

和谐



A STRANGER HERE MYSELF

From Xinjiang to Harmony

China-Australia Discourse | Screen Culture



**an ILLUSTRATED INTRODUCTION
with EXEGESIS**

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ABOVE: Shanghai, China [2024/03/16] | Sapar Uygur Restaurant at the intersection of Wulumuqi Lu and Yuyuan Lu in the central Jing An District. The streetcorner adjacent to the World Union Building at 199 Wulumuqi North Road, a high-rise apartment complex where for 2 years I had a rental apartment. I would often sit or stand across from the restaurant and watch the daily life around the thriving business unfold; absorbing the Uygur music playing, sometimes dining on BBQ skewers curbside. Harmonious co-existence. It reminded me of my first arrival in China, in 2011, in Xinjiang. [SOURCE: © personal archive]



Autoethnographic Film & Stories

Robert Cettl, a Czech-Australian author, educator and former SAR Research Fellow at Australia's National Film & Sound Archive, crafts autoethnographic films that weave personal and cultural narratives. His China-based experimental film, *Being in Time*, screened in *The Autoethnographer*, traces his lived experience as an inter-cultural communication teacher across Xinjiang's dynamic frontier Jinan's harmonious classrooms, Shanghai's lively bars, and an Australia-set poignant farewell to his late father. His ebook, *Autoethnographic Film as Post-Modern Genre*, a post-modern exploration of self through fractured, lyrical storytelling, contextualizes his filmmaking methodology in case study exegesis. Cettl's approach blends memory, identity, and inter-cultural dialogue, inspired by his 12+ years of pedagogic experience from Xinjiang to Shanghai and Jinan's tertiary EFL sectors. A passionate cinephile, he authored two film scholarship books with McFarland & Co., contributed a chapter to Bloomsbury Academic, and wrote on the Australian Cinema of Disability for Australian journal *Overland*. His films and writings, tagged **#MyChinaStory**, **#Autoethnography** and **#CinemaCultures**, embody **#CoexistingDualities**—harmony amid chaos, East meeting West. **From Xinjiang to Harmony**, Cettl's transmedia journey as "*A Stranger Here Myself*" invites you to explore his website, ebook and film, where stories seed connection.



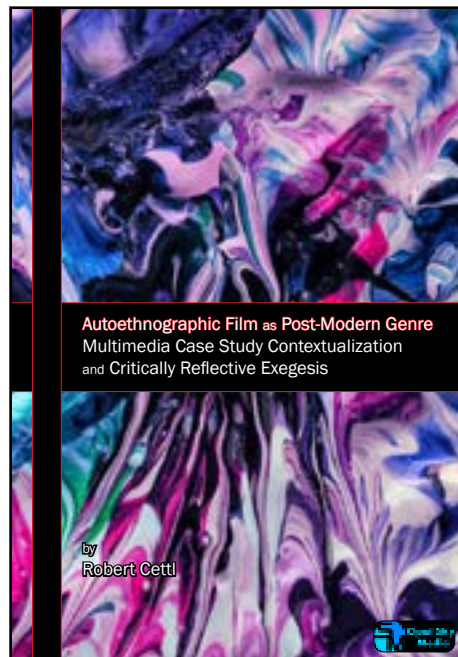
Seeding Stories: Xinjiang to Shanghai

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

In Shanghai's Jing An district, I found a cosmopolitan microcosm of China's vibrant chaos, echoing my first encounters in Xinjiang's developing corridors. As a Czech-Australian filmmaker, I sat daily outside my apartment, filming the rhythm of vendors, cyclists, and Uygur cooks—scenes that shaped my autoethnographic lens. This street, alive with **#MyChinaStory**, became the heart of my experimental film work, weaving Xinjiang's scenic wonder, Jinan's classrooms, Shanghai's bars, and an Australia that once was but is no more. My ebook, [Autoethnographic Film as Post-Modern Genre](#), dissects this craft, blending fractured narratives with inter-cultural reflections, as seen in *The Autoethnographer's* screening of my work. **#Autoethnography**, for me, is a dialogue between self and culture, embodying **#CoexistingDualities**—East meets West, chaos seeds harmony.

