

## Chapter Twenty-two

### Leaving China 欲穷千里登楼阁 (1979-1981)

I had been waiting for the UK student visa for over a month, but had heard nothing back from the British Embassy in Beijing.

One day, Dingding's father asked me. "Have you got any news about your visa?"

"No, I haven't heard anything yet," I replied.

"Yes, it's rather strange," he commented.

"The other day I went the Embassy to ask. They said that they hadn't heard anything back from London yet," I added.

"If they reject your visa application, it might... because of me..." he muttered.

"Really?"

I thought that he had said something to the British Embassy. Then he continued. "You know? The MI6 has my files. I was locked up in a few countries when I was in Europe and Hong Kong a long time ago. But I am sure the MI6 won't get rid of my files."

"Were you detained in foreign countries?" I was surprised.

"Yes, I've been to many types of prisons, the foreign ones, the Nationalist ones and the Communist ones."

"Really, which was the worst one according to your experiences?" I was expecting him to say the Nationalist ones.

"Actually some of the communist ones," he answered without hesitation. I was surprised to hear that.

I seemed to remember from what Dingding told me. Her father went through Long March handcuffed as a prisoner under Zhang Guotao<sup>1</sup>. Zhang killed many educated officers in the Fourth Division of the Chinese Red Army, but he didn't kill her father, because Zhang needed him to write propaganda materials on the journey through the Long March. The Fourth Division

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Guotao 张国焘 was an ultra-left leader of the Chinese Communist Party during the Long March Period.

of the Red Army went on a much longer route than the rest of the Red Army. After Mao took charge of the Communist Party, at the end, it was Zhou Enlai who came to the Fourth Division to release her father from the prison of that ultra-left Chinese Red Army.

“It must be a terrible experience, when you went through the Long March as a prisoner under Zhang Guotao,” I said. “What about the Nationalist prisons? Have you been in Zhazidong 渣滓洞 in Chongqing?” I asked my father-in-law. Zhazidong was one of the most notorious prisons at the time.

“Yes, I was there too.” Dingding’s father answered. He thought it for a little while.

“I was in the prison there in the mid-1940s. One day at lunchtime, suddenly I was given four dishes and one soup. The food was good. So I thought that I was going to be executed in the afternoon.”

It was known in China that a prisoner would be given a good meal before his execution. However, at three o’clock that afternoon, his cell’s door was open and he was taken to a prison office. To his surprise, the leader of the Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai Shek was sitting there. He severely told off my father-in-law for joining the Chinese Communist Party and lectured him about betraying the ideology of his father, Liao Zhongkai<sup>2</sup>, who was one of the founders of the Nationalist Party. Chiang Kai Shek said that he would let my father-in-law go this time, but after leaving of the prison, he must go and pay his mother (Dingding’s grandmother He Xiangning,) a visit, as she was worrying sick about him.

Actually, at that time the Nationalist governments wanted to demonstrate to Chinese people that they were willing to work with the CCP after the defeat of the Japanese invaders. One of the so-called ‘good gestures’ actions was to release a few of the high-rank communist prisoners, including General Ye Ting, the commander of the New Fourth Army. After these top Communist officials were released from the Nationalist’s prisons, they went back to Yanan, the CCP base by plane. However, that plane crashed on the way there. Luckily, my father-in-law was not among the victims.

There were a few conspiratorial theories in China’s modern history that involved the Liao family. Not long after Dr Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Nationalist governments died of liver cancer in 1925, Dingding’s grandfather, Liao Zhongkai was assassinated in August the same

