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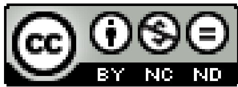

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1
Introduction

'Welcome to the "magic capital" (*modu*)!' said the message that popped up on my smartphone screen as my plane landed at Shanghai Pudong International airport. The term '*modu*' was coined in in a novel[1] of the 1920s, in which Shanghai was depicted as a mixture of brightness and darkness – the dark side cleverly hidden behind the glamorous modern facade. In Chinese, '*mo*' can mean demon, fantasy, magic or mystic; '*du*' means capital. So a decade ago '*modu*', the 'magic capital' or the 'demon capital', used to be an internet slang term that young people used to refer to Shanghai. It has now become a common nickname for Shanghai. This is probably because people appreciate that no other term can better articulate the character of Shanghai: the largest metropolis in China with its unique exuberance and apparently limitless possibilities.

The current eldest generation in Shanghai was born in a time when the average household could not afford electric lights. Today, however, they can turn lights off via their smartphones in a city that has benefited from full 5G coverage in the downtown area since 2020.[2] Based on 16 months of ethnographic research in Shanghai, this book is about how older people in the 'magic capital' live with the possibilities conjured by the 'magic' device of the digital age – the smartphone. Everyday life, ageing and digital practice are three of the main avenues of research inquiry.

The central thesis of this book revolves around the older generation in China and the two revolutions they have experienced during their lives – the first being the political revolution during China's radical communist era and the second being the 'digital revolution' constituted by the adoption of the latest digital technologies. We can only understand the latter by appreciating the legacy of the former revolution. Core ideas about how people should commit to constant 'self-reform' and become a 'new person' during China's radical communist period in fact only come to be realised during retirement. This offers a time in which people

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are able to engage in activities that reflect their real potential in life – something taken away from them when they were young during the earlier political revolution.

Nor is this confined to a singular part of people's lives. The revolutionary nature of the smartphone is founded in the way it now permeates almost everything people are engaged with in their everyday and social lives. All of this then bears on their relationship not only to retirement and the experience of ageing, but also to their neighbours, family, friends, home, locality and the state. So while the title of this book highlights ageing and the smartphone, the ethnography has to engage with everything from the purpose of life to dealing with ill-health or paying for goods.

The volume thereby aims to answer questions such as: How do ordinary Chinese citizens make sense of the social transformations in contemporary China and how do they see themselves in the light of these changes? What does ageing mean for individuals and their families in today's China? How can we understand the consequences of the smartphone in China and what lessons can we learn from digital China?

Many studies of contemporary Chinese society tend to spotlight the younger generation in the country, as young people seem 'naturally' to carry the features of the ever-changing dynamic of modern China. However, readers of this book will come to see why the study of the *older* generation in China may actually work better as a kind of 'shortcut' for gaining a deeper understanding of today's Chinese society. The People's Republic of China (PRC), established in 1949, is roughly the same age as the older generation in China who are the subjects of this book. This generation was present at the start of the development of the PRC. They have witnessed and experienced, in turn, the transition from war to peace, the Cultural Revolution, the implementation of the one-child policy, the socialist 'planned economy' and finally its reversal through market-oriented economic reforms. The social transformations that this older generation has experienced are unprecedented, profound and deep-rooted.

By mapping out the various aspects of older people's daily lives in the context of personal histories as well as daily digital engagement, this book argues that this older generation is not only the first 'new sandwich generation', caught between having to care for the elderly (their parents) and children (their grandchildren), but also the last generation to continue the traditional rites of family duty. It is in addition the unprecedented 'revolutionary generation' in China, indelibly marked by both the political revolutions in communist China and the 'information revolution' in digital China. This ethnography will demonstrate that far from

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being merely carried away in the flow of revolutions, this generation has in effect made its own revolution, achieving the revolutionary ideal of 'self-reform' during later life.

Studies of the smartphone also tend to focus on younger people because they are assumed to be the digital-savvy generation that best represents the smartphone age. However, smartphone use globally now extends far beyond a 'youth technology'.[3] Furthermore, the ethnography conducted in Shanghai suggests that the older generation in China, who used to be the 'information have-less',[4] have now embraced the smartphone in the most profound ways. The people in this book collectively tell the story of living their 'unlived' youth only when they became older, a phenomenon directly facilitated by the digital possibilities of the smartphone. In addition, the research will explore the way in which this generation are redefining social relations online while investigating new ways of practising kinship and friendship via the device. All these uses demonstrate how the oft-perceived binary or opposition between the human and the technology is actually here a much more dialectical, dynamic and constitutional process, revealed in the light of the daily life practices of ordinary Chinese older people.

Shanghai, with its prodigious clash of the new and the old, the past and the future, provides the context for this research. The rest of this chapter therefore offers a brief biography of Shanghai, followed by an introduction to the issues related to ageing and the development of digital facilities in contemporary Shanghai. This is followed in turn by an introduction to the research methodology and an overview of the overall structure of this book.

Shanghai: a brief biography

Shanghai, which literally means 'upon the sea', lies at the mouth of the Yangtze River (*chang jiang*), where the longest waterway in Asia joins the Pacific, completing its 6,300 km journey. The Huangpu River, the largest running through the city centre, is the last significant tributary of the Yangtze. Shanghai is China's most populated city and the third largest financial centre[5] in the world. Yet only a century and a half ago it was merely a fishing town. The modern history of Shanghai starts with the First Opium War (1839–42) between Britain and the Qing dynasty (1636–1912) of China. In 1842 the Qing dynasty was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking, which ceded Hong Kong to the British Empire and opened five treaty ports to British merchants, among them Shanghai.[6]

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In 1842 the British established the first concession in Shanghai which was untouchable by Chinese law. The presence of the British Empire in Shanghai was followed by other foreign powers, such as the French, Americans and Japanese.[7] Soon foreign settlement and concessions encroached upon much of what is now central Shanghai, except for the old walled Chinese city.[8] From missionaries to refugees, waves of migrants from all over the world flooded in, contributing to the mixed and cosmopolitan environment of early Shanghai. By the second half of the nineteenth century Shanghai had developed an urban modernity heavily infused with foreign, i.e. Western, influences, including both the development and deprivation associated with global capitalism.[9] In the early twentieth century foreigners accounted for almost one-quarter of the city's total population; the downtown area was said to be three times as crowded as London's East End and as ethnically mixed as New York.[10]

Thanks to this dazzling swirl of foreign control, bank buildings, glitzy restaurants, international clubs, dance halls, opium dens,[11] gambling joints and brothels managed by gangs, Shanghai gained its somewhat bipolar reputation; it became known simultaneously as the 'Paris of the East' and the 'Whore of the Orient'.[12] By 1934 Shanghai had grown into the world's fifth-largest city, with more skyscrapers and cars than any other Asian city and more than the rest of China combined.[13] Local shops carried the latest fashions and luxuries; local cinemas played the latest Hollywood films.[14] At that time Shanghai was a world of magnificent modernity, a world apart from the rural regions of the country, still bound in tradition. The neoclassical and Art Deco buildings along the Huangpu riverfront known as 'the Bund' (a word derived from Hindi) were a powerful symbol of Shanghai modernity (Fig. 1.1).

