

Australian Civilian Engagement with China in the Reform Era : The M Literary Festivals

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Australian Civilian Engagement with China in the Reform Era: The M Literary Festivals

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Abstract

The M Literary Festivals, founded by the Australian restaurateur and cultural impresario Michelle Anne Garnaut, AO, were a primarily English-language series of international literary festivals that ran on the Chinese mainland between 2003–2019. They were the first, and the longest series of international literary festivals in contemporary China to date. Despite being widely recognised as among the most important international cultural and intellectual forums on the Chinese mainland for nearly two decades, extant literature on the M Literary Festivals is scant.

This paper draws on public and private records, including programmes, diaries produced by Michelle Garnaut and interviews with people involved with the festivals. It draws on the perspectives of the festival's founders, organisers, partners and participants to construct a chronology of their origins and development. It further evaluates their significance with regard to three distinct contexts. In the first place, it argues that the M Literary Festivals pioneered and promoted the concept of contemporary international literary festivals on the Chinese mainland. Secondly, it assesses the significance of their city of origin, and their role in a cultural 'renaissance' in Shanghai vis-à-vis its cosmopolitan past, as well as the ways in which they grew from this reform epicentre to contribute to broader international attempts to engage with China during the reform era (1978–2017). Lastly, it offers an interpretation of their place in a historical Australian civilian-led tradition of pioneering engagement with the Chinese world, which has its origins in the late 19th century.

Regarding these three contexts, this paper demonstrates that the M Literary Festivals made significant contributions throughout their duration, but are also likely to take on historical significance, emblematic of China's reform era of which they were a part, as well as a source of inspiration for future pioneers of international engagement with the Chinese world.

Keyword

Michelle Garnaut, The M Literary Festivals, Contemporary China, Cultural Relations, Australian Civilian Engagement with China

中国改革开放期におけるオーストラリアの民間の対中関与： M文芸祭

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要旨

M文芸祭 (The M Literary Festivals, 上海国際文学祭 [Shanghai International Literary Festival, 2003-2019] および首都圏文学祭 [Capital Literary Festival, 2011-2014]) は、オーストラリアのレストラン経営者で文化事業家のミシェル・アン・ガノー (Michelle Anne Garnaut, AO) が創設し、2003年から2019年にかけて中国本土で主に英語で開催された一連の国際文学祭である。これは現代中国で初めて開かれ、最も長く続いた国際文学祭となった。20年近く中国本土で最も重要な国際文化・知的フォーラムとして広く認められてきたにもかかわらず、M文芸祭の意義を論じた文献は乏しい。さらに関連する史料の利用が容易ではなかったことから、その内容と発展を検討する学術的な試みは今日まで行われていない。

本論文では、プログラム、ミシェル・ガノーが作成した日記、M文芸祭の関係者へのインタビューなど、公私にわたる史料をもとに、創設者、主催者、パートナー、参加者の視点から、M文芸祭の起源と発展を描き出す。さらに、以下に述べる3つの文脈からその意義を評価するものである。まず、M文芸祭が中国大陸における現代的な国際文学祭の概念を開拓し、推進したことを論証する。次に、M文芸祭が上海で発祥したことの意義と、この文芸祭が上海のコスモポリタンな過去と響き合う文化の「復興」において果たした役割を論証する。実のところ、この改革の中心地から発展したM文芸祭は、やがて中国が最も開放的だった改革開放期 (1978-2017) に、国際社会が同国との関与を深める上で重要な役割を果たした。最後にM文芸祭を、19世紀後半に端を発するオーストラリアの民間主導の中華世界との関与という歴史的伝統の上に位置付ける。

本論文は上記3つの文脈を参照しながら、M文芸祭がその開催期間を通じて重要な貢献を果たしただけでなく、それが象徴する時代の記憶として、また将来中国世界と国際的な交流をはかろうとする者にインスピレーションを与える源として、歴史的意義を持つ可能性があることを指摘する。

キーワード

ミシェル・ガノー、M文芸祭、現代中国、文化関係、オーストラリア民間の対中関与

Introduction

The M Literary Festivals — comprising of the Shanghai International Literary Festival (2003-2019) and the Capital Literary Festival (2011-2014) — were a series of international literary festivals held on the Chinese mainland between 2003-2019. The M Literary Festivals were significant for being the first, and longest-standing series of international literary festivals on the Chinese mainland in the contemporary era. They were initiated by and grew out of the civilian enterprise of the Australian restaurateur-in-China and cultural impresario Michelle Anne Garnaut, AO (1957-), who

between 1999-2022 operated a number of Western restaurants and bars, situated at prominent and historically significant locations on the Chinese mainland.

Collectively known as the 'M Restaurants', Garnaut's mainland portfolio built upon earlier success at her flagship Hong Kong establishment, M at the Fringe (1989-2009). At various points throughout Garnaut's two-decade-long presence on the Chinese mainland, the 'M Restaurants' included: M on the Bund (1999-2022), The Glamour Bar (originally named the 'Glamour Room', situated adjunct to

the main restaurant between 2001–2006;¹ and, as the Glamour Bar, on a separate floor between 2006–2014), Glam (2015–2022) and briefly, Rollo di Pollo (adjunct to the main restaurant for 8 months in 2000) in Shanghai; and, Capital M in Beijing (2009–2017).

The earliest and longest standing of the M Restaurants on the Chinese mainland, M on the Bund, which was located on the seventh floor of the historic Nissin Building 日清大樓 at No. 5 on the Bund, is widely credited with having played an important role in spearheading the revitalisation of the once vibrant waterfront strip in the former Shanghai International Settlement. At the time of its opening, owing to the acceleration of market reforms in the country and the inflow of large amounts of foreign investment into the city, Shanghai was undergoing a significant transformation, and Garnaut's establishment on the Bund was situated in a prime vantage point from which to observe this. On the other side of the Huangpu River in the previously barren Pudong District, a series of skyscrapers had been completed over the preceding years, including the Oriental Pearl TV Tower (1994) and Jin Mao Tower (1999), while the city's new aviation hub, Pudong International Airport (1999) would be opened in the same year.

Despite these significant and expedited visible transformations to the city that once enjoyed a reputation as the cosmopolitan 'Paris of the East' in the early 20th century, numerous accounts indicate that, beneath the surface, there were important limitations to this parallel. At the time of Garnaut's opening in 1999, there were 28,700 restaurants in Shanghai² — this number increased to an estimated more than

100,000 two decades later, in 2019³ — and of them, few offered authentic Western fine dining. Of the Western offerings available, Garnaut recalls that the majority comprised of a sort of Russian-influenced 'Chinese Western' cuisine.⁴ The scant number of restaurants that did offer authentic Western cuisine were located in international hotels surrounding the former French Concession.⁵ With view to this, and a sense that 'China was the future',⁶ Garnaut set out to introduce, as she had successfully done a decade earlier in Hong Kong, independent, authentic Western fine dining to Shanghai. Although she eventually settled on the Bund location, this was contrary to conventional wisdom at the time. To run a successful Western restaurant, 'you have to be in the triangle of the Hilton hotel, the Garden hotel and the Portman hotel or it won't work,' she recalls being advised.⁷ As this paper will indicate in analysing the significance of one aspect of Garnaut's enterprise — the M Literary Festivals — her selection of the Bund contrary to this advice was likely informed by a vision not exclusively for a popular Western restaurant, but for a multi-dimensional cultural institution of historical and contemporary significance. This built on the corporate identity that Garnaut had forged at her original Hong Kong location, which was defined by a convergence of business, culinary innovation, a historically significant location, cultural patronage and social activism.

