

# BRUSH TALKS

Vol. 5 No. 1 Winter/Spring 2020

*A Journal of China*



# Brush Talks: A Journal of China

Vol. 5 | No. 1 | Winter/Spring 2020

BRUSH TALKS STAFF

*Founder & Editor*

Brian Kuhl (U.S.)

*Contributing Editors*

Duan Hongwei (段红伟, China)

Yang Zhengxin (杨正昕, U.S.)

*Brush Talks* publishes compelling nonfiction, along with photographs and occasional poetry, about China. We publish two issues per year and accept unsolicited submissions on a rolling basis. For more information, please visit [brushtalks.com](http://brushtalks.com).

Copyright © 2020 by Brian Kuhl. All rights reserved.

*Brush Talks* is set in Garamond and produced in Adobe InDesign.

Cover image: © Joseph Stern

*Because I had only my writing brush and ink slab  
to converse with, I call it Brush Talks.*

SHEN KUO 沈括

(1031-1095)



## CONTENTS

---

Winter/Spring 2020

*Jacob Rawson* 9 ESSAY  
Lucid Valley

*Kate A. Bour* 17 POEM  
Wu Yuan at Qing Ming Jie

*Jason Emde* 19 ESSAY  
Eight Scenes from Gifu

*Joyce Liao* (廖菁菁) 33 ESSAY  
What Is the Real “Sick Man”?  
[Chinese translation follows English version]

*Joseph Stern* 39 PORTFOLIO

*Anonymous* 61 INTERVIEW  
Coronavirus Chronicles

*Seth Rosenman* 82 POEM  
Chinese Vinegar

## Editor's Note

Welcome to volume five of *Brush Talks*, our first issue for 2020 as well as our first since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. In a few short months, life everywhere has been upended, and many of the pieces on the following pages reflect this. There's the mention of empty streets, a photograph of a man in Shanghai wearing a face mask, and a response to a newspaper column about the virus that sparked an uproar. But there's another theme running throughout the issue: cross-cultural exchange and perspectives. Thus, a Canadian writer, a long-time resident of Japan, ponders the spark China brought to his childhood friend; a young Chinese citizen examines the history of a loaded phrase with different meanings in the East and in the West; a photographer born in Canada to American parents, and now a twenty-year resident of China, brings his unique background to the images he makes; and old friends—one American, one Chinese—exchange messages documenting the spread of the coronavirus in real time. This theme continues right down to the poem on the very last page of the issue. And it occurred serendipitously, without my orchestrating it; I didn't realize it until I sat down to think about writing this. But it's rather fitting, as that's the spirit in which I founded this journal four years ago, hoping for a cross-section of voices and experiences related to China. It reminds us during this time of uncertainty that we're all needed. And we're all in this together.

In this issue, Jacob Rawson takes us to Mount Song, the next stop on his travels to China's sacred mountains, and Jason Emde writes lovingly of an old friend who came into his own by living in China. Joyce Liao coolly jumps into the fray surrounding the phrase "sick man of Asia," which was thrust into the spotlight again this spring thanks to a column in the *Wall Street Journal*. Joseph Stern's photographs give us a glimpse into the people and places he's observed in Shanghai and beyond. Our interview is about the spread of the virus that morphed into our current pandemic. And Kate A. Bour and Seth Rosenman share with readers their poetic gifts. My gratitude goes to all our contributors for their fine work.

Brian Kuhl

## Contributors

**Kate A. Bour** is a teacher and writer who lived with her husband in Shanghai and Suzhou for six years. During this time, they traveled extensively together throughout China, experiencing the beauty and culture of the country. She currently lives with her family in Iowa. Recent publishing credits include *The Caterpillar* and *A Shanghai Poetry Zine*. Her travel poetry can be read at [wornoutshoes.org/poetry](http://wornoutshoes.org/poetry).