On the other hand, for most ordinary Chinese people Shanghai was simply the setting for their everyday lives, with little connection to the magnificent Bund. As one research participant noted, even today:

> the Bund is for tourists, it is the *lilong* that is the authentic Shanghai life in my memory.

Lilong, which literally means alleyway, is a unique type of Shanghai residential area which came into being in the late nineteenth century. At that time, hundreds of thousands of Chinese migrants had flooded into Shanghai city, looking for protection and a living within the foreign concessions, especially given the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion[15] and the Boxer Rebellion.[16] Real estate development then increased dramatically, confronted by the lack of space yet economically incentivised to make the most intensive use

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Figure 1.1 The Bund by night. Source: Summer Park. Licence: CC BY 2.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ShanghaiBundpic2.jpg.

of the land required.[17] The Shanghai *lilong*, modelled after Western rows of houses but set within characteristic Chinese 'lanes and courtyards',[18] provided a convenient solution thanks to its minimal maintenance.

Within a *lilong* compound, houses are clustered around a 'fishbone' layout. The main alleyway runs all or part of the way across the block while smaller alleyways on each side are connected perpendicularly to the main one,[19] allowing many families to live together in the same compound with shared bathrooms and kitchens.[20] 'Shikumen', which literally means 'stone gate', is a representative type of *lilong* where the entrance to each alley is surmounted by a stylistic stone arch with carvings (Fig. 1.2). *Lilong* had become the most common type of housing in Shanghai up until the late 1940s. At the height of their popularity, *lilong* covered 60 per cent of the city.[21] Although the buildings were already designed to maximise the use of the land through condensed and compact box-shaped rows of houses, *lilong* dwellers creatively turned the lanes themselves into living spaces. In so doing they overcame apparent physical constraints and cultivated a unique Shanghai neighbourhood atmosphere.[22] In particular, the spatial arrangement of *lilong* has impacted upon people's experience of privacy:[23] a graduation from the public street to the semi-private main alleyway, then to side-alleyways behind a stone gate to the private individual houses, allowed people to experience a gradual change in the

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Figure 1.2 One of the typical *lilong* (alleyways) in Shanghai. Source: Ismoon. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:A_Lane_in_Zhenxingli.jpg.

sense of privacy as they leave or return home.[24] Exploiting this gradation, the lanes provide a small open space with shading, ideal for some activities, while the main alleyway is where street vendors would set up stalls and the side alleys are where residents would sit on their stools, chatting with neighbours as they prepared meals.[25] During fieldwork, older people constantly referred to their lives in the *lilong* as an essential part of their personal memories.

Lilong made its appearance as the unique urban landscape of modern Shanghai at around the same time as the *Communist Manifesto* was translated into Chinese (1920). The work was swiftly circulated among the secret societies hidden within the Shanghai *lilong*.[26] In 1921, within one of the typical 'stone gate' (*shikumen*) *lilong* in the former French Concession in Shanghai, a group of communists secretly held their first national congress, during which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP hereafter) was established.[27] Home to a vast proletarian and student population – both angered by the stark inequality between the Chinese and foreigners and between the poor and the rich, Shanghai became the Communist Party's first hope for a successful revolution. Subsequently, however, it was in the country's rural areas that the revolution first achieved success.

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A dark moment in the history of *lilong* came in 1937, when one of the bloodiest battles of the twentieth century broke out in Shanghai. The Battle of Shanghai (*songhu huizhan*) was the first major engagement between the Chinese National Revolutionary Army and the Imperial Japanese Army. At the height of the war nearly one million Chinese and Japanese soldiers were involved, and three million civilians in Shanghai suffered from the conflict. In his book *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze*, author Peter Harmsen argues that the prolonged Battle of Shanghai turned what had been a Japanese adventure in China into a general war between the two countries, ultimately leading to Pearl Harbor and seven decades of tumultuous history in Asia.[28]

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Shanghai weathered a period of chaos and conflict, followed by Japanese occupation. Despite this time the Shanghai *lilong* was still regarded as a 'free land' for one particular group of people. In 1938, when the great powers collectively shut their borders to all but a small selection of Jewish refugees, Shanghai was the only place, aside from the Dominican Republic, that remained open to these Jewish refugees.[29] During the Second World War Shanghai protected about 20,000 European Jews from Nazi persecution,[30] more than any other city in the world.[31]

During the Japanese occupation, making use of multi-class patriotism, the CCP forged its most workable alliance with elites from the city's middle and upper classes, a crucial part of its resistance against Japan. This cooperative relationship contributed significantly to the CCP's easy takeover of Shanghai in 1949.[32] The establishment in 1949 of 'New China', the People's Republic of China, put an end to the 'Old Shanghai'.[33] Following their Soviet predecessors, the Communist Party leadership saw urban planning as a spatial structure that played an instrumental role in the 'production of proletarian consciousness and lifestyle'.[34] The 1950s witnessed the wide repurposing and renaming of municipal landmarks associated with Western influence in the 'Old Shanghai', as well as reallocation of previously private properties on a massive scale. Members of the Party, government, military cadres and the working class moved into the mansions and apartments previously owned by Nationalist officials, foreigners, local capitalists and wealthy merchants.[35] Almost every foreigner left the city, now closed off from the world beyond China, while a good part of the Shanghai that made its name under the auspices of *modu* fell into a deep sleep, given the strict uniformity of communism.

Meanwhile Shanghai's political 'contribution' to the 'New China' had an equal if not more significant impact. The city became the powder keg for the Cultural Revolution[36] (1966–76) and served as a power

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base for Maoist ideals: in 1965 the first 'salvo' of the Cultural Revolution was fired by Shanghai's Yao Wenyuan, a member of the infamous 'Gang of Four'.[37] Throughout the political turmoil, Shanghai's radical leadership actively promoted a wide range of political struggles ranging from those impacting the army to education to industrial management. At the height of this turmoil one could see young 'Red Guards'[38] chanting across the city, confiscating individual households and destroying the so-called 'four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old habits and old customs).[39]

Yet in the middle of the turbulent Cultural Revolution, another powerful current emerged in Shanghai. In 1972 Shanghai hosted the historic meeting between then Premier Zhou Enlai and US president Richard Nixon.[40] The outcome of the visit of the very first American president in China was the Shanghai Communique, seen as the start of the normalisation of relations between the two countries and a document that laid the groundwork for China's 'reopening' to the rest of the world. In 1978, a few years after the Shanghai Communique was signed, the 'reform and opening-up' national policy,[41] presented by the then leader Deng Xiaoping after the death of Mao, started to shape contemporary Chinese society and its international relations in a profound way.

In terms of economic development, during the first decades of Communist rule, Shanghai was officially viewed as 'an unwelcome leftover from a humiliating and resented semi-colonial past'.[42] During that time Shanghai's assets, ranging from experts and skilled workers to factory machines, were 'dismantled' and reallocated to aid the development of other areas in the rest of China, while Shanghai's own growth was sharply restricted.[43] It was not until 1990, with the establishment of Pudong as an open area for development,[44] that Shanghai regained some of its socio-economic potential.

