" and Westernness with assumptions of class, cosmopolitanism and personal freedom. Walled compounds and private drivers allowed some expatriates to move easily from one comfortable enclave of Westernness to another, only engaging with the local Chinese Other touristically. However, many expatriates made deeper claims of local emplacement, stitching together patchwork cosmopolitan neighbourhoods out of scattered, often discontinuous local and expatriate spaces. These blended neighbourhood bubbles provided expatriates with a space for the performance of new, liminal, transnational identities - rooted in Shanghai but still comfortably Western.

# Acknowledgements

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# 1.0 - Introduction

Laowai, which literally means old-outsider, is a common but somewhat contested, colloquial term for non-Chinese foreigners. Among Shanghai's Western expatriates - or those Westerners who have relocated to China, primarily for employment or study - its intended meaning is sometimes debated. For some, the term carries negative connotations. However, the majority of expatriates I talked to viewed its use in more prosaic terms, as not inherently negative or positive, but simply an artefact of being in China, coloured by the intent of the user. Indeed, many expatriates repurposed laowai as a term of self-identification, utilising it to embrace their outsider status within China. In addition to recognising the term's contested nature, I also, therefore, view the word laowai itself and the disagreement surrounding its use as symbolic of the contested nature of expatriate identity more generally. The othering implied in its literal meaning, however gently intended, has deep structural implications for expatriate identity within China. For this reason, I have chosen to foreground the term in the title.

Considering their significance to the globalised economy, expatriate communities have attracted relatively little scholarly scrutiny. Much has been written about non-Western migration to the West, but there has been little attention paid to population transfers in the opposite direction. Due to its recent rapid economic growth, China has acquired a large community of expatriates, who have not, as yet, attracted significant ethnographic attention. Shanghai has a long historical and cultural association with the West and is still sometimes referred to as "the Paris of the East" or as China's "gateway to the West". Moreover, expatriate influence on the city's cultural and physical geography continues to be evident, in the upmarket gated communities marketed towards foreigners, in restaurant districts dominated by Western cuisines and in the slow colonisation of Shanghai's supermarkets by Western staples like breakfast cereals or cheese. Indeed, on sunny weekend afternoons, you might find it difficult to distinguish the cafe and bar streets of Hongqiao or the former French Concession from a leafy cosmopolitan suburb in Auckland, Paris or Portland. My sister and her husband lived in Shanghai for 3 years, from 2005 to 2007. It was their

experience of expatriation which led me to choose Shanghai's Western expatriate population as the subject of this ethnography.

Cultural, political and economic factors impact on identity construction to a significant extent. Because of this, the effect of expatriation on identity is not easily separated from the specific geographic and social context in which it occurs. Beginning in August 2011, I undertook a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai, documenting the effect of local social and environmental factors on Western expatriate identity within the city. Using data from participant-observation, as well as text gleaned from interviews and personal narrative, I examine the expatriate relationship to community, place and the local Chinese<sup>1</sup> Other. I also explore how these relationships contribute to the production of new transnational<sup>2</sup> expatriate identities. My primary research focus was on anglophone communities. However, in so far as they were also active in these communities, English-speaking expatriates from a variety of mainland European nations participated in the research as well. Shanghai International Studies University hosted me as a visiting researcher during my first year of fieldwork as well as providing me with academic and logistical support over this period. In December of 2013, I returned to Shanghai to live, and I have used the experience of living here to further contextualise data gathered during the initial period of my fieldwork.

In ethnographic writing - and in the travel narratives which proceeded and inspired the ethnographic project - arrival narratives have often been used to establish the writer's authority as the firsthand observer of a specified time and cultural context (Tyler 1986). By beginning their narrative with the subjective experience of crossing a boundary - this liminal moment of

- 
1. I use the term "local Chinese" here to differentiate Chinese citizens, living in Shanghai from ethnic Chinese who also claim some other national identity eg. American Chinese or Chinese New Zealanders. The terms Shanghainese (Shanghairen) has a more specific meaning, tied to family history and the Shanghainese language (Shanghaihua). As such it usually excludes the city's large population of internal migrants, the so-called waidiren - lit. person from outside.
  2. The transnational perspective on migrant identity is explained in the Methodology and Theory section (pp 10-25).

arrival - the writer necessarily assumes the position of a privileged observer, empowered by his or own presence and sense of difference to act as a mediator of that boundary, between Western and local or between self and Other.

In many respects, however, the boundary I crossed and the experience of crossing it actually defines my subject community. So, while I recognise that, by including parts my own narrative in this ethnography, I am privileging my voice over local Chinese voices, my focus here is not on describing local Chinese culture from the outside but on describing the expatriate experience of China reflexively, as an insider to that experience. Nor do I intend my own arrival narrative to be viewed as authoritative. I include it here as an addition to, and somewhat ironic comment on, the broad tradition of arrival narratives in Western depictions of China and in travel writing/ethnography more generally. I will defend my positioning within the ethnography more fully in the Methodology and Theory section (pp 10-25).

Before I had even boarded the plane to Shanghai I felt the first pangs of culture shock. While waiting in the departure lounge at Auckland Airport, I noticed, possibly for the first time in my life, that I was in a minority. Most of the other passengers were phenotypically east-Asian. Conversations in Chinese flowed over me and around me. The boarding announcements were given in Chinese first and then in English. Confronted by my own new otherness, I found myself wondering whether I might be making a mistake.

As we came in over Shanghai, the city was obscured by a thick blanket of smog. The pilot informed us it was 28° outside at 7 am, with a forecast high of 35°. Tail fin after tail fin, Air Lingus, China Southern, Singapore Airlines, parallaxed past my window as we taxied to a stop, and I found myself worrying about the list of things waiting to be accomplished once the fasten seat belt sign was turned off. On the strength of an internet advertisement, my email contact with the owner of an apartment in Xuhui and a phone conversation with one of the tenants I had agreed to pay a deposit sight-unseen. So, I was anxious about what I might find when I

got there. In order to phone my new landlady, I also needed to find a Chinese sim card. I had to trust that she had given me good directions and that the taxi driver would know where my new apartment was. More pressingly, though, I was worried that the customs officials would ask me something in Chinese and that I wouldn't be able to answer.

Thankfully the unsmiling customs official stamped my passport without comment and I soon found myself in the vast, nearly deserted, arrivals lounge, feeling very lost. On finding out that I wanted to buy a SIM card, one of the airport staff counter-intuitively directed me to a Hertz Rental Cars desk. Despite feeling that the faux-hawked teenager loitering behind the desk might be overcharging me, I paid the 150 RMB<sup>3</sup> he quoted then phoned my landlady. I told her I was on my way to the taxi stand. She said to call her back from the taxi and that she would meet me at my new apartment.

When I eventually found the taxi stand it was also almost empty. A Chinese family were the only ones ahead of me. The taxi dispatcher got up out of a wooden kitchen chair when he saw us approaching and mumbled into a walkie-talkie. A plastic flask of tea sat on the footpath next to the chair. Two taxis rumbled out of the underground taxi pool and pulled up next to the far end of the somewhat sooty cattle race we had queued up in. A little fuzzy from lack of sleep and unused to left-hand drive I attempted to get in through the driver's side door. The taxi driver looked at me like I'd lost my mind. I muttered "duibuqi",<sup>4</sup> and passed him a laminated card with my address on it in Chinese. Once we were on the road I called my landlady again and she told me she would probably be there before me.

We left the hotels, shipping companies and rental car depots - scattered accessories of all airports everywhere - behind us. The roofs of warehouses and low slung, liver-spotted apartment buildings, slipped by us like

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3. In August of 2011, this was around NZ\$28 or US\$24. Unless otherwise noted, currency conversions in the text are based on the exchange rate for 15th August 2011, which was the beginning of my first year in China

4. Sorry.

icebergs, two-thirds of their bulk hidden below the artificial horizon of the motorway. The occasional, lonely bit of farmland punctuated the industrial sprawl below. In the distance clusters of pink, impossibly tall and slender residential towers cut through the smog. Drivers, erratically trying to prove the shortest distance between two points is not a straight line, swerved in and out of traffic with little regard for safety and seemingly none for the law. My driver banged on the dashboard and shouted in Chinese every time we were cut off. As we got closer to the city centre, concrete and crumbling brick gave way to fake marble and glass. Sprawling malls and office buildings crowded in on either side. I nervously burned through the credit on my new SIM card, checking the GPS on my phone to make sure we were going in the right direction.

Eventually, though, we pulled onto a quiet suburban street in the heart of the former French Concession.<sup>5</sup> Metal gates and high brick and plaster walls faced the road, giving the whole block a cloistered looming uniformity. I dragged my luggage onto the curb and looked through the open gate at the peeling paint and apparent general disrepair of my new home.

Sweating up a storm in the now 30° weather and thinking that my landlady was already inside, I wrestled my bags up to the third-floor landing. With its green metal security grill and the Chinese New Year decorations on the door, I wondered at first if I had the right apartment. I had been told I would be sharing with a Belgian and a Canadian, but from the outside this apartment was as run-down and - to my eyes at least - foreign-seeming as the rest of the building. Not sure I was even at the right address, I knocked anyway. No answer. I remember thinking, as I dragged my luggage down the stairs again, that in hindsight it would have been better to have phoned my landlady from the curb.

She soon arrived and took me back up to the apartment. After showing me around, she had me sign the lease, gave me a key, an air conditioning

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5. Mainland China was never formally colonised, but, during the late Qing Dynasty, under the treaty port system, large pockets of “extra-territoriality” were established in Shanghai. My first apartment was located within one of these pockets - the former French Concession.

remote and a short lecture on conserving power. Within fifteen minutes she was gone again. Following a cold shower - it would be a few days before I discovered how to turn on the hot water - I changed clothes, then decided to search for something to drink. Around the corner from my apartment, I found a neighbourhood fruit stall, literally a hole in the wall of the compound next to mine. In addition to fruit they stocked bottled water, ice tea and soft drinks. I brought two-litre bottle of water, and drank about half of it on the way home as the temperature crept up to the mid-thirties.

Bicycles, scooters and taxis noticeably outnumbered private cars on the wide two-lane roads. The dusty, ozone taste of the air - like licking ash off a battery - the constant honking and distant sounds of construction, the frantic ballet of the traffic, all contributed to the alien quality of the place - its essential newness to me. The plane trees on either side of Xingguo Lu, formerly the Rue Paul Legendre, evoked the area's French semi-colonial past,<sup>6</sup> the leafy suburbs of Spielberg's Shanghai in *Empire of the Sun* or some orientalist Paris of the imagination. Across the street I saw a *bao'an*,<sup>7</sup> sweating in his navy blue uniform, standing outside the Radisson Hotel, with a walkie-talkie in one hand, ready to hail a taxi should any of the guests require one. Middle-aged ladies in baby blue coveralls clustered on the corner, leaning on bamboo brooms. An old man peddled past on a cargo tricycle calling out in Shanghainese for people to bring out their recyclables. It did not feel like home yet, but in the suburb and the city most associated with mainland China's collision with the West, I started to think it might have the makings of one.

## 1.1 - Historical and Demographic Context

Before outlining my methodology, I feel it is important to briefly discuss Shanghai's recent history with particular reference to the origin and development of contemporary expatriate settlement in Shanghai. Those readers unfamiliar with the deeper historical context may wish to read

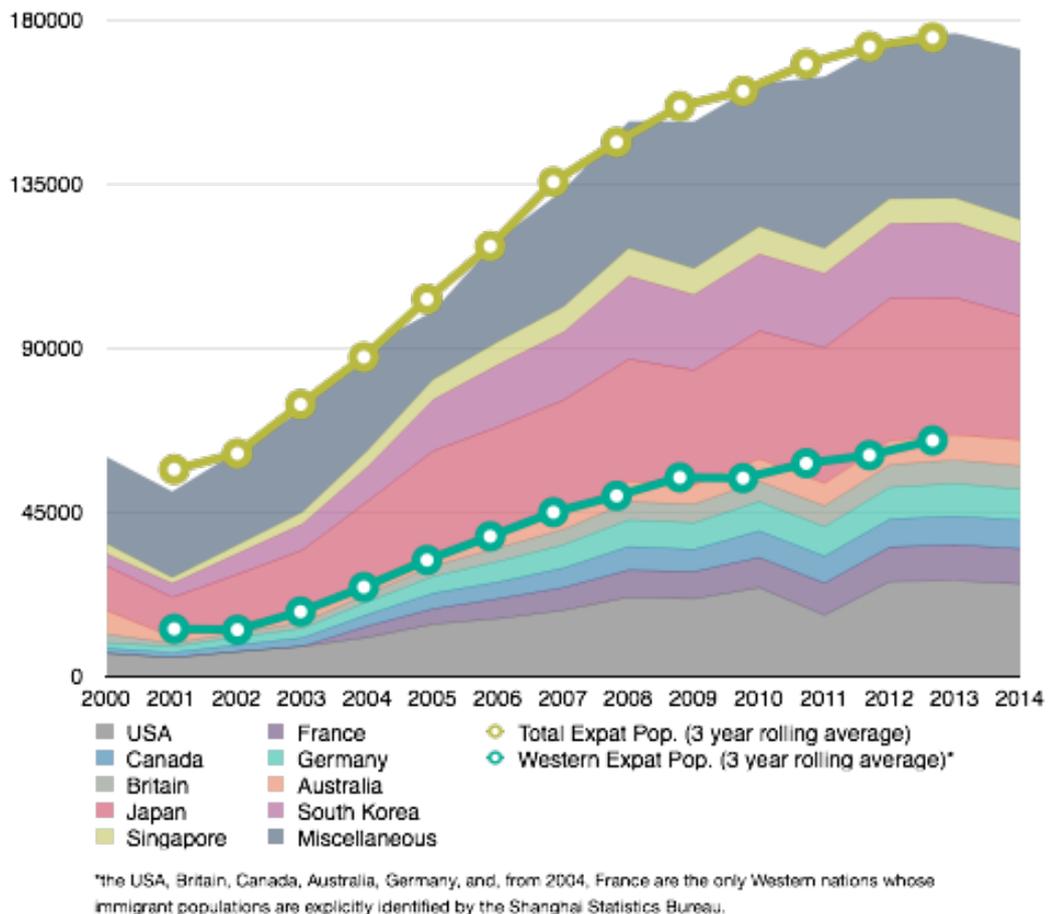
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6. China's experience of colonialism is more correctly referred to as "semi-colonial" and will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

7. Security Guard

Appendix A (pp 272-272), where Shanghai's semi-colonial and post-colonial history are discussed in more depth. I will conclude this section with a discussion of the demographic make-up of Shanghai's expatriate population as it exists now,

**Figure 1: Shanghai's Expatriate Pop. by Country (2000 - 2014)<sup>8</sup>**



In 1984, Shanghai and 13 other coastal cities were opened for overseas investment. Initially, the expatriate presence in Shanghai was limited to three Economic and Technological Development Zones in what were then the city's remote western suburbs. However, the influx of foreign investment and the growth of China's export economy attracted more and more people to Shanghai - both from within China and from other countries (Cheung 1996; Wong 1996). In 1993, the Chinese government approved a further Special Economic Zone for Shanghai, located in Pudong, on the

8. According to the Shanghai Statistics Bureau (SSB 2004b; SSB 2008; SSB 2011; SSB 2013; SSB 2015).

eastern bank of the Huang Pu. From a largely rural district which accounted for less than 10% of the city's population in 1993 but which constituted nearly half of its total area, Pudong very quickly grew into Shanghai's most populous district. In the Lujiazui financial subdistrict alone more than 50 new high-rises were constructed between 1993 and the end of 1996 (Jiao & Cai 1997; SSB 2004a). The Bund, Shanghai's iconic main street, an undeniable symbol of China's colonial past, was soon eclipsed by the looming, polythetic Pudong skyline growing up opposite it. Icons of colonial power, like the Custom House or the HSBC Building, were literally overshadowed by brightly lit projections of China's own rapidly growing state power.

After protracted negotiations, China entered the World Trade Organisation in 2001. As a condition of its entry, the Chinese government was required to institute further reforms, both to its economy and to its immigration law. As you can see in Figure 1, these changes contributed to rapid growth in Shanghai's expatriate population, from roughly eleven thousand Westerners living in the city in 2001 to more than five times that number by 2010.

According to the most recent Brookfield report on global relocation trends (2012), the average length of an expatriate assignment is 2 to 3 years, and although a number of expatriates I met had been in China for more than ten years, very few of them had permanent residency status. China introduced a permanent residency visa in 2004, but until very recently the criteria remained strict and Chinese Green Cards were rarely awarded (Yan & Zhou 2016).<sup>9</sup> Several expatriates I talked to were not even aware such a thing existed. As a consequence less than 1% of Shanghai's official expatriate population have permanent residency status (SSB 2015). A large number of expatriates I met were on short-term L or F class visas, which they needed to renew up to four times a year, frequently by leaving the mainland to reapply, and even the Z - or employment class - visa has

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9. New, more relaxed, requirements were announced in July of 2015. It is too early to tell what tangible effect these regulations will have on expatriate life.

to be renewed on a yearly basis.<sup>10</sup> In Hong Kong, by contrast, any person "not of Chinese nationality who [has] entered Hong Kong with valid travel documents, [and has] resided in Hong Kong for a...period of not less than seven years" (PRC 1990, s 3, ss 24.3) is eligible for permanent residency.

Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau figures for 2014 reveal that the Western nations with the largest number of citizens resident in the city were the USA, France, Germany, Canada and Britain, in descending order (See Fig. 1, p 7). Beyond official government statistics on visa type and nation-of-origin, reliable demographics are hard to come by. However, good general statistics do exist for the Chinese expatriate population as a whole. The Internations Expatriate Survey incorporates data from "a total of 14,272 expatriates... representing 174 nationalities and living in 191 different countries or overseas territories" (Internations 2016, p 4). According to their results, 46% of China's expatriates are women; the average age is 42 years old; incomes are spread evenly over a broad range of income categories and roughly two-thirds are in some form of relationship. The top three employment statuses were Employee/manager 43%; Teacher/academic/researcher 18% and Entrepreneur/Business Owner 12%. Being sent by an employer was the most popular reason for relocation, followed by finding a job in China (Internations 2016, pp 106-107).

In the absence of city-specific data, the China data from this survey provides a reasonable approximation of the demographic make-up of Shanghai's expatriate population. However, the overwhelming majority of expatriates I met during my four and a half years living and working in Shanghai were younger than 42. While it is possible that this reflects an unconscious bias of my own or an age-based bias within the communities I studied, it is worth noting that the same can not be said for my experience of other cities in China. In smaller cities such as Suzhou, Ningbo or Nanjing, middle-aged expatriates were much more visible. Shanghai's exciting night-life, the variety, quality and quantity of employment opportunities available as well as the ease of living there, make it an attractive

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10. Although this can be done without leaving Shanghai.

destination for young professionals<sup>11</sup> - especially when compared with these smaller cities - and this may account for the observed discrepancy.

## 1.2 - Methodology and Theory

Early discourses on migration focused on the perceived desirability of migrant communities abandoning their own cultures in favour of the host culture. In many parts of the world, the continuing ties of migrant communities to their home countries are still routinely framed as a "failure to assimilate". Contemporary migrant scholars increasingly recognise that, despite this pressure to assimilate, many migrant communities are strongly influenced by homeland ties or identities, or by social networks which extend across national boundaries (Levitt & Schiller 2004). According to this transnational perspective on migration studies, contestation between the host culture and the migrant's own is said to lead to the construction of new transnational identities, identities which "spill over the boundaries...of nation-states, thus exposing the very limits that these borders conjure" (Schultermandl & Toplu 2010, p 11).

The ethnographic project has always concerned itself with difference (Shore 1998, p 379). However, in constructing themselves as engaged in an objective "dialogue with the exotic" (Segalen cited in Forsdick 2000, pp 19-20), anthropologists have, until recently, paid very little attention to the reciprocal nature of exoticism or indeed of difference. It was only during the crisis of representation of the 1980s and 1990s that some anthropologists began to appreciate that in locating these differences they were saying as much about their cultures as they were about the subjects' own (Moore 1999, pp 5-9). Despite this realisation, and the significant minority of anthropologists who are now engaging with the developed world, anthropology remains largely focused on the exotic Other.

One of the difficulties in turning the apparatus of anthropology on its master is the uncontested nature of Western identity for Westerners. For

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11. The pull of Shanghai is so well understood that, when trying to fill vacancies in other towns, recruiters will often actively seek to deceive potential recruits about how close the job is to Shanghai.

those who self-identify as part of the majority, something it might be argued all majorities do without thinking, articulating their sense of that identity is likely to prove difficult. Several authors have, in fact, argued that the question “Who are we really?” is almost exclusively a feature of minority identity (Ardener 1987, p 44; Lie 2004, p 252). However, by focusing on the effects of the expatriate experience, I aim to document the construction of new transnational Western identities within the Shanghai context.

While ethnographies of Western expatriate communities are not unheard of, they remain a recent and developing field of inquiry. Although Crocombe (1968) and later Cohen (1977) both called for a greater engagement with Western transnational identity, there are few examples of ethnographic research into Western expatriate groups before the late 1990s and, even after this date, they remain relatively uncommon.

Anthropologist Anne Melke-Fechter's book-length work on Expatriates in Indonesia (2007a) is one of the most comprehensive ethnographies of privileged migration that I am aware of. Fechter notes that “notions of identity are always based on a notion of difference, the Other, or what lies beyond the boundaries” (p 27). She goes on to argue that these boundaries are given a new importance by the expatriate experience. The transition from the security of the majority to a situation where you are the foreigner - from unmarked to marked identity in other words - invites contestation and identity reinforcement. This leads to the construction of what Fechter calls “an expat bubble” (p 17), a cultural and often physical space for the performance of transnational identity (pp 103-127).

The idea of identity as something performed has its origin in Goffman's *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), but has since been more fully developed by Bauman and others (cf. Bauman & Briggs 1990; Pagliai & Farr 2000). In this context performance might best be defined as a deliberate and highly self-aware social display, which serves to highlight and reinforce identity. As we shall see, both Fechter's metaphor of the bubble and her use of performance theory can also be usefully applied to Shanghai's expatriate population. The concept of the bubble is, of course, widely

used within tourism (Judd 1999) and migration studies (Ackers & Stalford 2004). However, Fechter's use of the term is coloured by its use as a vernacular term by expatriates themselves (Fechter 2007a, p 167). My use of the term is also grounded in its vernacular use by Shanghai's expatriates. Rather than drawing on the idea of "the bubble" as it is employed in related disciplines, I prefer to let the participants define it themselves through their own usage of the term (see Chapter 5.0 pp 126-155).

Other expatriate communities that have been the subject of ethnographic research include U.S expatriates in the Costa Rican province of Guanacaste (Porter 2006) and Western expatriates in Dubai (Coles & Walsh 2010). Leonard's ethnography of expatriates in Hong Kong (2010) and Yeoh and Willis's very broad ethnography of Singaporean and British expatriates in China (2005) both present a sociological perspective on Western transmigrancy to China. Two ethnographers have written about Shanghai specifically, both also from a sociological perspective. During the research for this PhD, Phiona Stanley published a book length ethnography on English teachers in Shanghai, focusing primarily on education praxis and only dealing very briefly with the effect of expatriatism on identity (2012). James Farrer has also written extensively on foreigners living in Shanghai, predominantly looking at intercultural relationships, sex and sexuality. However, he has authored at least one paper looking more generally at expatriate identity in Shanghai and its relationship to place. Farrer utilises the notion of emplacement, or the sense of belonging in - or to - a place, to elaborate on this relationship (2010a).

A number of scholars have argued that the literature on privileged migration tends to focus on mobility and to "ignore the 'stickiness' of global cities as places of settlement" (Farrer 2010a, p 1212). According to Fechter, this emphasis on "global flows" deprivileges social boundaries as legitimate sites of inquiry. They are seen as ephemeral, appearing as "merely a zigzag or a dotted line" (Hannerz 2000, quoted in Fechter 2007a, p 25). In contrast to this, Meyer and Geschiere contend that "global flows actually appear to entice the construction of new boundaries as much as the reaffirmation of old ones" (1999, p 5). Strategies of emplacement and the

"stickiness" of Shanghai will go on to form an important part of my own discussions of expatriate identity.

Cosmopolitanism is also a common theme within the literature on privileged migration (Bauman 2001; Farrer 2010; Fechter 2007a). Some recent scholarship has called for re-orientating the notion of cosmopolitanism, away from "European, liberal, elitist ideas of world consciousness artificially imposed on [other cultures]" (Werbner 2008, p 1) and toward something rooted, feminist, vernacular and "centred on the global south" (Gilroy 2005, p 287; see also Werbner ed. 2008; Strand 2010; Bauman 2001; Cohen 1992).

For Shanghai's expatriates, however, the cosmopolitan values they espoused were drawn largely from the "liberal, elitist ideas of world consciousness" which the new cosmopolitan turn attempts to critique. As Strand and others have pointed out (2010; see also Baumann 2001), there is an embedded contradiction within the cosmopolitan ideal. Cosmopolitanism describes a utopia in which humanity belongs to a single community, a community in which difference is celebrated while simultaneously being erased. According to Strand, "Cosmopolitans" are seen as strangers nowhere in the world. But in fact, increasingly more people are now strangers no matter where in the world [they are]" (Strand 2010, p 139). These contradictions may, in fact, be impossible to resolve. For this reason, some scholars have argued for an "aspirational" (Eriksson & Karlsson 2012) or an "imagined" cosmopolitanism (Pollock et al 2000; Calhoun 2003). It is in this latter sense, of a cosmopolitan imaginary, that I employ the term here.

Calhoun suggests that "the 'imaginary' behind cosmopolitan social theory is rooted in the way elites participate in globalisation" (2003, p 542). It is an imagined global community, but one "signified by the icons of singular personhood" (Pollock et al 2000, p 581).

Anderson originally coined the concept of the imagined community to refer specifically to the nation-state, which he argued was,

imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of

even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

(Anderson 2006, p 6)

However, Anderson's own phrasing suggests that communities other than nation-states might also be imagined, if not in precisely the same way. For example, he suggests that before the advent of the nation-state certain groups understood they were connected to people they had never met, but that "these ties were once imagined particularistically - as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship" (p 6). In the chapters which follow, this broader definition of the imagined community plays an important role, - as it relates to the imagined cosmopolitan community of Pollock et al.(2000) but also in reference to imagined communities structured around shared regional or transnational identities such as Westerner or expatriate.

The term liminal has often been used by scholars to describe the transmigrant experience (Bhabha 1994; Kwok-Bun & Wai-Wan 2003; Sargent & Larchanché-Kim 2006; Tsuda 2003). In a very literal sense migration is a rite of passage. Indeed, the parallels between the act of transmigration and Van Gennep's three stages of ritual (1960) are not hard to see. Transmigrants must first exit their country of origin, separating themselves from a previous world. This process has both a social dimension - saying goodbye to friends and loved ones - and a legal one - the familiar rituals of customs and border control. Once past border-control, in the territorial nullity of the borderlands, transmigrants enter a liminal space betwixt and between discrete social, cultural and legal realities.

To an extent, they are then legally re-incorporated, once they arrive in the host nation. However, cultural and social re-incorporation may be significantly more challenging (cf. Monsutti 2007; Salter 2005). In fact, Bhabha and others have argued that for most transmigrants the liminal phase of migration persists throughout their stay in the host nation and that cultural liminality may be a central aspect of the migrant experience (Bhabha 1994; Aguilar 1999; Noussia & Lyons 2009).

Scholars have also frequently applied a ritual lens to the study of tourism. Graburn and others have argued that tourism is a kind of secular ritual, "in which the special occasions of leisure and travel stand in opposition to everyday life" (Graburn 2001, p 42; see also Graburn 1983; Andrews & Roberts eds. 2012; Kugelmass 1994; Hummon 1988; Lett 1983). According to this view, tourism should be viewed as a secular pilgrimage, whose participants are engaged in the search for a more authentic self via their engagement with an exotic, local Other (Graburn 1983. p 15).

As with other forms of transmigrancy, expatriatism involves the physical act of crossing a border, with the intent of working and living in the host-nation for an extended period. On the other hand, expatriatism is traditionally viewed as a temporary - albeit sometimes open-ended - state of being, a quality it shares with tourism. As we shall see, Shanghai's expatriates often also framed their engagement with the local Other as a search for authenticity or the exotic. In the following chapters, I argue that the ritual lens, as it is usually applied to tourism and other forms of transmigrancy, can also usefully be applied to Shanghai's expatriate population.

In her ethnography of expatriates in Indonesia Fechter identifies two distinct kinds of expatriates, "family expatriates" and "young professionals". She describes "family expatriates" as older executives who are incentivised to relocate via lucrative "expatriate packages" and who often bring their families with them. "Young professionals" on the other hand are workers on short contracts who are more interested in transitory experience than in constructing a home for themselves (2007a, p. 127-146).

In the course of this ethnography, I will argue that a similar division exists within Shanghai's expatriate population, although I intend to locate it somewhat differently. Instead of using the term "family expatriate", I prefer to use a much broader cover-term: corporate expatriate, meaning any corporate employee who is assigned to work in a country other than his or her country of residence usually for a limited period, often also incentivised by an "expatriate package".

The second group differs significantly from Fechter's notion of the "young professional". I refer to this group as postpats, borrowing the term from

Shanghai-based "postpat publishing house", HAL Publishing. When asked, Butler, one of the editors at HAL, defined postpat as,

The people that stayed longer than a few years. After the expats, you know what I mean? It's like a different breed of people. There was always those that come to another culture and end up staying and the truth is there's probably more people now staying than there used to be. I mean there's still people coming and going, coming and going, but I know more people now that have been here for more than five years, and they're not going anywhere. They're staying.

It is this intent to stay, or rather the lack of a specific timetable for leaving, which I have chosen to focus on as a key marker of postpat identity.<sup>12</sup> I favour this over the term "self-initiated expatriate" as it reflects this group's frequent framing of themselves as above and apart from corporate, short-term and newly arrived expatriates - "after the expats" as Butler describes them. As such, it is intended to describe a division within Shanghai's expatriate community that expatriates themselves recognise.

Claims by the members of this grouping, to post-national identity labels like Westerner or foreigner, have also informed my use of the term post-patriate.<sup>13</sup> Postpat participants were usually not settlers or immigrants in the classic sense. Even those who had been in China more than ten years typically viewed their stay in China as impermanent but open-ended. Considering the deeply emplaced - though still uncertain - nature of post-pat residency in Shanghai, the term temporary skilled migrant does not adequately describe them either. Although newly arrived and short-term expatriates are not the focus of this research and are not referenced often, I have treated them as a separate, third category for this reason. Few expatriates actively identify themselves using these labels. However, as mentioned above, they are often engaged in drawing similar distinctions

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12. A marker which now also applies to me.

13. Lit, *After the fatherland*.

amongst themselves, and as such these labels are intended as cover-terms only.

**Table 1: Interview Participants**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Dur of Stay</b>
<b>Angela</b>	Female	30s	UK	Business Owner	6-10 yrs
<b>Butler</b>	Male	40s	Canadian	Freelance English Teacher	6-10 yrs
<b>Harriet</b>	Female	30s	USA	Freelance Writer	6-10 yrs
<b>Bruce</b>	Male	40s	UK	NGO Director	10 yrs +
<b>Elaine</b>	Female	30s	USA	Trailing Spouse	10 yrs +
<b>Martin</b>	Male	20s	USA	English Teacher	1-5 yrs
<b>Siebe</b>	Male	20s	Belgian	Brand Manager	1-5 yrs
<b>Mark</b>	Male	40s	USA	Business Owner	10 yrs +
<b>Ben</b>	Male	30s	USA	Lawyer	1-5 yrs
<b>Susan</b>	Female	30s	USA	Charity Worker	1-5 yrs
<b>Sean</b>	Male	30s	New Zealand	Business Owner	10 yrs +
<b>Ingrid</b>	Female	20s	New Zealand	Investment Manager	1-5 yrs
<b>Bettina</b>	Female	50s	Italian-Aus	Trailing Spouse	5-10 yrs
<b>Karin</b>	Female	30s	Swiss-Can	Trailing Spouse	1-5 yrs
<b>Christy</b>	Female	30s	NZ	Trailing Spouse	1-5 yrs
<b>Faustine</b>	Female	40s	French	Trailing Spouse	1-5 yrs
<b>Anais</b>	Female	50s	French	Teacher	1-5 yrs
<b>Karen<sup>14</sup></b>	Female	30s	UK	Trailing Spouse	5-10 yrs
<b>Miller</b>	Male	30s	USA	Web Editor	5-10 yrs
<b>Bjorn</b>	Male	30s	Swedish	Quality Control Manager.	5-10 yrs
<b>Brigita</b>	Female	20s	Slovenian	Translator	1-5 yrs
<b>Zeke</b>	Male	20s	USA	Unknown	1-5 yrs
<b>Natalie</b>	Female	20s	US Virgin Is.	English Teacher	1-5 yrs
<b>Fei<sup>15</sup></b>	Female	20s	US-Chinese	English Teacher	5-10 yrs

Participant-observation is the central research method used in this ethnography. Of the authors cited above only Fechter (2007a) and Porter (2006) employed participant-observation in their research.<sup>16</sup> This may reflect the fact that the majority of ethnographers with an interest in priv-

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14. This group of 6 respondents were not interviewed individually, but participated in a focus group.

15. This group of 6 respondents also participated in a focus group, but instead of responding to a prepared set of questions, they were asked to recount personal narrative of their time in China.

16. Stanley refers to herself as a "participant-teacher-observer" (2012, p 8) which suggests she is applying some variant of participant-observation though she does not acknowledge this in her methodology section.

ileged migration have, thus far, either applied a geographic or a sociological understanding of ethnographic methodology to their research. Data gathered through participant-observation has been contextualised with text gleaned from focus group discussions, personal narrative and open-ended qualitative interviews. Most respondents were asked to comment on a variety of topics intended to determine the impact of expatriatism on identity, and what role if any privilege plays in this. The interview schedule evolved over time and some questions were only answered by a minority of respondents. Instead of responding to a prepared set of questions, six of the twenty-five respondents were asked to recount personal narratives of their time in China. The interviews were conducted in English. My continuing engagement with Shanghai, following my return to the city in December, 2014, has also proven invaluable allowing me to reflect on my findings and to test aspects of my analysis against the realities of expatriate life.

There is a growing acceptance in social research that “the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must...be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use” (Okely 1996, p 28). As a Westerner living in Shanghai, I was routinely confronted by many of the same pressures, and participated in many of the same activities, as the Western expatriates I went to China to study. This has made positioning myself along the participant-observer spectrum somewhat more complex, and probably more fluid than in a classic outsider ethnography. However, as Kirin Narayan argues: “Writing texts that mix lively narrative and rigorous analysis involves enacting hybridity, *regardless of our origins*” (1993, p. 682, emphasis added). In other words, the role of participant/observer positions the ethnographer both within the group and outside it - necessitating critical distance while requiring privileged access; inspiring wariness but striving for familiarity and trust. By exposing “the ethnographer’s own taken-for-granted understandings of the social world under scrutiny” (Van Maanen 1979, p 547) deep autobiographical description not only aims to approximate, for the reader, the experience of “being there” (Geertz 1988, p 6). When successful, it also draws them “into a collective experience in

which a version of truth is demonstrated for the collective to judge” (Butler 1997, p. 928). By reporting reflexively on my own experience - in what Michael Humphreys refers to as autoethnographic vignettes (2005) - I, therefore, hope to provide context for my shifting role in the research, as well as to compliment and comment on data gathered from other sources. It is certainly not my intention to privilege my voice over those of my participants, but rather to facilitate a dialogue between them, myself and the reader (Cruikshank 1994).

Although using internet forums or blogs to gather ethnographic data is a relatively new idea, it is rapidly gaining currency (cf. Kozinets 2009; Sade-Beck 2008). Even within the literature on privileged migration, this is not unknown. Fechter used forum posts, with some success, in her ethnography of Western expatriates living in Indonesia, for example (2007a). While she notes the views of some critics, who claim that the anonymity of the internet encourages the creation of radical discourses (cf. Zickmund 1997), Fechter argues that so long as the views expressed are seen as "intensified and magnified expressions of sentiments and beliefs" (2007a, p 15), and are backed up by actual fieldwork, the data itself can still be useful. With this in mind, I have also occasionally utilised data from online sources to complement data gathered in the field.

I began my research without any established network beyond my room-mates and the Western faculty members of Shanghai International Studies University. To address this, I began by focusing on the many open-to-the-public networking events organised by expatriate organisations in Shanghai (see Chapter 7, pp 190-223). Initially, I used expatriate online media and structured Google search queries to locate these organisations. However, I also met potential research participants by approaching them on the street. I would then contact them via email and ask them to meet with me informally, and without obligation, to discuss the research. Over the course of my fieldwork I had informal meetings like these with 43 prospective participants and collected the business cards of approximately twice that many. Several of those I met with suggested other groups whose meetings I should consider attending. During the first 6 months of my

research, I continued to solicit these recommendations, as well as to actively seek out other groups and events online.

Not being fluent in any language other than English, I tended to focus on groups or events where English was the common language. For example, I went to social drinks for the Australian Chamber of Commerce, the British Chamber of Commerce and Kiwi Expatriates Abroad, but I avoided going to the German or French equivalents, simply because, without a good grasp of the language, I would not be able to participate and my ability to observe would be fairly limited also.

I acknowledge that this effectively limits this ethnography to English-speaking expatriates. However, most of the communities I will discuss in this ethnography were highly multinational, typically including people from a variety of anglophone and non-anglophone countries. To exclude individuals who were born outside the anglosphere from this ethnography entirely would be to give a highly inaccurate picture of those communities. Moreover, Western expatriate life in Shanghai is, itself, somewhat biased in favour of English speakers. While many Western orientated businesses have English-speaking Chinese staff, Chinese speakers of other non-Asian languages are much less visible. It is also worth noting that, according to the Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau (SSB), in 2014, which is the most recent year for which any figures are available, nearly three-quarters of Western expatriates were from countries where English is the first language.

My initial intent was that interview participants would be drawn from both Western expatriate communities and the local Chinese host culture. Once I arrived, however, the size and complexity of the city as a fieldsite became impossible to ignore. Shanghai has a Western expatriate population as big as a mid-sized New Zealand city<sup>17</sup>, a daunting target on its own for eth-

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17. 64,877 expatriates from Germany, Britain, Canada, Australia, the USA and France are officially acknowledged as having been residents of Shanghai during 2014, the most recent year for which figures are available (SSB 2015). However, residents from other Western nations are not specifically identified in the dataset, and the short-term F Class visa, which a significant percentage of expatriates are in China on, is not included at all. More inclusive estimates suggest the figure is likely to be

nographic research. Demographically, the Chinese population of Shanghai is also exceptionally complex, with a tiny, extremely wealthy elite, a small but highly aspirant middle-class and a large underclass of migrant labourers and lower class Shanghainese. I soon realised that the language, cultural and economic barriers between myself and local Chinese were going to make it much more difficult for me to recruit them, or to solicit responses that represented their perspectives as reliably as I would have liked. Despite my feeling that the perspective of the host culture is often underrepresented in the ethnography of privileged migration, I therefore made the decision that interviewing local Chinese would also have to wait for follow-up research.

Instead, by drawing on previous scholarship, contextualised with data drawn from participant-observation and informal conversations with English-speaking Chinese, I hope to represent the perspective of the host culture in a more limited and general sense. My partner Fei has acted as a key interlocutor in this regard. Fei was born in Shanghai but spent much of her childhood and early adulthood in America. She visited Shanghai with her family regularly as a child and returned to live there full-time in 2009. She and I met in October of 2011 during the early stages of my fieldwork. Fei's childhood in America, her native grasp of English and her American citizenship certainly differentiate her from many local Chinese. Despite this, her continued relationship with her family in Shanghai and her cultural and linguistic background grant her an insider status that would be beyond the reach of most non-Chinese.

Although intimacy in field methods is no longer as big a taboo as it once was, a number of scholars have written critically about what happens when an ethnographic researcher's personal life intersects with the research (Irwin 2006; Oboler 1986; Gallmeier 1991; Snow, 1980). Comparable levels of income, education and mobility, as well as our similar socio-economic backgrounds, have meant that, for Fei and me, the kind of structural inequalities, for which intimate participant/ethnographer relation-

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significantly higher (cf. NatWest IPB 2012; Wong 2009).

ships are sometimes criticised (Bell 2002; Williams 2002), have not played a significant role in our relationship.<sup>18</sup> However, as Irwin has argued, beginning a romantic partnership during fieldwork comes with a number of other attendant problems, including defining spousal roles in the field and successfully navigating the end of the research (2006, p 164).

In the early stages of our relationship asking Fei to act as my bridge between China and the West seemed like a natural extension of the kinds of support spouses "should" offer one another. It took time for me to appreciate the degree to which she felt burdened by these requests. Having often been cast in the role of cultural and linguistic interpreter by her expatriate friends and co-workers, Fei did not always welcome me reminding her of her Otherness - or of my own Otherness within China. We eventually reached a nebulous understanding, with me being more selective about the kinds of questions I asked her and her indicating very clearly when she was not in the mood to answer them.

Irwin asserts that the most difficult aspect of intimate participant/ethnographer relationships is often navigating the end of the research (2006, pp 166-168). For Fei and me this certainly rings true. At the end of my fieldwork, Fei and I relocated to New Zealand, so that I could be closer to my University. This transition was very difficult for Fei and we consequently returned to China at the end of 2013, which was not an easy transition for me. This research has been a part of Fei's life for nearly as long as it has been a part of mine. When I met her in 2011 I was confident that I would be finished within two years. I have no doubt that continued pressure to be supportive and the uncertain, constantly advancing deadlines have added significantly to her stress in the five years since we met. In my view, this says more about the pressures doctoral study puts on relationships than it does about the specific pressures of spousal participation in ethnographic research. Indeed, given the all-consuming nature of PhD study, it's hard to see how I could have avoided involving her in the research to some degree and, while I have been careful not to over-priv-

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18. In fact, for most of my relationship with Fei, her income has exceeded mine.

ilege her views - taking care to support them with material from other sources - her contribution to the research has been invaluable.

Rather than conduct a large number of interviews then selecting a small subset of representative quotes, it was always my intention to only interview as many participants as I felt could realistically be featured within the text. In order that the broadest possible range of perspectives were represented, interview and focus group participants were, therefore, selected using maximum variation sampling. In maximum variation sampling participants are selected from the subject community for greatest variation across several categories (Patton 2002, p 235). Selection criteria initially included: gender; age; national, regional or ethnic affiliations and duration of residency. In practice, only those who had already expressed an interest in the research - either during the informal screening interview outlined above, or socially during the participant-observation process - were approached for interview, and not all of these agreed. Despite this, a wide variety of professions, nationalities, ages and durations of stay are included, as shown below.

Slightly more than 50% of the respondents were women. Of these, six were trailing spouses - having relocated to China in support of their husband, wife or de facto spouse's career. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I also spent some time as a participant-observer with a group of male trailing spouses. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts, I was unable to formally interview any representatives from this growing demographic. This reflects both the visibility of female trailing spouses within Shanghai's expatriate population and the fact that, in general, their schedules left them more available to be interviewed. Female trailing spouses are often referred to by other expatriates as *taitais*, a Chinese word meaning wife but which in this context is usually used to imply a life of privileged leisure. Although, some expatriates were comfortable using the term *taitai* to describe themselves, I have generally opted for what I feel is the more gender and value neutral term - trailing spouse - in describing this demographic.

Apart from the three respondents with hyphenated, binational identities - my partner Fei, Karin and Bettina - another three respondents also identified to some extent with one or more ethnicities. Ingrid's parents are German, and both Mark and Bruce self-identified as having Scottish ancestry. Attempts were made to recruit Westerners of non-European and non-Chinese descent, but, as the expatriate communities to which I was exposed were, for the most part, phenotypically white, opportunities to do so were rare. As we shall see local Chinese views of phenotypically "black" foreigners often differ radically from their views of "whiteness" (Section 4.2, pp 115-124). Understandably, returning and foreign-born Chinese also have a significantly different experience of expatriatism from phenotypically "white" Westerners. Because of these differences, an in-depth examination of either group falls largely outside the scope of this ethnography.

In order to provide a counter to my voice and to allow readers to form their own opinions about respondents' intended meanings, I've deliberately allowed substantial blocks of interview text to stand apart from my own commentary and analysis. From a critical perspective this might also be interpreted as an attempt at multi-vocality and, while the intention is definitely to reproduce the voices of interview participants as accurately as possible, I have reservations that any edited/non-collaborative text can be seen as truly multi-vocal. In so far as the sections of text used are selected by me, and are edited for fluency, an editorial voice is unavoidably present.

In a small number of cases - where a participant explicitly agreed to let me use their real name, where the risk to others privacy was small and where other details within the text might have compromised their anonymity anyway - I have identified participants directly. However, in order to protect the privacy of all participants I have generally opted to refer to those mentioned by a pseudonym, whether they requested one or not. Shanghai's expatriate population is so interconnected that, especially among the relatively small number of expatriates who have been in country more than 10 years, identifying one person can risk exposing the identity of several others.

All interview participants gave explicit written and informed consent to their involvement. Those who took part in participant-observation were informed orally of the reason for my presence and a level of group consent/oversight sought from those present. In all cases I was open and forthcoming about the nature of research, opportunities were given for participants to ask questions regarding their rights and an information sheet was made available to anyone who requested it. Interview participants were also asked to review a transcribed version of their responses and to make any corrections they deemed necessary.

This research project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. It was conducted in compliance both with that University's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (University of Waikato 2008) and with the code of ethics of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAA/NZ 1987).

## 2.0 - Community, Communitas

The phrase "expatriate community" is often used by expatriate organisations, or businesses targeting expatriates,<sup>19</sup> to describe their client-base. In reality Shanghai's expatriates occupied a fluid and ambiguous social space, marked by periodic departures as well as their own foreignness. Zygmunt Bauman has argued that "the 'bubble' in which the new cosmopolitan business and culture industry elite spend most of their time is...a community free zone" (2001, p 57). For Bauman's elites, who "live and work in a world made up of constant travel" (University of Virginia quoted in Bauman 2001, p 55), this may well be the case. However, very few of the expatriates I met fit neatly into this stereotype. Bauman defines the value of community as "safety in an insecure world" (Bauman 2001). By denying his extraterritorial community, he is therefore also negating any insecurities that they might experience due to their extraterritoriality and despite their apparent privilege.

Conversely, Bhabha argues that "the liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one" (Bhabha 2004, p 224). In other words, transmigration is characterised by moments of both accommodation - which Bhabha terms transitional - and resistance - which he frames as a translation of the home culture into new contexts. According to him, these "two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of migrant life." (Bhabha 1994, p 224). For Bhabha, Turner's concept of the threshold is as applicable to the macro level boundaries between cultures and nations as it is to the ritualised space between two states of being (ibid). Indeed Turner's own definition of liminality, as a space "betwixt and between established politico-jural structures" (Turner 1992, p 49) would seem to hint at the term's much wider utility. A number of other scholars have also borrowed from the anthropological language of ritual to

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19. Community Centre Shanghai, for example, calls itself "a non-profit that responds to the ever-changing needs of the expatriate community" (CCS 2011) while Active Kids Shanghai claims to offer "professionally coached recreational and competitive sports programs for children of the international community in Shanghai." (Active Kids n.d.)

describe transmigrant communities, framing them as liminal (Kwok-Bun & Wai-Wan 2003; Sargent & Larchanché-Kim 2006; Tsuda 2003).

In this chapter, I examine how expatriates use and define the communities they belong to. I then employ these constructions of community to further develop the notion of expatriate liminality.

## 2.1 - Friends from Distant Quarters

Is it not delightful to have friends coming from  
distant quarters?

(Confucius & Legge 1971, p 137)

Interview participants were asked a number of questions relating to social network formation. What follows is an examination of their responses, in which commonalities, both between individuals and across the cohort as a whole, are highlighted.

Although Shanghai is a city of 23 million people and the Western expatriate population has grown significantly in the last ten years, several expatriates I talked to compared expatriate Shanghai to a village or a small town. Sean, the managing director of a China Advisory Business, went so far as to describe it this way:

This is a small town. This is totally an integrity based environment, as, y'know, again, I'm sure it is everywhere. But, here it's even more acute because you make one mistake around here and everyone knows it. Especially in the circles I move in. Everyone knows it, and we know it very quickly.<sup>20</sup>

I frequently ran into people I knew unexpectedly at bars, at expatriate events or in the streets, and because of this, I too often found myself thinking of Shanghai's Western expatriate population as a single highly interconnected, discrete and bounded community. It is not uncommon to hear longer-term postpats claim that they know every Westerner who has been in Shanghai for more than a certain number of years. In these cir-

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20. Except where noted, quotes attributed to expatriates are drawn from qualitative interview. Quotes attributed to contexts other than interview have been reconstructed from field-notes.

cumstances, I would often ask if they knew one of the other long-term postpats I'd met. Nearly always their answer was a slightly disgruntled no. I wasn't immune from this either and occasionally caught myself assuming that two expatriates with shared interests, shared nationality or even shared sexuality, could be expected to know one another, only to ask and inevitably find out I was wrong.

Of course, the opposite also occurred. For example, I first met Sarah at an expat event, in her capacity as outreach manager for Lifeline Shanghai (LLS). I had already met, and would later also interview Angus, the Chairman of LLS and Marissa, his wife. Angus and Marissa both knew Scott, who was the Chairman of the local expatriate rugby club, the Hairy Crabs, with which Angus was heavily involved. Much later I found a story Sarah had written in a volume of short fiction published by HAL Publishing, an independent "postpat publishing house" run by some of my friends.

The fact that Sarah and I never encountered each other socially during my first year of fieldwork surprised me and is suggestive of a tendency common to Shanghai's expatriates, who, despite possessing an unusually large network of casual acquaintances, typically spent almost all their leisure time with a small exclusive group of close friends. Harriet, a freelance writer, called her closest friends the wolf-pack, describing them as,

a core group. There's a...I don't know...a prioritisation of each other, and almost needing permission to bring in new members. Which is quite secular compared to the more sort of open tribal experience in the US. The types of situations you've been - and the threat of them as well - cause a certain bond that wouldn't exist without that and Shanghai presents myriad ways and fears that make that happen very quickly. Almost for survival., like being very sick with the worst flu I've ever had in my life. I couldn't even get out of bed and calling a friend, who came and saved me. Carried me into the hospital, y'know? It's just something that makes you bond, as well as forgive for future conflicts. You also really value some of those friends, because of how long you've known them and the frequency with which friends leave. So those that are here for five years like me are up on a rung of importance

because most of them from back then have dropped off long ago. For my first year here I didn't have a group and then one formed, and this was quite international. There were two French, an American, a Swedish guy, a Canadian and then some British that came in and out and a couple of Taiwanese ladies that were also part of it. It had that feeling of, if you don't speak Chinese somebody can speak Chinese, or if you don't know about this law then somebody knows, if you need help with English I can help you with that. Like, 'I'm writing a resume I need help with English,' and then I'd be like, 'I can't speak Chinese and I got in a car accident.' No questions asked, immediate assistance. Knowing someone and having this, 'Hey, I just met you tonight, you're cool, but if you need anything you can call.' Then a lot of people moved away, finished jobs, got sick of Shanghai, hated it, whatever. That first one was the most painful I think, as that fell apart. Then feeling a sense of bonding with those that were left even more, and really feeling at the mercy of that.

Comparing them explicitly with friendships in the West, Harriet attributed a greater instrumentality to her closest Shanghai friendships. The relationship she describes, in which the "myriad fears and ways" faced by expatriates both inspire and necessitate stronger networks of support, echoes a perspective common among postpats.

Harriet made the connection between "the frequency with which friends leave" and her cautiousness in forming new relationships very explicitly when we first met, warning me that her early years in Shanghai had made her wary of "investing too much" in social ties with short-term expatriates, due to the inevitable social disruption when they left again. I noticed this caution in other postpats. Whenever I met longer-term postpats they were always friendly and supportive, but in a non-committal way, wary of, and sometimes overtly resistant to my attempts to move beyond casual acquaintanceship. Some of this is certainly attributable to my role as a researcher. On the other hand, newly-arrived expatriates generally did not exhibit the same reserve and were often extremely happy to include me in their social lives.

I asked Sean what effect the high turnover in Shanghai's Western expatriate population had on his choice of friends. He observed that,

it doesn't make me wary, because of my personality. But, it makes other people wary and I know that. I think certainly, some days you need to get away and not be in China. You need to surround yourself with friends that are, y'know, unconditional friends, and I tend to think you jell a lot faster in this environment. It was more acute fifteen years ago than it is now. Fifteen years ago you'd run into expats and they were very extreme by nature. Everyone was looking for something, running from something. Half of them were nuts. You meet a lot of very extreme individuals. You tend to bond a bit quicker because you don't have your family to fall back on. You don't have your three school mates. You don't have those structures. So you build your own, and I find that really exciting. They become your family. You have to share everything with them because you've got no one else to share it with. I think because of that you force yourself into some very close relationships, y'know? The irony of that is, having lived here fifteen years, I've been through, probably, three to five cycles of that, where there's a group of very tight mates and none of them are here any more. They all went away, and then there's another group. So, it's very transient, and you have to get used to that.

In contrast, Ben, a lawyer from the United States who had been in Shanghai a year, suggested transitoriness as one reason why Shanghai's expatriates were actually encouraged to meet new people:

Thought about it a lot and I think there's some specific Shanghai things, different from say Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, you have multi-generational families. Peoples tenure here tends to be short. I mean there are people who have been here for more than ten years, but I would say it's quite unusual to be here more than ten years. To be here more than twenty... we only know one family that's been here for more than twenty years. I think that's quite an unusual thing, and I would say the average is like three to five years. So there's a constant turnover. I look at our law firm. The people that went to Hong Kong that's where they're going to live,

whereas here most American companies, it's still considered a short-term rotational assignment and not a lifetime assignment.

Angela, a small business owner, also highlighted the transitoriness of Shanghai's expatriate population as significant:

Yeah, definitely. They become like family and then they leave. At the beginning, I made some really good friends and they happened to be here for about two, three years and I wasn't cautious about them. I was just like, let's be friends with everybody, and actually, I was lucky, y'know? All the guys are still here and all the girls have left. I miss them quite a lot. After every single year, people leave. A little kind of cage goes over your heart and you go, 'I don't want to go through this again.' It's actually really upsetting. I've got more friends leaving this summer and in October two of my really good friends are going to leave. As a consequence, I don't meet so many friends anymore. But, also, I think when you have a relationship with someone it can be incredibly intense because you rely on that person for a lot of things. If I was back home I'd very easily go and see my family or at least have them around to be like, 'stop being so ridiculous and get on with it,' So, yeah, I think it can be much more intense and you can get close to people quickly, but, at the same time you can also lose friends really quickly.

In conversation. Olivia, an art dealer from the UK, likened discouraging the attentions of a particularly persistent newcomer to fending off unwelcome romantic interest:

I met her at a party, and she seemed really lonely, so I gave her my cell phone number. We went out drinking one time, but then she wouldn't stop texting me. I just had to start ignoring her in the end. I mean she was nice and I felt guilty about it, but I just don't need any more friends at the moment. It was like getting rid of a stalker.

Harriet, also speaking informally, expanded on what she saw as the unusual openness and helpfulness of expatriates toward other Westerners:

You might have someone walk up to you, like at a party, and ask, 'Can you recommend a gynaecologist that speaks English,' and I'd say, 'Well I haven't been to one myself but I know someone who has. Let me just call her.' That would just never happen at a party in America.

Siebe, who I shared an apartment with during my first year in Shanghai, mentioned both his own caution when meeting new people and the contradictory openness of many expatriates toward other Westerners:

The very first time, of course, you know some people are moving and that leaves an empty space down there, so you try to fill it up again, but what you don't expect is that this happens every six months, right, and that's something I was not well prepared for. So yes in choosing friends you have those selective criteria, like, "Okay, you're a student. You're leaving in three months. It's been nice to spend some time with you. But, that's enough." You need a network here that you can count on in case something would happen or in case of need. That being said, when it comes to friends I don't think it's more important to have friends than it is to have friends anywhere else in the world. I just think it is important to have friends and that's it. It's very, very easy to make friends here, because the foreign crowd will look for each other and Chinese people who are open to foreigners, to welcome foreigners, are almost dying to become a friend. So, it is easier. However, it is not as easy as in your hometown to have something sustainable, for the very simple reason that most of these relations here in Shanghai are based on the short-term perspective. So, of course, it's easy to meet people and it's very easy to go out and to be friends, but it is not that easy to develop the friendship and to take it to another level and to build something deep and strong, because it takes time and this is a hub where people come and go.

This tension, between the need to make friends and the fear of losing them, came up frequently in my discussions with expatriates. Catherine, who is a stay-a-home-parent married to a Chinese citizen, compared her experience of making friends in China with going away to school:

I think one thing that happens here is you can quite often make very firm friendships. Maybe because everybody is starting from zero. It's a bit like going to boarding school or something together, and then when those people leave it can be a kind of sense of loss, so I guess if you were in a bubble and you had made these kind of friendships and those people move-on there can be all sorts of questions about identity and it can become quite difficult being here. Each time a really good friend leaves and you go through that sense of loss I kind of think to myself for a few days, I don't want to do this again, but then you do because that's life.