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<sup>2</sup> 廖仲恺

year. Under the leadership of Dr Sun, the Nationalist and the CCP were working together. Dr Sun was highly respected by the CCP too. Liao Zhongkai was one of the senior Nationalist Party leaders who was a great supporter to Sun's policies. Liao Zhongkai was also the one of the founders of the Whampoa Military Academy 黄埔军校. As Liao was an American overseas Chinese, when preparing for the Military Academy at the early 1920s, he naturally turned to the USA to ask for financial support. However, the US government did not want to get involved in the chaotic Chinese politics and they refused his request. As a result, Liao Zhongkai approached the new Soviet Union, which agreed to give him the full support with the money, weapons and the expertise. However, the condition was that the KMT should include the members of Communist Party in the Military Academy. Because of that, Liao Zhongkai was seen in public as one of the left-wing Nationalist leaders. After the assassination, Hu Hanmin, one of the right-wing leaders of the Nationalist Party was 'officially' identified for the person who was behind the murder of Liao Zhongkai. In fact, Hu and Liao were close friends in private for a long time. Hu was Dingding's only paternal aunt, Liao Mengxing's God Father and Hu was responsible for her education. The likelihood of Hu Hanmin himself being behind the killing of Liao Zhongkai was very low. The reality was that no one really knew who was responsible for the assassination. Many people in China believed that Chiang Kai Shek was a strong suspect, although he was one of the officials who investigated the case of assassination at the time. Chiang was known to be very loyal to Liao, as Liao helped him to climb up the political ladder. Anyway, without many senior party leaders in the way, Chiang Kai Shek got the top job of the country and became the leader of China.

Maybe the killing of his father and the breakdown of the relation between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party made Dingding's father join the Communist Party. Dingding's father was born and brought up in Japan, and later, he was educated in Europe. He went back to China to join the Fourth Division of the Red Army, which was led by Zhang Guotao, a Stalin style CCP leader, who persecuted anyone, who held opposition views. Not until Zhang Guotao lost his leadership position within the CCP, my father-in-law's suffering ended.

It was fascinating to hear Dingding's family history. I realised the toughness and cruelty of the modern politics in China, which was described as the struggle between life and death. I understood that the political struggle was real and personal. It made me understand the reason why China was like that and the ruthlessness of fighting for power. I appreciated Dingding's father's loyalty to Mao's leadership and his ideology. However, China's political value started

to change under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. It became freer and more open to the rest of the world, but China also rapidly became a more material-based country. It was sometimes difficult for me to follow. One day I was talking to Xiao Li, my father-in-law's bodyguard about studying abroad.

“Mandarin Deng<sup>3</sup> said that we should let youngsters to go abroad to study, if they wish.” Xiao Li said in mysterious tone.

“What? I've never heard anything like that in my life,” I responded. “If you let everyone go, who will be staying in China?”

“Deng says that they'll come back to China.” Xiao Li replied.

“No way! It's impossible,” I augured.

“Mandarin Deng says, if China is getting stronger economically, the educated ones will come back to help. The most important thing for us to do is to develop China's economy first, only then the overseas Chinese will come back to help just like many did in the 50s,” he looked at me and said, “So going to study in England is a good thing.” Xiao Li smiled.

Some of the high rank officials such as Yang Shangkun and Wang Zheng would sometimes come to visit Dingding's father. When they came, we would walk out the room, in case they have some important matters to discuss.

Finally, I received a phone call from the British Embassy in Beijing to say that my UK student visa was approved. At the same time, my siblings' applications to the USA were also in process. Mother had obtained a travel document for Hong Kong to visit Father. It meant that Yuyuda would have to come to live with Dingding to re-establish her life with her mother in Beijing. All Dingding's close supporters would not be there for her by the end of 1979. The next stage of our life became very real and imminent. Dingding and I had to face separation and the big changes in our life. It was even harder for our six-month-old new baby to face such changes.

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<sup>3</sup> Deng Xiaoping was known as Mandarin Deng 邓大人. 大人 Mandarin was used to address a high rank official in the Qing Imperial Court.

“It’ll be hard to live separately, especially when Dingding has to look after Yuyuda as well,” Xiao Zhao commented by trying to reassure me; “...but we are all here and will give Dingding the support that she needs.”

“Yes, Dingding, you’ll start a life of virtual widowhood,” Liao Hui Joked. Then he became more serious and said, “Talking about studying abroad, I think Dingding deserves more than anyone in this family, as she has the ability to study well.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll cope.” Dingding put on a brave face. “I’ll see Yungyung off in Guangzhou first, and then I’ll go to Shanghai to deal with the rest.”