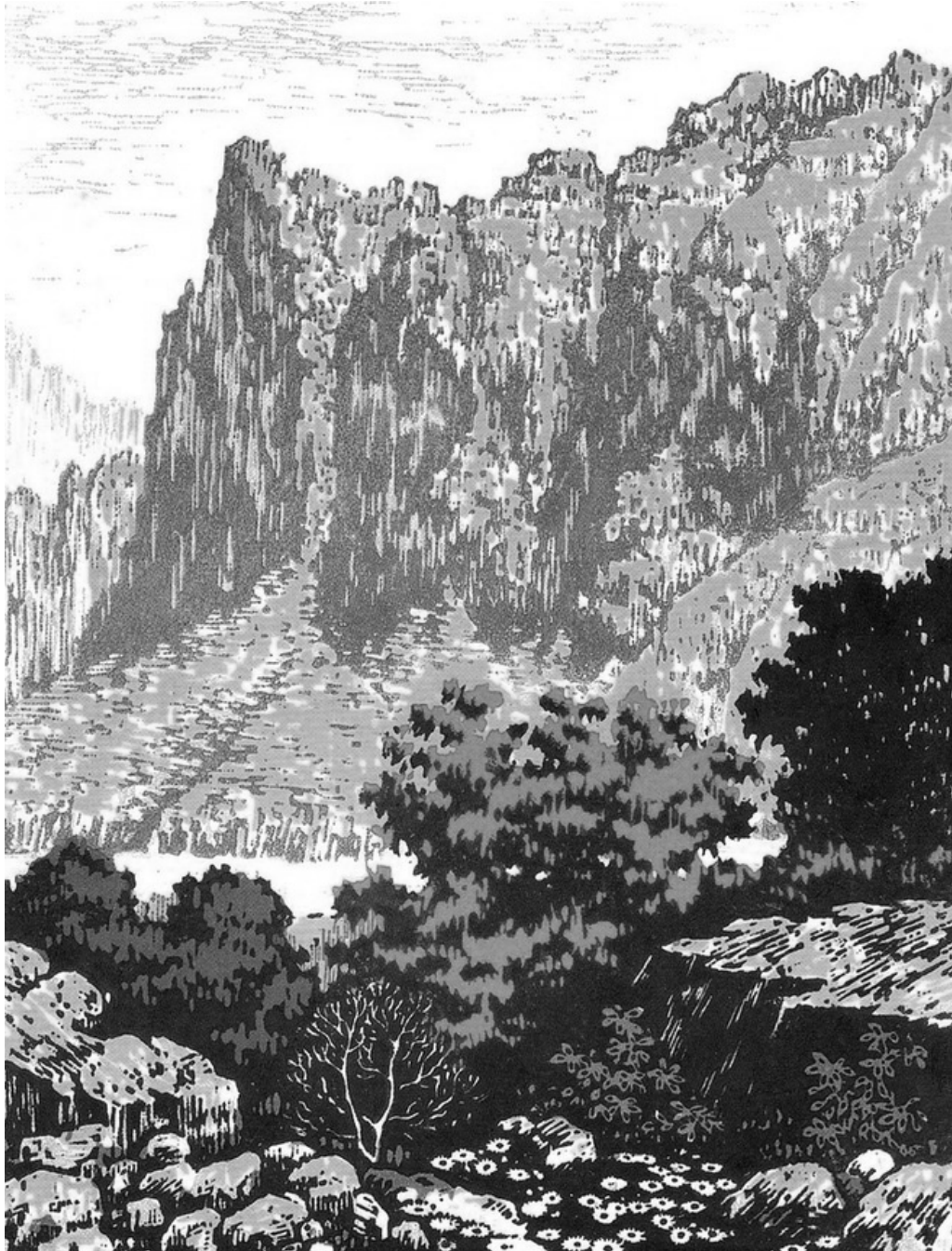
**Jason Emde** is the author of *My Hand's Tired & My Heart Aches* (Kalamalka Press, 2005) and the co-author of the parodic action novel *The Crunch Gang Meets the Deadly Zombie Ninjas of Japan* (Amazon e-book, 2018). His work has appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *Beyond Words*, and *PopMatters*, among other publications. He lives in Gifu City, Japan, with his wife, Maho, and their sons, Joe and Sasha.

**Joyce Liao** (廖菁菁) was born and brought up in Beijing, China. She is currently a student in Beijing intrigued by cross-cultural studies.

**Jacob Rawson** is coauthor of the book *Invisible China: A Journey Through Ethnic Borderlands*. After completing a master's degree in Chinese Linguistics at the University of Washington, he set out to climb the nine sacred peaks of China in 2010. His writings on South Korea have appeared in *Fulbright Korea Infusion*. He lives in Washington State with his wife and daughter.

**Seth Rosenman** is a poet and teacher based in the Philadelphia area. He taught ESOL in China for six years and met his wife in Beijing, and his daughter was born in Shanghai. He is still adjusting to being back in the USA—even though it's been almost three years—and he oddly shares his wife's homesickness for China.