Ingrid, an investment advisor who had only been in China a short time when I interviewed her, also saw her friend making process in Shanghai as unusual:

I feel that here in Shanghai, you may sometimes feel a connection that's more fundamental and simple than in other areas. So, with some of my German friends, it's simply because we're all in the same boat. We all got here about the same time. We're kind of each other's life rafts in all of this, y'know? They're the people with which I can say, "What the hell's up with this? How do I do this? Why can't I do that? It took me two hours to buy a bottle of milk today." It's a very simple kind of connection. Some of the friends I have here, in a different context, we may never be friends. That's not to say that somehow I'm less matched to the friends I have here than I would be at home. But, in New Zealand, um, factors such as profession, age, gender, other background factors would be proportionately stronger and, therefore, would form blocks in me running into these kinds of people, y'know? Here, relatively speaking, those blocks are kind of eroded and so in many ways it's a nice thing that I'm meeting people and connecting and befriending people that I would not have as many natural opportunities to connect with at home.

Faustine, another stay-at-home-parent, explained that for her there was a distinction between these early connections, who she referred to as "trainers," and the friends she made later:

Here, when you arrive, friendships or social contacts are made very quickly because people need each other. You need someone to, ah...to discover, to adapt. It's like trainers at the beginning. Um, for me, I've been lucky. I found someone, who trained me for the Shanghai life and for the new life here. Then you can build real friendships with people. You like the same things and everything, and then you build the friendships, Here, all the people who are already here are already trained by someone else so they need...they know what you need to feel good. So it's like, to be helpful to each other. First it's helping each other and then we build friendship.

Elaine, a postpat who self-identifies as a taitai,<sup>21</sup> described similar differences between her choice of friends in China and her choice of friends back in the US. However, she attributed the difference specifically to the Chinese cultural context:

Walking down a Shanghai street you're never going to blend in. You're never part of the culture. Y'know I was in Europe over the summer last year and I was in France, people spoke to me in French, I was, y'know, in Amsterdam and people spoke to me in Dutch. Like, I could have blended in and that's never going to be the case in China, ever. So when you have friends regardless of whether they're Western or Chinese, it's important for me to be able to talk to them about that and have them understand. That's why I think my friends...the friends that I have in Shanghai are completely different and unique to friends I would have had in the US. It's because they're going through the same things. They're quick friendships in Shanghai and sometimes they're short and sweet. I mean, people leave after two or three years. Being here for 10 years I've seen quite a few friends leave, but I've made quite a few friends.

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21. As mentioned in the introduction, taitai is a Chinese word meaning wife, which is used colloquially by expatriates to refer to female trailing spouses.

Conversely, Katie, a teacher at an international school and veteran of several expatriate assignments, observed that unusual friendships were not a feature unique to expatriate Shanghai in her experience,

Being my third international assignment, I think you will meet many, many people along the way, and often you're kind of stuck together. Whether you like this person or not, or you have the same interests or not, you're just in the same neighborhood or you're in the same playgroup. You're friends with them, and I've found everywhere I've moved I've met a couple of people that I'll always keep in contact - where the families meet for vacations and things like that.

The sense of heightened instrumentality, attributed by expatriates to the connections they made in Shanghai, was frequently linked to practical as well as emotional concerns. Miller, a web content editor from the US, had an experience which demonstrates the utility, even the necessity, of these networks of support.

This is Miller's tale, told to me during a true Shanghai stories workshop that I co-hosted with the expatriate writers group HAL Publishing:

Miller - The first thing I remember is the traffic light, and it's blinking red, green, red, green, but it's in the middle of the intersection on the ground. It's laid out and there's shattered glass everywhere. I see the girl who I was seeing at the time sitting on a stoop outside of a convenience store. She's got a jacket over her, and there's someone sitting next to her. So I went into the convenience store and I bought two bottles of water, and I gave her another bottle of water. I'd been seeing her for maybe a week and a half or two weeks, and I said, "I'm sorry, what's your name again?" I knew something was wrong, but I didn't quite have it in...in my thought capacity at the time. I just knew that something bad had happened. So I called Bjorn, and he said, "Hey, Miller, you guys, ah...you guys coming back or something?" "Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah." He said, "Okay, you guys know how to get here?" "Yes?" and he hung up, and I knew that somehow, something had not gone right in that conversation. So, I called him back, and said, "Bjorn, I think something happened." He said,

"Are you okay?" I said, "I don't know" So, Bjorn says, "Where are you?!" "Um, I...I don't know?" So he said, 'Miller is there anyone around you?' and I said, "Yes." "Okay give them the phone." So, I gave the phone to the girl that I was seeing and she got on the phone with him and told him where we were.

At this point, Bjorn took over the telling of the story,

Bjorn - We were at Yuyintang<sup>22</sup> I believe? So, I get this call. I think it was actually three or four calls before you managed to explain yourself. When I finally understand that something's up I ran out of there. My ex would have been with me. We drive up to the intersection and actually it looks like a truck ran through the...posts and into a car. Into the side of a building even. It's just like metal and glass and...fuck, mayhem everywhere, and there's a big crowd, as always, just standing around staring. There's two police guys there interrogating these guys. Like actually standing around fucking questioning them. He's got blood coming out of his ear. I essentially told them to go fuck themselves. I asked them, "Have you called an ambulance?" I don't think they'd even thought of it. They wanted to try and clarify the situation first, with the two people that were seriously injured in a car crash. I told them to go fuck themselves and just put these guys in a taxi and off to the hospital. That's good Chinese police work right there. It pisses me off still today actually. Fucking morons.

In fact, expatriates are routinely advised that in an emergency they should "[enlist] help to get a taxi quickly [because] ambulance service is often slow, ambulance personnel are not trained to give medical attention and you're required to pay the driver in RMB for the service upon arrival at the hospital" (Lee 2010). Because of this, support during an emergency is a concern for many expatriates. If you also don't speak the language this concern can only be made more acute.

The nature of medical care in Shanghai also divides sharply along lines of culture, class and language. Several of the interview participants did not

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22. One of the oldest underground live music venues in Shanghai

have long-term travel insurance, but even for those Western expatriates who are able to afford insurance and/or international hospital rates, a medical emergency in China is unlikely to be as easily managed as it would be in the West. My sister Carlee had to have her appendix removed shortly after she first arrived in China. She and her husband took a taxi to the hospital, but the taxi driver accidentally let them off at the Chinese hospital across the road. Their Chinese was minimal at the time and Carlee found this - and the rundown appearance of the hospital - disconcerting. Fortunately, one of the staff, communicating through gesture and broken English, directed them across the road to the international hospital and Carlee's surgery was completed without further complications.

Expatriates who cannot afford an international hospital visit face long waits, large crowds, a confusing and sometimes inconsistent bureaucracy, and the likelihood that their physician will not speak English. Jane, who had been in Shanghai for more than 20 years, told me that if she ever wrote a memoir of her time in China the title would be, "The Man with the Key is Not Here." She related this to an incident during her early years in China, well before there were any international hospitals in Shanghai. Her son had cut himself on a rusty piece of metal and she wanted him to get a tetanus shot. When she got to the hospital the cabinet where the vaccines were kept was locked and she was told, "the man with the key is not here today." Although Shanghai has changed an astonishing amount in the last 20 years, Miller and Bjorn's experiences illustrate that a similar gap between the expectations of expatriates and the reality of life in China still persists.

Christy, a stay-at-home-parent and part time event promoter, related the importance of her Shanghai friendships to concerns surrounding her own health, but also the health of her family,

My husband and I have to always have this reference of who do you call at three in the morning. Everywhere you go you kind of need maybe one or two families who you know you can call at three in the morning. I've never had to call anyone at three in the morning but, I know if I were in Wellington...y'know, you just have that. Because you have the friends you

grew up with and you have your family. It's having that certain kind of security there and then you can relax. Because of the language issue a medical emergency here ...just the thought of it is more stressful than the same thing in America or Europe.

For newly arrived expatriates like Christy, linguistic and cultural alienation was an almost constant reminder of their outsider status. However, even very experienced postpats like Sean described their reliance on a close-knit group of Western peers as characteristic of the Shanghai expatriate experience.

In her interview, Bettina, a stay-at-home-parent with moderate Chinese language ability, recognised that, for her, this tendency to favour the support of other Westerners over her local Chinese peers could sometimes be counter-productive,

It's amazing how you would rather trust a foreigner that you don't know rather than a Chinese person that maybe you've known for a little while or who lives in the neighbourhood. You would sort of assume that they have the same mindset that you have, just from being foreigners, and that's not necessarily the case but it's just first instinct. Normally you need to build up a friendship before it's such a good friendship that you would suffer from losing it. Although, I did have one exception this year when I'd only met this friend for 6 months. It's been as heart-breaking as the long-term friends that have left. The thing with life in Shanghai is that the friends are not just your friends like they would be in your country. They do for you what normally your old time friends or your family does for you. It's support, y'know? Especially for the woman, if the women are the ones not working, because the husbands are away, working long hours, or away traveling and all that. So if you have medical emergencies...if you feel down, your friends do what your family or your old time family friends do in your home country. Your Shanghai experience after two or three close friends are gone changes, y'know? It is a different experience. Men have this business

and work thing that takes up most of their time. But for the wives it's different.

Another factor common to almost all interview participants was the recognition that the particular stressors of life in China, cultural, social and linguistic, made having a reliable group of close friends significantly more important than it would otherwise have been.

The first group of expatriates I got to know well had only been in the city a few weeks when I met them and, just as with Harriet's first group of friends, they were part of a much more diverse, fluid and inclusive group than the tighter more exclusive group I spent most of my spare time with during the latter half of my fieldwork.

I met Sally, Twila and Cecile at Shanghai Expat's Sunday Coffee Meeting. Shanghai Expat is an online community, primarily for Western, English-speaking expatriates but also used by local Chinese interested in meeting foreigners. The coffee meeting was an afternoon networking event organised on a weekly basis. It was hosted by "Bazaar by Lotus, a new concept Entertaining Food Town" - a Japanese owned gourmet supermarket in Xintiandi. I'd been the week before but it hadn't been very eventful. There were only six people there and I'd spent most of my time talking with Michael, the founder of Shanghai Expat. The following week started slowly as well, but by 3 pm a sizeable group of us had gathered, first clustered around tables in an open area between the Deli Counter and the coffee concession, and then in more of a circle as people continued to arrive and added their chairs to the assembly.

There was one Filipino-Chinese woman in the group, but apart from her, it was a thoroughly English-speaking, Western group, mostly from North America. Twila and I struck up a conversation because she had studied Anthropology at undergraduate level. Twila is English and was in China on a three-month English teaching internship. She had already hit it off with Sally, an American, who like me was in China doing research for her Ph.D, which gave her and me something to talk about. Unlike me, Sally's Ph.D was in Biochemistry. She was taking part in a joint research project between her university in America and a local Chinese institution. She

intended to be in Shanghai for 10 months. Cecile is an extremely well-travelled French Canadian who had just taken a job at a hospitality training school. Twila and Sally were both in their early to mid-twenties and Cecile was in her early forties. Twila had already made plans to go to another expatriate networking event that evening, near Tianzifang, which is about 15 minutes away on foot, and the three of us invited ourselves to accompany her.

Except for the West African jazz band tuning up on the stage, the bottom floor of the bar was deserted. We eventually found one of the service staff leaning against the door of the kitchen. He led us outside and indicated with gestures that we should try upstairs. In the upstairs bar, sitting around a large dark-wood table, we found a smaller but much more diverse mix of expatriates and Chinese than had been at the Shanghai Expat event. There were no Shanghainese, but there were a couple of women from Jiangsu and one, Melody, who was originally from Hunan Province. The group was facilitated by a German man called Anton, but there was also a Hungarian couple, a man from Belgium called Georg and a woman from Thailand called Janya. We talked, and after about an hour Anton suggested we all go somewhere else for dinner. The sense of connection within the group was powerful and immediate. People exchanged cell phone numbers in a rush and plans were made for the following week.

For the next few months myself, Twila, Sally, Cecile, Melody and occasionally Janya or Georg, spent a lot of time together, in various configurations. We regularly went to bars and restaurants together and Twila, Sally, Cecile and Melody all watched the 2011 Rugby World Cup final with me. Melody, being Chinese, would take the girls shopping and help them bargain. Like many expatriates, members of our group also put tremendous effort into replicating Western holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving. Twila and Sally were planning their Halloween costumes from their first meeting, and at one stage Sally was seriously considering hiring a commercial kitchen so that she could properly prepare a Thanksgiving meal for the rest of us. However, after Twila left in November the group began to drift apart.

I also moved on, finding another more established group to focus my research on, with whom I had some shared interests. I found out about HAL, an expatriate publishing company, the usual way I found things out in Shanghai, through a series of conversations with strangers. I met Mark on the Bund, Shanghai's iconic main street. Mark was staring out across the Huang Pu, looking melancholy, and, for whatever reason I decided to strike up a conversation with him. "It's amazing to think that most of that wasn't even there fifteen years ago," I said, pointing out at Pudong. "I know," he replied, "I was here. I watched it happen."

I asked him what he did and he replied with the same slightly bemused expression he would later employ in his interview, in which he told me,

It's hard to say because actually I have three companies. I have three revenue streams and there's no connection between them. One of them the clients are in America and I do some outsourcing for them. It's overnight graphic processing. Another one is a live entertainment company in Shanghai, the clients are mostly Chinese. Then another company is an American company. We're opening up the China market for them. They provide security authentication and marketing for whatever you want.

We talked for several minutes, exchanged cards and then I went home and emailed him to ask if we could meet again to discuss my research further. We met a few days later at a gallery he helped to promote and I told him if he thought of anything I might be interested in to please let me know. Weeks passed and then, shortly after I met Twila and Sally, I got an email from Mark inviting me to another gallery opening that an acquaintance of his was organising. I went along, and, while I was talking to the promoter about my research, she mentioned HAL as something I might want to check out.

Butler, one of the Editors at HAL, had been in Shanghai for six years, while Bjorn, the managing director had nine years China experience. At the time, Groupthink, their biweekly writers group, was held at an Alice in Wonderland themed bar called the Rabbit Hole in Jing'an. Butler and Bjorn had some guanxi with the bar-owners, and we would often have the

entire second floor entirely to ourselves. Between 8 and 20 writers from a variety of backgrounds attended the group, but only a small handful ever became regulars. We would sit in the overstuffed purple velvet chairs, read our work to each other, respond to criticism and give feedback about the work of others. Bjorn and Butler were always cordial and supportive to new faces, but after Groupthink they usually went off to some other Jing'an watering-hole with a few of the other postpats, while the newcomers and I went back to our respective homes. Unlike my experience with Twila and Sally, the general impression HAL gave was of a tight inner circle that, while not completely closed to new members, was also quite selective about who they actually allowed in.

In the literature on storytelling, it is commonly argued that shared narratives assist with group formation in a number of ways, by "fostering group support...ratifying group membership [and] conveying group values" (Norrick 1997, p 199; cf. Bauman 1971; Mankowski & Rappaport 1995). Expatriates also frequently employed stories to communicate a shared history and shared values and to differentiate more established members from newcomers or from occasional hangers-on. In the case of HAL, an organisation focused on the telling of stories, this connection was even more explicit. Stories involving current or departed HAL members were told and retold. The story of Miller's traffic accident, of bar fights past, "research trips" to brothels, or of the time one of the writers got HAL banned from the Shanghai Book Fair<sup>23</sup> grew in the retelling, becoming part of a shared mythology. Being familiar enough with the stories to participate in their retelling marked you as an insider. Being a character in one of them signalled this even more strongly.

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23. Angela, an English teacher from the US Virgin Islands and HAL's event manager, recalled the incident in her interview, "I'm like, 'Hey, I work with HAL literature. We would like to be part of your book fair. We're publishers. We do short stories, blah, blah, blah. Um, love to hear back from you.' So I get back, 'Hi Angela, this is Samantha, unfortunately, you can't be in our book fair because [the HAL writer in question] and I have met and he jokingly asked in Chinese if I was prostitute/escort. For this reason, I feel like he's a liability. Especially since we are being sponsored by a women's [clothing label].' So I had to send back, 'I'm really sorry. He tends to get drunk.'"

## 2.2 - Fictive Families, Imagined Communities

While expatriate privilege<sup>24</sup> may well mediate the stressors typically associated with transmigrancy,<sup>25</sup> for my interview participants, some insecurities are still clearly experienced as significant.

According to Carola & Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, "the presence of a healthy social support network has long been regarded as a key mediator of stress" (2010, p 339). They go on to argue that immigrants are especially reliant on effective networks to provide them with acceptance, emotional support, advice and tangible aid in their new homes (p 339). Ingrid, Faustine and Harriet all cited access to reliable advice from their peers as one reason why establishing or maintaining a local support network had been important to them in China.

Acceptance is also a concern for many expatriates, and is hinted at in the responses quoted above, through Elaine's frustration at not being able to blend in, as well as in a desire, expressed by several respondents, for "understanding," through shared experiences, or as a result of all being "in the same boat" - as Ingrid phrased it. Miller's traffic accident and Harriet's experience with the flu are both examples, albeit extreme ones, of the sort of tangible aid Shanghai's expatriates might require from, or provide to, their own networks of support. They are also examples of situations that are complicated by barriers of class, language, culture and distance for many of Shanghai's Western expatriates. Angela, Christy and Sean all implicitly recognised the problem of distance, noting that relatives and established networks of friends were much less accessible in China than they would have been back in the home country.

Bjorn's framing of the response of police to Miller's traffic accident as incompetent clearly carries with it expectations of what might constitute

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24. In the absence of significant input from local Chinese, a thorough unpacking of this topic falls outside the scope of this research. However, I attempt a brief overview in Section 8.3 (pp 251-261).

25. These are summarised in Section 4.1 (pp 91-115)

competence in that situation - calling an ambulance, for example, or administering basic first aid. However, in a city where ambulance crews do not administer first aid, and where traffic will not and often cannot make way for emergency vehicles, these essentially Western expectations, are literally out of place. Incidents like these, or the threat of incidents like these, cannot help but contribute to the insecurities which Bauman (2001), Carola & Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2010) and others suggest the experience of community remedies.

Tangible aid from family and close friends back in the home country is effectively limited to what can be sent by post, or by wire transfer, and their ability to offer emotional support or advice may also be limited by their understanding of the Chinese context. Elaine and Bruce both complained that, when talking to people in their home countries, they had to, in Elaine's words, "dumb down [their] stories about China, dumb down what we did, explain constantly that people don't wear Mao suits every day and yes there are televisions." Several authors have documented this disruption of traditional support networks within a variety of non-Western transmigrant communities, and the construction of informal networks to replace them (cf. Ahmed et al 2004; Walsh & Simonelli 1986; Metcalf 1982).

For most expatriates life was noticeably punctuated by the repatriation of friends. Departures were typically marked by a large shared meal. During my initial fieldwork, teppanyaki restaurant were the venue for these meals so often that it became kind of a cliché - "We're having a farewell get-together for John." "Let me guess. We're doing teppanyaki again."<sup>26</sup> Of the seven interview participants I asked, only two said Shanghai's transitoriness had no effect on their approach to new social ties, although both believed they had seen its effect on others.

Expatriates, both in interview and in casual conversation, often drew indirect parallels between the support of family members and the support provided by their new informal networks, while Angela and Sean described

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26. Tastes seemed to have become more varied since then.

a more direct equivalence. "They become [like/your] family," they both said. The formation of fictive kin groups in migrant communities has been documented by a number of scholars (Cruz 1998; Dill 1998; Ebaugh & Curry 2000; Horowitz 1985; Kim 2009; Sørensen 2005). Among Shanghai's expatriates, these networks were not usually formalised, or structured to resemble a traditional family. The use of kinship terms by expatriates to refer directly to others not related to them by blood was rare. On the other hand, indirect comparisons to kinship roles were commonplace and uncontroversial.

The notion of fictive kin has been criticised in recent years because it prioritises affinal and consanguineal kinship as "real," whereas some cultures do not make such distinctions (cf. Schneider 1984). Despite this, and the absence of formal kinship terms or structures, it is my belief that the idea of fictive family still has some utility here, even if only as a cover-term. As the responses of several interview participants indicate, these relationships often do "replicate many of the rights and obligations usually associated with close family ties" (Ebaugh & Curry 2000, p 189).

As I outlined in Section 1.2 (see pp 14-15), a number of tourism and migrant studies scholars have used a ritual lens to describe aspects of the transmigrant experience (Bhabha 1994; Aguilar 1999; Noussia & Lyons 2009; Graburn 2001; Andrews & Roberts eds. 2012; Kugelmass 1994; Hummon 1988; Lett 1983). In her ethnography of retirement migrants in Spain's Costa Del Sol, Caroline Oliver extends the concept of migrant liminality even further, suggesting the use of the term 'imagined communitas' to describe the de-emphasising of normally accepted class differences amongst and between her participants.

According to Oliver this social levelling "particularly manifests in social relationships, because the imagined communitas generates limitless potential intimate friendships, yet gives no means of assessing their trustworthiness" (2007a, p 129). The social levelling Oliver describes was also visible among Shanghai's expatriates, and will be discussed in later sections. However, the responses of a number of the interview participants were also suggestive of this levelling. Siebe and Angela both framed

themselves as more cautious about making friends but explained that when they did it often happened faster than it would in their home countries. Faustine, Elaine and Sean also described the process of making friends in China as unusually quick, while Harriet felt that it was more common for strangers to offer and/or ask for help in Shanghai than had been her experience in America. It should be noted, however, that this accelerated friend making did not usually extend to local Chinese. Indeed, most expatriates socialised almost exclusively with other Westerners, a point left largely unstated in the responses of interview participants.

It seems likely that Oliver's use of the term *imagined communitas* is a deliberate evocation of Anderson's concept of the 'Imagined Community' (1991) though she doesn't reference it directly in her paper. Anderson's concept has been extended by a number of scholars to include imagined transnational communities, or communities neither limited by national boundaries nor imagined as sovereign - "an occupational community, a community of believers in a new faith, of adherents to a youth style" (Hannerz 1993, p 387). It has also been used to refer to diaspora communities (cf. Kastoryano 2003; Shi 2005; Sökefeld 2006) and the ethnic imaginary of Latino identity in the United States (Mato 1998). Other scholars have suggested its applicability to regionalist identities, through imagined regional communities which are themselves transnational, such as the European Union (Giordano 2009) or the Asia Pacific Region (Ching 2000; cf. Cayton 2008; Berger 2002; Sidaway 2004). It is in this latter sense which I believe it is most applicable to Shanghai's expatriates, who typically situated themselves within broad imagined communities of Westernness.

In Shanghai, the problems of trustworthiness Oliver refers to are further complicated, but also partially resolved, by the constant departure of friends. The resulting caution, which several interview participants described, was most visible in the small social groups, within which most postpats spent their leisure time. Postpats also typically avoided pursuing friendship with anyone who was not planning on staying in China long-term. A common piece of folk wisdom among expatriates holds that the

first question a newly arrived expatriate asks when they meet you is "where are you from", whereas the first question a postpat will typically ask is "how long are you staying". Siebe described a similar process when he met someone new, "You have those selective criteria, like, 'Okay, you're a student. You're leaving in three months. It's been nice to spend some time with you, but, that's enough.'"

By investing the majority of their social capital in such carefully selected, small and tightly bounded, fictive families expatriates effectively limit the frequency with which they must confront the "feelings of loss" described by Karen and a number of other interview participants. In this way, the *communitas* of shared experience and the assumption of shared identities and values is managed, by some expatriates, through their experiences of loss. By focusing their social obligations on those they know will be around to reciprocate them, these postpats are actively engaged in an assessment of the trustworthiness of new ties. Sean's description of Shanghai as a "totally integrity based environment" also evokes the kind of gossip cells which Gluckman and others have argued are an "important part of gaining membership of any group" (1963, p 314; cf Haviland 1977; Van Vleet 2003).

In a social context where the disruption of expatriate networks of support is cyclical and expected - almost normative - it is easy to see how the permanent state of uneasy liminality which Bhabha describes might also be used to describe the expatriate experience of Shanghai. The levelling effect of *communitas* creates an environment in which forming social ties is simplified. The broad, loosely bounded, interconnected communities that are the result were both contained within, and fed by a wider imagined community of Westernness. I view this community as imagined because it was primarily constructed around a "regional" Western identity, whose transnational scope also means that "its members will never know most of their fellow-members." The experience of *communitas*, which I have argued was a feature of Shanghai's expatriate population, and "the limitless potential...friendships" that are its result, are a direct expression of this imagined transnational community.

Expatriates typically self-identified as Westerners and applied this identity to their Western friends and associates. Commonly they had a widely diverse fictive family, drawn from many different, mostly Western, national backgrounds. They also belonged to a wider imagined transnational community defined primarily by the shared experience of being a Westerner in China. Within the shifting, transitory support networks of Shanghai's expatriates this regional imaginary, and the sense of a common identity which it provides are a distinct advantage, providing expatriates with a broad, much less exclusive, secondary network of support from which to draw new fictive family members when established members depart.

## 3.0 - Self and Other

As suggested in the previous chapter, many expatriates maintained broad and fairly fluid networks of casual acquaintances, which were defined primarily around an imagined community of Westernness. In this chapter, I explore how this transnational Western identity is constructed, both by expatriates and by local Chinese, how these interdependent definitions reinforce one another and how this Western imaginary is linked to other terms, like expatriate, laowai, foreignness, and whiteness.

In her ethnography of Western expatriates in Indonesia, Fechter observes that in the process of expatriation "national identities became a significant resource for representations of self and Other" (2007a, p viii). According to her, the social lives of expatriates in Indonesia are dominated by organisations which are organised on national lines (2007a, p viii). As I go on to describe in Chapter 7 (pp 190-223), although there are a number of expatriate organisations in Shanghai, whose membership is defined along lines of nationality, there are also many organisations whose membership is open to expatriates of all nationalities. In addition, for those expatriates who belonged to them, expatriate networking and support organisations were typically either a way to make new acquaintances or a space for the enactment of existing networks of support. With a few exceptions, performances of national identity were rare and because most expatriates possessed fictive families drawn from a variety of national backgrounds, these performances were often also a transnational, cosmopolitan experience. I spent Christmas night 2011 with some Greek friends who served us traditional Grecian holiday fare like kalitsounia and sesame baklava. As mentioned on in an earlier section (p 40), in November of that year I watched the Rugby World Cup final with a woman from Britain, a Hungarian woman, an American, and a slightly conflicted French Canadian - all of whom were supporting the All Blacks.

Fechter sees cosmopolitan attitudes and a reliance on informal networks of support as particularly characteristic of what she calls "young profes-

sionals", young expatriates who are not on a package<sup>27</sup> and who came to Indonesia on their own, and contrasts them with "family expatriates" (2007a). Five of my interview participants came to Shanghai on an expatriate package. Despite this, when asked if there was anything they did to reinforce their sense of national identity, almost all the interview participants told me that they lacked the time, the opportunity and/or, most commonly, the inclination to regularly attend events or participate in organisations which were marketed towards a particular nationality. Several pointed to their ability to pursue friendships with people from a wide variety of nationalities and backgrounds as something which particularly attracted them to life in Shanghai. Admittedly the common language of this cosmopolitanism is English and it, therefore, may be somewhat less evident, or available, to those who are not from majority anglophone countries. Shanghai's French, German and Japanese communities certainly had a reputation for insularity among expatriates from other countries. However, given that I and many of the native English-speaking expatriates I met had close friends who were not from majority anglophone countries, Germany and France included, this is clearly not the case for everyone.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the corporate expatriates I most commonly encountered were serial expats, moving from one overseas assignment to the next, with little idea of when they might return to their home country. A number were married to people from countries other than the one they were born in and, because of this, the question of "where home is" was often a tricky one, for them and for their children. For these expatriates, as well as those who have made an open-ended commitment to life in China, a strong attachment to their home country is likely to be counter-productive.

In his own ethnography of Shanghai's expatriate population, James Farrer suggests that the desire for place leads many postpats to de-emphasize national affiliations in favour of "cosmopolitan citizenship", which he

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27. As explained in the introduction, an expatriate package is a set of benefits provided to corporate expatriates as compensation for the perceived hardship of an overseas assignment.

28. A third of the interview participants were not from majority English-speaking countries, including two from France.

describes as "an idealised image of a culturally cosmopolitan, locally integrated and economically successful immigrant entrepreneur" (2010a, p 1211). He goes on to document this transnational, cosmopolitan imaginary among his participants, describing it as a "Westernised and hybridised" space, enacted through narratives of cultural, social and economic citizenship (ibid, pp 1225-1226). Globalisation scholar, Daniel Mato, In his examination of Latina/Latino identity in the US, argues that transnational imaginaries,

both express feelings and build meaning. The circulation of these representations and their appropriation by diverse social agents take part in larger social processes of both visualising and developing a transnational community.

(1998, p 600)

Others have argued that the notion of the Oriental Other arose alongside the Western self, and was the product of the West's need for self-definition (Said 1993). Comparable relationships have also been suggested between the "White subject" and the "Non-White Other" (Wright 2004) and between primitiveness and modernity (Torgovnick 1991). Expatriation challenges these discourses of "white" Western dominance, by exposing expatriates to alternative, co-imagined and co-produced definitions of self and Other. It is with an examination of these, local Chinese constructions of Westerners and the West, that I begin my unpacking of expatriate identity in Shanghai.

### **3.1 - Laowai Style**

Given the contested nature of the term "Western" - and the fluid and negotiated nature of identity more generally - local Chinese constructions of foreignness or of the Western Other, are certainly an important facet of expatriate Identity. Using examples drawn from Chinese online media, the news media and the literature, as well as from my own participant-observation, this section examines these constructions in more detail,

The terms expatriate, laowai and foreigner were often used interchangeably with Westerner by expatriates as markers of collective identity. In a column for the Shanghai-based New Zealand expatriate publication

Strewth, Dan Smith observes that in China "your foreign features bestow on you some magical abilities" (2012, p 2). He then goes on to identify the - alleged - inability of Chinese locals to differentiate between "the White man shuffle" and John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever as one of these "superhuman feats of Laowai-ness" (ibid). One regular contributor to the *ShanghaiExpat* discussion forums posted a thread in the Dating and Relationship section, asking, "Based on my 1 [year] living experience in [Shanghai] as a white female, I'd say it's a tough place for Western girls to meet someone...Girls: what do you think?" (vol07 2009). In a blog post entitled "The Laowai Death Stare", another expatriate writes,

I've experienced it in remote corners of the country, where people seem to think they're the first and only white person ever to visit China...I don't understand why you'd be surprised and upset to see other foreigners in amongst the 80,000 or so people wandering round the Forbidden City.

(Steve 2011)

This link, between foreignness, whiteness and Westernness in the popular discourse of expatriates, is also present in the discourse of local Chinese regarding Westerners. In a popular posting on the Chinese discussion forum Tianya,<sup>29</sup> one Chinese man writes,

In the West, young people start dating and losing their virginity at around 14 years old, but for many in China, it is 20 years old or even later, so first the starting point is already different. Laowai have 10 more years of experience on Chinese men.

(quoted by Rensi 2013)

Shanghai has significant Japanese and Korean communities, and a small, but growing population of expatriates from African nations. However, these groups are categorically separate from "white" Westerners in the local Chinese imagination. According to my partner Fei, the term laowai, which literally means "old outsider" was used by her local Chinese family

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29. Translated from Chinese by *Chinasmack*, a website specialising in Chinese social media commentary

and friends to refer, almost exclusively to phenotypically "white"<sup>30</sup> Westerners. Sociologist James Farrer makes a similar point, in his ethnography of cross-cultural sex and sexuality in Shanghai, arguing that local Chinese rarely use the Chinese words for "white" or "Western" to describe foreigners. He implies that these terms are often redundant because the word *laowai*, or its more formal alternative *waiguoren*,<sup>31</sup> already connote both "whiteness" and Westernness for many local Chinese (2010b, p 79).

It seems likely that this link between whiteness and the West, or what some scholars call the "normativity of whiteness" (Aveling 2004; Haggis 2004), is able to persist as a facet of expatriate identity, because "white" men remain the dominant image of Westernness within the world as a whole and within China in particular. Instead of the contextually unmarked term for foreigner -*laowai* - local Chinese commonly refer to anyone they consider "black" by the marked terms *laohei* - old black - or *heiren* - black person. While still marked as foreign, they are, unlike "white" expatriates, primarily identified by their phenotype, a marginal category within an already marginal group.

Just as whiteness is associated with the West and cosmopolitan values, for many local Chinese there remains a strong association between "blackness", Africa, backwardness and danger. Indeed, for many "black" expatriates, the experience of trying to convince local Chinese people that they were not, in fact, from Africa, was exasperatingly common. In their video "Being Black in China" the sketch comedy group Mamahuhu makes this point explicitly:

In China, white Americans have no boundaries  
when claiming their nationality. But black  
people are often thought to hail from Africa.

(Mamahuhu 2015)

On *ShanghaiExpat*, in a thread on "Being Black in China", Zak101 describes how students reacted to their first lesson with his newly-arrived

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30. From this point "white" in scare quotes refers to phenotypically "white". Similarly "black" in scare quotes refers to phenotypic blackness.

31. Person from a foreign country. Foreigner.

African-American colleague: "Of course, the kids were terrified when he walked into the room. [There were] screams of fear" (2009).

Fei related a similar conversation she had with some of her local Chinese students:

One of them asked me if there were black people in my hometown in America. When I said that, 'yes, sure there were,' she asked me if I was afraid to live there. Another time I asked my students whether they would ever date a black person. Most of them said they wouldn't, and when I asked them why they told me black people were all violent criminals.

Kevin, a "white" English Teacher from Australia, described attracting similar levels of unwanted attention while showing an Australian Aboriginal friend of his - who was in China as a tourist - around some parts of Shanghai. "It was all a bit full on," he told me, during another friend's farewell celebration, "People started pointing and jostling us. I was embarrassed for them. I felt like I had to apologise on behalf of China or something."

Sinologist Barry Sautmann argues that the first-hand experience of local Chinese is unlikely to be a basis for their stereotypical views of "black" people, with whom he alleges most local Chinese have little or no direct contact (1992, p 435). Contemporary first-hand accounts of what it is like to be "black" in China, certainly suggest that this is still the case in many parts of the country. In an auto-ethnography of her experiences as an African American tourist in China, Coleman writes about an experience she had in a market in Xian,

I ask our guide, Ting. She...opts to plead ignorance, even as several dozen people begin to press in around us very clearly yelling something, something that is not in my Chinese-English dictionary or part of my limited Mandarin vocabulary. A few dozen women walk behind me, and then reach around to my face to run their fingers quickly across my cheek or to give a quick pull of the tips of my long dread-loc'd [sic] hair. After this first, daring wave of curious women examine my Black body, more, and more, and more women rush up, reaching out in the hopes of doing the same—touching and pulling.

(2009, p 6)

The emergence of significant communities of African migrants in Guangzhou (Porzuki 2012) and other Chinese cities has undoubtedly made "blackness" more visible within those regions and throughout China as a whole. Far from eroding stereotypes of "blackness", the coverage of these communities in the Chinese news media tends to reinforce them. The African migrant community in Guangzhou, which Porzuki characterises as "a thriving African neighbourhood" (2012), is referred to locally and in the Chinese media as Qiaokeli Cheng, or "Chocolate City" (Pan 2008). Many of its inhabitants are in China illegally, and this has led to sporadic clashes with police (Porzuki 2012). In 2010, a Nigerian man was the first foreigner to receive the death penalty for drug trafficking. During my stay in China, this community again received widespread attention when African migrants clashed with Guangzhou police over the death of another Nigerian man while in police custody (Beech 2012). The reaction to this later incident in Chinese social media was revealing. Commenting on an article entitled "Foreign nationals assemble in Guangzhou following death of male foreigner in police custody" a *NetEase* user from Shanghai commented, "So polite putting it as 'male foreigner.' Why not just be direct and say African black?" (quoted by Fauna 2012). Another *NetEase* user from Hebei suggested,

Quickly drive out these black devils from China,  
we don't welcome black devils here!! Black  
devils are hidden dangers upon society, rape,  
robbery, smuggling, AIDS... What use is allow-  
ing these black devils to stay in China?

(quoted by Fauna 2012)

Guangdong's proximity to Hong Kong and Macau has long given it an association with smuggling and criminality in the Chinese cultural imagination (cf. Ap 2011), and the presence of such a large population of undocumented African migrants within the province may also reinforce Chinese stereotypes. Fei recounted a conversation with one Nigerian man, living in Shanghai, who told her that both expatriates and local Chinese often wrongly assumed he was a drug dealer, based solely on phenotype. Interestingly I also occasionally encountered this view from expatriates.

On hearing that a friend of mine had met a "black" man at a Shanghai nightclub and gone home with him, only to end up being aggressively stalked by both him and the nightclub owner - who was also "black" - one "white" expat smiled at me knowingly and said, "Were they Nigerians?" When I went to Hong Kong to renew my visa, another "white" expatriate warned me to watch out for Nigerian men asking me "to carry a suitcase across the border for them."

Sautmann describes the stereotypical view of many Chinese towards "black" people as related to the portrayal of African nations in Chinese news media as "destitute, ignorant and unstable" (1994, p 435). Additionally, he points to the exposure of local Chinese to depictions of "blackness" in Western film and television as another contributing factor (p 435). Whether accessed on the internet, via Chinese video sharing sites like Tudou, through the popular and broadly affordable market for pirated DVDs, or "legitimately" at the cinema, these depictions of "black bodies as dangerous bodies" (Gormley 2005, p 126) are much more accessible in today's China than they were in 1994 when Sautmann wrote his article. Coleman also addressed this in her autoethnography,

RC: "Qin, we've got to know. Everywhere, we've been kinda the centre of attention. People taking our pictures...We are kinda getting more attention than most foreigners. Is there an understanding of Black...?"

Qin [suddenly interrupting]: "Like Barbershop!"

RC: "What???"

Qin: "Black. Like Ice Cube. Like "Barbershop." [Plainly] Um hmm. But you were different with that man in the restaurant. He didn't expect you to be like that." Robin: "Wait! You mean to tell me that what he knows about Black folks is from movies like "Barbershop!?"

Qin: [Rather matter of fact] "It's very popular here."

(Coleman 2009, p 14)

Beyond these, more recent, influences, Sautmann argues that "blackness" is historically linked, within Chinese culture, to rurality and the peasant class, whom many Chinese frame as "dark and backwards" (1994, p 435). This is further complicated by what Chinese cultural critic Shu-mei Shih,

describes as the long association between slavery and "blackness" in the Han Chinese imaginary (2013, p 156). Even on the hottest summer day near my apartment in Shanghai, it is not unusual to see local Chinese women riding down Huashan Lu on their scooters, completely shrouded in a broad-brimmed hat, long pants and a long-sleeved jacket to protect themselves from the sun. Often even their faces are covered with a mask and sunglasses or a tinted visor. After returning from a holiday in the Philippines, my partner Fei had several students comment on her tan. "You're so dark, you look like a farmer," they told her.

In contrast "whiteness" carries many positive connotations for local Chinese, and this has led to the commodification of "whiteness" by the Chinese advertising industry. Even as recently as five years ago, it was not unusual for Chinese advertising scouts to approach "white" expatriates in the street and ask them if they would consider being in a commercial. My sister Carlee was asked to model while she was in Shanghai, and a number of postpats also testified to how common these encounters were when they first arrived (cf. dr3x320 2007). Several also told me that "that sort of thing doesn't happen as much now" - the population of professional "white" Western models in Shanghai having grown to satisfy the demand. Even during my first year in China, however, Twila, a TESOL teacher from the UK, was asked if she would model for a local Chinese co-worker, who had a side-business as an online clothing retailer.

I often heard recently arrived expatriates voice their surprise and occasional discomfort at the overwhelming presence of "white faces" in Chinese advertising. In one advertisement for Chaumet Jewellery, seen on the Shanghai metro, a "white" woman, smiling flirtatiously cradles her bare chest, her bed-hair pushed back off her face with a tiara (see Plate 1, p 67). There is an implied equivalence between the sexual availability of the model and the prestige associated with brand name jewellery in this image, and its suggestion, that the former can easily be exchanged for the later, is a clear example of what Johansson calls "the fetish of the Western woman in Chinese advertising"<sup>32</sup> (1999). According to him, through advert-

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32. Johansson's phrasing here also highlights the unmarked nature of "whiteness"

isements like this, "the Western female body is made into a stereotype of strength, sexuality, and promiscuity that can be consumed and cannibalised without any fear of losing belief in the traditional virtues of Chinese women" (1999, p 382). Johansson's argument exposes an underlying tension in Chinese depictions of "whiteness", the Chinese relationship to Westernness and to its own economic reform more generally. By its very nature, advertising is an aspirational medium, but when it is also used to promote the sexualised values of commodity fetishism - values which contrast sharply with the "traditional", "civilised" values of Chinese culture - disentangling desire from fear, or identity from difference, becomes increasingly complex.

Nor is it only "white" women who are used by Chinese advertisers to mediate this gap. In an advertisement for Chinese clothing label JuStyle, a group of "white" teenagers, sneer sullenly at the Camera, (Plate 2, p 67). Their puffer jackets - a style that was very popular during the first winter I was in Shanghai, and which originates with US hip-hop culture - are open, exposing the bare chests of the men, and the shoulders and midriffs of the women. The men are posed in a way that would be called camp in the West, and the women offer their own - unnatural and stiff - versions of bad-girl sexuality. One of the men rests his head on the chest of an implicitly topless woman. The overall impression is of a poorly styled "white" pop group from the 1980s. It seems likely that the Chinese advertisers were trying to evoke exactly the same sanitised, "whitened" version of African-American, urban, hip-hop sexuality that "white" western boy-bands have historically also attempted with their styling. This appropriation of African American popular culture is certainly not new, or unique to the Chinese context (Verney 2003, p 59). What is noteworthy is the use of white models as an acceptable proxy for "blackness" or "rebelliousness" in a culture which still expects rigid conformity from its youth and typically views "black" foreigners with deep antipathy. Johansson argues that depictions

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within Western Identity. He asks, "If Caucasian women in ads represent the West, the interesting question is not only what kind of 'West' they represent, but how they represent the West." (1999, p 378)

like these allow advertisers to engage with the changing nature of Chinese identity, without explicitly contradicting its established values. Because young "white" Westerners are already seen to "embody an animalistic sexuality - ruled by their passions and desires" (Johansson 1999, p 385), they are an acceptable expression of the conflicted aspirations of many Chinese towards the West, where using the image of a young Chinese person would not be.

"White" Westerners are also used in Chinese advertising to evoke success, wealth and prestige. In an advertisement for a luxury apartment development in Xuhui, a "white" woman is shown being offered coffee service by an elderly "white" man in the classic uniform of a butler (Plate 3, p 68). In English and Chinese, the caption of the advertisement reads "A Setting of Great Prestige." In an advertisement for another real estate development, this time in the neighbouring district of Jing'an, a "white" Western businessman walks purposefully through the foreground of the picture, clutching a briefcase. In the middle ground, a group of "white" men and women conclude a business deal with a phenotypically "east-Asian" man. "White" and phenotypically "east-Asian" shoppers walk down a busy shopping street, past a cafe, prominently featured in the middle ground. As both of these billboards were located in neighbourhoods frequented by Westerners it might be argued that local Chinese were not the primary target of these advertisements. However, in their study of Chinese consumer readings of global and local advertising appeals, Zhou & Belk conclude that such Western "global" depictions do carry aspirational value for Chinese consumers by acting as surrogates for "status, cosmopolitanism, excitement, modernity, quality, technology, and beauty" (2004, p 71). They represent what anthropologist Louise Schein has called an imagined cosmopolitanism, in which "desire...is in distinct ways about overcoming spatial constraint, about acquiring worldliness through engagement, in whatever form, with the world's goods and lifestyles" (1999 p 360).

Johansson's positioning of "white" Westerners as mediators of this imagined cosmopolitanism parallels the scholarship of Chih-yu Shih, a China Studies scholar, who argues that Western notions of an Other - as distinct

from the self - contradict the Chinese epistemological concept of "all under heaven". According to him, "there is no such concept as 'Other' in this epistemology... 'The Chinese' is no more than an epistemological frame that divides the world into the centre and the periphery" (2010, p 537). Chinese perceptions of self depend on the rectification of the self toward this cultural centre, in his view, and not on a purely adversarial relationship with the Western Other. China's shifting relationship with modernity and with its cypher, the West, is, therefore, one in which "the West ceases to be the West. The West is either at the periphery with a potential to reach the centre, or at the centre waiting to be reduced to the periphery during times of corruption" (2010, p 538).

Outside of Shanghai, and in some of the city's outer suburbs, where few Westerners live or work, it is not unusual for "white" expatriates to be asked to pose for photographs by local Chinese. During a casual conversation over coffee, Agnes, a gallery manager from the UK, told me about an encounter one of her friends had with the seamier side of this practice,

She's this tall, stunning Russian girl, and one day a Chinese woman comes up to her at the train station and asks if she can take her picture. Just a tourist she thinks, so she says okay. Thinks nothing more about it. Anyway, one day she's shopping on Taobao, browsing, and the next thing you know up pops her head, photoshopped onto some underwear model's body.

Twila also routinely had the Chinese residents of her neighbourhood, which was at the end of Metro line 7, come up to her and ask her to pose for a photograph with them. "I'm just on my way to the Lawsons<sup>33</sup> and up comes some woman with a camera," she told Sally, Melody and me over dinner. "'So beautiful' she tells me, and meanwhile here's me, in my flip-flops and track-pants. The last thing I want is to have my picture taken." Another expatriate told me about a friend of his, whose large red beard attracted an exceptional amount of attention. On one holiday in the North

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33. A Japanese owned convenience store chain.

of China, he got so sick of the locals asking for his photograph that he started asking for people to play him.

In some of the more central and/or affluent districts of Shanghai where phenotypically "white" Westerners are not as unusual, this visibility automatically marks you as a target for beggars, con artists, pimps and street merchants of all persuasions. On one occasion I had a woman chase me across four lanes of traffic, shouting, "Hello" over and over again. Hawkers could also be very aggressive, asking me, "You want bag? Watch?" as I walked past. On my way back from Kiwi drinks, my first week in China, I had three men sidle up, one after the other, to offer me exactly the same pitch, "Hasheesh, marijuana," they told me, "Very, very good." A few weeks later a pimp on Nanjing Xi Lu offered me "lady massage," minutes after watching me say goodbye to a female friend outside the metro station. On another occasion, while I was eating at a McDonald's near the train station, a beggar came up to my table and handed me a sign, "I am deaf and dumb," it read in clear handwritten English, "please give me money." Another man stopped me on the Jing'an pedestrian overpass, and told me that he was a business executive from Beijing and that he needed money for a taxi because his briefcase had been stolen with everything he owned in it. When I told a postpat acquaintance about it later, he laughed and said, "They're always from Beijing."

Even in very gentrified, upper-middle-class suburbs, like the one I lived in during my first year in China, "white" children are often seen as exotic. I was coming back from the metro station one day when I saw a "white" Western woman pushing a stroller. Walking next to her was her daughter, blond haired, also "white", probably no more than four years old. A local Chinese woman, in late middle age, actually crossed the street to get a closer look. The little girl saw her coming and backed up against the wall of the compound she and her mother were walking past, looking trapped. Her mother smiled uncomfortably, as, undeterred, the local Chinese woman pinched the girl's cheek and tried to talk to her in Chinese, before happily going on her way. In his interview, Ben discussed the effect this level of attention was having on the daughter of some friends of his,

She was only two at the time and they really had a hard time first adjusting. She's a beautiful, blond haired, blue eyed little girl, so she gets a lot of attention when she's walking around. It really scared her at first, and one day they were doing something away from the house. They'd been here a couple of weeks and they said, 'Okay,' to their daughter 'let's go home' and she was like, 'okay, okay, let's go home, let's go home!' She was so happy, and they thought, 'Oh this is great she's really adjusting well,' and they got to the apartment and she was like, 'No, no, no. I thought we were going home?' They said, 'well we are home.' 'This isn't home. This is China! This is China!'

My brother-in-law, Bob, who lived in Shanghai for two years and now lives in Taipei, explained that dealing with this unwanted attention from local Chinese can be problematic, both for the children themselves and for their parents. According to him,

It's tough, y'know? My four-year-old son gets quite annoyed by it. There's also the fact that in most situations back in the West you don't want your kids to be okay with that. Touching a stranger's kid is a bit of a danger sign in the West. Here it's a common occurrence. You don't want to teach your kid it's okay to be rude to people, but at the same time, he has a right to his own space.

Pregnant "white" women also sometimes face attention which would be considered intrusive in the West. While she was pregnant with my nephew, my sister Carlee often had local Chinese strangers approaching her, wanting to touch her stomach. However, even pregnant "white" women or children seldom face the sort of aggressive, physical curiosity which Coleman endured as a reaction to her "blackness" (2009). When local Chinese approached my sister or my nephew they always did so openly and with friendly good-humour. They might have been transgressing Western cultural norms but they were always extremely polite by Chinese standards. Coleman's story, on the other hand, reads like the precursor to a riot. Instead of being open about their curiosity her attackers - and it certainly must have felt like an attack to her - are initially furtive and then, emboldened, they act as a mob, negating her personhood

in a rush of objectification. It is this difference in approach, more than anything else, which, in my view, embodies the fundamental categorical division between laowai and laohei for many local Chinese.

It is important to note that, although, the root word lao literally means old it can also be used as an honorific, as in the word laoban, meaning boss. Similarly, it is often used as a sign of familiarity. In the same way that English speakers might address a friend as "old chum", or "old mate," Mandarin speakers commonly address friends as laopengyou, old friend, and/or prefix their surname with lao - LaoZhou, LaoWu etc. An article in the *People's Daily Online*, written shortly before the Shanghai Expo, is at pains to assert that the term laowai should be received in the latter sense, as "a good-humored nickname for foreigners" (2007). The 8th edition of the Lonely Planet Guide for China goes further and asserts that the term is "the most polite word the Chinese have for foreigners" (Harper 2002, p 119). As Farrer points out, however, more formal and, therefore, polite terms for foreigner certainly exist in Chinese (2010b, p 79). In a persuasive response to Lonely Planet's claim, Chinese-Thai blogger Tom Vamvanji asserts that "you would be ill-advised to address the president of the PRC as 'Lao Jiang' for what you get across would be exactly the opposite of respect! And yet 'Lao Jiang' can be heard...in jokes, everyday mentions and, Heaven forbid, critical comments" (2005). He goes on to argue that laowai also began as a way to poke fun, or "sneer" at foreigners, but that its wholesale adoption by the Chinese population has largely mitigated its original satirical connotations (2005; cf Shanghai Star 2001).

Westerner's experience of the way laowai is used is also sometimes at odds with the narrative that it is a term of respect and/or amity. In conversation, Gerald, an academic from the US who spoke fluent Chinese, told me that although the term itself didn't bother him, its use, and the attention which came with it sometimes did:

You hear the word laowai when you are walking down the street, and you know they're probably talking about you. Often what they're saying is not very flattering either. Sometimes people will just point at you and shout out "Ni

kan kan ba laowai"<sup>34</sup>. When I go back to the States on holiday I sometimes like to repay the attention. When I see a group of Chinese tourists I'll point to them and loudly say "Ni kan kan ba laowai!" My daughter hates it.

While his tongue-in-cheek use of laowai to refer to Chinese tourists in America captures the term's literal meaning, it is general not used reciprocally in this way - whereas I believe the the more formal waiguoren can be.<sup>35</sup>

The word laowai is also a frequent topic of debate in expatriate online media. One poster in a thread on *ShanghaiExpat* characterised his response to the term this way,

The feeling is not one of respect. To respect someone is to address them as an individual...laowai is just another way to be reminded that we are not part of this society and never will be. Think if you did this in your home country, calling immigrants or visitors 'hey foreigner'.

(btravers33 2011)

In a similar thread on *ShanghaiStuff*, the thread author explains that in his "ears there's this kind of negative tone and negative feeling about laowai, taken the way and in which situation Chinese people use it." (John is here 2011). However, according to an article in the Shanghai-based English language publication, the *Shanghai Star*, such critical viewpoints are only representative of a minority of Shanghai expatriates. The article reports that "a [2001] survey done by Xinmin Weekly found nearly 70 percent of foreigners in Shanghai do not object to being referred to as laowai because they believe the term is neutral" (2001). The term's widespread use in Chinese news media, in a variety of contexts,<sup>36</sup> certainly supports

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34. "Look at the laowai."

35. Although Chinese immigrants to the West often continue to use the terms laowai and waiguoren to describe non-Chinese, and "white" people in particular.

36. A Google News search, performed on the 18th of Feb, 2016, returned 279 occurrences of the search term "老外" - the Chinese characters for laowai - in Chinese language news sources during the previous week.

the idea that it no longer carries any derogatory connotations for local Chinese either.

Expatriates I talked to rarely gave me any reason to think they disliked being referred to as a laowai, and many of them expressly embraced the term as a marker of identity, a process of reclaiming which is also widely evidenced in expatriate online media. Laowai Comics, a webcomic published by a male expatriate based in Jiangsu province, is one example of this. According to the author, he intended the comic as an "expat venting session" (Laowai Comics 2012) but he also frequently uses it to poke fun at expatriates themselves. In one comic, a surprised looking laowai has done something to attract the ire of the rest of the patrons in an expat bar. The caption reads, "Shits going to go down...that FOB<sup>37</sup> laowai just said something positive about China." Another example of this practice, which has been viewed more than a billion times on the Chinese video sharing website Youku (Appell 2012), is a parody of the pop song Gangnam Style, entitled Laowai Style. Its creator Jesse Appell, an American university student in Beijing, uses the parody's Chinese lyrics to deconstruct local Chinese expectations of Westerners,

I'm...the type of laowai who eats Chinese food every day and doesn't use a spoon...The type of laowai who doesn't wait for the traffic light to turn green...Who researches Chinese culture at Tsinghua, that kind of laowai...I'm the type of laowai who sucks at basketball. The type of laowai who buys stuff at Silk Street but doesn't get ripped off. The type of laowai who doesn't drive a BMW and instead drives a second-hand electric bike...Who saves money by having a crappy phone...Who only drinks Wang Laoji<sup>38</sup> and doesn't eat KFC.

(Appell 2012)

By contesting local Chinese stereotypes of foreigners - as rich dilettantes who do not speak Chinese or refuse to eat Chinese food etc - Appell is engaged in repurposing laowai and the associated concept of foreignness

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37. Fresh off the Boat.

38. A kind of herbal tea.

as a positive aspect of his identity. In choosing a Chinese word to signify their new transnational identities, those postpats who self-identify as laowai are also imposing their own meanings on the term, as well as tacitly acknowledging the role China plays within their respective identities. For these postpats, laowai is no longer a term of exclusion. It has become an expression of belonging, not just a sense of belonging to Shanghai's imagined expatriate community itself, but, by extension, belonging within China as a whole.

If the term laowai is semantically neutral for local Chinese, the idea of foreignness is certainly not conceptually neutral. As we have seen it often comes loaded with connotations of privilege, cosmopolitanism, promiscuity, exoticism, the West and "whiteness". Local Chinese attitudes to "whiteness" are also entangled with cultural ideals of beauty, and are usefully contrasted with the firmly entrenched, racialised stereotypes of "blackness" present in contemporary Chinese culture. As the work of Johansson (1999) and others (cf. Zhou & Belk 2004) suggest, local Chinese relationships to the West are further complicated by China's continuing rapid development. The West is associated with Chinese aspirations for a modern lifestyle, but often these aspirations are in direct conflict with more "traditional" values. Because of this the West, and by extension Westerners themselves, "therefore, not only [represent] a promise, but also [pose] a threat...to the idea of full [Chinese] identity" (Johansson 1999, p 387).



Plate 1: Chaumet Advertisement, Shanghai Metro



Plate 2: JuStyle Advertisement, Shanghai Metro



Plate 3: Real Estate Development, Jing'an, Shanghai. Slogan reads "A Setting of Great Prestige."



Plate 4: Real Estate Development, Jing'an, Shanghai



Plate 5: Traditional Shanghai Street in the 1930s, People's Square, Shanghai.



Plate 6: Sign outside an Expatriate Bar in Jing'an, Shanghai. "The Spot - Your home away from home."

## 3.2 - The Real China

Just as Chinese constructions of the Western Other influence expatriate constructions of Self, expatriate constructions of China and the Chinese Other can be seen as a mirror in which expatriate identity is also revealed. In this section, I use interview participants' responses to the statement "Shanghai is not the real China" to examine their attitudes towards China, and to reveal how these attitudes further influence the expatriate construction of self.

In Shanghai particularly, it is easy to imagine Chinese culture as something in retreat, overwhelmed by the onslaught of Western consumerism. As Appiah has argued, though, this view drastically minimises the agency of non-Western cultural actors, as well as ignoring the multilateral nature of globalisation itself (2006, pp 101-115). China's rapid development is often framed, both in China and abroad, as a game of catch up with the West (cf. O'Sullivan 2011). In Shanghai, the pervasiveness of Western luxury brand advertising, bombarding you in taxis and following you down into the subway,<sup>39</sup> certainly suggests a structural association between the West and success in Chinese minds. Western brands are so desirable that a brisk market for Chanel and Tiffany branded plastic shopping bags has sprung up online.<sup>40</sup> For the Chinese consumers who buy and use them, these bags are a projection of face, an enactment of aspirational identity, representing not who the person feels they are, but rather who they want to be. As Schein has argued, acts like these enable local Chinese to have a stake in China's new imagined cosmopolitanism (1999).