My Australian National Film & Sound Archive research on the Australian Cinema of Disability honed my eye for marginalized voices, a thread in my McFarland books and Bloomsbury chapter. In Shanghai and Jinan, teaching inter-cultural communication to EFL students, I used authentic new media and inter-cultural experience to foster storytelling, mirroring my films' themes. These classrooms, like Shanghai's streets, are spaces of connection, where students' stories echo my own. My pre-Covid corporate EFL teaching across China's cities revealed cultural narratives in everyday interactions, enriching my lens.

A Xinjiang restaurant, steps from a Shanghai apartment I maintained during the Covid years, was a muse. Its daily life recalls Xinjiang's sensory overload, grounding my film's exploration of identity and memory. Autoethnography, as I practice it, captures this act of seeing—personal yet universal, lyrical yet raw. My [Overland article on disability cinema](#) extends this, linking personal and societal margins. **From Xinjiang to Harmony**, my ongoing transmedia project, channels these experiences into films, writings, and vlogs, inviting global audiences to join the dialogue. Explore this journey on my website, "[A Stranger Here Myself](#)", where Xinjiang's seeds bloom into stories of 和谐.



ABOVE: Shanghai, China [2024/03/16] | The City Oasis enclave at 1101 Wuding Lu, Jing An as one passes by the window-front (right) to one of my favourite “hangouts” when in the Jing An area, Botannical Basket. Although priding itself on being a gin bar, it serves specialty mixed cocktails, the skill of the Russian mixologists being personally appreciated. [SOURCE: © personal archive]

Teaching Harmony: Jinan's Narrative Hub

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23



At the University of Jinan, Shandong, China, my inter-cultural communication classroom is a crucible for inter-cultural communication, where stories seed harmony. My teaching, rooted in lived experience of pedagogic practice in Shanghai and Jinan's tertiary EFL sectors and pre-Covid corporate training, fosters **#MyChinaStory**—East meets West, personal meets universal. Students' calligraphy of “和谐” and pomegranate sketches mirror my films' themes, connecting their stories to mine. Jinan's classrooms extend this, nurturing cultural dialogue. Jinan is the hub for my **@XinjiangHarmony** campaign.

Jinan, my creative home, mirrors Adelaide, my Australian base, where sister city ties (Jinan-Adelaide, Shandong-South Australia) deepen my work. A recent Harmony Week visit to Adelaide's Bibliotheca bar, a cozy haven of books and cocktails, crystallized these connections. Its warm community, like Jinan's classrooms, fosters dialogue, echoing my teaching and China's vibrancy. Sipping a pomegranate-inspired drink, I recalled Shanghai's neon-lit bars and Xinjiang's markets, where sensory chaos seeded my films.

Teaching in Jinan and Shanghai's EFL sectors, and pre-Covid corporate training, honed my focus on **#MyChinaStory**—East meets West, individual meets collective. Adelaide's Harmony Week, celebrating cultural unity, resonates with this, tying my 12-year China journey to Australia's multicultural heart. From Xinjiang's roots to Jinan's campus, my teaching fuels **From Xinjiang to Harmony**, a narrative of identity and connection.

From Jinan to Adelaide, united in the place memories of over a decade of lived experience as a Czech-Australian in China, I invite you to join this dialogue of harmony.



ABOVE: During Harmony Week 2025 (03/15-21), towards the concluding cycle of the Adelaide Fringe Festival, Robert Cettl frequented his favorite cocktail bar / local haunt when in his hometown: the Bibliotheca bar. [SOURCE: © personal archive]





ABOVE: Australian Graffiti adorns the wall of a “squat” (temporary lodging for nomadic homeless), the last location in Adelaide that I visited with my father before he died. He adored the place and we made a film there together, featured in my autoethnographic release *Being in Time*. INSET: The Sydney Opera House: a landmark I had to take at least one photograph of myself. [SOURCE: © personal archive]

Branding the Journey: Stories Unfold

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

My bookshelf (pictured above), an archival mosaic of artifacts, kitsch figurines, Nanjing Imperial embroidery, and pirate DVDs, sets the scene for my 12-year story from Xinjiang to Shanghai to Jinan. As a Czech-Australian autoethnographic filmmaker, I weave these artifacts into **From Xinjiang to Harmony**, a transmedia narrative branded through [@RobertCettl](#) on X and the website [A Stranger Here Myself](#) via [#MyChinaStory](#). Through this transmedia [#autoethnography](#), I craft fractured, lyrical stories, as seen in *The Autoethnographer's* screening, reflecting my sense of [#CoexistingDualities](#)—East meets West, chaos meets harmony.

