

Chapter Twenty-one

Living with the Liao family

About six months after I had arrived in Beijing, one late afternoon in February, Dingding's father came home in a rather agitated mood and he asked Xiao Li, his new bodyguard to bring out a large and powerful shortwave radio receiver from his bedroom to the sitting room. He was trying to tune into some foreign radio stations.

“What's going on? Why is the old man like this?” I asked Xiao Li, as I was rather concerned.

“Maybe something major is happening. They've just had a meeting.” Xiao Li muttered briefly.

“What?” I asked.

“The old man won't say.” Xiao Li replied.

My father-in-law never discussed his work with his family members. Not until the following day, I found out from the daily newspapers that China launched a large-scale military offence in Vietnam at midnight of the previous day to start so called the Third Indochina War. No wonder my father-in-law was worried about the world opinions on China's action.

At that time, many Chinese people believed that the story behind the war was like this. During his visit to the USA earlier 1979, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping¹ must have discussed his plan with the USA government. China wanted to ease the Indochina's political tension, which was indirectly controlled by the USSR. At that time, Cambodia was occupied by Vietnam, the ally of the USSR. As there had been too many Sino-Vietnam boarder incidents, China wanted to take a major military offensive to 'teach Vietnam a lesson', but it was also worried that as a result of its military action in the south, the USSR might create trouble on China's northern border. China would like the USA to be on its side when its military action took place. Although the USA did not publicly support China's action against Vietnam, it was believed that the USA might have provided China with some Vietnamese military information, as the US army had just left Vietnam. On his way back to China, Vice-Premier Deng might also have discussed his plan with the Japanese Prime Minister. It was believed that after coming back from his round world trip, Deng held a meeting with the China's

¹ Although Deng's official title was the Vice-Premier, he was the real leader behind the China's political scene.

senior politicians and military leaders. His rationale was that a large scale of short and sharp military offensive might change the Indochina region's political situation. Vietnam might call back its main force from Cambodia to deal with China's attack from the north, so that it would ease its grip over Cambodia. Although the USA and Japan were not publicly backing China's military action, they were not completely against it either. China's campaign must be effective and short. China's leadership hoped to launch an attack that was similar to the Sino-India conflict in 1962. China thought that a two-week-long large-scale military campaign might achieve its political objectives. It would also be a good opportunity for the Chinese army to be engaged in the real battlefields. The aim was that as soon as the Chinese force reached the capital of Vietnam, China would immediately draw back its forces to its border.

Unfortunately, the implementation and the outcome of the battles were not at all like Deng had expected. The war lasted much longer and it caused a large casualty too. People in China were watching the situation developing with a heavy heart. The worst thing was that it did not improve the regional political situation either, as Vietnam did not withdraw its army from Cambodia to deal with China's attack. However, it must be said that the Sino-Vietnam border conflict was stopped after the war was ended.

Within the first month I was in Beijing, Dingding and I paid a few visits to Aunt Zhu, who looked after Dingding when she moved out of home. Aunt Zhu lived in a big house with a beautiful garden, which was scattered with colourful Chinese flowering crab-apple trees. The house was situated in Di'anmen 地安门, not far from the Imperial Gardens. Someone said that the house was once used by Chiang Kai Shek when he came to Beijing to stay before the Communist took over the power. Dingding introduced me to many of her friends in Beijing. Apart from her colleagues in the hospital that she was working for, most of them were from the same social circle, including Maomao (Deng Rong, Deng Xiaoping's youngest daughter). Xiaohui was one of her closest friends. Xiaohui's father Su Yu, was a very talented general of Chinese army and an important military leader who fought the Nationalist government out of power. Xiaohui's family was in another big house near Aunt Zhu. Xiaohui was married to Xiaolu, whose father, Chen Yi was one of the ten Chinese marshals and was the Foreign Minister of China from 1958 to 1972. Both Chen Yi and Su Yu were the commanders of China's Third Field Army, which played a major role in the most decisive battles with the Nationalists over the second civil-war period (between 1945 and 1949). Xiaohui often came to visit Dingding and they shared many common interests and talked a lot. Xiaohui admired

Dingding's boldness and her courage. Dingding dared to cross beyond the expected boundary. Xiaohui told me many stories about Dingding. One of which was that, over the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, many top officials were either locked up or were under house-arrest, as they were labelled as Capitalist Roaders 走资派. Dingding was not afraid of visiting them at their homes or in hospitals. When Dingding heard that Wan Li², her father's colleague was hospitalised she went to hospital to visit him and brought him some food that she had cooked for him. A Red Guard at the door questioned the purpose of her visit. Dingding replied, "I am coming to deliver some food for a patient."