The final chapter of this history of Shanghai may be more familiar to readers: the city became the world's busiest container port[45] and a global centre for business and finance, research, education, culture, science and technology.[46] With its own terms in cultural developments, from literature to fashion, contemporary Shanghai also stands at the front of China's push into today's modern world.[47] Shanghai is now the showpiece of a Chinese modernity taken on its own terms. Skyscrapers, many designed by internationally renowned architects,[48] populate Pudong, in the previously low-lying farmlands on the east bank of the Huangpu River, overlooking the European buildings on the Bund across the river (Fig. 1.3). The city saw the building of about 4,000 high-rises, and nearly 1,500 miles of roads have been built in and around the city within the last decade.[49] By 2004 more than 70 per cent of the *lilong* alleyways had

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Figure 1.3 The skyline of the Pudong financial centre at night, as seen from the Bund. Photo by Ge Li (commissioned by Xinyuan Wang).

Figure 1.4 Typical residential tower blocks in Shanghai. Photo by Rui Zhong.

been wiped out during the massive-scale reconstruction of the old city[50] and most former *lilong* residents had moved into tower blocks (like the one shown in Fig. 1.4).

Some of the historic charm of Shanghai was preserved in the former French Concession in the very centre of Shanghai – an area with very few high-rises, but rather a mix of *lilong* and European-style buildings. Some of the *lilong* buildings that survived were repurposed as commercial

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properties.[51] Many villas, adorned with plaques recounting the history of the building, line the streets. Traffic is slow and London plane trees, called 'French phoenix trees' (*faguo hutong*) by local people,[52] create a green tunnel on the street, used by pedestrians and cyclists during their daily shopping run or their journeys to local cafés, galleries or restaurants. The area is a world apart from the fast pace of the rest of the city (Fig. 1.5).

This brief account shows that while it is one of the most recent Chinese cities, Shanghai has experienced some of the most dramatic social transformations in the country's history – transformations that had long-lasting consequences for China as a whole. A sense of this history is essential to appreciating the lives of the research participants in this book: people who kept referring to their 'Shanghainese' identity. As articulated by one research participant:

> Our Shanghai people would say 'I love Shanghai' much more often than 'I love China'. Our sense of belonging is more about *modu* the city, rather than the country.

Before 1843, when Shanghai was forced to open as a treaty port, it was not likely that any such sense of 'Shanghainese' identity, standing out from either the national or the local consciousness, would have been felt.[53] It was the history of Shanghai as a treaty port, a city full of migrants with a distinctive cosmopolitan nature, that helped to create a local culture of Shanghai, commonly known as *haipai* (Shanghai style). Such culture, along with its striking features of cosmopolitanism, innovation and commercialism, a powerful meeting point of West and East,[54] is now viewed as an identity that links the city's past, present and future.

Figure 1.5 A typical road featuring French phoenix trees and villas in the former French Concession. Photos by Marcus Fedder.

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Figure 1.6 Screenshot of the virtual tour of Shanghai. The video can also be viewed at: https://bit.ly/shanghaisite.

To complete this biography of Shanghai, I would like to invite you to join a three-minute virtual tour of Shanghai through the short film above (Fig. 1.6). This short film shows not only the skylines of Shanghai, but also the *lilong* area in the city centre. Unlike the tourist guides, this will allow you to enter ordinary households and gain some visual impressions of people's daily lives. The film also acts as a bridge between understanding the city in context and the primary concern of this volume, that of ageing and smartphones.

Ageing Shanghai and digital Shanghai

China has the largest and most rapidly ageing population in the world.[55] Chinese people in their seventies and eighties have double the life expectancy of their parents' generation.[56] On the other hand, China has 'leapfrogged' most other countries in its rapid digitalisation over the past two decades. The country now leads the world in fields such as smartphone ownership, mobile internet penetration, mobile payment and mobile app use.[57] The number of internet users on mobile phones is 847 million, accounting for over 99 per cent of internet users in China, with the smartphone being the most popular device for accessing the internet in the country.[58] Shanghai is leading China in both fields, not only in terms of population ageing but also in the use of digital.

Shanghai has been the 'oldest' city in China for more than three decades and was the first to be categorised as a 'super-ageing society'.[59]

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One-third of Shanghai residents were aged 60 or over in 2018[60] and the average life expectancy had reached 83.63 years, with 81 years for men and 86 years for women.[61] The ageing rate (the percentage of the population aged 65 and above) of Shanghai residents was 14.3 per cent,[62] higher than New York and London in 2017 – all of which makes Shanghai arguably one of the most rapidly ageing metropolises in the world (Fig. 1.7).

In this book, the term 'older people' is associated with a relatively broad age category, referring mainly to retirees in their fifties through to their seventies. Compared to the other major ageing societies in the world, Chinese people in general retire at a relatively young age: 50 for women and 60 for men, with some minor variations allowed for different jobs.[63] Also, compared to previous generations or their peers in many other societies, there is good reason to expect that older people in urban China[64] are likely to enjoy more healthy years following their retirement. The implication is that the 'older people' studied in this book are not necessarily the subject of gerontology; most of the research participants in this research are indeed relatively healthy. Furthermore, 'old' (*lao*) in traditional Chinese society commonly implied a higher social status. For example, the words for teacher (*lao shi*) and boss (*lao ban*),

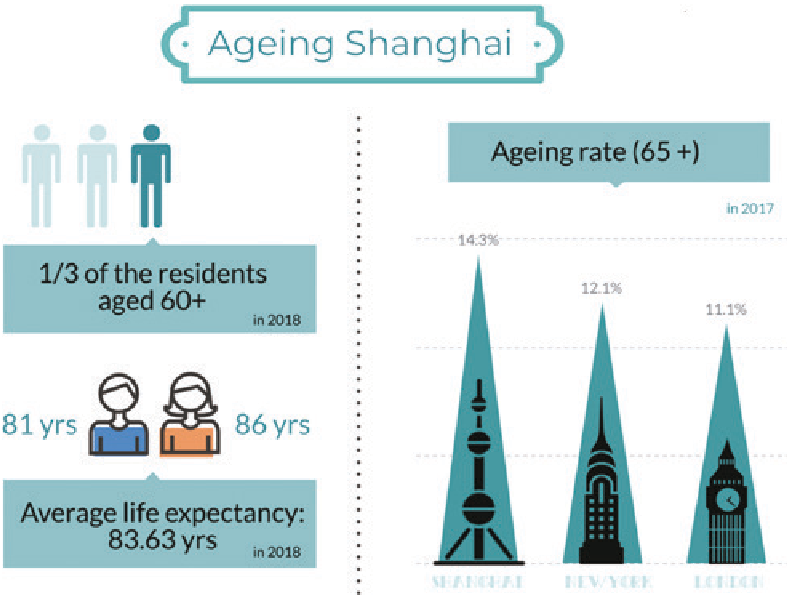

Figure 1.7 Statistics related to ageing in Shanghai. Infographic by Xinyuan Wang.