Although it would take some time for the trend to become evident, with the second restaurant on the Bund only opening five years after Garnaut, M on the Bund proved to be the harbinger for the revitalisation of an international culinary scene in Shanghai and had a pioneering role in rejuvenating the Bund's

identity as a contemporary hub for all aspects of cultural life.

Apart from its role in revitalising Shanghai's international culinary landscape, M on the Bund would also evolve into a community space. For many expatriate residents, the restaurant's calendar of cultural events, including at various points exhibitions, talks, salons and cabaret performances, filled a void in an otherwise limited landscape of opportunities for the satiation of their intellectual and cultural interests. Although once scarce resources such as foreign language literature would become increasingly available, and the spectrum of cultural engagement would expand as Shanghai's resident and visiting foreign population grew over the subsequent years, M on the Bund and its cultural programmes would remain notable for their scale, influence, longevity, continuity and intellectual breadth.

The M Literary Festivals (2003–2019) are the most noteworthy and renowned of Garnaut's cultural engagement initiatives that contributed to cultural life in China. Stemming from a single speaker, invited to Shanghai by Garnaut on the sidelines of an engagement at the Hong Kong International Literary Festival,⁸ with an audience of around a dozen people, the festivals grew substantially in size and influence over the subsequent years.⁹ Between the two festivals that comprise the M Literary Festivals, over a period of 17 years, some 705 speakers from dozens of countries visited Shanghai and Beijing to present at a total of 741 sessions,¹⁰ which regularly attracted audiences in the hundreds. At their most active, the festivals ran over three weekends, hosting over 100 authors and attracting audiences of up to 6,000 people,¹¹

and while remaining independent, enjoyed the support of consulates, embassies and arts councils of numerous countries.

The first of the M Literary Festivals, the Shanghai International Literary Festival, was timely in opening possibilities for intellectual and cultural engagement between China and the world, as well as bringing internationally influential authors and thinkers to China at a time when economic reforms were in full force. It was also significant in that it was founded and operated as an entirely civilian endeavour. Arguably, these factors were important to its success, and although the festivals were never officially endorsed by the Chinese authorities, Garnaut's initiative implicitly satisfied the desire of the local authorities to showcase their reform to the world. According to the Australian author and former Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing Nicholas Jose (1987–1990), in bringing an international audience to Shanghai, Garnaut had achieved something that Chinese officialdom had hoped for in the preceding years but could not logistically pull off.¹² Having started as a cultural endeavour, the M Literary Festivals are also noteworthy for having introduced the concept of international literary festivals to the Chinese mainland.

Scholarly inquiry into the origins, development and significance of the contemporary notion of international literary festivals has gained traction in recent years. Among the field's most prominent works are Millicent Weber's efforts to document the history of literary festivals,¹³ which she argues have their roots in the mid-20th century and have a strong connection to Commonwealth countries but underwent their most significant growth and expansion

in the last decades of the 20th century. It was against this backdrop that literary festivals were popularised in Asia, and the M Literary Festivals thrived.

Contemporary literary festivals in mainland China specifically have also been the subject of recent scholarship. This has included Jospia Mijoč's series of books on the EU-China International Literary Festivals 中欧国际文学节,¹⁴ which quantify and examine the utility of literary festivals to government as a tool of public diplomacy. Despite the heightened academic interest in the significance of literary festivals on the Chinese mainland, there have been no scholarly attempts to date to document the history and development of the first, and longest running of these festivals, the M Literary Festivals. As of writing, an accessible, accurate and complete account of the festivals, their contents, history and significance does not exist. This is likely in part due to the absence of readily accessible records pertaining to the festivals.

The present paper seeks to begin to address this by providing a starting point for further research on the festivals and their significance. Drawing on programmes, diaries produced by Michelle Garnaut and a series of semi-structured interviews with people (including businesspeople, diplomats and writers; international visitors, expatriate residents and Chinese locals) who were involved in, participated in or attended the festivals, this paper constructs a chronology of the development of the festivals and serves as a guide to relevant resources, on the basis of which further analysis of their significance may be conducted. Its interpretations are not

intended to be exhaustive and are informed by the perspectives reflected in interviews with the expatriate and local élites and aesthetes who engaged with the M Literary Festivals.

The first section provides a chronological overview of the origin and development of the M Literary Festivals, documenting the ways in which they evolved, highlighting important junctures in their history, and pointing to their significance and influence. The following sections evaluate the M Literary Festivals, their significance, and contributions with respect to three distinct analytical lenses. These are:

- 1) The significance of the M Literary Festivals within the contemporary tradition of literary festivals, and their role in pioneering and promoting international literary festivals on the Chinese mainland;
- 2) The role and significance of the M Literary Festivals as part of China's reform era (1978–2017)¹⁵ cultural 'renaissance' in Shanghai *vis-à-vis* its cosmopolitan past, and their role in facilitating international engagement with China in the reform era; and,
- 3) The contribution of the M Literary Festivals to the tradition of Australian civilian engagement with China.

Finally, the conclusion summarises these findings, and points to future possibilities for the study and understanding of the contributions of the M Literary Festivals.

The origins and development of the M Literary Festivals

Following the opening and success of Garnaut's flagship fine dining establishment M

on the Bund in 1999, the Australian restaurateur was quick to expand its offerings. M on the Bund was defined as much by its terrace view overlooking the Huangpu River as its signature cuisine, but to the rear of the terrace and main dining area, there was underutilised space. Especially outside of normal business hours Garnaut offered the space to friends and acquaintances with community-oriented ideas. During this early period, Garnaut was advised by the visiting Melbourne restaurateur and cultural patron Mietta O'Donnell to use the space to host cultural salons.¹⁶

For a short stint in 2000, Garnaut dabbled in the idea of a more affordable alternative to M on the Bund — a mixed-use venue which combined art with casual dining, specialising in rotisserie chicken and pizza, called Rollo di Pollo. Drawing on inspiration from O'Donnell, the new restaurant doubled as a 'co-op art platform', featuring the work of local artists, including the China-based producer and curator Davide Quadrio's first gallery on the mainland. Rollo di Pollo would be short-lived, however, lasting 8 months before Garnaut would decide that the business was untenable. Garnaut's clientele were drawn to M on the Bund for glamour, indulgence and its views — the cheaper option fell short on all counts and failed to draw a crowd.

Garnaut's initial attempt at diversification was unsuccessful, but it provided the inspiration and foundation for what would prove to be one of her most well-known contributions to cultural life on the Chinese mainland in the reform era. The area would have to remain fundamentally 'mixed-use', providing auxiliary seating for M on the Bund *pro re nata*, but instead of emphasising its independence from the main

restaurant, Garnaut saw that it was necessary that the two were complementary and, to an extent, co-dependent.

Over the following year, Garnaut developed the concept of the 'Glamour Room' (later renamed the 'Glamour Bar'). Upon opening, Garnaut simply said of the new concept, 'Shanghai is ready for a bar for grown-ups'.¹⁷ It was as a more natural extension to M on the Bund and would serve as an area where the restaurant could accommodate patrons in a different setting, without disturbing the ambience of the main dining area. She enlisted the designers of M on the Bund and the earlier Rollo di Pollo, Roger Hackworth and Debra Little, to convert the space into 'a 21st century impression of a 1930s Hollywood movie set', which was completed and opened in late 2001.