"A patient? Which patient? The Red Guard asked.

"Wan Li, who was hospitalised a few days ago," Dingding answered.

"What is your relationship to this Capitalist Roader?" The Red Guard asked with a suspicious tone.

"Mind your own bloody business!" Pointing her finger at the Red Guard's nose, she shouted in the top of her voice, "How dare you, to ask ME questions like this! What the fuck do you think you are! Get out of my way immediately!" Dingding was in a furious rage. As no one ever dared to talk to the Red Guards in such abusive manner and normally they were the abusers but not the abused. That Red Guard was in a total shock and did not know how to respond. He just let her in.

"They treated people inhumanly, so they deserved to be shouted at," Dingding commented with a smile but was slightly embarrassed.

Dingding did not have a sense of fear. Somehow, she was driven by her own inner guidance rather than external pressure. Xiaohui's description of Dingding also explained much more about Dingding's characters and the actions that she took over period of our early relationship. She would fight on for whatever she thought was right and would not yield to pressure.

Under the political influence of the Cultural Revolution, most Chinese people were wearing blue and grey colours in the 1970s, but Dingding read books and magazines from abroad. She was interested in fashion and beauty. She was not afraid of bringing the western consuming

² After the Cultural Revolution, in late 1980s Wan Li became Chairman of China's National People's Congress (the head of the national legislature).

ideas and fashions into China. She influenced her peer and the friends around her. She was very much ahead of her time.

One Sunday her siblings came home for a family meal. After dinner, the family was sitting in the sitting room having the usual chats.

Liao Jian, Dingding's oldest sister looked at Dingding and made a genuinely innocent comment, "You do look like someone from Hong Kong."

"Come on, you are really slow, aren't you? Can't you see, this is our family's beauty queen," Liao Hui, her oldest brother made a joke with his sense of humour, but somehow, he managed to insult both sisters.

"When you go out, don't you mind people looking at you?" Doudou, her youngest brother asked Dingding.

"So what?" Dingding replied. "It's a free world."

"I don't think so, some people would say you are influenced by the Capitalist ideology," Doudou teased his sister.

"Yes, right. What about Old Mao having his young lovers? No one dares to talk about that in public," Dingding replied.

"That's different. Maybe it isn't true," Doudou said.

"Of course, it's the truth," Dingding was in the fighting mood again.

Dingding's father stood up and walked into his room. It was obvious that he was not pleased to hear any criticisms of Chairman Mao; even Mao was dead and was no longer in charge of China. As a result, the conversation was halted.

Later in the evening Dingding explained to me that her father was very loyal to Mao, even though he was locked away to be interrogated during Mao's Cultural Revolution.

"I really would like to get out of here," Dingding said suddenly.

"Why?" I asked.

"...This place is too claustrophobic... There is no freedom for individuals," she replied.

“Yes, I’ve heard that from you before, but why don't you just get out?” I asked.

“I can’t,” she sighed.

“Why not? Just get out of China, like Deng Zhifang³ who has applied to go to the States to study.”

“My father has vowed that as long as he is alive, no one from the Liao family should leave China and go abroad.”

“Why did he say that?” I asked.

“He thinks that the Communist Party leaders should not take advantage of their power for the benefit of their own families and they should set good examples for the people of China.” Dingding explained.

“But... Deng Xiaoping is one of the most important leaders in the CCP. How come he let his son go to the States?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we have too many relations abroad; maybe if we go, it might cause problems for his work here, but I really don’t know the real reason...” she paused for a little. Looked at me and said “...but you can, because your surname isn’t Liao,” her face suddenly lit up. “I’ll try to get you out.”

“Are you sure? Even if I were allowed to go, it would mean that we are going to be separated again. Do you really want that?” I was not convinced by her idea. “You are pregnant. I think this plan is too risky.”

“Come on; no pain no gain 没有付出就没有收获. When we started going out, it was also an impossible situation. You didn’t expect the present outcome then, did you?” she said with confidence. “Remember: if we try our best all the time, and don’t always expect for the best outcome, then nothing would hurt us...” She smiled. “I have a plan... Your resident permit is still in Ma’anshan, isn’t it?”