From Jinan's university, my teaching hub, I launch this project with a pinned tweet (April 25, 2025), linking to the website hub and an exegesis of my autoethnographic filmmaking methodology published through [@OpalSkyMedia](#). My ongoing film series, including a vlog, captures Xinjiang's vibrancy, Shanghai's neon aesthetics, and Jinan's cultural centres, serialized on YouTube. These vlogs, seeded in my classroom's calligraphy of “和谐,” are tagged [#MyChinaStory](#), and I invite global audiences to join my transmedia journey. So too, as a film historian, I also reflect analytically on films from an inter-cultural prism promoting Cinema as a Cultural Bridge [#CinemaCultures](#). Each post / follow-through link highlights a film (indie, classic, or global) and unpacks its cultural context or communication themes.

Memories of Shanghai's street-life and Adelaide's Harmony Week at Bibliotheca bar shape my lens, blending personal and cultural narratives. My vlog, filmed mostly in Jinan and Shanghai, shares reflections and insights, including teaching moments, travelogue footage and inter-cultural stories. My autoethnographic films / vlogs draw on a personal video archive (2011–2025) to craft a narrative about identity as a Czech-Australian teacher in China, reflecting on cultural immersion, displacement, and eventual reconnection with Australia's multicultural identity during Harmony Week, 2025. A context-setting related e-book release, dissects this autoethnographic craftsmanship, offering a post-modern guide for filmmakers and viewers alike as my X account, [@RobertCettl](#), coordinates with [A Stranger Here Myself](#) being the heart of this branding, [From my archive to your screen, these stories seed connection across borders.](#)

BELOW: My first rendering of the internal sense of 和谐: A personal favorite enhance dsmartphone snapshot, while strolling Shanghai's Jing An district fort the first time circa New Year 2016–2017. [SOURCE: © personal archive]



On Teaching and Filming

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

I've always seen teaching and filming as two sides of the same story. In 2011, when I began teaching English in Xinjiang, I wasn't just sharing language—I was listening. My students' "My Cultural Story" exercises, where they wove tales of family, heritage, and dreams, taught me to see the world through their eyes. Those Urumqi classrooms, filled with Uygur and Han voices, were my first films, even if I didn't yet hold a camera. Their stories shaped me, and I began filming to capture what words

alone couldn't: the texture of a market, the pause in a student's voice, the vastness of a desert horizon.

My first work as a prospective autoethnographic filmmaker was a travelogue of my lived experience in Xinjiang, with first sojourns to Beijing and Chengdu. It originally ran 6+ hours, but was never released on social media or otherwise. In fact, a copy of the travelogue (and the 48+ hours of raw footage it was assembled from) was offered to Australia's National Film & Sound Archive, where I had been a SAR Research Fellow immediately prior to coming to China. To my surprise, I must admit, they declined (sight unseen) to add the footage to their collection alongside the two other experimental autoethnographic documentaries of mine then currently stored in the collection.

By the time I reached Shanghai again in 2025, filming was my teaching. "Shanghai as Palimpsest", the first **From Xinjiang to Harmony** vlog, is a classroom of sorts—Wulumuqi Lu's Uygur restaurant, alive with Xinjiang's flavors, mirrors the stories I once heard. I film to layer these moments, blending Shanghai's neon with Adelaide's quiet bars, just as I once guided students to layer their narratives. My 2022 film *Being in Time*, shot during Beijing's Winter Olympic buzz, was another lesson: the camera became my way to question media narratives, much like I questioned my students to dig deeper. Teaching taught me to listen; filming taught me to show.