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both occupations associated with higher status, also contain the term 'old'. However, in today's Chinese society, the ethnography will show that being older no longer guarantees a higher social status; various forms of ageism are starting to arise, in addition to certain social stigmas associated with the older generation. During research the term 'older people' was used with caution, depending on the specific context in question.

Often the concern is as much with an 'older generation' as with older people; the word 'older' is often used as a collective term identifying the cohort who experienced roughly the same historical periods, the people who now call themselves 'our older generation' (*lao yibei*). This refers in particular to those born during the first decade of the 'New China' in 1949, and who had experienced the Cultural Revolution (1967–77) during their youth and economic reforms during their middle age. As the rest of this book explains, they are the 'revolutionary generation' or the 'Red Guard generation'.

A further unique facet of this older generation in China is that they are both the first and the last generation who will fully embrace the digital possibilities facilitated by the smartphone at the later stages of their lives. Several chapters in this book, through ethnographic research, convey the way in which older people in Shanghai have applied the smartphone to various aspects of their everyday activities, ranging from self-care, social relations or even redefinition of their life purpose. All of these phenomena are situated in the wider context of the proliferation of the smartphone in digital Shanghai. From 'smart care for the elderly' to 'the Smart City', the term 'smart' was constantly mentioned throughout my research, both by the management of the care homes I visited or by government officers. The term 'smart city'[65] refers to the development of urban infrastructures facilitated by advanced digital technologies, including Big Data and the Internet-of-Things (IoT), as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotic processes. It has now become one of the buzzwords in Shanghai's government reports and daily news.[66]

An example of the way in which the digital has become woven into everyday life is the dominance of mobile payment. Throughout my entire fieldwork, which lasted for 16 months throughout 2018 and 2019, I only used cash twice.[67] Shortly afterward the global pandemic that began in late 2019 significantly boosted online shopping around the world, while the post-lockdown reopening of enterprises has also seen significant growth in the use of QR codes in various situations. However, in 2018 the use of QR codes was already ubiquitous in Shanghai. People ordered food, rented bicyles, hailed taxis, booked hotels and more simply by scanning QR codes via their smartphones.

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There were several reasons for this pioneering application of online shopping and mobile payment in China. In 2003 the outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), caused by a strain of coronavirus, had caused cities and factories in the country to be shut down for months. As later acknowledged in Chinese academia and media, this provided an unprecedented opportunity for the newly emerging e-commerce companies, such as Alibaba, to grow with breathtaking speed. The 'internet' in general then became woven into the fabric of ordinary people's lives.[68] More than 15 years after the SARS crisis, the fieldwork conducted in Shanghai, as reported in this book, will show just how deeply embedded the mobile internet now is in people's lives. As an example, consider this street scene taken from my fieldnotes:

> On the last day of the seven-day *shuilu fahui* (the water and land rite) at Jing'an temple, the famous temple with more than 780 years of history in the very centre of the most flourishing and buzzing downtown area of Shanghai (Fig. 1.8). Besieged by a proliferation of high-rise shopping centres, Jing'an temple is the only place where people burn 'money' not as luxury consumption, but for the benefit of their ancestors. One woman who was busy burning 'spiritual money' (*ming bi*) explained that the money made out of tinfoil paper is for the ghosts and deities, so that the souls of the deceased

Figure 1.8 (left) Jing'an temple in Shanghai city centre. Photo by Xinyuan Wang.

Figure 1.9 (right) A digital prayer board in Shanghai. Here visitors can scan the QR code and post their prayer online; it will then be publicly shown on the screen. Photo by Xinyuan Wang.

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persons will find some peace during purgatory, called *chao du*. Earnestly she added: 'Today is the last chance of the year for ghosts to receive money!' According to her, in the afterlife ghosts must be 'bribed' to avoid them imparting too much torture and hardship onto passing ancestors.

The air was full of the choking smell of the dense smoke of the burning of 'spiritual money' and incense. The smoke symbolises the transition from the tangible material world to the intangible spirit world. On the other side of the raging flames a big standing electronic screen called 'Prayer merit and credit list' (*qi fu gong de bang*) was visible. Standing in front of the big screen, people are busy reaching the deities in a more 'environmentally friendly' way – by holding their smartphones against the screen to scan the QR code on the top so that they can post a prayer online (Fig. 1.9). The prayers they compose then pop up in the form of vertical red scroll on the big screen immediately after being submitted; many people take a photo of the screen for their own records.

The combination of the golden temple, the shining shopping centre, dense incense smoke, burning spiritual money and the bright red digital screen remained one of the most powerful images in my memory during the 16 months of fieldwork. It is these multiple layers of images that I needed to reveal in telling the story of people's lives in Shanghai.

A note on methodology: making out the true face of Mountain Lu

It was rare that research participants would themselves ask questions about research methodology, since it is hardly a topic of general conversation. The most poetic question about methodology of my study, however, came from a casual afternoon chat with Angu, a retired cook in Shanghai. Angu asked me in our second meeting: 'So … how can you make out the true face of 'Mountain Lu' (*lushan zhen mianmu*)?'

Mountain Lu, one of the most renowned mountains in China, is known for its grandeur and steepness. However, Angu was not referring to the physical Mountain Lu. The expression the 'true face of Mountain Lu' has its origin in a poem by Su Shi (1037–1101)[69] and is in daily use among Chinese people. The phrase describes an ambiguous and

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unpredictable or complex situation. The original four-line poem goes as follows:[70]

> It's a range viewed in face and peaks viewed from the side,
> Assuming different shapes viewed from far and wide,
> Of Mountain Lu we cannot make out of the true face,
> For we are lost in the heart of the very place.

Almost a thousand years ago the great poet Su Shi explained that we cannot make out the 'true face of Mountain Lu' because we are within the mountain and therefore 'lost in the heart of the very place'. Looking back, Angu's question is more like a kind warning: is it possible fully to understand people's life in a mega-city such as *modu* Shanghai when I am in Shanghai itself, overwhelmed by its richness and contradictions?

Su Shi and Angu are right: observing *from a distance* has the benefit of not getting lost or distracted. However, this raises a fundamental question of epistemology: how do we define the 'true face'? Shanghai is a mega-city, but this is not just a geographic term. It is also about the numerous life stories and memories of people engraved into its landscape: the personal struggles and efforts that lie behind the stunning skylines in Pudong; the joy and sadness in thousands of households dwelling in the forests of tower blocks; and the gossip and news travelling through the *lilong* alleyways. All are true experiences of people living in Shanghai, but they are very different. So what kind of 'true face' are we looking for? And what kind of 'true face' really matters? What gives us the authority to say that one is truer than another? Or if no authority exists, how do we work with multiple truths and the many different faces of Shanghai?