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39. For the metro's poorest passengers these can only be an exercise in frustrated consumer voyeurism. The average annual salary in Shanghai, for 2011-2012, was only RMB 52,655 (CER 2012) or NZ\$9353. An iPad costs RMB 3688 - NZ\$655 - in China (Apple China 2013), or more than three week's wages for a middle-income Shanghai resident. By contrast, an iPad in New Zealand costs NZ\$729 (Apple New Zealand 2013), less than one weeks wages for a middle-income New Zealander (Statistics NZ 2015).

40. A search of Taobao, the Chinese online marketplace, for Chanel 礼品袋 - Chanel gift bags in English - returned more than 200 retailers offering the bags, purchasable for between 4 and 8 RMB each, or around one NZ dollar.

Even if the bag only contains lunch,<sup>41</sup> for as long as they are carrying it the person who purchased the bag is able to look, and presumably feel as if they have just stepped out of Chanel.

Despite this process of cultural borrowing - what Appiah prefers to call "cosmopolitan contamination" (2001, p 102) - Shanghai remains defiantly and pervasively Shanghainese. For Shanghai at least, the process of economic reform has often been framed as a return to, or renewal of, the city's "traditional" haipai, or sea style, itself seen as embodied in cultural values of cosmopolitanism, commercialism and innovation (cf. Larmer 2010; Ma 2012; Wang et al. 2009; Wu 2004; Cheung 1996). Coined by a group of writers from Beijing towards the end of China's semi-colonial period, haipai was originally intended as a rebuke, contrasting the Westernised values of Shanghai with the traditionalism and formality of jingpai, or capital style (Wong 1996, p 31).

According to historian Marie-Claire Bergère, however, "the bourgeois modernism" of Shanghai during the semi-colonial period, remained rooted in traditional kinship networks and regional loyalties, and was "thus not based on a break with tradition, but on its ability to make tradition serve new objectives" (Bergère 2009, quoted in Wong 1996, p 28). Just as it sometimes is today, semi-colonial Shanghai was also frequently characterised as the "Other China", a liminal place, neither Chinese nor Western but embodying the values of both (Cheung 1996, p 50). Shen Hongfei, a leading cultural critic in Shanghai, argues that, in fact, Shanghai has always been a cosmopolitan city. "We've always been accused of worshipping foreigners," he told National Geographic, "but taking foreign ideas and making them our own has made us the most advanced place in China" (quoted in Larmer 2010).

Shanghai's expatriates often echoed local Chinese constructions of Shanghai, framing the experience of the city's wealthy and middle-income residents as inauthentic in comparison to the rest of China, while at the same time being typical of Shanghai. This distinction between the "real

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41. A Swedish owned clothing retailer which is also popular in Shanghai.

China" and the "other China" of Shanghai, was often complicated - particularly for recently arrived and corporate expatriates - by stereotypical expectations of China or of Chinese culture.

Ben, a lawyer from the US with significant China experience, described his own sense of separation as primarily an economic and geographic phenomenon, not specific to his status as a foreigner,

Certainly in Shanghai, you have to really force yourself out of it, and there's the expat bubble in Shanghai where a number of Chinese people also exist, but even outside that there's a Shanghai bubble. You take your first tier cities, y'know, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, that's one bubble. It's almost like a concentric circle of bubbles. In my Law Firm there's two of us who are partners and the other guy, he is now an American citizen, but he's from Chongqing. He lives over there in Jinqiao in the heart of, y'know, what I think of as the most Westernised part. His kid goes to what I think of as the most Western of the international schools. He has this house. It literally has a white picket fence around it, and he's basically recreated his suburban Chicago existence. When we came to look at houses he said, "Oh, Ben you've got to live over here." I said to him, "You got to understand, I got to get out there a little bit more. I want to be using Chinese." His reaction is "I've now made enough money that I can live in a place like this. Why would I not live here? Why would I not send my kid to a school where he's going to have great English and a great education?"

The concept of the expatriate bubble is examined in more detail in Chapter 5 (pp 126-155). However, Ben's statement that Shanghai represents a bubble of its own, echoes the haipai metanarrative, framing Shanghai as a special case within China, one in which his emplacement is legitimated by the co-presence of wealthy Chinese.

I met Andrew, a recently divorced former soldier, at Aussie drinks. He had come to China as a trailing spouse and was now in Shanghai hoping to find work. His ex-wife was still in Beijing and wasn't supporting his visa anymore. Attracted by the vibrancy of Shanghai's economy and the

opportunities he was sure would come with that, he'd decided that he wanted to stay on anyway. Our dialogue ranged from his experience in the wine industry to China's appetite for luxury goods, to the differences between Chinese culture and the West, to Tiananmen square and Mao-era history. "You need to get out of Shanghai," he told me during our conversation, "You haven't seen the real China until you've been up to Henan, or out to Anhui. It's a different world out there. Much more basic. Much more Chinese."

I often heard expatriates express this desire to find the "real China," or give advice on where in the PRC to find it. Chinese citizens from outside Shanghai also frequently displayed a parochial attachment to some part of their home province, framing this as the real China. When she found out I had not yet travelled outside the Shanghai city limit's, Apple, a student from Anhui told me, "Shanghai is not China. If you are studying China, you need to go outside the first tier cities like Shanghai. I hope one day you will visit my hometown of Lu'an. That is what China is actually like.' The fate of this "real China", and finding what remains of it have also often been a central preoccupation of the Western media's coverage of China's recent development (French 2006; Howard-Johnson 2003).

The widespread currency of perspectives like Apple's and Andrew's led me to ask some of the interview participants for their reactions to the statement, "Shanghai is not the real China." Most expressed qualified support or framed themselves in direct opposition to it. Only, Anais, a stay-at-home parent from France, expressed unqualified agreement with the sentiment:

But Shanghai seems to be so easy for us, it's so easy to come and to live. Everything is ready for foreigners... but I think if you move in China, perhaps to Chengdu, or Xian, or - I don't know where - it's not so easy for foreigners. So, for me, real China is not Shanghai because it's too easy for me. The first time I said, 'Oh it seems to be like China town in New York,' and there's more Chinese in Chinatown than in Pudong. Pudong is not Chinese. It's just a big place for foreigners. Almost a playground.

Pudong's central district is Shanghai's most populous with more than 5 million inhabitants (SPNAPG 2011), many times more than either the entire population of Manhattan (NYDCP 2013) - where New York's Chinatown is located - or any reasonable estimate of the expatriate population of Shanghai.<sup>42</sup> Anais' misapprehension that more Chinese people live in New York's Chinatown than in Pudong therefore, suggests a somewhat limited view of the district.

In his interview, Butler, a freelance English teacher from Canada, argued that expatriates who use the phrase "real China" are often articulating a preconceived view of what China is:

The real China meaning what? The fucking dirt and the mud and pig shit, and eating fucking meat that's been sitting on the fucking chopping block with flies around it while they push it away with paper fans? Is that the real China? How could Shanghai not be the real China? It's part of the China experience. There's a huge section of this country that's still, yes, living in poverty and in a third world state, but the coastal cities are all first world. I think that foreigners, they come here and they say they're looking for the real China. The temples that were all destroyed during the cultural revolution and rebuilt in the 70s, y'know? I mean sure they look old but they're not. It's this ignorant sort of perception that foreigners have that they're going to go and discover the world. This isn't like the early 19th century. We're not discovering Shangri-La. All that romanticism, it's all gone now, and I think our generation have this nostalgic sense to seek out these stories that we've heard and try to discover these things. I haven't discovered a single new thing, essentially, since coming to China. I mean yeah things are different, you see things that you've never seen before, but ultimately there's no real authenticity to anything anymore.

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42. Shanghai's official expatriate population in 2014 - including expatriates from non-Western countries, but excluding transient expatriates - was 171874 (SSB 2015). More inclusive unofficial estimates range from 200,000-400,000 (cf. NatWest IPB 2012; Wong 2009).

Interestingly, although Butler derides the imagined authenticity sought by some expatriates, describing it as romanticism, his conclusion, that "there's no real authenticity to anything anymore," suggests that he too imagines a historical - or more likely an ahistorical - "authentic" China existing prior to European colonisation. Additionally, his argument that foreigners' expectations of China are often shaped by narratives of discovery and colonisation, echoes a great deal of the recent scholarship on tourism and leisure migration in the developing world. Echtner and Prasad describe this "myth of the unchanged" as particularly pronounced in China and other "Oriental" destinations. They argue that this metanarrative "systematically portrays the destinations as firmly entrenched in a time ripe for a journey of discovery" (2003, p 669). According to Echtner and Prasad, these expectations are shaped by a shared Orientalist imaginary that promises esoteric wisdom, virgin territory, exotic people and opulent surroundings, echoing colonial mythologies used to justify exploration, conquest and trade (2003, p 669).

However, as the responses of Butler and a number of my other participants suggest, poverty not opulence is often central to many newly-arrived expatriates construction of the Chinese Other. Bruce, a postpat who had been in China for ten years, also described other peoples' framing of "the real China" as frequently rooted in the idea of China as a third world country:

The real China is the bit of China you are in now. It's real. It's a reality. Yeah, the reality is different, depending on your geographical location but the bottom-line is the real China is this. This is it. We're in Shanghai, this is the real China, but it's the Shanghai reality. There is another reality for other people in other parts of China. It's just a bollocks statement. The reason it rubs me up the wrong way is because a lot of people expect that the real China is some little guy in a coolie hat, digging holes in the road or riding a bicycle with a chicken hanging off the back. It's almost derogatory.

Bruce's wife Elaine argued that in addition to being a construction by expatriates of the Chinese Other - which she saw as having been drawn from literature and other sources - the "real China" was also a manifesta-

tion of white privilege. Conversely, she then went on to describe this stereotyped view as having some basis in fact for the majority of Chinese;

When I hear real China, unless that person is Chinese, I tell them to fuck off. They're never going to experience the real China because they're Western and there's no possible way for them to experience the real China. The real China, for most people, is the Chinese working in the fields, y'know, struggling day in day out - and it's mostly true. Everybody has read the statistics. Eighty percent of China are farmers and workers. So, that all being said, I enjoy when I go into the countryside but I absolutely, fundamentally understand that I'm seeing it through a Westerner's eyes. I go to a restaurant and order food and they are back there, like, beating grandma to make sure that I get the fattest chicken. That's not really the real China, right? Even now there's a perception that China is a poor country, with poor people, not able to understand the rest of the world and then they come to Shanghai and they're like 'whoa, this is totally different from my expectations,' Even on the way to Nanjing you see what people expect to see and then they say, 'Oh well that's the real China,' but Shanghai could not be China without the peasants in the field being China.

The statistic Elaine quotes, that only 20% of China's population are middle-class or above, was mentioned to me several times by expatriates. Actual estimates vary, from as low as 10% (Zhang 2013) to as high as 25% (Luhby 2012). Like Butler, she implicitly locates these people outside Shanghai, in "the countryside." This division between city people and country people is also reflected in Chinese law. Only those born to parents, who themselves are registered as Shanghai residents, are automatically entitled to live and work in the city. Those born elsewhere must apply for a hukou, essentially an internal visa, to reside in Shanghai legitimately. However, Shanghai's massive appetite for cheap labour means that the division between city and country is no longer as sharp as it once was. Compare Marissa's reification of this divide with her employ-

ment of an Ayi<sup>43</sup> from Anhui, the largely rural home province of so many of Shanghai's Ayi that, for a number of expatriates, the two were stereotypically associated.

Siebe, my roommate during my first year of fieldwork, also recognised that very few mainland Chinese are living a middle-class lifestyle, which he, Elaine, Bruce and Butler all frame as typifying Shanghai for them;

Well, let's put it this way, of course, Shanghai is the real China. I mean it's just the international window of China, which is different than if you would travel. Of course, you would see something different. The same goes for the United States. I'm sure Arkansas is not the same as New York City and the same here. What people mean with real China is that you don't see the factories, and you don't see the poverty and you don't see the farmers out there because this is still the vast majority. But, um, no. China, of course, is all of that, and the factories, and the poverty, and the farmers and these huge urban platforms, as Shanghai and Beijing and Guangzhou. So, for me, all of it is real China. I couldn't imagine that you would not include Tibet in China or that you would not include Mongolia or ...or Shanghai. All of it is part of China and it makes what people understand when...when they talk about China.

Despite objecting to the phrase "real China", Harriet, a freelance writer, described what she saw as significant economic and political differences between Shanghai and the rest of China. She also recognised that in some of Shanghai's less affluent districts many of those differences became markedly less apparent.

For some reason I'm more comfortable with the statement it's not really China, y'know? Because it's so many other things as well, and kind of always has been - as a port town, as a place of international business of various kinds, as a culture that has managed to be international before any other part of China was, or many other parts anyway. Y'know, Shanghai has been a verb in English for many genera-

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43. House Keeper. Lit. Aunty and by extension a polite term for any middle-aged women.

tions. I feel there's less influence of other cultures, ah, just about an hour away from here, in suburban Minhang, y'know? The architecture is even a bit more Western than you might find in Jiangsu, Anfu. Beijing even, y'know? I feel has less Western influence in the culture. In the ideals. Also, I think a lot of people, especially international business people, both Chinese and Western, are constantly, confronted with the line around Shanghai and the rest of mainland. There's things you can publish here, there's things you can do legally here that you cannot do anywhere else in mainland China, So I can see where that would actually be a concrete, measurable way in which it is not the real China.

In recapitulating the cosmopolitan imaginary of the haipai narrative, Harriet presents a version of the city's history which favours local cultural agency and neglects Western colonial influence. Although she presents parts of Shanghai as more authentically Chinese, she locates these sites of authenticity on city's suburban fringes.

Martin, an English teacher from the US, also identified HongKou, the district where he lived, as being more Chinese than some other parts of Shanghai.

I would say parts of Shanghai are the real China. I think HongKou is pretty akin to, like, what you might see in Chengdu or something. I think a lot of the expats like to insulate themselves in Xujiahui or Jing'an. They see white people everywhere. They see everything's relatively clean. I think the real China is just dirty and there's more... like... country people.

For Martin the real China is signified by rurality, as embodied by Shanghai's weidiren - or migrant labourers - and dirt. Shanghai's more affluent suburbs, inhabited by both expatriates and wealthy Chinese, not to mention China's rising middle-class, are excluded by this definition.

Mark, a self-described serial entrepreneur who had been in China for sixteen years at the time of his interview, dismissed the idea that Shanghai was not the real China:

I suppose if you want a monolithic view of the entire country you could say that, but it's part of China, Chinese people live here, it's part of Chinese history. How can it not be? It's a real China. It's a real part of it. There may be a larger population group. Another economic level. There's still a lot of subsistence farmers here. But, they're both real parts of the country. Certainly other people round the country view Shanghai as the real China because they try to emulate it, right? There's Xintiandi all over the country, and walking streets all over the country,<sup>44</sup> and they look to the culture that comes through here. So, it's one part of China, as much as any other. It's just a smaller demographic, but it's the real China.

Despite rejecting the label "real China", Mark's framing of Shanghai in opposition to a "larger population" who are on "another economic level" clearly implies a similar division. His framing of Shanghai as an economic and cultural model, above and apart from the rest of China, also suggests such a division.

Like Mark, Faustine, a stay-at-home parent living in Pudong, described Shanghai as a role model for the rest of the country. She contrasted the city's Westernised public face, with a hidden, implicitly more Chinese, lower income population, which like Harriet, she located on the city's fringes.

For me, Shanghai could be a concentrate of China because there are some glossy parts but not far away from here you've got farmers, small villages, with only...okay, you have to search for them to find them because you don't see them. There are walls. They are hidden. So here you've got industrial parts, farmers as well as expatriate compounds, like here, super-brand mall and shopping malls, Xintiandi with the nightlife, and you've got huge markets, you've got everything all parts of China the past, the future, the today, here. You

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44. Xintiandi is a well-known retail development in Shanghai, located within a historic lane-house neighbourhood. Under the pretext of rescuing the houses which remain, a number of the lane-houses were bulldozed, creating a European-style walking street. This style of development has been emulated in several other Chinese cities.

can get very different contexts and then you have to travel to see something else, but here you can see a lot.

Fabienne's framing of Shanghai as a microcosm of China, reflecting an urban, consumerist, Westernised future, but also containing hints to a rural, poor, Oriental past, was a perspective shared by a number of expatriates. Although Bettina described Shanghai as not representative of the lives of most Chinese she also framed the city as a representation of the country's future.

If you think of how the vast majority of people live and you look at Shanghai and you think Shanghai does not represent the majority of Chinese life on average. But it is also the real China because the Shanghainese are what China is turning into. It won't be like this for all the Chinese but all of the big Chinese cities, they're going to follow the Shanghai trend, y'know? Still, I think when you generically say 'the real China,' you mean people living with very little, working very hard, in living conditions that we don't really see at all in Europe. I do take my children regularly on walks around the villages and it's interesting to show them that there's other people that live like that, but also it's very interesting for us. When my parents maybe were growing up, that's how things used to be done in Italy so I find it very interesting. I'm very sorry that Chinese people cannot value this at all. So they keep on routinely destroying older neighbourhoods, which is a physical change in the makeup of the city but it's also a social change because all the people that used to live in the neighbourhoods live like a family and they get put in a high-rise building and they become more and more isolated because there's no common space anymore, there's no common life anymore.

Bianca's conception of Shanghai's older neighbourhoods as something romantic or picturesque, to be consumed touristically for her own improvement and that of her children, presents a narrative which is again "strongly reminiscent of the colonial era" (Echtner & Prasad 2003, p 669). Her perception that the loss of the longtang, or lilong, would result in the destruction of traditional ways of life, was also widely shared, both between expatriates themselves and in the Western media (cf. Larmer

2010). However, as Karen, a British stay-at-home parent whose husband is Chinese, explained, for many Chinese these old neighbourhoods have complicated histories:

I think for my husband's parents China is what came before communism. So, for them the lilongs, and destroying that, is destroying a difficult part of history and if they want to recapture something it would be the social ties people had before that.

Longtang are an artefact of the semi-colonial period, and are characterised by blending of Western and Chinese architectural styles. Longtang houses were originally large single family dwellings, intended for the Chinese middle-class. Following the Communist Party takeover, they were subdivided, and the original owners were evicted or forced to share their homes with a number of other families. As these developments are demolished to make way for shopping malls, apartment buildings or hotels their residents are compensated and relocated, sometimes forcibly, to modern apartments on the fringes of Shanghai. For many families, these new, more spacious apartments represent an increase in their standard of living and the opportunity for more privacy (Cockain 2012). Some tenants do resist eviction of course, either because they believe the compensation they have been offered is inadequate or because they are simply unwilling. In one instance, at least, a longtang was saved from demolition because its local Chinese residents recognised its historical value and lobbied the city government to protect it (Wang 2011). The belief that local Chinese are unconcerned about the destruction of Shanghai's history, a belief I heard articulated by a number of newly arrived and corporate expatriates, reflects an imagined orientalised, traditional, crowded but more socially connected origin point for the city, which modernity is pulling China away from. By privileging themselves as the moral framers of this narrative and locating themselves outside the process of development, these expatriates are viewing China through a touristic lens, one which is informed by, and again recalls, the colonial gaze that "first 'sold' the East to the West" (Veugopal 2012, p 244).

In contrast to Elaine and Harriet, Ben, who lives in Puxi, felt that even within Shanghai the boundary between what he previously described as the Shanghai bubble, and the "experience of living in the rest of China" was quite porous.

Just today I went for a run along the river and on one hand there's a Peugeot dealer there and working right in front of it, appears to be a husband and wife team pushing a wheelbarrow full of discarded, cans, bottles, y'know, all that stuff? Whereas that Peugeot dealership, I would guess sells to 98% or more Chinese people, so, y'know, that Peugeot dealership that's very much the real China and those guys pushing that cart. Very much the real China. When we met you that first time we were staying in a beautiful, luxury executive residence place in Xintiandi, until we found our place. Very, very nice, and then I walked out to the corner and there was this guy sitting on a stool with a huge tub of live bullfrogs and he was chucking the frogs' legs in a bucket, discarding the carcasses of the frogs, just into the gutter and then presumably went on to try and shill his frogs' legs to the local restaurants around there, and that was not three hundred yards from Tiffany's or Cartier.

Although Ben characterises both the Peugeot dealership and the waste pickers as equally "Chinese", it is the latter he frames as out of place in urban Shanghai. Likewise, the roadside butcher with his bucket full of frogs is set in opposition to the neighbourhood in which Ben lives - a conspicuously primitive, exotic Other invading the glossy, Westernised modernity of Xintiandi. Ben's speculation that the dealership's customers were almost all Chinese echoes his earlier assertion that "a number of Chinese people also exist" within the expatriate bubble ( p 72). By framing the experience of middle-class and wealthy Chinese as typical of Shanghai, Ben is, therefore, also normalising his own experience of the city.

In her interview Susan highlighted the implied dismissiveness of the phrase "Shanghai is not the real China," describing it as a fantasy,

Well usually it's coming from, in my experience, some 23-year-old foreign kid who's working for a wire service or on some kind of scholarship or something and they're very highly educated

about what China is, and they come to Shanghai and, y'know, "this isn't real." I feel irritated by it because I think it's a little bit ignorant and it's dismissive of what's happening. I think everybody wants to have that experience where there's, like, a water-buffalo and you eat jiao zi on the street in Beijing. This is the real China. This is what the real people do. But also the real people of China work in offices and live in high rises and eat at Pizza Hut. You know? Like, I live near Suzhou Creek, and they're tearing down the whole neighbourhood around my building and it's all ramshackle. Like, it's really incredible to see and people still live there, kinda squatting. There's no roofs so they just put up a bunch of umbrellas. I mean that's real China just as much as the guy paying for his Lamborghini with cash. The idea of real China is the idea of the real America or a real France It's just, a fantasy.

Like Ben, Susan structures her description of the real China as a series of binary pairs ie, "eating jiao zi" is to "eating at pizza hut" as "living in a shack" is to "buying a Lamborghini with cash". Certainly, the experience of most of Shanghai's residents falls between these two poles, and, while it is possible that the nature of the question encouraged a polarised response, where many of the interview participants chose to locate those poles is informative - with poverty and Chinese culture on one side, and the West and conspicuous consumption on the other.

The argument that Shanghai is not the real China not only reifies divisions between expatriates and local Chinese but, by framing their Chinese experience as more authentic than the listeners, it can also be an enactment, for some expatriates, of what Jaworski and Thurlow (2009) call an elite stance. The scepticism shown by several of the interview participants to the concept of a "real China" should, therefore, be read as a reaction against this elitism. The almost universal recognition of the phrase by my interview participants, as well as the level of hostility towards it, present in a number of their responses, suggests the stereotype's wider currency beyond the many separate occasions I heard expatriates employ it.

Generally speaking, though, interview participants framed the divisions between Shanghai and the rest of China with remarkable uniformity, making it possible to infer the following structure from their responses.

**Table 2: Expatriate Conceptions of China / Shanghai dialectic**

China	:	Shanghai
Rural	:	Urban
Poor	:	Rich
Dirty	:	Clean
Traditional	:	Modern
Past	:	Future
Authentic	:	Inauthentic
Exotic	:	Mundane
Eastern	:	Western

This structure, in which the city is seen as inauthentic while the countryside is framed as a more genuine expression of traditional values, is certainly not unique to expatriate Shanghai, or to China as a whole (cf Cheng 2004). However, the relationship of China's first tier cities to the smaller, less wealthy communities which surround them is obviously more fluid and complex than this structure allows. Shanghai's massive appetite for cheap migrant labour alone is enough to have drastically altered - not to say deformed- the lifestyles of most of the surrounding provinces. Reports of villages emptied of everyone but children and the elderly are commonplace (Tatlow 2013; Wu 2013). Because of this, the notion of a fixed and enduring traditional existence is at least as problematic in rural China as scholars like Hobsbawn and Ranger have argued it is elsewhere in the world (Hobsbawn & Ranger [1983] 2012; Ranger 2014). The rural idyll reported by Andrew or Apple, commodified by the Chinese government, and consumed touristically by a number of expatriates, is therefore as much a product of Shanghai as it is an embodiment of "traditional" lifestyles. As Karen pointed out, the cultural legacy of Maoist policies like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution complicate the discussion of tradition in contemporary China even further (cf Billioud 2007; Xu 1998).

Historian Hanchao Lu describes Shanghai's relationship with its own development as coloured by what he calls a "nostalgia for the future". Through this, he argues, Shanghai's semi-colonial past has been reframed as a cultural model for China's post-reform society (2002). As we have seen, it was common for my interview participants to frame the post-Maoist lifestyles of China's rural and urban poor as traditional and conceive of that tradition as eroded by development. Farrer calls this "socialist nostalgia" (2010a), but as Elaine suggested, expatriate nostalgia seems to owe as much to books like the *Good Earth*, or to an imagined orientalist and pastoral China before communism, as it does to depictions of life under Mao.<sup>45</sup> In fact, postpats typically framed elements of the Western stereotype of China which directly evoke the Maoist era - Mao suits, collective agriculture, little red books, communist orthodoxy etc. - as regrettable historical kitsch, largely divorced from the reality of China as it is today.

The equivalence made by several of the interview participants between lower income Chinese and rurality is not completely supported by the statistics. In 2009, there were fifty million urban poor in China or 7% of China's total urban population (Yang 2011). Of these, the overwhelming majority were, and continue to be, migrant labourers from non-urban areas, who, because of the hukou system, are still denied many of the rights<sup>46</sup> of Chengliren, or city people, within their new urban habitus. A number of scholars have argued that the economic and social inequality imposed by this distinction in law reinforces existing regional and rural stereotypes for urban Chinese, who in turn use those stereotypes to justify the necessity of the hukou system itself (Kuang & Liu 2012; Jost et al, 2005; Smart & Zhang 2006). When my expatriate acquaintances would complain about people spitting in the street, or joke about the "Beijing

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45. I discuss the relevance of expatriate nostalgia in greater detail in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124)

46. Including education for their children, healthcare and, in the centres where it is available, access to the Minimum Living Standard Scheme (Chen & Barrientos 2009; Xinhua 2013)

Bikini"<sup>47</sup> I often heard local Chinese acquaintances say, "those people are peasants/migrants/weidiren. They are not Shanghainese."

I also frequently heard Western expatriates recycle these stereotypes in conversation. Sometimes this would take the form of a light-hearted paternalism, framing the stereotype as socially backward or reactionary. In our interview, Elaine described her Ayi's use of regional stereotypes as frustrating:

There's a feeling of superiority between different provinces and different cities, so, for example, my Anhui Ayi, y'know, who I love to death and trust implicitly, is not trusted by the Shanghainese and she would, therefore, not trust someone from Hubei or Shenzhen, and, not because she's been to Hubei, or Shenzhen, but because she's heard, through the great Chinese grapevine that all people from Shenzhen, across the bar, are thieves, and I find that quite frustrating.

More commonly, though, and typically with reference to Uighur or "Xinjiang people",<sup>48</sup> it would involve a direct affirmation of the stereotype. Fei and I both had our phones stolen during my stay and when we told other expatriates about it the first thing they would normally say was, "it must have been a Uighur." Similarly, if any of my expatriate friends was a victim of theft they would also often attribute it to a Xinjiangnese - "I was sitting in a cafe with my bag hanging off the back of the chair and someone just lifted my phone straight out. It was probably some Xinjiang person."

Shanghai's "more traditional" urban poor were often framed as literally as well as figuratively marginal by my interview participants, almost all of whom either located them outside the city, on its margins or described them as hidden within the city. Ben, one of only two participants to locate lower income Chinese within his own neighbourhood, clearly saw them as unusual in that context. It is certainly true that lower income Chinese are often not as visible in the places Western expatriates live or spend most of

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47. Chinese men rolling up their shirts to expose their bellies on hot days.

48. Uighur are the principal ethnic group in Xinjiang, and for most expatriates the terms Uighur and "Xinjiang person" were used interchangeably.

their time. However, even in the best parts of the former French Concession waste pickers roll down the street on their cargo trikes several times a day calling out for recyclables. Nor can the high walls around the city's many construction sites completely conceal the migrant labourers who work inside or the narrow, multi-storey prefabricated barracks which serve as their Shanghai homes. I regularly saw Shanghai's urban poor on the subway, with their belongings in sacks or buckets; or kneeling on cardboard boxes in the street holding signs begging for food or a way to get home. As Susan points out, in the narrow streets either side of Suzhou creek, a few blocks away from art galleries and apartments worth 20,000 RMB a month,<sup>49</sup> the urban poor hang on in tumbled down lane houses, using umbrellas and tarpaulins to keep out the rain.

The responses of most of the interview participants, and the structure I've inferred from them, also risks excluding the majority of Shanghai residents, whose lifestyle falls somewhere between the wealthy, Westernised urbane and the poor, "traditional" weidiren. In contrast, to Ben's description of his Chinese coworker's house in Pudong, those who earn close to the city's median income of 52,655 RMB per year (CER 2012) typically live a much more crowded existence. Migrants who earn close to this amount are likely to live in tiny rented one or two room apartments, which they might share with a partner. Middle-income Shanghainese families are much more likely to own their own dwelling. It is normal for Shanghainese children to live with their parents until they're married. Once married, couples will usually continue to live with the husband's parents, while also helping to support the wife's mother and father financially (cf. Baoru 2010; Cockrain 2012; Davis 2000, p 273; Farrer 2002; Shao 2013 ).

Even for those earning a more Western wage, the picture may not be much different. Jenny, a Shanghainese friend of Fei's working in a well-paid teaching position, invited the two of us around to her apartment for dinner on the first day after Chinese New Year, traditionally a day for spending time with family and close friends. Jenny lived in Hongkou, an

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49. Around NZ\$3700.

outlying district of Shanghai. She owned the apartment with her mother. Fei and I entered into a short corridor, off which was a bathroom, a narrow kitchen, and the main living space, which contained Jenny's mother's single bed, two dining chairs, a formica kitchen table, and a curtained off alcove. In the alcove, - a converted balcony - was Jenny's bed, a computer desk and the apartment's only windows. We sat around the table - Fei on the bed - while Jenny's mother busied herself in the kitchen. She served us a four-course meal - soup, dumplings, a vegetable course, a meat course - and then she went back to her job as an Ayi for a brothel. When there was nothing left but scraps we cleared aside the dishes and Jenny and Fei sat around snacking on sunflower seeds and gossiping, a traditional activity during Chinese New Year.

Melody, a Hunanese landscape architect, who was part of the group I spent most of my time with when I first arrived in Shanghai, lived in a rented apartment by herself a few blocks from the conspicuous affluence of Xintiandi. Her apartment was even smaller than Jenny's. The front door opened directly onto her bedroom. There was a small bathroom in one corner but no separate kitchen. An electric hot-plate and a kettle sat on a low table by the door. Her bed was the dominant piece of furniture in the room, and the only place to sit. She'd asked Sally, Twila, a British engineer named Simon and myself back to her home following a meal at the hotpot restaurant around the corner. She was apologetic about how small her apartment was. Sally told her what a great location it was, and Twila complimented her on the view. I said I like the polished wood floors. I felt that I had to say something to reassure her and I believe the others were similarly motivated. Apart from Melody, we all lived in shared apartments with large communal living areas. My roommate Selena's bedroom was larger than Melody's whole apartment. The first few minutes of stilted conversation, with the five of us perched awkwardly on Melody's bed suggested to me that I was not alone in my sudden awareness of our relative privilege.

In my experience, the daily exposure of most expatriates to the lives of local Chinese is often limited, and the construction by my interview parti-

cipants of Shanghai in opposition to the rest of China reflects this. Narratives of development and Westernisation feature heavily in the responses quoted above. Poverty and "traditional" manifestations of Chinese culture are marginalised in the imagined Shanghai of these narratives, and, accordingly, the city is depicted as a Western space, a "first world" city as Butler phrased it - or in the process of becoming one. This suggests that faced with the need to define a place for themselves within the city, many expatriates construct a fragmentary Shanghai around themselves, bounded and constrained by their expectations and experience.

Expatriates often framed themselves as the interlocutors of this dialectic, locating themselves somewhere between its poles. Economically, for example, many expatriates I talked to recognised that they were both much better off than the poorest Chinese, and significantly less well off than the wealthiest of Shanghai's new rich. By pointing out the existence of a more privileged local Chinese elite these expatriates were not only justifying their own relative financial privilege. They were also contesting their outsider status - symbolically bookending the Chinese experience and defining a place for themselves between those bookends. Some expatriates had a similar relationship to manifestations of tradition or history within Shanghai. I often heard expatriates express regret that what they saw as "traditional" ways of life were being threatened by development, and then, in the next breath reify the process of development itself as natural or inevitable. Hearing expatriates blame Chinese culture, as Bettina did, for these perceived excesses of development was also not uncommon. However, even in the milder expressions of resignation and dismay at the disappearance of the city's old neighbourhoods, it is possible to hear an emotional investment in Shanghai as "Home".

### **3.3 - Summary: Centre and Periphery**

The imagined Western community of Shanghai's expatriates was not simply a product of their own cultural understandings of the West, or of Western culture, but was co-imagined and co-produced by local Chinese interlocutors, as well as by the Chinese media. Foreignness, "whiteness" and Westernness are interchangeable concepts for most local Chinese and

representations of the Western Other in Chinese advertising are often entangled with privilege, modernity, cosmopolitanism, sexual availability and the exotic. "White" Westerners, therefore, constitute an ambiguous presence in China, signifying both a lifestyle which many local Chinese aspire to and a threat to Chinese cultural authenticity.

According to some scholars, the Western notion of self, defined in opposition to an Other or Others, does not adequately describe the Chinese relationship to self, which is not defined in opposition to the West, or Western culture, but is constructed in relation to a shared cultural model of "Chineseness". China's complex relationship with modernity has meant that position of the West and Westerners within this centre-periphery frame is fluid, highly contextual and negotiated. This ambiguity was also reflected in the immigration status of most postpats, who, despite being ineligible for permanent residency, usually considered China their home. Local Chinese constructions of national identity present a racialised ideal of Chineseness, which also restricts the ability of expatriates to "become Chinese".

## 4.0 - Place and Identity

In his highly influential critique of anthropological theories of place, Edward Casey argues that:

place is no empty substratum to which cultural predicates come to be attached; it is an already plenary presence permeated with culturally constituted institutions and practices.

(1996, p 46)

In other words, places do not exist independently of the cultural and spatial meanings which we inscribe upon them, but are, in fact, defined by them. Tilley also asserts that "personal and cultural identity is bound up with place" (1994, p 15).

For transmigrants, the places in which their daily lives are lived come pre-inscribed with meanings that are, by definition, foreign and which may even be hostile to their own understandings of "home" and self. Place and place-making, therefore, take on an increased importance within transmigrant communities (cf. Van Riemsdijk 2014; Main & Sandoval 2015; Kilgore 2011; Gielis 2009). Edward Casey argues that this process of emplacement - or being-in-place - is undertaken self-consciously by transmigrants "through active processes of work, narratives and movement" (1996, p 148). In this chapter, I examine how some of these processes are employed by Shanghai's expatriates. I also outline some of the barriers to expatriate emplacement and what role the desire for place plays in expatriate constructions of identity.

### 4.1 - 'This is China': Barriers to Belonging

Before exploring the expatriate desire for place further, it is useful to understand the cultural, linguistic, economic and legal factors restricting expatriate emplacement within Shanghai. These barriers are revealed through an examination of expatriate attitudes to, and interactions with, the Chinese Other.

Before I even arrived in Shanghai, I was confronted with a situation which gave me a taste for just how fundamentally alien and frustrating China can

sometimes seem to expatriates. I had been invited to present a paper on my Masters research at the Shanghai International Conference of Social Sciences (Foote 2011) and had brought forward my intended arrival date in Shanghai by a month to accommodate this. However, something about the invitation letter made me suspicious, so before I paid my registration fee, I emailed a New Zealand academic who was listed as being a member of the organisational committee on the conference's website. He emailed me back and told me that although he remembered agreeing to be a part of the committee some months before, he had heard nothing about it since. Now very concerned about the legitimacy of this conference, I emailed my contacts at Shanghai International Studies University to ask for their opinion. David Henry, a postpat academic from the United States, replied with three words "Welcome to China." In the following months I also heard this sentiment, which is often colloquially phrased as TIC, or "This is China", from a number of expatriates. For me, it became both a statement of resignation, an acknowledgement that I had limited control over those aspects of life in China which fell outside my comfort zone, and a celebration of my own new found identity as an expatriate. By implicitly recognising that, as an expatriate, I made a choice to live in Shanghai, and by dismissing any difficulties I might face as largely trivial, I framed myself as someone who has the necessary "intestinal fortitude", in both senses, to stay there. I made this distinction in regard to myself, in part, because of the way I heard the phrase used by others, as a method of subtly distancing the speaker from someone making a complaint - the hardened postpat on one side of the equation and the newcomer destined for burn-out on the other. As Sean phrased it,

I think as an expat you have to be less judgmental. Because there's so many things you can't agree with and if you obsess on them they're going to overcome you...overtake you. I've seen it a million times and then three months later you see them, they're burnt out, they're alcoholic, and they're leaving for the airport.

It was through narratives like Sean's that the notion of TIC, and the implied mental toughness which goes with it, were often used by expatriates as a

marker of identity and a way of claiming ownership of place. Not just "This is China", then, but also "I live here. If you don't like it you can leave".

This is also often the sense in which TIC is used in expatriate blogs and online media. One blogger who lives in Ningbo explained the phrase to readers like this:

when faced by impenetrable bureaucracy and the culture of the group...Old China Hands, tell us that there are occasional experiences...when you must shrug and say – This is China – and move on.

(trailingspouseinChina 2012)

A forum user based in Pudong echoed trailingspouseinChina's definition of TIC, in their response to another thread on the topic.

I think TIC is a great phrase...There is so much here that cannot be explained, cannot be changed... 'This is China' means it's just the way it is. You can't change it, so you either take it or leave it, accept it or leave.

(chineseexpatpudong 2011)

The phrase "this is China" implicitly recognises these factors as outside expatriate control, and, because of this, TIC is not only used by expatriates as an act of emplacement within China but can also be seen as an act of Othering directed against Chinese culture. By emphasising difference and eliding similarity, even the positive enactments of the TIC attitude quoted above suggest that, for some expatriates, at least, the gulf between Western and Chinese culture is seen as unbridgeable. In Shanghai's expatriate online media, TIC is frequently used in an explicitly dismissive or derogatory manner. In a thread which began as a list of observations entitled "You know you are in China when...", one forum user had this to say,

We know how much effort [Chinese] people like to make... (Show up on time, leave late, whine about it; but never start, never follow through, do a half-assed job and NEVER take personal accountability, because excuses are always an option). The interface with non-Han is defined by difference, not similarity...You are foreign, and foreign is lesser, and that is self-evident, now appreciate my largesse by speaking with you, and give me what's in your pocket

because life has unfairly bestowed the wrong race with wealth and now justice will prevail  
TIC - where psychological dysfunction is called culture.

(Shinbone 2011)

Shinbone clearly fails to recognise that the interface between Han and non-Han is reflexive and negotiated and that by dismissing Chinese culture as "psychological dysfunction" he is constructing an identity for himself which is also based on difference.

Having recognised that they were valuable within China because of their difference, many of the postpats I met framed reconciling those differences between Western and Chinese culture as, not only impossible but also undesirable. They were defiantly comfortable in their Otherness, advising newcomers "You can't be Chinese"<sup>50</sup> and viewing with suspicion those who tried. I sometimes heard stories, usually told as cautionary tales, about expats who lit off for the interior and "went native". On one occasion, during Kiwi Drinks, a male postpat told me this story about a former acquaintance, "He really wanted to be Chinese. The next thing I heard he'd found himself a Chinese wife and was farming somewhere in rural Shaanxi province." The same person went on to tell me about a young expat male who had interviewed for a job with his business.

He told me he tried not to spend much time with other Westerners. He lived in an apartment with an elderly Chinese man, and spent most of his time with him because he said he found him 'intellectually fascinating'. I asked him, 'how Chinese do you think you are?' and he said, 'Oh, only about half.' Only about half?! You're not Chinese at all.

Expatriates who would like to assimilate, however, continue to face significant barriers to legal and cultural integration. As we have seen, immigration is usefully viewed as a rite of passage, but one which may, in the case of Shanghai's expatriates at least, actually be impossible to complete. China's immigration law has historically left very little space for

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50. Or, as Elaine phrased it on p 34, "you're never going to blend in."

those who wish to make the country their permanent home. A permanent residents visa does exist but, while a 2015 policy change was intended to make this visa simpler to get, the lack of transparency and consistency surrounding the application process has meant that only a tiny minority of even long-term expatriates are motivated to pursue the so-called Chinese green card.

Indeed, immigration policy changed so frequently and was so inconsistently enforced during my fieldwork that most expatriates relied heavily on their employers to handle the visa application process for them. This was also a site of significant stress for Shanghai's expatriates. The constantly shifting policy landscape and the fact that local Chinese staff rarely stayed in the visa specialist position for long, meant that those tasked with visa renewal were often only marginally more well informed about the application process than the expatriates themselves. This, combined with the tendency of some employers to try and bend visa rules when it suited them as well as the more fluid and negotiated bureaucratic culture of China more generally, gave the legal space occupied by Shanghai's expatriates a highly contested, and, therefore liminal feel.

Moreover, contemporary Chinese definitions of national identity are in most cases still linked to a racialised conception of Han identity, based on narratives of "biological descent, physical appearance, and congenital inheritance" (Dikötter 1994, p. 404). Farrer quotes one Chinese academic as having told him that, "For most Chinese it is impossible to imagine a foreigner ever becoming Chinese" (2010a, p 1217). This racialised understanding of Chineseness also characterised the reasons given by several of the interview participants for their own lack of integration. In attributing her place in Chinese society to an inability to "blend in" (p 34), Elaine identifies her phenotype as a central and unalterable aspect of her difference. Ben also pointed to phenotype as a barrier to integration,

It's certainly hard, because you can't look at someone in America and immediately know whether they're American, but you assume everyone you see is American because America has very diverse people that live there.

Whereas if you look at me you immediately know that I'm not Chinese.

For expatriates whose children were born in China, have grown up there, or will do so, these barriers to belonging often take on an additional significance. Bettina discussed the potential effect on her own children during our interview,

Okay, let's say, instead of moving to China I moved with my young children to Australia and we lived there all the time. Eventually, you would consider my children Australians. They would consider themselves Australian. Born overseas, but Australian. It doesn't matter how long we live in China or how well the children read and write the language and how well you can speak. They'll never turn into Chinese, right? Not just for the physical features. They'll just not be considering Chinese because it's like oil and water we can be next to each other but we don't really mix...deeply.

As I argued earlier, "whiteness" is often linked in the Chinese cultural imagination to foreignness and to the West. In Xinjiang province, in north-western China, however, phenotypical divisions between foreigners and Chinese citizens are much less clear cut. A "white" Australian friend of Fei's was sometimes asked, while cycling through rural China, if he was Chinese and, even in Shanghai, I frequently saw Uyghur street hawkers who were phenotypically indistinguishable from the Western expatriates they were trying to sell to. On the other hand, as one expatriate pointed out to me, "Uyghurs are not really seen as Chinese by Han either, are they?"

The notion of hyphenated identity, evoked by several of the interview participants, reflect a Western understanding of multicultural nationhood not shared by many Han Chinese. China lacks the history of mass migration from outside which characterised the development of multiculturalism in most Western nations, and until recently internal migration was also tightly controlled. This meant that, prior to reform, China's fifty-five official minority ethnicities were geographically as well as socially marginal figures for the majority of local Chinese, and, despite the growing visibility of some of these minorities in large cities like Shanghai, that marginality remains (He

2005; Fong & Spickard 1994). The same is true for recent migrants from outside China, and, although expatriate marginality is usually softened by privilege in Shanghai it is also often complicated by it. With very few exceptions,<sup>51</sup> expatriates were overwhelmingly drawn from countries where they were part of the majority, the centre against which multicultural diversity was defined. By coming to China, they placed themselves on the other side of that dialectic. The statement "you can't be Chinese" is, therefore, probably best viewed as a reaction against this unaccustomed, permanent but uneasy liminality and not only as an expression of the frustrated desire to assimilate culturally or be allowed to assimilated legally.

Sean's assertion that expatriate complaints were often counterproductive reflects a common point of view among postpats. During her interview, Harriet explained why she and her peers found the frequent complaints of some expatriates annoying,

If you just vent about how much you hate China, pretty quickly somebody in my core group who have been here a long time is going to say, "Why are you here?" or, "What do you want to do about it?" or "What can we do about it?" "Shut Up." You're making it about China" Because schlocking it off on to the fact you're in China is getting further away from the solution.

Like Harriet, Susan described the majority of expatriate complaints as counterproductive, "I get so sick of listening to other expats bitching about the spitting, the noise and the honking. It's not as if any of us has to be here. Everyone who is here made a choice to come." This notion that expatriate is by definition a self-selected identity also came up at one of the Bumps and Babes seminars on air pollution. Having patiently responded to a large number of very similarly worded questions, along the lines of, "How can I best protect my child from pollution?", the American-born paediatrician who was taking the seminar told her audience, "If you're

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51. I met several African-Americans for example, as well as a small handful of Maori and Pacifica expatriates. I touched on how their experience of expatriation differs to that of phenotypically white Westerners earlier in this chapter. Regrettably a more in-depth analysis of those differences is beyond the scope of this research.

genuinely concerned about it, perhaps you should leave China. At least, you have a choice. Most Chinese people have no choice at all."

Expatriates bring to China an understanding of mannered behaviour rooted in their own cultural norms and are acculturated to regard violations of these norms as rude, unclean or even uncivilised. Public spitting, pushing in line, anxieties about bargaining, shouting and even the unhurried saunter of local Chinese pedestrians were common topics of complaint for newly arrived and corporate expatriates. Air pollution, food safety issues, and lack of personal space also constitute very visible differences between the social geography of Shanghai and the experience of living in most Western countries. In contrast to those postpats whose cosmopolitan attitudes towards cultural difference represent a claim of urban citizenship in Shanghai, the corporate and newly-arrived expatriates I encountered were typically much more vocal about those differences, often with little regard for who might be listening.

During a dinner with an English-speaking local Chinese friend, Twila and Sally, both recently arrived, short-term expats, started having a conversation about Shanghai Metro etiquette. "I hate it when they just start pushing on before everyone's off the train," Twila told us. "When people don't wait to let me off I've just started pushing back," Sally replied, "The other day I had to shove about five people back out onto the platform just to get off the train." Twila continued, "I don't understand Chinese people sometimes. I was on the metro the other day, and I got up to give a little old lady my seat. Some guy with a kid just pushed in and took it. I was really angry." I'm not sure how Melody, our Chinese friend felt about this. She didn't say much and I felt distinctly uncomfortable for her. I found myself defending the man with the baby, or even Melody by proxy, saying "I get the feeling children are the cultural priority here." Suddenly it struck me that this was a conversation from which Melody was effectively excluded and that what we were doing was essentially the same as talking about her as if she was not there.

I brought this story up with another expatriate acquaintance, an academic from America who had been in China for many years. In response he told

me a story about a former colleague of his who became well-known for a similar disregard for the feelings of his Chinese coworkers:

he used to come into our offices... in those days we Westerners each shared an office with a Chinese colleague, and he'd say something to them like, 'No offence but,' before turning to me and saying something awful about 'Chinese People.' My Chinese colleague came up to me after one of these and asked me, "Does he think just because I speak English I'm not Chinese?'

Cultural differences are also magnified and complicated in Shanghai due to the city's exceptional size. Overt public spitting, while not as taboo in China as it is in the West, is certainly considered indelicate by many local Chinese. Despite this, it was not unusual for me to see several, often quite ostentatious, acts of public expectoration on the twenty-minute walk from my apartment to Jiangsu Rd Metro Station during the morning rush hour. Public spitting was also a common topic of complaint for newly-arrived and corporate expatriates, many of whom characterised it, and other acts considered rude or odd in the West, as representative of the Chinese culture or people as a whole. The fact that I typically walked past at least five hundred local Chinese on the journey to Jiangsu Lu, however, suggests that the spitting I observed may have been the exception rather than the rule, and is as likely to have been an expression of individual agency or a minority norm. Moreover, much of the behaviour which newly-arrived and corporate expatriates often described as rude or annoying was also seen by the wealthier local Chinese I spoke to as uncultured and attributed by them to peasants. The frustration expressed by expatriates at aspects of local Chinese behaviour is therefore often also an issue of class. Those doing the spitting were usually not censured by local Chinese onlookers and, because these incidents confirm existing Orientalist understandings of Chinese culture, the popularity of cultural explanations among newly arrived and corporate expatriates is understandable.

Shanghai's large population also means that, even if expatriates actively avoid the local Chinese population, some degree of contact is difficult to

avoid. Even those expatriates who lived in gated compounds in Pudong or Hongqiao - popularly considered to be among the least well-integrated expatriates in the city - interact with China on some level, if only through their driver, their Ayi, or their building maintenance man. Revealingly, when I asked the focus group of trailing spouses, all of whom lived in expatriate compounds in Pudong, what things they disliked about living in China, interactions with domestic staff and service people were among the most common areas of complaint. Katie, a serial expatriate, who had worked in Germany and Japan, explained how her discomfort at having service staff conflicted with her sense of who she was as a person:

for me, it's a bit of trust when the Ayi is cleaning my house and maybe it's just me, but I've never had a helper in my house. When she's upstairs and I'm downstairs helping with homework, although, I don't have diamonds all over my room it's just somebody in my house and do I trust them? I'm trying not to be that way because she's never done anything. It's been something I've never experienced because I'm a very trusting person and I feel I have a lack of trust in China.

In my view, the mistrust Katie describes, and the related feelings of guilt reflect her own awareness of the gap in wealth and opportunity between her and her Ayi or driver. Given her presentation of self as a well travelled, open-minded, trusting person, it seems unlikely that her distrust is the product of racial or ethnic stereotypes but is instead a projection of class. Katie is worried about theft, not because she or her family have too much - no "diamonds all over the room" - but, implicitly, because her Ayi has so little. In her response to Katie, Anais, a trailing spouse from France, also expressed an awareness of this gap in wealth and opportunity between her and her Ayi:

for example, my Ayi. It was not easy for her when she started in my home - with all the furniture, we have two children, we have a dog, we have a lot of food. For her, it's very surprising, and perhaps she would like to have the same, or not, I don't know.

When I first arrived I also found the presence of our Ayi in my home deeply unsettling. She spoke no English, and before I met Fei I had no way to

communicate with her. I would plan not to be in the house when I knew she was going to be there. When my rent was due, I would leave it for the landlord to collect on our kitchen table, and like Katie, I often worried that the Ayi might be tempted to steal it, despite the fact that she had given me no indication she was untrustworthy. Her habit of hanging up all my clothes in the closet, including tee-shirts and underwear, annoyed me and, unable to communicate this to her, I would grumpily rearrange things after every visit. Occasionally I would be unable to find an item of clothing or an important document and instead of assuming I had lost it myself, I would wonder whether she had thrown it out or taken it for her family. Like Katie, I had trouble reconciling these feelings of mistrust and annoyance with my own self-image. The idea of paying someone to clean up after me made me uncomfortable. Over time, my Ayi and I learned to communicate to an extent, and I started to regard her as a familiar and even familial presence in my home - the word's literal meaning, which is Aunt, imposing a figurative significance on our interactions. Fei would often tease me about my tendency to rush around, tidying my room as soon as I heard the Ayi open the security door.

Several other newly-arrived and corporate expatriates described similar levels of distrust and discomfort toward their service staff. Maria, a trailing spouse from Switzerland told me that her driver routinely lied on his timesheet, but that she felt guilty confronting him about it because she and her husband earned so much more than he did. Another of the focus group participants, Bettina, told me that she sometimes felt that her Ayi was judging her for her spending habits:

I always hide my shopping docket from my Ayi because, I know what she's thinking, 'Why we should be spending 20 times as much for a piece of chicken when I get it from Carrefour for - ?' Y'know? But for me, it's like we have to eat chicken here for the next 3/4/5 years and I really want to minimise the hormones and all that, but, they have no idea. They just look at you and they think that you're silly because you spend all this money when you get it for twenty times cheaper.

The trustworthiness of service staff is also a common topic of conversation in expatriate online media. Although most forum users responded to a thread entitled "Do you leave [y]our house keys with your Ayi?", in the affirmative, one poster had this to say,

No... The potential problem does not directly lie with your Ayi but her extended family. The locals tend to allow distressed relatives in their extended family [to] drive them to desperation. One bad illness, gambling debt etc etc... nothing that can be predicted. Prevention is better than cure.

(jasonnoguchi 2010)

In a more recent thread on *ShanghaiExpat*, forum users discussed another common question asked by expatriates, "am I paying too much for my Ayi?" The thread author was paying his Ayi 500 RMB a month to come twice a week and clean his apartment.<sup>52</sup> He was in the process of moving to a new, larger apartment and she had approached him for a raise. Responses to this question were more mixed, with some forum users telling the thread author that he was already overpaying his Ayi and others supporting her request for a raise. Eventually, the thread turned to whether Shanghai's Ayi were overcharging expatriates more generally:

The problems with Ayis and their pay stem from the Laowai themselves, there are always some dumbarsed laowais feeling sorry for the plight of the Ayi and paying them much more than they should... One Ayi we had told my Chinese ex... she expected a 200 RMB<sup>53</sup> tip because the laowai family before used to do this every week. That was her first and only week with us.

(tihZ\_hO 2012)

Although they may be expressed more overtly online, there is no reason to think that the views expressed by tihZ\_hO, and supported by several others in the thread, are not also manifested offline. Angela, a postpat

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52. Approximately NZ\$90.

53. NZ\$37

entrepreneur whose Ayi played a significant role in her business and was paid accordingly, told me that

it's definitely a problem and a lot of people have said that I overpay her, but, I don't really care. She now can live on her own. She doesn't have to live in a dormitory at the age of 55. Actually, without her, I couldn't have got where I am, so...I mean obviously, I don't want to overpay every single...willy-nilly. They've got to prove that they're going to work hard.

Complaints about the standard of workmanship in China were common from expatriates. One female trailing spouse told me that every light fixture in their apartment had been replaced at least once since moving in, because of poor wiring. During the trailing spouse focus group, Karin, a Swiss-Canadian trailing spouse, who had only been in China a short time, described her own frustrations with the maintenance staff in her compound,

Karin I would say also, this sort of short-term thinking in terms of when we ask them to come fix something with our house or whatever, and they come and just -

Christy Put some glue on it

Karin -put a little bit of something on it and then you call them the next day and they come back to do the -

Katie It's more of a frustration, yeah?

Karin Yeah, it's a frustration and you realise I guess, that this is the way it is here.

As the interjections of Christy and Katie suggest, Karin's comments were also supported by a number of the other participants in the focus group.

Martin, whose Shanghai experience was, in many ways, at the opposite end of the spectrum to most compound dwelling expatriates - he could not afford an Ayi for example - also mentioned poor workmanship as something he did not like about China,

Nothing works. Half the time the internet doesn't work. I got that air conditioner installed. They don't tell you what they are going to do. My landlord just came in. He was like, 'Alright we're taking your air conditioner out. We're putting a new one in,' and he didn't tell me ahead of time. So he puts the air condi-

tioner in and it doesn't work. It drips water. So we tell him, some guy comes to fix it, it's fixed for an hour, then it starts again and then a week later someone else fixes it, it starts again and the third time they finally fixed it. China's famous for having low-quality products and you can see it everywhere. Everything is pretty low quality and people just want to do their job and go home.

Having a tradesman, usually a stranger, in your home is something which many people find unsettling. For Martin, and for the significant percentage of expatriates who do not speak Chinese well, these experiences are often additionally frustrating. Because Martin and his landlord lacked a common language he was forced to rely on Chinese friends to mediate their interactions, as well as his interactions with Chinese tradesmen. The additional pressure placed on those friendships certainly coloured Martin's Shanghai experience, and when an American Chinese friend of his, who had been helping him a lot in this way, decided to leave Shanghai, Martin told me he was concerned about how he was going to survive.

Like Martin, my inability to speak Chinese made the interactions I had with Chinese tradesmen in my own apartment more difficult. My landlady sent tradesmen around to the house on several occasions, often with very little warning. The first time it happened I didn't receive her email telling me that someone was coming over until after the shifu<sup>54</sup> was already standing in my kitchen. For several minutes, he had been trying to explain to me who had sent him and why he was there, and all I was able to say in reply was "Ting bu dong. Ting bu dong" - I don't understand. Eventually, I figured out that he was looking for someone named Li, but it took me a further minute, at least, of frustrated mutual misunderstanding to link that name to my landlady, who I knew primarily by her English name, Wendy. I called her and she told me that he was there to repair a light fixture in the living room and then asked to speak to him. I was still so discomfited by

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54. Westerners will be most familiar with this term because of its usage in Chinese martial arts, to mean master or teacher. In common usage it is also used to refer to qualified workers - ie. anyone from tradesmen to taxi drivers.

his presence after he handed the phone back, that I went and hid in my bedroom until he had finished doing what she sent him there to do.

For the working partners of trailing spouses, indeed for any expatriate in a corporate setting, Chinese business culture is likely to be the aspect of Chinese culture they are most exposed to. Expatriates typically worked in environments where their co-workers were almost all Chinese. A number had Chinese employees or underlings and several also had a Chinese boss. Jim, a senior executive in a fire safety consulting firm, attributed his difficulty making Chinese friends to this, explaining in conversation that,

in Chinese business culture your boss is always your superior. It's never a personal relationship. You're never friends. The people who work under me don't want to spend time with me outside of work. They want to relax.