**Joseph Stern** has lived in China for twenty years, where he received a BA from Yunnan University in Chinese Language and Literature. He lives in Shanghai, where he writes, takes photos, and produces videos discussing social, educational, and cultural topics. His work has appeared in the *American Journal of Poetry*, the *Main Street Rag*, *Gargoyle*, and other publications. His writing and photography can be found at [blackmarketsoul.com](http://blackmarketsoul.com).



Woodcut by Li Qun. China National Museum of Arts Collection.

**Lucid Valley**  
by Jacob Rawson

*A desolate town overlooks an ancient ferry,  
Autumn sunset fills the peaks.  
Far away, beside Mount Song,  
I return to my secluded life.  
—Wang Wei (8th century)*

Two postings vie for attention on a faded brick wall behind the two-thousand-year-old Central Peak Temple Complex. A sign stenciled in blocky white characters reads, EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING THE FOREST AND PREVENTING FIRES, while just above a red banner expertly placed by a local eatery proclaims, ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BARBECUE—FREE BEER. Above the tiled temple rooftops, stolid mountain bluffs peek out from behind a grove of giant thuja trees where a farmer gathers firewood in bundles.

The Mount Song range rises above the southern banks of the Yellow River basin, with thirty-six peaks stretching along an axis of thirty or so craggy miles. The central mountain of the sacred Daoist five, Mount Song was where Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang dynasty performed the imperial rites in the year 695, and is still the site of some of China's oldest Buddhist monasteries.

I follow the outside of the temple wall, keeping Mount Song's highest peak in view while skipping across rows of wheat and ducking under poplar branches to the end of a dirt road that connects small Daoist shrines between grain crops.

At one of these small buildings, laundry hangs on a clothesline in front of wooden statues that depict Laozi, the mythical founder of Daoism. Just inside the wooden doorway, dust-covered deity statues sit on a stone slab shelf that is held up by a stack of red bricks. The temple caretaker who steps out does not look much younger than the temple itself. He gives a toothless half-grin in greeting, and then reverts to a disinterested resting scowl.



In a bid to establish good favor, I recite the first lines of the *Dao De Jing*: “The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name . . .” He interrupts me with an unimpressed cough, nods down the road and returns inside the building.

The next brick structure has the characters for Dragon King Temple carved into its ancient threshold timbers. The temple’s slow-talking, middle-aged custodian emerges and takes me around the side, pulling back a cover made of planks nailed together to reveal a gray-brick-lined hole. He tells me the well was dug during the Han dynasty, some two millennia ago, and that he still drinks from it today. We move into a small room with an altar for the wife of the Dragon King. The priest takes my hand and pushes in with his thumb, feeling the wrinkly contours.

“Do you have agitations in your life? I can sense a disturbance.” His wrinkled brow shows a deep concern. “You’ve been having trouble sleeping, haven’t you?” A smile slowly grows on his face. “But you’ve had a lucky year. Luckier than last year!” He continues examining my hand, tracing the seams with his fingers. “You overanalyze things. Do not be so cautious.” Then: “Are you married?” “Have you been with a woman recently?” “How many times?” The palm reading devolves into an uncomfortable forced confession, and I slowly pull my hand back.

He lifts up my shirt and begins rubbing my stomach, then chest. He leaves his hand on my stomach and enters a state of deep concentration. I wait for what surely will be a harsh verdict.

“Alas, you are a good-hearted person.”

In front of the temple complex vendors sell flimsy paperback volumes on feng shui, Daoist divination, the *Book of Changes*, and Mao Zedong’s quotations. I amble along the margins of provincial Route 316 in the shade of red ornamental maples and stationary green taxi cabs. The horizon sours to a cloudy plume, and soon the valley is enveloped in a dull pensive gray. In the side lane reserved for scooters and bicycles I dodge delivery trucks and fruit-stand umbrellas, and watch as the high-rise apartment buildings of the small city of Dengfeng gradually emerge from the valley mist with the stoic demeanor of stone statues.