Everything happened very fast. The following morning Dingding and I arranged the trip for the south. First, we had to go to Shanghai for me to say goodbye to my family and relatives. After that I had to go to Hong Kong before going to the UK, as there was no direct flights from Beijing to London in the late 1970s.

Dingding’s father was in the sitting room getting ready to go out for meetings. When he saw us walking in, he asked Mr Zheng, his secretary, “Who is the Ambassador to the UK now?”

“It’s Ke Hua,” Mr Zheng relied.

“Can you give Yungyung Ke Hua’s contact details please, just in case?” Dingding’s father asked. Then he turned to me and said, “Living separately can be tough and you both should be fully prepared for it.”

“We are prepared for that. I’ll try to come back in the summer break,” I said.

“Yes, that’s a good idea,” he agreed and went out for work.

“It won’t be a good idea. He can stop you going back to the UK at any time,” Dingding muttered to me. “I’ll try to find a way to meet you in Hong Kong in the summer. It’ll be better than you coming back to China,” Dingding added.

“...But I thought that you were not allowed to leave China,” I doubted her plan.

“I’ll find my way.” Dingding replied.

Before leaving Beijing, I had a farewell party. We made a large quantity of Chinese dumplings at home with the people of only our generation including the siblings of Youming, Dingding's sister-in-law's family.

Late September 1979 Dingding and I went to Guangzhou. We stayed a night in the 'Little Island' 小島, the government guesthouses in Guangzhou. The following day I said goodbye to Dingding to start my journey of a new life. I took the train to Luohu 罗湖 in Shenzhen 深圳, the border town between China and Hong Kong.

When I reached Kowloon Station in Hong Kong, it was in the early evening. The most surprising thing was to see the building lights that were fully lit against the dark sky. It gave me the impression of an overwhelming energy and the liveliness of the capitalist city. Father came to the station to meet me. Then he took me to see my grandmother whom I had not seen since I was six. Grandmother and Father lived in a tiny room with a bunkbed in a very small apartment in Hong Kong North Point. They had to share the kitchen and bathroom with their landlord family.

Father told me that his friend Mr Chen had invited Father and me to stay in his flat for the two nights when I was in Hong Kong. Father was looked after by his three friends, who were running a property company in Hong Kong. Mr Chen was one of the three owners of the company. He was a friendly, loud and hospitable character. Another owner of the company Mr Xu, who had many children. As most of Mr Xu's children had studied in the UK, I was encouraged to talk to them about the life in the UK as a student. They were all very helpful, positive and enthusiastic about their experiences in the UK, but their description of student life was completely foreign to me. After talking to them, I felt even more frightened, as I did not have the UK school education background. I realised that my life in the UK would be a long and hard struggle. I could not speak English. I felt that everything that I experienced in Hong Kong was rather overwhelming. These young people had their own cars, their own life styles and they were so independent. Was this kind of freedom that Dingding had been talking about? Was this kind of life style that Dingding I really wanted to pursue? My last five years in China was like riding on a roller coaster: from the Cultural Revolution to living in a poorest village as a re-educated youth; to working as a violinist in a provincial orchestra; to living with a family of China's top rank official in Beijing. Then finally, I was going to face a new aspect of life in the UK. Father told me that when he came out of China, he had nothing. Therefore, his friends offered him a job to work in their company. Because of his financial situation, sponsoring me

to study in the UK would be very hard. After spending two days in Hong Kong, I felt even more anxious and bewildered.

Having an English meal on the British Airways was another interesting experience. I can still remember eating Brussels sprouts first time. I was fascinated by these delicious baby cabbages and I loved them.