The Glamour Room readily traversed between its identities as a standalone bar, extended dining space and an event space, allowing Garnaut to continue develop its offerings, which initially included live music accompanying after-dinner drinks. This became a regular feature and was formalised with the introduction of the 'Live at the Glamour Bar' series, which hosted performances of chamber music earlier in the evening from 5pm, and contemporary acts from 10pm.¹⁸ The series 'revived the elegant tradition of sophisticated drinks and after-dinner music in Shanghai,' claimed an introductory note on the Glamour Bar.¹⁹

The live musical performances would remain a staple offering of the Glamour Bar, but it would take on new significance for cultural relations when the inaugural Irish Consul General in Shanghai (2000–2004) Geoffrey

Keating proposed to Garnaut that the venue could serve as a home for other artforms as well, and that the consulate would be willing to co-operate to facilitate this. Keating placed emphasis on the country's cultural diplomacy, noting that 'as a diplomatic tool, culture is very important as a way of creating a distinct identity... because ultimately, people will not trade with you if they don't know you exist',²⁰ and identified Garnaut's restaurant as a place where this could take place. Garnaut agreed, and over the subsequent years, the Irish Consulate in Shanghai partnered with M on the Bund to bring a range of cultural events to the restaurant. These included performances by Irish musicians, readings by poets and authors, and an annual 'Bloomsday' celebration, which paid homage to the Irish novelist James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*.²¹

The success of these events saw a diverse programme of cultural events take shape and become permanent fixtures of the Glamour Bar. Among them, Garnaut would revive another Shanghai tradition past with the introduction of a series of talks that were collectively known as the 'Glamour Bar Lectures', or the 'Glamorous Lecture Series'.²² To launch the series, Garnaut invited the Australian author Frank Moorhouse (1938–2022), who was working on a book about the martini in literature, to deliver the inaugural lecture. As Tina M. Kanagaratnam, a long-serving co-organiser (2003–2015) of cultural events at M on the Bund, notes:²³

In 2003 Australian restaurateur-in-China Michelle Garnaut got wind that the author Frank [Moorhouse] was working on a book about the Martini and literature. Garnaut was already known for her pioneering

fine dining restaurants in Hong Kong and Shanghai and had recently opened the Glamour Bar in Shanghai. In addition to serving sublime Martinis, the Glamour Bar had just launched a cultural events series: the Martini and literature would be a perfect fit.²⁴

At Garnaut's invitation, and at the height of the SARS crisis in early 2003, Moorhouse delivered his lectures on the 'Martini in Literature' in succession at Garnaut's Hong Kong location as part of the Hong Kong International Literary Festival, and later at the Glamour Bar in Shanghai.²⁵ Moorhouse's lecture defied the panic of the SARS crisis and among his peers, many of whom cancelled their appearances in Hong Kong at news of the outbreak, to:

...la[y] the foundation for what would, under the ægis of Michelle Garnaut, be among the most important, and free-flowing, international cultural and intellectual forums on the Chinese mainland for nearly two decades — the Shanghai International Literary Festival (2003–2019), held at M on the Bund in Shanghai, and the Capital Literary Festival (2011–2014), held at Capital M in Beijing.²⁶

An experimental series of 'Glamorous Lectures' followed,²⁷ but Moorhouse's lecture would be especially significant for its role in laying the foundation for what would become the first in the stable of the M Literary Festivals — the Shanghai International Literary Festival. On the basis of the Moorhouse arrangement, in the following year, Garnaut formalised an agreement with the Hong Kong

International Literary Festival that would see a number of its speakers also travel to Shanghai to participate in a smaller scale event attached to the main festival, hosted at the Glamour Bar.²⁸ Moorhouse's 'Martini Lectures' were thus retrospectively denominated the inaugural festival, in recognition of their role in facilitating this development.

Over the subsequent years, the partnership with the Hong Kong International Literary Festival provided the basis from which the Shanghai festival was able to grow from a small event run over a single weekend with five visiting speakers in 2004 into a large-scale event of international significance with a broad spectrum of speakers and topics by 2007. Initially, speakers with a connection either to China or Australia spoke in Shanghai on the sidelines of the Hong Kong festival (2004)²⁹, but this soon grew to include a broader spectrum of writers, including internationally renowned authors, as the festival expanded and gained prominence (2005)³⁰. While some participating authors were familiar with and had long-term involvement with China, for others, participation in the Shanghai festival represented their first trip to and experience of the country.³¹ This would become one of the festival's defining features and contributions to facilitating engagement with the Chinese world.

The Shanghai festival also gradually established its independence. Alongside engagements facilitated by the Hong Kong festival sessions, it introduced sessions that featured local authors and tied into the local literary community (between 2005–2006), as well as segments supported by consulates and cultural institutions that identified its value for

advancing cultural relations on the Chinese mainland.³² This combination saw the festival's spectrum of speakers and themes develop to mix the international with the local, and the contemporary with the historical.

The popularity of the Glamour Bar and its cultural programme outgrew its small space at the back of the restaurant, necessitating expansion, which saw Garnaut open a larger iteration of the Glamour Bar on the floor below M on the Bund in mid-2006. Between 2007–2014, this provided a significantly larger home for the Shanghai International Literary Festival, as it became formally named.

By this point, although it was no longer the sole literary festival on the Chinese mainland — The Bookworm bookstore in Beijing had held its first 'mini literary festival' in August 2006³³ — the Shanghai International Literary Festival had become an internationally recognised, major literary event.³⁴ According to its organisers, hitherto the festival was run with 'no funding, no volunteers, and one sponsor...[selling] tickets at the restaurant', while the 2007 festival attracted such wide interest that 'the telephone lines were tied up with Festival bookings and restaurant customers couldn't get through'.³⁵ It was widely recognised as China's premier international literary festival, and noted for the breadth and profile of its speakers and themes. Owing to the eclectic identities of their host institutions — Garnaut's restaurants — the M Literary Festivals were able to transcend the constraints of traditional literary festivals to invite speakers and facilitate discussion that dealt with subjects that were not necessarily purely 'literary' in nature, in ways that festivals attached to more traditional literary

institutions could not.

The importance of the Shanghai International Literary Festival as a platform for advancing cultural relations was recognised by numerous consulates and national arts institutions.³⁶ By virtue of its partnerships with these institutions, the festival was further diversified to feature speakers from non-Anglophone countries often underrepresented at literary festivals, as well as multilingual sessions.³⁷ These features helped to distinguish the Shanghai festival as an international forum that addressed the deficiencies of literary festivals, which are often criticised for neglecting non-Anglophone literature and authors.

The Shanghai festival also bolstered its importance for the literary world, both locally and internationally. Interactive workshops on writing and publishing for aspiring Shanghai-based authors (from 2007) saw the festivals become further intertwined with the local community. These events would help to foster numerous careers, who would speak and launch their books at later festivals and would prove to constitute some of the festival's most important contributions to the development of Shanghai's local and expatriate literary communities. The festival also became an event of international importance for the literary and publishing world with the introduction of international book launches (from 2008) into its purview.³⁸ For a number of authors dealing with China-related matters the M Literary Festivals became their preferred forum for debuting new publications, which in many cases were produced during the author's time in China and were either directly or indirectly assisted by involvement in the festivals.

Although their primary purpose was to promote engagement with international culture and literature, the festivals grew to encompass a high-profile forum for dialogue on contemporary issues (from 2009), with the introduction of the *Financial Times* Great Debate session to the annual festival programme.³⁹ The *Financial Times* Great Debate (2009–2014, 2017–2019) was notable for its role as a rare continuing and candid forum on the Chinese mainland for discussion of sensitive and sometimes controversial matters, including criticism of events in China. The fact that the debates were held in English and attracted an audience primarily comprised of English-speaking expatriates was likely a factor in their unhindered success. There were however instances in which the envelope was evidently pushed, although it was not always clear where exactly the line was. A 2017 session on free speech, for example, went ahead undeterred, but the 2014 *Financial Times* Great Debate on China's environmental challenge — a sensitive matter at the time, particularly in the Chinese capital — attracted a pre-emptive warning from the authorities, but nonetheless went ahead in Shanghai (but not in Beijing, where a M Literary Festival was also held that year).⁴⁰ This conundrum is all too familiar for those involved in public life on the Chinese mainland, which necessitates the navigation of the opaque margins of tolerated speech in an attempt to retain credibility without jeopardising one's livelihood — a balancing act which becomes more difficult when business interests are at stake.⁴¹ Garnaut's success in facilitating these events demonstrates that, under the right political, economic and social conditions, and with some sensibility and determination, the potential for provocative intellectual discussion

on the Chinese mainland is not always as limited as is commonly thought.