“Yes...” I answered.

“OK, that’s good. Whatever we do, you don't mention this to my father.” Dingding instructed.

³ Deng Xiaoping’s youngest son.

The following evening Dingding and I went to pay a visit to Aunt Bian Tao, Wang Li's wife. When we enter their house, Aunt Bian Tao was very pleased to see Dingding and she told me that Dingding was not at all afraid of visiting her husband in hospital regularly and brought him food when he was in house-arrest at the early stage of the Cultural Revolution.

After the Cultural Revolution, Wan Li was rehabilitated. His third post was the CCP First Secretary to Anhui Province. In other words, he was in charge of Anhui. Although his home was in Beijing, Wan Li spent a lot of time working in Anhui. Dingding explained her plan to Aunt Bian Tao and asked if Wan Li would help me to get a passport, so that I could apply for schools abroad. Aunt Bian Tao listened very carefully then asked, "What about you, Dingding?"

"I can't go. My father won't let me go with him," Dingding looked at me. Aunt Bian Tao nodded and said. "I understand. Let me talk to your uncle Wan, and we'll see what we can do for Yungyung."

"Please don't tell my father about this yet. We'll tell him our plan as soon as Yungyung has got his passport."

The telephone in the sitting room rang and Dingding answered. It was Guo Zhiyu, daughter of Guo Linshuang, a famous Chinese entrepreneur and the owner of Yong'an Company in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Guo Zhiyu was a friend of my uncle Lin Shenghe who lived in Germany. Guo would like to pay a visit to Dingding's father. By coincidence, he was in the sitting room at that moment. Dingding pressed the "hold" button on the phone and asked her father if she could come to visit. To everyone's surprise, Dingding's father said yes without hesitation.

Guo came with her husband Shen Jianbai who was an engineer by training and had many patent products. However, they came to Beijing on behalf of the Sheraton Group to talk to Dingding's father about building multifunctional tourist centres, hotels and resorts in China. In the late 1970s, the most advanced hotel in Beijing was Peking Hotel, which was like a dinosaur comparing with the ideas that Guo and Shen proposed. Dingding's father liked their ideas for the development. After the couple had left the house, Dingding's father said that when Guo announced her name on the phone, he mistook her with another person, who he worked with when he was doing the 'underground' work before 1949. It was an unexpected

but productive meeting for him. Guo and Shen's plan was to build ten large hotels and resorts in major Chinese cities with multimillion dollars of investment. Dingding and I were mesmerised by their bold ideas. We were impressed by their rapid responsiveness and effectiveness: any questions or requests that they could not give on the spot, they delivered them in the following day. Dingding was very enthusiastic and did not mind to help them to get things off the ground. We often went to Peking Hotel where they stayed to talk to them. They worked hard and were on the phone all the time. A week later, they even produced detailed plans and drawings of hotels and resorts for different cities in China according to the local conditions. The couple travelled to the cities to negotiate their plans with the local authorities after Dingding's father had contacted the relevant local governments. We met Guo and Shen again after their first round-China -trip. To my surprise, there were less than a handful of Chinese local authorities, who were willing to discuss their tourist development plans. It looked very disappointing, after all the effort that they had put into the project. However, Guo was still positive about it and said that it was quite common in the business world. At end (in 1985), she only successfully built one such hotel. It was the Great Wall Sheraton Hotel in Beijing, which was the first large scale western hotel in China.

Guo got along with Dingding well. They had the similar personalities, which were very open, talkative and innovative. Guo told us how they got to know my uncle Lin Shenghe in the States before his family immigrated to Germany.

One day, Guo asked us to join her for dinner at Peking Hotel. The conversation carried on after the dinner. Dingding was in her usual charming offensive mode.

“Can you tell me if there is anything at all that I could do for you both?” Guo suddenly asked us. Dingding and I did not expect that. It caught us by surprise.

“Could you get Linlin, Duoduo and Ganjing to the States to study?” Dingding asked. I was double shocked, as we had never discussed this between ourselves. I was just sitting there and became speechless.

“What about you both?” Guo asked.

“No, I won't be able to leave China. My father won't let me.”Dingding replied briskly.