David Horn came to Heathrow to meet me by car and took me to his home in south-east London. As he was brought up in Beijing, David spoke perfect Mandarin. Actually, his Mandarin was much better than mine. He and his wife Chang Yuan was going through a divorce procedure. Chang Yuan went back to Thailand with their two sons, when David was trying to finish his PhD at Imperial College London. That evening he offered me some French red wine at the supper. It was my first experience of drinking French wine. Only then, I realised that French red wine had no sugary taste. That early evening, I felt rather strange. David told me that I was suffering from jet lag. I did not know that the time difference could have such weird effect on me. Two days later, David Horn took me to meet Janet, my English landlady, in Fitzjohun's Avenue, in Hampstead area. Not until then I found out that my rent was much more than I had anticipated. As a result, I had to cut down my food budget. I could only afford having some bread. Occasionally I would have some tinned fish, as I had to save some money for the transport in London, which was expensive too. The English School that I went was near to the Goodge Street Underground Station. The class was too difficult for me to follow. Once the teacher asked me a question very slowly for a few times, I still could not understand her. Finally, she could only say, "Poor Kan." I put my surname before my given name, as any Chinese people did, so everyone called me by my surname. Partly because nobody could manage to say my given name properly, not even a Chinese person, as it was spelled wrong in my passport in the first place.

However, I really enjoyed the walk from the Belsize Park Underground Station to Fitzjohun's Avenue. It was a peaceful and quiet walk, which gave me time to think, unlike the atmosphere in Hong Kong, which was fast and noisy. Life in the UK was not as materialistic as it was in Hong Kong. There were plenty of music and art activities in London. There were free concerts in churches and free entry to museums and galleries. However, I desperately missed the life in Beijing and I missed my family and the new baby Yuyuda. Although Dingding sent me letters and Yuyuda's photos every week, I still felt homesick. Because of the drastic cutting down on

the expenses on food and enduring the changes of my life, I lost 19 kilos in my first year in the UK. It actually was not a bad thing. I was slightly overweight when I was living in Beijing.

Life was also difficult for Dingding and Yuyuda in Beijing, although there was a nannie to look after Yuyuda, all the mental support that Dingding had before was no longer there anymore.

To my surprise, Dingding somehow had persuaded her father to let Yuyuda and herself to come to Hong Kong to see me over my first summer vacation. I struggled through the year in all the aspects and saved enough money to buy a plane ticket for Hong Kong in the summer.

Dingding and Yuyuda went to Hong Kong before my arrival. Mother went to the Station to meet them, but she waited there for ages. After all the passengers left the train, she was still standing on the platform and could not find Dingding and Yuyuda. With the disappointment and worries, she went back home. A (long-awaited) little while later, Mother had a phone call from the Xinhua News Agency (which was the official Chinese representative office in Hong Kong then), saying that Dingding and Yuyuda had safely arrived in Hong Kong and asked Mother to go there to fetch them. Mother went there without delay and saw Dingding sitting there with some blood on her shirt. Yuyuda was entertained by some of the office workers. Mother was puzzled and anxiously tried to find out what was going on.

“I went to the station to meet you and Yuyuda, but I couldn't find you there,” Mother explained.

“After crossing the border, Dingding suddenly fainted and fell on the ground. When she woke up, she asked the border guards to call us, so I sent a car to fetch them. They didn't get onto the train. After they've arrived here I asked our doctor to check her briefly and I immediately phoned you to let you know that they are safely here,” one of the important looking guy explained the situation to Mother. “She is OK now. I can send a car to take all of you home. Just let us know where you want to go.”

They were driven to an old and dilapidated three-bedroom building in a rough area of Quanwan, in Hong Kong New Territory. The house was quite far away from the Hong Kong Island. The building was bought for redevelopment by the company that Father was working for. Father's friends, the owners of the company thought that the sudden increase of the family members made my grandmother's one-room accommodation in the North Point impossible to manage. After Linlin and Duoduo came to Hong Kong, they temporarily stayed with the Chen family, as their children were in the USA, so they had spare bedrooms for my sisters. Mother was the last one to come out of China. Before she left, Mother handed the keys of our Shanghai flat to



Dingding and she also let my aunt (her sister) and her family use the flat, but she left the front bedroom locked for Dingding whenever she wanted to come to Shanghai to stay. Before Mother arrived in Hong Kong, Father's friends thought that the house in Quanwan could be a temporary solution for the whole family of three generations. When Mother first arrived in Hong Kong and saw the condition of the accommodation and the standard of living, she was so upset and depressed. She wanted to go back to Shanghai immediately. Somehow, Father persuaded her by saying that going through that difficult phase of life was for the sake of the next generation. It would give the children's future a chance.