This interplay drives [A Stranger Here Myself](#). Every vlog, every frame, is a lesson in harmony, a story shared. I don't just teach or film—I live the stories, from Xinjiang to Shanghai, and invite you to see them too. Explore this journey at [A Stranger Here Myself](#), where my classroom and camera meet. It took a long time, but the **From Xinjiang to Harmony** vlog is now underway with "Shanghai as Palimpsest".

#MyChinaStory

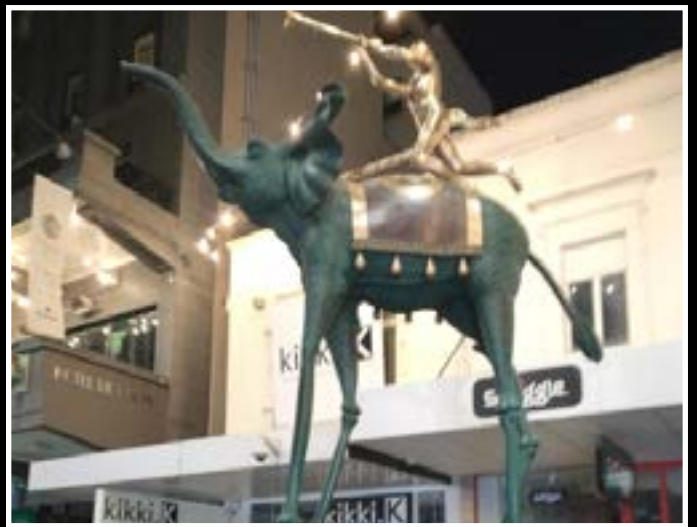
IMAGES: LEFT Prominent sculpture greets visitors to the main East Gate. **BELOW LEFT** Although it doesn't snow heavily, winters at the University of Jinan can be both beautiful and unusually cold. **BELOW RIGHT** students preparing for their exams at UJN. [SOURCE: © personal archive]



From Xinjiang to Harmony: Screenshot Gallery

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23









Being in Time: A Cinematic Reflection

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

In 2022, Shanghai's streets became my canvas. As the Beijing Winter Olympics swirled with global debates, condemning China, I filmed *Being in Time*, a 35-minute meditation on place and loss. My camera captured Wulumuqi Lu's Uygur restaurant, Wuding Lu's City Oasis, and Shanghai's neon pulse, but my heart was elsewhere—Australia, where I last saw my father before his passing. As a Czech-Australian, I've always lived between worlds, aware of his legacy, and this 35-minute film uses split-screen montages to bridge them, anticipating the style also informing *From Xinjiang to Harmony's* first vlog "Shanghai as Palimpsest". My father's death anchored this story, his memory fading into Shanghai's skyline amid global headlines of "genocide" and boycotts. *Being in Time* doesn't judge—it reflects, layering my grief with a city's life.

Being in Time is deeply personal, yet universal. My Xinjiang teaching in 2011, where students shared their "My Cultural Story," taught me to layer narratives. In Shanghai, amid headlines of "genocide" and boycotts, I layered my Czech-Australian lens—part European, part Antipodean—with China's complexity. The film doesn't argue; it reflects, blending my father's memory with a city's heartbeat. Published by *The Autoethnographer*, it's a cornerstone of *A Stranger Here Myself*, alongside "Shanghai as Palimpsest" and *Genocide Games*. My eBook, *Autoethnographic Film as Post-Modern Genre*, explores this method—how montage holds grief and connection.

My Czech roots run deep. A new video, still in progress, captures my father's tale: a childhood under Nazi occupation, escape from Soviet Czechoslovakia to German refugee camps, and migration to Australia as a "New Australian" in the post-WW2 wave that shaped multiculturalism. Indeed, his name appears in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's database, not as a Jewish survivor but in the Aronson Archive, documenting non-Jewish political refugees from Soviet regimes. This history, tied to WW2's displacement, informs my lens—part Prague, part Sydney, now Shanghai.

Being in Time grounds *A Stranger Here Myself*. This film is my bridge across continents, loss, and stories. Watch it in full or read the eBook at [Publisher link], and explore its echoes in *From Xinjiang to Harmony*. Support on [Patreon](#) to join this journey.

How do your memories span borders? From Xinjiang's classrooms to my father's Australia, these stories cross borders.