It was to this valley, the legends claim, that a monk from India brought the ideas of Zen Buddhism along with a regimen of physical exercises that became the seeds of the kung fu tradition. While the records of Bodhidharma's sixth-century exploits are sparse and sometimes disputed, the city and its famous Shaolin Temple enjoy iconic branding today, commonly regarded as the center of Chinese martial arts. The temple, which lies at the other end of the valley between two peaks in the Mount Song range, has become a requisite stop on the tourism circuit, with a parking lot for tour buses twice the size of its own monastic grounds. Perhaps the most prominent section of the temple complex, its show theater, offers on-the-hour performances complete with colored spotlights, aluminum prop swords, and metal-pipe-broken-over-the-head heroics.

In recent decades the area's reputation has given rise to a few dozen private kung fu academies that offer boys from around the country the chance to learn the ancient art from self-proclaimed masters. My own interest lies in spectacles of the more organic variety, so I give Shaolin Temple a pass and set off down the highway in search of these academies.

On Yinghe Street a hip-hop beat blares through the glass doors of a break-dancing school. Across the street, a kindergarten counters with a techno dance mix that crackles through intercom speakers.

Near a small wooded hill called Chess Board Mountain Park I spot a sign chiseled into a large stone facade: CHESS BOARD MOUNTAIN MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY. I follow a grim industrial alley behind a filling station, stepping into the drainage ditch to let trucks fully laden with black coal and quarried stone rumble past.

Next to the alleyway, Shaolin Martial Arts Supply, LLC sells sparring helmets, chest pads, knee pads, punching bags, and practice vests. I wave through the door to the friendly owner, and he leads me inside. He picks up a metal staff, then unscrews it in the center to reveal a pair of nunchucks, which he begins enthusiastically spinning around my nervous perimeter. I nod politely in support of his show, while at the same time awkwardly and emphatically coaxing him to stop.

Outside the academy I explain to the elderly gatekeeper that I would like to learn about the institution. He makes a phone call, then clicks open the heavy gate and leads me back through an open-air schoolyard where little boys lounge on mattresses licking popsicles and fighting spears rest unused against walls.

We continue into a narrow maze of administrative offices where the gatekeeper introduces me to Principal Wang Haiying, a middle-aged man with a shaved head and a Nike tennis T-shirt.

Calligraphy scrolls and an ink bowl are set out on a table, and piles of crumpled calligraphy papers cover the floor. One wall is filled with a custom-built glass case full of trophies, certificates, and medals.

Principal Wang explains that the students pay a tuition of 6,000 yuan (900 USD) per year, which includes food and lodging at the school. While the students may dream of acting in kung fu flicks, he continues, most will end up finding jobs as martial arts teachers, performers, police officers, and security guards.

He brags that he has taken his students to the U.S. and U.K. to perform many times, and that they appeared as Shaolin monks on the 2009 American TV show *Superstars of Dance*, while he appeared as one of the show's judges.

He motions to one of his young assistants to find the evidence. The boy clicks through a hard drive full of kung fu video files, and plays a recording of the TV show while another boy serves green tea from a brass pot. When Principal Wang appears on screen in the introduction of the judges, the assistant exclaims, "That's him!" The boy skips ahead in the broadcast to show the Shaolin performance and a cheering American crowd.

I follow Principal Wang down the hall as he points to various posters of the school's international performances. "I am the leading exporter of kung fu in China, the only one leading international performances. I will head back to the U.S. later this year." Two young students enter the hall. "There they are." The two six-year-olds who had sparred on the TV show stand near the doorway. The students maintain disciplined expressions, showing no change in emotion.

We walk through the complex into a brick-paved courtyard where twenty boys wearing the red and black school warmup suit leap and bound through their

morning drills under a large display of red characters mounted on the outside of the dormitory wall that reads, BRING HONOR TO THE NATION. To one side of the courtyard the municipal court has erected an inspirational display under a tiled temple-style awning that reads, SHED BLOOD AND SHED SWEAT, BUT DO NOT SHED TEARS.

We return to the office and I ask to take a photo with the group, but Principal Wang insists that he must change clothes first and leaves the room.

Moments later he returns wearing an orange monk's robe, and we pose in front of the shiny trophy case, faces solemn and expressionless.

\* \* \* \*

On a clear morning I begin ascending the stone steps that lead up Mount Taishi, the name for the central peak in the Mount Song range. Below the ridges the shrubbery bunches into a thick green veil before thinning into a rough vertiginous lattice above.

At the first open cliff face a sign warns, LOOSE ROCKS NEXT 200 METERS, DO NOT LINGER." I quickstep past three informational signs that give the geological history of the mountain. Here the hiker must make a tough decision: learn about brittle faults and cross-bedding or avoid a possible rockslide.