For these reasons, in response to Su Shi and Angu, I would say that anthropologists are not seeking for the 'true face'. Instead they build their picture by respecting each individual life story, set as it is against cultural values and constraints. Rather than looking to be away from the mountain in order to gain perspective, the anthropologist is trying to come ever nearer, to observe 'from close up and within'[71] as their means of portraying the metropolis through the experiences of each resident. If an anthropologist was to rewrite the last two lines of the poem, it would therefore appear rather differently: 'Of Mountain Lu we can map out the true faces, for we are deep in the heart of the very place'.

Today new paths are emerging for an ethnographer to follow if they wish to find their way 'deep in the heart of the very place'. For example, digital anthropology[72] aims to understand the consequences of digital technology through ethnography. The online landscape does not even appear on the surface of the city, other than in the vista of people

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peering at their screens. We have to journey into the screens themselves to observe the private interactions and chats that circulate around this otherwise invisible terrain. In contrast to journalism, where the value of stories lies in their being new, the ethnographer waits until they have become a mundane part of everyday life. Such accounts are no longer of interest to journalists but have become an aid to the ethnographer trying to gauge a sense of 'typicality'. In many cases the stories now appear so mundane that research participants are often confused, wondering what on earth the anthropologists are so excited about.

We are excited because it is precisely by becoming 'invisible' that everyday practices gain their power to structure normative behaviour – without people realising that this is why they act as they do. That is what we call the 'humility of things'.[73] The fact that we do not notice the air we breathe is hardly a sign of its unimportance. We are seeking out certain defining features of society that would be taken for granted by its insiders; the less they are noticed, the more efficient and effective they are in shaping the society.

This explains why researchers need to spend more than a year living within the local community. It also explains the focus upon participant observation rather than research methods such as interviews and surveys, in which people are likely to be fully aware of the presence of the researcher and the fact that they are being studied or watched. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead observed, 'what people say, what they do and what they say they do are entirely different things'.[74] Our method is to go to the roots of the society where we can be immersed in local life as it is experienced by local people. In practice, the core of participant observation is often achieved through making friends, building trust and gradually coming to empathise with their perspective on life.

For example, in this fieldwork, I spent much of my time engaging with activities directly related to neither the use of the smartphone nor the topic of ageing. Rather, they form part of what we term 'holistic contextualisation'[75] because no one lives just through their age or just online, and everything else they do may have a bearing upon the topics of research. The three-minute short film below (Fig. 1.10) captures the key message of doing anthropological fieldwork: it involves getting to know people the way you get to know your close friends.

In writing a book based on ethnography, it is crucial to convey not only the unique character of each individual, but also to address what may be regarded as typical, for example, or characteristic of the Shanghainese. Research participants themselves commonly use the word 'typical' (*dianxing*) as part of daily conversation; they may comment

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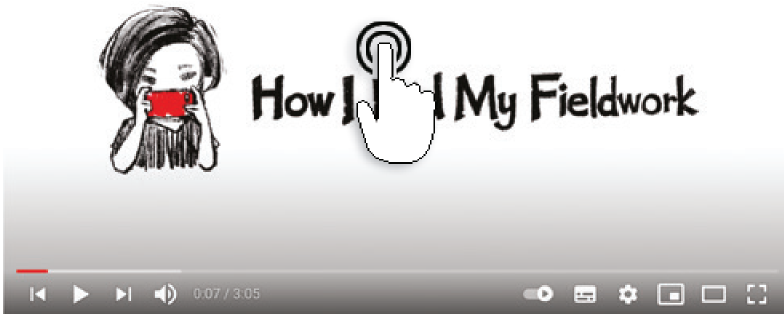

Figure 1.10 'How I did my fieldwork'. The film can be seen at https://bit.ly/shanghaifieldwork.

that 'it is typical her to forward this kind of news to the family WeChat group' or 'my father was a typical "socialist father" during Mao's time'. Furthermore, when people disagree with one another about what should be regarded as typical, what for them is a problem, then becomes a valuable insight into further nuances for the ethnography.

As the foundation for this ethnography, I lived for 16 months throughout 2018 and 2019 inside a low-rise living compound, referred to in this book by the pseudonym *ForeverGood*. Located in the former French Concession in the heart of Shanghai, *ForeverGood* was built in the late 1940s as collective accommodation, hosting employees of a state-owned institute. It is a 'new style' alleyway (*xinshi lilong*) residential compound. These new style alleyways[76] can roughly be understood as an advanced version of *lilong* which, as explained above, were the dominant residential house style in Shanghai throughout the 1930s and 1940s but gradually disappeared during the economic reform. The individual rooms in new style *lilong* are relatively spacious and the alleyways wider. In addition, the ground floor has a front yard and a small back yard garden attached to it in some cases. However, it is still common to see shared kitchens and toilets in these new style *lilong*.

During the 'class struggle' of the Cultural Revolution in particular, many households were reallocated, with well-off households forced to relinquish living space to 'working-class' households. These property rights still constitute a significant historical legacy from the Cultural Revolution for the older people who live here.[77] For example, in

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ForeverGood, the flat below mine used to belong to one household before the Revolution. During the political struggle, however, the father of the household was deemed to be 'a running dog of capitalism'. As a result, they had to give up one room to a 'working-class' household who then shared their kitchen and toilet. This situation did not change after the Revolution, leaving the two households still 'sharing the same roof', with inevitable daily conflicts. Such situations are common in many *lilong* and European-style villas in the city centre, where dwelling spaces originally designed for one household were divided into separate living spaces shared by multiple households. This means that some older people still live with the same neighbours who used to monitor or even persecute them during revolutionary times.

ForeverGood consists of 23 residential buildings, housing more than 3,000 residents and 941 households. The average age of the residents is around 60 (32 per cent were aged over 60, while 6 per cent were over 80). *ForeverGood* was my immediate neighbourhood during my 16-month stay in Shanghai, and the place where I immersed myself in the daily rhythm of ordinary people's lives. My neighbours were the first group of research participants. I became more accepted in this neighbourhood by volunteering and joining various kinds of community activities. For example, over 15 months I voluntarily held a free English evening class for the children from the neighbourhood once a fortnight. Since the one-child policy was implemented in the late 1970s children have become the focus of the Chinese family, especially in urban areas. Anything to do with their children would usually motivate the entire family, involving two or even three generations. Once the children in the neighbourhood were seen to be greeting me happily, their parents and grandparents did the same.

I also helped the 'Residents' Committee' (*juweihui*) to curate an exhibition based on the oral history and photographs of the residents and the neighbourhood, which was then on display for over a year. Preparation of this exhibition allowed me to visit more than 20 households where people generously showed me their family albums and shared detailed personal stories with me. While at first these stories seemed irrelevant to their current engagement with the digital, it was ultimately through the lens of this earlier revolutionary time that I gained a better understanding of people's attitudes towards smartphone use. As the rest of this book shows, I came to appreciate how the first political revolution determined a good deal of the second digital revolution.

