

# Book Club Kit

“Tender, atmospheric, and wholly captivating . . . Juli Min has established herself as a sharp chronicler of contemporary China—and of the ever-complicated matters of the heart.”

—Kirstin Chen, author of *Counterfeit*



# A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

Once upon a time, a young woman moved to China for love.

I was born in Korea, grew up in New Jersey, did stints in Boston, Seoul, and New York—I was used to living in different countries and different cultures. But Shanghai was a shock, and before I met my Shanghainese husband, honestly it was a place I'd never expected to live.

Shanghai is a city of unimaginable scale (pop. 25+ million), where fantastical visions of the past and the future bump up against one other. It is a city of great wealth and great poverty. It is both welcoming and impenetrable to foreigners. I fell for its contradictions, for the glamour and the grit. I have been here for nearly a decade.

During this time, I have had two children—a daughter and a son—and have grown close to my in-laws and my local extended family. Shanghai is now a place where I have roots. It is, to me, family and home and romance and love. I have tried to honor the complexity and reality of these things in my debut novel, *Shanghailanders*. And I have tried to write the story of what might happen after a fairy tale ends—by telling the story of the Yangs in reverse, concluding with the wedding of Leo and Eko but exploring their lives with their three daughters along the way.

Despite enjoying my expat life in Shanghai, I sometimes feel homesick for family and friends. I have met virtually with my MFA cohort book club every month since the summer of '22. Living so far away from my writing community, I know firsthand how nourishing, how necessary, and how downright fun being part of a bookclub can be. I am so pleased that you are considering *Shanghailanders*. I hope you fall in love with this city and these characters, as I have.

It would be my honor to participate in your group's discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juli Min". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# PALMIERS

The palmier is a cookie that bridges cultures (much like the Yang family in *Shanghai*)—a French cookie that became adored in Shanghai, where they're known as hu die su (or “butterfly cookies”), in the glamorous early-twentieth-century period of the city’s history.

## Ingredients

- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 puff pastry sheet

## Directions

*Makes 20 cookies*

- Preheat oven to 450°F.
- Place the puff pastry dough on a floured surface. Sprinkle it generously with sugar and run a rolling pin on it.
- Fold over the dough into the center and repeat again until the center meets.
- Cut it into 1/4 inch cookies. Place them sideways on a baking sheet.
- Bake them at 450°F for 6 minutes and flip them over to the other side.
- Bake for 5 more minutes and enjoy!



# THE SHANGHAI

A sophisticated drink whose sweetness is balanced by just enough tartness and bitterness—exactly what I hope you'll get in *Shanghaianders!*

## Ingredients

- 1.5 ounce light rum
- 0.5 teaspoon grenadine
- 0.5 ounce anisette liqueur
- 0.5 ounce lemon Juice
- Lemon wedge (optional)
- Ice cubes

## Directions

*Makes 1 cocktail*

- Take a cocktail shaker and put a few ice cubes in it.
- Measure the anisette, grenadine, lemon juice, and light rum, and the pour into your cocktail shaker.
- Place the lid of the shaker back on it, and then shake very well.
- Strain the contents of the cocktail shaker into your cocktail glass.
- If you want to garnish, cut the lemon wedge in a slit and then slide it in the edge or side of the cocktail glass.



# SHANGHAILANDERS PLAYLIST

**“The Summer We Crossed Europe in the Rain”** by Stacey Kent

**“Promises”** by Jhené Aiko

**“The End of the World”** by Julie London

**“By the Suzhou River”** by The Shanghai Restoration Project

**“My Heart Belongs to Daddy”** by Marilyn Monroe

**“Japanese Denim”** by Daniel Caesar

**“I Get Along Without You Very Well”** by Chet Baker

**“The First Time I Ever Saw Your Face”** by Roberta Flack

**“Traveling”** by Hikaru Utada

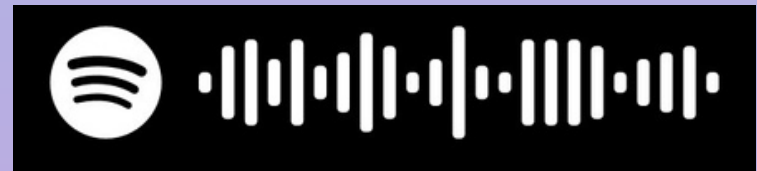
**“Ces bottes son faites pour marcher”** by Eileen

**“Ring My Bell”** by Anita Ward

**“Easily”** by Bruno Major



Listen on Spotify by scanning the code to the right with your mobile device.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** *Shanghailanders* is a story told backward through time from 2040 to 2014. How did telling the story this way inform your reading experience?
- 2.** All the members of the Yang family are keeping their own secrets, and we see the consequences ripple out in varying ways. Discuss how the relationships between family members are affected by these secrets.
- 3.** Min deftly tackles the nuances of class structure in Shanghai. How do class differences play out throughout the course of the novel?
- 4.** Eko Yang is an expat—or “Shanghaileander”—and her connection to Shanghai ebbs and flows over time. What connects her to the city? How do changes in her life lead her to define herself as Chinese, Japanese, French—or Shanghaileander—at different times?
- 5.** Discuss the relationship between Leo and Eko. How does it shift? What actions from the past inform their relationship in the present?

**6.** Throughout the course of the novel, Yumi and Yoko have a strained relationship. What contributes to this dynamic? Is there anything left unsaid between them that adds to the tension?

**7.** Discuss the chapters featuring the Yang family's private driver and their nanny. How do their perspectives change the way you view the Yang family? What unique points of view do they bring to the story?

**8.** Discuss the chapter "Ponies on the Mountain in the City on the Sea." How does Lucy's death affect Kiko's relationship with her sisters? How does the confrontation with their father reflect their roles in the family?

**9.** Discuss Kiko's fascination with American culture and fame. What do you think informs her desires?

**10.** Did you have a favorite narrator? Was there one perspective you related to the most? Why?

# LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH



Juli Min is a writer and editor based in Shanghai. She studied Russian and comparative literature at Harvard University, and she holds an MFA in fiction from Warren Wilson. She was the founding editor of the Shanghai Literary Review and served as its fiction editor from 2016 to 2023. Her first novel, *Shanghaianders*, will be published in May 2024 by Spiegel & Grau (US) and Dialogue Books (UK). Translations are also forthcoming in Japanese, Spanish, Norwegian, and German. You can follow her on Instagram [@julixmin](https://www.instagram.com/julixmin).



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