During his interview, I also asked Siebe about the difficulties he faced as a mid-level manager within a local Chinese company,

You have to manage people in a different way and you have to talk to your directors in a different way. The whole way of doing business is different. For instance, the timing is very important and if you want to suggest something in front of your boss you have to wrap it as though it was his idea. Otherwise, it will not work. It's not the same in Western companies because you can openly tell your boss, "I don't agree or I don't think that's a good idea, because of this and this and this reason." When it comes to the people I manage it's very difficult to make them understand what you require, because, I guess, and this is only a guess, the education is so different that they don't deal with these kind of requests and assignments in the same way that we do. There is no problem solving. There is no long-term thinking. So, if you ask them to do something that's exactly what they will do and what might be obvious to people in the west is absolutely not obvious to people here.

Like many of the postpats I talked to, Siebe had developed strategies to accommodate himself to these differences, but even some long-term postpats, like Sean, who had been in China for 15 years, still occasionally found aspects of Chinese business culture frustrating. When asked what

the major differences were between Western culture and Chinese culture, Sean had this to say:

Yes means 'No, but I'll find a way to tell you later,' That's something that I still struggle with and in fact, now that I have a foreign business with foreign clients, refuse to accept from my staff. I went through a long period, like everyone else does, of trying to understand that, and placate it. Now I just say, 'That's not good enough,' which is also wrong because that's confrontational, it's very direct, which is not the Chinese way. Talk to my father-in-law who spent 35 years over here, or my business partner who spent 30 years in China. Go and ask them the answers to these questions. They'll just laugh and shake their heads.

Over the course of his interview, Sean frequently returned to this continuity of experience, between the newcomer's desire to understand and "placate" cultural differences - to "fit in" in other words - and the security in difference he attributes to very long-term postpats, like his father-in-law. His observation, that expatriates who spend too much time focusing on cultural differences are often not in China long before "they're burnt out, they're alcoholic, and they're leaving for the airport," suggests that he attributes his own success as an expatriate to a similarly relaxed attitude to difference. However, his recognition that some aspects of life in China remained confrontational for him, even after fifteen years, also implies that this attitude is sometimes difficult to maintain.

As I argued earlier, for the newly-arrived and corporate expatriates I encountered, cultural differences were often used as a catch-all explanation for anything the speaker found unusual or disagreeable. "Making it about China" in this way was much less common among postpats. Longer-term postpats typically framed themselves as more resilient and, therefore, less bothered by the minor daily irritants that newly-arrived and corporate expatriates often complained about. They rarely complained about China or Chinese culture, unless I asked them directly or when something unusually confrontational happened.

The death of Yue Yue, a two-year-old Chinese girl, who was run over multiple times outside a busy market in Guangdong, and lay in the street for

nearly 15 minutes while passers-by ignored her, certainly qualified as confrontational (BBC 2011). Everywhere I went in the days following, expatriates would ask me, "Did you hear?" "Have you heard?" "Isn't it awful how that poor girl died?" In her interview, Elaine described her reaction to the incident.

I dislike the fact that there's no follow through with rules and regulations. I am always saying that China is like a two-year-old child without rules. I think that the Chinese, in general, try to get away with what they can until somebody calls them on it. When there's a red light there's a red light. End of story. I've probably got in almost more accidents because I've stopped at the red light than if I had just bust my way through the red light and tried to avoid traffic coming the other way. I dislike the fact that unless somebody knows you they won't help you and they would walk over your dead body in the street and that's because there's no Good Samaritan rule and of course that was really solidified for everybody with that girl being run over by a car in Guangdong.

Elaine's framing of the death of Yue Yue, as a symptom of a wider issue in Chinese culture, echoes the response of many expatriates to the tragedy. Another expatriate pointed out that the tale of the "Good Samaritan" was a product of Judeo-Christian philosophy, and argued that it had no equivalent in Chinese thought.<sup>55</sup> Local Chinese that I spoke to about it were, if anything, even more shaken by Yue Yue's death than were the expatriates I discussed it with. Unlike expatriates, many of whom saw her death as the result of a flaw specific to Chinese culture, local Chinese tended to blame her death on specific systems and processes, which they saw as largely external, acting upon Chinese culture but not worthy expressions of it - the Chinese legal system,<sup>56</sup> the spiritual effect of China's new material-

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55. In the strictest sense this may well be true. However, the golden rule certainly does exist in many forms in Chinese philosophy. In Lao-tzu's *Treatise on the Response of the Tao*, for example, he writes, "Help people in desperate need. Save people from harm... View the losses of others as your loss" (Li 2003, p xxxii).

56. Specifically the 2006 case of a man named Peng Yu. Mr. Peng stopped to help an elderly woman who had been hit by a bus, took her to the hospital, only to have her accuse him of being the one who knocked her down. The judge in the case ruled that Mr. Peng was guilty, reasoning that only a guilty man would have stopped to

ism or the callousness of individuals, for example (cf. Fauna 2011). After a month or so, many postpats began to rationalise her death in similar terms, reaffirming their commitment to China in the process.

At least one China commentator has drawn a parallel between Yue Yue's death and the murder of Kitty Genovese, a New Yorker whose 1964 murder was also witnessed by a large number of people who did nothing to help her (Hing in FlorCruz 2011). Xia Xueluan, a Chinese socio-psychologist, blames China's rapid urbanisation for creating a "stranger society", where interactions between neighbours are "characterised by estrangement, distrust and independence. In such a society", he told CNN, "it is not surprising to see incidents like this" (quoted in FlorCruz 2011).<sup>57</sup>

It is certainly true that acts of callousness, similar in nature if not in degree to the death of Yue Yue, are a visible presence in most large cities. Twila, who was originally from London, told me she felt better equipped for life in Shanghai because she was already well practiced at insulating herself from the lives of the people around her. She called this protective pose "London Head". Although there are similar social pressures acting on the denizens of large cities everywhere, for local Chinese residents of Shanghai these pressures are magnified by the pace of change and interpreted through their own national and regional cultures. The pressures might be universal but their outcomes are local and specific.

By imagining herself as the victim of a similar tragedy, Elaine expresses fears of her own vulnerability, resurgent in the wake of Yue Yue's death, a death she links herself with implicitly - just one more potential victim of

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help the woman (Fauna 2011). I often heard this precedent used by local Chinese to explain the death of Yue Yue.

57. The stranger society/acquaintance society dialectic, which Xia is referring to, is commonly used in both Chinese scholarship and the Chinese news media to explain the social problems stemming from China's rapid development. The term acquaintance society, or 熟人社会, begins to appear in Chinese language scholarship around 1994 (cf. Huang 1994; Zhou 1995), and is first used in conjunction with "stranger society" by Xiang (2000), in a paper published in the English-language journal of the Changchun Communist Party Institute. The concept of a "stranger society" clearly draws on the sociological concept of the stranger (cf. Meyer 1951; Powell 1961), and the work of Adam Smith in particular (Teichgraeber 1981, p 117; Ignatieff 1984, p 119). It may also draw on Tönnie's *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* dialectic (2001 [1887]).

China's "stranger society". Her statement that "unless someone knows you they won't help you" suggests that the indifference she ascribes to local Chinese is something she has experienced personally. This echoes an awareness common to expatriates that if they ever were in real trouble, most local Chinese would not be of much help.

During the True Shanghai Stories focus group, Brigita, a translator from Slovenia, described an experience, which further supported the idea that Elaine's fears were grounded in real dangers:

I was riding my bike and I saw this car. Literally the moment I was in front of the car he just went [makes rocket noise] and I was falling off my bike, y'know? So I'm lying on the street somewhere on Wukang Lu, and I'm like, "What the fuck just happened to me?" I was really hurt. There's a hundred people around me, nobody approaching me to ask, 'Are you okay? Is anything wrong with you?' The guy who hit me, who was driving a Mercedes obviously, is just sitting in his car, and I'm still shocked from the impact. Finally, he gets out of the car, and I was starting to talk Chinese to him, "What the fuck are you doing? Won't you just say something?" and he's like, 'What do you want me to say? Nothing happened,' At that moment I was just like, 'Arghhh, whatever!' and I rode off crying.

When Brigita finished her story, some of the postpats in the focus group told her that she should have tried to negotiate compensation from the driver more directly, as this was "the Chinese way" to handle the problem. It is not uncommon to see arguments, or even physical fights develop between the two parties to an accident. The Chinese justice system is corrupt, highly partisan and slow moving, however, and local Chinese often prefer to pay the victim off rather than risk involving the police.

Some expatriates used the phrases "Bad China Day", or "Shanglow" to refer to experiences like Brigita's, in which an unusual event forced them to confront their marginality more directly. Although accidents are by definition a traumatic experience, as Brigita's narrative suggests, cultural barriers can elevate these experiences from chance misfortune to sites of alienation and rupture - incidents of lasting significance. Unlike Miller,

whose own accident was made more challenging because of a language gap, Brigita speaks Chinese well enough to communicate effectively and her discomfort was, therefore, largely the result of cultural differences. For Brigita the accident itself appeared to be a secondary concern. Her intention, in telling the story, was clearly to convey her distress at the driver's callousness, and the unpredictability of Chinese road users generally.

It is evident from Brigita's narrative that, in addition to the behaviour of the driver, her accident was made more traumatic by the passive gaze of local Chinese spectators. In his contribution to Miller's tale, Bjorn described the large crowd which had gathered and were "just standing around", as typical and implied that he found their passivity frustrating.

During the trailing spouse focus group, Christy also commented on this aspect of Chinese culture:

Christy - The thing I like the least is the lack of compassion.

Katie - No heart.

Christy - I mean the number of times my youngest daughter has fallen flat on her face getting out of the taxi and passers-by kill themselves laughing and that happens all the time, and now it gets to her big sister too Yesterday she marched up to a woman and said, 'that's not funny'.

During my first few months in the country, I experienced the tendency of some local Chinese to laugh openly at a stranger's loss of face for myself. On my way to meet a friend near the Morganshan Lu Art District, I had a nasty fall from a kick scooter, landing across the curb and bruising my arm from below my elbow to the middle of my bicep. Immediately the three workmen standing opposite burst into laughter, while I lay winded on the ground trying to get up. I can certainly appreciate that I must have looked ridiculous. Interpreting the laughter of those three workmen through a Western cultural frame, however, it was hard for me not to see it as malicious, even if, in so doing, I was recapitulating the long-standing "Ming the Merciless" stereotype of the Chinese as unusually cruel. Writing during the 1920s, Bertrand Russell also exaggerated Chinese callousness, claiming that "if a dog is run over in the street, 9 out of 10 passers-by will stop to

laugh at the poor brute's howls" (2007 [1922], p 210). In fact, the popularity of reality television illustrates that Westerners are just as capable of finding entertainment in a stranger's distress. The fact that some local Chinese are comfortable expressing this enjoyment openly again reflects differing cultural understandings of propriety as well as China's rapid transition from "the acquaintance society", characterised by strong networks of interdependence, to a society of strangers. Expatriates, who, as I argued in Section 3.4 (pp 91-125), symbolise for many local Chinese the values of reform, are often doubly estranged from their local Chinese neighbours, unconnected by social ties and lacking even the shared regional, national or linguistic identity which their neighbours can call on in similar circumstances. They are privileged outsiders, and, from the perspective of lower income local Chinese, it is easy to see how this might make them a tempting target for fun. Regardless of local Chinese motives, incidents like the ones quoted above can be traumatic, and not just because they highlight and magnify cultural differences between expatriates and local Chinese. As the Asian Studies scholar Eric Hayot argued in his deconstruction of Russel's dog narrative, they also remind expatriates of "the possibility of [their] own meaningless suffering and death" (2009, p 199)

A Bad China Day might also be precipitated by crime. As suggested earlier, loss of personal property due to theft was a common experience for Shanghai's expatriates, with bicycles, motor scooters and Apple products such as iPads and iPhones being the most popular targets. When I mentioned that I sometimes saw bikes, unlocked by the side of the road, one postpat jokingly asked me where. "I'd have taken it", she told me. "My bike has been stolen so many times, I think it's about time I got my revenge." During a similar conversation, Simon, an engineer from the UK, told me that one of his friends had his phone stolen on the metro while he was listening to music on it. "He was sitting there, and the next minute the music just stopped. He went to check his phone and realised it was gone. They'd actually cut the cord of his headphones with scissors or something."

I also experienced being the target of thieves. I had just met up with some friends outside Shaanxi Rd. Station, in an area of Huaihai Lu that, at the time, was notorious for street hawkers, when I realised my own phone had been stolen. I brought it after arriving in Shanghai, as I wanted something that could take high-quality photos, could shoot video and which I could use as an audio recorder for my interviews. It represented a considerable investment, not only financially but also in terms of the phone numbers and other information it contained. Its GPS feature allowed me to navigate an unfamiliar city with confidence. The Chinese dictionary application and access to Google Translate gave me a rudimentary, if occasionally misleading, way to bridge the language barrier.

Up until then I had made a habit of putting the phone beyond the easy reach of thieves, in my right front trouser pocket. I put my wallet in the left one, and my field-notebook in one of the two back pockets. Winter was beginning, I was still not used to wearing a jacket and instead of returning it to my pants after using it, I had put the phone in the much more accessible outside pocket of my jacket. Someone must have seen me do this because the next time I stuck my hand in my pocket the phone was gone. I felt distraught, violated, and angry. An otherwise pleasant, mildly touristic outing to explore the city came to a crashing halt, in collision with Shanghai's underclass, or its underworld, both of which had been relatively invisible to me up to that point.

I knew that if I wanted to file an insurance claim I would need a police report, so the next day I set out to obtain one. Without the aid of my phone's GPS, though, I found locating a police station difficult, and when I found one I still had to contend with the language barrier. I used Google Translate, before leaving the apartment, to prepare a text explaining what had happened, which I then showed to the Desk Sergeant. This certainly helped, but our lack of a common language and his desire to deal with me himself meant that every time the sergeant wanted to ask me a question he had to send for a young female constable, who did speak English so that she could translate. After each of my answers he would send her away, then attempt to ask me another question in Chinese, to which I

could only respond, "ting bu dong." The sergeant tried getting the young constable to translate over his cellphone at one point, but it ran out of batteries, so down the stairs she came again. Handing me the police report, after about twenty minutes of this back and forth, the sergeant offered some parting advice, which the constable translated for me. "We do not recommend foreigners to carry phones in their pocket", she told me. "Many people try to steal them." She suggested I carry a backpack instead, something I had made a conscious decision not to do because I thought they made me look like a tourist. Throughout my stay in Shanghai, Fei and I made a game out of trying to guess if the foreigners we saw were tourists or expatriates, and it had always been important to me that I was perceived to be on the inside of that dialectic. The sergeant's advice made me more aware of how meaningless that distinction really was. For him, and for the young constable I was simply another foreigner, and I realised that for most Chinese I probably always would be.

Natalie, a TESOL teacher from the American Virgin Islands, also had her phone stolen soon after she arrived in the country. Her experience prompted the participants in the True Shanghai Stories focus group to share their own experiences with crime in China,

Fei - One time I was riding my bike in my neighbourhood and I feel something in my blind spot. I turn around and this guy is, like, booking it behind my bike, and his hand is in my purse and I was just like [screams] He was, like running so fucking hard,

Miller - I was on the bund, and there was this couple, and this guy, yeah, same thing, claw hand. I went up behind the guy and I go, "Hey!" and he looks at me and I went up to him and I told him, "I'm not going to start anything but, y'know, I saw what you did," and I went and told the couple and they were like, 'Oh thank you.' I was like, "Yeah, you should probably put your purse up here, not behind you."

Fei - Yeah, all my Chinese friends put their backpack in the front, purse like this [indicates tucking it under her arm], y'know?

Natalie - When I was in Europe I was so accustomed to that and I moved to China I just got this sense of security up until two days ago.

The sense of security Natalie mentions was shared by a number of expatriates, and will be discussed in more detail in Section 8.3 (pp 251-261). However, because this bubble of security exists, when it is punctured it is often more of a shock for expatriates than it would otherwise have been. As I argued in the previous section, expatriates tended to normalise their own relative privilege by framing poverty as a largely rural issue and locating Shanghai's urban poor at the symbolic and literal margins of the city. Expatriate experiences of crime often challenged these preconceptions by bringing them into contact with a side of Shanghai from which they were otherwise insulated. Those who benefit least from China's new society - lower income Chinese and migrant labourers - were also the most frequent antagonists in the culture clash narratives of expatriates.

Newly-arrived and corporate expatriates tended to discuss their cultural and class-based anxieties more frequently and in greater detail, engaging in collective reaffirmation of contested Western norms and values with other members of their fictive kinship networks. I would argue that these conversations represent an understandable reaction to the inevitable "culture shock" of going from an unmarked and uncontested identity into an environment in which Westerners are highly visible and Western norms and values are frequently challenged. Given the impermanent and negotiated nature of the expatriate presence in China, such aggressive policing of the boundaries of identity by corporate and newly-arrived expatriates is understandable. In her summary of the research on identity change as a consequence of transmigration, sociologist Olga Seweryn writes that "the more unfamiliar and negative the foreign culture is evaluated, the closer the migrants tend to feel to their own cultural background" (2006, p 25).

However, it seems clear from the responses of postpats that such rigid boundaries were often not seen as sustainable by them and were sometimes even a source of tension between newcomers and postpats. Postpats often used phrases like "this is China" to criticise the "us and them" attitudes of other expatriates and to frame themselves, in Sean's words, as "less judgemental". As the Bad China Day narratives reveal, postpats might still fall back on cultural stereotypes when confronted by

something sufficiently traumatic or confrontational. Generally, though, they were more likely than newly-arrived or corporate expatriates to view these incidents, and local Chinese by extension, as more than just the simple product of culture and many of the postpats I met were at pains to point out that they had a number of Chinese friends. When asked if there was any aspect of Chinese culture which they found hard to deal with, postpats were often careful not to "make it about China".

Along with the legal impossibility of becoming Chinese, the difference between Western and Chinese ideas of multiculturalism present a very real barrier to expatriates laying claim to place in Shanghai. In response, and in addition to the enactments of cosmopolitan identity outlined above, postpats tended to frame themselves as more comfortable in their own alterity, often telling newly-arrived expatriates, "you can't be Chinese". This was clearly more than simple advice, and should also be read as a reflection of the speaker's own frustrated desire, if not actually to be Chinese, then, at least, to be more fully integrated, culturally and legally within China - and perhaps to be recognised as such by local Chinese. The phrase "This is China" similarly reflects this double-bind, acting both as a narrative of emplacement for some expatriates, and as a justification for, and even entrenchment of, their continued outsider status. The strategies expatriates used to resolve this gap are examined in more detail in the following section.

## **4.2 - 'Fitting In' and the Expatriate Desire for Place.**

In order to more fully understand the effects of transmigrancy on the identity of expatriates, an examination of the strategies expatriates used to emplace themselves in Shanghai is necessary. I outline a number of these strategies in the following pages and discuss their role in framing the boundaries of new transnational identities.

A number of newly-arrived and corporate expatriates I met were taking Chinese lessons. Many of them framed learning Chinese as something they felt they had to do, to "make the most of" their Chinese experience.

They also often narrated their interactions with local Chinese as "cultural experiences", valuable opportunities to learn about a different, implicitly more traditional and, therefore, more authentically Chinese, way of life.<sup>58</sup> However, in seeking to consume difference, these expatriates also reified and commodified Chinese exoticism.<sup>59</sup> As all commodities have a value, some newly arrived and corporate expatriates were understandably reluctant to look beyond the exotic. These expatriates appeared to define their own identities in opposition to a stereotyped view of Chinese culture, and to see Shanghai as a Western cosmopolitan space, largely separate from the "real China".

"Making it about China" was generally seen as counter-productive by the postpats I talked to. Instead of focusing on difference as a barrier to emplacement, postpats tended to put more emphasis on defining a place for themselves within China, which was, in part, defined by their difference. As illustrated by the responses quoted in Section 3.2 (pp 70-89), almost all of the interview participants expressed qualified opposition to the notion of a "real China". While the postpat interview participants were generally the most opposed, their responses still typically framed China as divided into two halves -the poor, traditional and rural countryside on the one hand and wealthy cosmopolitan and urban Shanghai on the other. This cosmopolitan image of Shanghai was also supported by local Chinese constructions of Shanghai, and Party sanctioned depictions of the city's history. These

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58. This is certainly also a danger for anthropologists. As Marc Augé puts it, "we may legitimately wonder under what conditions anthropology without exoticism is possible" (1998, p xvi). However, a significant literature now exists on ways to address this and other issues of representation (Gupta & Ferguson eds. 1997). By employing a reflexive, comparative approach and by including a wide range of voices drawn from both the subject community and, where possible, from the local Chinese host culture I aim to provide alternatives to my own voice within the text.

59. While postmaterialist writers often attempt a distinction between "regimes of production/consumption centred on commodities to [those] emphasizing experience" (Hines 2010, p 293) this distinction has also been frequently criticised. According to Belk, possessions should be seen as "reasonably tangible, but may include certain experience and knowledge (eg. last year's vacation - 'I've been there done that!)" (1982 p 185). It is with Belk's definition of possessions in mind that I apply the idea of commodification to expatriate constructions of the Chinese Other above.

narratives assist and legitimate expatriate emplacement within Shanghai as a whole.

Comparative emplacement was also common, pointing to other segments of the expatriate population as less well integrated than the postpat perceived themselves to be. Those who live in so-called expatriate compounds were commonly framed as "living completely in a bubble", a space which, as we shall see in Chapter 5 (pp 126-155), is otherwise seen as negotiated and highly permeable. In other contexts, I frequently heard expatriates apply the term to themselves, i.e. "we live in a bubble", to point out the gulf which separated their experience of Shanghai from that of the majority of local Chinese. In fact, I would argue that like TIC and "You can't be Chinese", the currency of the phrase "expatriate bubble" within the Shanghai's expatriate population also implies a frustrated marginality. Shanghai's expatriate media, too, is notably preoccupied with belonging. During my first year in China alone, the *Shanghai Daily* interviewed me three times about my fieldwork, and the question of how well the expatriate population "fit in" to Shanghai was high on their list of questions all three times (Yao 2012a; Yao 2012b; O'Neil 2011).

Despite this, Chinese language fluency was rare among Shanghai's expatriates. Most were satisfied with what is often referred to as "survival Chinese", or a level allowing them to have simple conversations and conduct everyday transactions. Among postpats, only Siebe, who had been in China for three years and worked in a Chinese speaking office, was still actively trying to improve his spoken Chinese. Even among very long-term postpats, those who had been in China for 15 years or more, fluency was relatively uncommon. Several postpats told me that their language ability had reached a plateau during their first few years in China and they had not been motivated to improve it since. Mark, who had been in China for 16 years and told me he spent most of that time associating almost exclusively with local Chinese, hardly spoke any Chinese at all. Sean explained how his own early enthusiasm for learning Chinese, began to diminish once he became settled in Shanghai,

I didn't speak Chinese. I wanted to. More than I do now. Enthusiasm is a big thing, and you

need to capture it so I went and found a local tutor. You're using it with your staff, so your basic use of the language, on a daily basis, goes up quite quickly, and mine did, and it probably hit a level that I've still never got back to. Again this is just my excuse list, but, my wife speaks the language as well as any foreigner I've ever met. Yet I can take her into a taxation meeting and by her own admission, she'd be next to hopeless. A couple of years ago I asked her 'Do you think I should stop and study for six months?' and she said, 'Darling you could study for two years and you'll still never get your Chinese to a level that you can use in business.'

Others saw Shanghai itself as having fostered their complacency. I was once told by Jim, a news consultant working for CCTV's English language service, that "the only Chinese you really need to survive in Shanghai is zhege," or, literally this thing here. "You just point at what you want and say zhege," he told me. In reality, even if, like me, they had just memorised a few key words and phrases, almost all the expatriates I met spoke more Chinese than this. In most everyday situations, however, my lack of Chinese was not an impediment. A number of expatriates with experience in other cities were quick to tell me that this was not necessarily the case everywhere in China. Beijing, in particular, had a reputation for being challenging for non-Chinese speakers, not just because its taxi drivers were said to shout at passengers who pronounced their desired destination incorrectly, but also, reportedly, because fluent Chinese was considered a mark of belonging within the expatriate community as well.<sup>60</sup> Susan described the difference in attitudes, when asked why she thought it was easier to meet people in Shanghai:

Here they're like, 'Oh I'm here for six weeks, I'm here for three years' or whatever, 'Let's go party and have a good time.' In BJ they're like, 'Hmm, how's your Chinese?' In Beijing, I would go to parties and everyone would speak Chi-

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60. Expatriates I talked to attributed this to Beijing being China's diplomatic, political and academic centre, arguing that the interests of the expatriate population reflected this. Shanghai and the Shanghainese were, on the other hand, usually seen as much more mercantile.

nese. Foreigners, Chinese people, it was all in Chinese. Here, it's so rare to meet a foreigner whose Chinese is good. I get annoyed when I'm at a place like Baker n Spice and there's a foreigner ordering in Chinese, and I'm like 'Come on!' She's answering you in English and you're still like. 'Hai you yi ge Croissant.'<sup>61</sup> [laughs] 'Okay. Stop. This is not the place to improve your Chinese.'

Chinese words and phrases were often adopted by expatriates as a way of emplacing themselves within Shanghai. Despite the fact that both Chinese and English are used on maps and street signs, most of the newly-arrived expatriates I met quickly adopted the Chinese word *lu* instead of the English word *road* when giving directions, even when talking to other expatriates. When discussing money they typically used *kuai* and *mao*, the terms most commonly used by local Chinese, instead of the more formal *yuan* and *jiao*, or the English *RMB*. *Laowai*, *Ayi*, *fuyuan* and *shifu* quickly became synonymous with *Westerner*, *maid*, *waiter* and *driver* in their vocabularies. Many expatriates also adopted Chinese pronunciations for local place names, pronouncing the first syllable of *Shanghai* to rhyme with *hang* instead of *hung*.

Postpats often salted their spoken English with a wider variety of specialised Chinese vocabulary, for example, *meinu* meaning a pretty girl, *guanxi* to mean influence, *mafan* for trouble and *Laoban* for the owner of a business. Those who spoke Chinese well might even drop whole Chinese sentences into the conversation as demonstrated by this example from my interview with Elaine,

There is a favourite saying and I have actually promised the next person who tell's me it in Chinese I'm going to punch them in the face, and it is, 'wo gei ni shuo, wo gei ni shuo,' and normally it's a middle aged to older Chinese gentleman with a cigarette in one hand, his man bag in the other, his keys to the Audi in his pocket. He's dictating to those around him, 'wo gei ni shuo,' which basically means, 'let me tell you,' and that's totally acceptable in China. It

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61. One Croissant Please.

doesn't happen as often, in the West. I mean Warren Buffet doesn't stand around and go 'wo gei ni shuo. yinwei wo you henduo...' I have so much money, so let me tell you what to do."

Linguistic code-switching, or switching between two or more languages, is common within multilingual and transmigrant communities. Significant scholarly attention has also been paid to the practice and its significance in the formation of transnational identities (cf. King & Ganuza 2005; Sánchez 2007; Scotton 1983). Writing with respect to the inhabitants of Gibraltar, prominent sociolinguist Melissa Moyer argues that their code-shifting between English and Spanish expresses a desire to be identified as British subjects and to distinguish themselves from the Spanish while also manifesting an independent cultural identity of their own. According to her, "this leads to a personal and collective ambiguity regarding their true identity: a hybrid culture and identity manifest linguistically through bilingual code-switching" (2002, p 220). Code-switching also often serves a functional purpose, particularly during second language acquisition- ie. using words from a second language to refer to concepts which are either not directly translatable into the language being spoken, or not present in the speaker's vocabulary for that language. However, considering that many expatriates lacked genuine fluency in the language they were borrowing from and that the terms being borrowed were usually easily translatable into English,<sup>62</sup> it is difficult to see what role code-switching might play in the speech of expatriates, other than as a performance of hybridity. By appropriating Chinese words and phrases, postpats projected a blended cosmopolitan identity. Their code-switching should therefore be viewed as an act of emplacement, affirming the speaker's connection to China and to Shanghai.

Because the words were borrowed into English and therefore primarily directed at an English-speaking audience, they also helped to define the boundaries of expatriate identity. At a party celebrating the Western New Year, I was introduced to Paula, a visiting American academic who spoke

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62. An exception might be *guanxi*, whose English translation, *influence*, does not carry the same cultural meanings as the original.

very good Chinese. I used the word *Ayi*, and she asked me what I meant by it. Bill, who had introduced us, explained that I was talking about my house cleaner. Paula replied, "Oh, right. I wasn't expecting you to switch languages like that." I found this experience doubly jarring. Her unfamiliarity with a common practice defined her as an outsider to expatriate Shanghai, despite her command of Chinese, while also reminding me of the shallowness of my own emplacement within China. To her *Ayi* was a kinship term and an honorific. For me, its primary significance was to the woman that cleaned my house.

The Huangpu river doesn't just run through the centre of Shanghai. It also ran through the geographic imagination of many of my participants. Puxi residents often identified themselves in opposition to Pudong, describing their side of the Huangpu as the fun side and Pudong as the family side. Some residents of Pudong also demonstrated regionalist identities by adopting tongue-in-cheek nicknames of their own, referring to Pudong as Pu Jersey or the Dong. Identification with, and good natured rivalry between, even smaller, suburban, sections of Shanghai was also not uncommon among expatriates.

As I argued in Section 3.2 (pp 70-89), postpats often framed life in Shanghai's older neighbourhoods as traditional and expressed an investment in that tradition. In doing so, these expats de-emphasised the influence, not only of colonialism but also of Maoism on the lives of lower income, local Chinese, while framing the impact of development as both necessary and necessarily destructive. This tendency, to view the Other as living a fixed and simple "traditional" existence, outside of historical time, is certainly not unusual. It has been one of the central meta-narratives of colonialism (Fabian 1983; Haddour 2000, p 104) and it is also inherent to the rhetoric of development, which implies that nations like China are moving towards a permanent "developed" state - Fukuyama's "end of history" (1989) - and away from their ahistoric, un(der)developed past (Rojas 2001). When utilised by expatriates, this narrative, which frames local Chinese as both victims and beneficiaries of development, also served to demonstrate their investment in China, while distancing the speaker from the negative con-

sequences of China's new economy, in which they are inevitably participants.

According to Farrer, narratives like these express a "post-colonial nostalgia", through which,

expatriates selectively appropriate and disavow colonial analogies... including a re-interpreted or sanitised nostalgia for the colonial-era symbols of Western power and prestige, which are reinterpreted... as a mythology of urban cosmopolitanism.

(p 1213, 2010)

However, expatriate nostalgia also echoed the cultural narratives used to justify Shanghai's development by the Shanghainese themselves. It would be difficult to walk down the Bund and not have some sense of the history of European influence, which by their very existence, those buildings signify. Amongst expatriates, though, the colonialist implications of that history seldom came up and were rarely articulated in any detail. It was much more common to hear them express their own "nostalgia for the future" (Lu 2002), rationalising Shanghai's development with reference to the values of its past. However, these values were nearly always described as a natural outgrowth of Shanghainese culture, not as a product of colonialism. Echoing Shen Hongfeng, Scott described Shanghai as, "a fishing village that came good a hundred years ago, and again they're hungry. They're really hungry, and so they're very commercial." Harriet's statement that "[Shanghai] has managed to be international before any other part of China was" is another example of the tendency of some expatriates to prioritise local cultural agency, and to deemphasise the impact of colonial or foreign intervention on Shanghai's history.

Underneath People's Square, past by thousands of people each day, there is a recreation of a Shanghai Street in the "old days" which demonstrates this airbrushing of semi-colonial authority - and anything else unpleasant - out of Shanghai's history perfectly. Signs in English and Chinese identify the display as a "Traditional Shanghai Street in the 1930s." A cardboard cutout of a smiling Chinese lady in a rickshaw being pulled by a rustically dressed but well-scrubbed runner stands between a street sweeper and a

woman with an empty basket. Under the watchful eye of a Chinese policeman, an upper-middle-class Chinese family in Western dress promenade past the Shanghai Race Club's Pavillion, a bastion of Western privilege that once stood where People's Square is now. Another family stand in line for a street-car (see Plate 5, p 69). Foreigners are conspicuous in their absence from these tableaux.

Shanghai's history of cosmopolitanism is a shared mythology, which justifies the project of development, by reframing Shanghai as primarily a Shanghainese endeavour, within which the expatriate presence is seen as both incidental and natural. By reinterpreting the semi-colonial period as an expression of Shanghainese values, haipai not only acts as a narrative of emplacement for expatriates themselves, it has also made their return to Shanghai, the former centre of foreign power on the mainland, politically palatable, both to the Party<sup>63</sup> and to the Shanghainese more generally (cf. Larmer 2010; Ma 2012; Wang et al. 2009; Wu 2004; Yueng 1996). Although the newly-arrived and corporate expatriates were often actively engaged in maintaining a touristic distance from Chinese culture, the longer they had been, or intended to be, in Shanghai the more likely my participants were to express the desire to "fit in" or to belong. These longer-term postpats utilised a range of emplacement strategies. Some employed and reinforced Shanghai's cosmopolitan imaginary, calling on the city's semi-colonial period to justify their place in the city and their own role in China's contemporary development. They also tended to echo official Chinese narratives of Shanghai's history, deemphasising colonial narratives in favour of those which highlighted local cultural agency. Linguistic code switching was widely used by expatriates, both as an act of emplacement in Shanghai and to differentiate themselves from less well-integrated expatriates or tourists. Comparative emplacement was also used more directly, with postpats commonly framing themselves as better integrated than corporate and newly-arrived expatriates. However, rather

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63. Ending the treaty port system, and foreign control of Shanghai, had been a major plank of Chinese communism since its inception (Sonnenburg 2003, p 114; Chen 2007, p 8).

than functioning to further integrate expatriates within Chinese culture or the Chinese state, many of these strategies reify expatriate liminality, defining the boundaries of new transnational identities.

### **4.3 - Summary: Westerners on the Threshold**

Expatriates typically framed Shanghai as Western, urban, modern, developed, wealthy and - relatively - clean, while the rest of China was seen as Oriental, rural, traditional, developing, poor and dirty. Clearly, this structure poorly reflects China's complex social reality and, when confronted with its contradictions, several of the interview participants responded by relocating those contradictions - the urban poor specifically - to Shanghai's periphery. Several of my postpat interview participants normalised their ambiguous status within China by locating themselves between the two poles of this dialectic, describing themselves as poorer than the richest Chinese while recognising that they were better off than the, implicitly rural, bottom 80% of local Chinese earners.

Newly arrived and corporate expatriates tended to engage with Chinese culture in fairly superficial ways, often constructing a stereotyped view of the Chinese Other. These stereotypes were frequently enacted in conversation with peers, functioning to rationalise and contain violations of established Western norms and values. Behaviour such as public spitting was explained by these expatriates as representative of Chinese culture as a whole, serving to reify and maintain the cultural and social distance between themselves and Shanghai's local Chinese population. As suggested by the responses of several interview participants, this approach was frequently challenged by postpats, many of whom displayed a more relaxed, TIC, attitude towards their own difference. Rigidly defined boundaries between self and Other were generally seen as counterproductive by postpats, and "Making it about China" was discouraged. However, a number of postpats were still quick to point out that "you can't be Chinese". Moreover, when exposed to anything unusually confrontational many postpats returned to an essentialised view of Chinese culture to explain it.

Postpats also frequently framed themselves as better integrated than other categories of expatriates, describing corporate expatriates as "living completely in a bubble". They employed a variety of strategies to mediate the gap between China and the West - or between self and Other - and justify their emplacement in Shanghai. With reference to the values of Shanghai's past many expatriates utilised and co-produced - alongside local Chinese and the city's government - a cosmopolitan imaginary, justifying their position within the city, and the project of development itself. Several asserted belonging to specific districts or suburbs, and/or constructed personal neighbourhoods, enacting regional identities that were both located within Shanghai and insulated from it. Linguistic code-switching was also widely used by postpats to assert transnational identities, emplacing the speaker within China and distinguishing them both from other - non-expatriate - Westerners and Shanghai's local Chinese inhabitants.

The liminal positioning of Shanghai's expatriates, between China and the West, between rich and poor, within China but separate from it, required postpats to make the threshold their home, defining an identity for themselves which straddled national and cultural boundaries.

## 5.0 - Defining the Bubble

The notion of an "expatriate bubble" has been used extensively in the literature (Fechter 2007a; Butcher 2010; Jacob 2003; Haslberger and Brewster 2007; Marx 2001). It is also a term that is used by expatriates themselves and occurs frequently in expatriate media. Expatriates commonly used it to discuss the physical and cultural spaces they inhabited, either comparing life in Shanghai with life in their home countries, comparing their lives with the lives of local Chinese, or using the spatial metaphor of the bubble to compare their own emplacement in China with that of less well-integrated expatriates. In this Chapter, I explore how these different constructions of the expatriate bubble are used by expatriates and by scholars. I also discuss its importance and attempt to link it to the ideas of expatriate liminality developed in the previous chapter.

Although many of the expatriates I talked to framed themselves in opposition to the stereotypical image of the Western expatriate, very few disputed the notion that there were Westerners living very privileged lives in Shanghai, isolated behind the walls of a compound, while engaging only with the host culture through their workplaces, through Western-friendly "local" restaurants or as a tourist. As we have seen, postpats commonly used the example of less well-integrated expatriates to narrate their own comparative emplacement - reinforcing the stereotype while presenting themselves as exceptions to it. In reality, even for those expatriates who were the most insulated from the local Chinese context, some level of economic, personal or professional integration with the host culture was unavoidable. On the other hand, like most transmigrants, Western expatriates faced cultural, legal and economic barriers to integration that were specific to the local context.

Dual or hyphenated identities are common in the public discourse of many Western countries and are available to transmigrants within those countries as markers for new transnational identities. It would be an oversimplification to frame these identity categories as legitimising transmigrant difference, or to argue that they negate the barriers faced by

transmigrants to the West. As Derrida points out “the silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything” (1998, p 11). It does, however, provide transmigrants with a political and cultural space within which to perform their difference or to challenge barriers to integration. To borrow a phrase from Obododimma Oha, those with hyphenated identities “live on the hyphen...between lives, cultures, languages, spaces, ideologies, etc.” (2005, p 259). While this may “suggest a destabilisation and an ambivalence” to Oha (2005, p 259), the hyphen also defines and legitimises a space within which transmigrant and minority populations can then locate themselves. These liminal multicultural spaces do not exist in the same way within Chinese discourses of national identity. Western multicultural discourse creates and legitimates a space for migrants within the West, but because no such space exists in China, expatriates must create one for themselves. I am conscious that I need to be careful not to conflate the experience of migrants from the developing world to the developed world<sup>64</sup> with the experience of expatriation. Nor do I want to be interpreted as suggesting that migrants to the West have it easier than expatriates overall, merely that migrants to the West are participants in discourses of nationhood and national identity whereas expatriates are excluded from those discourses. Except in rare and probably highly context dependent cases, expatriates - China’s Western transmigrants - seldom move beyond the category of foreigner, of laowai, or of outsider in the eyes of local Chinese.

On the other hand, most expatriates did not seem that interested in claiming a hyphenated Western-Chinese identity. The phrase “You can’t be Chinese” usually carried a double meaning; communicating both a warning - it’s impossible to become Chinese - and an imperative - “don’t try too hard to become Chinese.” Those expatriates who did “go native” often became the subject of cautionary tales or jokes and were generally viewed with suspicion. The absence, within local Chinese culture, of a culturally

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64. I recognise that the terminology of development tends to position “different cultures on different temporal scales: Europeans race ahead and [everyone else] is caught in a time-warp” (Armbrusterp 2010, p 1240). The terms developed and developing are used here purely because they are widely recognised cover terms.

defined space for resident foreigners and the reluctance of most expatriates to "become Chinese" meant that Westerners who chose to live in Shanghai were forced to define their own cultural spaces. They invented new identity labels for themselves, appropriating the local Chinese word *laowai*, and using English words like *expat* or *Westerner* to define a liminal space for themselves between China and the West.

Fechter refers to these social and cultural spaces as bubbles of Westernness or "bubble[s] of Europeaness" (2007a, p 28). In her ethnography of Western expatriates in Singapore, Melissa Butcher, too, uses the notion of a bubble, describing it as "a comfort zone consisting of the familiar, shared meaning and in particular friends, language and humour" (2010, p 27). She goes on to argue that "Western bubbles", like those she documents in Singapore, are a conspicuous feature of many large Asian cities (2010, p 34). Both Fechter and Butcher see these bubbles as negotiated and permeable spaces that are set apart from, but necessarily connected to, the local cultural context (Fechter 2007a; Butcher 2010). The academic literature on intercultural management, on the other hand, often uses the term "expatriate bubble" to refer to a zone of permanent alienation. The bubble is seen as a maladaptation - a reaction to culture shock - which a "culturally sensitive and therefore efficient global manager" should be able to avoid (Jacob 2003, p 13; cf. Halsberger and Brewster 2007, p 387; Marx 2001, p 67).

The prevalence of "the bubble" metaphor in blogs and opinion pieces written by expatriates based in a diverse range of cultural and political contexts (Harvey 2012; Thompson 2013; Zinger 2013) suggests that it has significance beyond the few contexts in which it has been documented by researchers. Predictably, given the globalised nature of the expatriate labour force, the notion of an expatriate bubble was also commonly discussed among Shanghai's expatriate population. Before moving on to examine how these bubbles are manifested within the physical geography of Shanghai itself, it therefore seems appropriate to consider how the term was used in Shanghai's expat media and to examine to what extent interview participants felt the term applied to them.

Shanghai's expatriates often evoked the notion of an "expat bubble" to refer both to their separation from local Chinese and as a recognition of their own relative privilege. In a blog post entitled *The Expat Bubble*, the male head of a corporate expatriate family, living in the upmarket Jinqiao district of Shanghai, writes,

If you slurred to your taxi driver while out drinking in downtown Shanghai...and woke up in Jinqiao you would have thought that he put you on an aeroplane [sic] back to Wichita, Kansas. Many like to say that..you are in the 'bubble', protected from the extremes that China has to offer.

(Baba 2012)

Ruby Gee, a Chinese American columnist for *Shanghai Expat*, echoes a common claim, that some expatriates never escape this bubble. She argues that for these expatriates, "Chinese faces – they're just there, to serve you at overpriced bar venues, to gape at you on the subway, and to hassle you on the streets to buy their junk" (2012). Gee points to language and cultural barriers that make it more difficult for non-Chinese expatriates to engage deeply with the "real China". She then goes on to suggest a one-day itinerary of activities which she claims "will open the eyes of many expats who have never stopped to consciously observe Chinese society firsthand" (2012). Far from dissolving the expatriate bubble this narrative reinforces it, promoting a temporary, deliberate engagement with the local cultural context and framing China as the exotic object of a Western touristic gaze. The activities Gee suggests - buying bing<sup>65</sup> from a street vendor, having lunch at a blue collar noodle bar or watching old people do tai-chi in the park (2012) - are all deliberately ordinary. Even in upmarket, suburban Jinqiao, perhaps Shanghai's best-known expatriate ghetto, there are working class neighbourhoods where Gee's itinerary is lived by local Chinese every day. In contrast, the wealthier postpats I encountered tended to live a less separate, but still suburban existence, living in renovated townhouses in

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65. Chinese savoury pancake.

the former French Concession or spacious, modern apartments in upmarket "local compounds". Less well-off expatriates usually lived in smaller two room apartments in blocky, crumbling, 1980s era apartment buildings or in shared, larger apartments. Often these apartments were also renovated and furnished, by the landlord or by the expatriates themselves, to suit Western tastes. Although they continued to patronise expatriate bars, supermarkets and restaurants,<sup>66</sup> most postpats also regularly shopped and ate in the same places as their local Chinese friends and neighbours, not for the experience but because the quality was good and the price was competitive.

In an opinion piece for CNN travel, Shanghai postpat Edward Falzon writes,

I've lived in Shanghai for almost four years now, and... I really love it here. But many of my expat friends are still living in a bubble that is a serious departure from what one might call "true" Shanghai. For us, RMB 50 is a cheap cocktail. For a local, that's dinner for four... but the best wontons I've eaten in Shanghai...aren't from a Bund or Xintiandi restaurant... they're RMB 16 and conveniently located 100 metres from my Luwan apartment.<sup>67</sup>

(2011)

Falzon distances himself from his less well-integrated friends, who he alleges "live in a bubble", only to include himself within that bubble with the sentence that follows. By drawing an equivalence between the price an expatriate pays for something and the proximity of his/her China experience to an imagined "'true' Shanghai", Falzon conflates class divisions with cultural ones. This again reciprocates the link drawn by several of the interview participants between poverty and cultural authenticity. It is also suggestive of a common preoccupation for

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66. The popularity and importance of expatriate restaurants, bars and supermarkets in the construction of expatriate bubbles is examined in Chapter 8 (pp 224-263)

67. 50 RMB is around NZ\$9. 16 RMB is close to NZ\$33.

Shanghai's expatriates, amongst whom the difference between the "local price" and the more expensive "expat price" was frequently discussed. Falzon uses his ability and willingness to cross this line to distinguish himself from less well-integrated expatriates. In this respect, his local knowledge is an enactment of a locally emplaced, but still explicitly Western, transnational identity. Falzon concludes the article with an instruction to his readers that "the Bubble must be deflated", not abandoned, cautioning them that emulating local Chinese too closely might be interpreted as condescension rather than a genuine attempt to integrate (2011).

During our interview, Ben, a lawyer also framed the bubble as both a cultural and class-based division:

On the one hand, yes we want to have our US breakfast cereal and things like that but on the other hand, it's ridiculously expensive to buy those things. If you're living in a bubble this is a very expensive place to live. But if you can get out of the bubble and pay Chinese prices for things then it's very economical. We usually talk about it, choosing which aspects of your life are going to be in the bubble. I get my hair cut at a very local place, because why pay more than ten kuai for a haircut, especially for me. Whereas my wife gets her hair cut squarely in the bubble and pays more here than she did in Washington... and the guy does a better job. I lived in Nanjing back when there was no bubble and it's a lot of fun living the non-bubble life if you have the time and the patience. I would love to take my family, like for a year and live in a third tier city in China. My wife, I'm sure, would be totally up for the idea. The kids would get used to it. The question is how do you get off that work hamster wheel and be able to do it.

Ben's description of the expatriate bubble as a hard-to-escape and at times unwelcome economic division between himself and local Chinese illustrates a common perspective amongst corporate and newly arrived expatriates. I often heard expatriates claim that Shanghai was one of the most expensive expatriate cities in Asia or even in the world, and while

some imported foods, like breakfast cereals, for which there is still only a limited market in China, remain expensive, there is a growing market for many Western products - coffee most notably<sup>68</sup> but ice cream and Western-style fast-food restaurants like Burger King and McDonald's are also increasingly popular. There is also a concerted and active effort by Western food importers and restaurateurs to capitalise on the Chinese association between the West and cosmopolitan sophistication, promoting wine, cheese and other Western "prestige" items as emblematic of those values.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, many Western cuisines and ingredients can now often be found at, or even below, their Western equivalent price. Of course, as Falzon points out, there is always a cheaper local option. However, this again reflects the economic divisions in the city, as well as the cultural divisions between expatriates and local Chinese.

Ben pointed to Shanghai's International Schools as a key manifestation of the expatriate bubble, pointing out that local Chinese are excluded from enrolling in them by law. However, his suggestion that even quite wealthy local Chinese executives might struggle to bear the financial costs of sending their children to an International School<sup>70</sup> is somewhat contradicted by the growth and increasing stratification of the private education sector in China (Deng 1997; Hannum & Park 2012; Lin 1999).

Bettina, a stay at home mother also linked expatriate integration with the

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68. As of June 2013 Starbucks had 2008 locations in Shanghai or roughly one for every 10,000 residents (Starbucks China 2013). For comparison, Auckland, New Zealand has one Starbucks for every 100,000 residents (Starbucks NZ 2013).

69. In many cases this involves, literally teaching local Chinese consumers how to appreciate the product. There is a notorious advertisement which plays on video screens in the back of Shanghai's taxis, featuring Debra Melburg, the "Master of Wine" offering advice on wine appreciation in florid and boozy, subtitled English. I met one English expatriate whose job it was to travel around China delivering wine appreciation seminars for a French wine company. Cheese is also promoted in this way. While shopping in the Xintiandi Mall, I happened upon a well-attended seminar put on by an Italian cheese importer, educating Chinese consumers how to eat cheese, how to pair it with wine and so on.

70. Which, for corporate expatriates, are still often borne by their employers, as part of their expatriate package.

education choices she and her husband made for their children,

It varies a lot I think. There's a lot of people that just come in to grab the money and go and they're not really interested very much in the culture. There are some people, they integrate more than others. I've known of people, ah, Americans who send their children to the Chinese local schools. I think I stand somewhere in the middle, my children have always gone to bilingual schools. They go to a local school with an international stream and they're learning how to write and all that. But would I say that they're perfectly integrated? No. The Chinese believe that there's no way you can learn Chinese like they do. Doesn't matter that you've always lived here, had a Chinese Ayi, always done bilingual education, so I think that's probably as far as we will go. I would never be happy living in a Chinese compound because there would be a few things about the habits of the Chinese that would bother me on a daily basis. I do love to explore but I need to go back to a place that feels comfortable and safe.

Bettina's reference to the cultural barriers to integration faced by her children, despite their age-level fluency in Chinese, again reinforces the idea that, for most expatriates, the bubble is not just a space which they choose for themselves. Bettina makes it clear that her bubble fulfils a personal need for comfort and security. However, according to her, it was also shaped and contained by the liminal space within which local Chinese locate the foreign Other.

Like Bettina and Ben, Christy saw her children's education as a key factor in the formation of her bubble,

Lots of us meet people through our kids and none of them are in Chinese local schools, so the people that we meet are necessarily foreigners and they do activities with other foreigners and so, if you don't make an attempt, things just move you in that direction. Yeah, I think we all are in a bubble. More so than in other countries I mean I never felt in a bubble in Italy or..ah, the US, or in Germany, or in France, because it's a lot easier to speak the language and the cultures are so much more similar, so I think here we're necessarily in a

bubble. But I guess you can choose how big or small your bubble is and there are things that you can do to make that bubble less artificial and less constraining. The bubble feels safe and to a certain extent, I find that challenging and think what kind of a poor, wimp are you that you need to come back to Shanghai and go, "oh my goodness. I can go to Starbucks or take my kids to that public toilet and I know it's not going to be completely horrifying" and, um... if I want to stay here another three to five years, which we do. I need the bubble. Otherwise, Ben will come home and find me banging my head against the wall.

Christy described her bubble as a cultural and social safety net, a space to retreat from China into. She not only located Western spaces within this bubble but also incorporated local spaces, such as public bathrooms, that she knew to be Western-friendly. Additionally, she implied that her bubble was fluid and negotiated, changing size depending on choice and circumstance.

Harriet, a freelance writer, also framed the size of her bubble as dependent on context, portraying it as vulnerable to rupture and occasionally requiring repair.

Maybe I just feel it more here but I definitely feel that I do live in a bubble more just in a sense of class. I'm by no means wealthy, or have a savings account or anything, but, I have friends who do and if I was in a state of emergency I have a handful of people that would be very willing to help me, and that's a kind of bubble. Occasionally that gets punctured and broken down, and I...I welcome that, and then sometimes I really don't want it to be, and I repair the tear in my bubble. I define the bubble idea as - firstly it's a mental place that I've built and maintained and then can always go to, that is, maybe even more closed off from the outside than it maybe would be in the West. It starts there and then my apartment, yeah...my desk. Shut the window. If I want it to be dark I can make it dark, or whatever, to help facilitate going into my mind. But writing friends abroad, reading about the US and Europe. Just being able to leave here mentally. Even if I can't afford to, or can't, time-wise or money-wise,

physically leave. Mentally I can always leave.

Unconsciously echoing Bucholtz & Hall's definition of Identity as "social positioning of self and other" (2005, p 486), Harriet described her bubble as an internal mental boundary, protecting her from unwanted outside influence. She frames this boundary as a pre-existing facet of her personality, which had been foregrounded and exaggerated by the experience of living in China. In addition, Harriet described her bubble as a social space, defined primarily by her "wolf pack", the fictive family she outlined in Section 2.2 (pp 43-48).

Angela, a postpat entrepreneur, also linked the exclusive, tightly bound nature of her fictive family with the persistence of her own bubble,

I slightly live in a bubble. I realise I haven't looked at the news for a week. I hate looking online, I want the paper in my hand. It frustrates me, actually, sometimes. Yeah, I suppose it's the proactive thing. It just happens without you knowing it, but, I've just realised that I don't even know what events go on in Shanghai anymore. I used to always be like there's this new thing here or there's this or that. Unless I'm cooking at it I don't know about it. Last weekend I had the first weekend off in ages so, I'm exhausted by those things and I miss the social aspect of doing that. But, therefore, the bubble thing is frustrating because sometimes it feels like it's quite hard to get out of it and to move on and to meet different friends or to have a weekend away to somewhere that you haven't been before.

For Angela, the bubble is not only a social or a cultural space. It is also defined by an absence of information, or more accurately by the unaccustomed inaccessibility of information within China. The mediasphere in Shanghai is perhaps even more pervasive than in some Western cities, with news coverage broadcast on TVs in the metro and with news-stands every few blocks in most commercial areas. However, because these sources are all in Chinese those expatriates who do not speak or read putonghua fluently - almost certainly a sizeable majority - are excluded from participating in the discourse. English-language media do exist of course, but they tend to be very self-referential, focusing on the expatriate

lifestyle rather than, say, international affairs or Chinese politics. More serious topics are occasionally covered by CCTV's English-language service, and by newspapers like *China Daily*, but usually with such an obvious pro-China, pro-Party bias as to be seen as unreliable by most foreigners. Censorship is a factor in this too, of course, negatively impacting both the quality of the news reporting and expatriate scepticism of it. Interestingly, according to Andrew, an American postpat who was working as a news consultant for CCTV, the most common form of censorship within the Chinese news media is self-censorship.<sup>71</sup> In his experience direct intervention by the state in day-to-day reporting was relatively uncommon.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, the print versions of English language publications are not widely stocked. Rather than a casual relationship to acquiring current affairs knowledge expatriates must, therefore, actively seek out news from online media, many of which are, of course, censored or blocked in China. This not only separates expatriates from local Chinese, symbolising, as it does, a much broader zone of linguistic exclusion from public life but as Angela points out, it can also create a gap in knowledge between expatriates and their friends and relatives back in the home country.

Karin, a stay at home mother who had only recently arrived in China, described the bubble as a moral hazard of life in a compound,

We've only been here for three months so...but I  
can see how it can happen. We live in a  
compound you know, and we have small children

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71. There are also examples of newspapers challenging the Chinese censors, most notably the *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, or *Southern Metropolis Daily*, which successfully broke the story of a SARS epidemic in 2003, at a time when the government did not want it covered. Subsequently, members of the editorial staff were arrested and charged with corruption (Kahn 2004). More recently 25 senior staff at the *Nanfang Zhoumo*, or *Southern Weekend*, were arrested, also on corruption charges. It is generally suspected, however, that these arrests represent a "targeted attack on the idea of an independent news media" (Denyer 2004) rather than a genuine criminal conspiracy.

72. Andrew told me that for important or politically sensitive events directives were usually sent out from the relevant ministry, instructing broadcasters on how to cover the story. In some cases, these directives instructed broadcasters not to cover a particular story at all. However, print media and broadcast media fall under different ministries and this sometimes led to confusion. Andrew recalled a number of stories that CCTV were instructed not to cover, but which were subsequently broken in the daily papers the following day.

and everything is there for them, so, I can...I can see how you wouldn't leave really, but, we've said now we need to make the effort to get out every weekend and to do something else and to see something else. Meet other people you know, and not get stuck in that life because then you're not getting the most out of it.

Although she framed the bubble as undesirable, Karin also depicted it as a self-contained refuge that enabled her to engage with the "real China" selectively. By narrating this engagement as an attempt to "make the most" out of her time in China, Karin, like many corporate and newly arrived expatriates, commodified and reified cultural differences.

Katie, a teacher with experience as an expatriate in several countries, also described her bubble as a consequence of life in an expatriate compound,

When we lived in Japan we lived in the middle of a Japanese community and in Japan there's no compounds, you don't have to pick a compound. So, in coming here and looking at houses when we were moving we were both very disappointed. 'Ach, we have to live in a neighbourhood and there's so many foreigners.' We didn't want that experience. We chose the compound we live in for the French language because there's so many French families and our kids are developing the French language. I think it's your choice how big your bubble will get. You're a foreigner in another country, you'll always be in some sort of a bubble. You're not treated the same. You're not! ...but I think having small children that it's very important to let your kids see you being open minded for them to grow.

At the time of her interview, Katie and her husband were both teaching at an International School. Her statement that she "had to" live in a compound, therefore, reflects the degree to which the lives of corporate expatriates are sometimes dictated, or are at least shaped, by the companies who employ them. Later in her interview Katie reiterated this point, arguing,

You don't have a choice of where you want to

live. Not saying I would live in the middle of a Chinese community now knowing how China works, but when you come here you are given a choice of this compound or this compound and it's foreigners anyway.

As Bianca's enrolment of her children in a private local school suggests, even in Jinqiao, where Bettina and Katie were both living, more culturally local options do exist. However, for at least some corporate expatriates, aspects of their lives, including accommodation and the education of their children, are paid for and/or arranged by their company as part of their expat package. Although these services certainly make relocation easier, Katie's response illustrates that the assistance provided can also have a disempowering effect. Through residential placement in an established expatriate compound and/or through mediation of an expatriate's initial contact with the host-culture the expatriate package often reinforced expatriate perceptions of living in a bubble.