Alongside the *ForeverGood* compound, I also conducted fieldwork in a suburban area consisting of crowded tower blocks of the type most

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Shanghai residents now inhabit. In addition, I worked in both a care home for older residents in a medium-income suburb and a large care centre for the elderly in a town adjacent to Shanghai. The fieldwork conducted in the home for older residents and the 'centre for the elderly' near Shanghai brought with it a focus on migrant care workers and the adult children of the elderly, both of whom now tend to be in their fifties and sixties.

I also joined an association set up by a group (with about 200 members) of local Shanghainese people who were interested in the history of old buildings, such as Art Deco buildings and old *lilong* buildings in the city. These participants were also mainly in their fifties and sixties. By joining their activities, such as the weekly walking tours in the city, in which they visited various buildings, I came to know many people. About 20 of them became key research participants, not only regarding me as a personal friend but also introducing me to their close friends and family members. Furthermore, acknowledging these older people's deep affective attachment to the old Shanghainese buildings helped me to appreciate the relationship between people and space. This in turn provided further important insights that enabled me to understand the role of the smartphone in older people's everyday experience of 'dwelling'.

Ethnography was conducted both online and offline. A major benefit of such long-term ethnography was that research participants gradually developed a level of trust that meant they were comfortable sharing not only their personal stories but also 'opening' their smartphones up to me so that I could participate in their online lives. I thereby gained first-hand information about what people really do with their smartphones and how they navigate various social relations via WeChat,[78] the dominant social media platform in China used by all these research participants. I was able to observe people's online interaction and posts, their WeChat groups and conversations on their personal profiles. As a result, WeChat became one of the major 'places' I got to know people well, chatting with them on a daily basis. During fieldwork I added more than 300 new WeChat contacts – most of these were my research participants.

The online ethnography continued even after I left Shanghai in June 2019. At the end of my fieldwork Mr Huang, one of my research participants, said a very modern 'goodbye' to me:

> Even living in the same city, friends meet on WeChat. Live near or afar, it matters much less once you are on WeChat. So, see you on WeChat.

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Mr Huang is indeed right. More than three years after leaving Shanghai, I am still very much in the loop when it comes to gossip between neighbours or the troublesome relationship between a mother and her daughter-in-law in Shanghai. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic I still managed to follow the changes in people's daily life via WeChat. At the time of writing, my digital 'neighbours' continue to send me good morning stickers every day and regularly update me about the lockdown situations in April 2022, all of which are 5,700 miles away from my office in London – and all thanks to WeChat.

For more specific topics, I also employed in-depth interviews and surveys. These were mostly carried out at a relatively late stage of the fieldwork, when research participants had developed the trust and friendship required to treat questions seriously and provide thoughtful answers. For example, in order to gain a more comprehensive description of the use of smartphone apps, a systematic app survey was carried out with 30 research participants aged from 45 to 88. All of them had at least six months' experience of smartphone use, with an overall average of two years' usage of the device. For this task each participant showed me every app installed on their smartphone, then discussed their use of all these apps. In addition, interviews focusing on the use of WeChat groups were conducted among 52 key research participants (30 male and 22 female participants, aged between 45 and 75). In these interviews research participants displayed all the WeChat groups they had joined and told me about their experience in each of these groups in more depth.

I also carried out a 40-question survey about people's use of smartphones for the purposes of health and care. This survey was completed by 150 older people. In addition, the research detailed above was complemented by various smaller online and offline surveys in a more spontaneous fashion throughout the fieldwork. These were undertaken as and when needed in order to gain a better sense of a particular phenomenon. Given the constraints of space, only some of these are referred to in this book.

Fieldwork research ethics carefully followed the guidelines of the European Research Council (ERC) which is the funding body of this project, as well as UCL's research ethics committee. Each research participant learned about my role as researcher from our first encounter and signed the project's consent form. In order to preserve the basic maxim of ethical research, which is to ensure that no harm ensues for any research participants, they have been fully anonymised – not just through the use of pseudonyms but also, in some cases, through adjusting basic background information to ensure that they cannot be recognised.

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A final note on how to read the book

In the spirit of holistic contextualisation, this book tackles a much wider brief than simply the use of smartphones and the experience of older people in Shanghai. Throughout the book, a variety of 'big issues' within contemporary Chinese society are discussed, including demographic structure, social mobility, family development, individual and collective memories, belief and political participation, as well as the nature and legacy of revolution. Understanding smartphones and appreciating the particularities of each individual is now mutually complementary, given both the proliferation of smartphones and their involvement in practically every aspect of a person's everyday life.

The first three chapters provide three essential perspectives: the experience of ageing, everyday life and social relations. Ageing may be physical, mental and social. The experience of ageing is both individual and collective. By exploring the consequences of two major policies in China, the modern retirement policy and the family plan policy, at both a social and personal level, Chapter 2 provides some key context for understanding the experience of ageing for this older generation in China. As the post-reform pension policy was only introduced for this older generation, it has significantly changed the nature of retirement as well as people's expectations and coping strategies in old age. By contrast, the family plan policy, which has existed for more than three decades, has had a long-lasting influence on demographic features in urban China, transforming the social role and social status of old age. Based on the analysis of the impact of retirement and shifts in family structure, Chapter 2 highlights the newly gained social role of grandparents and explains why this older generation is an unprecedented new 'sandwich generation'.

Chapter 3 attempts to capture the dynamics of everyday life as well as the emerging digital routines of retirement. It reveals more about the daily practice and general discourses among older people, and their wider social connections, in order to explore the smartphone's role in the fields of self-care, lifelong education, shopping, self-presentation, interpersonal communication, entertainment and the circulation of information. This chapter also provides the social and cultural context required to make sense of these digital practices among older people. For example, this chapter introduces two organisations that play an important role in older people's everyday activities: the 'Senior Citizens' University' (SCU) and the 'Residents' Committee' (RC). Both organisations reflect the entrenched influence of the Party-state on Chinese society at grassroots

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level. The chapter also showcases that the drastic changes this older generation experienced in their daily lives are the key context for us in appreciating the reason why its members embraced the newly formed digital routines with such passion and determination.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion of everyday life, but with a particular focus on the social relations that play a vital role in people's life after retirement. To capture the nuances around the maintenance and development of social relations through the smartphone more effectively, Chapter 4 presents a detailed discussion of the practice of Chinese *guanxi* (social relations), a concept that can be traced back to the ideals of Confucianism. The ethnography shows how these Confucian principles have been internalised to form an essential part of daily interpersonal interaction. This chapter then considers in more detail one specific type of *guanxi* that only came into being thanks to the proliferation of the smartphone and the popularity of WeChat groups (*qun*) among older people: 'the friends from WeChat groups'.

Following the discussion of people's everyday activities in their social and institutional context, Chapter 5, called 'Crafting smartphones', and Chapter 6, called 'Crafting health', examine two specific activities that have become a constant within daily life: the use of smartphones and the practice of self-care. Chapter 5 describes smartphone practices more broadly, as well as exploring public discourses surrounding the use of the devices among older people. Its focus is upon the role of the smartphone in the fields of self-care, self-presentation, visual communication and the distribution of information.