Dingding explained a little more about my siblings' situation and told Guo that it would be wonderful if she could find somewhere in the States that would offer them some scholarships. It was very bold of Dingding to take the initiative and spoke on behalf of all my siblings.

“OK. I'll see what I can do for them. I'll let you know the possibilities when I come back to Beijing in two weeks' time.”

When we were walking out Peking Hotel, I asked Dingding, “Why did you say that? We haven't even discussed it with any of my siblings.”

She laughed and said, “When an opportunity comes up, you have to grab it. When it goes away, it won't come back again, you know? There is no time to ask questions and make discussions, OK?”

We immediately informed my sisters and brother. Dingding told them to learn English to prepare for any possible courses or university programmes abroad. Two weeks later, Guo came back with an US academic, Prof Kennedy of Alaska University. We were told that there was a possibility for three pre-university places with bursaries in Alaska for my siblings, but they would have to find some part-time work to earn their living expenses. Dingding reckoned that my siblings should get out of China with the first opportunity. Although Alaska was not an ideal place, it was in the USA and it was an opportunity to study abroad. Again, we both made the decision for my siblings and accepted the offers, so that they could get the ball rolling for the visa application procedures.

In April 1979, Aunt Bian Tao phoned Dingding saying that my passport was ready for collection at the main police station of Ma'anshan, Anhui province, but I would have to collect it in person. Just by chance, Dingding's father was going to take a ship to visit Japan with a large group of Chinese delegation, in order to promote Sino-Japan relation. It was planned that the voyage would start from Shanghai. As the preparations for the trip was going to happen in Shanghai, her father decided to go to Shanghai by train. Dingding asked her father if we could go to Shanghai with them.

“As you both are going to be away around the time of the birth of your grandchild, It would be much better for me to Shanghai, so that Yungyung's mother could be there to look after me and the baby. Yungyung has to go to Nanjing for a day or two. After that, we both can see you off in Shanghai. Don't you think that is a good plan?” Dingding said it very persuasively.

“I think it’s a good idea, since there won’t be anyone here to look after her when she is having her baby, she should come to Shanghai with us.” Dingding’s mother supported the idea.

“Yes, of course. Just let Secretary Zheng know that they both will be travelling with us to Shanghai.” Dingding’s father agreed and rushed out for another meeting.

We were driven onto the Beijing Railway Station platform where two special carriages were waiting for us. The carriages were attached to the end of a normal scheduled train to Shanghai. In our carriage, there was a sitting room with a table, sofas and some soft chairs. Going further into the carriage, there were two main bedrooms. Both bedroom and the double bedroom attached to bathrooms and then followed by a compartment of two-bed soft berth and another compartment of four bunk beds with a shared washroom in between. The kitchen and dining area were in the second carriage and there were accommodations for the entourage. I had to tell Secretary Zheng in advance that I was getting off in Nanjing, as our carriage doors were not allowed to open when the train stopped at the platforms on its way to Shanghai. As soon as I got off the train in Nanjing, I went into the main ticket hall and got myself a ticket for Ma’anshan. After leaving Ma’anshan railway station, I went to the city’s main police station straight away. I established who I was and the purpose of my visit. Then I was asked to wait before I was called into an interview room where a police officer was sitting at the other side of a table holding my passport.

“What is your name?” the officer asked. I announced my full name. I had been warned that when collecting an official document for travelling abroad, one would have to listen to a ‘lecture of Chinese politics’. So I was fully prepared for a serious talk about how to behave when living abroad from the police officer. He looked at me again and said, “Anyway, in your case, I’ve got nothing much to say. I am sure your father-in-law has already told you all. No need for me to repeat it again,” he just handed the passport over to me.

“Is that all?” I asked.

“Yes, but before you go, you’d better check through everything on the passport to see if all the information is correct.”

I looked through the document carefully and noticed that my name in English was spelt wrong and my occupation was described as a ‘player’. However, I did not want to complain or to ask any more questions, as I knew that if I had asked them to correct the information, it

would have been another long delay, so I just said, “They all look fine to me.” I shook his hand and left the police station.

My plan was to catch a train to Shanghai on the same day. When I arrived at the station, the tickets for the fast trains that evening were already sold out and there were only tickets for the over-night slow train still available. I just got the first possible ticket and sat on an overcrowded and messy carriage on my way to Shanghai. It reminded me of the trips that I made in the winters of the 1970s: coming back to Shanghai from the countryside. What a big contrast, compared it to my first part of the journey to the south.