Butler, a postpat who works as a freelance English teacher, argued that even if he wanted to live in a bubble, his financial situation would not allow it,

I don't think that I would have stayed here as long as I did if I just had to be friends with the Chinese people. There's just too many cultural differences between the way we live our lives, but is that a bubble? I think that's expat guilt. I'm not a rich expat. I don't have a package. I don't live in...in a penthouse and I don't have a driver<sup>73</sup> and I don't have immunity when...when I toss a hooker out the car. So, no I don't live in a bubble. I get spit on and pushed and almost run over and people yell at me and I experience the culture of where I live every single day because of where I live and because I don't have the money that allows me to sort of push above it. I mean this is Shanghai, this isn't, y'know, butt-fuck Anhui. Pizza Hut's been here for 15 years. It's all part of the city, it's part of the culture. Shanghai's always been an

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73. The role played by local Chinese drivers in the construction and maintenance of the corporate expatriate bubble will be examined in more detail in Section 6.1 (pp 157-172)

international city. If we want to go out and get sushi you can get sushi. If you want to go out and get a burger you can get a burger. If you want to get Chinese food you can get Chinese food.

Cain's suggestion that corporate expatriates enjoy the same extraterritorial, legal immunity granted to foreigners during the semi-colonial period, not only echoes a perception common among expatriates, that they were less subject to the law in China than they would have been in their home countries.<sup>74</sup> It also reflects the very real biases within Chinese law enforcement towards those with the wealth or the *guanxi* to avoid a conviction (cf Li 2009; Wang 2013).

His belief, that the rhetoric of the expatriate bubble is motivated by guilt, reflects the way the term is often used by expatriates, to narrate their own failure to integrate or to make claims of comparative emplacement, by applying the notion of an expatriate bubble to others. It is, therefore, important to contrast his dismissal of the idea of a bubble with his own positioning of self in opposition to wealthy compound dwelling expatriates. His framing of the corporate expatriate Other against the postpat self is suggestive of the divisions within Shanghai's expatriate population discussed in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124). By contrasting cosmopolitan Shanghai with rural Anhui, Cain provides a comparative frame within which his China experience is seen as relatively authentic. By extending that frame into the past, using the length of time Western food has been available in Shanghai to illustrate his point, he is legitimating his emplacement as "traditional".<sup>75</sup>

As implied by his response, Cain's closest friends in Shanghai were all Westerners, something he attributes to cultural differences, and his

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74. This belief is examined in more detail in Section 8.3 (pp 251-261)

75. It is certainly true that some Western style foods are gaining in popularity in Shanghai. One expatriate I talk to referred to China's growing obesity problem (cf Yu et al. 2012) as the "McDonald's Bomb". However, as I go on to discuss in Section 4.1 (pp 91-115) many expatriates favoured Western-themed bars and restaurants which were not popular with local Chinese, and some stopped visiting bars once they started to attract a more local Chinese clientele.

reification of these culture differences suggests that maintaining an identity separate from the local Chinese Other remained important to him despite his rejection of the idea of an expatriate bubble. Rather than critiquing these boundaries, Cain's discomfort is, therefore, likely to be a response to the negative implications of the bubble for many expatriates.

Susan, a postpat working in the not-for-profit sector, argued - like Cain - that other expatriates often used the idea of an expatriate bubble to justify their own perceived lack of integration,

I work at the Shanghai Centre, the Portman. I have lunch there, buy my groceries there, I've been to the pharmacy there. I do feel more and more like I live in a bubble. But I don't mind. [laughs] I have a good friend who's always like, 'We're all just foreigners that live in a foreign bubble,' and I always feel like he needs to justify the way he lives and I don't want to ever feel like that. If I wanna eat foie gras every day then I will. If I wanna eat Chinese food every day then I will. I had this really scary moment a couple weeks ago. Where I was having lunch with two girlfriends and somehow we all started bitching about our Ayis. [laughs] I was like 'Oh my god. I hate myself!' But, yeah, I think we're sort of drawn to other foreigners because we're all foreigners, we will never fit in, no matter how much we try. I mean I feel like I live in a bubble in terms of outside news. It's really hard to catch up with the international news cycle. The presidential elections in the US, for instance. I just I have no idea what's going on. I live in a bubble in terms of paying my bills, I mean here, honestly, I try to pay my bills on time, but if I don't? Like six months later the guy knocks on the door and he's like, 'Oh you owe me such and such,' and then I pay it. In the US it's, like, so much more structure. So I feel like in a way I live in this really cushy bubble. It's cheap to go out. It's cheap to order food. It's cheap to go travel. I don't wanna leave!

Echoing Angela, Susan characterised her own bubble as a boundary, not only between herself and local Chinese but also between her experience of life in China and her experience of life in the West. Her use of the self-contained world of the Shanghai Center as a metaphor for the expatriate bubble emphasises her own liminal placement within Shanghai, neither

completely at home in the bubble nor able to successfully “fit in” within China itself. Perhaps because of this tension, she narrates her own movement between these two cultural spaces as largely a matter of personal choice, and, therefore, something she should not have to justify. In this way, she avoids confronting the privilege of her own mobility, while simultaneously normalising her position within the city.

On the other hand, Susan also points to aspects of the bubble that she feels are prescribed or are at least an expression of the cultural, political and geographic realities of life in China. Her tendency to spend the majority of her time with other foreigners is framed in this way. Susan’s comment that “it’s really hard to catch up with the international news cycle” suggests that, like Angela, the transition from the Western to the Chinese mediasphere was also one of the reasons she felt disconnected from her home country. Furthermore, by comparing the process of paying utility bills in China with doing the same thing in the United States, and by discussing the affordability and convenience of life in Shanghai more generally, Susan made it clear that, for her, the bubble was an artefact of the qualitative differences that made her life in Shanghai easier than it had been back in her home country.

When characterising his own bubble, Bruce also referred to these qualitative differences,

Yeah, like, utility bills. Talk about living in a bubble. What do we pay for water rates, gas, electricity? I've got no frigging idea. It doesn't even register. We just go round the corner to the little corner shop.<sup>76</sup> In the UK, you have to freaking have a standing order and you have to sign up and they take it out of your bank account We live in a quiet compound, down a lane, no traffic, no spitting, swearing, noise. Y'know, absolutely, in a bubble. First time in my life...but

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76. Utility bills can be paid at most convenience stores and were usually so low that most expatriates considered them a trivial expense. In the apartment, I shared with Siebe and Selena, for the four months from Nov 10th to February 29th - the coldest months of the year - the total cost for water, power, gas and internet was 2325 RMB or 775 RMB/person. This works out to roughly NZ\$434 or NZ\$144/person.

I'm 40 now so I'm using that as an excuse. Large corporates on the whole, from what I've seen, executive management, families, come here for two or three years do a stint, and in the worst case scenario, some of these guys you can see they're just chalking up the days like they're in prison. It's just purely to further their own corporate career. Yeah, okay, fine, whatever, live in a bubble. Cars, drivers, maids, y'know, three story house, gardens, best schools, and have huge chips on their shoulders.

Bruce's suggestion that the corporate expatriate bubble was often less fluid because of the short-term nature of expatriate assignments, and his observation that for a few expatriate's China continued to be seen as a hardship posting for the duration of their stay, again parallels narratives of comparative emplacement common among postpats.

Certainly, the few expatriates I encountered who were "chalking up the days" usually presented an unmistakable contrast to the cosmopolitan, locally emplaced values typical of Shanghai's postpats. At a *ShanghaiExpat* mixer in Pudong, I met one recently arrived American expatriate who personified the stereotype perfectly. Ironically he had come to Shanghai on a prestigious academic scholarship with the aim of learning Chinese but narrated his limited experience of the city in much more explicitly oppositional terms than was usual among expatriates, framing Chinese culture as inherently inferior and using this to reinforce an existing nationalist identity. On learning that I was an anthropologist, he attempted to recruit me into supporting these views, arguing that, because he had seen people spitting in public and babies in split pants urinating in the street, China was far too uncivilised to ever overtake the West. He told me he hated Chinese food, then complained about the cost of Western food and said he had given up on finding anywhere in Shanghai that "could cook a steak properly."<sup>77</sup>

Considering the degree to which the Western exceptionalist

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77. He also called Barack Obama "Barack Osama" and told me that he "wouldn't be surprised if [the President] turned out to be a Muslim".

metanarratives have been challenged by China's return to global super-power status, it is perhaps surprising that I encountered so few expatriates who framed their relationship to China in such openly hostile terms. On the other hand, as a member of a tiny minority, the stress of maintaining such an explicitly oppositional identity must be considerable. As anthropologists Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich and Catherine Trundle have argued, "most people still become mobile with the intention of settling once more and of making the new locality a meaningful site for daily life" (2010, p 1).

Elaine, who is married to Bruce, also contrasted her own bubble with those of less well-integrated expatriates,

I think that the really wealthy Chinese can claim to live in an even nicer bubble than we live. But it's very easy in Shanghai, because you're Western, because you don't fit in to exclude yourself from society and to exclude yourself from problems. It's a very easy thing to do, because you're living here for a short amount of time and you're going home, and so I think that that bubble is then defined by that exclusivity of "I'm just not going to participate in society." I laugh at myself sometimes, because, now that I'm a housewife, my bubble is a five-kilometre radius. As long as I can go to restaurants within five kilometres, my nail salon, the avocado lady bless her soul, then I'm...I'm quite happy and yet I would like to say I'm slightly different. I meet Americans from Michigan. They come over here and they're on these huge packages, and they're having a great time and they're going out to bars and they're going to Mint and they've got their private drivers and they've got their kids in schools that are the same price as Harvard, and that does something to people I think.

The distinction Elaine makes between the privileged, exclusionary lifestyle of corporate expatriates and her own more mundane and local bubble is also similar to Cain's description of his Shanghai experience. Her incorporation of the avocado lady, a local Chinese entrepreneur who turned her Wulumuqi Lu greengrocers store into an expatriate favourite by stocking difficult to locate Western food items, demonstrates the role

local knowledge plays in the construction of this more cosmopolitan bubble.

Although Elaine sought to normalise her emplacement in Shanghai, echoing Ben's suggestion that "a number of Chinese people also exist" in a bubble (p 72), she went on to reify her own bubble as a barrier separating her from Chinese locals, arguing that "you don't fit in. You don't blend in". As I argued in Section 4.1 (pp 91-115), this notion that foreigners "can't be Chinese" was frequently articulated by expatriates. Her emplacement is a comparative emplacement. By framing her own bubble as less nice than either corporate expatriates or Shanghai's "really wealthy Chinese," she positions herself as more authentically in place than either of these groups - justifying the privilege of her own bubble as "slightly different".

During his own interview, Martin, a TESOL teacher, expanded on the role played by this imposed liminality in the construction of his own bubble,

Expatriates insulate themselves. They have their own little bubble of the clubs they go to and the bars and the restaurants. Very few of them, in my experience, have like good Chinese friends. We insulate ourselves I think, so we can't integrate. Even though Shanghai would probably be the best place in the country to actually have some degree of integration, I don't think that's going to happen in mainland China. I don't see how it can, at least not in the next 20/30/40 years. They want all the foreigners to come here, but at the same time, like around June when that stuff that happened in Beijing. When something like that happens then they just turn up the xenophobia on their whim. So, I mean you can't integrate with that kind of environment.

The incident in Beijing mentioned by Martin, an attempted rape of local Chinese girl by a British man, was discussed frequently by expatriates during my last few months of fieldwork in Shanghai.<sup>78</sup> As Martin suggests,

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78. It occurred in the open on a busy street in Beijing. The girls repeated and increasingly frightened refusal, "bu yao, bu yao", soon attracted the attention of local shopkeepers and the alleged perpetrator was caught, literally, with his pants around his ankles. He received a brutal beating at the hands of a growing crowd of

however, shifts in immigration policy and in the attitude of local Chinese towards laowai have occurred periodically throughout the period of reform and are now an accepted part of life for many postpats.

Ingrid, an investment manager who had recently arrived in China, but who had travelled extensively in other parts of the developing world, also made a distinction between her own bubble and the lives of those expatriates she perceived as less well-integrated than herself,

I think to some extent I do live in a bubble, but perhaps to a lesser extent than for some other expats. I have a Chinese roommate. I have a Chinese working environment. I mean my Chinese is not good but I try, and I feel that it's also better than many. In some ways I scorn those who are here for the expat lifestyle, those who go through their day and don't interact with one Chinese person, except their driver, y'know? I don't know why, but I intuitively I feel scornful towards them. The related point I wanted to make towards that is, at some point, whether it was being in China or as an accumulation of my other travel experiences I've learnt to understand and accept that I'm not Chinese and I won't ever be, y'know what I mean? And that's just a reality and a thing that has to be appreciated. I mean, some of the daily interactions that I enjoy most are every morning when I buy my fruit at the fruit stall outside my work. The linguistic interaction and the non-language interaction. The mother of my Chinese roommate doesn't live in Shanghai, but she comes to visit occasionally. These are some of my favourite interactions that I treasure and enjoy and hold dear to me.

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irate locals, which was caught by a mobile phone camera. The alleged rape drew xenophobic responses from many Chinese netizens and, at least, one local Chinese celebrity. Shortly after the video came to public attention, the government announced a "hundred-day crackdown" on immigration, and although the reason for this policy change was never made explicit, it was widely concluded both by expatriates and in the Western media that the two were linked (Steinfeld 2012). There was a raid on a prominent expatriate nightclub in Shanghai. There were rumours that anyone who could not produce a passport with a valid visa inside had been detained, and some patrons had even been deported. Eventually it emerged that Filipino staff had been the actual target of the raid and there were even suggestions that the club's landlords had arranged for the raid to get back at club management for a perceived loss of face.

Ingrid uses the interactions she has with local Chinese to differentiate herself from less well-integrated expatriates. However, unlike Cain who frames his own interactions with local Chinese as unexceptional, she highlights these experiences as personally valuable precisely because they involved local Chinese. Her selection of positive experiences to illustrate the degree of her integration is usefully contrasted with her consciousness of the cultural boundaries between herself and Chinese locals. By incorporating some local Chinese into her bubble, and by allowing it to be permeable at its periphery she, like Cain and Elaine, is engaged in the performance, not just of a Western identity, but of a transnational cosmopolitan identity as well.

Siebe, a postpat brand manager working for a Chinese company, also used his encounters and relationships with local Chinese to imply the fluid and negotiated nature of his own bubble,

I believe that most expats, whether they're students or working here, kind of live in a bubble. I believe that most of the interactions are limited. When you go to a restaurant and when you buy your vegetables and that's it. Perhaps not even that, and then, the thing is, when you have some free time you go far away because you can't bear China any longer. You have had enough. That's how I see people who work here and a bit the same for students. I mean I'm also in my bubble. Here you have the cultural dimension, of being in China. Yes, the fact that I can go to a Western bakery every now and then and have a good chocolate pie puts me in such a good mood that I can deal with the very annoying shop assistant at the Chinese supermarket. These mechanisms are there in order for you to be able to cope. Then again I also like to just to go out with my partner and his friends. It's entirely in Chinese and I don't understand most of it, but I can enjoy that as well. It's not something I could do every night but, yeah.

Siebe described the majority of expatriates as only peripherally engaged with the local cultural context. Like Ingrid, Cain and others, he distinguished himself from this group through his own interactions with

local Chinese. Despite his continuing efforts to improve his spoken Chinese, at the time of interview, it was still only at survival level. Siebe's response suggests that, because of this, forays outside his bubble were often mediated by his local Chinese partner and that this mediation allowed him access to, though not full participation in, situations that would normally be closed to expatriates who lacked fluent Chinese. He also implied that his ability to choose how deeply or how often he engaged in this way allowed him to feel more at home in China, and that having a Westernised bubble to retreat to assisted this emplacement. However, because he worked for a Chinese company, and had local Chinese co-workers, managers and subordinates, there were clear limits to Siebe's ability to effectively manage his contact with local Chinese in this way. Siebe's description of the difficulties he faced as a cross-cultural manager and employee (see p 105), suggests that he also frequently found his workplace culturally challenging.

Sean, a postpat business owner, discussed what effect operating a business in China had on the formation of his own bubble,

I think you'll find a lot of expats, myself included, that during the day spend a lot of time doing the dinners, dealing with the bureaus, dealing with their bureaucracy. So, during the weekends do I want to hang out with Chinese people as well? No, I don't, and I'm not apologising for that. That's not my culture. I like my culture and my culture's not just New Zealanders. It's Westerners. It's Anglo-Saxons. This is a melting pot, a really great melting pot. That's one of the cool things about being here. So, y'know, embrace that, enjoy that. Or not, up to you, but that's something that I love about it.

Sean's self-identification with an imagined community of Westernness echoes Susan's description of her own social group as mainly comprised of other foreigners. This tendency of Western expatriates to associate primarily with other Westerners was discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 (pp 26-48). Sean's description of Shanghai as a melting pot contrasts markedly with his framing of New Zealand identity as a subset of Anglo-

Saxon Western identity. In doing so he excludes both Maori and non-Europeans from his definition of New Zealand, placing them in a similar liminal category to the one he himself inhabits within China. By referring to Western culture as “Anglo-Saxon”, Sean also makes explicit a connection, between whiteness and Westernness, which is normally only implied. It might be tempting to hear in this racialised construction of cultural identity an echo of racial nationalism. However, it is important to read the statement in light of the context in which Sean lives. When a Chinese migrant to America lays claim to an Asian-American identity they are accessing an already defined social and cultural space within the American state, one which straddles the boundary between China and America. As I argued earlier, however, no such identity category exists in China (p 95). So, while Sean’s statement is certainly coloured by the West’s history of dominance over the non-West, his recourse to race as an identifier can also be read as a response to the exclusionary, racialised politics of Chinese identity itself.

For those expatriates who are married to, and have children with local Chinese, the local : expatriate boundary is often permeable to the point of meaningless. Karen, a British stay-at-home mother married to a local Chinese man, argued that maintaining a bubble in her situation would be impossible,

I don't think I'm in a bubble. It's impossible to be. My husband brought me to China, and he's originally Chinese. We've been here seven-and-a-half years. So I've been through a whole process of 'Oh my goodness. Where are we?' and now I'm kind of fairly fine. We're here another year so I think I'll go through that process the other way round when we go back. I have a Chinese mother-in-law so that's been a whole learning process but I can see that it's been a learning process for both of us. She wanted to get involved quite directly in our family affairs but she's also good at accepting that I'm different and taking a step away and I think. The fact that we are foreigners in some ways makes it easier. They can explain lots of things to themselves by saying 'well they are different'.

However, even for Karen, difference remained a persistent and constantly reinforced aspect of her identity. She described reification of this sense of difference by Chinese locals, including her mother-in-law, as helping to free her from cultural expectations which she might otherwise have found disagreeable. In this way, even though she may not seek it out, the peripheral position that expatriates occupy within Chinese culture benefits both Karen and her Chinese interlocutors, by providing them with a cross-cultural space within which to negotiate their shared difference.<sup>79</sup>

Anais, a stay-at-home mother whose husband was a corporate expatriate in China on short-term assignment, also disputed the relevance of "the bubble" for her and for her family,

When you arrive they ask you if you want to live with French, only French, so for me, the danger was not to try find other people, other nationalities. I want my child to meet other children from other countries, to see that it's not perhaps as easy for them as it is at home. The bubble, you can choose to open and to close it, so, it's good to have a French or an American doctor, dentist, some food. Yes. But I think, for me, I'm just here for 2 or 3 years so it's not a necessity. I think I could survive in another city, like...ah...Xian or Chengdu. But if you are going to stay longer here, it's good for you and for your children to have people who talk the same language as you, to eat the same food, just to have some...ah...some identity.

Anais' belief, that those who intended to stay in China long-term benefited the most from the expat bubble, presents an interesting contrast to the stereotype view that corporate expatriates<sup>80</sup> are not as well-integrated as their postpat contemporaries. As I argued in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124) this stereotype was often used by postpats to justify their own comparative emplacement, and it seems likely that Anais is

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79. This is certainly not a situation that is unique to China (cf. A & C Luke 1998; Lomsky-Feder & Leibowitz 2010; Cerroni-Long 1985; Cottrell 1990; Fu et al. 2001). For more on cross-cultural families in China, however, see Huang (2000).

80. Most of whom, like Anais' husband, will only be in Shanghai for between 1-3 years.

engaging in a similar act of comparative emplacement here. However, her assertion that she would have felt comfortable living in a second or third tier city has to be contrasted with the choice to live in an expatriate compound. Later in her interview, Anais suggested that, although this choice may have been made passively to begin with, it was now a matter of personal preference,

If you asked to live in a Chinese compound it's not easy. I had a friend last year, she moved to live in a Chinese compound. It was very, very hard for her because Chinese people don't want foreigners with them. I think when you come here you don't want to become Chinese and I think for Chinese people there is other objectives. Everybody is more or less selfish so I think Chinese people want to take what they can from foreigners and foreigners come to win more money and to go back home. Perhaps you can try, if you are married with a Chinese man or... I don't know. But I think the culture is so different that I'm not sure you can have a good life if you live permanently here. I'm not sure.

Like Katie, Anais used her family's emplacement within a multi-national, but still explicitly Western, expatriate compound to dispute the notion that she lived in an expatriate bubble. By restricting her definition of the bubble to expatriates who only associated with their own co-nationals, Anais is repurposing the metaphor to justify her own emplacement within Shanghai. Like a number of expatriates, she further justified her position within China by arguing that deeper integration for foreigners was impossible. Her framing of local Chinese interactions with laowai as mutually exploitative echoes a belief shared with me by a number of other expatriates - ie. that their own inability to make local Chinese friends reflected a degree of Chinese self-interest which they regarded as characteristic of Shanghainese culture more generally. It was rare to hear expatriates acknowledge, as Anais has, that this self-interest was equally present in the actions and motivations of expatriates.

Faustine, another stay-at-home mother whose husband was in China on assignment, also disputed the extent to which the notion of a "bubble"

was applicable to her family,

We tried to avoid having this bubble. I mean, for me a bubble would be you don't have any interaction with the country you are in, or with other people. We have the security of the family. So, that maybe could be a bubble, but, it's only for us just to have some reference, and then we try to keep a normal life. Okay, as normal as we can. We have a driver. In Europe, we don't have any driver. But we try to stay as normal as possible here and to keep as many interactions with people, with things, with what's outside. I'm here as a foreigner so I try to first accept everything. I try to be okay with everything or I try to adapt. Sometimes it's too much, but it's only three years. Also, when I go back to Europe I say, "Okay the air is fresh, I can see the sky. It's not so dirty, it doesn't smell. So that's okay." I just accept that and I try to understand. Before moving here, I came here many times for work and for me China was very aggressive, very noisy. So when my man told me, 'okay we have to go to China,' I told him, 'Okay, Shanghai I go, other cities I couldn't,' but I was happy to come here because for me it was, ah, nicer and ah, more friendly for foreigners to adapt.

Faustine equated Europe with normalcy in her response, and it is clear that, for her, a normal life is synonymous with a European or Western lifestyle. She implied that the additional privilege available to expatriates in Shanghai could potentially become a barrier to achieving a normal life and that avoiding the bubble, therefore, entailed maintaining her Western lifestyle in spite of her Western privilege. On the other hand, she implied that the Western cosmopolitanism of Shanghai was a key reason she had felt comfortable relocating to China in the first place. Like Anais, she suggested that the short duration of her husband's assignment had also helped her to rationalise those aspects of life in China that she found difficult to deal with. Similarly, she presented regular visits back to her home country as an opportunity to reconnect with "a normal life". As Siebe argues, the impulse to leave China, and, more importantly, the legal and financial ability to do so, can also be seen as an extension of the

expatriate bubble.

Faustine implied that when China became "too much" she could always retreat to the security of the family, which she stated might also be seen as a bubble. The expatriate compound in which she and her family lived and the international school her children attended provided her with a space for the performance of this Western family identity, and would certainly have helped her to recreate a "normal life" in Shanghai for herself, her spouse and her children. The family is a concept closely allied with the notion of home in the European cultural imagination. Family is often seen as "as the center of family life; a place of retreat, safety and relaxation" (Somerville 1997, p 227; cf Mallet 2004). Faustine's evocation of her family as a "bubble" - a space of "security" and normalcy - clearly echoes that tradition.

With the exception of Cain, all of the interview participants were comfortable with my use of the term bubble to describe the cultural and often physical distance separating them from the local Chinese population. As demonstrated in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124), expatriates commonly used the bubbles of less well-integrated expatriates to imply their own more authentic emplacement in Shanghai. However, many of the expatriates I talked during my stay were also comfortable applying the term to themselves. The responses quoted above reflect both tendencies, with the majority of interview participants either explicitly emplacing themselves within the expatriate bubble, or narrating their position in Shanghai with reference to it - framing it as a danger that they were actively resisting. Only Cain and Karen felt that the bubble did not, in some way, apply to them personally. Karen felt that having a local Chinese spouse made maintaining a bubble impossible, although she still recognised that her status as a foreigner privileged her in certain settings, providing her with a space for the performance of Western cultural difference. Cain, on the other hand, dismissed the notion of an expatriate bubble as a misplaced expression of expatriate guilt, while also narrating the cultural differences between himself and local Chinese as fixed and

stable markers of identity.

Martin's argument that the fluid and liminal positioning of foreigners within China makes integration difficult and, therefore, necessitates the construction of an expatriate bubble, parallels research into the effects of social exclusion on transmigrant and minority communities in the West (Guarnizo & Smith 1998; Nagel & Staeheli 2004). In his ethnography of Turkish adolescents in Germany, anthropologist Sven Sauter writes, "The exclusion from society produces a new awareness of 'we' as a group... Home can be...a social space. The young people... are Frankfurters, not Germans, because they are not allowed to be" (2003, p 176). According to Anna Secor, the Kurdish minority population of Istanbul also contest their own political and social exclusion in Turkey through the reappropriation and redefinition of parts of the city as Kurdish space (2004).

This increased awareness of "we" - a term which only has meaning when set in opposition to "them" - can be seen in the way expatriates framed their bubbles as well as in the terms they used to identify themselves as a group. Like the Kurdish youth in Secor's study, expatriates used national and regional identity labels, such as Westerner to set themselves apart from the local Chinese Other.<sup>81</sup> Possibly in response to racialised politics of Han Chinese identity, a few even repurposed racial identity labels, self-identifying as white, or - as Sean did during his interview - as Anglo-Saxon.

In a broad-based ethnography of communities of "new immigrants" to California, Cross and Keith argue that transmigrants are "engaged in a continuous process of appropriating, resisting or accommodating to changing objective conditions in their environment" (2013, p 63). De Certeau calls this the process of "making do", through which users "reappropriate the spaces organised by means of socio-cultural production" (2011 [1984], p xiv), adapting them to suit their own interests

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81. See Section 3.1 (pp 51-69)

and expectations. These processes of making do were also visible in the expatriate re-appropriation of Chinese space into bubbles of Westernness, and the way in which those bubbles were then described by expatriates.

Corporate expatriates usually framed the expatriate bubble along strictly cultural lines and were more likely to see their own lack of integration as a natural, fixed and inevitable expression of their status as outsiders. Postpats, on the other hand, typically described the size of the expatriate bubble as an accommodation - something negotiated between themselves and the local Chinese geography of Shanghai. Demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of its construction they sometimes used class boundaries as well as cultural ones to locate their bubble. For instance, Katie, a corporate trailing spouse, excused her choice to live in an expatriate compound as the result of limited accommodation choices, while Harriet, Susan and Elaine - all postpats - saw their apartments and/or personal neighbourhoods as locations they themselves had selected and were employing in the construction of their respective bubbles. As I argued in Section 3.1 (pp 51-69), postpats also routinely reappropriated terms like *laowai* and *expatriate* to position themselves somewhere between foreigners and locals, and the construction of their bubble often reflected this liminal placement.

Unlike the minority communities documented by Cross & Keith (2013), Sauter (2003) and Secur (2004), Shanghai's expatriate population occupies a position of relative economic privilege. De Certeau's notion of "making do" implies a process of negotiation, between the individual and the "dominant cultural order" in which each is transformed by the other (2011 [1984], p xiv). As a number of the interview participants pointed out, the economic privilege enjoyed by some corporate expatriates meant that they were able to "push above" this process of negotiation, and more directly impose a Western, middle-class, suburban lifestyle onto the local Chinese context. Postpats were more likely to be actively and directly engaged in the process of "making do", contesting their alterity, both

through the re-appropriation of parts of the city as Western spaces and through the inclusion of trusted and familiar "Chinese" people and spaces within their bubbles. Ingrid, for example, highlights her Chinese roommate and Chinese working environment as mitigating factors in the construction of her bubble; Elaine incorporated Chinese businesses into hers and Siebe points to his relationship with his local Chinese boyfriend as a feature of his. This more outward-looking and cosmopolitan bubble allowed postpats to make claims of local emplacement while continuing to provide them with a refuge from cultural and class-based challenges to that emplacement.

Despite this variation in their experience of the bubble, the concept was widely used and commonly understood by Shanghai's expatriates. Even those few interview participants who disputed its use, located themselves at a distance from China, evoking cultural and/or class-based divisions in order to normalise their emplacement within a liminal comfort zone. In the following chapters, I examine how this transnational bubble was manifested within the social lives of expatriates, and what role it played in the maintenance of identity.

## 6.0 - Integrity of the Home

Shanghai's expatriates often used the metaphor of a bubble to describe the liminal spaces they inhabited within Shanghai, straddling the boundaries between China and the West. In this chapter and the one which follows it, I consider how these constructions are manifested within the physical and cultural geography of Shanghai, and what role they play in the lives of the expatriates themselves,

Some expatriates framed their bubbles in strict opposition to China, using positions of relative privilege to overlay Western suburban lives on to the geography of Shanghai, and only engaging with China peripherally. For others, the bubble was more layered and negotiated - a cosmopolitan and transnational, but still largely Western, space.

This variation in expatriate constructions of the bubble reflects divisions within the expatriate population as a whole - between corporate expatriates, who framed China as a locus for experience but who live at a distance from it, and postpats, who saw themselves more deeply integrated within China, but who were also more comfortable in their own alterity. The division between postpats and corporate expatriates was also evident in the personal geographies expatriates employed when describing the city. Puxi, the west bank of the Huangpu, where I lived was sometimes called the "fun side" of Shanghai. Conversely, Pudong, where many of the so-called, expat compounds are located, was often referred to as the "family side". With a river cutting the city in two, those who lived in Pudong had little incentive to socialise in Puxi, and vice versa. Likewise, the other well-known centre of corporate expatriate settlement, Hongqiao, which is in Puxi, was remote enough from the city centre that postpats, living in Jing'an, or the former French Concession, seldom went there or even talked about it.

The homes of expatriates were important foci of identity and several interview participants pointed to their own homes in Shanghai as the fixed centre of their bubble. Within their homes, expatriates had the most con-

control over their environment and were therefore, more able to reproduce a Western lifestyle and were usually the most distant from the local cultural context.

Home-making has been examined by scholars from a wide range of social science disciplines and through a number of theoretic lenses (Chapman 2004; Mallett 2004; Miller 2001; Pink 2004). The ongoing globalisation of the labour market, and consequent increases in population mobility more generally, have led a number of scholars to consider what effect these contemporary geographies of movement and settlement have on the notion of "home" (Ahmed et al. 2003; Al-Ali & Koser 2002; Brah 1996; Rapport & Dawson 1998). For transmigrants, in particular, the notion of the home-place - a physical space where everyday life is lived - need not be, and frequently is not, where they feel most "at home". The tension between these two definitions highlights the extent to which home can be regarded as a process, one which involves ongoing habits of home-making (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Miller 2001).

I will consider postpat home-making practices in greater detail later in this chapter. It should be noted, however, that most postpats did not regard their own lives as typical of the expatriate experience in China. It is for this reason that I begin my examination of the expatriate relationship to Shanghai's physical and cultural landscape with the group most often accused of walling themselves off from it - corporate expatriates.

## **6.1 - Compounded: Corporate Expatriate Home-Making**

Corporate expatriates often brought spouses and/or children with them when they relocated. Most had come to China because their company asked them to, not because of any particular interest or investment in China or in Shanghai. The "sents" rather than the "wents" as one postpat phrased it. The limits imposed by the length of their assignment to China also placed a limit on the ability, and therefore the willingness, of corporate expatriates to engage deeply with the local Chinese context.

Corporate expatriates commonly framed their stay in China as a valuable cultural experience and themselves as external observers and consumers of that experience.

The homes of corporate expatriates often sharply embodied this outsider status, drawing unambiguous, physical boundaries between the West and China, between public and private space and between outside and inside. Although there were exceptions, many of the corporate expatriates I encountered either lived in gated suburban communities, in Hongqiao or Jinqiao, or in serviced apartments attached to 5 Star Hotels, such as the Shanghai Centre or the Kerry Parkside. Typically these were highly Westernised developments. The Parkside complex, in Jinqiao, includes "182 elegantly designed and fully serviced [apartments]" (Parkside n.d.) as well as offices, several bars and restaurants, a health club, an on-site bakery and a Western supermarket. Inhabitants of the Shanghai Centre, in Jing'an, had access to a similar range of Western-friendly facilities.

Across the road from Kerry Parkside are the Regency Park Villas, an expatriate compound "development of about 367 luxurious villas and semi-detached houses" (CKPH 2015). Like many expatriate compounds Regency Park offers a close reproduction of an upmarket, Western suburban neighbourhood. Identical McMansion style<sup>82</sup> townhouses, with fenced backyards, line a neatly laid out network of private roads and footpaths. There is even an international school on the grounds. The postpats I talked to often derided these "expat compounds" and serviced apartment complexes as "expatriate ghettos", and even the expatriates I met who lived in them frequently characterised their own buildings and/or neighbourhoods as almost exclusively inhabited by other foreigners.

In their marketing and in their design these spaces are presented as outposts not just of Western suburbia, but also of unaccustomed privilege. Words like "luxurious", "premier", "extravagant" and

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82. A style of suburban development popular in America, characterised by ostentatious, "super-sized" homes lacking in distinguishing characteristics. Ironically, this style of home is also stereotypically attributed to Chinese tastes in New Zealand.

"prestigious" are commonly used in the publicity material for expatriate compounds (CKPH 2015; WCMP n.d.). Facilities such as clubhouses, cinemas, ballrooms, and sports clubs were an ordinary and even expected benefit of living the compound life for many corporate expatriates. While eating dinner at a restaurant, I overheard one recently arrived corporate expatriate couple discussing their housing options. The male spouse ate his meal and listened while his partner talked him through a series of photographs she'd taken of all the properties she'd seen that day. "This one doesn't allow cars anywhere on the grounds," she told him, "Your driver goes down into these underground tunnels, and they go right to your basement door." Then swiping to a new photograph, she said, "That's the clubhouse." "What was the clubhouse like?" he asked her, becoming noticeably more attentive.

Although few compounds that I visited banned cars totally, Regency Park was also planned to resemble a "quaint colonial-period American university towns... with dedicated pedestrian areas free from cars contributing to the small-town feel" (WCMP n.d.). Indeed, large dedicated pedestrian areas were a common feature of Shanghai's up-market compound developments. It is telling that the designers of Regency Park chose to connect the absence of cars with the coherence of the small-town bubble they were attempting to create, relegating, as it does, not just the car but also its local Chinese driver to the periphery of this imagined middle America.

I visited one couple, the Reeds, who lived in Jinqiao, in a large, two story townhouse with a fenced backyard - a common sight in many Western countries but a sign of real privilege in a city of 23 million people, where space is at a premium. Unlike most suburbs of Shanghai, where the street front is broken up by small shops, the footpath lined with bicycles and motor scooters, and trash pickers and street vendors pass by regularly, the public roads of Jinqiao are clean, quiet and largely free of traffic. Compound walls line both sides of the road, unbroken, sometimes for the whole length of a long city block. Gates are policed by uniformed

bao'an<sup>83</sup> and sometimes also secured by motorised traffic barriers and card operated pedestrian turnstiles.

The gate of the Reeds' compound opened onto a two-lane private road, curving through neatly manicured grounds, past the compound office and health club, then branching off into a confusion of smaller pedestrian-only side streets. The townhouses themselves were nearly identical, revealing very little about the personalities or preferences of their inhabitants. All were rendered in the same palette of neutral zones - charcoal, white, off-white - their designs slight variations on a very narrowly defined theme. A bao'an passed me in an electric golf-cart, then circled back around and asked me what I was doing there. "Yi bai san hao," one hundred and three, I told him and he directed me back up the way I had come and down a cul-de-sac.

The neutral palette continued inside the Reeds' home. Achromatic carpets, soft furnishings and wall treatments suggesting that the house was designed, not as a reflection of personal taste, but as blank space onto which the renter could then project their own notions of "home". This design ethic, which real estate professionals sometimes call "neutral decor", is so widely utilised and recommended in the West that it has now become something of a cliché (cf Lomas 2012).

Its use by property developments marketed at expats allow those expatriates to more easily negotiate their engagement with Chinese material culture and the local Chinese world outside their homes. The absence of competing spatial meanings - a defining feature of neutral decor - allowed families like the Reeds to more easily personalise their living space, often closely replicating their homes in the West.

Corporate expatriates are typically provided with a relocation allowance by their employers, making it possible for some of them to ship a propor-

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83. Closest approximation in English is security-guard though they are more like doormen - and they are almost always men. Literally translates as Security Protection.

tion of their household goods to China. For these expatriates, the act of relocating home was usually a much more literal and direct process than it was for their postpat contemporaries. Shipping books, photographs, kitchenware and appliances, children's toys, ornaments and even furniture to China, allowed corporate expatriates to populate their new homes with spatial meanings and personal narratives transposed directly from their homes in the West.

As the Reeds showed me around their home, I asked them if this or that ornament or piece of furniture had come with the house, if they had purchased it since arriving in China, or if it had been shipped with other possessions when they first arrived. The Reeds too often pointed out personal additions to the minimal and impersonal decor of the rental house. A staircase which came off the entrance way led up to the private family spaces - bathrooms and bedrooms - on the second floor. Photos hanging on the staircase wall showcased absent relatives and memories of life in the West. In the master bedroom, on top of a four drawer dresser, which, they told me, had come with the house, there was a scattering of ornaments and personal effects. More framed photos of family life in America were arranged in the dresser's rear corners, while, tucked into the edge of the large mirror on the wall behind was an unframed picture of the Reed family on a recent vacation in Vietnam. Near one edge of the dresser a Xingjiangnese bead necklace, recently purchased from a street vendor, spilt from the open top of a jewellery box. A treasured antique perfume bottle, which once belonged to Mrs. Reed's grandmother sat next to a pair of well worn, silver backed men's hair brushes belonging to Mr. Reed. The bed faced a large ranch-slider, which opened onto a private balcony, overlooking their backyard, and the broader green expanse of the rest of the compound beyond it. With the exception of the bao'an in his golf cart there was nothing in this view that linked it to the rest of Shanghai or to China more generally.

Outside of a small range of popular titles, for which a robust pirate literature market exists, English-language books are expensive and difficult to

come by in Shanghai. Despite this, the children's bedrooms both had bookshelves well stocked with English-language children's literature and, downstairs in the open hallway between the entrance way and the dining room, a selection of adult fiction and non-fiction was prominently displayed on a shelving unit, purchased from a nearby IKEA.

The children's bedrooms were scrupulously tidy, with favourite toys brought with them from the West given pride of place among newer or more local acquisitions. For a recent birthday, the Reeds had repainted the bedroom of their son in Dallas Cowboy colours, and team paraphernalia decorated the walls. In his sister's room, dolls and stuffed animals sat in neat lines on the bed.

In the sunken living room a lacquered ornamental sideboard, purchased in a Shanghai antique market, sat underneath a large wall mounted flatscreen TV. Both the flatscreen and the off-white sofa in front of it had come with the house. Mrs. Reed told me that sofa had been the thing she'd liked least about the house when the estate agent had first shown them round it. It was covered in brightly coloured throw pillows, purchased from IKEA.

Though well designed and equipped, the Reed's kitchen was small in comparison to the rest of the house. Unusually for Shanghai, it had an oven and a dishwasher. Although far more common in houses and apartments intended for the expatriate market, these appliances were not ubiquitous, even in homes like the Reeds'. Until recently it was uncommon for the kitchens in local Chinese apartments to even have a built-in cook-top, let alone an oven, and many local Chinese still do most of their cooking on an electric hotplate.

Despite the price and the inconvenience, corporate expatriates often took pains to replicate Western rituals of food preparation and consumption in their new homes. The Reeds brought pans, cutlery, flatware and even some smaller kitchen appliances - a coffee maker and a hand blender - with them from America. Like many other corporate expatriates I talked

to, the Reeds distrusted locally produced food, toiletries and even cleaning products, often resorting to familiar brands imported from the West or expensive locally grown organic fruit, vegetables and meat. They sourced the majority of their groceries from Cityshop - a chain of supermarkets specialising in imported and luxury food items. Although some local Chinese do shop at Cityshop, it is common to hear expatriates refer to it, or any of the other high-end imported food supermarkets in Shanghai, as expat supermarkets or Western supermarkets. Similarly the imported food section of Carrefour, a major big-box supermarket chain, was also often referred to as the expat section.

The placement and choice of personal effects within the Reeds' home formed part of an episodic and processual narrative, linking a shared familial landscape of kinship and memory with the physical geography of the townhouse they now lived in. As the Reeds showed me around their house their possessions evoked a series of anecdotes and associations through which the couple not only constructed a home for themselves but also enacted a series of collective and individual identities - as parents, as a family, as cosmopolitan world travellers and as expatriates with continuing deep roots in their home country.

Scholars have often commented on the important role that possessions play in the construction and maintenance of identity, within Western consumerist cultures in particular (Csikszentmihalyi & Rocherberg-Halton 1981; McCracken 1990). For transmigrants, in a variety of geographic and cultural contexts, this importance is frequently heightened. Possessions are used by transmigrants to assert and maintain a connection with their home countries and to establish a connection with the host culture (Belk 1992; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991).

Few corporate expatriates had any intention of staying in China long-term. For most, their intended stay was defined and, to some extent, dictated by the length of their assignment. Those who expected to return to their home countries once their stay was over often imagined this as a return to a more authentic existence. Going "back home" or, as Mrs.

Reed described it, "going back to the real world." The ability to reproduce a home-life as close as possible to their own view of normal enabled these expatriates to minimise the impacts of expatriation, on identity and on family. It also allowed them to remain connected to places and ways of living to which they expected to return within a set time-frame. Faustine, a stay at home mother, echoed this construction of family life in her home country as natural, and of life in China as unnatural, when she told me, "[this cannot] be a normal life. We have a driver. In Europe, we don't have any driver. But we try to stay as normal as possible here". Bettina described her own reliance on the family's driver, somewhat counter-intuitively, as a loss of freedom. "It's not a plus for me to have a driver," she said. "On the one hand, I would be scared to drive in Shanghai, but you lose your freedom having a driver".

Drivers were frequently included in corporate expatriate packages and were usually perceived as necessary, or, at least, convenient. With familiarity, they could eventually become an accepted, even beloved, part of family life - picking the children up from school, driving the stay-at-home spouse on his or her errands during the day, fetching guests from the airport and so on. On the other hand, for some corporate expatriates they also represented an unwelcome, even untrustworthy foreign intrusion into family life. During her interview, Maria complained about her driver cheating on his timesheet. "It's always a matter of do I trust you," she told me. "I'm a very trustworthy person and I feel I have a lack of trust in China."

When meeting with corporate expatriates, it was not unusual for them to be dropped off by their driver. Once the meeting was over they would then send a text message, letting their driver know that they were ready to be picked up. Poorly parked late model sedans with smartly dressed Chinese men snoozing in the front seat are a fairly common sight in certain areas of Shanghai, as drivers wait for an appointed pick-up or for a text message telling them when and where they need to be next. Fechter has written about the impact of having a driver on the lives of Indonesia's

expatriates, who she claims "frequently spent their entire day in the city without so much as setting foot on a street surface" (Fechter 2007b, p 43). Likewise in Shanghai, local Chinese drivers gave corporate expatriates the ability to travel between bubbles of Westernness, effectively avoiding the poorer, implicitly more local Chinese spaces between. In this way the novelty of these spaces are maintained and, as we have seen, continue to be viewed touristically, as "valuable experiences" rather than as spaces that could and were actually being lived in (cf p 116). It's important to note, however, that large numbers of local Chinese also employ drivers. So many, in fact, that car manufacturers have started catering to the demand by increasing the size of the backseat in models intended for the Chinese market (Wernie 2013).

Despite this, many of the corporate expatriates I met viewed their Ayi or drivers as a necessary but often discomfoting - and by implication alien - presence in their lives. During her interview, Bettina, who had left a career in computing to move to China, described the impact having an Ayi had on her experience of motherhood,

It's taken my three years to realise how many things I missed out with my second daughter that I didn't miss out with my first one. It was easier. I would cook dinner and the Ayi would give them a bath. With my second daughter from the time she was one-and-a-half till four I missed out on all that play time during the bath, for example, because it was easier for me. I realised that Ayi's are great, for help, but, you do run the risk of, ah, giving them too much responsibility. There will be some things with time they will do with your children that, it's okay if they do it once or twice but] it's a different culture and if they do it over time, over months, they will take habits and things that aren't necessary what you want.

Anais, whose own choice to be a stay-at-home-parent predated her time in Shanghai by more than a decade, used the behaviour of others to frame her views on the topic,

A lot of, ah, parents here, ah, think that the Ayi can take care of [the] children, [their] homework, everything. So the parents have a very

good life without the children because the Ayi takes care of them. The driver takes care of the children and, ah, so, your children lose their reality, and they think can do everything they want with the driver, with the Ayi.

Katie, a teacher at an international school, told me, "I've never had a helper in my house [before coming to China]. When [the Ayi is] upstairs and I'm downstairs helping with homework...its just somebody in my house and do I trust them. I'm trying not to be that way because she's never done anything." For Katie, it was not only the cultural gap between herself and her Ayi that she found discomfiting. For her, as for many of the expatriates I talked to, domestic staff served as a persistent reminder of unaccustomed relative privilege. Echoing a common framing of the poor in Western popular discourse, expatriates, when confronted by this class gap in their own homes, commonly responded with feelings of distrust and/or guilt. Some justified the disconnect between this reaction and their continued employment of domestic staff by claiming that they felt obligated to employ them.

The Reeds told me that when they arrived they had, at first, been reluctant to hire an Ayi, but were told by friends that in China it was expected of those with financial ability "to put something back". This classist social pressure was not really present among postpats that I talked to, for whom having an Ayi was generally seen as a choice. Indeed, the majority of expatriates, whether they were postpats or corporate expatriates, framed this dilemma as a trade-off, with the significant benefits of having an Ayi or a driver winning out over personal feelings of discomfort.

For even relatively middle-income local Chinese families, hiring an Ayi is rarely seen as unusual or as an extravagance. When visiting the family homes of local Chinese acquaintances, it was very common for food to be prepared and served by an Ayi. I also talked to expatriates who worked as private tutors for wealthy local Chinese families - families who in some cases employed as many as five Ayi and two or three drivers. Consequently, expatriate employment of domestic staff is more accurately viewed as an artefact of the economics and culture of China, as well

as the class positioning of expatriates within that context, rather than as a simple product of expatriate privilege or of Shanghai's semi-colonial past.

The physical walls of expatriate compounds and the guarded doors of serviced apartment complexes are also representative of classist barriers, highlighting the complex intersection of class and race within Shanghai. Corporate expatriates often pointed to a perceived absence of local Chinese within their compounds and apartment complexes, presenting this absence as something regrettable but outside their control. Katie's statement that "when you come here you are given a choice of this compound or this compound and it's foreigners anyway" is one example of this. Security guards, *Ayi* and drivers, who worked and sometimes lived within the walls, are othered by sentiments like these - their daily presence, their Chineseness, and their personhood itself, lessened or even subtly negated. For Katie, as for most of the expatriates I interviewed,<sup>84</sup> Westernness and a middle-class lifestyle were closely related concepts. Local Chinese neighbours were usually described by corporate expatriates, either as liminal figures rarely seen and out of place, or as exceptional - exceptionally Westernised, exceptionally rich, exceptionally friendly. During her interview, Katie offered a clarification to this effect. "Okay maybe [there are] a few Chinese families here and there [but they] have a little bit of money," she told me. In this way, local Chinese are relocated outside the walls of these Western spaces or co-opted by their expatriate neighbours, as de-facto Westerners, through a shared middle-class lifestyle and shared "Western" values.

In addition, expatriate assumptions of class were often tacitly supported by the attitudes of most local Chinese towards Westerners. Expatriates often told me that they felt less accountable for their actions in China than they had felt at home. Expatriate writer Renee Reynolds calls this a "do-something-crazy-and-get-away-with-it-card" (2012).<sup>85</sup> This sense of being

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84. See Section 3.1 (pp 51-69)

85. This aspect of expatriate privilege is covered in more detail in Section 8.3 (pp 251-261)

above the law was able to persist because it is seldom contested by local Chinese authorities, in part because Westernness and wealth or power are commonly linked in the imaginations of the local Chinese working class. When buying from street vendors, or in a market setting, Westerners are usually charged more than a local Chinese person would be, and typically attract far more aggressive sales tactics.

Language barriers also contain these communities and serve to define them as Western spaces. Compounds, where French or German are the lingua franca do exist, but, as I have stated elsewhere, the language which bounded Shanghai's expatriate spaces was more commonly English. The Chinese language ability of most expatriates was fairly limited, and for corporate expatriates, who only expected to be in China for a limited time, this general tendency was even more pronounced. Corporate expatriates were more able to afford English-speaking Ayi and drivers who acted as a buffer between their home space and the Chinese world beyond the walls. Rather than having to use their often limited Chinese to accomplish day to day tasks - such as giving an address to a taxi-driver, dealing with local tradesmen, or going grocery shopping - corporate expatriates were often able to offload these tasks onto their domestic staff.

As suggested by some of the responses quoted in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124), less well-integrated expatriates sometimes described the lives of ordinary Chinese as “hidden”, or even as absent from their section of the city. A Franco-Singaporean trailing spouse who blogs under the name Beau Lotus, and describes her occupation as “Mere, Fille, et Femme”,<sup>86</sup> documented her own encounter with this “hidden” side of Jinqiao. Her writing is of particular interest because it so closely and un-self-consciously replicates a stereotype that is widely commented on by expatriates - ie. the privileged, bored and lonely, socially isolated taitai. Her other postings reveal that she has a wealthy, “European” - presumably French or, at least, Francophone - husband, and two children, that she lives in an expatriate compound in Jinqiao and that her

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86. Mother, Daughter and Wife.

children go to expensive international schools (Beau Lotus 2010; Beau Lotus 2012; Beau Lotus 2013).

She begins her travelogue by explaining that prior to asking her driver “where he went for his lunch breaks...since most of the restaurants in the area were so expensive” (2012) she had not been aware that “the Locals [sic] side” (2012) of Jinqiao even existed. Describing her visit as motivated by boredom - “I had nothing on my agenda today... I decided to call the spa and arrange for a body scrub and hot stone massage... It felt wrong to stay indoors” (2012) - she nevertheless seems bemused by her driver's response to her touristic curiosity about his life. “What's there to see there?” he asks her (2012).

Her framing of this area as “Where the locals [sic] live in Jinqiao” (2012) again exposes a class-based division between her own life in Shanghai - her bubble - and what she perceives as the more authentically Chinese lives of the urban poor of Shanghai.<sup>87</sup> However, her conflation of the Chinese working class with Chinese culture more generally also racialises this division, effectively excluding wealthy and middle-class Chinese from her imagined Shanghai.

Her blog post continues as a photo-essay, in which she documents the distance between her own bubble and a partially imagined, more authentically Chinese way of life. Embarrassed locals, caught in the act of their everyday lives become unwilling objects for her touristic gaze. Despite being a familiar site in most parts of the city, even the neighbourhood waste picker is singled out for this attention. For her the working class neighbourhood is literally picturesque, ie. fit to be made into a picture, but it is her framing of the pictures she makes that give us the biggest insight into her conceptions of China as well as her conceptions of self in relation to it. Referring to her own neighbourhood

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87. Her views are usefully contrasted with the views of the middle-class Shanghainese I was able to talk to, for whom localness was usually a core facet of their identity. For them it was the city's urban poor who were the outsiders and they often referred to them as such, calling them waidiren, farmer, peasant etc.

as “our part of Jinqiao” she writes that it

doesn't look that much like what you have in mind of China. It is clean, with wide streets...lots of restaurants that cater mainly to expats and many white and S.E Asian people walking about.

(2012)

Unsurprisingly then, it is the parts of working class Jinqiao which confirm her expectations of China - the dirty, the cheap, the crowded, the poor, and the handmade - to which Beau Lotus' eye appears most drawn. The resulting images can be read as a statement of difference and of distance. As her driver's question suggests, the camera itself enforces this distance, casting her in the role of observer and reifying her status as an outsider. Beau Lotus makes it clear that this is a positioning she prefers, constructing, through her prose and choice of photographs, a bubble of upper-middle-class, “white and S.E Asian” suburban privilege within - but crucially distant from - an imagined poor, dirty, crowded and traditional China.

Katie's identification of residential compounds as emblematic of expatriate life in China (see p 137) is interesting. Postpats often derided compound dwellers for their cultural separation from local Chinese. However, compound developments reflect a thoroughly Chinese middle-class ideal of suburban living and are part of a long cultural tradition in China. Shanghai's historic longtang started life as gated neighbourhoods for middle-class local Chinese, and walled and gated apartment complexes continue to dominate the landscape in many parts of the city. When I first met her, Fei lived in a thoroughly local compound in YangPu Qu which was as self-contained as many expatriate compounds are,<sup>88</sup> incorporating a school, a hall, a convenience store and a liquor concession.

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88. It was, however, much larger than most expatriate compounds, with between 20,000-35,000 residents and was originally constructed as a work-unit compound for a nearby factory.

This again suggests that the isolation of corporate expatriates within fairly exclusive compound developments is not simply a self-imposed reification of cultural boundaries. According to Ronald Knapp, a prominent specialist in Chinese vernacular architecture, enclosed neighbourhoods have been a feature of Chinese cities since the beginning of urban history, not only serving as markers of private property, or performing a defensive function, but also symbolically separating "inside and outside, family and stranger" (2000, p 2). Chinese walled compounds assist in the production of collective identities which can then be called on in times of difficulty. Despite the changes imposed on China during the Maoist era, and more recently during the process of reform, compound walls continue to function as markers of collective identity for local Chinese (Bray 2005; Knapp 2000; Logan 2011). Expatriates who live in compounds are, therefore, participating in a discourse on identity, the vocabulary of which has been imposed on them by the Chinese cultural context. They are not only walling China out, in other words. They are allowing themselves to be walled in.

Nor is the suburban idyll promised by many high-end compound developments only intended to appeal to foreigners. Most so-called expatriate compounds usually contain some local Chinese inhabitants and, even in Hongqiao and Jinqiao, the two suburbs most associated with compound life, expatriates' compounds are interspersed with those marketed primarily at upper-middle-class local Chinese<sup>89</sup>. This further supports the view, put forward by several of the interview participants, that the bubble is an economic as well as a cultural construction.

With the security of the family at its centre, the corporate expatriate bubble often seemed particularly focused on the home. By paying for personal effects to be shipped to Shanghai and by placing corporate expats in

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89. Next to the Regency Park development, for example, is an equally upmarket development called Siji Yayaun, or Seasons Villas. Although both provide a range of language options, the Regency Park webpage defaults to English, while Siji Yayuan's home page defaults to Chinese, suggesting a more local focus (Seasons Villas 2009)

Western-themed homes and communities, expat packages permitted a more accurate reproduction of life in the home country. The idealised suburban surrounds of many expatriate compounds and the self-contained world of serviced apartment complexes extended this Westernised home space beyond the domicile itself.

The lives of local Chinese were usually located beyond the walls of these compounds and apartment complexes, banished to other parts of the city or even to the other side of the Huang Pu entirely. The framing, by corporate expatriates, of their domestic staff as an unwelcome intrusion also illustrates the liminal nature of Shanghai's expatriate living spaces: living spaces which are necessarily located within China and vulnerable to puncture by China, but which were usually also explicitly Western spaces.

## **6.2 - You Can't Go Home Again: Postpat Redefinitions of Home.**

In contrast, postpats typically framed themselves as living a much more integrated, cosmopolitan existence. This was reflected in new, more fluid definitions of home and new spatial meanings, that blended the Western with the local. The expatriate compounds of Pudong and Hongqiao were described disparagingly as a "bubble existence" or "like living in an American suburb" by many of the postpats I talked to. Instead, they lived in well maintained, modern apartment buildings or in renovated apartments in slightly older buildings - constructed in the last 30 years, during the early years of economic reform. It was also common to hear expatriates refer to their buildings as Chinese apartment buildings, their compounds as Chinese compounds and their neighbourhoods as Chinese neighbourhoods. To support this claim to local emplacement they might assert that they were the only foreigner in their apartment complex, or that almost all the people living in their building were Chinese. Cain typified this in his interview when he told me, "I get spit on and pushed and almost run over and people yell at me and I experience the culture of where I live every single day because of where I live". Likewise, postpat food blogger Mary-Anne writes "We live in a Chinese building on a very Chinese street, with

chickens and ducks being killed and skinned down on the sidewalk" (2011).