In 2011, the M Literary Festivals expanded to Beijing with the establishment of the Capital Literary Festival under the auspices of Garnaut's Beijing restaurant, Capital M, which had opened in the Chinese capital in late 2009.⁴² Between 2011–2014, the Beijing festival would share many, but not all speakers with the Shanghai festival. The smaller Capital Literary Festival was distinguished from its more internationalised sister festival by a programme that placed greater emphasis on China as the subject of discussion, as well as its closer proximity to diplomatic missions, which facilitated closer collaborations.⁴³

The addition of the Beijing festival saw the M Literary Festivals grow in scale (as illustrated in Figure I) and influence, reaching their peak in 2013.⁴⁴

Notes on data

Speakers (Total) and Sessions (Total) refer to the distinct number of participating speakers and unique sessions for a given year. Speakers (Shanghai) and Sessions (Shanghai) refer to the distinct number of participating speakers and unique sessions at the Shanghai International Literary Festival for a given year. Speakers (Beijing) and Sessions (Beijing) likewise refer to the distinct number of participating speakers at the Capital Literary Festival and unique sessions for a given year.

* The Capital Literary Festival (Beijing) was planned for 2015, but cancelled, with two speakers from Shanghai also speaking at Capital M in its place, rendering 2014 the last Capital Literary Festival. These two speakers and sessions are included for statistical purposes.

** The Shanghai International Literary Festival (Shanghai) was planned for 2020, but delayed and later cancelled, rendering

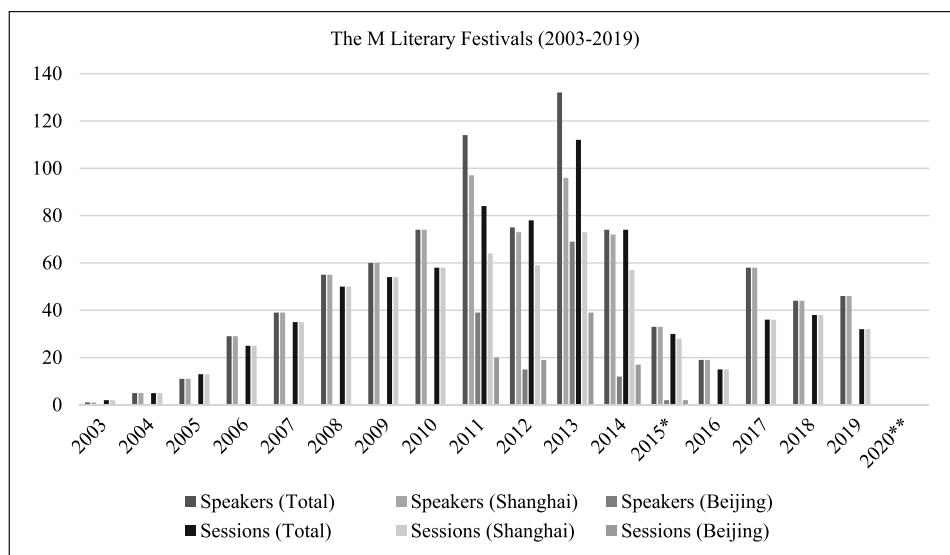


Figure I: The development in scale of the M Literary Festivals (2003–2019)

— the Shanghai International Literary Festival (2003–2019) and the Capital Literary Festival (2011–2014) — by year.

2019 the last Shanghai International Literary Festival and the last of the M Literary Festivals in their previous form.

The Beijing festival presented unique challenges, however, particularly due to the location of its host institution in the central area of Qianmen 前门 (Zhengyangmen 正阳门), overlooking Tiananmen Square, which was often subject to restrictions during political events. These factors would necessitate a delay and downscaling of the Beijing festival in 2014, likely due to their coinciding with the annual plenary sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). In the following year, the 2015 Beijing festival would have to be cancelled at the last minute due to such restrictions.⁴⁵ The Capital Literary Festival would not be revived before the closure of Capital M in late 2017, making 2014 the last of the Beijing festivals.

The logistical challenges of the Beijing festival and its eventual discontinuation saw the M Literary Festivals quickly reduce in scale from their peak. The Shanghai festival was largely unaffected and had remained a large-scale event until 2015, when it was significantly reduced in scale following a rent hike in late 2014 that necessitated the closure of the Glamour Bar and a downsizing of Garnaut's Shanghai operations.⁴⁶ A partnership with a long-term co-organiser was also concluded, bringing the festivals under the exclusive auspices of Garnaut and the M Restaurant Group. Following a warning from the authorities about the controversial *Financial Times* Great Debate on China's environmental challenge (in 2014), subsequent festivals further adopted a more cautious, less politically

sensitive tone. The debates were eventually reintroduced (in 2017), featuring discussions that were nonetheless contentious, but avoided direct criticism of their host country.⁴⁷

These developments saw the festivals repositioned for the remainder of their existence more as smaller, intimate gatherings of authors and thinkers than the large-scale events that had defined them at their apex. In their later years, their long-term contribution to a tight-knit local literary community was highlighted by book launches and sessions by Shanghai-based authors who had developed their writing through participation in the festivals over the years.⁴⁸

Within this milieu, the later festivals continued to explore new possibilities, notably featuring a Chinese government-affiliated novelist-cum-economic-advisor (2019).⁴⁹ Whereas their detachment from 'official China' had been a factor in their earlier success in treading the fine line of tolerated speech on the Chinese mainland, this development may have indicated a possibility for the M Literary Festivals to take on a new role as a forum for international exchange and dialogue. This would not be realised, however — the 2020 Shanghai International Literary Festival was postponed, and later cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁰ With the closure of M on the Bund in February 2022, the M Literary Festivals, in their previous form at least, have come to an end.

The significance of the M Literary Festivals within the contemporary tradition of literary festivals

Drawing on Alessandro Falassi's broad definition of the 'festival',⁵¹ in her 2018 book *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book*

Culture, the prominent literary festival scholar Millicent Weber defines the contemporary notion of the 'literary festival' as:

[F]estivals that in addition incorporate literary culture into their constitution. They work as a celebration of literary culture; they frequently occur at a time which is of literary significance, for example commemorating a particularly significant literary anniversary; they integrate aspects of literary culture into their organisation and events; and/or they address a specific community that is defined through engagement with literary culture.⁵²

With this definition, Weber demonstrates in her extensive review of the history of literary festivals and their study that literary festivals gained popularity throughout the last decades of the 20th century, primarily in Commonwealth countries, and mostly in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.⁵³ The earliest and longest-running of these, the Cheltenham Literary Festival, began in 1949, and was followed by a number of festivals established throughout Commonwealth countries, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁴ At the time of publication of her 2018 study, Weber placed the number of literary festivals held annually across the English speaking world at over 450.