Both Linlin and Duoduo had been given students visa to study in Alaska, but the US embassy in Beijing rejected Ganjing's application. The reason was that he had not reached the age for university education in the States. Somehow, Dingding got Ganjing a place in a college in Guangzhou where she had more connections that might help Ganjing to go to Hong Kong. When Dingding heard that both Linlin and Duoduo had abandoned their plan of studying in the USA, she was not very pleased. Father explained that with his financial situation, it would be impossible to support all his children to study abroad. When Dingding arrived in the family accommodation in Quanwan, she saw that my family's social and financial situations were no longer like the ones that she knew of in Shanghai. Duoduo was working in the same company with Father, but Linlin was working in a glove factory, which was run by my cousin. They were just like any immigrants from mainland China in Hong Kong and had to start everything from the beginning again. It must be a shocking experience for Dingding to see all of that. Dingding had high level connections in Hong Kong with her relations such as the Tam family and friends such as Cha Chi Ming and Liu Ding Zhong who were the main players in Hong Kong's political and financial circles. Dingding took me to meet all of her friends and relations in Hong Kong. Most of the socialising activities took place in clubs, restaurants and homes: we were invited for many extravagant meals, which were way above my family's league; the places that they lived were for the Hong Kong upper classes. Some of them invited Dingding, Yuyuda and me to stay with them, but Dingding politely rejected their kind offers and told them that we must be with our immediate family. Father's friends, the owners of the property company invited everyone in the family out for meals a few times. Dingding was always friendly and entertaining in all the social events. As she spoke fluent Cantonese unlike the rest of my family members, everybody who we met in Hong Kong loved her and said that she did not have the manners of Chinese leaders' children and she was so easy going and friendly with common people. The social experiences that I went through over that summer were emotionally

overwhelming and as if, I relived my earlier life in China: rapidly going through all the lives of different social classes.

However, since she had the trouble when crossing the border, Dingding knew that she was not well. Dr Chen, a high rank hospital consultant in Hong Kong, a family friend of Dingding's carried out a major check-up for her, but could not find anything wrong.

Xiao Zhao, her sister-in-law came to Hong Kong with her Beijing Central Ballet Company to perform. When it was her day off, we spent a day together in Hong Kong Ocean Park. Yuyuda started her first step in Hong Kong. Mother was over the moon when she saw Yuyuda again. Dingding and Yuyuda's arrival somehow cheered Mother up and made that summer enjoyable for everyone.

"I'm enjoying myself too, and I am happy when I am with you" she smiled. "Why shouldn't I enjoy myself when I can? Anyway, I'll have to go back in a month time."

"What a pity. Why can't you stay here for a bit longer?" Duoduo asked.

"I've promised my father: when Yungyung goes back to the UK, I will bring Yuyuda home."

One afternoon we received a phone call from my cousin saying that Linlin had an industrial accident in the factory. A machine that she was operating had badly damaged her left hand and was in the hospital waiting to be operated on. Dingding immediately jumped into action and phoned Dr Chen to arrange the best surgeon to operate on her. Dr Chen transferred Linlin to St Marry Hospital where he had more control. When Dingding arrived in hospital, doctors explained the situation in details and were trying very hard to save as many fingers as possible for Linlin. Dingding was grateful to all the medical team for making a great effort and provided Linlin with excellent care. Maybe it was her manner, some of the hospital staff mistook Dingding to a high rank official from Beijing.