From the establishment of the communist state until the late 1970s, residents in cities and towns were not permitted to buy or trade in properties. The Chinese state and state-owned enterprises allocated housing based on need, a system that remained partially in force until 1998 (Juanhong 1999; Lisheng et al. 2010). Echoing public housing everywhere, buildings constructed during this period typically suggest in their design an emphasis on utility over aesthetics. Building exteriors, stairwells and landings are often characterised by exposed concrete and a brutalist, almost industrial functionalism.

The apartments themselves were originally constructed as carbon copies of their neighbours, with the same basic layout replicated on every floor of the building. In many cases, the buildings themselves were similarly replicated, sometimes twenty or more times, within a single lane or compound. Shanghai's large population and overheated property market<sup>90</sup> has meant that large scale, high density, property developments continue to be popular. Trying to locate a friend's building within a confusion of identical structures is a common experience for Shanghai's expatriates, regardless of whether they live in a new building or an older one.

Since reform, status and owning property have become strongly linked concepts in Chinese culture. According to a 2011 survey, for example, 70% of local Chinese women reported that they would only consider marrying someone who owned their own home (Jacobs 2011). Rather than seeking to negate class difference, newer apartment buildings, therefore, usually appeared designed to exaggerate them. The floor and walls of communal areas were frequently tiled in marble or faux marble. Deco or art nouveau ornamental plasterwork and light fixtures were common. Neatly uniformed *bao'an* could often be seen behind an expansive desk in

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90. It is a common investment strategy in China to buy property and leave it vacant, relying on the market's continued growth for a return. Concern over this strategy has led to laws forbidding individuals from owning more than one property within Shanghai city limits.

the lobby. Greco-roman columns and statuary were also used, repurposing Western icons of power and tradition to root the buildings and their local Chinese residents deeply within Shanghai's imagined history of Western influence.

For local Chinese these spatial meanings "'cut' from the historical urban experiences of Western societies and cultures" (Pow & Kong 2007, p 148) are also symbolic of emerging upper-middle-class identities - identities that are, themselves, entangled in complex ways with local Chinese conceptions of the West (Pow & Kong 2007). For postpat residents, however, more used to seeing those symbols attached to prestigious corporations or institutions, the resulting aesthetic was frequently seen as over-done, impersonal, even surreal.

A tension, therefore, existed for many postpats between this clash of aesthetics and their - perhaps guilty - enjoyment of the privileged life such buildings are designed to evoke. This conflict, between the Western belief that less is more and the Chinese projection of face, was often commented on by expatriates. One evening over dinner, Oliver, an interior designer from the United States, complained that he often found himself in conflict with his clients regarding their design choices, "I'm like, 'I know you want the marble floor tiles, but do you really need a gold plated water feature in your living room?'"

In contrast to the similarity of apartment exteriors, in both older and more modern apartment buildings, interior spaces were often designed as an overt reflection of the status of the landlord-owner. Ornate flocked wallpaper, heavy wooden furniture, ornate chandeliers, and gold accented brocade curtains are not an uncommon sight when viewing mid-range apartments for rent in Shanghai.

For many of the postpats I talked to, searching for an apartment therefore required finding something which was not only in the right area, for the right price, but which was also "not too Chinese looking". A conversation I witnessed between Jodi, a Jewish-American postpat and Vanessa, a Chinese-American friend of hers, typified this view for me. We were at

Jodi's apartment with other friends, and Vanessa, who had visited the apartment before asked, "When did you get all this chinky furniture?"<sup>91</sup> "It's the landlord's" Jodi replied, "We've always had it."<sup>92</sup>

Because of this tension between Western tastes and local Chinese design sensibilities, postpat apartments were typically furnished in a mixture of Chinese and Western styles. Jodi's apartment was in a newer, probably post-1990s, building, set in a zone of intense redevelopment close to Shanghai's historic centre and overlooking Suzhou Creek. The older buildings surrounding it were in various states of partial or total demolition and disrepair. In some cases street-facing doors and windows had been bricked up, whole neighbourhoods literally defaced while the developers worked to remove the few remaining "stubborn nails".<sup>93</sup> Tumbledown structures from the 1920s and 1930s crowded into nearby alleys, many still occupied despite holes in the walls and roof, with tarpaulins and even the occasional umbrella being used to keep out the weather (cf. Susan's response on p 83). Out of this chaotic terrain Jodi's building stuck up like an off-white finger. Inside, cream walls and high ceilings framed a grand atrium, starkly empty except for a red-brown, faux marble security desk, with a bored looking bao'an behind it. A pair of purse-lipped cherubs sat in alcoves on either side of the desk.

Inside Jodi's apartment, the large, open plan living and dining area was dominated by a heavy wooden sideboard, with gilded corner embellishments and a claw footed dining table, protected from scratches and ring

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91. Chinky is not a word I ever heard used by "white" expatriates, but it was sometimes used by Chinese Americans to differentiate their own, more Western sense of taste, from that of local Chinese (cf. Tong 1971). While self-articulation of identity boundaries by Chinese American expatriates - or re-patriates - was common, most were uncomfortable when "white" expatriates attempted to articulate the same differences.
  92. Fei, who also finds some of the ways China's emerging middle-class express their wealth somewhat "tasteless," pointed out to me that the Western pose of stylish simplicity is equally vulnerable to cross-cultural satire (cf. Armstrong 2013). "Those pristine white boxes look great when there's no one home, but what do they say about the person who lives there?"
  93. Nail house, or dingzi hu, is a colloquial Chinese term for a home whose owner is refusing to sell out to developers (Beschizza 2015).

marks by a large sheet of glass - the furniture which Vanessa called "chinky". Like most expatriate homes, the apartment had a modern, western style bathroom and kitchen. The bedrooms were also furnished in contemporary Western fashion with desks and modular shelving units from IKEA and all of the main rooms had their own air conditioning units.

A large screen TV and lounge suite from IKEA defined the living room, in the centre of which was a large glass coffee table, overstuffed with DVDs. Although there were some Chinese and Japanese titles in amongst them, the overwhelming majority were American or European movies and TV series. Buying DVDs from the neighbourhood Big Movie was a regular activity for many postpats, and spending weekend afternoons on the couch binge-watching pirated American or British TV shows was commonplace. Buying pirated DVDs or illegally downloading Western media allowed postpats to maintain an affordable connection to the cultures of their home countries. It helped them to bring the familiar into the heart of the home. The role of the television in home-making has been commented on by a number of scholars. For most Westerners it has replaced the hearth as the focus of the family (Morley 2005; Flynn 2003). A number of scholars have argued that this role is even more pronounced for transmigrants "not only in temporarily connecting them to their private homes or to their public sphere of origin, but also in recreating the 'warmth' of domesticity, in other words in 'making them feel at home'" (Bonini 2011; see also Kama & Malka 2013; Morley 2002).

In less expensive apartments postpats were sometimes able to bring something of their own personality to the decor of their home spaces, repainting or changing fixtures. Because most apartments in Shanghai come pre-furnished, however, personal touches tended to be small and usually evoked new China-focused lives, rather than attempting, necessarily, to recreate former home-spaces within China.

During my fieldwork, I shared a three bedroom apartment with Siebe, a Belgian brand manager, and Selena, a Hong Kong Chinese PR consultant. Both were working for local Chinese companies. The apartment was in a crumbling local Chinese compound with a gate that sometimes would not

open and a bao'an who lived in the guard shack next to the gate. The building's stairwell window leant precariously out into the courtyard, there was no elevator and the exhausts from kitchen extractor fans spotted the landing walls with grease. Metal security screens covered most people's doors, and the doors themselves, particularly on the upper floors, were almost all heavy steel. From the outside, our apartment looked like the others on the same floor. Behind the flimsy and easily bypassed security screen our wood-grained steel front door was never locked - no one seemed to have a key. Inside the interior was bright, clean and modern. The furnishings supplied by the landlord - beds, desks, a large L-shaped settee, a television, a coffee table, a kitchen table, standing lamps - were almost all from IKEA. Current and former residents had added to the decor by repainting parts of the house, by buying their own furniture and by adding an eclectic collection of objects gathered - and, in the case of former residents, abandoned - during their time in China. Some of these objects had been found on the side of the road, some had been inherited from former roommates or departed friends and a few had actually been purchased. Oversized potted plants, a graffitied mannequin and giant plaster artist's models of eyes and a nose personalised the living room. A collection of three chairs, mismatched, rickety and undersized,<sup>94</sup> had been picked up by a former roommate during drunken journeys back from nightclubs and bars. It seems likely that she took the first chair on a whim but by the time she moved out, Siebe told me, she was notorious for these thefts. Even the rattan shelving unit we kept the TV on had been brought home by her from no one knew where.

In local Chinese homes, food is usually served "family style", coming to the table in large bowls or platters. The diners then use a spoon or their chopsticks to transfer small amounts into a bowl for their own consumption. A local Chinese dinner setting might comprise a bowl for soup, a

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94. In the summer time local Chinese often bring chairs out into the street. They eat their meals, play cards and mahjong or just converse with their neighbours on the sidewalk. In this way public space becomes private space. Often these chairs are left in place when not in use, probably because their owners imagine no one would bother stealing them.

smaller bowl for rice, a spoon, a pair of chopsticks, and perhaps an additional saucer or small bowl for bones or scraps. For this reason larger Western style dinner plates and cutlery are not as available as they would be in the West and dinner parties in Shanghai frequently involved the guests sharing plates and cutlery. Individual knives, forks and spoons can sometimes be purchased at local Chinese supermarkets for around 10 RMB each.<sup>95</sup> Sets of cutlery and flatware can also be purchased from certain speciality stores, IKEA being the most frequently mentioned example among Shanghai's expatriates. However, big box stores like Walmart or IKEA are still not ubiquitous in China as they are in the West, and getting to them can be time-consuming. Postpats typically framed these stores as expensive, over-crowded and inauthentically local spaces. Smaller, cheaper, more Chinese, and, therefore, more authentic, alternatives were usually preferred, where available.

On certain street corners, in postpat heavy districts like Xuhui, among the street vendors selling fruit, scarves, or pirated DVDs and literature you can occasionally find someone hawking a load of precariously balanced crockery and flatware from the back of their cargo-trike. Vendors like these were popular with postpats, because they offered them a more "local" experience. Getting the best price, often called the "local price", was a preoccupation for many postpats and stories about the best places and methods for doing so were shared widely.

Unlike corporate expatriates, many postpats were reluctant to pay extra for Western ingredients, preferring to substitute cheaper local alternatives - substituting ground pork for ground beef, for example. With items such as Western herbs and spices, bread or breakfast cereal,<sup>96</sup> for which no local alternative exists, postpats might be forced to pay extra, buying them from

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95. Around NZ\$2.

96. The sweetness of Chinese bread, often labelled "milk toast", is a common complaint among expatriates. During the initial period of my fieldwork breakfast cereals were just starting to penetrate the Chinese market, and were only available at expatriate supermarkets, or large local Chinese supermarkets with an imported food section. Breakfast cereals are now much more commonly available, and less expensive than they were, though still more expensive than they are in the West.

expat supermarkets or bakeries. Ovens were uncommon, however, making many Western dishes difficult to reproduce. Some postpats made do without, but some became more interested in certain foods, simply because they were no longer as easy to make. Entertaining, particularly during traditional winter holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas, was also challenging without an oven. Because of this, large bench-top toaster ovens were a relatively common presence in postpat apartments.

A number of postpats I talked to took the trouble to learn how to cook some well-loved, but previously commonplace food item, specifically because it was so difficult to find in China. A prominent expatriate business, Amelia's Homemade Jams and More, arose out the founder's frustration at not being able to find good preserves in China. Another friend taught herself to make hollandaise sauce, for a similar reason. Postpats often told me they enjoyed shopping at small local Chinese stores and wet markets, narrating their efforts to negotiate a more "local" price with the stall holder as a mark of their emplacement in Shanghai. Rather than doing all their grocery shopping in a single supermarket, postpats were, therefore, more likely to shop around between a number of smaller stores, located within walking distance of their home. In this way, food shopping itself becomes a way of engaging with the city.

Many postpats also enjoyed a wide variety of international and local Chinese cuisines. Popular online delivery services like Mealbay or Sherepas allowed their users to choose from dozens of different restaurants and provided menus in both English and Chinese. For a small fee, they would bring your order directly to your front door, or if the compound was locked, to your gate, where the delivery man would shout out for you until you came down to pay him. As we shall see in the following chapter, eating out was also popular, and an important part of building and maintaining postpat networks of support.

Another postpat acquaintance, Sven, a freelance translator and editor, lived by himself on the top floor of a longtang in the heart of the former French Concession. His home-space communicated an even more radical disconnect from life back in the home country. A few, limited, concessions

had been made, either by him or by his landlord, to Western notions of comfort. A sit-down toilet had been installed in the bathroom<sup>97</sup> and a large bed with a good mattress took up about a third of the large open plan living space.<sup>98</sup> An easy chair, a couch and a coffee table delineated the living area. The apartment had no kitchen, though, and apart from the two cats, a scattering of personal papers, a bottle of red wine, and some cheese and crackers on the coffee table, there was nothing to suggest that this was a space where day-to-day life happened. It was a space for work and a space for sleeping, but not obviously a home, not in the classic sense of "an expression or symbol of the self" (Mallet 2004, p 82). Sven's public persona - that of a gregarious and charismatic Swede with a broad and active network of friends - was not easy to discern in the ascetic, monk-like surrounds of his home-space. His choice to live in a longtang though did communicate the important, even central, position China held within his notion of self.

In part, the backpacker asceticism of some postpats dwelling spaces reflected the difficulty and expense of bringing possessions from home.<sup>99</sup> The limitation of one piece of checked luggage and one carry-on imposes a bottleneck through which only the most important things can be passed. Treasured smaller items were sometimes sent to China in care packages or brought back on subsequent trips home. For the most part, however, it was easier for postpats to reimagine home within the Chinese context, rather than to relocate an existing conception with them to Shanghai.

Instead of populating their living spaces with memories that were meaningful only to them, postpats tended to collect and display items that evoked new shared identities and new networks of support. Rhianne, an event manager from America who had been in China for 6 years, showed me around her long-term apartment shortly before she subleased it to some

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97. In many of Shanghai's longtangs, the residents share a single communal bathroom.

98. It is still very common for local Chinese to sleep without a mattress, on what is essentially a wooden box, with just a thin foam underlay.

99. China's custom laws make sending personal effects out of China significantly easier and less expensive than shipping them into China.

friends of mine, "When I arrived in Shanghai, all I had was one backpack and a little carry-on. This place didn't come furnished. Everything in here I own."

She narrated her stay in Shanghai through art-works which recalled events or people of special significance, "These paintings are from an event I curated in in 2010. This one is from the exhibition I helped organise for the HAL book launch... in 2011 I think. Here it is," she said crossing to the bookshelf. "Party Like it's 1984."

For Rhianne, her home-space itself had special significance. She was moving into a larger place with her boyfriend, but she was still very attached to her current home. "This house has had artists living in it for 15 years. I really want it to go to creative people. It's a very special place."

Like Sven, her apartment was located in a longtang. It took up the top three floors of the narrow structure. She had repainted and furnished the interior and organised whatever repairs needed to be made by herself. In the winter, she covered the draughty wooden window frames with a product she called ghetto wrap, clear plastic insulation film that is stretched across the window and heated with a hair-drier to shrink it around the frame. She had also formed a close relationship with her downstairs neighbours, whose hallway she had to pass through to get to her apartment,

That woman standing by the window is 102 years old. They're waiting for her to die, but she is still hanging in there. She is deaf as a post. Downstairs is where her daughter lives. She teaches saxophone on Saturday and Sunday mornings and here is where the daughter-in-law lives. She is very cool. She likes to have karaoke parties with her girlfriends sometimes.

As I discussed earlier, postpats commonly positioned themselves as the successors of a historical imaginary, in which Shanghai's present was seen as a continuation of the values of its past. Although the majority of expatriates did choose to live in more modern apartment buildings, the large number of English-language real estate advertisements for high-end renovations of longtang (cf. Ark Shanghai 2013), suggest that a significant

number of expatriates are willing to literalise their figurative investment in Shanghai's more "traditional" past by renting a piece of that history.

In an article about his own experience with longtang renovation, Tom Doctroff describes the necessity of getting to know his neighbours - politely explaining his plans to each of them, while easing the way with expensive gifts and offers of compensation - before they would allow him to begin the alterations. According to him,

conflict resolution is a community affair, usually managed by an informal power structure. 'Individual rights' rarely trump collective harmony... A few "suspicious" residents had banded together to send a message: as a foreigner, I was entitled to no special privilege and my "Western lifestyle" should not disrupt the unity of the neighbourhood... Smiles and friendly chitchat are necessary-but-not-sufficient confidence builders.

(2011, n.p.)

By seeking a more local, more Chinese experience in this way postpats made their liminality even more explicit. Not only were they emphasising the difference between themselves and the stereotypical corporate expatriate; by immersing themselves in what they saw as a more local Chinese experience they were necessarily exposing themselves to reminders of their own non-Chineseness.

This impulse, to connect with China in a more meaningful way, sometimes had unforeseen consequences for my participants. When I first met Susan she was living, with her partner, on the top floor of a longtang house. In order to get to her apartment, which was accessed by a lockable door at the bottom of a narrow staircase, she had to walk through the living area of her downstairs neighbours. One day, after an afternoon nap, she awoke to find an unfamiliar Chinese man standing in her apartment. She asked him, in Chinese what he was doing there and he told her he was looking for one of his friends. I was telling Harriet this story and she told me a similar thing had happened to friends of hers, who also lived in a longtang.

Longtang living at its most local was, therefore, usually seen by postpats as a romantic but impractical choice, too problematic for serious consider-

ation. Most of the postpats I met who had lived in longtang, only stayed in them for a short time before moving back into more modern accommodation, narrating the experience as worthwhile but probably not to be repeated.

Occasionally I might also hear an expatriate draw parallels between their own lives and an essentialised, "white" colonialist lifestyle of the imagination. This was often related to their discomfort at making use of an Ayi or driver, but some postpats saw echoes of semi-colonial Shanghai in other areas of their lives. In her interview, Harriet told me that, for her, going to expatriate bars, which often only have Westerners in them, "can just feel like you're having a colonial experience." Sven displayed a more post-modern, satirical attitude to the city's semi-colonial past. He had a linen safari suit made during my second summer in Shanghai, which he wore with a straw fedora. Clearly looking for a reaction, he made a habit of telling everyone he met that his resemblance to a French plantation owner was deliberate.

As we have seen, however, postpats more commonly repurposed local Chinese narratives of the city's history, deemphasising colonialism, emphasising local agency and normalising their own presence in the city (see Chapter 3, pp 49-90). They commonly referred to Xuhui Qu and the Western part of HuangPu Qu as the "French Concession" or simply "The Concession". Occasionally one of my friends would point out, with heavy irony, that it should actually be referred to by its politically correct title, the "former French Concession". For many postpats, especially those who chose to live in the Concession, this area also offered a sense of connection to Shanghai's past, and by using its historical title they claimed a kind of shared Western ownership over the space.

Postpats often identified strongly with the area around their house, narrating it as "my neighbourhood" Before I moved into my apartment, Siebe described it as a village, saying that it was like "[living] among the people...in a small block with only Chinese families in it. Every time I come back home it feels like entering the village of the Old French Concession". Elaine called the part of the French concession she lived in her

"hood", defining it roughly as anywhere she could reach on her scooter within five minutes, and explaining that she liked the fact that, now she was a taitai, she rarely had reason to move outside it.

During her interview, Angela described her own connection to the neighbourhood in which she lived and worked,

I built a little small community, I live down the road, I work here. I know the guy who...he fixes my bike and the guy who brings my water and the woman who fixes up my clothes on the street, y'know? I've been here for three years and I more than just recognise them, y'know? We've a little chat every time and that really helps with feeling like you...you've made a home for yourself and, therefore, you're almost in...in a little village in a massive city.

Typically, these distinct but often overlapping personal constructions of neighbourhood were not only defined by familiar places, but also by social landscapes of familiar people - networks of *guanxi*, familiarity and trust with local Chinese business owners built up over time. Elaine described the value of these relationships for her during our interview,

I know the bar people on a first name basis here. Like if I was to leave something here they'd call me, or, if it was my phone, they'd just hold it for me and then the next time I came in they'd be like, "Hey, you forgot your phone last time."

This local knowledge also serves as social currency, assisting postpats in strengthening existing relationships, within their fictive kin-group, and helping them to establish new relationships of trust and support with expatriates from outside it. In some cases, this local knowledge was so valued and widely disseminated that not being aware of it might, in itself, mark you out as an outsider. The Avocado Lady is the stand-out example of this. Her business strategy, of providing expatriates with food items they require, often cheaper than they could be gotten elsewhere, has paid off to such an extent that it is rare to find an expatriate who does not who she is. She even has folklore attached to her<sup>100</sup> and her popular nickname

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100. One expatriate told me that there is not one Avocado Lady but two and that they are sisters. Another told me that the Avocado Lady's daughter had opened up a

was so frequently the response, when postpats were asked how to find this or that food item, it is now almost a cliché.

Many expatriates used the term neighbourhood and bubble interchangeably to refer to a space that they felt at home in, a familiar space which they felt they belonged separate from the rest of China - in which their foreignness was more marked. As we shall see in the following chapter, these neighbourhoods are where the social lives of postpats were lived. They offered physical but fluid geographic centres around which the fictive kinship networks of expatriates could be constituted, and they pushed the concept of home out beyond the walls of one person's apartment, into the wider city.

Choice of home-space remained an important point of difference between postpats and those they saw as less well-integrated. It was relatively common to hear postpats frame their home as located "in a Chinese apartment building" or to talk about how few expat neighbours they had. In this way, the apartment building itself acts as a cosmopolitan bubble, allowing postpats to perform new transnational identities, without compromising the privacy or the essential Westernness of the home-space. Behind the heavy steel front door common to apartment buildings in China, postpats were better able to control their exposure to the local. They utilized Western media to populate their homes with the familiar and the canny, providing a refuge from what was unfamiliar and uncanny about the local. In the absence of traditional kinships networks, postpats used mementos of their time in China to help construct and maintain new fictive families and to build new shared mythologies. In turn, these networks of support were central to the practice of home-making for many postpats.

By choosing to locate their homes within buildings that they saw as local Chinese spaces, and then constructing a Western mediated cosmopolitan bubble for themselves within those space, postpats drew complex lines of self-identification and exclusion between themselves and China. These

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Western-style butchery across the street from her shop. When Fei asked her about the second story she told us that her daughter was only 12, was still in school and was definitely not going to be a butcher if she could help it.

lines were then extended out in the area around their home, creating broader cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, a wider, familiar and secure space that was home-like.

### **6.3 - Summary: Defining Expatriates through Home-making Strategies**

The division in identity and experience between postpats and corporate expatriates is best illustrated by the popular stereotype of the river as a dividing line between two extremes, with new, Western, family orientated, brash and business-like Pudong on one side and the old city, Puxi, "the fun side", on the other. As with all such structural opposites the reality is much more complex and fluid, with expatriates moving across this boundary regularly - both in the physical sense and symbolically. Enclaves of corporate expatriates also exist on the Puxi side, and while it is less common, some postpats I met had also settled in Pudong.

Although I have drawn the division between these two groups of expatriates to reflect stereotypical views within Shanghai's expatriate population, these views are also broadly reflective of the different ways expats live in and relate to the city. Examining the ways that postpats and corporate expatriates make their homes in Shanghai both illustrates these divisions and illuminates the underlying oppositions which structure them.

Because corporate expatriates usually only intended to be in China for a set length of time, they tended to be less interested in putting down deep roots in the city. Generous salaries and relocation packages made it possible for them to more accurately recreate familiar home-spaces from the West. High-end expatriate compounds provided corporate expatriates with an idealised Western, suburban landscape onto which they could transpose existing conceptions of home. Popular compounds and serviced apartment complexes were also usually located on the outskirts of the city, offering a space physically and symbolically cut off from the local and from China. Walls separated these self-contained Western spaces from the rest of Shanghai and uniformed staff served as literal gate-keepers, keeping the local world at a distance. Corporate expatriates, with their

local Chinese drivers, rarely moved beyond this Western bubble, travelling easily between their homes and other implicitly or explicitly Western spaces - international schools, expatriate supermarkets, international restaurants, malls specialising in Western brands and Western mediated corporate workplace.

When corporate expatriates did engage with the local, they inevitably did so as tourists, choosing experiences that highlighted their own cultural, and perhaps more critically their class, difference. Often they framed these experiences as having occurred in "the real China", relocating themselves and their home-space outside China in the process. Conversely local Chinese residents were usually described as out of place in the compounds, apartment buildings, neighbourhoods or even the districts where corporate expatriates made their homes. Corporate expatriate framings of Pudong in particular frequently echoed Anais' description of the district as "a big place for foreigners" (p 73).

In contrast, postpats were both less able and less interested in recreating the homes they had left behind in the West. Instead their homes reflected new blended, transnational identities. Postpats usually favoured the older parts of the city, closer to its historic semi-colonial centre. In so doing they laid claim to a historical imaginary, in which the foreign presence in Shanghai is framed as an expression of traditional, local Chinese values. This helped legitimise postpat emplacement, allowing postpats to see themselves as part of a continuity of Western settlement in the city, rather than as temporary migrants.

They often chose apartment complexes in which they and their roommates or partners were the only foreign residents, or where foreigners were in the minority, narrating these as "local buildings" or as "Chinese compounds". Shanghai's historic longtang offered an concrete embodiment of Shanghai's haipai style - the meeting of East and West - but were also narrated, by the postpats who lived in them, as quintessentially local spaces.

The interiors of their apartments sometimes reflected a compromise between the local Chinese design sensibilities of the owner and the Western tastes of the postpat tenants. Minimalist interiors were also common.

However, unlike corporate expatriates who were able to project existing notions of home onto their new places of residence, postpats usually came to Shanghai with only a small number of personal possessions.

Although apartments in Shanghai are typically pre-furnished, there were obviously some things that postpats had to supply for themselves. While postpats prided themselves on living a more cosmopolitan lifestyle, most were unwilling to give up Western expectations of home life completely. Knives, forks and large dinner plates were difficult to find, and not having enough of them, when entertaining guests, could act as a reminder for postpats of how shallow their roots in China actually were. By eating from a wide range of different Chinese and international cuisines postpats enacted new cosmopolitan, transnational identities. However, Western foods and foods from the home country continued to hold a central place in the eating habits and culinary desires of most postpats.

They populated their homes with objects collected from their time in China, selectively admitting those that were safe, or familiar, or had a personal significance. The narratives that surrounded these objects lent a sense of fixity and continuity to fictive kinships networks, which were in reality under constant flux. Western media also helped to make postpats feel at home, bringing the warmth of the "family hearth" (Morley 2002) into home spaces that typically existed in fluid but uneasy counterpoint with the local world outside.

For both postpats and corporate expatriates, home provided an important reversal of the outsider status that is usually ascribed to laowai by local Chinese. Inside the home-space itself, the things which mark expatriates as outsiders - "whiteness", inability to speak Chinese, relative wealth - were normalised, and local Chinese were themselves marked as outsiders. How expatriates managed this boundary - between inside and outside, between local and foreign and between the West and China - was dictated, in large part, by whether they framed their presence in China as long-term choice or as short-term necessity. Corporate expatriates, "the sends" in this dipole, tended to have a more strictly bounded notion of home. They inhabited self-contained Western bubbles, rarely engaging

with the local, except as tourists. Postpats, who might also be referred to as "the wents", tended to have a more fluid relationship to China and their definitions of home reflected this. They engaged selectively with the local in their choice of home-space, in their food choices, in the mementoes they had on display. However, they also relied on Western food, and Western media to familiarise and Westernise the home-space.

Postpats also tended to react to the tension between a Western inside and a Chinese outside by forming strong attachments to the area around their home, constructing discontinuous cosmopolitan neighbourhoods of familiar places and people that could act as an extension of the home. A discussion of these broader bubbles of cosmopolitan, neighbourhood space is the subject of the following chapter.

## 7.0 - Networking & Support Organisations

While the home was critically important in building and maintaining expatriate identities, the stereotype of the expatriate completely isolated from the world outside his, or her, home or compound seldom proved accurate. As I argued in Chapter 2 (pp 26-48), one of the factors that distinguishes Shanghai from a number of other expatriate destinations is the inherently fluid and transitory space inhabited by expatriates in China. This cultural and legal liminality led many expatriates to place greater emphasis on building and maintaining networks of support. These networks were often constituted around new transnational identities, within wider imagined communities of Westernness. Expatriates typically described these wider communities as contained by a "bubble", a physical and cultural space usually imagined as separate from the rest of China. In this chapter, I examine the role played by expatriate networking and support organisations in the construction and maintenance of this bubble.

Expatriates in Shanghai have access to an extremely broad range of clubs and societies, from well-known fraternal organisations, such as Rotary, to professional networking groups like Expatriate Professional Women in Shanghai (EPWS), to chambers of commerce, to religious organisations, charities, theatre groups, social sports leagues and so on. Consulates and national chambers of commerce<sup>101</sup> provide support to their own communities, while large groups, like the Shanghai Expatriate Association<sup>102</sup> and American Women in Shanghai, draw their members primarily from the city's mostly female trailing spouse population. Although the Shanghai Expatriate Association does accept male members, a separate, far smaller group, the Guytais,<sup>103</sup> was also recently formed specifically for male trailing

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101. Or regional in the case of BeneCham, the chamber of commerce for Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

102. Frequently confused in conversation with Shanghai Expat, the social media website mentioned above.

103. A pun on taitai.

spouses. In fact, trailing spouses of both genders were among the most active members of many expatriate clubs and societies and so it is with this group that I begin my examination of expatriate networking and support organisations.

## **7.1 - The Style to Which We Have Become Accustomed: Trailing Spouse Groups**

May our wives continue to keep us in the style  
to which we have become accustomed.

- toast at a Guytai event.

While most of Shanghai's expatriate networking and support groups were nominally open to all foreigners, the active membership of groups like AWCS, SEA and the Guytais were often effectively limited to Shanghai's trailing spouse population. These groups held most of their events in the middle of the day, a schedule which tended to preclude working expatriates from attending but often implicitly or even explicitly favoured Shanghai's trailing spouses.

Full-time or close to full-time childcare and/or housekeeping left many trailing spouses with little to do during the middle of the day. This ability to socialise during normal work has become a storied part of the taitai stereotype. An article from *That's Shanghai*, entitled "Shanghai Taitai, poses the question "What do people who have nothing to do all day, do all day?" (Jones 2011). For some, trailing spouse groups, like the ones mentioned above, provided a partial answer to this question.

Trailing spouse organisations typically hosted regular "coffee meetings", "ladies nights" and "mixers" in Western-themed cafes and bars. Both American Women's Club of Shanghai (AWCS) and the Shanghai Expatriate Association (SEA) hosted their monthly coffee meetings in the ballrooms of five-star-hotels. The calendars of both clubs are tied to the US school year and because of this they were engaged in their yearly recruitment drive as I began my fieldwork. Coffee meetings form an important part of this recruitment effort and, thanks to my early contact with a vendor who often worked expatriate events, I was invited to attend

both the AWCS and the SEA meetings during this time. There was very little to distinguish these events, beyond the national backgrounds of the attendees - AWCS members were predominantly drawn from Shanghai's American population, whereas the SEA's membership was more varied. Because of this similarity I will focus my description on the AWCS Meet and Greet Coffee Morning, held every month in the Grand Ballroom of the Four Seasons Hotel, in Jing'an.<sup>104</sup>

On my way to the Four Seasons I had crossed over the Yan'an pedestrian over-bridge, carefully walking around the beggars who often congregated between Yan'an Lu and Jing'an Temple. One man snaked along Huashan Lu on his belly, causing groups of young Chinese women to clutch at each other and give him a wide berth. Above them, and in the distance the gold, hip-roofed peaks of a refurbished Jing'an Temple offered a testament to Shanghai's return to wealth and importance.<sup>105</sup>

The lobby of the Four Seasons presented a pristine, spacious and gilded contrast to the beggars on Huashan lu. Shanghai was heading into Autumn, and the weather was unusually mild. Even so, stepping into the air-conditioned atrium felt like a cold dry slap, blowing the dirt of the city back out into the street and keeping the heavy, hot air at a comfortable distance. Seeing my look of confusion, one of the staff, who were standing at regular intervals around the lobby, approached me and asked if he could help. "American Women's Club," I said, feeling out of place,

"It's in the Grand Ballroom." The staff member directed me up a wide, marble staircase, onto a broad mezzanine. A rectangular table occupied one end of the mezzanine with a small crowd of smartly dressed expatriate women surrounding it. Four expatriate women, with name badges on their lapels, stood on the other side of the table, offering information, sign-up

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104. The October SEA Coffee Meeting was held in the Ballroom of the JC Mandarin Hotel, also in Jing'an.

105. Jing'an Temple had been almost completely demolished during the Cultural Revolution. It was reconstructed by worshipers in the early 1990s. However, this temple was demolished in the interests of urban development and replaced "with a splendid new temple in order to compliment the new pedestrian only street near-by" (Ji 2011).

sheets and copies of the club periodical, Spirit Magazine, to whoever was interested. Opposite the table, a set of double doors stood open, through which the ballroom itself was visible.

Decorated in cream and gold, with blue and cream carpeting and an ornately panelled ceiling, the aptly named "Grand" Ballroom was configured as a marketplace, similar to the vendor area of a trade show or community fair. A variety of stalls was set out in a u-shape around the edges of the space, some advertising services or expatriate organisations and others selling products from jewellery to air purifiers. There was an area to sit down and socialise in the middle of the room, and near the door there was a refreshments table, with coffee, tea and a selection of finger foods. In New Zealand, similar events are usually held in church halls or vast, warehouse-like "exhibition centres" and I was continually struck by the opulence of the venue and what it said, consciously or unconsciously, about the privilege of the community AWCS served.

The fact that trailing spouse organisations often held their networking events in spaces like the Grand Ballroom suggests that notions of privilege played a role in the identity construction of some expatriates, helping to differentiate them further from the majority of local Chinese while also counterpointing their lives prior to expatriation. Through its use by AWCS the ballroom, an economically exclusive space by definition, was re-conceptualised as an exclusively Western space as well. Attendees at the coffee meeting were predominantly white, almost all female and of course predominantly American. Except for the "grand" decor, there was very little to separate this event from similar events in the West, and this made the experience of stepping into the ballroom one of dislocation, or perhaps relocation - out of China and back into the West, or from a marked back to an unmarked identity, in other words.

The AWCS Coffee Meeting, and events like it, also represent an opportunity for businesses to market to expatriates, and corporate expatriates in particular, in a more focused and direct way. The vendors at these events can, therefore, be seen as a cross-section of expatriate demand. For this reason, an overview of the types of goods and services marketed at these

events can also tell us a great deal about the relationship of expatriates to their own expatriation.

The vendors at the AWCS Coffee Meeting can usefully be divided into two groups: those selling/advertising goods or services, and those promoting expatriate charitable groups. Apart from those, such as the Shanghai Community Centre and Lifeline Shanghai, who concern themselves exclusively with the welfare of expatriates, there were also stalls soliciting for a migrant labour education charity, called Stepping Stones, and the reforestation and environmental education charity Roots and Shoots. Although most of the trailing spouses I encountered had little or no involvement with charitable concerns, a significant minority were somewhat involved in one or more charities and at least two had made a career out of their involvement. Some scholars have suggested that charity work often functions as a self-provisioning activity for trailing spouses, allowing them to express agency within their new environment (cf. Fechter 2007a, pp 50-51).

Instead of enacting notions of independence and self-worth through charity work, some spouses started small businesses. These cottage industries were also heavily represented at the AWCS Coffee Meeting. There were several stalls selling food items, clothing or jewellery, and a number of these were operated by trailing spouses. One woman, I talked to was advertising her services as a portrait photographer. I asked her what had prompted her decision to start her own business, and she told me that,

My kids are all in school now and that has meant that I have a lot of spare time. I have an Ayi so there's no housework that needs doing and I've always enjoyed photography. So, I started taking photos for friends and pretty soon I realised there was a market for this. If you want to get a family photo taken here you can't just pop into Walmart y'know?

Expatriate businesses often began in this way, by noting a product or service that was difficult to find in Shanghai and providing it themselves. The vendor who told me about the AWCS and SEA coffee meetings used the events to promote his artisan coffee roastery. He had a full-time position outside of the business and told me he had initially started it as a hobby,

but also out of frustration at not being able to find good quality coffee in Shanghai. Since then, however, a second coffee retailer, also an expatriate, had entered the market and he too was promoting his product at the AWCS event.

Other products and services promoted at the AWCS Coffee Meeting included International schools and hospitals, satellite dishes - providing access to Western media - a Western hair salon, a stall selling cheeses and one selling Western manufactured herbal supplements. Stalls advertising air and water purifiers addressed the frequently stated environmental concerns of expatriates. Air pollution, in particular, is a huge health concern in Shanghai. Expatriates with children were especially prone to worrying about the air quality in the city.<sup>106</sup>

Many of the same products and services were also advertised at the SEA Coffee meeting, at the yearly Expat Expo,<sup>107</sup> and in expatriate media. A number of the vendors also hosted talks for Bumps and Babes, the expatriate group for parents and expectant mothers. When taken as a whole, these vendors reflected the corporate expatriate desire to replicate, as closely as possible, key aspects of their Western middle-class lives in Shanghai. The relative popularity of these stalls suggest that education, health care, personal grooming, food and drink, media and the environment were central concerns for many of the attendees.

Guytai events were organised in a slightly different way. Individual members would ask, via the group's mailing list, how many might be interested in a particular activity and, provided there was enough support, the original poster would then be responsible for organising the event. My first Guytai event was a tour of the microbrewery at the Kerry Parkside Hotel, followed by lunch. The Kerry Parkside is in Jinqiao, a half hour metro journey from my old apartment in Xuhui and well outside my usual stomping ground. Because of this, I arrived a little bit late. Most of the Guytais had already

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106. Bumps and Babes regularly held air pollution seminars, to instruct expatriates on the best way to mediate the risks.

107. A major, yearly trade show for expatriates which is held at the spectacular neo-classical Shanghai Exhibition Centre.

gathered in the Brew Bar, next to Parkside's ground floor lobby. Several groups had already formed, and I wasn't too sure who I should announce my presence to. I noticed one tall, confident-looking man, moving from group to group, smiling and shaking people's hands.

Before coming to Shanghai, Paul had been a successful business executive in his own right, but his wife had been offered a job managing the China operations of a major US company. They lived in a serviced residence in the Parkside complex, which probably cost more per month in US dollars than my whole apartment did in RMB. Paul was one of the Guytai's more active members and the brewery tour had been his idea. I told him who I was. He introduced me to a couple of the other Guytais before excusing himself to greet other new arrivals.

The brewery tour began predictably with the brewmaster explaining the brewing process, outlining the notable features of his brew operation and offering his audience an opportunity to taste the hops. After the brewery tour, we were shown up to the function room where we would be having lunch. Henry a postpat, whose wife was the CFO of a major US food and beverage company in China, sat opposite me. The function room we were in had a view of the newly completed clubhouse at Regency Park Estate, the expatriate compound where Henry lived. I told him about my research and he showed me a column he'd just written for the expatriate parenting magazine "Shanghai Child." After everyone was settled and the food had been served, Paul stood up and made a toast: "May our wives continue to keep us in the style to which we have become accustomed."

Female trailing spouse organisations, like AWCS, organise a wide variety of activities for their members. Many reflect what might be regarded as stereotypically feminine concerns or interests, like cooking, cosmetics, or fashion. In her ethnography of trailing spouses in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, Braseby argues that a focus on similarly gendered activities helped her female participants reify a role of their own in opposition to their partner's role as bread winner (2010, p 182).

Guytai events, at least while I was in China, were also often focused around stereotypically masculine pursuits or interests. In addition to the

Brewery tour, the Guytais organised trips to the Coca-Cola Factory, a Go-Kart racing track, and the Shanghai F1 grand-prix. Like the brewery tour, other Guytai events were often bracketed by drinking and followed by a large lunch. Indeed, the Go-Kart excursion was described as an opportunity to celebrate "the Christmas season in true male style: drink and drive" (Guytai 2011).

Doucet has argued that remaining "connected to traditionally masculine sources of identity" (2004, p 279) is important for many stay-at-home fathers. She sees this expressed through "gendered self-provisioning work," such as carpentry, landscaping or machine repair, either around the home or as a volunteer within the community (2004). While at least one of the Guytais was a keen amateur carpenter, with a large collection of power tools, for many trailing spouses opportunities to engage in this sort of gendered self-provisioning are limited. Most expatriates, whatever their income level, lived in houses or apartments whose interior and exterior maintenance was undertaken by someone else. The ability of trailing spouses, of either gender, to construct an identity as a caregiver or homemaker is also likely to be complicated by the affordability, and consequent widespread patronage, of Ayi in Shanghai. Most of the family expatriates I talked to employed a full-time Ayi, whose responsibilities usually included housekeeping, laundry and some childcare. Some Ayi might also be expected to cook for the family.<sup>108</sup>

Elaine, who became a taitai after working in China for a number of years, described the effect of her own transition as significant,

My husband got a couple of really nice job offers and I was made redundant so it happened conveniently that I could be a taitai, and, first of all, I have to say it was a huge hit to my ego. I've never been made redundant so that took, like, at least three months to get over, and then it took another two months to just realise that I had no purpose, other than

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108. Community Centre Shanghai publishes a cookbook for Ayi, in English and Chinese, offering "a collection of 180 recipes..an excellent guide to teach your Ayi how to prepare a dinner for a Western family...it's a "must-have" for your Chinese Ayi!" (CCS 2011).

to, sort of, cook and clean and whatever, and in China your cooking and cleaning can be taken away from you by Ayi. But, on the other sense, it's been really nice. I never imagined myself as a housewife and so it's been actually really nice, being able to be home for my husband and have the meal on the table and..y'know, just look pretty. I really enjoy looking pretty. I enjoy getting my hair done, I enjoy getting my nails done, and having the time to do that's been really nice.

Just as Elaine describes finding fulfilment through the performance of traditional feminine roles, like "having a meal on the table" for her husband, or through the performance of traditional expectations of femininity, like getting her hair and nails done in order to look "pretty," I would argue that the gendered nature of many Guytai events are an attempt to reassert a masculine role in the absence of accessible, self-provisioned, expressions of identity.

However, not all activities organised by trailing spouse organisations are similarly gendered. AWCS organises museum, gallery and street food tours, charity fundraisers, exercise classes and day trips to places like the "DongShan Fishing Village and Tea Plantation" (AWCS 2013). Since the initial period of my fieldwork, the Guytais have also undertaken more events with a focus on tourism, self-improvement or charitable contributions.

Braseby's description of her male participants reluctance to discuss exactly this question (2010, p 182) reveals that this can be a source of anxiety for trailing spouses themselves. Organisations such as the Guytais and the AWCS provide an answer for their members, supplying them, not only with networking opportunities but also with something to do and be a part of. Organisations like AWCS and the Guytais provided a forum for people who would not otherwise have met to get to know one another gradually.

As suggested by Ben's statement, that his wife was "the friend making point of [their] marriage", trailing spouse groups were not just beneficial for the trailing spouses themselves. By opening up new avenues of shared

social network formation, they benefited working partners as well. As you might imagine, friendships formed during an AWCS Coffee meeting, or a Guytai event, were often broadened to include husbands or wives. In their ethnographic study of trailing spouse involvement in expatriate careers, Luring and Selmer also documented the "active role [trailing spouses often play] in developing the social network and social capital necessary for their [working partners] to work effectively" (2010, p 67).

As discussed in Section 6.1 (pp 157-172), trailing spouses and their corporate expatriate partners tended to live in exclusive gated communities, or upmarket serviced apartment complexes. Often these complexes were situated near expatriate supermarkets, international schools and expensive Western eateries. The corporate expatriate package, which made this self-contained, comfortable bubble possible is also what allowed trailing spouses not to work in the first place. Without a job, or other commitments that might force them to engage with the local Chinese world outside their homes, or indeed leave their compounds at all, it is easy to see how some trailing spouses end up feeling socially isolated, or trapped by the bubble. In fact, scholars have suggested that trailing spouses, in general, are more likely to have trouble adjusting to their expatriation than their working partners (Gupta et al 2012; Harvey 1996).

Organisations like CCS help to expand both the social and physical aspects of the trailing spouse bubble. Locating their events within existing enclaves of Westernised, middle-class privilege - the ballrooms of 5 Star Hotels and Shanghai's more upmarket bars and restaurants - meant that the resulting social spaces were not only bubbles of Westernness but that this Westernness was complicated and also partially defined by class. Through opportunities for education, a - usually touristic - engagement with the local, and new social connections, these organisations provided their members with a space to develop new communities and identities. The often stated desire to "make the most of their time" in China, meant that for many trailing spouses these new transnational identities were aspirationally cosmopolitan, but were also usually defined in strict opposi-

tion to the exotic, poor, ill-mannered, culturally and spatially distant Chinese Other.

## 7.2 - Community Services

A number of expatriate organisations were more explicitly focused on the health and welfare of the expatriate community. Even though these groups were usually open to all expatriates, and informally to local Chinese in some cases, their membership was again usually dominated by trailing spouses.

One such group was the parents support group Bumps and Babes, who held their twice monthly meetings in two locations. Pudong meetings I attended were held at the Cook Lounge, a bar located within the Kerry Parkside Hotel, and at the Bluefrog IFC, an upmarket burger restaurant situated beneath Shanghai's iconic International Financial Centre.<sup>109</sup> The Puxi meetings were held at the slightly more mid-range, but still elegant Paulaner Brauhaus, a German bar and restaurant. Usually, these meetings took place in the morning, and often the bar or restaurant opened early to accommodate them. Some attendees were working mothers on maternity leave, but, again because the group held their meetings during the day, its core membership was mainly drawn from Shanghai's trailing spouse population. Attendees paid a door charge and were usually served a light brunch before the guest speakers began their presentations. At Paulaner, brunch consisted of fresh fruit and pastries, coffee, tea and fruit juice. Female Chinese waitstaff, dressed in Bavarian beerhall kitsch, added a somewhat surreal touch to the proceedings. Attendees sat together at long tables making conversation during this time. People talked about what had brought them to Shanghai, they talked about their children, about their spouse's profession, and what their own profession had been before they arrived in Shanghai. They discussed the challenges of living in China and shared information about potential solutions. Some exchanged contact information.

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109. Shanghai's tallest building until recently, the IFC is known colloquially as the Bottle Opener.

Following brunch, an expert speaker, or more frequently a panel of speakers, would present on the day's topic. Topics focused on areas of particular concern for expatriate parents or expectant parents. Usually the experts were recruited from businesses with an interest in monetising these concerns. Pollution, giving birth in China and multilingualism were all topics covered in Bumps and Babes talks that I attended. For the pollution talk, one of the experts was an air nose and throat specialist from United Family Hospital - a private and very expensive international hospital with branches in many Chinese cities. The other was an air purification consultant. The multilingualism talk was presented by a speech therapist and the talk on giving birth was presented by two doctors, one from the international department of a local Chinese hospital and the other from the obstetrics unit of United Family. Usually, the experts also had brochures available, advertising their facilities, services, or the products they sold.

The question and answer session which followed the talks was usually dominated by notions of cultural and physical contamination. Through their questions, attendees voiced fears about China as primitive, dangerous and dirty. Following the pollution talk, the panel was asked repeatedly how attendees could best protect their families from Shanghai's deteriorating air quality.

When should I make my child wear a mask?  
When should I keep my child inside, or home  
from school?

During the question and answer session, following the talk on multilingualism a number of the attendees described the choice, to expose their child to the Chinese language, as an active one, made because they believed it would benefit their son or daughter in the long run. However, many also asked whether acquiring Chinese might carry any negative impacts for their sons or daughters - despite being told several times by the expert speaker that it was unlikely that it would.<sup>110</sup> In the talk on giving birth, after

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110. Some of the attendees came from very multi-ethnic, multi-lingual families. In the most extreme case the child was regularly exposed to 5 languages. His mother was Belgian and so spoke French and Flemish with him in the home. His father was Spanish. He had a Chinese Ayi, and spoke English in school. However, these parents tended to be less concerned with the dangers to their child of learning more than one language and more concerned that they might not select one of their natal

repeated reassurances from the two doctors that either hospital could handle any complication which might occur, one woman still asked them under what conditions she should consider flying to Hong Kong to have her baby.

The remove at which many corporate expatriates live from what they consider to be the real China functions to provide them with a zone of liminality - a Western, middle-class bubble. On the other hand, anxieties about cultural and environmental contamination, like those expressed in the questions above, demonstrate how vulnerable this bubble is to puncture. They also echo earlier - colonial - narratives in which the physical contamination of the body by dirt or illness was routinely conflated with the cultural or psychological pollution of the "white" self by a non-"white" other (cf. Low 2003; Boehmer 2005).

One of the functions of Bumps and Babes was to mediate these concerns for expatriate parents, giving them access to expert knowledge and guidance that might otherwise be difficult to access. However, simply by providing expatriate parents with a forum where they could have their concerns validated by experts and by their peers, these seminars helped to create a safe social space in which Western values and expectations were implicitly supported as normal. Attendee's questions repeatedly framed pollution, dirt and inefficiency as inherently Chinese problems, reinforcing a barrier between themselves and the local Chinese world outside their bubble. Worries about children becoming multilingual also reflect a perception, common in the English-speaking world, of monolingualism as the norm. In this way, the language barrier helps to reinforce and is itself reinforced by, the overt Westernness of the corporate expatriate bubble. China and the Chinese language is located on the outside of this bubble, and English-speaking monolingualism is re-normalised within it.

Bumps and Babes provides parents and expectant parents with expert advice and a space for the enactment of a specialised network of support rooted in the shared experience of parenthood. After the talk was over the

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languages as a first language.

members would often network over their children, forming social ties through the exchange of compliments, pregnancy and parenting narratives. The seminar would be deconstructed and anxieties reexamined, friendships forming over shared discomforts.

A number of studies of non-Western migrant communities suggest that coherent and reliable support networks are particularly important during pregnancy and in the early stages of childrearing, and may even have a beneficial effect on the health outcomes of the child (Sherraden & Barrera, 1997; Laganá 2003; Viruell-Fuentes, 2007). Although the pressures on typically higher income expatriate mothers are likely to be different than those experienced by lower income non-Western migrants, the environmental and cultural concerns quoted above suggest that, for the trailing spouses themselves, at least, those pressures are not insignificant.

More generally focused community services, like Community Center Shanghai (CCS) or Lifeline Shanghai, also exist. Sarah, Lifeline's outreach manager described the service as,

A free and confidential telephone helpline. We help anyone who speaks English.<sup>111</sup> So, uh, I would say about 75% of our callers are expats, and the rest are local Chinese who speak English. We don't have any materials that are translated into Chinese, we don't speak Chinese on the phone. We're not allowed to actually, by government law, and they find us, somehow. They become quite often frequent callers. They call daily or weekly, just to talk. There's a Chinese mental health helpline, but it's automated up to a certain point, it's not confidential, and it's not anonymous, whereas Lifeline is. We don't ask about who they are, where they live. We take no info from them. We don't keep their phone number.

Until recently CCS has located its centres exclusively in those outlying areas - Jinqiao, Minhang, Hongqiao - stereotypically associated with compound living and the corporate expatriate families who are purported to

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111. "We operate primarily in English, but are also able to offer support in fourteen other languages. We do not, however, offer support in Mandarin." (Lifeline Shanghai 2012)

favour it. The majority of the activities and services offered by CCS are also either family focused, or occur at times of the day when most people in paid employment could not attend. For new expatriates, CCS offered a free course, called Shanghai 1 2 3, "a half-day essential orientation that is structured to give you the tools and information necessary to successfully navigate your first year and beyond!" (CCS 2011). They also offered a professional counselling service.

Like the trailing spouse networking groups, they offered weekly coffee meetings. These would usually be around a guest-speaker or discussion topic. Day tours of nearby attractions were sometimes offered. During the day, they hosted workshops and classes on topics such as Chinese and European language, arts and crafts, dance etc. In addition, after-school classes and a summer programme were offered for children. Separate classes in English and cooking were offered for Ayi and drivers.

According to Sarah, a significant proportion of Lifeline's clients were also trailing spouses. The most common reasons for calling Lifeline, in her estimation, were,

I hate to say it,<sup>112</sup> but, a lot of lonely housewives, a lot of loneliness in general. Women who followed their partners here, who have been following their partners from place to place and, struggle to fit in, struggle to find their role here. Their partner travels a lot or works all the time. So loneliness and homesickness are very big issues. Infidelity, occasionally. I also hate to say this, because it's such a cliché, but, the stories of foreign men leaving their wives for their Chinese secretaries come up, a lot [laughs], and, substance abuse. Shanghai has, as I'm sure you've experienced, a very active nightlife and we get a lot of calls from people that are just, overwhelmed. But yeah, homesickness, loneliness, substance abuse.

This apparent need on the part of Shanghai's trailing spouses is perhaps reflected in the focus, of organisations like CCS and Lifeline, on informing this demographic about their services and also on aligning those services

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112. Sarah's reluctance here, may be a reaction against the stereotype of taitais as poorly adjusted and unhappy.

to said demographic. Lifeline and CCS maintain a highly visible presence at sign-up events for SEA and AWCS, both of which are primarily trailing spouse organisations.

In contrast to the trailing spouse experience, most working expatriates were forced to engage with the local Chinese population - and, therefore, to confront their own alienation - to some extent, on a daily basis. Without this pressure, it is easy to see how the bubble might start to feel like a prison, especially for those trailing spouses who viewed the local Chinese world outside their compound as something imposed on them by their expatriation, rather than as a challenge, or a choice. Although this attitude was not overtly present in my interviews, within Shanghai's expatriate population as a whole, it was popularly believed to be common among trailing spouses. In addition, similar adjustment problems have been documented among trailing spouses in other centres of expatriate settlement (Fechter 2007a, pp 37-59; Arieli 2013; Cieri et al 1991),

Postpats often looked puzzled when I mentioned the apparently abundant support available to them. Most of them knew of the support and networking opportunities available from their chambers of commerce, their consulates, and from social media websites. However, very few were aware that Shanghai had even one community centre for expatriates, let alone five of them. Some knew that Lifeline existed, but told me the service wasn't well publicised, that they didn't know the phone number and/or knew no one who had actually used the service.

Lifeline Shanghai consists of approximately 70 paid staff and volunteers (Lifeline Shanghai 2012), while Community Centre Shanghai employs twenty people across its five centres (CCS 2011). On that basis alone it seems likely that both are well utilised. In the case of Lifeline, some degree of ignorance might be attributable to the general stigma attached to mental health issues. People who call a confidential helpline are, after all, unlikely to then recommend the service to their friends. By definition crisis counselling is also a service you don't know you will need until you need it.

The events and assistance provided by community service groups like Bumps and Babes, Lifeline and CCS, highlight some key areas of concern

for expatriates, several of which have been touched on elsewhere in this thesis. Issues such as social and cultural isolation, estrangement from established networks of support, pollution, food safety, and healthcare concerns were frequent topics of conversation for expatriates generally. However, the membership demographics of these groups and the way they structure themselves suggest that trailing spouses experienced these issues to a greater extent than the rest of the expatriate population. This is also supported by the research of other scholars in trailing spouse adjustment (Gupta et al 2012; Harvey 2011).

### **7.3 - Social and Professional Networking**

Although trailing spouses were served by a large number of networking and support organisation that predominantly - and often exclusively - catered to their particular needs, Shanghai's working expatriates were able to utilise a variety of social and professional networking groups as well. Some, like Shanghai Rotary, are chapters of large international fraternal organisations. However, many of the groups that I encountered were specific to the Shanghai environment.

Organisations whose membership is nominally constituted along national or regional lines, such as chambers of commerce, or de jure chambers,<sup>113</sup> were among the most visible of these groups. With one or two prominent exceptions<sup>114</sup> Shanghai's chambers of commerce typically perform more than their traditional business lobbying role. In the case of BritCham, AusCham and KEA most, if not all, events were reasonably priced and were not restricted to dues-paying members.

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113. KEA China for example. According to Kea's manager in Shanghai, because New Zealand doesn't have a Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, and because Chambers of Commerce are one of the few ways to legally constitute a foreign non-profit in China, KEA is registered as such, though it does not perform all of the same functions as one.

114. The American Chamber is by far the most traditional in this respect, and consequently the most exclusive. A one-year individual membership to AmCham is 2650 RMB at the time of writing - around NZ\$494 or US\$415 - effectively limiting membership to the very top tier of American expatriate managers.

It might be tempting to imagine that these outposts of nationhood also constitute natural, ready-made communities for Shanghai's expatriates. However, when asked if there were any activities they participated in which made them feel more connected to their national identity, the interview participants either didn't mention their national chamber of commerce at all or told me it wasn't something they participated in. Christy, who I met at Kiwi Drinks, told me, she saw KEA events as a professional networking opportunity only,

I'm organising a New Zealand festival. That is why I go to Kiwi Drinks because I'm on the hunt for sponsors, which is obviously where we met, But I'm a hundred times more connected to the NZ community than I have been in 14 years.

Siebe told me, that he felt bad about the fact that he hadn't been to any of the events organised by BeneCham, or the Belgian consulate, during his time in Shanghai:

I'm almost ashamed to admit that, in those three years time, I haven't done anything in connection with my home country. I haven't participated in any social gathering happening by the consulate or a Belgian restaurant and I don't even know any other Belgian here in Shanghai. Um, so, no, not really, but, since a couple of months, I had to renew my passport. I took a flyer and I told myself that in the next couple of months, probably next year, I would do this step of going to at least one of the happenings or the events organised by the Belgian consulate or the chamber of commerce.