Importantly, the contemporary notion of literary festivals, as Weber's review demonstrates, has its origins in Commonwealth countries, and a strong connection to the English-speaking world. Despite their contemporary prevalence, the most widely known literary festivals in the United States only began in the late 20th and early 21st century.⁵⁵ It was around the same

time that literary festivals began to emerge across other continents, albeit primarily in areas with a historical link to the Anglophone world, and where English remains widely spoken. Notably, these included the Hong Kong International Literary Festival (established in 2001), the Ubud Writers & Readers Festival in Bali (established in 2004), the Jaipur Literature Festival (established in 2006), the Galle Literary Festival (established in 2007) and the Storymoja Festival in Nairobi (established in 2007).⁵⁶

It was against the backdrop of this international literary festival boom that the first of the M Literary Festivals, the Shanghai International Literary Festival, was conceived in 2003. Unlike the majority of the aforementioned festivals, the Shanghai festival was unique in that, despite the city's colonial and cosmopolitan past, English was not widely spoken outside the expatriate community, and access to foreign literature was limited. Although the festival would be primarily conducted in English, it would also host a range of non-Anglophone authors, both local and international, and on occasion, offer panels in Chinese and languages other than English.

By 2007, the Shanghai International Literary Festival had grown from a small gathering with one man talking about martinis in literature to an established event of international significance attracting internationally renowned authors and featuring 35 sessions that ranged across a wide spectrum of literary discussions, in a programme that mingled the international with the local, and the contemporary with the historical.⁵⁷

Literary culture was incorporated into the design and running of the festivals which

grew to include writing workshops, a literary competition, debates on contemporary issues, book launches and sessions intended to introduce children to literature.

Having introduced the concept of international literary festivals to the Chinese mainland, the M Literary Festivals grew within this tradition to pioneer a novel approach that embraced and responded to the context and time of their surroundings. Reflecting their restaurant setting, culinary themes would feature throughout the years. Embracing their home in Shanghai, and later Beijing, they gave prominence to local histories, heritage and interests, including promoting and cultivating local literature and writers. They embraced the zeitgeist of the reform era and dealt with subjects of importance to people interested in China and its shifting relationship with the world. The M Literary Festivals also addressed what is identified by critics as one of the key deficiencies of traditional international literary festivals, spanning beyond the Anglosphere to nurture a multicultural and multilingual literary tradition, that was inclusive of local (Chinese) works, authors and language, as well as those of regions typically underrepresented at international literary festivals (including the Nordic region, the Philippines, Israel, India and Sri Lanka).⁵⁸

Beyond their direct contribution to sharing literary culture and encouraging cultural exchange, it is significant to note that, although it is difficult to ascertain the exact extent, the M Literary Festivals and their success had a wide-reaching influence, whether direct or indirect, on the establishment of other cultural initiatives and institutions by like-minded individuals

across China.

The Bookworm, founded by the British entrepreneur and long-term Beijing resident Alexandra Pearson, operated international bookstores at various points in time between 2006-2019 in Beijing, Chengdu and Suzhou. The Bookworm International Literary Festival,⁵⁹ which began in Beijing and ran for 13 years between 2006-2019 (with the exception of 2017) became the second international literary festival on the Chinese mainland and would forge partnerships including an author-sharing arrangement with the Shanghai International Literary Festival and Capital Literary Festival.

While governments had previously partnered with the civilian-led M Literary Festivals and Bookworm International Literary Festivals to implement cultural initiatives such as Australian Writers Week in China, in 2017, the EU-China International Literary Festival established by the Delegation of the European Union to China became the first explicitly government-led international literary festival on the Chinese mainland in 2017.⁶⁰

The influence of international literary festivals also extended to indigenous initiatives that took on a distinct local flavour. The One Way Street 单向街图书馆 bookstore (also referred to as One Way Space 单向空间, or OWSPACE since 2014), co-founded in Beijing by a group of Chinese cultural entrepreneurs and media personalities including the prominent author Xu Zhiyuan 许知远 in 2005, represented a Chinese-language-focused addition to this collection of what would become known in broad terms as 'cultural spaces' 文化空间 on the Chinese mainland. One Way Street has run the One Way Street Book

Festival 单向街书店文学节 since 2015.⁶¹

The M Literary Festivals, and in particular the Shanghai International Literary Festival, were perhaps unique in their link to an institution with the ability to transcend the potential limitations that an exclusive association with literature that locations such as bookstores posed. Unlike the Bookworm or the One Way Street bookstore, Garnaut's restaurants had various dimensions to their identity, and were conducive to other forms of cultural engagement. Their wide clientele, too, contributed to the appeal and influence of their cultural activities beyond the exclusively literary realm, allowing the Shanghai International Literary Festival and the Capital Literary Festival to penetrate parts of society that traditional literary festivals could not. The festivals' wide spectrum of authors and topics, which range from the historical and esoteric to the popular — atypical of other festivals — and the size of its audiences — up to 6,000 people per year — testify to their broad appeal and their contribution to the tradition of international literary festivals on the Chinese mainland.⁶²

The role of the M Literary Festivals in a Shanghai 'renaissance' and international engagement with China in the reform era

The first of the M Literary Festivals — the Shanghai International Literary Festival — was significant at the time of its inception for being the first such festival in the contemporary context on the Chinese mainland, and for spearheading the establishment of the tradition of international literary festivals in the country. It is also noteworthy that the M Literary Festivals originated in Shanghai, where

contemporary reform era policies provided the ripe conditions for the revival of the city's historical cosmopolitan identity and cultural traditions past. The M Literary Festivals took on a decidedly contemporary flavour, to be sure, but they also channelled and played on this historical connection. As Tina M. Kanagaratnam has noted:

At first blush, English language literary festivals in China seem counter-intuitive — but perhaps less so when the origin of those festivals is Shanghai, China's most cosmopolitan city. Thanks to its 'century of shame' (1843–1943, when Foreign Concessions ran much of the city), Shanghai was home to a generation of western-educated intellectuals, its legacy bilingual, bicultural writers like Lin Yutang and Eileen Zhang, and a literary class whose influences came equally from the west as from the east.⁶³

The 'century of shame' Kanagaratnam refers to is in some other contexts remembered as the city's 'golden age'.⁶⁴ As noted historians of Shanghai Lynn Pan and Leo Ou-fan Lee have argued with respect to various aspects of cultural life in the period, the 1920–1930s saw Shanghai gain an international reputation as the 'Paris of the Orient' for its 'mixed-up', 'East-meets-West' cosmopolitan identity and bustling cultural scene.⁶⁵ It is significant to note that, as Andrew Field has argued, the development of such a rich and freewheeling spectrum of internationalised cultural life on the Chinese mainland, including but not limited to literature, could only have occurred in Shanghai:

In the case of Shanghai, both entertainment

and publishing developed and thrived in the relatively liberal, *laissez-faire* environments of the concessions, an impossibility in other parts of China, given the strict control that the Chinese government exercised over the media and culture industries during the Qing and into the Republican era.⁶⁶

With view to this historical identity, it is perhaps natural, then, that contemporaneous commentators viewed Shanghai in the contemporary reform era as going through a something of a 'renaissance', *vis-à-vis* its cosmopolitan past. Responding to Joseph Levenson's 1966 lamenting remarks on what he saw as the 'provincialism of the culture of the Cultural revolutionaries', in which he implied that 'one way or another... China will join the world again on the cosmopolitan tide', Leo Ou-fan Lee wrote in 1999 that:

He [Levenson] would have been heartened to know that China has indeed joined the world again 'on the cosmopolitan tide' of transnational market capitalism. Some people are indeed listening. Since the late 1980s, thanks to investors from Hong Kong and other countries, Shanghai has been undergoing an exhilarating urban reconstruction...⁶⁷

For many commentators and participants, the emergence of the Shanghai International Literary Festival was viewed as part of, and symbolic of, this 'renaissance',⁶⁸ and not unlike the events of 1920–1930s Shanghai, it is significant that China's first independent international literary festival would emerge and prosper in the relatively liberal environment that the city provided at the height of the reform

era embrace of international engagement.