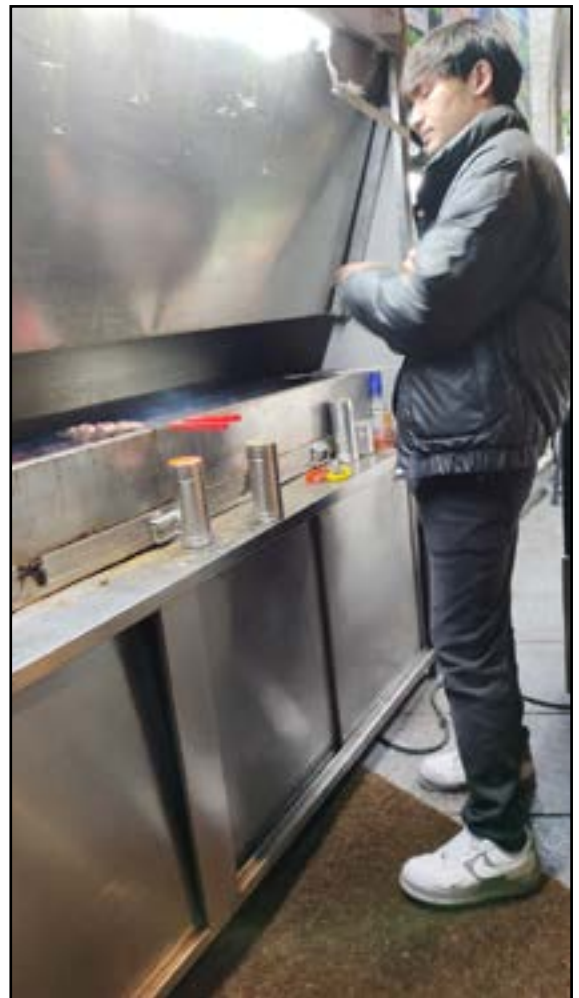
What (place-)memories shape your world?



**"The autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other by traveling, becoming a stranger in a strange land, even if that land is a fictional space existing only in representation."
(Catherine Russell)**



TOP LEFT TO TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT: *Being in Time* successive screenshots indicating temporal transition in place-memory via montagist split-screen technique | Split screen progression from 1) thick description of location (an LP and collectibles bar / cafe In Jinan, Shandong: Cosmic Comics); 2) time passing in juxtaposing large background to small split screen of a "real-time" situation: 3) thick description change segue in background to reference music culture of setting / place with split screen image from a different time (future?); i.e. temporal transition as one screen takes over full image, cut to 4) the smaller split screen alternate time now becomes full screen present. The net effect is intended as time passing over thick description of place memory, rendered on film as montagist reconstruction of lived perceptual experience, i.e. memory and place-identity. This technique propels the film through multiple locations and temporal zones - from seeming present to distant past.



ABOVE: Shanghai, China [2024/03/16] | Late evening at he street BBQ stand at the Sapar Uygur Restaurant. The restaurant is directly across from the building housing my (at time of writing) rental apartment. As smoking as not allowed anywhere in the apartment building (including in the apartments themselves), I often go outside and enjoy a cigarette on the curb facing the restaurant, sometimes going there for a BBQ beef skewer or two. Delicious. [SOURCE: personal archive]

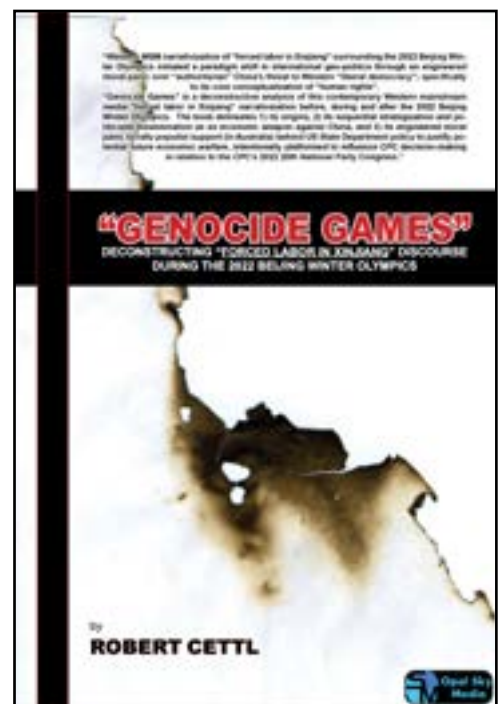
Unpacking Narratives: The *Genocide Games* Context