Bruce, who I also met at Kiwi Drinks, mentioned that he preferred to stay away from organisations with a focus on national or ethnic identity,

On LinkedIn<sup>115</sup> you've got the Shanghai Scots. I've been invited along to that, but, I must admit, y'know, I always tread quite carefully around these organisations because they can get a little bit too zealous or xenophobic at

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115. A popular social network for professionals.

times and I like a bit of passion about identity  
but I don't want to get too sucked into it.

Bruce's attendance at Kiwi Drinks, despite this stated dislike, is telling. Only occasionally did KEA, BritCham, or AusCham events have an overtly nationalistic focus. Beyond including mince pies and pavlova in the buffet, patriotism was only an obvious feature of KEA events during the Rugby World Cup. Even Waitangi Day was a relaxed family day. Despite the presence of the NZ Consul General, many of the symbols of New Zealand - and particularly of Maori - identity were notably absent or deemphasised. Apart from the food, the most characteristically New Zealand element was the musical entertainment. A couple on acoustic guitars, backed up by their children, played New Zealand party standards like "10 guitars" and "Pokarekare Ana." What looked like a New Zealand Tourism video, featuring sweeping aerial tracking shots of the Southern Alps, played on a screen behind them. However, most people paid little attention to either the band or their backdrop, and for most of the event the room was crowded with small, inwardly focused, groups, noisily conversing.

Responses of my interview participants notwithstanding, the KEA and/or AusCham events I participated in were always extremely well attended, particularly the regular Friday night drinks. The lack of responses reflecting this popularity is no doubt related to difficulties I faced in recruiting interview participants at KEA or AusCham events. Those I did manage to recruit tended to be on the periphery themselves, either newcomers like Christy or true outsiders - those not from Australia or New Zealand, like Bruce the Briton or his American wife Elaine.

Typically as people arrived at Aussie drinks, or Kiwi Drinks, they would join people they already knew, and, in many cases, had evidently prearranged to meet there. Tight circles and animated conversations actively discouraged interruption. A few well-known individuals floated from group to group and occasionally conversations were struck up between acquaintances at the bar, or while waiting in line at the buffet. Newcomers often spent their time leaning against the bar, or in other high traffic areas, on their own or in pairs, walled-eyed, alert to any potential for outside interac-

tion. Generally speaking, though, conversations between strangers were rare.

Although national interest is the ostensible reason organisations like KEA and AusCham exist, the lack of emphasis placed on the symbols of national identity at their events suggests that this is not their key focus. Nor do they offer an effective means of developing new networks of support in my experience. Instead, I view Kiwi Drinks and Aussie Drinks as a space for the enactment of already established communities and networks of support. Membership of both KEA and AusCham are limited to, but also nominally inclusive of all, conationals. However, forming social ties within these networks of support proved no easier than in any other established expatriate network. Despite a shared national identity, it took 6 months of going to KEA events fairly regularly, talking to anyone who seemed like they might be at a loose end before someone actually initiated a conversation with me. I was standing around between speeches at KEA's Waitangi Day celebration, when a man, who the manager of KEA had previously pointed out to me as "the Cheesemaker," walked up and said, 'I've seen you at a bunch of these things before.'

For many expatriates, and particularly for those who came to China to find work, rather than to take a job they had already secured, these spaces also served a professional, as well as a social, networking function. Over the course of several weeks, at a number of expat mixers we both attended, I saw Lillian, a newly-arrived expatriate, unemployed and in her early 20's, introduced, to several top executives by KEA's Regional Manager for China. They were all open and friendly and several of them offered advice, albeit somewhat paternalistically, on who to talk to and how to improve her chances with potential employers. Even after she got work, teaching English at a kindergarten, these men showed continuing interest in her, offering to "see what they could do" in finding her a more challenging job.

Fechter sees the transitoriness of Indonesia's Western expatriate population as making "social identification" with a new group of peers more difficult. According to her, this is complicated by strict social codes dictat-

ing who it is and isn't appropriate to socialise with (2007a, p 45). These class-based social codes were notably absent from my experience of Shanghai, at least within the expatriate population itself. For a young, newly-arrived, unemployed migrant to have direct access to the Managing Director of a major Airline, or the General Manager of a large international bank within days of arriving in the country would be very unusual in New Zealand. Within expatriate Shanghai, a large number of social contexts exist where class or social rank are, if not actually absent, certainly greatly deemphasized.

Sean, while discussing his experiences working with expatriate sports clubs, described this phenomenon as something he particularly enjoyed about Shanghai,

In more conventional, mature environments there's an old boys' network. I mean here there's an old boys' network too, but, y'know, we're part of it in 15 years. Expats are also really helpful by nature because someone helped you. No one cares what you do during the day. We go out and play touch rugby on Saturday and you're playing with the head of Coke and the President of EHP and three students and no one cares. No one knows what they do. They..we don't have that conventionality, and that hierarchy and that cliché and that snobbishness and that I love. There's people I've known for a decade. I don't know what they do during the day. I don't care, and I think that's exciting too. I find the conventionality a bit suffocating when I go back to other cultures,

One of the more selective and mysterious manifestations of the old boys' network mentioned by Sean, is the Savage Club. They describe themselves as a "Bohemian Gentleman's Club" (Savage Club 2013 ). Membership is available by invitation only, and the few members I've talked to were deliberately vague about what exactly happened during club functions. Along with the many recreational activities the club organises for its members, it also provides a business coaching and mentoring service. The parallels between this group and other fraternal societies are clear.

The club draws its name and contemporary legitimacy from another Savage club, which was active in Shanghai during the later part of the 19th century. Unfortunately in evoking the grandeur of the semi-colonial era they are also entangling themselves in a problematic history of classism, sexism and racism. The gentleman's clubs of the late 19th and early 20th century were, after all, bastions of white male privilege (Sinha 2001).

Surprisingly, the first time I met a Savage Club member he was not the privileged, rugby blazer wearing, private schooled scion of wealthy parents for whom the phrase Bohemian Gentleman's Club seems almost deliberately crafted. Brad was a biker from Queensland, with an unkempt ginger beard, who I met at Aussie Drinks. He had come to Shanghai as an architectural model builder, developed RSI and then taken a job managing the warehouse of a large Australian owned export operation. I probably would never have even found out about the Savage Club if I had not already been talking to Brad, when his boss, the owner of the export business, happened to ask him in passing whether he would be at the club's next event. The club's name alone was enough to spark my anthropological curiosity and I asked Brad what sort of organisation it was. "It's a businessman's networking group. We have these long lunches" he said and then hesitated, smiling slyly, "But I don't want to say too much. What happens at Savage Club stays at Savage Club."

According to Brad, his boss nominated him for membership of the club. It is difficult to imagine any prominent businessperson in New Zealand, having been granted membership of a similarly exclusive organisation, such as the Northern Club in Auckland, deciding to nominate his warehouse manager for membership. It is equally difficult to imagine the Northern Club looking kindly on such an application, and unlikely that someone as determinedly working class as Brad would feel comfortable in an exclusive gentleman's club as it's traditionally conceived.

Despite this apparent class blindness, the Savage Club remains defiantly a Gentleman's club. Even the name appears to be a celebration of colonial masculinity, and existing photos of the club membership suggest that they are also predominantly white (cf. Hoopes 2012). Shanghai's Western

expatriate population is itself, largely white. However, this does not make the exclusivity and colonial nostalgia evoked by the notion of a gentleman's club any less problematic. By recapitulating the oasis of elite European masculinity which Victorian club life represented, the Savage Club, whether consciously or not, is making a strong statement regarding the preferred positioning of its members within China and within the world.

Perhaps in response to these zones of male exclusivity, and certainly as a reaction against corporate patriarchy, Shanghai's expatriate women were themselves actively engaged in creating female-only professional networking spaces. Expatriate Professional Women in Shanghai (EPWS) was one such group, founded, according to its President, because,

Men put a lot of pressure on professional women to act and to look a certain way, and it's good to have somewhere you can network with other women away from all that...and for those who are single, perhaps it's an opportunity to not be distracted by the attractive men in the room [laughs]

EPWS also had a higher degree of ethnic diversity than the Savage Club, or, indeed than most expatriate groups. During my formal fieldwork, the executive committee was made up of several American Chinese, a Singaporean woman, and a British Indian as well as a number of phenotypically white expatriates.

EPWS hosted larger cocktail events every few months and was trialling a WoMentoring programme for its members during my formal fieldwork. They also hosted weekly networking "Women of Vision" breakfasts for their members, which were framed around a speaker, usually a successful expatriate woman. Men were normally prohibited from attending, except when invited to present. The EPWS board were generous enough to grant me a rare exception to this rule, permitting me to attend two of their networking breakfasts.

The first of these featured Tori, a founding member of SEA and the chairperson of the environmental education and reforestation charity, Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots. She described her early years in China, reminiscing that when she had first arrived, 20 years before, Shanghai's

entire expatriate population were able to fit comfortably on the lawn of the Australian consulate, where they met regularly for drinks, weather permitting. She related how before Diet Coke was widely available in China, demand was so great that when word began to spread that the Shanghai Hilton had just had a couple of pallet loads delivered, someone from SEA 'went down and talked the whole shipment out the back door'. She went on to describe how her executive role with the SEA brought her to the attention of HRH Prince Charles, during one of his visits to Shanghai, and that this led to her being appointed as the China representative for his charitable interests. A last minute decision to attend a talk by Dr Jane Goodall, who Tori described enthusiastically as 'captivating, enchanting I was so excited. Of course, I just had to meet her afterwards', culminated in her being asked by Dr. Goodall to spearhead the foundation of the Chinese branch of her charity, the Jane Goodall Institute.

Roots and Shoots is also one of very few locally registered non-profits in China. This status had only been possible because of the intervention of a senior official in China's Inland Revenue department, a favour that Tori credited to his fascination with her connections to British Royalty. Non-profit status is so rare in fact, that, according to Tori, the tax law which covers them has not even been written yet. Rather than filing returns, she described travelling to Beijing each year to negotiate the charity's tax bill with her friend, the royalist, directly.

June, the owner of a successful China-based furniture manufactory and a mother of three, was the guest speaker at the second power breakfast I attended. She discussed coming to China as a student in her early 20s. After graduating, she got a job in Shanghai with an office furniture retailer. She soon realised that she could provide the same products at a cheaper price by manufacturing them in-house. Her boss was unwilling to take the necessary financial risk, and so June formed her own company, which despite a few China-specific hurdles, continues to be a success. She also talked about the struggle to balance her responsibilities as a parent with her role as a business owner and entrepreneur, explaining that the affordability of domestic help in Shanghai had made this a much more active

choice than would have been the case in Australasia. Recognising that she was privileged to be in a position to make such a choice, she framed her decision 'to step back from the business a bit and take the time to be a parent,' as both a burden and a source of pride.

In its aims, EPWS is certainly no different from similar organisations in the West, such as the New Zealand Federation of Business and Professional Women. I imagine that highlighting the stories of "self-made" business women, like June and Tori, is a common feature of many women's professional networking groups, appealing as it does to one of the central narratives of global capitalism (cf. Kimmel 2002). Where EPWS differs is in the geo-cultural context in which it operates, and in the challenges faced by its members specific to that context. EPWS frames itself as assisting its membership to '[adapt] to an expatriate work life and environment...[to thrive in] an expatriate work environment and lifestyle" (EPWS n.d). While EPWS members often described the opportunity to meet and talk to women who had already "made it" as inspiring, the elements of each narrative of success that caused the most comment were those specific to China. Rather than focusing on general business practices, the questions following a presentation often sought to expand on these elements as well as the China-specific business problems of the attendees.

Social and professional networking groups allowed working expatriates to build new networks of support. Expatriates were then able to draw on these networks of support to discuss issues specific to doing business and living in China. These groups typically drew their members from all tiers of expatriate society, from English teachers and job hunting college graduates to senior executives from major multinational corporations. Having such easy access to the contacts knowledge and experience of the "old boys [or girls] network" certainly distinguishes organisations like KEA, Auscham, EPWS and even the more exclusive Savage Club from their equivalents in the West. As I argued in Chapter 2 (pp 26-48), the appearance of classlessness that characterises these and other expatriate groups is usefully understood through the social levelling effect of *comunitas*. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is only an

apparent classlessness. Lower-middle class and working class local Chinese were effectively excluded, by the cost of entry and by the prices at event venues. Even wealthier local Chinese were rarely active participants. As you might expect, the levelling effect of *communitas* only applies within the imagined community of Westernness that is its basis and does not extend beyond it.

## 7.4 - Expatriate Media

Shanghai's expatriates were also served by a wide range of online and off-line media. These media products were utilised by a broad cross-section of Shanghai's expatriate population, as well as by English-speaking local Chinese, and differed in several important ways from those groups and services discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

One such product was the Shanghai Call Center, more informally known as the Magic Number, a free 24-hour call and text-in centre run by the city government, and used by expatriates for everything from simple translation issues to recommending a good restaurant or nightclub. This can have its limits though, as one expat blogger found out when she asked the operator to direct her to the closest lesbian bar. The Communist Party has a somewhat closeted attitude towards the issue of homosexuality and predictably the operator's response was to repeatedly state, "No, ma'am, I'm sorry we have no information about this" (Hot Pot Time Machine 2012).

Major English-language newspapers such as the *Shanghai Daily* and the *China Daily* were not widely read by the expatriates I talked to, who generally regarded them as unreliable and usually uninteresting Party propaganda. Free glossy lifestyle magazines like *That's Shanghai*, *City Weekend*, *Timeout Shanghai* and *Shanghai Family* were more popular, although some expatriates I talked to complained that they were difficult to find. Each of these publications currently also has an online version, through which most, or all, of the content published in print can be freely accessed, and the two most popular, the *Shanghaist* and *SmartShanghai*, exist only online.

Magazine style websites like these often complemented traditional reportage with other services such as job listings, online dating, business listings and events calendars. I have occasionally seen my expatriate contacts share news articles from *City Weekend* or *Shanghaist* on social media. However, it was much more usual to hear publications like these discussed in relation to the kinds of listings mentioned above. It was common, for instance, for expatriates to use the business listings on these site's to discover new restaurants or nightclubs or to recall the address of more familiar spaces. Reviews written by the sites users both supplement and counterpoint the more formal restaurant and venue reviews published by the website's staff. In the absence of popular crowd-sourced reviewing platforms like Yelp, which are often blocked in China, this gives expatriates access to greater local knowledge than they might otherwise have. Physical addresses are usually provided in both English and Chinese characters and expatriates often used these listings to communicate a destination to local Chinese taxi drivers.<sup>116</sup> Events listings, which typically included listings for drinks specials and restaurant promotions along with musical and artistic events, were also popularly perused and consumed.

However, the Chinese government's control of what could and could not be covered even by corporate media has made online social media much more important for finding out certain kinds of information, not only for expatriates but notoriously for Chinese citizens as well (French 2008). Many of the most popular Western social media platforms - Facebook, Google+, Twitter and so on - are blocked by the Great Firewall. Gmail, Google's popular free email service, has also been periodically blocked, as have free social file-sharing services such as Google Drive and Dropbox. Without a VPN<sup>117</sup> these websites are impossible to access.

The overwhelming majority of expatriates had access to a VPN and most used one on a regular basis. Jessie, an English teacher in his late 20s,

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116. *SmartShanghai* refers to this section as the Taxi Printout.

117. Virtual Private Network. A way of hiding your internet traffic by routing it through another server. Commonly used by Laowai, as well as an undetermined but probably large number of Chinese, to circumvent Chinese censorship.

told me that access to the internet was very important in helping him to remain connected to his home country. "I participate in forums," he told me "I email people, I chat and Skype with friends". Freelance writer Harriet told me that "internet problems, even with VPN," were some of the things she disliked most about living in China.

During the irregular government crackdowns<sup>118</sup> on VPN use, it was common to hear expatriates complaining about the effect this had on their ability to keep up with news or to communicate with families and friends back in their home country. Responding to a reported crackdown on VPNs, expatriate blogger Carole Killeen writes,

[VPNs are] vital for us Expats in China... we all operate with Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Websites, Youtube, we all have our E-Mails accounts from Yahoo or Gmail, we all download our music and APPS from iTunes... If all these... are blocked, how [can] we live? It is a necessity for us to keep in touch with the world, our families, work... Unimaginable and intolerable. I do not know about you, but for me, it is very clear. I'm going home!

(2012)

Expatriates occasionally interpreted these crackdowns as directed at them specifically. During the same 2012 crackdown, one forum user on *ShanghaiExpat* suggested, "When they decide they no longer want nor need outsiders, they will simply cut us off, tell us to behave like Chinese do, and/or leave," (Woshiweideren 2012). It was, however, more common for expatriates to view their VPN use as a natural consequence of their outsider status, something that should be, and usually was tolerated by the government. An expatriate user of the popular entertainment, social networking and news website, Reddit, writes, "it seems that the government doesn't care about foreigners using VPNs, or even a small number of Chinese citizens" (JaggedG 2015). This sentiment has also been echoed

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118. Authorities usually crackdown on VPN's by blocking access to the VPN servers themselves. However, recently they have also started blocking the protocols used by some devices to communicate with VPNs.

from within the VPN industry itself. Chris Mathews, a spokesman for the California-based Freedur VPN service argues that,

The Chinese government doesn't care about us, they just don't want their citizens stumbling upon something on the Internet that will cause them to (raise) questions.

(quoted in Jennings 2010)

It might be tempting to assume, as many expatriates have, that the activities of resident foreigners are viewed by the Chinese state with something approaching ambivalence. However, the bubble of relative freedom enjoyed by expatriates, online and elsewhere, is not absolute,<sup>119</sup> nor is it limited to expatriates. In fact, most expatriate online media also have active local Chinese users. In addition VPNs continue to be used by an undetermined number of local Chinese, despite periodic crackdowns from the authorities,<sup>120</sup> and, at least, one first-tier university in China provides local Chinese students and staff with VPN access.<sup>121</sup>

In fact, I would argue that the Great Firewall does not function, and perhaps is not even intended to function, as a "wall between China and the World" (Yang 2014). Fundamentally it is a classist barrier, a gatekeeper and watchdog that is most effective at policing those with the smallest investment in the current system - the 95% of local Chinese internet users who earn less than 8000RMB a month (CINIC 2014). Furthermore, English-language fluency can be seen as a companion barrier to the Great Firewall, preventing most local Chinese<sup>122</sup> from a full participation in the

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119. For example, a Western tourist, Noel Hidalgo, was deported during the 2008 Olympics for uploading a video he'd made of a Free Tibet protest in Tiananmen Square to several Western social media platforms (Grant 2008). More recently, and perhaps more worryingly, an American expatriate based in Shenzhen was deported from China, while on holiday in Tibet, for sending SMS messages critical of the situation there (Teon 2015).

120. Reliable figures are hard to come by, but one estimate suggests that as many as 90 million Chinese internet users may use VPN in order access restricted social networks, or about 14% of all internet users (Mander 2014; Bischoff 2014).

121. My source for this is a staff member at the university in question. I have also heard hearsay reports that most of the first tier Universities in fact provide their students with VPN access.

122. There are no reliable figures for how many Chinese citizens speak English fluently. However, the popularity and cost of private English-language training schools in

global internet.<sup>123</sup> Just as the ability to leave China physically is becoming a marker of class identity in China (Hulme 2014, p 11), China's virtual frontier is also increasingly permeable, provided you have the money.<sup>124</sup>

Of course, China has its own very robust, and largely self-contained, local internet, with services like Wechat, Renren, Weibo and Baidu providing a close approximation of blocked services like Facebook, Twitter, and Google. Wechat, a Chinese-owned social messaging platform, has recently become very popular with Shanghai's expatriates, with event and community organisers using the apps group-chat functionality to communicate directly to, often quite large, groups of expatriates. One group, for example, called Actors in Shanghai, has 124 members at the time of writing, any of whom can contribute to a wide-ranging conversation covering everything from entertainment industry questions, to advertisements for shows and workshops, to visa advice. However, on several occasions I also heard expatriates debating how private their communication via Wechat really was, and cautioning others to be careful what they said in messages or in group chat. Indeed this fear that "the Party is watching" is not without basis. Reposting blocked content in Chinese, or even mentioning certain words or phrases on Chinese-controlled social media platforms like QQ or Wechat, can be enough to earn a visit from the police (Rife 2015; Citizen Lab 2013). Expatriate social media, on the other hand, appears to be much less tightly monitored or controlled.

*ShanghaiExpat* and *ShanghaiStuff* both contained fora where users could make requests for advice and assistance. Usually, these requests were for fairly mundane things, but unlike the Magic Number or Wechat group chats, members seemed more free to criticise the Party, ask each other

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China, marks competency in English as a firmly middle-class phenomenon.

123. A recent survey of the 10 million most popular websites in the world found that more than 50% of them were in English (W3Techs 2015).

124. As well as the inclination. Many of the middle aged local Chinese I talked to had no real interest in global social media, although most could certainly have afforded a VPN and many had accounts with Chinese services like Wechat. Younger people on the other hand, including many of my own students, were often intensely curious about the parts of the internet they were not permitted to access.

how to go about finding a VPN (ecbritz 2010), or even determine the local attitude to marijuana use (Chang 2011) - activities which are illegal in China. One forum user on Shanghai Expat sought to protest China's blocking of the online business magazine *Business Insider*, by reposting the entire text of the article that inspired its censure, *The Macroeconomics of the Chinese Kleptocracy*.<sup>125</sup> BrunO, the forum user, argues that the article had been "blocked in China, since it spells the truth" (2012). Although he appears to view his reposting as an act of principled liberation, it is important to note that BrunO's ability to engage in such a protest fundamentally depends on the makeup - and possibly the size - of his audience.

Online communities like *ShanghaiExpat* and *ShanghaiStuff* typically also included a facility whereby expatriates could arrange to meet each other IRL,<sup>126</sup> whether through events organised by the website itself, or via a forum post asking for companions for coffee, to attend an event, or participate in a specified activity. During my first few months in Shanghai, Twila or Sally would often text me saying that someone on Shanghai Stuff had suggested a walking tour of the former French Concession for that weekend, or a pancake breakfast, or a visit to the M50 art district in Putuo Qu. A sizeable group could usually be counted on to attend, some Chinese, but usually mostly laowai. Anton, Georg, Melody and Janya all belonged to the forum and were often the ones who planned each week's activities. We were usually given a start time in the early afternoon but would often wait for up to an hour for everyone to get there. The waiting time was used as a "getting to know you" period for those who weren't regulars, as the latecomers tended to be people who had been to events organised by this group in the past. By the time we had finished our leisurely progress through M50, or down the tree lined boulevards of the former French Concession, it would be early evening and Anton or Melody would suggest somewhere close by to eat.

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125. The article alleges that "China is a kleptocracy...a country ruled by thieves....People I know deep in the weeds (that is people who have to deal with the PRC and the children of the PRC elite) accept it" (Hempton 2012).

126. In real life.

This ability to evaluate potential social ties over the course of an afternoon, or perhaps over several weekends, without the implied commitment of having to specifically arrange it yourself, was a vastly different experience for me from the more formalised Shanghai Expat coffee meetings I described earlier. With Shanghai Expat events there was an almost complete turnover of attendees from week to week, with only the organisers showing up with any regularity. They were also confined to a specific time and place, but not focused around any particular activity. Similar to the Guytai events described above, the activities organised by the group from *ShanghaiStuff* were more spontaneous, often exploding beyond their pre-arranged boundaries.

Unlike most of the organisations discussed in the previous section, these online communities were usually open to anyone, even local Chinese, and were not specifically engaged in constructing or defining a specific offline community. While the regular networking events and online forums hosted by *ShanghaiExpat* and *ShanghaiStuff* do provide a space for expatriates and interested Chinese to establish and promote their own communities, the websites themselves typically only mediate that process - in the sense of an impartial facilitator, but also often as the medium through which the process is conducted.

Online expatriate media, more generally, gave expatriates the ability to find and consume the information that was most relevant to them. The ability to comment on that information and to provide their own content in the form of user submitted reviews or event listings has meant that these sites have also become a representation of community and of shared interest in their own right.

Although popular Western social media platforms, such as Facebook, Google+ and Twitter, remain blocked in China, many expatriates continued to use them with the help of a VPN. However, perhaps because VPN services were often patchy, expatriates primarily used these services to maintain their connection to family and friends outside of the Chinese mainland, rather than to communicate with new networks of support in

Shanghai. Increasingly expatriates have turned toward local alternatives - most notably Wechat - for this purpose.

## 7.5 - Summary

A large number of Shanghai's expatriate networking groups were either explicitly intended for trailing spouses or relied on trailing spouses to provide their core active membership. One possible reason for this, as suggested by the premise of the *SmartShanghai* article quoted above, is that taitais often had more time to devote to these organisations than other expatriates did. As Sarah suggests, trailing spouses were also more likely to have trouble adjusting to their expatriation, and were, therefore, more likely to require the support of an expatriate organisation. This conclusion is also generally supported by the literature on trailing spouses globally (Gupta et al 2012; Harvey 2011; Fechter 2007a, pp 37-59; Arieli 2013; Cieri et al 1991),

Organisations like AWCS, SEA and the Guytais not only helped trailing spouses to fill their excess leisure time with personally meaningful activities, they also provided a social space where networks of support could be built and maintained. In fact, almost all the expatriate support organisations examined above performed some form of networking function for their members. For some groups, this meant providing a space for the maintenance and enactment of established networks of support, like KEA and AusCham. Other groups passively mediated the construction of these networks, as the online communities discussed in the previous section attempt to do. Many groups were actively engaged in the construction of a community of shared experience, such as the Guytais, SEA, AWCS, EPWS or Bumps and Babes.

From the products and services advertised at their meetings, to access to the local knowledge of peers and experts, to their choice of Western-themed bars, restaurants and hotels for their meetings, expatriate networking and support groups aim to position themselves between China and the West. They seek to create liminal spaces for the performance of new transnational identities - bubbles of familiarity and shared experience

that straddle the boundaries between the foreign and the local. Within these bubbles, feelings of *communitas* - usually focused around an imagined community of Westernness - led to de-emphasising of normally accepted class differences. It was common to see expatriates from a variety of class backgrounds interacting as equals, online or at group events. However, this social levelling did not usually extend beyond the expatriate population to local Chinese. Not all expatriate networking groups were open to local Chinese members but, for those that were, expatriate reliance on English as a *lingua franca*, venue choices and the cost of attending events meant that only cosmopolitan upper-middle-class local Chinese were able to attend or even interested in doing so. For this reason, it is, perhaps useful to see these groups as bounded as much by class as they are by the cultural divisions between China and the West.

## 8.0 - Expatriate Sociality

There wasn't much else for me to do in Shanghai. No girlfriend, no job. Tabula Rasa and a drink.

(Wahlstrom & Guzman 2011, p 84)

For many expatriates the structured environment of expatriate networking and support organisations was only of limited use. If they regarded them as important at all, most expatriates that I talked to described these organisations as of peripheral importance to the fictive families discussed in Chapter 2 (pp 26-48). Typically these informal, small and tightly bounded networks of support also existed within wider imagined communities of Westernness. In this chapter I will examine how expatriate social spaces like these are reflected in and informed by the physical geography of Shanghai.

As you might expect, in a city where foreigners constitute such a small minority of the population, the professional lives of most expatriates were dominated by local Chinese co-workers, employees, employers, suppliers and clients. Local Chinese constructions of the employee : manager dialectic are informed by rigid notions of status and face. Social contact across workplace hierarchies is restricted because of this (Brew & Cairns 2004; Wong et al. 2007). It was, therefore, unusual to meet an expatriate whose working life was located as firmly within the bubble as their social life was. Those expatriates who worked in corporate settings often narrated their workplace as a site of cross-cultural contestation. Scott, who owns his own business, framed his bubble as an escape from the professional necessity of engaging with the local Chinese context, reasoning that he spent

a lot of time doing the dinners dealing with their bureaucracy. So, during the weekends do I want to hang out with Chinese people as well? No I don't.

For most expatriates these factors effectively ruled out the workplace as a viable site of social network formation.

For expatriates with children, school was often seen as a locus for social networking activity. Christy, a stay-at-home parent, alluded to a connection between her children's schooling and the composition of her fictive family, saying that

lots of us meet people through our kids [&  
none of them are in Chinese local schools, so  
the people that we meet are necessarily  
foreigners

This overlap between the social lives of expatriates and the schooling of their Children was also brought up by Ben, a corporate lawyer, who observed that,

It's hard, y'know? I travel like crazy for work so I'm not the friend-making point of our marriage. That's my wife, and she's not meeting anyone through work. You have to have a foreign passport to go to international school. That's where we meet most of our friends, y'know? I'm dealing with General Councils and the CEOs of the Chinese operations of major international companies and many of them are Chinese, but there's not much interaction.

However, the same conventions that usually control interactions between parent and school in the West also operate, to a large extent, in the International School environment. Opportunities for social contact with other expatriates are, therefore, limited to certain prescribed contexts - dropping your child off at school, picking them up, or during school events, for example.

The necessity of spaces within which to establish and perform new identities or to maintain old ones, therefore, led expatriates to look outside their homes and workplaces.

## **8.1 - Eating the Other : Expatriate Consumption of Cosmopolitan Space**

Firm distinctions were frequently made between expatriate bars/eateries and local bars/eateries in the everyday discourse of expatriates. In her influential essay, *Eating the Other*, bell hooks writes,

The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new

delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling.

(2009 [1992], p 366)

When compared with the rest of China, the Shanghai in which expatriates live is certainly highly Westernised. However, their position as members of a minority population mean that for most expatriates some degree of interaction with local Chinese was impossible to avoid. As I argued in Section 4.2 (pp 115-124), claims of emplacement were important in the performance of new liminal, expatriate identities, particularly for those postpats hoping to make a life in China. For many expatriates these claims were implicitly, or explicitly, tied to their consumption of the local Chinese Other.

In contemporary Chinese culture the consumption of alcohol is still commonly paired with activities that are undertaken within a group, such as eating at a restaurant or singing with friends or business associates at a K-TV.<sup>127</sup> They are often located in private spaces, allowing local Chinese to "build trust and connectedness within the group by nakedly and maximally exposing his or her individuality, an action that does not take place in regular public settings" (Fung 2001, p 44). As such these spaces function to reinforce existing social or business relationships, and not to facilitate new ones. Prior to reform, bars, which is to say spaces primarily intended for the social and public consumption of alcohol, were relatively unknown on the Chinese mainland. In the early 1980s, a number of private bars catering for visiting business people and tourists opened up near the large international hotels in central Shanghai. As longer-term foreign residents began to make the city their home, bars specifically targeting the expatriate community were also established. According to Farrer,

these new "expat" bars provided imported drinks and international food at international prices, in an atmosphere as studiously close to home as possible. Televisions showed American and British sports and news channels. For many local Shanghainese these bars were expensive and boring, offering no live entertain-

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127. A style of karaoke which originates in Korea and which takes place in a private room. Sometimes a cover for the sex trade in China.

ment, no dancing, and limited menus. These bars were for foreigners.

(2009, p 24)

While the divisions between expat space and local space have been blurred somewhat in recent years, and most so-called expatriate bars now have at least a few local Chinese customers, the continuing currency of these terms suggests their utility as markers of identity.

Those bars and eateries which expatriates identified as local spaces were frequently framed as spectacles to be consumed, when in the mood. Early in my stay, Agnes told me that if I wanted to experience a real Chinese nightclub I should go to Bar 88, her tongue in cheek manner suggesting this was both a warning and a recommendation. When I pressed her about it she told me Bashiba Ba<sup>128</sup> was "just noisy, crowded and kind of crazy. Very Chinese." Similarly, I often heard newly-arrived expatriates, in particular, sharing stories about the "great little noodle place" they'd discovered in their neighbourhoods, or the street food they'd had the night before. For Barret, an English teacher from Australia, making the most of his China experience meant trying as many different local foods as possible. "I tried the weirdest thing last night," he once gleefully told Fei. "It was soft and yellow and it tasted and smelt horrible". "That's stinky tofu," she replied, "it's delicious." As suggested by the responses quoted in Section 3.2 (pp 70-89), this use of the touristic frame to engage with China was not at all uncommon, particularly among corporate and newly arrived expatriates.

There was also a general sense among expatriates that local bars and restaurants were defined by price, charging patrons the "local price" instead of the more expensive "expatriate price." On the other hand some expatriates regarded the prices at Shanghai's cheaper bars and restaurants as a reason to be cautious. As we've already seen, food safety is a topic of significant concern for many expatriates. Cases of food poison-

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128. Bashiba Ba is Club 88 in Chinese, The word for eight is a homonym for prosper in Chinese, and is therefore considered to be lucky.

ing were common enough that expatriates typically seemed to regard the disease with a mixture of wariness and resignation. The sale of fake alcohol was also widely discussed both in the media and by expatriates themselves (Middlehurst 2012). On several occasions I heard expatriates attribute a particularly bad hangover, or unusually rapid loss of function while drinking, to fake spirits, often reported to contain methanol (Middlehurst 2012). Indeed, most of the postpats I met were much less likely to patronise a restaurant or bar they were unfamiliar with, unless it was recommended to them by someone they trusted.

There are a number of factors which separate the experience of a Westerner eating in a local restaurant, from that of a local. As Elaine pointed out, the first and most obvious of these is his or her foreignness itself. While we were in Shanghai Fei took me to a number of restaurants which were almost exclusively patronised by local Chinese. The head waiter of a Hunanese place, called Spicy Joint, made a point of coming over to tell me, in halting but otherwise excellent English, that he had come to our table especially to recommend that I try their Hot and Sour soup, just because my presence in his restaurant was so unusual.<sup>129</sup> At a Shanghai breakfast place in Hongkou, Fei also overheard a Chinese grandmother point at me and warn her young granddaughter, "Look. the laowai knows how to use his chopsticks. Now sit down and eat up or we'll send you home with him instead."

For many expatriates another big barrier is language. Even those who spoke Chinese well were rarely literate enough to read a menu in Chinese. Some local restaurants, especially the ones closer to the central city, provided pictorial menus in English as well as Chinese. However, the English used in menus and on signs in China is often eccentric - notoriously so in fact (cf. Phillips 2012). With dishes like "Millet Pepper fell in love with a Small Cock" or "The Incense burns Screw" (Christensen 2011),

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129. This also happened to me in a Korean BBQ place, near Fei's apartment in Yangpu District. The owner told me, "Even distinguished visitors from abroad like kimchi."

selecting from a poorly translated bilingual menu is often no easier than choosing from its Chinese only equivalent.

Conflicting cultures of eating and dining out were another factor. In Chinese family style dining it is usual to order a number of dishes to be enjoyed by everyone at the table. This method of dining can be disconcerting for those unused to it. A few weeks after I arrived in Shanghai, I was invited out to dinner by a friend, Abby, who was passing through Shanghai with her parents. The four of us went to a fairly expensive Chinese restaurant near People's Square. After puzzling over the pictures for several minutes, avoiding the snails and frogs and announcing their choices to each other with tentative statements like "this doesn't look too bad" or "I think I might try this," Abby and her parents placed their orders pointing emphatically at the menu. Abby said zhege and xie xie<sup>130</sup> in more or less appropriate places, while her parents spoke to the waiter loudly and slowly in English. "That won't be enough for you will it dear?" Abby's mother asked her husband. "Let's just get some fried rice to share." he suggested. "Can we get some rice!? We want some fried rice to share!" he told the waiter. "How do you say rice in Chinese, David?" Abby's mother asked me. When the meals arrived we discovered we had ordered 3 entree sized meat dishes and Abby, who is a vegetarian, was the only one with any vegetables. Thankfully we had the rice to fill up on.

Fei's usual tactic for picking somewhere to eat, when it was just the two of us, was to find a place with a long queue and join it. According to her, her Chinese friends and relatives also assessed the quality of restaurants this way - the assumption being that if people are willing to wait for their food it must be good. At Spicy Joint we'd sometimes wait for an hour or more for our table, sitting in rows of plastic chairs outside the restaurant, like airline passengers waiting for a boarding announcement. In contrast, my postpat friends and I spent a number of evenings walking from one full restaurant to the next, looking for somewhere that could seat us immediately.

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130. "That one" and "Thank you" respectively.

Rather than splitting the bill, as is more common among Westerners, in Chinese culture offering to pay the bill yourself is considered polite. I frequently saw groups of local Chinese diners arguing good-naturedly over the maïdan,<sup>131</sup> sometimes for minutes, before one of them finally managed to place his ATM card inside the bill folder and hand it to the waiter. The rules around when to yield, to whom and under what circumstances are complex and can therefore be intimidating for expatriates (cf. Chung 2011, p 170). Chinese-American journalist Liz Tung explains that these rules are sometimes not even clear for foreign-born Chinese,

I was interviewing someone I'd just met and he suggested that we go out to a relatively expensive restaurant... When the bill came, my interview subject had gone to the bathroom, and we gazed upon it in horror: it was nearly RMB800. "Oh no," my boyfriend looked stricken. "He's trying to pay!" ...I raced up to the counter waving my bank card. "Can I use this to pay?!" I cried desperately. "I'll go check!" [the waiter] said. I waited around for a minute, and then I spotted my interview subject pulling out a credit card. "No!" I said. "Let me!" "I've got it," he said, handing his card to the waiter. "No, I should treat you," I said... "IT'S MY PLEASURE!" he roared, pushing my card away.

(2012)

The Chinese preference for not deboning meat before chopping it up was also frequently mentioned by expatriates as something which bothered them. If shellfish or a piece of meat is small enough to fit, Chinese people will ordinarily place the whole thing in their mouth and use their teeth and tongue to separate the edible parts from the inedible ones. It is common to see diners cover their mouths and then spit what remains - pieces of bone, prawn shells etc. - into a pile on the table next to their plate (cf. Hu & Grove 1999, p 36-40). The ability of the average Shanghainese to place a whole prawn inside his or her mouth, spit out the shell and swallow what remains was discussed in almost mythological terms by some expatriates.

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131. Means both the act of paying the bill and the bill itself.

The conflict between cultural practices like these and Western ideas of mannered behaviour may be one reason expatriates spend so much of their time in bars and restaurants that are themselves Western-themed, and/or that are predominantly patronised by Westerners. After all, in many Western countries children are taught to regard small pieces of bone in food as a choking hazard and to think that spitting at any time was a breach of good manners.

Even in some expatriate restaurants the waitstaff rarely came by your table to check on you, as is usual in the West. When you are ready to place your order, or want to settle up, you are expected to attract the attention of your server, by calling out "fuyaun"<sup>132</sup> in a loud clear voice, even if they aren't in the same room as you at the time. Fei noticed that many of her expatriate friends were uncomfortable with this practice when they first got to China, gesturing for service as waitstaff walked straight past them. She also suggested that once they got the idea they often over compensated by yelling too loudly. I certainly found myself doing this, frustrated at not getting the sort of service I was used to, and feeling rude for having to ask, I would sheepishly bellow, "Fuyuan! Maidan!," over the clamour of the the other diners.

For Siebe the service provided in Shanghai's bars and restaurants was something he both enjoyed about the city, and found annoying,

The same goes for the service.. and this is something very ambivalent, because, I mean, the service is not good in China at all. But you have service right? When you go to the restaurant I'm getting used to the fact that I have three people around me. One who gives me some tea, one who would take my coat in winter and the other one who I would order [from.] I'm getting used to this attention that you get and that you would never ever get back home, right? This is something even more addictive in countries such as Thailand or Hong Kong, because there the service is good, whereas here it's not. But, still the the life you can have here is very comfortable.

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132. Waiter.

Discomfort around cultural differences like these, led many expatriates to favour specific local restaurants and to opt for specific dishes from those restaurants.

For corporate and newly arrived expatriates, the ability to discover and access local spaces was often factored into narratives of authenticity. In conversation, Simon, the engineer from the UK, gleefully described a pool hall he and his friends had "discovered" near his house, "It was just a little local place. We were the only Westerners in there. Really cheap too. Like, five kuai for one of the big bottles of Tsingtao. Not much more than you'd pay at a C-Store."

Expatriates who valorised their experiences patronising local bars and restaurants, often framed these experiences as inspired by their desire to have a "real China" experience - to make the most of their time in China. Like Elaine, however, many of the postpats I met expressed scepticism that it was even possible for a laowai to have an authentically local experience.

Instead, postpats often used these spaces to make claims of cosmopolitan, local emplacement, referring to them as "my local noodle place/wet market/fruit shop" etc. With the home at their centre, these spaces formed the basis for broader, often geographically discontinuous constructions of neighbourhood. Expatriate social life was lived in these familiar, cosmopolitan, neighbourhood bubbles and new transnational identities were performed. In this way local space was translated by postpats, becoming an expression of self and of community.

Expatriates would often recommend these familiar spaces to their peers, using local knowledge to build social capital, both within their fictive kin-group and within wider networks of casual acquaintance. Usually this knowledge was acquired through the recommendations of local Chinese co-workers or friends. Melody, a British educated architect from Hunan, often performed this mediatory role for her expatriate friends, Twila and Sally, recommending places to eat, helping them to interpret the menu and translating their requests to the waitstaff. Her ability to speak Chinese was

by no means the central facet of her friendship with Twila or Sally, but her help was certainly appreciated by them.

Business entertaining was another common way that expatriates became exposed to local restaurants and to local Chinese ways of eating and drinking. In Chinese business culture, inviting employees, business associates or clients out for a meal is seen as an important way to cultivate *guanxi* - the reciprocal networks of trust and obligation central to Chinese notions of personhood (Kipnis 1997; Fuller 2014; Goh & Sullivan 2011). I attended one such dinner, given by an English training school for a group of newly hired foreign teachers.<sup>133</sup> It differed from other business dinners I have attended, in that there were no mainland Chinese in attendance. The company's management was represented by a foreign teacher manager from Belgium, called Hans, and a recruitment specialist from Taiwan, whose English name was Adam. However, in many other respects the experience was similar. We ate in a private dining room in an upmarket Chinese restaurant. Ornate light fixtures, large mirrors and carved lacquerware wall panels gave it a palatial feel. A thick linen cloth covered the 12 seat, circular table.

After asking the rest of us if there was anything we particularly wanted to try, Adam, with enthusiastic recommendations from Hans, ordered for the room. The food was served "family-style", onto a lazy-susan in the middle of the table, and each person transferred what they wanted into their own bowl, using chopsticks or a spoon, as required. Shanghai specialities like hot and sour soup and fried dumplings were prominent among the choices. More adventurous dishes, like bullfrog pot and spicy freshwater snails had been included at Hans' insistence. Encouraged by him, the new trainees competed in trying these dishes. Some had been in China previous to their employment at the training school, and they also joined with Hans in encouraging the newer arrivals to step outside their culinary comfort zones. Saoirse, an Irish woman who had studied in China previously, told a skeptical friend, "Go on. You have to try the bullfrog. They

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133. Foreign teacher is a job title commonly used within China's ESL industry.

taste like wee spicy fried chickens and the peppers and lotus root that are mixed in with it are fantastic."

In Chinese dining etiquette an empty rice-bowl is the sign of a stingy host (Zinzius 2004) and so, if Adam noticed one of us was not eating, he too would encourage us, rotating the lazy-susan, so we were confronted with what ever it was he thought the most appealing. For the most part, even those that seemed intimidated by certain dishes embraced trying them. The only person who did not conform was Alice, a recent university graduate from England, who had relocated to China on a whim after breaking up with her boyfriend. She chose the safest looking foods - plain rice, cucumber salad and so on. She picked around the edge of her plate unhappily as one-by-one her new coworkers encouraged her to try this or that dish. Hans informed me later that Alice had failed to turn up for training the following day and had phoned him from the airport that night. Having been in China less than a week she was going home. Although they were not exactly happy, Hans and the other expatriate staff at the training school regarded her early departure as fortuitous. "Look at how she was at the dinner," Hans told me. "With an attitude like that she wouldn't have lasted long here anyway."<sup>134</sup>

Zeke, a teacher at an International School, told me about an early encounter he had with the Chinese culture of business entertaining. After signing the lease on a new apartment, Zeke and his girlfriend were invited, by their landlord, to a business dinner celebrating Chinese New Year. According to Zeke the other guests were local Chinese employees of his landlord,

He was feeling very generous and he took us out for this amazing feast. He put us right next to him, since we were his guests. We were like his centerpiece. Like, 'Come look at these motherfuckers' He was just pouring shots like nobody's business and every time somebody

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134. While culture shock was likely a large factor in Alice's decision to leave, it should also be noted that the company had decided to push her straight into teaching after only a three day orientation. In contrast, other trainees were given a full week of training.

drank we all drank. I'm trying to pick up on body language, because I don't understand a fucking word at this point. I didn't even know how to say, 'Ni Hao.' Then, after we ate he was like, 'Okay, we're going to go to KTV. He leans over my girlfriend and makes a point to put himself on her chest while he's leaning over to me and he's like, 'There will be girls.' I didn't know what the fuck he meant, so, I was like, 'Okay, it's not a problem for me,' and he turns to my girlfriend and he's like, 'Are you okay?' She's like, 'Sure,' and he freaks out, like, he's speaking in Chinese. He's like, 'They're cool. They're cool. This is totally going to happen. We're going to do this.' So we go to KTV and it has a fucking bathroom in the KTV. Now, this should have been a fucking sign to me, but I was like, 'Oh that's so convenient. You have a bathroom.' So we chill for a little bit and we're picking songs. Before the songs even start coming on, this little dude comes in with this train of girls just walking in behind him. So, I didn't know how far these girls actually intended to go. I had no idea that this even existed, much less, what it really was. Maybe they were just, y'know, private hosts. My song came on and I stand up to sing. My landlord has already started dancing with this one girl. He grabs me and puts her in a sandwich between us and he's putting my hands down her pants and I'm like, 'Oh shit! Okay, alright. I get it. I got to go.'

This story clearly says as much about the landlord's expectations of Western culture as it does about Zeke's beliefs about China. As you might imagine, wives and girlfriends are not generally invited to clubs like the one Zeke describes. Indeed, according to Jacka et al, the use of sexual services within Chinese business entertainment culture "is one factor that makes it difficult for women to get high-level positions...in certain industries, because it simply is not appropriate for women to visit such venues" (2013, p 56). The landlord's invitation of Zeke's girlfriend to KTV, therefore, suggests that he views her differently from the way he might view a local Chinese woman. His overt sexualisation of her - making "a point to put himself on her chest" - while not typical of the behaviour of local Chinese men towards Western women in my experience, is also suggest-

ive of underlying cultural assumptions of Westerners as more sexually expressive and adventurous (cf. Stanley 2013).

By framing the experience as cultural Zeke is situating himself as a passive consumer of his narrative, a privileged observer of something exotic. However, as his discomfort with his own lack of Chinese suggests, without a good understanding of the language, this touristic viewpoint may have been the only frame available to him. His belief that he and his girlfriend were also on display, reflects a mutual exoticism often reported by expatriates. Jim, the fire safety executive, described his relationship with a very wealthy Chinese acquaintance in similar terms, "He uses me to impress his business associates. I'm his token Western friend."

Restaurants favoured by local Chinese for business entertainment or for special occasions, were often outspokenly luxurious and ornate - thick carpets underfoot, the furniture weighty dark and traditional, or upholstered in rich brocades and silks, with gold accents on the walls and ceilings. In contrast to these more upmarket Chinese restaurants, the bars, nightclubs and restaurants that expatriates most frequently identified as "local places" were small, crowded, comparatively cheap and strictly utilitarian - just furnished with formica tables and folding plastic chairs in many cases. They sometimes covered their tables in plastic to help facilitate clean up. Often the paint on the walls was faded, chipped and stained with a patina of old cigarette smoke and grease. Posters showed maniacal Chefs brandishing bottles of poison, captioned with the command to "Strictly Oppose the Use of Illegal Additives in Foods" in blood red Chinese characters.

According to Fei, these were the true local places, favoured by her as well as her, mostly middle-class, local Chinese relatives, students and friends, because they served simple, homey Shanghainese food at an affordable price. She told me that more expensive restaurants were not local in the same way in her view,

Expensive places like Xiao Nan Guo still serves traditional Shanghainese food, but it's like the difference between something ordinary people would have eaten, and something that would have been served to nobility. Proper local places serve more, like, ordinary...comfort food.

You might go to Xiao Nan Guo for a special occasion or because you want to impress someone with how generous you are, but it's not usual. A lot of businessmen take their Western clients there, to show them Shanghainese food. Which is stupid because most Westerners want to have the experience of going to somewhere really local. They want to be able to tell their friends, "I ate dumplings from this little hole in the wall place while I was in Shanghai."

Expatriates could also choose from a truly cosmopolitan selection of global cuisines. Exceptional Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Mexican and South American restaurants competed with Indian, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese food for the expatriate dollar. By eating at Simply Thai or Pasta Fresca, expatriates were, in a very real sense, consuming elite cosmopolitan identities, finding value in their own essential rootlessness through narratives of globalised transnational emplacement. However, they still tended to favour the familiar, choosing dishes and cuisines that were popular in their home countries.<sup>135</sup> Like Cain, a number of expatriates extended this Western orientated bubble of cosmopolitanism to encompass Shanghai as a whole, justifying their own presence in the city by framing the city as having been a locus of cultural exchange "forever".

In addition to eating the other, through their consumption of local and global cuisines, expatriates often sought to elaborate their cosmopolitanism in more direct ways. Siebe's suggestion that when expatriates "have some free time [they] go to Phuket or far away" is an accurate representation of the tendency of expatriates to holiday outside Shanghai. The exodus is so significant that, during International School summer vacation and between Christmas and Chinese New Year, many expatriate networking and support groups suspend operation altogether, and the usual expatriate hangouts become very quiet indeed.

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135. Mealbay's six most popular restaurants include a Mexican restaurant, an Italian restaurant, a pizza place, two burger restaurants and a British gastro-pub (Mealbay 2014).

However, Siebe's assertion that other expatriates were typically motivated to travel "because [they] can't bear China any longer" was not always supported in my conversations with other expatriates. It was just as common to hear expatriates describe their travel plans as motivated by the touristic desire to "see the world", as it was to hear them framing those plans as an opportunity for escape.

Because of this tendency to leave Shanghai over the winter and summer holidays, discussions of travel were common between expatriates both before and following these periods. The AWCS and SEA Coffee Meetings that I attended occurred after the summer break and small groups of attendees formed and broke apart spontaneously throughout both events, gathering in front of the refreshment table or a particular vendor, to renew old acquaintances and discuss what they had done over the holiday period. The majority of the expatriates I met had travelled extensively both within China and internationally. Indeed, a number of interview participants described increased opportunities for travel as one of the things they enjoyed most about living in China. Fechter argues that expatriates use these travel narratives to construct cosmopolitan geographies, which "are replete with personal memories, [and] furthermore play a role in the performance of exclusive international and global identities" (2007a, p 133). It seems likely, therefore, that expatriate wanderlust reflects both increased opportunities for travel - within a region typically regarded as "exotic" and "mysterious" in the West - as well as the liminal nature of expatriate emplacement within China.

As expatriates are unable to "become Chinese" any claims to emplacement they make within China are necessarily limited, and expatriate constructions of identity, therefore, tended to be globally orientated while still claiming emplacement within the local Chinese context. By eating from a range of different cuisines, both from inside China and from other parts of the world, expatriates enacted identities that were literally transnational, i.e., not confined to one nation or culture. Many expatriates further elaborated these new cosmopolitan identities by travelling extensively.

## 8.2 - Tabula Rasa and a Drink: Expat Bar Culture

Western-themed bars, in particular, were popular outlets for expatriate sociality. In Jing'an, in the former French Concession, in Xintiandi and in Lujiazui I was introduced to streets, pedestrian malls and shopping centres in which local Chinese eating and drinking culture was essentially invisible, especially if you were unable to read Chinese. On streets like Yongkang lu or Wuding lu, clusters of western restaurants, bars, cafes and grocery stores were gradually pushing out cheaper, more local options.

In her interview, when I asked Elaine what made her feel connected to her identity as a Westerner, she talked about the role the Shanghai bar scene played in maintaining her social circle:

Other than drinking copious amounts of wine?  
...but no, it's how I connect, I think to friends and this goes back to my earlier comment that there isn't anything else. So, I've become quite the restaurant connoisseur, I've become quite the wine connoisseur, and that is because it's how I socialise with friends, and, regardless of whether it's at a restaurant or at my own home, that's what you do. That would be different than how I'd do it in the States. Like, I'm terrified of going back to the US, because how would you socialise. How do you meet people?

Expatriates often compared Shanghai to a "small town" or a "village". Bumping into acquaintances unexpectedly was a relatively common occurrence and nowhere was this small world effect more apparent than in city's Western-themed bars and eateries.

I met Elaine and her husband Bruce at Kiwi Drinks, during my first week in the city. Bruce gave me his business card, and I emailed him about meeting again to talk about my research. He forwarded my email on to his wife. She told me they were having drinks with some friends the following Friday, around 10pm at a place called Glo and asked me if I'd like to come along.

Glo is a British franchise with several locations in other countries. Their Shanghai restaurant, which had only recently opened when I began my research, took up an entire four storey building on the corner of Wulumuqi Lu, and Donping Lu. The cafe-bakery on the first floor was closed, and the gastro grill on the second floor was in the process of closing. The third story lounge bar, was long and narrow, with a row of modular booths along the wall opposite the bar. Each booth, upholstered in plum coloured vinyl and strewn with oversized, pink and paisley cushions, framed a floor to ceiling window overlooking Wulumuqi Lu.

By the time I arrived at Glo, Elaine, Bruce and their friends were in a booth at the far end of the bar, getting ready to leave. Bruce was active in several expatriate organisations and, that evening, he and Elaine seemed to know everyone at Glo. Benoit, a Frenchman in beige leather boat shoes and an open necked, short sleeved shirt tucked into his khaki short pants arrived just as they were settling up. With him was a very drunk Englishman and his apologetic girlfriend. Benoit started to discuss the politics of Shanghai's expatriate rugby club, the Hairy Crabs, with Bruce. The Englishman plied us all with shots aggressively, while his girlfriend tried to keep him from falling over. "I don't drink," I explained, and while Elaine was apologising for his insistence, she told me "Drinking is such a huge part of life here. I don't think I know anyone else who doesn't drink." Realising her boyfriend had had enough for one night the Englishman's girlfriend struggled to get him back out the door. As they were leaving we were joined by Frank, an American-born Chinese rugby player, who knew Bruce and Benoit from the Hairy Crabs. With him was Huan, a young local Chinese doctor. Huan seemed to be in the process of deciding if he wanted to start playing rugby himself, and was being encouraged by Bruce and Frank. "Isn't it dangerous?" he kept asking them. Bruce made numerous attempts to say his goodbyes, but every time he tried, Elaine was deep in conversation with someone else who had just walked in, and who she appeared to know well.

During the later part of my stay, I also frequently ran into people I knew at Shanghai's expatriate bars and burger joints. Before leaving China I ran

into Emily for the first time in six months at Crocus, a Jing'an gastropub I rarely spent any time in. I reconnected with Janya, the Thai expatriate I met during my first week in China, under similar circumstances - bumping into her by chance at a cocktail bar that I had never been in before. When I discussed these incidents with other expatriates they frequently went on to share their own narratives of chance meetings.

The juxtaposition between Shanghai, the city of 23 million inhabitants, and the imagined cosmopolitan "small town" inhabited by expatriates is certainly striking. Moreover, as the responses quoted in Section 3.2 (pp 70-89) suggest, for some expatriates, at least, the discrepancies between these two images of Shanghai were not always obvious. For many expatriates, Shanghai, itself, was a cosmopolitan village, and the lives of the majority of local Chinese were, therefore, reimagined as peripheral, both to the city itself and to their experience of it.

In part, this perception of the city as village is an artefact of the ghettoisation of expatriates within several, widely dispersed areas of Shanghai. However, even within the districts in which I spent most of my time, Jing'an and the former French Concession, I was surprised, on a number of occasions, to run into whole groups of people who shared very similar interests, but who nonetheless were completely unacquainted with each other. For example, when I first met with the committee members of East-West theatre, an expatriate theatre group, I invited them to an event being held by my friends at HAL Publishing, only to discover they had never heard of HAL. The other major expatriate theatre group in Shanghai, the Shanghai Repertory Theatre (SRT), did have a well established connection with HAL, and there was also a significant overlap between SRT and East-West, but for what ever reason these connections had not translated into contact between HAL and East-West. This is particularly significant because the key organisers in both HAL and East-West were postpats who had been in Shanghai for at least five years.

This tends to suggest that the perception of a single, massively interconnected expatriate village is largely illusory. Instead, the large number of expatriate bars and cafes, even within a single district, as well as the tend-

ency of expatriates to favour a small subset of these establishments, permitted the construction of innumerable overlapping but independent bubbles of sociality even within a single district. Each expatriate's bubble was, therefore, an individually defined space - social and shared but also highly personal.

Shanghai's expatriate bars and eateries tended to be spacious, spotlessly clean, and carefully designed spaces. They often presented their patrons with exacting reproductions of familiar Western archetypes, at least in terms of their interior decor. The European village or local pub, for example, was emulated all over the city. The recently closed British-themed pub, The Bulldog, could easily have been lifted wholesale from the East End of London, complete with soccer jersey wearing regulars, who the cockney landlord knew by name. Likewise, O'Malley's, perhaps one of the best known expatriate bars in Shanghai, with its cozy private wood-panelled booths and open fires in the winter time, provided its visitors with a high-quality recreation of the quintessential Irish pub. In both cases the transition from the street to the interior of the bar was sharply marked. The Bulldog inhabited a fairly nondescript, three story, concession era building on the corner of Wulumuqi Lu and Dongping Lu. The neat red bricks which typify buildings of the period had been covered in spackle and painted an alarming, though very Shanghainese, mustard yellow colour, loudly proclaiming an aesthetic which has been out of style for 30 years in the West. The only indication that there was a bar within the building was an illuminated sign, of the eponymous Bulldog, mounted next to the entrance-way at head-height. O'Malley's on the other hand was completely contained within a walled compound of its own, and boasted several outdoor eating and drinking areas.