Beyond their role in contributing to this cultural 'renaissance', the festivals also presented an important means through which internationally influential writers and thinkers could witness this transformation first-hand. In many cases, participation in the festivals represented the first 'China experience' for authors,⁶⁹ and without this platform, it is likely that many would not have had the opportunity to travel there. Although it is difficult to measure the precise impact that this had on international perceptions of China as it opened itself to the world, at least anecdotally, it is clear that the experience left an impression on a number of influential figures. As part of an interview given on the sidelines of the 2007 festival, the prominent American author Gore Vidal, who Garnaut recalls usually 'never [did] festivals outside New York',⁷⁰ said of Shanghai:

After the cultural revolution there's been a huge burst of energy, which is quite visible just looking at the city (Shanghai) here. Looking at the new buildings down there (on the Bund), you feel volatile, you feel life.⁷¹

Civilian-run cultural institutions like the M Literary Festivals also served an important function in informing and facilitating one avenue of public diplomacy initiatives to engage with China in the reform era. These include, for example, Australian Writers Week in China,⁷² established by the Australian Embassy in Beijing in 2008, as well as the EU-China International Literary Festival, established by the Delegation of the European Union to China in 2017.⁷³ Jospia Mijoč's research on the EU-

China International Literary Festivals provides an important primer in understanding and analysing value of such cultural endeavours to governments:

The promotion of individual cultures through the publishing industry products (books) is a prerequisite for economic representation, understanding and linking. The publishing industry products present cultural identity cards approaching traditions, customs and expectations in communication processes.⁷⁴

With view to this, it is understandable that representatives of foreign countries would be inclined to support these initiatives, and likewise, that the relevant Chinese authorities would, at the very least, tolerate or possibly encourage such exchanges against the backdrop of reform era policies. As the journalist Ron Gluckman puts it bluntly in a 2011 article, referring to the Capital Literary Festival and another Beijing-based festival, the Bookworm Literary Festival:

Long a literary wasteland for anyone unenthusiastic about Communist Party propaganda, China has been opening up, little by little, not only to foreign ideas, but also internationally-acclaimed books. With two literary festivals underway in Beijing, China's capital is finally making literary strides in its quest to become a World City.⁷⁵

For Garnaut, an international businessperson and entrepreneur, the Chinese reform era presented a wealth of economic opportunities — including those from which she and her business benefited — but was also clouded by prejudice

and often superficial experiences. As she details in an interview, Garnaut saw initiatives like the M Literary Festivals as an important element in developing meaningful and lasting international engagement, at a moment when, as she saw it, this was the precise exigency of the era:

When we first started doing it... it was very important to me that people came to China and actually saw something of China for themselves.

I was... sick of journalists coming for four days — come to Shanghai, stay at the Grand Hyatt, come to M on the Bund, visit one other place on the Bund, wander around the Former French Concession and say, 'I'm writing a piece. I'm writing the definitive piece on Shanghai'. It's like... you have no idea. No idea about China. That was one of the reasons we started to do things. I felt very strongly that people had... either a totally negative view of China, which was completely unfair, or this la-la view of China, which was also ridiculous... Well, let's have people here, more interaction and talking to other people about what's really happening... You meet really interesting people, and... it stimulates ideas.⁷⁶

The extent of the partnerships developed to deliver the M Literary Festivals demonstrates that they were valued by those seeking to advance diplomatic, social and economic ties with China in the reform era. Consulates and art institutions from 18 countries — Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Sweden — supported the attendance

of artists and authors from their countries at various points over the 17 years of the M Literary Festivals.

The M Literary Festivals were at the forefront of the cosmopolitan 'renaissance' in Shanghai that became emblematic of the Chinese reform era. Beginning from the epicentre of the reform era, they also epitomised, and helped to pave the way for possibilities for international engagement to grow through cultural initiatives elsewhere on the Chinese mainland.

The contribution of the M Literary Festivals to the tradition of Australian civilian engagement with China

There was a particular appeal and significance of the M Literary Festivals and their host to the Australian presence in Shanghai, too, which was broader than exclusively literature. Like the work and legacy of another Australian civilian pioneer a century earlier, George E. Morrison (1862–1920), Garnaut's endeavours in China, and particularly the M Literary Festivals, facilitated international dialogues and exchanges at a key moment in contemporary China's development. The significant contribution Garnaut made from an Australian perspective would be recognised both informally by respected and influential figures and formally by the Australian Government with the award of one of its highest civilian honours.

The former Australian Consul-General in Shanghai (2002–2006) Sam Gerovich recalls that M on the Bund was a meeting place that was 'international, but Australian in terms of its contents', and as a 'forerunner ... symbolic of what Australia did in China as

a middle power', was an 'element of a very successful cultural diplomacy programme at that stage'.⁷⁷ In addition to its explicit support for cultural events, the Australian community in Shanghai would also see in M on the Bund an important vehicle for conducting diplomacy and business against the backdrop of a showcase of Australian culture. This is illustrated in a farewell note to M on the Bund by the Australian sinologist Geremie Barmé, in which he recalls, after moderating a panel on free speech with the British author Timothy Garton Ash at the 2017 Shanghai International Literary Festival, ending the night with a discussion over dinner on the Bund, finished with a serving of the famous Antipodean dessert of pavlova.⁷⁸ M on the Bund was perhaps the only place on the Chinese mainland where such provocative discussion could converge with a soft, sweet and quintessentially Australian dessert to culminate in what some may well deem to be an example of 'soft power' in the making.⁷⁹

As Gerovich indicates, M on the Bund in many ways symbolised and showcased the sort of engagement with China that Australia desired *par excellence*, and in recognition of the breadth of her contributions, Garnaut was awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of Australia in 2018 for 'distinguished service to Australia-China relations as a restaurateur and entrepreneur, to the promotion of Australian food, film and design, as a supporter of literary and cultural programs, and as a role model'.⁸⁰

With her appointment to the Order of Australia for her contributions to Australian engagement with China, including her role in establishing and facilitating the M Literary Festivals, Garnaut joins a lineage of Australian

civilians who have, in various ways, pioneered forms of understanding and engagement with the Chinese world.⁸¹ Each of these Australians has inherited and built upon this legacy in unique ways that responded to the conditions of their time to forge forms of engagement that responded to immediate urgencies, and contributed to a tradition that has continued, and likely will continue in various forms.

As I have argued elsewhere, there is a historical significance to the Australian connection to the M Literary Festivals, M on the Bund, and their Australian founder:

The M [Literary Festivals], and their founder, form part of a long-standing antipodean tradition of cultural engagement with the Chinese world.