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

In 2022, as I filmed *Being in Time* amid Shanghai’s Olympic buzz, as the world’s eyes were on Beijing. Media headlines screamed “genocide” and “forced labor” in Xinjiang, framing the Games as a moral battleground. My *Genocide Games* report, a work-in-progress, doesn’t take sides—it dissects these narratives. As an autoethnographer, I’m drawn to how stories shape reality. The report analyzes Western media’s language—terms like “reeducation camps” versus China’s “vocational training centers”—and their roots in sources like Adrian Zenz or U.N. reports. It’s not about truth; it’s about how narratives are built and wielded to construct a “truth”.

This work complements *From Xinjiang to Harmony*. Where “Shanghai as Palimpsest” weaves Wulumuqi Lu’s Uygur flavors with Adelaide’s multicultural bar, seeking connection, *Genocide Games* questions division. Both are autoethnographic: one builds bridges, the other unpacks barriers. Filming *Being in Time* in Shanghai’s streets, I saw a city alive, not the crisis of headlines. Yet I also saw how media shapes perception, just as my students’ stories in Xinjiang shaped mine. The report, hosted at [A Stranger Here Myself](#), invites you to question these narratives too—not to judge, but to understand.

Genocide Games is part of my labyrinth, alongside vlogs and my eBook, ebook, *Autoethnographic Film as Post-Modern Genre*. Support on [Patreon](#) lets you access it early, joining a conversation about stories and their power. The gallery’s images—Shanghai’s skyline, Xinjiang’s deserts—remind me why I do this: to weave harmony through understanding, one frame at a time. What stories shape your world?



Weaving Harmony: A Global Tapestry

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23



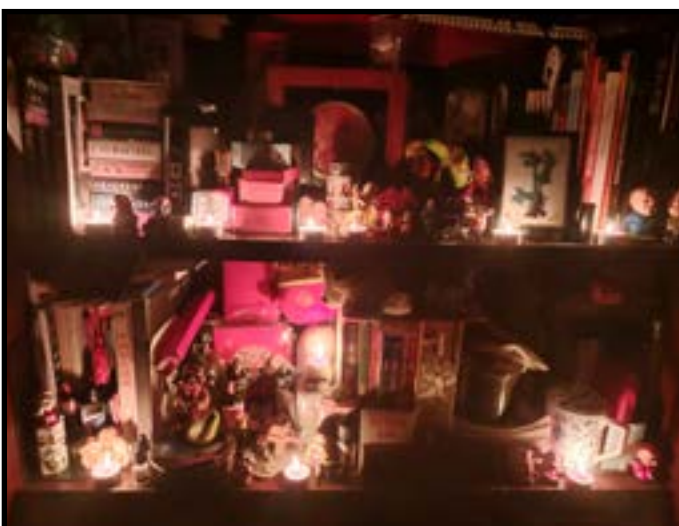
Harmony isn't just a word—it's the living pulse of my work, and my experience as an Australian in China since 2011. When I filmed **"Shanghai as Palimpsest"** beginning on Wulumuqi Lu, the Uygur restaurant's sizzle and chatter felt like Xinjiang reborn, a bridge across time and place. That street, named for Urumqi, carries my 2011 memories of teaching students whose stories wove Uygur, Han, and global threads. In Shanghai, the bustling urban cityscape, with its vibrant colours and decor, the sense of harmony was second to none, as it is in my teaching experience in Jinan. In Adelaide's Harmony Week bar, filmed in March 2025, I saw the same weave—books, cocktails, and voices from every corner of the world. These images, vivid in the gallery before this page, are glimpses into my longitudinal tapestry, stitching cultures together.