American themed bars were also popular. Bubba's, a Texan Barbecue joint popular with expatriates in Hongqiao, cultivated a carefully curated, down-home Southern aesthetic. Sports memorabilia, stuffed animal heads, confederate flags and other americana covered the walls almost totally. Susan described the attraction of these bars for her, while talking about her plans for the 4th of July,

I'm just going to this cheesy American bar. The Southern Belle? I mean any brew pub would do. Southern Belle has all of the Texas shit all over the place. I don't really like hanging out with tons of Americans here. But every once in a while you kind crave it. I enjoy going there and listening to people talk but, after about an hour, I'm like ,Oookaaay [laughs] I'm done. But in the US I'd probably not go to a place like Bubba's. So. It's strange the things that you want when you're away from it. If I were living in the US, a place where old white guys go I would never want to go.

Even the Australasian archetype of the sports bar, often dirty and depressing places in their natural setting, had their essential qualities refined, sanitised and polished for the consumption of Shanghai's expatriates. In bars like the Shed, or the Camel, expensive furnishings, pool tables, rugby on the big screen, carefully curated collections of sporting memorabilia or temperamental Australian barmen successfully gave the impression of a sports bar without the ancient, cigarette scarred, formica bar leaners and slot machines of many similar venues in my home country.

Admittedly, there is very little in this description which separates the sort of establishments most popular with expatriates from any number of gastropubs, tapas joints, or cocktail lounges in Auckland or Wellington. I would argue that this is their function. Most of Shanghai's popular expatriate bars and restaurants made use of archetypes with which their Western patrons would have already been very familiar. This, clearly very conscious, relocation of Western archetypes into the local Chinese context, answers the occasional need, mentioned by Sean, "to not be in China anymore". Stepping over the threshold often had an almost magical transpositional quality, and when describing these spaces, newly arrived expatriates frequently told me that walking into them felt just like walking into a neighbourhood bar back in their home country. Like O'Malley's, many expatriate restaurants and bars made use of outdoor spaces, rooftop terraces and walled courtyards, to extend this bubble of Westernness into the world beyond the bar, while still keeping the rest of China out.

The upmarket decor, and, at least in local Chinese terms, the equally upmarket prices, were typically what set Shanghai's expat bars apart from their prototypes in the West. Expatriates often complained about the relative expense of eating and drinking in these spaces, drawing implicit comparisons to less expensive local-Chinese alternatives. Cheaper restaurants and bars offering a Western-style eating and drinking experience did exist. The infamous Windows sports bar franchise, with three locations in Shanghai, is one example of this. With its worn American pool hall decor, waitresses in skin tight uniforms emblazoned with the Budweiser logo and its menu of locally priced American bar foods, Windows Scoreboard, Windows Too and Windows Garage were seen by most expatriates as low-class dive bars. Popular with younger, newly arrived expatriates and the, often, very young looking teenage children of corporate expatriates or postpats, the franchise attracted a love/hate, last bar in a long night of drinking, reputation among older expatriates.

Because it attracted young local Chinese looking for an affordable space to perform Western orientated consumerist identities of their own, Windows also had a reputation as a pick-up joint among expatriates. In the caustic satirical rant, *Yellow Fever*, Tom Mangione, an expatriate poet and musician based in Shanghai, adopts the persona of a Windows regular, explaining,

I've got the yellow fever baby.  
It's infected my eyes, infected my toes.  
I was up to 5am last night,  
chasing Meinus<sup>136</sup> at Windows.

In many cases, expat bars and restaurants were also designed to feel older than they were. Plaster ceiling ornamentation, dark wood furnishings and interiors, half panel walls and rustic styling elements like bare brick and exposed roof beams were frequently used to effect this sense of history. Manufactured and recycled antiquity was a popular aesthetic throughout Shanghai. Neoclassical and renaissance influenced design elements were also a very visible presence in new commercial buildings and

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136. Beautiful girls.

in compound developments marketed at China's new rich. As I have already pointed out, these manufactured histories served to legitimate the project of development itself, projecting the city's new consumerist values back into an imagined cosmopolitan past. Expatriates and Shanghai's local Chinese elites have both benefited from the sense of continuity that these developments evoke.

The hospitality industry in Shanghai is highly competitive. Nightclubs, cocktail bars and restaurants create an impression of luxury through high-quality fittings and fixtures. Presenting patrons with an epicurean, sometimes ostentatiously original, design concept is one way that promoters sought to stand out in an otherwise crowded marketplace. M1NT [sic], a fashionable nightclub located on the Bund, was notorious for its aquarium full of sharks. Rumour had it that the aquarium had to be restocked regularly because the vibrations from the music killed the fish. Flask, a speak-easy style cocktail bar in the former French Concession, with its entrance hidden behind a vintage Coca-cola machine, received global attention when its unique design landed it on the front-page of the link-sharing website Reddit in 2015 (Lowe 2015).

At the less reputable end of the spectrum, Datong Mill, Shanghai's "only underground nightlife strip mall... is part Disney World, part movie set, part Macau's Venetian casino-hotel" (Woo & Hanratty 2010). With its gilded cherubs, blue-sky painted ceilings and an Eiffel tower knock-off sticking out of the sunken entrance courtyard, the sprawling development clearly represented a significant investment by its owners. Once the home of seedy lady bars<sup>137</sup> with names like Libido and TT Bar, by the time I visited Datong Mill in 2011, an aeroplane-themed nightclub called Departure 10 Ultra Lounge appeared to be the only tenant still in operation.

Datong Mill may originally have been conceived as a replacement for the infamous Tongren Lu bar street, closed down by police in the lead up to the Shanghai Expo (Woo & Hanratty 2010). Before Tongren Lu, expatri-

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137. Sometimes also called Hostess clubs, a Lady Bar is a bar which employs women to flirt with the customers.

ates favoured "the unspoken, giant block party of a meeting place" Maoming Lu (Willmont quoted in Wu 2012), which was, itself, substantially cleaned up in 2004 - reportedly because Jiang Zemin and other high ranking party cadres were planning to retire in the neighbourhood (Zatt 2004). Older postpats remembered both these locations fondly. During my fieldwork, however, the cluster of nightclubs, bars and restaurants situated around Hengshan Lu, in the former French Concession, was favoured by most of my expatriate acquaintances. Another smaller cluster of bars on Kangding Lu, which has since been shut down, was also popular. When I finished my formal fieldwork in 2012, Yongkang Lu, also located in the former French Concession, had only recently begun its transformation from shopping street to bar street, but it was already attracting expatriate attention. By March of 2013 the street had become so crowded and noisy that local residents were driven to throwing water onto the party-goers below. Now outdoor drinking is banned on the street after 10pm and bar owners must pay a "secret tax" to keep residential inhabitants happy (Fullerton 2013). One expatriate called YongKang Lu:

a kind of expatriate Disneyland. On weekends there are so many foreigners on the street, that one taxi-driver who dropped me off there was like, "Wa! Hendo Laowai!" - "Wow! So many Laowai!".

Expatriates typically seemed to regard their favourite bars and eateries as a home away from home. Often this role was acknowledged in a bar's furnishings, cultivated by the management and staff and explicitly promoted through branding (see Plate 6, p 69). With comfortably upholstered bench seats, arm chairs and settees, free WIFI and Western food to order, these spaces actively worked to create a welcoming, home-like environment, in which extended social patronage was encouraged. It was unusual for expatriate bars and restaurants to have Western staff, even in fairly senior positions. However, the ability of the local Chinese wait or bar staff to speak English typically exceeded the ability of their patrons to speak Chinese.

For many expatriates these spaces were the foci of around which networks of support were constituted, and within which their social lives were

lived. Weekend brunch specials, afterwork happy hours, ladies' nights and other regular promotional events punctuated the week, serving as an opportunity to maintain fictive kinship networks, to reconnect with casual acquaintances, to meet new people and, perhaps most importantly, to simply feel normal. Elaine described a similar relationship with her favourite wine bar:

This particular restaurant that we're sitting in is one of my new favourites because it's five minutes from my house...walking! Or crawling. I mean I could crawl in eight minutes. Not that I do. It's outside, it's in the sun, it has inexpensive alcohol, they know me on a first name basis. They don't serve food here but I can order food from Sherpas. So, I was here with a group of friends the other week, and the pizza place that's next door was closed, so I called Sherpas. They delivered to the restaurant that we're currently sitting at. I drank their beautiful wine and I ate beautiful food and I just thought this is it. Like, this right now, this is the reason I live in China [...] because you can't do that anywhere else.

The most popular expat bars had very few local Chinese customers, and there were a number of restaurants and cafes which were almost exclusively patronised by expatriates. Harriet, a freelance copywriter, used the word segregation to emphasise her own discomfort at these divisions:

Most of the time in a given bar or restaurant... most Chinese people I know don't even like Western food, even a little bit and are annoyed by it. Besides that, it's exorbitantly expensive... just not good. That's changing. There's some tastes opening up and some status connected to French food and American food. But they're there for that one experience they won't probably go there all the time, usually. Shanghai's a vast web of bars and...and restaurants, really. But, I see that segregation, y'know? There's so many places I'll walk in and not a single Chinese person, except maybe one behind the bar, y'know?

The term segregation is unavoidably coloured by the West's history of entrenched exclusion of minority ethnicities from full participation in the life of the nation-state. Harriet's use of the term is particularly interesting,

because it implies that, despite the process of expatriatism, implicitly "white" Westerners living in China retain the same position of dominance and control over their environment that they enjoyed in the West, or even that expatriatism itself exaggerates that dominance. As segregation is largely seen as an historical evil in most Western countries, its use, in this context also evokes a time during which the power relations between "whites" and non-"whites" in the West were more expressly unequal than they are now. Indeed, it was relatively common to hear expatriates frame the expatriate bubble within a historical continuity of "white" privilege - using metaphors drawn from colonialism or early 20th century race relations to describe their own positioning within China.

In reality, expatriates only constitute a tiny fraction of Shanghai's total population, and occupy a radically different legal and social position than they would have occupied in their home countries. So, while the social contact between expatriates and local Chinese was usually somewhat limited, it would be a mistake to conclude that expatriates imposed this racial or ethnic exclusivity on their local Chinese hosts. As I argued in previous chapters, it is much more accurate to see expatriate apartness, to the extent it exists, as a negotiated expression of both the expatriate desire for their own cultural space and the positioning of Westerners as peripheral figures within the local Chinese culture itself. It is also, undoubtedly an expression of class.

Although expatriates often had local Chinese friends, who gave them access to an implicitly more "local" world outside the bubble, it is important to note that this was usually a reciprocal relationship, with expatriates exposing their local Chinese friends to Western-orientated foods and experiences as well - each involving the other in the construction and performance of their own cosmopolitan identities. Contact with local Chinese who did not speak English, who could not afford to patronise expatriate establishments, or who were uncomfortable in a Western context was usually limited to the workplace or the marketplace.

Shanghai's expatriate bars offered a range of restaurant quality Western foods from typical gastropub fare, such as burgers and pizzas, to more

specialist cuisines - the southern influenced flavours of bars like Boxing Cat and Bubba's, Bangers and Mash from O'Malley's or an antipodean Sunday roast from the Camel. Expatriates often debated the relative authenticity of these Western favourites, waxing nostalgic about particular restaurants or dishes that they missed from their home country. For Fei it was the Mexican fast-food restaurant Chipotles. For another postpat friend it was New York style bagels. When a restaurant opened up, which, rumour had it, used recipes stolen from the popular American fast-food chain, In-N-Out burger, I heard the question, "Have you tried Cali Burger?", more than half-a-dozen times from American expatriates I talked to.

The effort made in this case, to authentically reproduce a food missed by expatriates, illustrates both the importance of food for expatriates and the value of that demand to expatriate and local entrepreneurs. Several scholars have written about food's particular importance within transmigrant communities as a marker of identity (Meza 2013; Ross 2011; Bernstein 2004). In the West this demand has historically provided a gateway for the introduction of foreign cuisines to local palates. Without the demand from Italian, Chinese or Thai transmigrants for lasagne, fried rice or pad thai it is doubtful that these dishes would have become part of the culinary vocabulary of the Anglosphere. Likewise, according to several long-term postpats, when McDonalds first opened in Shanghai there was a line of expatriates stretching around the block. McDonald's now has hundreds of locations in Shanghai alone and their customer base is primarily local Chinese. Even in areas of the city with larger expatriate populations, it was not unusual for me to be the only expatriate in a McDonald's or Burger King that was absolutely packed with local Chinese customers.

Harriet's acknowledgement, that Western cuisines increasingly carried a status value for local Chinese, echoes much of the research into the consumer habits of China's emerging middle-class (cf. Johansson 1999; Zhou & Belk 2004). It also suggests that expatriate Shanghai is a much more permeable and negotiated space than her use of the term segregation might otherwise suggest.

During his interview Cain reiterated the role played by class in defining the bubble. Arguing that the divisions, between expatriate bars and local bars, were now largely illusory, he pointed to an increase in the income levels of local Chinese to explain this phenomenon,

There was definitely a time when you'd go to a bar here and there'd just be white people in there. No Chinese people in there. You'd have maybe one Chinese girl that was dating some guy. Now you go to a bar and see a lot of Chinese people, but that's more money, y'know? More money to spend.

Cain is correct, that even the most popular expatriate bars usually had some Chinese regulars. Not only was the Chinese Other habitually commodified and consumed by expatriates seeking new liminal, cosmopolitan identities, middle-class local Chinese often sought a reciprocal engagement with expatriate spaces.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that this puncturing of the expatriate bubble by local Chinese was always welcomed by expatriates. Occasionally an expatriate bar became popular with local Chinese, and when this happened the bar's expatriate patrons frequently went elsewhere, complaining that the bar had lost its authenticity, or its atmosphere had changed, or that it had become too crowded. Expatriate friends of mine stopped spending as much time in an Alice-in-Wonderland-themed bar, the Rabbit Hole, when its Chinese patrons started to out-number its Western ones. The Rabbit Hole had gone from an expat bar, a space where expatriates were unmarked, to a space in which Westerners were again the minority.

Farrer argues that this repurposing of expatriate businesses by local Chinese into spaces for the performance of Western orientated cosmopolitan identities is not a new thing. He cites the example of the Hithouse, one of the earliest post-reform bars. Opening in 1993, the Hithouse was located near Fudan and Tongli University and was intended to appeal to foreign students. The bar's foreign clientele soon attracted Chinese students who were interested in constructing Westernised cosmopolitan identities of their own. Unfortunately for the bar's owner,

Foreign students...did not make up a large enough customer base to keep the Hithouse in business, and their numbers dropped off sharply after more "authentic" bars opened up in the city center...Contrary to the efforts of the owner, the Hithouse developed into a nightspot for local youth.

(Farrer 2009, p 27)

Because of this cycle, in which expatriate spaces are defined, eroded and finally relocated, the boundary between expatriate space and local space was highly permeable and negotiated. By using familiar Western archetypes, expatriate bars and restaurants provide a space, not only for expatriates to spend time with their fictive families, to express and maintain wider communities but also for the performance of a transnational, Western identity. By framing their favourite bars and restaurants as "expatriate" spaces, many expatriates implicitly echoed Sean's recognition of his desire for a space symbolically "outside" China. Harriet's "vast web of bars and restaurants" is therefore not so much characteristic of Shanghai as a whole, as it is characteristic of many Westerners' experience of the city.

### **8.3 - Foreigners Behaving Badly: Drink, Drugs and Expatriate Privilege**

As indicated by Sarah's description of the reasons clients have for calling Lifeline, substance abuse is a significant problem among Shanghai's expatriates<sup>138</sup>. The accessibility of alcohol in the city certainly plays a role in this problem. Beers and spirits are both easily purchased from most convenience stores for a few kuai a bottle, and they stock pure ethanol in the same aisle as wine in some supermarkets.

Although Shanghai has a legal drinking age, it is only very loosely enforced. During one conversation, Eric, a recent graduate from one of Shanghai's International Schools, told me that some of the children at his school had been drinking at bars since they were 13, and that it was very

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138. See p 204. See also AA Shanghai (n.d).

common for 14 and 15 year olds to go out drinking. "I used to bars all the time when I was at school" he told me, "But I'm over it now."

Twila and Sally quickly worked out that they could drink almost every night of the week for free if they wanted, by restricting themselves to bars and nightclubs that offered free drinks to women on a given "Ladies Night". Some bars would also periodically host events where, once you paid a nominal door-charge to get in, the drinks would be free. The Boxing Cat Halloween party was one such "all you can drink" event.

I spent some time with one expatriate whose birthday was in late October. She had been talking about dressing up to celebrate it since she and I met. She found out about the Boxing Cat Brewery Halloween party through the events page on Smart Shanghai and between the two of us we organised a group of about ten people to go. Towards the end of the evening I realised I hadn't seen her in a while. I eventually found her on the third floor, almost too drunk to speak. Between myself, Bill the American academic, his wife Olivia and their friend Sandra, we decided it was time we took her outside. Bill and I took one arm each and we frog marched her down three flights of stairs. We made it outside just in time for her to throw-up on the pavement. It was at this point that we realise none of us knew where she lived.

There is little, or no concept of host responsibility in Shanghai, a point that was highlighted for us when Olivia got into an argument with the girlfriend of one of the owners of Boxing Cat. When Olivia forcefully pointed out that the bar shouldn't have let our friend get so drunk to begin with, the bar owner's girlfriend replied, "Where do you think you are? This is China. She should have been more careful."

One woman who had been in Shanghai for nearly two decades, only half joking, told me that she was "practically a borderline alcoholic". As Sarah suggested, however, this border was easier to cross in Shanghai than perhaps most expatriates realise. Sebastian, a postpat who had been in China for 6 years, temporarily alienated most of his close friends during one particularly self-destructive month long bender. He owed many of them money and was becoming increasingly belligerent and self-destruct-

ive. Friends of his that I spoke to at the time had started to actively avoid him and were both relieved and somewhat apprehensive when he told them that he was moving to Guangzhou to make a new start,

Sean's description of Shanghai as a small town is also suggestive of the limits to expatriate permissiveness. When describing expatriate attitudes towards China's political system, he attributed some cases of alcohol dependency to an inability to adjust,

I've seen it a million times. "I'm going to show them how we do this," and then three months later you see them, they're burnt out, they're alcoholic, and they're leaving for the airport.

Marijuana, cocaine, and MDMA were all also available in Shanghai and were used, to varying extents, by expatriate acquaintances. In the expatriate bar district of Yongfu lu, or near JZ Bar on Fuxing Lu, or in any number of other locations in Shanghai, Western-looking pedestrians were routinely and openly approached by drug touts. The tout, might be Nigerian or Xinjiangnese, but dressed stylishly - like a Western club goer. "Hashish, marijuana. Very, very good," they would tell you.

Despite China's strict anti-drug laws (Shen 2014), and the widespread belief that the government monitors wechat communication, I have seen drug use openly discussed in wechat groups. When asked about expat drug use, most expatriates repeated the widely held belief that the Chinese police do not care what foreigners do. However, this did not always hold true. Susan told me the story of one of her expatriate acquaintances, who happened to be buying marijuana at a Xinjiangnese Restaurant when the place was raided by police,

The PSB<sup>139</sup> interrogated him for something like 10 hours. In the end they were like, 'Fine, you can go, but we own you. Anytime we call you, you have to tell us who's using and where they're buying it from.'

Stories like these expose the inevitable tension between the extended holiday offered by Shanghai's nightlife and the professional ambitions which

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139. Public Security Bureau

had brought many expatriates to Shanghai in the first place. Like Twila and Sally, many of the expatriates I met were young people, on short-term assignments, or in temporary employment. The stereotypical view, often articulated by expatriates, is that the majority of these transient expatriates are English teachers who are unskilled, generally unreliable and in Shanghai primarily to take advantage of the party lifestyle. Martin, a TESOL teacher himself, articulated a variation of this stereotype during his interview:

there's this trait among English teachers that a lot of them are alcoholics because they just sit around, or they go out and drink and they just have their few core friends and that's about it. Or some of them try to get laid or whatever, but, yeah, I think the city just lends itself to it. Everyone's so alienated here. So, it's just the way it is.

I met a number of TESOL teachers who celebrated this stereotype unapologetically, but I also met several who took their work very seriously and were understandably defensive about being pigeon holed. Fei put herself firmly in the later camp, when, in response to a friend describing a group of drunk and rowdy twenty somethings standing outside a 7/11 as "probably English teachers", she asked, "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

This stereotype also overlooks the increasing number of expatriates who use English teaching as a point of access to the Chinese job market, hoping to find something more in line with their career goals once they are in country. For these people, as for corporate expatriates and their spouses, their career - or the career of their spouse - is what motivated them to come to China in the first place, and their attitudes to the city's bar scene usually reflected this. Martin commented on this underlying division, within Shanghai's Western expatriate population,

some people come here and they know they're going to be here for 3 to 6 months on an internship and they spend every night partying [on] Hengshan Lu. Other people end up here and they have a full-time job and they kind of just live here.

Studies of backpackers in many parts of the world have revealed that it is not uncommon for travellers to relax their inhibitions while they are in a foreign country (Briggs et al. 2011; Brumer 2011; Egan 2009; Tutenges 2012). This interruption of normal social rules is widely seen as a characteristic of liminal space, where according to Turner "almost anything may happen" (1975, p 13). For expatriates, for whom liminality could be regarded as a permanent or semi-permeant state, this more permissive stance sometimes became the new norm.

The belief that most social or legal indiscretions committed by expatriates would be ignored by police - and by local Chinese more generally - was often repeated by expats. In conversation, Agnes, a postpat gallery manager, told me,

You can get away with a lot. I actually worry about how I'm going to cope with life back in the UK now, where, y'know, there are actually consequences for things.

Elaine made a similar point during her interview,

If you think you can get away with it, you will do it until you can't and that's the bubble. I think your definition of normal changes when you're in China. I mean, in the US your definition of normal is, you get up, you go to work, you talk to your friends around the water cooler about American Idol, you go home, you microwave yourself a lean cuisine, you watch a little TV so you can talk to your friends the next day and that's the extent of your day. Like, this is why I could never go back to the US because that's normal in the US and for us it's no longer normal. I mean come on look at us. How badass are we right now?

In this way, expatriate privilege acts as a marker of identity, not only separating expatriates from Shanghai's local Chinese population but also differentiating them from other Westerners not based in China. As Elaine implies, it defines a liminal, cultural and social space, "the bubble", within which new cosmopolitan, transnational identities are performed.

On the Chinese internet the idea that expatriates are given special treatment by the authorities is also popularly and frequently expressed.

Responding to a popular video on this topic from the video-sharing site Todou, QQ user 色空 writes,

In many of our countrymen's noses, even the  
fart of a foreigner is fragrant.

(in Jamie 2013)

Another QQ user explains,

I completely do not understand, really. Why [do]  
a portion of Chinese people so blindly worship  
the foreign? ... They're humans and you're  
human too. Where are you inferior to them?  
There truly are too many idiots.

(甜美的小世界づ in Jamie 2013)

Although local Chinese often did allow expatriates to get away with behaving in ways that they otherwise might not condone - which, perhaps, were not even legal - it would be an oversimplification to view such special treatment as a manifestation of white privilege only.<sup>140</sup> In China rules, and even many laws, are notoriously enforced in a flexible and negotiated way, a reality encapsulated in the popular Chinese saying, "the mountains are tall and the Emperor is far away." A good example of this is Shanghai's public smoking ban. Introduced in 2010, by the time I first arrived in 2011 the anti-smoking law was already only selectively enforced. You seldom saw ashtrays openly displayed on the tables of bars or restaurants, but if you wanted to smoke all that was usually required was to ask. Now, in 2015 most bars have ashtrays included as part of their table settings and patrons generally assume they can smoke unless they are specifically told otherwise (cf. Zhou 2015). Because of this flexibility it may not always be clear where the line between permitted and prohibited activities actually lies, with even quite common every day activities, such as smoking, falling into a murky middle ground of "discouraged but usually tolerated".

Complicating this further are the connected issues of guanxi and class (cf. Cohen 2010; Peerenboom 2002; Xin & Pierce 1996). When caught out in a transgression, it is not unusual to see wealthier local Chinese openly

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140. An in-depth examination of expatriate privilege and its connection to whiteness would require more input from local Chinese than was possible in this ethnography.

berating the minor official who is trying to hold them to account. Elaine, a postpat who self-identifies as a taitai, gave the following example,

I was at a parking garage and this jerk in a beemer was sitting at the gate and he refused to pay the 5 kuai gate fee. In Chinese he was basically saying, 'I've only been here for five minutes' and the guys like, 'We have you on record. We can see you've been here for an hour and a half. You're driving a Beemer. Give me my five kuai.' I mean it's not like this money's going into this guard's pocket, right. The traffic this guy was causing was unbelievable, so, I ended up getting out of my taxi, walking over to the guard and handing over 5 kuai and then telling the BMW driver, in Chinese, 'Oh, sorry, do you not have the 5 kuai to get out. That's no problem. Let me help you.' He of course lost face then, and then threw out his 100 kuai or whatever, and I was, like, 'Oh no, no. It's fine. It's taken care of. You can go now.' Unfortunately because there's such a disparity that guard didn't feel he could really call him on it and he probably would have eventually let him go.

I have already documented the role played by class in the construction of the expatriate bubble. Chinese constructions of the Western Other were also commonly focused on "status, cosmopolitanism, excitement, modernity, quality, technology, and beauty" (Zhou & Belk 2004, p 71). Wealthier local Chinese who had on-going, coequal relationships with expatriates were significantly more likely to relate to unfamiliar Westerners as individuals, rather than as simple products of whiteness. However, for most expatriates, interactions with local Chinese were seldom coequal - predominantly consisting of short conversations with service staff, low-level functionaries or lower paid Chinese coworkers. Indeed, for working class, and lower middle-class Chinese the class difference between themselves and expatriates is very real.

Apart from an implicit and often explicit class difference, the language barrier which usually existed between expatriates and local Chinese imposed an additional disincentive to local Chinese involving themselves in expatriate misbehaviour. As Elaine framed it during her interview, "they're paid 3

kuai an hour and whatever mafan<sup>141</sup> you are going to give them is not worth 3 kuai an hour." Brigita, a Slovenian freelance translator, described an interaction she had with the Chinese police using similar language. "They just [don't] want any mafan with the laowai," she told me.

These factors contributed to the belief, from both expatriates and local Chinese, that foreigners were privileged by their lives in China. Communities and the apparent lack of consequences led expatriates to feel and sometimes act as if "anything could happen". However, the local Chinese tolerance for expatriate misbehaviour was not without limit, and those limits were not always clearly defined.

One night I was standing outside a cafe during a poetry reading, talking to Bjorn. A happy French couple walked past us, leaving the venue, and started to unlock their bikes. Suddenly the laoban of the restaurant, a middle age Chinese lady, came running out shouting, "Stop! Thief!" in English. She wrestled with the French girl for control of the bike. The French girl was yelling back - also in English - "You're mental. Let go of me!" Meanwhile a Chinese man had taken hold of the back of the bike and the girl half fell, half climbed off, backing away as the laoban came after her swinging.

Bjorn, who speaks Chinese well and knew the laoban a little, stepped in between them and began trying to find out what had happened. "This is mental" the French woman responded, over the laoban's cursing, "They're all mental. Let go of me. Tell her to let me go." A crowd was gathering. Patrons from the cafe, street sweepers and delivery drivers came over to see what the shouting was about. The Police arrived. The French woman's face quickly went from angry to scared.

The Chinese man who had grabbed the bike wagged his finger at the french woman. "You French people all have bad characters," he told her. Another woman shouted something in Chinese that Bjorn later translated

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141. Trouble or inconvenience.

for me as, "This is our land. If you want to act this way, go back to your country."

"She says you took something from the restaurant," Bjorn said, turning to the French girl, "If you give it back and apologise this will all go away."

Nearly crying now the French girl reached into her backpack and pulled out two small wooden figures, one of a waiter and one of a chef. Later she would tell Bjorn, "I didn't know they had personal significance for anyone. They just looked like cheap rubbish to me."

Nor are all such conflicts peacefully resolved. Stories about groups of angry Chinese assaulting rude or disrespectful foreigners appear periodically in local Chinese or expatriate social media (bluey 2009; Fauna 2010; Fauna 2012). Danny Cancian, a New Zealand expat, spent five years in a Chinese prison following one such incident. According to Cancian, a group of three local Chinese attacked him in retaliation for an altercation he had had with one of the men two days earlier. The man reportedly walked into Cancian, while he was eating at a restaurant, and became angry after Cancian told him "You should say excuse me" (in MacDonald 2013). During the second incident Cancian threw one of his assailants to the ground and kicked him in the face, accidentally killing him (MacDonald 2013).

More recently there was a spate of incidents in Beijing, often assumed to be related, where foreigners have reportedly been attacked simply because they were seen with phenotypically Asian women (RFH 2015; Reddit 2014). It is important to note that these stories are considered noteworthy, by expatriates, local Chinese and the media, precisely because they are exceptional. However, these stories are also suggestive of the limits of local Chinese tolerance toward expatriates and, by extension, towards expatriate privilege more generally.

At its extremes, the liminal lifestyle described above is clearly not sustainable, but for those who are in Shanghai to enjoy that lifestyle this may not be seen as an immediate problem. The expat bar scene was something many expatriates described as central to their Shanghai experience. Most

also framed the city as a temporary destination which they would inevitably leave at some distant, yet to be determined, point in the future. Even the more settled postpats usually had one or two anecdotes about wild Shanghai nights they had participated in.

In a piece the expatriate writer Renee Reynolds wrote for a true Shanghai stories workshop that I hosted with Hal, she described this as a "do-something-crazy-and-get-away-with-it card":

We'd plowed deep into another night of beer, whiskey and chatter. It was two or three or four when the others had gone. There we sat, B and me, the last peopled table, swaying like child-sailors in dread of our imminent docking. Both of us lived with our girlfriends back then and on this night, shared a total lack of desire to go home to them. Last I'd seen mine her canines were exposed – in front of them a red object in mid-air quickly approaching.

Recounting this to B created a do-something-crazy-and-get-away-with-it card. They pop up, these cards, all over Shanghai at night like mushrooms in a shit patch.

We plucked ours and ate them right up.

I felt immediately set free. B appeared fully charged. His blonde hair standing up toward the moon, his pale eyes twinkling bright – the plan was brewing...

(2012)

Similarly, Siebe described how after a night out drinking, his former roommate Holly would often come home with things that didn't belong to her. Fei also knew a number of people who saw Shanghai as an extended holiday. She recalled one friend in particular who became well-known for his tendency to wake up "the morning" after under a shrub. In many cases stories like these were told and retold, forming part of a collective mythology, their shared excesses framed as both comic and heroic. Occasionally they would take the form of a cautionary tale, the washed up TESOL teacher, heading into late middle age, with few friends and no prospects, "spending all his money at lady bars, on fake hookers" as Fei said of one of her acquaintances.

Narratives like these assisted expatriates in the formation of individual and collective identities, normalising expatriate privilege and helping to separate expatriates - both from the local Chinese population and from other, non-expatriated Westerners. The extent to which Shanghai itself assists in maintaining this liminal, social and cultural bubble - by paying foreigners more than locals and by being forgiving of expatriate non-fluency in Chinese, among other factors - is, of course, a manifestation of that privilege.

## 8.4 - Summary

As we have seen, expatriates commonly located themselves between China and the West. This liminal placement required expatriates to eat the Other, utilising local and globally orientated spatial meanings to enact new cosmopolitan identities. Eating from a range of local Chinese and world cuisines allowed expatriates to reimagine Shanghai - which is more than 98% Han Chinese (SSB 2011) - as a cosmopolitan city, normalising their emplacement within it. By articulating a division between this cosmopolitan imaginary and the local spaces situated within it, expatriates claimed partial ownership over large sections of the city.

Expatriates tended to define local spaces both by price and by the absence of other foreigners. This lower "local" price was also often reflected in the decor - worn fixtures, faded menus and grease stains reinforcing existing expatriate associations of cultural authenticity with poverty and dirt. On the other hand, differences in local Chinese cultures of eating and drinking, concerns about food safety, lack of information and the language barrier made accessing these spaces challenging. Expatriates utilised local Chinese friends and coworkers to locate and familiarise themselves with safe, well-regarded local spaces and then disseminated this new found local knowledge themselves, capitalising on it to reinforce existing networks of support and facilitate the formation of new connections.

Newly arrived and corporate expatriate often used the perceived authenticity of these spaces in narratives of cosmopolitan emplacement, exotifying the local as a "cultural experience". On the other hand, by labelling these

local spaces as "my local noodle-shop/fruit-shop/wet-market/Chinese supermarket", postpats made deeper claims of local emplacement, stitching together a patchwork cosmopolitan neighbourhood out of scattered, often discontinuous local and expatriate spaces.

Expat bars and restaurants used Western spatial meanings, Western food, English-speaking staff and comfortable styling to extend the home space outward into these cosmopolitan neighbourhoods. In fact, for many expatriates these restaurants and bars - not the home space itself - were the centre of their social lives. Bars and restaurants like these fulfilled the need, periodically felt by expatriates, "to not be in China anymore". Just as local spaces were defined by low prices and inexpensive furnishings, expat spaces used upmarket furniture and fittings, and comparatively high prices to create a classist economic bubble that excluded most local Chinese. However, reciprocal consumption of the Western Other by an emerging, globally orientated Chinese middle-class meant that expat spaces were also fluid, moveable and subject to frequent redefinition by expatriates

Because restaurants and bars played such a central role in the social lives of expatriates, opportunities for misbehaviour were often close to hand. Expatriates frequently told me they could get away with things in China that they never would have got away with at home. On the Chinese internet the opinion that Westerners are granted special treatment in China is also a common one. However, it would be a mistake to see this as a simple reflection of white privilege. The negotiated and flexible nature of the social contract in China allows wealthy and middle-class local Chinese a similar level of freedom. Language plays a role as well, discouraging local Chinese from interacting with expatriates, even to chastise them. On the other hand, whiteness is undeniably entangled with class in China. Pale skin is traditionally associated with status in the Chinese cultural imagination and expatriates were typically paid more than a similarly qualified local might be. This entwining of whiteness and class privilege was an uncomfortable fit for many expatriates, calling into question the legitimacy of their place in China and exposing them to deeper structural inequalities

within the system of global capitalism as a whole. In response expatriates both minimised their own privilege, by describing themselves as comparatively less privileged than many local Chinese, and mythologised it, recounting "do-something-crazy-and-get-away-with-it" narratives, in which their privilege acted, sometimes literally, as a get out of jail free card.

## 9.0 - Conclusion

Shanghai is a liminal city, often described as China's gateway to the West. Shanghai's Western expatriate population also exist on the threshold, both within China and within the city they live in. They are positioned, by cultural difference and often by personal choice, between China and the West, making homes for themselves in Shanghai despite being unable - and perhaps also unwilling - to ever become Chinese.

Language, cultural and class barriers contributed to expatriate alienation and led to the occasional "bad China day" or "Shang-low", even for comparatively long-term expatriates. The ability of family and friends in the home country to relate to, or effectively relieve these pressures was usually limited. Concerns about food safety, pollution or what to do in a medical emergency were also frequently experienced as significant. In response, expatriates often formed small, predominantly Western, fictive families as a stand-in for home country networks of support. Local knowledge, shared experiences and a shared history allowed these fictive kin networks to offer more effective support than could friends or family back in the home country.

The transitory nature of Shanghai's expatriate population meant that these fictive kinship networks were often strictly bounded. Departures were commonplace, marked and frequently traumatic. Most postpats had experienced the complete turnover of their Shanghai support network at least once. Many said this made them wary of investing too deeply in new connections. For these expatriates, how long someone was planning to be in Shanghai was just as important as shared interests or beliefs. The carefully policed boundaries of their fictive kinship networks tended to reflect these concerns.

Outside the small tightly bounded social grouping of the fictive family, I also documented a much broader imagined community, based on assumptions of a shared transnational Western identity, a common language - English - and the shared experience of expatriation. The feeling of *comunitas* this engendered contributed to a flattening of class, cultural and

interpersonal barriers between expatriates. Expatriates often reported feeling like they made friendships more quickly than they would have in the West. The feeling of all being "in the same boat" - as Ingrid phrased it - meant that help and advice were usually freely given, even to relative strangers. At expatriate social gatherings, class barriers which might have hindered the development of these connections were also less evident. However, this apparent classlessness did not often extend to interactions between expatriates and local Chinese.

In the Chinese media, images of "white" Westerners tend to be associated with qualities like success, modernness, wealth and prestige. Advertisers also often use "white" bodies to embody implicitly Western ideas, such as sexual availability, youthful rebellion or personal freedom. These ideas challenge traditional Chinese values but also have a growing appeal for a new generation of Western orientated local Chinese consumers. In this way, "white" Western bodies are also liminal bodies, literally mediating the gap between the aspirational cosmopolitanism of China's emerging middle-class and the traditional values of its past.

The West is also associated with whiteness in the Chinese cultural imagination. Chinese terms for foreigner, such as *waiguoren* and *laowai*, are usually only used to refer to "white" Westerners. "Black" expatriates are, of course, also seen as foreign but are placed in a different structural category from their "white" counterparts". Usually referred to as *laohei* or *heiren*, they are therefore doubly marked, both by their foreignness and their phenotype and are often still seen as primitive, tribal or potentially dangerous. Because of these continuing primitivist associations, when attempting to claim non-African national identities, Western identifying "black" expatriates regularly faced scepticism from local Chinese.

Similarly, expatriates commonly articulated an imagined China which was poor, rural, dirty, traditional and more authentically Chinese than they believed their lives in Shanghai to be. This "real China" was framed in opposition to a Shanghai which was rich, urban, modern and relatively Westernised. Chinese constructions of Shanghai have also historically framed the city - and not always positively - as a locus for a more mercant-

ile, Western-influenced haipai culture. Haipai is typically contrasted with the more traditional jingpai, or capital style. Several expatriates evoked this historical imaginary in their own narratives of emplacement - using Shanghai's relative wealth and historical association with the West to position themselves closer to the centre while symbolically dislocating Shanghai's urban poor to the city's periphery. Some scholars have argued that a centre/periphery framing is characteristic of Chinese discourses on identity. According to this view, Chinese national identity is usually constituted in relation to an idealised, Han Chinese centre and not in opposition to an external Other. By framing Shanghai as China's future, some interview participants sought to reorient this construction, redefining cosmopolitan, Western-facing Shanghai as the centre. However, as the structural oppositions discussed above - and in Table 2 (p 84) - illustrate, expatriates typically viewed the city as peripheral to China and viewed themselves as liminal figures within it.

The common refrain among expatriates, "you can't be Chinese" reflects a literal rite of passage - immigration - stalled in its middle phase, before reincorporation. Conceptions of national identity centred around a racialised notion of what it means to be Han, along with China's strict immigration policy, meant that, even for very long-term postpats, their status as laowai, or outsiders, was fixed. Expatriates typically responded to this by self-identifying as expats, as laowai or as Westerners and using this identity to separate themselves both from local Chinese and from newcomers or tourists. Many identified the liminal cultural and often physical space these labels defined as an expat bubble, "the bubble" or "my bubble".

Usually centred on the home, expatriate bubbles were highly personal, fluid and vulnerable to puncture. Corporate expatriates were typically only in China on short-term assignments. Because of this, they were less invested in making China their home and, therefore, tended to inhabit bubbles that held the local Chinese world at a distance. Relocation allowances allowed corporate expatriates to more closely reproduce the homes they had left behind in the West. They often lived in walled expatriate

compounds or upmarket serviced apartment complexes located on the suburban fringes of the city. Many such developments were highly self-contained, with International Schools, expat supermarkets, health clubs, Western-themed bars and restaurants - in some cases even health-care providers - within the same complex or very nearby. Uniformed bao'an guarded the gates of these, idealised representations of Western urban or suburban life. Private drivers transported corporate expatriates, their spouses and families to work, school, on errands and between social engagements. This gave corporate expats the ability to move through the local Chinese city without having to engage with it deeply. It further contributed to distorted social geographies in which local Chinese - including service staff such as bao'ans, Ayi and drivers - were depicted as largely absent from, or invisible within, the areas where corporate expatriates lived. On the other hand, compound living has deep cultural roots in China and local Chinese who can afford it also commonly hire Ayi and drivers. Corporate expatriate bubbles should, therefore, be seen as a product of the intersection between class, local Chinese cultural factors and the expatriate desire for place, not simply as a manifestation of white privilege. The bubble provided corporate expatriates with a space for the performance of globally orientated cosmopolitan identities which, nonetheless, remained largely rooted in the home country and in Western suburban ideas of home.

Trailing spouses, though clearly privileged in some ways, often found adjusting to life in Shanghai challenging. Many had given up high-powered careers of their own to relocate to Shanghai with their working spouse. They were typically married to -or de facto partners of - corporate expatriates and often lived some distance from the central city. For these individuals, who usually had no established support network, limited ability to speak Chinese and little understanding of local Chinese culture, compound life could be very isolating. Several support and networking organisations exist to address this issue, providing trailing spouses with access to local knowledge and ready-made networks of support. Events and activities organised by these groups served to mediate the city for

their members, helping trailing spouses - and their families by extension - to extend the physical and social boundaries of their bubbles beyond the walls of the compound. For their corporate expatriate partners - and for some postpats - professional networking groups and fraternal organisations performed a similar function.

Postpats are defined in this research by their intention to stay in China indefinitely. Unable to move past their outsider status, they used bubbles that straddled the line between inside and outside, foreigner and local, the West and China. Postpats often made claims of comparative emplacement, framing their own bubbles as more permeable and local to Shanghai than those of their corporate expatriate contemporaries. Many lived in what they referred to as local Chinese buildings or compounds. Rather than being strict recreations of Western understandings of home, the postpat home-space was frequently a compromise between local Chinese spatial meanings and the expatriate desire for place. Without the corporate expatriate ability to bring the contents of home with them to Shanghai, postpats populated their apartments with personal effects collected since arriving in China, creating new cosmopolitan definitions of home in the process. In most cases, however, their social lives were predominantly lived outside the home-space in a "web of [Western-themed] bars and restaurants". In fact, hospitality businesses frequently capitalised on the expatriate desire for place by themselves replicating a home-like environment. Through claims of ownership - usually articulated as "my local noodle place/wet market/Chinese supermarket" - familiar local Chinese spaces were also incorporated by postpats into cosmopolitan discontinuous neighbourhoods. These blended neighbourhood bubbles provided postpats with a space for the performance of new, liminal, transnational identities - rooted in Shanghai but still comfortably Western.

Both for corporate expatriates and postpats, the structure of the bubble was heavily entwined with privilege. Frequently this relationship was explicitly acknowledged by the expatriates themselves. Among local Chinese and within the expatriate population itself expatriate privilege was widely linked to whiteness, and certainly the two are related. However, as men-

tioned above, both whiteness and Westernness are closely linked to assumptions of class in Chinese culture. Indeed, expatriates typically did occupy an elite class position relative to the majority of local Chinese. It was this class position, more so than racial or ethnic biases specifically, which provided expatriates with the resources to maintain and construct their bubble.

The West and the East have historically been framed in opposition to one another, as competing cultural paradigms, even as rivals. With the rise of the Asian Tigers this rivalry is now often couched in economic terms<sup>142</sup> and echoes a longer tradition of Western fears of the non-West.<sup>143</sup> According to Said, however,

in reading the Orientalists one understands that the apocalypse to be feared was not the destruction of Western civilisation but rather the destruction of the barriers that kept East and West from each other.

(2003, p 263)

Expatriates straddle this boundary, existing on the threshold between the West and China. As Bhabha rightly points out, transmigrant liminality is both a process of transition and an ongoing act of cultural translation. Staying in Shanghai long term requires postpats to both fit themselves into China and to translate their own cultural and spatial meanings onto the local Chinese world around them. The incorporation of both Western and familiar local spaces into the postpat bubble reflects this ongoing process of migrant home-making. Expatriate "bad China day" narratives, on the other hand, reflect moments of rupture in that process and of the bubble itself. Narratives such as these - and the "this is China" attitude that typically accompanies them, also serve to normalise these ruptures, implying that the speaker possesses some skill of resilience or mediation which the listener lacks.

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142. "Asia 'to eclipse' US and Europe by 2030" (BBC 2012 for example, or "East overtakes West in tomorrow's world." (McCrae 1992).

143. "It was in the year 1976 that the trouble with China reached its culmination" (London 1910, p 308)

Indeed, the uncertain, fluid and liminal positioning of expatriates is, in many respects, what gives them - and postpats in particular - their value within the Chinese labour market. Whether they worked as English teachers, writers, translators, entrepreneurs or corporate executives, almost all the expatriates I met worked to mediate the boundary between China and the rest of the world. The skills which allowed postpats to successfully straddle this boundary in their daily lives made them more effective, both at interpreting China for other Westerners and at interpreting the West for local Chinese interlocutors. Postpats also commonly recognised these skills as a source of personal value or of shared identity - utilising their China experience to set themselves apart from other Westerners, while also framing their Westernness as fundamental and inalienable.

Western expatriates not only represent a challenge to the Party's notion of "traditional" Chinese values, they also pose policy challenges for a country with a nationalistic, authoritarian government and no real history of mass immigration. Recent visa reforms have loosened the criteria for permanent residency, theoretically making it easier to get a Chinese green card. However, since Xi Jinping became the country's paramount leader in 2013, attacks on Western influence in China have become both more visible and more frequent. Ideas such as democracy and human rights have long been seen as Western imports by the Party and viewed with deep ambivalence - if not actual hostility. Now, however, these ideas and the West itself by implication, are under more sustained attack.

In a political climate where Chinese academics can be disciplined for teaching "Western values" (AFP 2015); human rights lawyers are being arrested en masse (Tang et al. 2016); foreign NGO workers are forced to "confess" on Chinese television (Phillips 2016); Chinese women are warned to be wary of relationships with Westerners - in case they turn out to be spies (AP 2016) - and Chinese political dissidents can be abducted from foreign countries with apparent impunity (lynegar 2016) it is perhaps not surprising that Western businesses now feel increasingly unwelcome in China (Brown & Burkitt 2016). How expatriates navigate China's cooling relationship with the West and what effect this will have on the

construction of the expat bubble remains to be seen. There is little doubt, however, that, while China's economy continues to grow, the liminal cross-cultural space occupied by expatriates will continue to grow in importance along with it. As long as it remains possible to do so, some expatriates will continue to make this highly fluid and contested space their home.

# Appendix A

## A Brief History of Shanghai

The degree to which China, and Shanghai, in particular, can legitimately be referred to as having been colonised continues to be debated (Goodman 2000, p 889; Osterhammel 1986). Shanghai was one of five "treaty ports" mandated by the treaty of Nanking (1842). This treaty, which concluded the Opium War, was the first of several so-called "unequal treaties" China would sign over the next hundred years. Unequal because, although the Chinese were forced to make significant concessions, other parties to these treaties were given no obligations in return (Hoe and Roebuck 2009, p 203). Both the treaty of Nanking and the later treaty of Wanghia, between China and America (1844), had the declared purpose of opening up China to trade. However, the Treaty of Wanghia would also place both the Americans and British - as well as the citizens of other countries granted "most favoured nation" status - outside the grasp of Chinese law. In the International Settlement, this would be leveraged into de facto sovereignty by the Shanghai Municipal Council, thereby establishing what the North China Herald called the most "unconventional municipality in the world" (quoted in Sergeant 1991, p 17) and effectively dividing the city in three. The southernmost portion of Shanghai, including the old walled city centre, remained in Chinese hands; the French Concession in the middle was governed by the French Consul, alongside the Conseil d'Administration Municipale; while the northern third of the city, the International Settlement, was run as a quasi-republican microstate in its own right (Wasserstrom 2009, p 3). Both the French Concession and the International Settlement refused to pay Chinese taxes while simultaneously levying taxes against their Chinese inhabitants; both formed their own police forces and militia and both reserved the right to land troops while denying Chinese troops the right to enter their respective territories. The assumption of administrative independence from China, by the International Settlement, in particular, had little or no legitimacy under international law and certainly no preced-

ent. What the settlements lacked in legal authority, however, they made up for with "bluff, manoeuvre and force majeure" (Murphey 1953, quoted in Sergeant 1991, p 17).

Until recently Chinese sources have tended to refer to China in this era as a semi-colonial and semifeudal society (Han 2005, p 85). A number of Western scholars also use the term semi-colonial to distinguish colonialism in China from more fully realised forms of colonial domination; as practiced in India during the same period, for example (Goodman 2000; Osterhammel 1986).

There is also an emerging revisionist trend in the recent literature which argues against colonialism being a fundamentally negative factor in Shanghai's history. The Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences has argued that:

The operations of the Western colonialists in the Shanghai concessions in the last count served - however vicious their intentions might have been - as an unwitting instrument of history in stimulating the progress of Shanghai's society.

(quoted in Wagner 1995, pp 425-426)

Wagner, in turn questions whether the term 'colonial' should be applied to concession-era Shanghai at all, regardless of the prefix. His claim, in support of this idea - that the settlement's Chinese inhabitants were not barred "from access to education, from jobs in the sensitive public media or from political activities" (p 442) - is somewhat problematic. Firstly, while these methods of control might be seen as symptomatic of colonial oppression, they are clearly not always present. Secondly, local Chinese were denied political representation in the International Settlement until 1928, despite providing the bulk of the council's revenue (Goodman 2000, p 893); were denied access to many of the settlement's schools; and were subject to many other restrictions (Bickers 1998, p 187; Bickers and Wasserstrom 1995). The idea that Westerners "were not a colonial threat" (Wagner 1995, p 442) because they were never in direct competition with the Chinese government for control of the nation-state is also suspect. By Wagner's own admission the foreign concessions were established and

maintained with colonial military force (p 441) and provided refuge for "reformists, revolutionaries, gangs and refugees" (p 440). His view, that this acted "as an integral... part of the Chinese body politic" (p 441), without which cultural and social change would have been impossible, radically downplays the destabilising influence foreign intervention has had in China and ignores the resulting human cost of that change. If we are to accept Wagner's argument, that destabilisation of Qing dynasty China by the treaty powers led directly to the rise of the Communist Party (the Party) and eventually to the current era of Dengist reform, we must also accept that these same factors had some bearing on events between 1912<sup>144</sup> and today.

The event which looms largest in China's historical imaginary is undoubtedly the Japanese occupation of the eastern part of the country during World War Two. The War of Resistance Against Japan, or as it is sometimes also called the Anti-Fascist War, remains a potent propagandistic touch-stone for the Chinese government. Television dramatisations of the period are hugely popular and, when shown a Japanese flag, local Chinese children will often respond with, "I hate Japan". However, the Party's often repeated desire for "a full and accurate account of the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army during the war" (Schriver 2015) is not matched by a similar commitment to accuracy or transparency regarding its own history. Events such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square have largely faded from public memory, despite the huge impact that these events must have had on anyone who lived through them.

Very few Westerners remained in Shanghai following the end of World War Two. Between 1945 and Mao's death in 1976 communist party policies were responsible for the deaths of between 40 and 70 million Chinese citizens, or 8-12% of the population. Between 1958 and 1961 the economic policies of the Great Leap Forward caused widespread famine and environmental degradation. In order to meet strict quotas set by the central

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144. Fall of the Qing Dynasty/foundation of the first Republic of China (Rowe 2010).

government, local party officials routinely lied about rice yields and then made up the difference by cutting back on rations for the farmers themselves. In the countryside tens of millions of people starved to death. Life in the cities was more bearable but was still marked by shortages, corruption and the whims of the Party. One Chinese friend recalled her father telling her that as a young child he used to look forward to contracting worms because worming tablets were the only sweets they ever got. According to her, he also remembers participating in the Party's ill-advised war against sparrows, banging pots and pans to keep them in the air until they died from exhaustion. Sparrows were targeted as part of the four pests campaign because it was believed they ate grain. So many sparrows were killed that they were nearly driven to extinction inside China, and are not a common sight in Shanghai even today. Ironically the real beneficiaries of this campaign were locusts and other grain eating insects. Insect swarms devastated crops throughout China during the period, contributing to the ongoing famine.

As the scale of the disaster started to become clear, Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi began to take control of economic matters, sidelining Mao. Concern for his own position led Mao to launch the Cultural Revolution in May of 1966. Claiming that bourgeois elements were aiming to restore capitalism, Mao insisted that these "revisionists" be removed through violent class struggle. China's youth responded by forming Red Guard groups around the country. As the movement spread, it resulted in widespread factional struggles in all walks of life. Between 400,000 and 3 million people were killed in the ensuing unrest and tens of millions more were violently persecuted (Heberer 2009). The children of those with a "bad class background" - intellectuals, artists, the former bourgeoisie and so on - were often "sent down" for reeducation, working, sometimes for years, in unfamiliar parts of rural China far away from their families (McWilliams 2000; Ye 2010; Chang & Halliday 2011). Even Xi Jinping, China's current President, did not escape unscathed. Xi's father, a prominent communist leader, was purged, then publicly berated, Xi himself was sent to work on a farm in rural Shaanxi for 6 years and his sister was "persecuted to death" - harried into killing herself (Buckley & Tatlow 2015). In fact, of the five men

who have served as Paramount Leader since Mao, four had their lives significantly impacted by the Cultural Revolution, whether as victims of the policy, its architects or both.<sup>145</sup> Nor are these stories exceptional. As Thomas Heberer has argued "terror and arbitrariness... ran rampantly throughout the first phase of the Cultural Revolution and affected every individual person" (2009, p 173).

For the generation now in their 50s and 60s these twin traumas - the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward - formed the backdrop of their childhoods and adolescences. Despite its undoubted impact, this fractured period is now almost entirely absent from China's public discourse (Wu 2014; Fong 2006; Yang 2012). Without it, however, the current era of economic reform and spectacular growth would very likely not have taken place. Deng rose to power in the vacuum created by Mao's failed policies. The chaos created by the Cultural Revolution gave him the leverage to oust the Gang of Four, sideline Hua Guofeng and push through the early stages of reform, all without significant resistance from within the Party (Baum 1996; MacFarquhar 2012).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, farming was de-collectivised and a number of Special Economic Zones were established, opening China up to foreign trade for the first time since 1949. Economic reform also introduced new tensions into Chinese society as a whole. In 1989, university students around China, concerned about future job security in the newly liberalised labour market, inflation and many other factors, began to protest the pace of reform. In Beijing, they occupied Tiananmen Square - a symbolically important location because of its association with Mao's proclamation of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 - and

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145. Hua Guofeng, Mao's successor, rose to power as a vocal supporter of the Cultural Revolution leading the movement in Hunan. During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping's son was imprisoned, tortured by Red Guards and became a paraplegic when he either jumped or was thrown out a four story window. Deng, arguably one of the key targets of the policy, was purged from the Party leadership and sent to work in a tractor factory for 4 years (Pantsov & Levine 2015; Kissinger 2011). Hu Jintao's father was also denounced and jailed during the same period (Havelly 2007).

demanded that the ongoing economic reforms should be accompanied with more significant political reform.

There was an unusually large number of foreign press in Beijing at the time, there to cover a historic visit by Russian Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Instead, they began to focus their coverage on the growing protests. Initially, the Chinese government seemed unsure how to respond. There were those in the Party who supported the students' demands while others saw the protest as a direct challenge to Communist Party legitimacy. Eventually, the latter faction won out. The protest's most senior supporter within the Party, Zhao Ziyang came to the square and tearfully told the students "We came too late". Eventually tanks were brought in and the protests violently suppressed. As many as 1000 people were killed. Student leaders who survived either fled the country or were arrested and forced to recant. Zhao Ziyang was purged and placed under house arrest. On the other hand, Jiang Zemin, then party secretary of Shanghai, was promoted to the CPC Standing Committee, having managed to resolve the protests in Shanghai without resorting to deadly force (Lim 2014; Zhang 2008).

More so than either the Cultural Revolution or the Great Leap Forward, Tiananmen remains highly politically sensitive in China. Along with Tibetan independence and Taiwanese Sovereignty, Tiananmen is one of the "three Ts" expatriates routinely counsel newcomers not to discuss (cf. Volodzko 2015). Indeed, Tiananmen is still so heavily suppressed that, in the lead up to the 26th anniversary of the crackdown, users of the popular online payments app Wechat Wallet noted an unusual bug - or was it a feature? Transfers containing the numbers 64 or 89 - potential references to the date that suppression of the protests began<sup>146</sup> - routinely failed, resulting in the error message "unusual transaction, please try again" (Yan 2015).

In the immediate wake of Tiananmen, many foreign governments advised their citizens to leave and China's new expatriate communities began to

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146. June 4, 1989, or 89-6-4 as it would typically be written in China.

abandon the country in large numbers. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and many foreign governments suspended loans to China. Within China itself, resistance towards reform stiffened and Deng saw his influence within the Party reduced. Some reforms were reversed and strong control over press, publishing and mass media was reasserted. However, China's provincial leaders resented the new slow pace of reform and, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the central government again began to follow Deng's proscription of "kai fang" or "opening up" (Fewsmith 2001)

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