When I arrived in Shanghai, I went my family flat before going to Ruijin Guest Houses (RGH) 瑞金宾馆 where Dingding’s family was allocated to stay. The RGH compound was the Benjamin Morris family estate in the early 20 Century. It contained four large western style houses over a big private park. After the Communist took over the power in 1949, it became the official residence of Chen Yi, the first Shanghai Mayer (who was Xiaolu’s father). Later the RGH became the Chinese government’s guesthouses. Dingding’s family stayed in a French style building within the compound. Dingding and I were in one of the bedrooms on the first floor. As my family was invited for a French meal with Dingding’s parents at RGH that evening, I went to the RGH with my sisters in the afternoon. Both sitting and dining rooms and my parents-in-law’s bedroom were on the ground floor. There was a long-corridor like sitting area with a row of south-facing French-windows. There was an old upright piano on the east side of that sitting area. Although it was slightly out of tune, I used it for my practice and music homework. All the houses in the compound were occupied by the members of the delegation for the trip to Japan. There were families including Su Yu, Xue Ming (He Long⁴’s wife) and Deng Lin (Deng Xiaoping’s oldest daughter) ... A week before the ship setting off for Japan, many of them had their outfits made by the craftsmen in Shanghai. Tailors, shoemakers and other useful people were asked to the compound to do the measurements for those who were going on the trip.

A week went by quickly. After Dingding’s parents left for Japan, Dingding went to stay with Mother for the last month of her pregnancy and I went back to Beijing to continue my music studies there. Before we left Beijing for Shanghai, Dingding asked Chang Yuan⁵, a family friend to find me a place in a London English language school so that I could improve my

⁴ One of the founders of the Chinese army.

⁵ A Thai aristocracy who lived in China for a long time before leaving for the UK

language skills before entering a course of hotel management either in England or in Switzerland. David Horn, Chang Yuan's husband was arranging this for me. Late May in 1979, I received a letter of acceptance from Pitman School of English in London Goodge Street for an English language course. I immediately went to the British Embassy in Beijing to apply for an UK student visa. When I was sitting in the waiting room of the British Embassy, looking at the solemn expressions of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh's portraits, I felt that a big change in my life was right in front of my eyes. My doubts of the separation from my new family; facing different culture and the unknown future suddenly all rushed into my head. I told myself that I just had to go for it. It was for a better future for every one of my immediate family including myself. After helping Guo and Shen to set up hotels and resorts in China, it made us think that tourist industry was one of the possible areas that might benefit us either in or out of China. I went through all my applications formalities without the knowledge of Dingding's parents.

June 1979 Dingding's parents came back to Beijing from their trip in Japan. One evening, I found an opportunity to tell Dingding's father my plan that I had applied to go to the UK to study English first. I was fully prepared for his negative response, but to my complete surprise, he said, "That's a good idea, but you know, Dingding and her new baby can't go with you."

"Yes, I know. I hope I can do something for China when I finish my course in Europe."

"Good, but who will be sponsoring you there?" That was his first question.

"I think my father in Hong Kong might be able to manage the first part of my study in the UK." Although I did not know exactly my father's financial situation in Hong Kong, I said it to prevent any negativity from my father-in-law.

"OK. England is a cold country... I remember that when I was a student in Europe, life was tough... Then I didn't have much money, but I had rice and butter which kept me going and kept me away from the cold and hunger," he paused a little, "You know, it wasn't expensive to buy butter there..." He continued, "I've got a friend in Cambridge, and his name is Joseph Needham, who might be useful to you later." He paused for a little. "I met Joseph during the Korean War." He smiled. As if he went back to the past. "...It was a very hot summer. Joseph suggested that everybody should wear trousers without knickers ... Sorry, I've carried away. Anyway, you will have to learn English language first."

“Yes, indeed. I’ll try my best,” I responded. I knew that Dingding’s father was very good at many foreign languages. He was fluent in Japanese, English, French and German.

I was moved by his thoughtfulness and open-mindedness. I did not experience any of the negativities from him at all.

My plan was going to Shanghai just before the birth of our new baby in the second half of June. One evening I had a phone call from Mother saying that there were some signs of Dingding was in labour. I immediately went out and bought a train ticket for Shanghai. Dingding’s mother asked me to take some of the nice fruits and flowers that she had just brought back from Japan for Dingding. She asked me to keep her informed and told me that she would come to Shanghai as soon as she could.