Chapter 6 examines health as a cultural practice and considers how it has been impacted by the digital capacities facilitated by the smartphone. Based on ethnographic insights into the ways in which people manage their own health in everyday life, this chapter explores the social and moral aspect of health, highlighting the profound influence of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in people's engagement with self-care. The accepted dynamic and dialectical relationship between body and mind among Chinese people is found to be the key for making sense of the way in which they appropriate smartphones for health-related practices. The research shows how a gradual decline in physical capabilities is matched by a remarkable increase in social capabilities thanks to the adoption of smartphones.

If we compare this book to a documentary about this older generation in China, the chapters discussed so far should be seen as a series of wide-angle shots of the social landscape complemented by long shots of

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various aspects of people's lives. These are punctuated by shots from up close, made up of the elements of the book that present the stories of individuals. By contrast, in Chapter 7, called 'Personhood in revolution(s)', and Chapter 8, called 'Life purpose', the camera focuses down on some extremely close shots to capture the subtle facial expressions of the main characters and look into their eyes. In many ways these two chapters are the 'soul' of the book, touching as they do on the foundations of memory, personhood and the purpose of life. These two chapters also include discussions of a considerable length of history in contemporary Chinese society, which are woven into the narratives of individual life stories.

For example, the key theme of Chapter 7 is 'revolution': the 'trademark' of this older generation in China which has lived through not only the radical political revolution of the Cultural Revolution, in the early stages of communist China, but also the 'digital revolution' in the later stages of their lives. The current digital revolution is thus being experienced differently by the older generation, who had been fundamentally shaped by the earlier political revolution. Chapter 7 argues that 'revolution' has become an embodied concept that is manifest in a wide range of people's daily practices. It further explains ordinary Chinese people's understanding of youth and ageing, tradition and modernity, before considering what, ultimately, it takes to 'do personhood' (*zuoren*).

The discussion of the historical relationship between individuals and the Party-state as one of the striking features of this revolutionary generation starts in Chapter 7. It continues in Chapter 8, which examines people's individual struggles during the social transformations of the past seven decades in contemporary China, including the periods of political revolution and economic reform. The chapter reveals the narratives around this older generation's life purpose, in the context of these radical and extraordinary changes in society and values. It also reflects on how people take up the digital capacities presented by smartphones as a means to create and live out new narratives of their lives.

The book's conclusion summarises the social consequences of the smartphone in contemporary China and what the process of ageing now means to ordinary Chinese people. The conclusion connects the dots revealed in the previous chapters and introduces new essential context, required for a thorough understanding of smartphone use among the older generation in China. For example, it discusses how smartphone practice needs to be appreciated in the light of China's all-encompassing quest for digital modernity, a development both sponsored by the Party-state and supported by ordinary people, who see digital engagement as a good citizen's moral duty. Or, to take another example, it explains how

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their specific perception of ageing – as well as the related healthcare and digital practices – only make sense in the wider context of an adaptable Chinese cosmology responding to this ever-changing society. Finally, the Conclusion reflects upon what we can learn from the Chinese case, both in terms of the relation between humanity and technology and in that between individuals and society.

Notes

1. The novel *Mato* (1924) was written by Japanese author Shōfu Muramatsu, who lived in Shanghai in the 1920s.
2. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/06/c_138204560.htm (accessed 1 November 2021).
3. See the comparative book of the ASSA project: Miller et al. 2021.
4. The concept of 'information have-less' was coined by media scholar Jack Linchuan Qiu to describe people who benefited from inexpensive internet and mobile phone services. The 'information have-less' is between the haves and have nots, including migrants and retirees. See Qiu, J. L. 2009.
5. https://www.longfinance.net/media/documents/GFCI_28_Full_Report_2020.09.25_v1.1.pdf (accessed 1 November 2021).
6. Keller, W., B. Li and C. H. Shiue 2013.
7. Colonialism in China is usually associated with the 'century of humiliation' (*bai nian guochi*) experienced under Western imperialism in the nationalism discourse. In the book *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China's global history*, Isabella Jackson insightfully reveals the transnational colonialism that permeates Shanghai and its administration in the International Settlements. Jackson's investigation of the significant role that the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) – a colonial governance of the International Settlement led by non-state actors – played in the International Settlement in Shanghai reveals the complexity of Western colonialism in China in the context of a 'transnational process'.
8. Johnstone, W. C. 1937.
9. Frazier, M. W. 2019, 133.
10. Of the city's population of 3 million, 70,000 were foreigners. See French, P. 2006, 191.
11. In the eighteenth century the British had become a nation of tea drinkers. To prevent a trade imbalance (e.g. due to the astronomically increasing demand for Chinese tea), the British tried to sell more of their own products to China. However, there was not much demand for wool products in a country accustomed to either cotton or silk. Opium turned out to be the 'best' solution to this trace imbalance. Highly addictive opium, known in China as 'foreign mud', rapidly became the drug of choice for all sectors of Chinese society. In 1890 an estimated 10 per cent of the Chinese population smoked opium. The Opium Wars arose when the Chinese tried to curb the deliberate attempt to create a society addicted to this drug. See Brown, J. B. 1973.
12. Scheen, L. 2012, 121.
13. French, P. 2006, 191.
14. Boasting the best-equipped studios and the best-run heaters, Shanghai cinemas dominated the mass culture and entertainment scene across urban China before 1949. See Fu, P. 1997.
15. The Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), also known as the Taiping Revolution, was a massive civil war between the Manchu Qing dynasty and the Han, Hakka-led Taiping heavenly Kingdom. With a death toll of between 30 and 50 million, the Taiping Rebellion is one of the bloodiest civil wars in world history. British interests in Shanghai grew rapidly in the Taiping Rebellion period and the British helped the Qing government to draw in intervention against the Taiping armies when they attacked the Shanghai port in 1860 and 1862. In the end the Qing government won the war. See Chappell, J. 2016.
16. The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), also known as the Boxer Uprising, was an armed insurrection in China. It was initiated by ordinary Chinese peasants against increasing foreign intervention in China. The peasants were known as 'boxers' in the West due to their martial arts

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showmanship. The rebellion used the slogan: 'Support the Qing, exterminate the foreigners'. The Boxer Rebellion, although short-lived, played a significant role in the rise of nationalism in modern China; it was later to inspire Chinese nationalists, including a young Mao Zedong, for decades to come. For a vivid portrait of the Boxer Rebellion see Silbey, D. J. 2012.

