

*Fragment from "Luna From China" (original title: "Luna Uit China"). It's Beijing, 2032. The 18-year-old Luna meets with Mr Fan, who has information about her father.*

She had no trouble finding the teahouse. Mr Fan had not exaggerated. The wooden pavilion in Xi Jinping Park was beautifully situated, half-hidden among cherry trees and tall, lush ferns. On either side of the wooden, classically Chinese door hung red lanterns with yellow-and-red banners, displaying the name of the teahouse in elegant calligraphy. The Chinese name consisted of two rows of eight characters, while the plaque with the English name simply read: 'Chez Xi'.

The interior was breathtaking. There was a stunning moon gate set in a double wall made of paper lattice, as if a shadow play could begin at any moment. The gate led to the actual teahouse, where a guzheng, a Chinese zither, immediately caught the eye. It stood in the middle of the room, waiting to be played. Around it were grouped solid oak tables, both long and short. On either side of each table were simple, sturdy benches without backs. Some tables were located in large recesses along the side, while red silk curtains lent a touch of privacy to the side rooms.

The floor was paved with uneven reddish-brown tiles. On one wall hung a truly magnificent portrait of the former president Xi, made entirely from broken pieces of teapots and cups. The portrait shimmered like a sun above a series of smaller portraits of the key statesmen in Chinese history, from the creation god Pangu and the ancient superheroes Yao and Shun to renowned leaders like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Luna walked past the portraits and several groups of older tea drinkers towards Mr Fan, who was seated in one of the recesses. She felt their gazes upon her, though the tea drinkers were lost in thoughts about China's remarkable progress over the last hundred years.

She started by politely and elaborately apologising to Mr Fan. He wanted nothing of it. He too had once been young and impetuous, he said, his eyes twinkling like in the photograph. Mr Fan began with a Yunnan Pu'er tea, cheerfully packaged in little bags. As he savoured it, he elaborated on the teahouse and the esteemed tea culture. Although the Chez Xi teahouse had only opened in 2024, it represented a nearly five-thousand-year-old tea tradition that began with the legendary Emperor Shennong. Besides tea, he had also invented agriculture. At least, according to the legends. It was never clear how literally one should take such legends, Mr Fan advised her. Just like tea, no issue in the world was black and white. Thus, it was essential to view each story from multiple perspectives, from ancient legends to recent family histories.

She suppressed a yawn. She hastily finished her tea, hoping that Mr Fan would then get to the point more quickly.