When I arrived at home in Shanghai in the early afternoon, My Japanese neighbour ODM told me that Dingding had already given birth to a baby girl and Mother was still with them in hospital. I was going to see Dingding immediately, but ODM looked at me with a concerned expression.

“Have you got a name for her yet?”

“No, of course not, it’s still too early. I haven’t even met her yet.” I answered.

“You have to be careful when choosing her name.”

“Why?”

“The baby’s name might affect Dingding and it might even affect you too,” she said in a serious tone.

“In what way?”

“Life and death,” she said it with the emphasis on death. I thought that she was a little melodramatic about her fortune telling skills. “Please give her a Chinese name that has at least 29 strokes, otherwise it won’t be good.”

“OK. I’ll certainly do so.” Only then, she smiled.

Dingding stayed in a private ward of Huadong Hospital 华东医院. When I reached hospital it was just before four in the afternoon. Mother was in the waiting area. As soon as she saw me, she was relieved and told me about her nerve-racking experience of waiting without knowing

what was going on the labour ward early that morning. Mother told me that Dingding was having a nap, so she came out to wait for me there. Then she smiled “I’m looking forward to meeting my granddaughter,” Mother said cheerfully.

When I walked into the ward, Dingding was awake, but looked tired. I was very excited to see her. The consultant of the maternity ward came in to see Dingding and when she saw so many fruits and flowers on the table and said, “Oh you’ve got a nice husband.” I replied, “These are from her parents who have just returned from their trip to Japan.”

“I can bring out your daughter to show you. But it’ll be after 5 pm...” she said with a cheeky expression, “I can sneak her out for you.”

“Yes please,” I said. “I would like to meet her too,” Mother was quite excited about it.

“OK. See you after five,” she went out. After five o’clock, the consultant brought our new baby into the ward. The baby only opened one eye and the other was firmly closed. She had a very round head with rosy cheeks.

“We should call her Round-Head,” Dingding suggested with a smile. I suddenly remembered what ODM told me. “Do you think the characters of her name have more than 29 strokes?”

“29 strokes? Why?” Dingding asked.

“ODM said so and, she said that it was important,” I did not explain why.

“OK, then if we use the full-form characters, it should have more than 29 strokes,” Dingding was counting the number of the strokes of the name. “In fact it has 42 strokes. Are we allowed to use the full-form characters?” asked Dingding.

“I suppose so, but it also applies to her proper name too,” I replied.

“But your surname has only three strokes... I will ask my father to find her a name with a lot of strokes,” Dingding laughed.

“Don’t be so superstitious about that,” Mother commented.

Dingding stayed in hospital longer than expected, as she badly reacted to the stitches. It made her wound impossible to heal. It was an agony experience especially in the hot summer weather in Shanghai. After Yuyuda 圓圓頭 (which was the new baby’s nickname in

Shanghai dialect) came home without Dingding, she was given baby-formulas and was looked after by Mother.

Two weeks later, Dingding came out hospital, but was not fully recovered. My mother-in-law came to Shanghai to see her and Yuyuda.

After Yuyuda's first month celebration party at home in Shanghai, Dingding and I went back to Beijing and left Yuyuda with Mother, as Dingding was never properly recovered and had to go to hospital to have her open wound redressed every day. We thought that Beijing's climate might be better for her to recover.

The first thing that she asked her father to do after coming back to Beijing was to choose a name for Yuyuda.

"It must be more than 29 strokes. OK?" Dingding instructed her father.

"Why?" her father asked.

"Yungyung's Japanese neighbour says so. Just do it according to her instruction."

"It's hard to do it, as Yungyung's surname has only three strokes. It means that the other two characters will have to have more than 26 strokes." Dingding's father commented.

"Yes, it's difficult, so we would like to ask YOU to take the task," Dingding replied.

"Will it be OK, if I use the characters in the traditional form?" her father asked. "I like the traditional Chinese names and I like the character of phoenix. Why don't you call her Yunfeng (雲鳳)? Of course, it should be written in the full-form. Is that OK with you both?"
Dingding's father Asked.

"Is it more than 29 strokes?" Dingding asked.

"Yes, it has 31 strokes including the surname," he replied.

"OK, then that's fine." Dingding smiled with a relief.