17. Arkaraprasertkul, N. 2009.
18. Ibid.
19. Guan, Q. 1996, 25.
20. Lü, J., P. G. Rowe and J. Zhang, eds. 2001, 63.
21. https://www.chinahighlights.com/shanghai/attraction/lilongs.htm (accessed on 1 November 2021).
22. Interested readers could read Li, J. 2014. This book insightfully captures the nuanced social life within *lilong* living under Mao Zedong's communism and later Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening of China.
23. 'Graduated privacy' was a term originally coined by Nelson Wu to explain the use and sequence of spaces in traditional Chinese courtyard houses. See Wu, N. I. 1968, 32.
24. Fang, K., X. Wang, L. Chen, Z. Zhang and N. Furuya 2019.
25. Arkaraprasertkul, N. 2009.
26. Chen Wangdao, one of the early Marxists in China, was the first translator of *The Communist Manifesto* into Chinese. As Mao Zedong revealed in 1936, Chen's Chinese edition of *The Communist Manifesto* inspired his Marxist convictions. https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774e7763444e78457a6333566d54/share_p.html (accessed 1 November 2021).
27. The first National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was held in Shanghai and Jiaxing between 23 July and 2 August 1921. At the time there were 57 members of the Chinese Communist Party, including Mao Zedong. The meeting started in Shanghai, but came to an end due to harassment from the police in the French Concession. It was then moved to a rented tourist boat on the South Lake in Jiaxing.
28. Harmsen, P. 2015.
29. https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/11/shanghais-forgotten-jewish-past/281713/ (accessed 1 November 2021).
30. Read the detailed history of Jewish refugees in Shanghai in Meyer, M. J. 2003.
31. https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/11/shanghais-forgotten-jewish-past/281713/ (accessed 1 November 2021).
32. Stranahan, P. 1992.
33. Scheen, L. 2012, 121.
34. Bray, David. 2005, 151.
35. Frazier, M. W. 2019, 150.
36. The Cultural Revolution, formally called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a political movement launched by Mao Zedong. Its goal was the preservation of Chinese communism by purging the remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. For details of personal memories of the Cultural Revolution, please see Chapter 7.
37. The 'Gang of Four' faction refers to members of a radical political elite who were eventually convicted for implementing the harsh policies of the Cultural Revolution. The group included Mao's third wife Jiang Qing, as well as Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan.
38. Mao insisted that violent class struggle was necessary to protect the Chinese communist revolution. In response to Mao's appeal, millions of young people nationwide formed 'Red Guards'. For details of personal memories of the 'Red Guards' please see Chapter 7.
39. Yeung, Y. M. and Y. Sung, eds. 1996.
40. 'https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18006.shtml (accessed on 1 November 2021).
41. Read more about the personal experiences of participants during China's period of economic reform in Chapter 8.
42. Murphey, R. 1988, 158.
43. Yeung, Y. M. and Y. Sung, eds. 1996, 3–4.
44. On 30 April 1990, when Pudong was declared a special development area, 10 preferential policies for the development of Pudong were announced. These included policies related to the income tax of foreign investors, permission for foreign banks to open branches in Pudong and a free trade zone in Pudong. See details at Yeung, Y. M. and Y. Sung, eds. 1996, 277–8.
45. https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/ports-logistics/shanghai-port-retains-crown-worlds-busiest-container-port-2020 (accessed 1 November 2021).

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46. Yeung, Y. M. and Y. Sung, eds. 1996.
47. In terms of the overall introduction to contemporary Shanghai culture, an excellent book to start with is Jenny Lin's *Above Sea: Contemporary art, urban culture and the fashioning of global Shanghai*. See Lin, J. 2018.
48. For example, the world's second-tallest building Shanghai Tower. See https://factsanddetails.com/china/cat15/sub95/item416.html (accessed 1 November 2021).
49. Larmer, B. 2010.
50. Lei, P. 2019.
51. Areas such as 'Xintiandi' and 'Tianzifang' are full replicas of *lilong* that were devoted to shopping and entertainment. You can read a report on the current situation of Shanghai *lilong* at https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1342/beloved-by-westerners%2C-shanghais-lilong-fail-to-attract-locals (accessed 1 November 2021).
52. It is estimated that two out of three trees in Shanghai are London plane trees. The London plane tree is a hybrid between the American sycamore and the Oriental plane. These two kinds of trees were collected as specimens from European voyages in the seventeenth century and planted close together in the Vauxhall Gardens in London. The offspring of these two types of trees, the London plane tree, was discovered by John Tradescant, an aristocratic plant collector; it became widespread after the reconstruction of Paris in the nineteenth century. When the French arrived in Shanghai in the nineteenth century, they planted London plane trees alongside the lanes in the French Concession, leading local Chinese people to associate these trees with France. Sycamore trees (*hutong*) are always associated with the phoenix in China, as in folk tales these birds only rest on sycamore trees. For more background on trees see Grolleman 2018 at: https://jaapgrolleman.com/trees-of-shanghai/ (accessed 1 November 2021).
53. Xiong, Y. 1996.
54. Gamble, J. 2002.
55. UN Economic and Social commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'Long-term care for older persons in China' (working paper). https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Long%20Term%20Care%20for%20older%20persons%20in%20China.pdf (accessed 1 November 2021).
56. The average life expectancy in China has risen from 34.51 years in 1940 to 76.62 years in 2020. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041350/life-expectancy-china-all-time/ (accessed 1 November 2021). It is worth noting that the significant reduction in the mortality rate of newborn babies has also contributed to the average life span.
57. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/cn/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-cn-2018-mobile-consumer-survey-en-190121.pdf (accessed 1 November 2021).
58. https://techblog.comsoc.org/2020/01/01/china-internet-penetration-reached-61-2-in-1st-half-2019-99-1-access-internet-via-mobile-phones/ (accessed 1 November 2021).
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60. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/29/c_137074836.htm (accessed 1 November 2021).
61. http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1138831.shtml (accessed 1 November 2021).
62. http://tjj.sh.gov.cn/tjfx/20181123/0014-1002033.html (accessed 1 November 2021).
63. For example, female officials retire at the age of 55. In the case of hard physical jobs men retire at the age of 55 and women at 45.
64. Please note that given the profound rural and urban divide in China in various aspects of social life, all of the discussion of the ageing experience in this chapter – as well as in this book – is primarily about people in urban China.
65. Eremia, M., L. Toma and M. Sanduleac, 2017.
66. For example, see Ali Haidery, S., H. Ullah, N. U. Khan, K. Fatima, S. S. Rizvi and S. J. Kwon. 2020.
67. One of these occasions was when I purchased a Chinese SIM card at the Pudong International Airport upon arrival and was then unable to pay via mobile (the result of not having a valid Chinese phone number). The other occasion was during a trip to Beijing. At the time (2019) I had been so used to tapping in and out of the Shanghai Metro by using my phone that I had not anticipated being unable to purchase a metro ticket via my smartphone in the capital city.
68. Guo, S. 2021, xii.
69. Su Shi is one of most talented and accomplished figures in classical Chinese literature.

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70. Su Shi, ‘Written on the Wall at West Forest Temple’. The poem is translated by Prof. Yuanchong Yu (1921–2021) – a famous Chinese translator best known for translating ancient Chinese poems into English and French.
71. Magnani, J. G. C. 2005.
72. Horst, H. and D. Miller, eds. 2020.
73. Miller, D. 1987, 107.
74. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/margaret_mead_130631.
75. Miller, D. et al. 2021, 21.
76. Zhao, C. 2004.
77. Phillips, K. L. and A. L. Sommers. 2009.
78. For a brief introduction to WeChat, a hugely popular Chinese multi-purpose and messaging app, please see the second Appendix of this book.

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