In late dynastic and early republican China, the Peking residence and library of the Australian journalist-cum-adventurer George E. Morrison (1862–1920) provided something of a scholarly sanctuary for students of the ‘Far East’,⁸² and was apparently so well-known among locals and international visitors alike that one urban legend has it that rickshaw drivers assumed foreign guests were all visitors of Morrison and his famous library on what was then known to many as ‘Morrison Street’ 莫理循大街 (now Wangfujing 王府井大街).⁸³ In the 1980s, residents of the diplomatic residence compounds at Qijiayuan 齊家園, Sanlitun 三里屯 and Jianguomenwai 建國門外 routinely hosted ‘foreign salons’ 洋沙龍,⁸⁴ which brought together some of the most prominent young foreign and Chinese thinkers active in the Chinese capital at

the time, including Australians Geremie Barmé, Linda Jaivin and Nicholas Jose — all of whom would later be speakers at the M [Literary Festivals].⁸⁵

There is an extensive extant canon of works that detail the individual contributions of many of these civilian pioneers.⁸⁶ Among them, George E. Morrison is particularly notable for both his contributions to Australian understandings of China during his lifetime, but also for the ways in which he has taken on an afterlife as the harbinger of this tradition. Australians engaged with the Chinese world are often at some point in their career drawn to Morrison’s story and legacy.⁸⁷ The most prominent way in which this legacy has continued to influence Australian engagement with and understandings of China is through the ‘George E. Morrison Lectures in Ethnology’, which was established in 1932 by Chinese residents of Australia in memory of Morrison, with the objective of promoting cultural relations between the two countries.⁸⁸ The Morrison Lectures, which continue to this day at the Australian National University in Canberra, played a key role in establishing the importance of Asian Studies in Australia, and brought prominent speakers from all walks of life to speak on topics ranging from the esoteric to current political affairs. The Morrison Lectures also played an important role in informing understandings and debates about China and Australia’s relations with it throughout the past century. The M Literary Festivals and Garnaut’s own legacy built upon this tradition, and in a similar fashion to the Morrison Lectures, offered an avenue for Australian engagement with China that responded to the conditions and needs of their time.

In 2022, Garnaut wound up her business and cultural endeavours in China, and the M Literary Festivals in their previous form have concluded, but their contributions and impact are lasting, and their legacy endures in various forms. Among the direct products of the M Literary Festivals are writers who established their careers through participation in the festivals (such as Aaliyah Bilal); the works that were made possible by or launched as a part of them; the initiatives that developed out of them (for example, the 'Literary Shanghai' community⁸⁹, co-founded by former festival co-organiser Tina M. Kanagaratnam); and the institutions that have, in their own way, built upon the traditions that they helped to pioneer on the Chinese mainland (such as the One Way Street Book Festival, Australian Writers Week in China and the EU-China International Literary Festival). Perhaps what will prove to be most pertinent, though, is their afterlife in the memory of the thousands of people who participated in or attended them. The legacy of the M Literary Festivals may take on new significance as inspiration for the next chapter in the enduring tradition of Australian civilian engagement with China.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, the M Literary Festivals constituted a significant contribution to international engagement with the Chinese world in the reform era. As a literary institution, they were pioneering, and helped to pave the way for the development of contemporary literary festivals on the Chinese mainland. Viewed within the context of their city of origin, they were also at the forefront of a cosmopolitan revitalisation of Shanghai in the

reform era. The political, social and economic conditions of the Chinese reform era provided the ripe conditions for this cultural institution to thrive and grow in the reform epicentre of Shanghai, from where their influence helped to spawn other like-minded initiatives and inform one avenue of public diplomacy for foreign governments developing their cultural relations with China at the height of its receptiveness to international engagement. Finally, the M Literary Festivals and their founder constitute an important contemporary contribution to a lineage of Australian civilian pioneers and initiatives, and a tradition of distinctly Australian attempts to forge understanding of and engagement with the Chinese world, which has its origins in the late 19th century and the legacy of the great Australian explorer-cum-journalist George E. Morrison.

These interpretations are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, this paper has collated resources which were hitherto not readily available in the public domain to provide a roadmap for further scholarly applications and represents an initial contribution to the documentation and analysis of the M Literary Festivals. It has analysed their significance and contributions within the three contexts most apparent at the time of writing. Given the proximity of their conclusion to the present, it is conceivable that new dimensions for interpretation of the M Literary Festivals and their significance for interdisciplinary understandings of contemporary China and international engagement with it will arise, warranting further research from novel analytical perspectives.

Although the M Literary Festivals have

concluded, their impact and legacy endure, including through the cultivation of authors, enthusiasts and entrepreneurs. It is not immediately apparent what the future may hold for the M Literary Festivals and the traditions they have contributed to, but it is likely that they will continue to provide inspiration for the next generation of civilian pioneers to forge novel ways of engaging with the Chinese world that are 'fit for purpose' in a new era.

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Notes

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- ¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, I refer to the Australian government economist Ross Garnaut's definition of the beginning of the Chinese reform era (1978), which is denoted by the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Although economic reform would only be formally recognised as the Party's core pursuit in ideological terms three years later at the 6th Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, with its first revision to the Party's guiding 'principal contradiction', reforms were initiated at the 3rd session with Deng Xiaoping's rise to the apex and introduction of the *Boluan Fanzheng* 拨乱反正 ('eliminating chaos and returning to normal') era policies which underpinned the reform era. By contrast, although as Carl Minzner has argued the policies and tendencies that would eventually lead to the end of the reform era had their roots in the early 2000s, it was under the leadership of Xi Jinping (2012-present) that these trends would intensify in an era that may be dubbed the 'late reform era', culminating in the declaration of a new 'principal contradiction' at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017 ('contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life'). As I have also argued elsewhere, it is this development which denotes the beginning of a new era in which liberal economic reform is no longer compatible with the Party's guiding ideology. See: Ross Garnaut, '40 Years of Chinese Economic Reform and Development and the Challenge of 50', in Ross Garnaut et al. (eds.), *China's 40 Years of Reform and Development: 1978–2018*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2018, pp. 29–52; Carl Minzner, 'The End of China's Reform Era', *Asia Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2018): 83–98; Callum Smith, 'Shanzhai and Common Prosperity: How China's Grassroots Entrepreneurs Helped It Fake Social Harmony in an Era of Gross Inequality', *Human and Socio-Environmental Studies*, No. 43 (2022): 106.
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Appendix: Chronology of the M Literary Festivals (2003–2019) — the Shanghai International Literary Festival (2003–2019) and the Capital Literary Festival (2011–2014) — their details and notable developments by year.

Year, location(s), dates	Details and notable developments
2003 Shanghai: 23-24 March	<p>Title: Frank Moorhouse: 'The Martini Lectures'¹</p> <p>Scale: 1 speaker, 2 sessions.</p> <p>Details: Michelle Garnaut invites the Australian author Frank Moorhouse to deliver the inaugural 'Glamour Bar Lecture' on 'The Martini in Literature'. As part of an arrangement with the Hong Kong International Literary Festival, Moorhouse speaks at Garnaut's Shanghai and Hong Kong locations. The 'Martini Lectures' are retrospectively recognised as the inaugural Shanghai International Literary Festival.</p>
2004 Shanghai: 6-7 March	<p>Title: Shanghai Literary Festival Weekend 2004²</p> <p>Scale: 5 speakers, 5 sessions.</p> <p>Details: Five authors (Qiu Xiaolong 裘小龙, Maxine Hong Kingston, Brian Castro, Michelle de Kretser and Nicholas Jose) speak at in Shanghai over one weekend as part of the Hong Kong International Literary Festival. The theme of the festival was described as 'fanning a passion for English literature with an Asian focus', featuring 'the writers who create the stories of modern Asia'.</p>
2005 Shanghai: 5-19 March	<p>Title: Shanghai Literary Festival 2005³</p> <p>Scale: 11 speakers, 13 sessions.</p> <p>Details: The Shanghai festival grows in scale and breadth, running over three weekends. Whereas previous festivals had exclusively featured authors with a connection to either Australia or the Chinese world, the 2005 festival included a greater and more international spectrum of speakers, which it described as 'recognised literary luminaries [including Alan Hollinghurst, Thomas Kenneally and Shirley Hazzard] and hot new rising stars [including Hsu-ming Teo and Mardi McConnochie]'. Dedicated panels of local and New Zealand authors were introduced to the programme, denoting the festival's independence.</p>
2006 Shanghai: 4-19 March	<p>Title: The Shanghai Literary Festival 2006⁴</p> <p>Scale: 29 speakers, 25 sessions* (estimated).</p> <p>Details: The festival continues to grow in importance as an international literary event, with high-profile authors attending, including the 2005 Man Booker Prize winner John Banville. The connection between the festival and local literary communities is</p>

