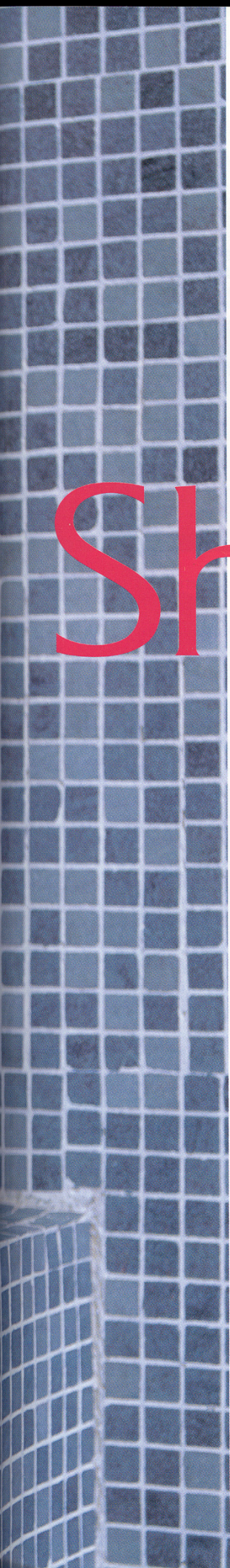


Shanghai-born Vivian Yang is  
meeting critical acclaim with her  
poignant novel, *Shanghai Girl*.  
Rosemary Hamilton meets Hong  
Kong's rising literary star







**L**ike anyone who writes for a living, I am in total awe of real novelists. I find 2,000 words something of a trauma so I view those who produce books as creatures of unimaginable talent. And that's just the way I feel about those who write in their native language. Meeting Vivian Yang, the Shanghainese authoress of *Shanghai Girl*, a novel written entirely in her second language, English, was inspiring to an even higher degree.

# Shanghai success

Yang is extremely down-to-earth. While we did the shoot she was concerned about whether the photographer was too hot outside and whether we were in need of refreshment. For a woman of remarkable talent, she is very diffident about her achievements and constantly downplays her outstanding linguistic skills.

Yang lives in Hong Kong, near the Peak, with her husband Calvin and super-bright daughter Katie. Having previously lived in New York the family makes regular trips back to America to visit friends, family and favourite haunts. Yang has the novelist's hunger for new sights and sounds and obviously loves the contrast between Asia and the West, eating up the details in each city she visits, ready to spill them into her novels.

Even in her speech, Yang is carefully descriptive; one feels that not a single adjective is carelessly chosen. She believes that the roots of her writing career grew long ago when she was a small child in the Cultural Revolution. As Yang's parents were professors at the University of Shanghai, following the Revolution they were sent into the countryside to be 're-educated' by the peasants. At that time Yang learnt the power of the written word as she communicated with her parents by letter, describing her everyday life and scenes to them. "I knew then that I would be a writer," she says.

Yang's childhood began in the charming French concession of Shanghai, an area which is now becoming extremely popular as the city enjoys its latest renaissance. The French Park, or Fuxing Park as we know it now, was ►



Shanghai girl becomes  
Hong Kong girl



Sam Donaldson, ABC newscaster, inspired the young journalist



Vivian at the  
university campus



Enjoying the park in the  
French concession



Vivian felt  
surprisingly at  
home in Paris



opportunity to express her experiences. Is the story autobiographical?

"I am a girl who grew up in Shanghai, studied and then moved to America, so yes, I am similar to Sha Fei Hong [the lead character in the novel]. But it is not autobiographical. The girl in the book is not me. Although of course writing does draw on our experiences so there are things that I have experienced or seen and some of the characters have little pieces of people I have met," says Yang.

The novel is written from the standpoint of three main protagonists, Sha Fei Hong, Gordon Lou and Edward Cook. Sha Fei is the title's Shanghai girl, Gordon Lou is an American Chinese, while Edward Cook is an American

working in the consulate in Shanghai. Yang confides, "I found his [Cook's] character hardest to write. Not only is he a man, he is a man from a foreign culture. Sha Fei was easiest because although she is not me she is most similar to me". *Shanghai Girl* is a fascinating consideration of how people of different cultures interact and a study of how people behave when they are living in the midst of a foreign society.

It is good to know that Yang has plans to write another novel and this one may even be set in Hong Kong, a city that Yang has grown to love in the three years

she has been living here. *Shanghai Girl* is superb literature and one of the best of the crop of contemporary novels to have been written by Chinese authors; we eagerly await Yang's next literary feat. □

To order your copy of *Shanghai Girl* visit [www.xlibris.com/ShanghaiGirl.html](http://www.xlibris.com/ShanghaiGirl.html) ISBN: 0-7377-4796-8

a favourite childhood stamping ground of Yang's (it is now the 'Lan Kwai Fong of Shanghai' as Allan Zeman's empire expands bringing California, Tokio Joe's and Baci to this charming location). The flavour of life in the French Concession was predominately European, with architecture straight from a Parisian boulevard. "When I went to Paris I suddenly felt very at home! I recognised small things like the bathroom fittings!" Yang exclaims.

Of course this very privileged lifestyle changed overnight when her parents were sent away; their beautiful home was opened up to house many families and young Vivian's world turned upside down. Like many of the Chinese who lived through the Cultural Revolution, Yang does not dwell on the period, neither to complain nor to justify what she and her family went through — perhaps *Shanghai Girl* has been her

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