Six weeks went by very quickly. It was the time for me to go back to the UK. A few days after I had left, Dingding went back to Beijing with Yuyuda as she had promised her father. She had made many new friends in Hong Kong. A month after she went back to Beijing, she sent me some photos of her in different fashionable outfits that her friends gave her as presents and the ones that she bought in Hong Kong. She wrote to me and said that she could understand clearly that my family was struggling to survive in Hong Kong and she would be depressed if she was

in Mother's situation. She said that she would try to find a way to help the family. Although the final aim of us living together seemed to be even further away, we both still thought that the price was worth paying. We talked about the consequence of a long period of separation and we both knew perfectly well that it would make us grow apart, but felt that we should give each other space and needs. The only thing that we could hang on to was our trust and the feeling for each other. We always reminded ourselves how we came together despite of the difficulties in the early stage of our relationship. I felt that there was a strange force driving us through a desperate situation. We talked a lot and tried hard to be positive about everything, but I could also sense the sadness from her too.

Early in 1981, Dingding wrote to me and said that she went to stay in the Shanghai flat for a few days. She had a plan, which was to ask Father's work place for his pension. When Father left for Hong Kong, he did not claim his pension for working in a state-owned work place for thirty years. Partly Father wanted his work place to believe that he was coming back to Shanghai after visiting my grandmother in Hong Kong. People in the similar situation would do the same. Dingding said that if she could claim Father's pension successfully, she would ask her overseas friends, who came to Beijing, to use the RMB that she got from Father's pension fund. She would ask them to pay me in the GBP in London, so that Father did not have to pay for my tuition fees and living expenses in the UK anymore. In the early 1980s, the RMB was still very much state controlled currency that could not be taken out of China. I spent a hundred and twenty pounds from the first lot of the GBP that I received from Dingding on a French-made copy of a 1721 Strad violin from my landlady's cousin. He had a few old violins that he wanted to get rid of and, he was willing to sell them cheaply, I thought it was an opportunity to get one. However, I never told Dingding that.

As planned, I phoned Dingding on 15 March to wish her happy birthday. She said that she had not felt very well. The previous day, Aunt Zhu arranged a birthday party for her, inviting some singers and dancers to entertain her. She was reluctant to get out of the house, but felt that she ought to go. Xiao Zhao went there with her, but they did not stay there for long. Dingding said it was a typical style of Aunt Zhu's party, which was full of joy and laughter. Although she liked it, she felt something was missing. The following two days Dingding spent quite a lot of time in bed. Her parents thought that she might be depressed. Her father talked her, asked her to be positive, and encouraged her to go to work. He thought that getting out of the house might make her feel better.

Two days after her birthday I had a phone call from Pingping, Dingding's second older brother.

"I think that you should come back to Beijing as soon as possible," he said in a serious tone.

"Why? What is going on," I asked.

"Dingding is very ill in hospital," he said.

"How serious is her illness?" I asked.

"Very serious," he replied.

"Really? What is her present situation?" I asked, but Pingping did not reply. I could sense something was seriously wrong and asked again.

"Is there any hope?"

"No, I am afraid, not at all," he said. "We are waiting for you to come home," our conversation ended then.

"What is going on and what does that mean?" I asked myself. I phoned my family in Hong Kong immediately. They found it strange too. In the past, Dingding had warned me that there might be a possibility that her father would call me back to China. I could not tell if the situation was real or not. In addition, there was no way for me to check either. Anyway, I had no choice, but had to book a ticket for Hong Kong immediately. When I arrived in Hong Kong and I phoned home in Beijing again and only then I learned that Dingding died on 17 March. Mother and I bought the plane tickets to go back to Beijing immediately.