	bolstered by a series of sessions including a luncheon with the Shanghai-based expatriate authors of a book (<i>Shanghai Lu</i>) and a session dedicated to a local effort to translate the work of the late Australian sinologist C. P. Fitzgerald into Chinese.
2007 Shanghai: 10-27 March	Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2007 ⁵ Scale: 39 speakers, 35 sessions. Details: The Shanghai festival becomes an established and recognised major international event. Its sponsorship base grows significantly to encompass consulates and national arts institutions — including those of Australia, Canada, Ireland, Britain, New Zealand and France — as well as corporate partners. By virtue of these partnerships, speakers from non-Anglophone countries are included, as well as multilingual sessions in Mandarin Chinese, French and German. Events that integrate with and nurture the local community, including interactive writing workshops and children’s sessions, are introduced. The spectrum of speakers and themes is broadened to encompass events that are not necessarily ‘literary’ in nature, including an appearance by the Australian politician Bob Carr in conversation with the prominent American writer and public intellectual Gore Vidal.
2008 Shanghai: 29 February – 16 March	Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2008 ⁶ Scale: 55 speakers, 50 sessions. Details: Importance of the festival for the international literary and publishing world is bolstered with the introduction of five book launches — Geremie Barmé’s <i>The Forbidden City</i> , Lucy Cavender and Peter Goff’s <i>Beijing, Portrait of a City</i> , Howard Goldblatt’s translation of Jiang Rong’s 姜戎 <i>Wolf Totem</i> 狼图腾, Kishore Mahbubani’s <i>The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East</i> , and Lynn Pan’s <i>Shanghai Style: Art and Design Between the Wars</i> — to the programme.
2009 Shanghai: 6-22 March	Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2009 ⁷ Scale: 60 speakers, 54 sessions. Details: The <i>Financial Times</i> Great Debate is introduced to the programme, seeing the festival become a rare forum for critical and candid discussion of often contentious subjects on the Chinese mainland. In its first iteration (2009-2014), included: ‘China and Obama’s America’ (2009), ‘China Will Be a Superpower by 2020?’ (2010), ‘Is the Globalisation of Culture a Force for Good?’ (2011), ‘Does China’s Rise Spell America’s Decline?’ (2012), ‘Is Capitalism Broken?’ (2013), ‘Can China Overcome Its Environmental Challenge?’ (2014).
2010 Shanghai: 10-20 March	Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2010 ⁸ Scale: 74 speakers, 58 sessions. Details: Growing web of consular supporters sees the introduction of authors and topics related to parts of the world that are often underrepresented at literary festivals, including the Nordic region, Israel, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.
2011 Beijing: 26 February – 12 March Shanghai: 5-20 March	Title(s): The Inaugural Capital Literary Festival 2011, The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2011 ⁹ Scale: 114 speakers, 84 sessions (total). – Beijing: 39 speakers, 20 sessions. – Shanghai: 97 speakers, 64 sessions. Details: The festivals expand to Beijing. Many speakers at the larger, more internationalised Shanghai festival also speak at the smaller scale Beijing event, which placed greater emphasis on China as the subject of discussion. The introduction of the Beijing festival facilitates closer collaborations with embassies, including hosting the opening session of the Australian Embassy’s Australian Writers Week in China 澳大利亚文学周.

<p>2012 Beijing: 25 February – 7 March Shanghai: 2-17 March</p>	<p>Title(s): The Capital Literary Festival 2012, The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2012¹⁰ Scale: 75 speakers, 78 sessions (total). – Beijing: 15 speakers, 19 sessions. – Shanghai: 73 speakers, 59 sessions. Details: Spectrum of topics and speakers grows to range from niche interest to popular culture, including an appearance by the <i>Simpsons</i> creator Matt Groening.</p>
<p>2013 Beijing: 2-17 March Shanghai: 1-17 March</p>	<p>Title(s): The Capital Literary Festival 2013, The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2013¹¹ Scale: 132 speakers, 112 sessions (total). – Beijing: 69 speakers, 39 sessions. – Shanghai: 96 speakers, 73 sessions. Details: The festivals reach their apex in terms of scale and influence and enjoy the support of the largest number of government sponsors in their history.</p>
<p>2014 Beijing: 16- 23 March Shanghai: 5-21 March</p>	<p>Title(s): The Capital Literary Festival 2014, The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2014¹² Scale: 74 speakers, 74 sessions (total). – Beijing: 12 speakers, 17 sessions. – Shanghai: 72 speakers, 57 sessions. Details: The <i>Financial Times</i> Great Debate, ‘Can China Overcome Its Environmental Challenge?’, goes ahead in Shanghai but is not featured in Beijing, following a warning from the authorities. The Capital Literary Festival is delayed and downscaled due to political events in the city and becomes the last following the cancellation of the 2015 festival. The ‘<i>That’s Shanghai</i> Erotic Fiction Competition’ is introduced, broadening the festival’s appeal to parts of the local literary community.</p>
<p>2015 Shanghai: 31 October – 8 November</p>	<p>Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2015¹³ Scale: 33 speakers, 30 sessions (total). – Beijing: 2 speakers, 2 sessions*. – Shanghai: 33 speakers, 28 sessions. Details: The Capital Literary Festival 2015 is cancelled due to political events (in lieu, two speakers at the Shanghai festival spoke in Beijing informally). The Shanghai festival is reduced in scale following the closure of the Glamour Bar and conclusion of a partnership with the previous co-organiser. The festivals are repositioned as a smaller, more intimate event under the exclusive auspices of Garnaut. The <i>Financial Times</i> Great Debate is discontinued. Sessions adopt a politically less sensitive tone (pondering, for example, ‘Is the Foreign Press Too Tough on China?’).</p>
<p>2016 Shanghai: 19-26 March</p>	<p>Title: M’s 2016 Mini March LitFest¹⁴ Scale: 19 speakers, 15 sessions. Details: Despite being the smallest event since 2005, the festival continues to receive the recognition and support of consular partners.</p>
<p>2017 Shanghai: 10-22 March</p>	<p>Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2017¹⁵ Scale: 58 speakers, 36 sessions. Details: The <i>Financial Times</i> Great Debate is reintroduced. In its second iteration topics included: ‘Has Western Democracy Been Discredited?’ (2017), ‘North Korea a Threat to World Peace?’ (2018) and ‘Is Brexit Best for Britain?’ (2019).</p>

2018 Shanghai: 15-28 March	Title: The Shanghai International Literary Festival 2018 ¹⁶ Scale: 44 speakers, 38 sessions. Details: Two Shanghai-based expatriate authors who had developed their writing through participation in the festivals over the years (Lenora Chu and Aaliyah Bilal) present their work, demonstrating the festival's contribution to the literary community.
2019 Shanghai: 14-27 March	Title: M's Shanghai Literary Festival 2019 ¹⁷ Scale: 46 speakers, 32 sessions. Details: The festival continues to explore new possibilities including an 'insider' presentation by the Hugo Award winning novelist and economic advisor to the Chinese government Hao Jingfang 郝景芳. The 2019 Shanghai festival would be the last, following the postponement and eventual cancellation of the planned 2020 festival, and the closure of M on the Bund in 2022.
2020 (cancelled)	Title: M's Shanghai Literary Festival 2020 ¹⁸ Details: The 2020 festival is postponed and later cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Total	705 distinct speakers, 741 sessions.

Appendix notes

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