This harmony drives [A Stranger Here Myself](#). My vlogs, like **"Shanghai as Palimpsest"** commences the **#MyChinaStory From Xinjiang to Harmony**, layer Xinjiang's

deserts with Shanghai's neon and Adelaide's warmth, seeking connection over division. My 2022 film [Being in Time](#), shot during the Beijing Winter Olympics, grappled with global tensions—media narratives that my **Genocide Games** report unpacks, not to take sides but to understand how stories shape perceptions. In Jinan, Beijing, and Chengdu, I filmed markets, temples, and teahouses, each a thread in this global fabric. My accompanying eBook, [Autoethnographic Film as Post-Modern Genre](#), reflects on how these threads form a whole, anchored in lived experience.

I don't just tell stories—I live them, hoping to inspire others to see harmony in their own.

At [A Stranger Here Myself](#), you'll find this tapestry: vlogs, reports, films, and a labyrinth growing with your support on Patreon ([Patreon link]).



From Xinjiang to Harmony: A Cinematic Journey

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

From Xinjiang to Harmony is a vlog series at the heart of [A Stranger Here Myself](#), blending autoethnographic storytelling with intercultural narratives. As a Czech-Australian filmmaker and educator, I explore personal and cultural connections across China, Australia, and beyond, drawing on my lived experience teaching in Xinjiang, Jinan and Shanghai and filming globally. This series weaves memories, places, and perspectives through cinematic vlogs, inviting viewers to reflect on identity and harmony in a globalized world.

"Shanghai as Palimpsest", the flagship vlog, sets the stage with a 10-12 minute exploration of Shanghai's vibrant streets. Split-screen montages layer present-day scenes with archival footage, connecting Shanghai's energy to past experiences in Xinjiang and other regions. Poetic narration, presented in English with Chinese subtitles, guides this journey, offering a reflective lens on cultural intersections. Informed by my background in autoethnography and intercultural education, the vlog captures the dynamic interplay of time and place, crafted for scholars, film enthusiasts, and global audiences.

From Xinjiang to Harmony extends this vision through additional vlogs, each deepening the narrative of connection and discovery. My work, rooted in years of teaching and filmmaking, aims to foster dialogue about culture and identity, resonating with [#autoethnography](#), [#CinemaCultures](#), and [#MyChinaStory](#) communities.

Join this journey at [A Stranger Here Myself](#), where you can explore the full project and related resources. Subscribe to my [YouTube Channel](#) for **"Shanghai as Palimpsest"** and future vlogs. Follow updates on X at [@RobertCettl](#), and support the creation of new stories on [Patreon](#). Engage with us—share your story of harmony and connection.



Reflections on Autoethnography

by Robert Cettl | 2025/04/23

Autoethnography is the lens through which I explore personal and cultural narratives, blending self-reflection with broader societal insights. As a Czech-Australian filmmaker and educator, I use this method to weave stories that connect individual experiences to collective histories, bridging cultures across China, Australia, and beyond. In *“Shanghai as Palimpsest”*, the flagship vlog of *From Xinjiang to Harmony*, autoethnography shapes cinematic montages, layering Shanghai’s vibrant present with memories of teaching in Xinjiang and other regions. This approach invites viewers to see the world through a personal yet universal perspective, fostering dialogue about identity and connection.

My work draws on years of intercultural education and filmmaking, capturing moments that resonate across time and place. The images in this booklet’s gallery—snapshots from films and archives—reflect this process, each frame a story of encounter and reflection. Autoethnography allows me to navigate my dual heritage and global experiences, crafting narratives that speak to scholars, film enthusiasts, and diverse audiences. By combining visual storytelling with reflective narration, I aim to illuminate the interplay of self and culture, encouraging viewers to explore their own stories.

From Xinjiang to Harmony embodies this vision, with *“Shanghai as Palimpsest”* as its cornerstone. Through autoethnography, I seek to build bridges of understanding, resonating with [#autoethnography](#), [#CinemaCultures](#), and [#MyChinaStory](#) communities. Explore this journey at [A Stranger Here Myself](#), subscribe to the [YouTube Channel](#), follow [@RobertCettl](#) on X, and support new stories on [Patreon](#).



“Discover cinematic stories of culture and connection. This free booklet weaves Shanghai’s vibrant streets with global narratives, blending autoethnographic insights and stunning visuals. Dive into a journey from Xinjiang to harmony—download now at *A Stranger Here Myself.*”



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