The morning of 17 March, as Dingding had been feeling unwell, Lingdi, the helper in the house came to her room and brought her breakfast on a tray. Dingding was sitting up in bed. Lingdi left the breakfast with her and told Dingding that she would come back to fetch the tray when she finished the breakfast. About half of an hour later, Lingdi came into the room and discovered that Dingding had lost consciousness. She immediately informed Dingding's mother who called the hospital where Dingding worked. The hospital suggested that it would be much quicker if the family could bring her into hospital by car immediately. However, that morning Dingding's father had an early morning meeting and the car and the driver were out. Dingding's mother called Youming, Dingding's sister-in-law's family, which was only two streets away, to ask if their family car was available. Youming's mother sent the car to Dingding's house immediately and Uncle Yang, the gardener, held Dingding and got into the

car. She was taken to the A and E Department, but after 30 minutes, the hospital announced that Dingding was dead. When Dingding's father came home from his meeting, he was shocked to hear the news. He gathered all the family members in house and said, "I would like to suggest that the hospital must carry out a post-mortem examination on Dingding."

"...But we don't know... what if they discovered that... she had killed herself by taking sleeping pills..." Dingding's mother was worried about the cause of her death. And of course, she worried that if Dingding had committed suicide, it would not look good on an important public figure like her husband.

"We will have to explain the cause of Dingding's death to Yungyung. We must find out the truth" Dingding's father was very adamant.

"Liao Hui, could you please look into this and liaise with hospital?" He asked his oldest son to take charge of this. "We have to inform Yungyung and ask him to come back as soon as possible."

"OK, I'll phone Yungyung," said Pingping, Dingding's second oldest brother.

The autopsy results came out and it said that Dingding died of aneurism. It said that her aneurism was on the inner wall of her main artery next to her heart. Xiao Ping, a colleague of Dingding was there during the entire autopsy procedure. She told me that there were clear evidences of the scars on her kidneys that were left from the lupus that Dingding developed in her late teens and her blood vessels were very brittle, which properly was caused by taking the hormone steroid during her treatment of the lupus. These were all the facts that might contribute to her sudden death.

Her funeral was held in the hospital where she had worked. Many people came to her funeral. Dingding's father came too and to everyone's surprise, he made a speech. We all regretted that we did not record his words. What I could remember from his speech was that Dingding never yield to any political bullying. During the early period of the Cultural Revolution when the extreme-left political power and the Gang of Four was in control, Dingding stood firmly on her belief of humanity. She had a clear sense of right and wrong. Many people appreciated what she did for them and they would always remember her.

Yes, indeed. These words described Dingding's characters very well. Even in her own family, Dingding was the person who always liked fighting for justice. If her mother treated her sister-

in-law badly, she would immediately tell her mother off. She simply could not stand watching the suffering of injustice.

The following day Dingding's father had a talk with me.

"There are a few decisions that you will have to make. Would you consider coming back to China? Or, are you going to stay abroad?" He asked directly and I did not expect him to ask me such straightforward questions, so I hesitated.

"You have to make the decision and I will try my best to help you," he paused a little and continued, "If you decide to come back, I can help you to build your career here, but I can't help you much if you decide to stay abroad." He explained a little more of his questions.

"Thanks, but it was Dingding's wish to go abroad and I think I'll stay in the UK to carry on my study." I said.

"What about Yuyuda?" He asked. "You can't look after her as well as doing your study."

"Early Xiao Zhao was very kindly said that Yuyuda could live with them, as Liao Hui always wanted to have a daughter." I pause for a little while. "Everyone is very kind, but I think I should do what Dingding wanted. If it is possible, Yuyuda should stay with my mother in Hong Kong for the time being. Besides, she knows my mother well."

"What about Dingding's Ashes? Are you going to take them with you to the UK too? I don't think this is a good idea. You can leave one-half of ashes here and the other half in Hong Kong... It's a tradition in Japan that one often leaves half of the ashes with her original family." Dingding's father explained.

"I think that I would like to take her out of China. I'll leave her ashes in Hong Kong temporarily."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure." I was very definite.

"OK, in this case, I'll ask someone to get Yuyuda's a travel document for Hong Kong. It shouldn't take very long." He said.

When I first heard the news of Dingding's death, I was completely shocked, but I could not take in the fact that she was no longer there. After the funeral, I physically felt pain, sadness and despair. My decision for the future, namely Yuyuda and myself was driven by that emotion.

I felt that Dingding had become a martyr for the freedom that she wanted so badly. She had been longing to get out of China and to have an independent life, but after helping every member of my family to leave China, she died in China. How could I just leave her there? I thought that as she could not leave China when she was alive, it would be my duty to take her with me then. That was something I must do for her.

I was very sure that Dingding's death must have caused her parents a great deal of pain as well. It must be very hard for Dingding's father to realise that the world had changed and the trend of China's political value had changed too. Most importantly, Mao's ideology that he tried so hard to uphold was gradually crumbling around him. He tried so hard to set a good example for the people of China, but the whole Party had moved away from that. He must have felt that he could no longer hold his family hostage for the sake of this outdated political value.

That evening Dingding's father gave me a wallet. There were two thousand US dollar notes inside. He said, "I won't be able to help you much for your study in the UK. That is what I have. Please take it." The cash must be the leftover money from his heart operation in the USA a year before. I was very much moved by his gesture and I gratefully accepted his help. Later he told all of his children, "From now on, it'll be your own choice whether you want to stay in China or to go abroad. And I won't stop you leaving China anymore."

I was so tired went into bed, but could not sleep. I suddenly remembered that I was given some sleeping pills by Xiao Zhao. I took one and waited...

...As someone in the funeral hinted that Dingding was hiding somewhere in Shanghai, I decided to go there to find out what she did and why she disappeared after her last trip in Shanghai. I paid a visit to Maomao, one of her close friends in Shanghai, but she told me that she had not seen Dingding for a little while. Somehow, I could sense that she was not telling me the truth. I kept badgering her and finally she told me that Dingding did not want to see me again and she had found her new life in Shanghai. Maomao also said that some members of Dingding's family also knew her situation, as Dingding would occasionally go back to Beijing to visit her family. Dingding was adamant that she did not want to me to know anything about her new life and I should stop looking for her.

I was convinced that it was just a bad dream and I did not believe that Dingding would do anything like that to me or to her daughter. My guess was that she must have been taken by

somebody. I was very determined to find those who were responsible. When I was wondering in the misty raining streets of Shanghai tried to find some clues, suddenly I heard the sound of violin playing. At the beginning, I could not recognise the tune. I followed the music to the doorway of the big cathedral in Shanghai People's Square. I recognised the music and it was the D major section of Bach's Chaconne for solo violin. I knew the music well, as one of my colleagues practised it regularly when I was in Ma'anshan. I walked into the cathedral, but I could not see the violinist, instead I saw three beard western people in ancient clothing, sitting at a grand-looking table, decorated with gold in the middle of the cathedral. Somehow, I sensed that those people who could give me the answers. I told them the story of my missing wife. They listened very hard and carefully, but as if, they could not hear me. I got more and more frustrated and heated. Finally, I became so angry to the extent that I accused them for kidnapping Dingding. They seemed puzzled and could not understand why I was so furious and emotional. I was shaking and screamed at them, "Look, when I come back here later, I will change everything! I mean everything! Can't you see, there is something seriously wrong with your lot?" I was despaired and exhausted. When I walked out the cathedral, I could hear Chaconne again, but this time it was the third section of the piece, which was a sobbing melody in the minor key. Somehow, I disappointingly realised that if I was sitting at same place as those three westerners in the cathedral, I would be just as emotionless as them.

That emotionally draining nightmare haunted me repeatedly in the first three years after Dingding's death. I tried hard to understand that dream. Somehow, it made me believe that some part of me was selfishly emotionless and did not want to understand other people's feeling, but some part of me was trying hard to break free. The country that I was brought up and lived in had been snatched away from me and I felt completely lost. As if, I was drifting away into an unknown land holding onto my old values and memories. All the events in the past were just like some sort of ornaments and decorations on the mantelpiece of my memory. I kept telling myself that I should be more positive and loving. Dingding, my parents and many people around me had all made different degree of sacrifice for their loved ones. I believed that those who were brave enough to embrace the selfless love, would always make a better world for everyone.