After pausing to rest in a stone pavilion, I fall into step with a college senior from the southeast province of Zhejiang who has set out to climb as many mountains as he can during a school break. Liu Wei tells me he has already scaled a few peaks in Henan Province and is maintaining a torrid pace of one mountain per day.

Each time we pass a small trickle of a stream, he washes the water over his face with the careful intention of ritual ablution. At each altar he stops to kowtow and burn incense.

"I'm not a Buddhist, this is just what we Chinese do." He speaks Mandarin with a pleasant southern cadence, and local hikers stop to comment on his attractive twang. Members of an art club from Beijing scuttle along the cliffs with

us, their matching hats bobbing up the steps with the rhythm of a syncopated marching band. The artists stop at each promontory to sketch the scenery, and Liu Wei and I soon leave them behind as we navigate a dry ravine and then a steep incline that leads to a broad viewpoint.

At the lookout ledge a sinewy man has stopped to rest next to his cargo of twenty-four large bricks bundled together with yellow twine and draped from both sides of a stout bamboo pole. I ask the porter about his load, and he tells me the bricks are for a new temple that will be constructed near the summit.

“They pay me one yuan per brick. With four loads per day, I can earn about one hundred yuan.” He shows a proud grin.

I marvel aloud at this physical prowess. Four times up the mountain with a back-breaking load, the same mountain I am struggling to climb once carrying nothing but a day pack. He dismisses the sentiment. “My body is strong because I do this every day.”

Liu Wei and I scamper up a final embankment and reach the summit stone monument, which has been decorated with etchings of initials, phone numbers, and messages from generations of past hikers. A lone magpie perches atop the monument, and looks off intently at the soft ridgelines that disappear into the white haze of the Henan plains to the north. To the south, the cliffs drop off into low foothills, which roll flat and become the industrial parks of Dengfeng. The city’s grid of boulevards, apartment blocks, and soccer fields is visually lucid but at the same time emotionally distant. Its logic is obfuscated by the summit’s ethereal air of serene detachment, and a cool rousing breeze makes me wonder if all of civilization could be a fleeting mirage.

Liu Wei pauses to enjoy the gust, then takes leave to explore a ridgeline trail that drops out of sight into a deep ravine.

During the hike down I start feeling queasy, and begin to worry about my breakfast of steamed pork buns. Hobbling down each step in a miserable state, I pass some local women resting with their incense bags on a broad flat rock face.

They call out to me in giggles. “We call it the ‘stone bed.’ Come sit. It’ll be good for you.”



I obey, stretching out on the flat surface, and then complain about my queasiness. They point to a small temple altar just off the trail. “Go kowtow. Go pray. You’ll feel better. It will heal you!”

I hesitate to abandon my horizontal position, but the women grab me by the arm and thrust me into the small building where plastic bodhisattva statues decorate the shelves and a half dozen pilgrims occupy simple wooden benches.

“His stomach is in pain. He needs to pray for relief!” the women explain to the caretaker, who instructs me to kneel down on a padded kneeboard and then bow three times with hands together. I awkwardly complete the process and the monk hands me three incense sticks. I hold them in front of me, bow three times again, then attempt to push them into the sandy base of the incense burner but apply too much force and cause the sticks to break. This solicits gasps from my audience and then whispers and giggles recounting my inauspicious faux pas.

The monk lights three more sticks, I repeat the kowtows, and this time he uses a finger to dig out a small hole in the sand of the burner pot. I place the sticks in, and he shows me how to bring the smoke to my face and breathe it into my lungs as a purification rite.

Finally, he passes me a ceramic bowl filled with hot water, draws the incense smoke toward the water with his open palms, and instructs me to drink. I do my best to keep from vomiting into the incense burner while trying not to think about how many others drank from the same bowl. I empty the vessel into my throat, thank the monk for his blessing, and offer a hearty grunt to the women in parting. Their giggles recede to silence as I trace the steps back down into the brushy canopy of the Mount Song foothills.

Just before emerging from the trees onto city streets, I pass an old pilgrim who is footing a slow descent. She wears a blue farmer’s tunic and woven grass sandals, and I stop and smile as she sings her pleasant refrain in a deep soulful voice.

*I’ve climbed a tall mountain,  
But I’ve nothing to say.*



Woodcut by Li Qun. China National Museum of Arts Collection.

## Wu Yuan at Qing Ming Jie

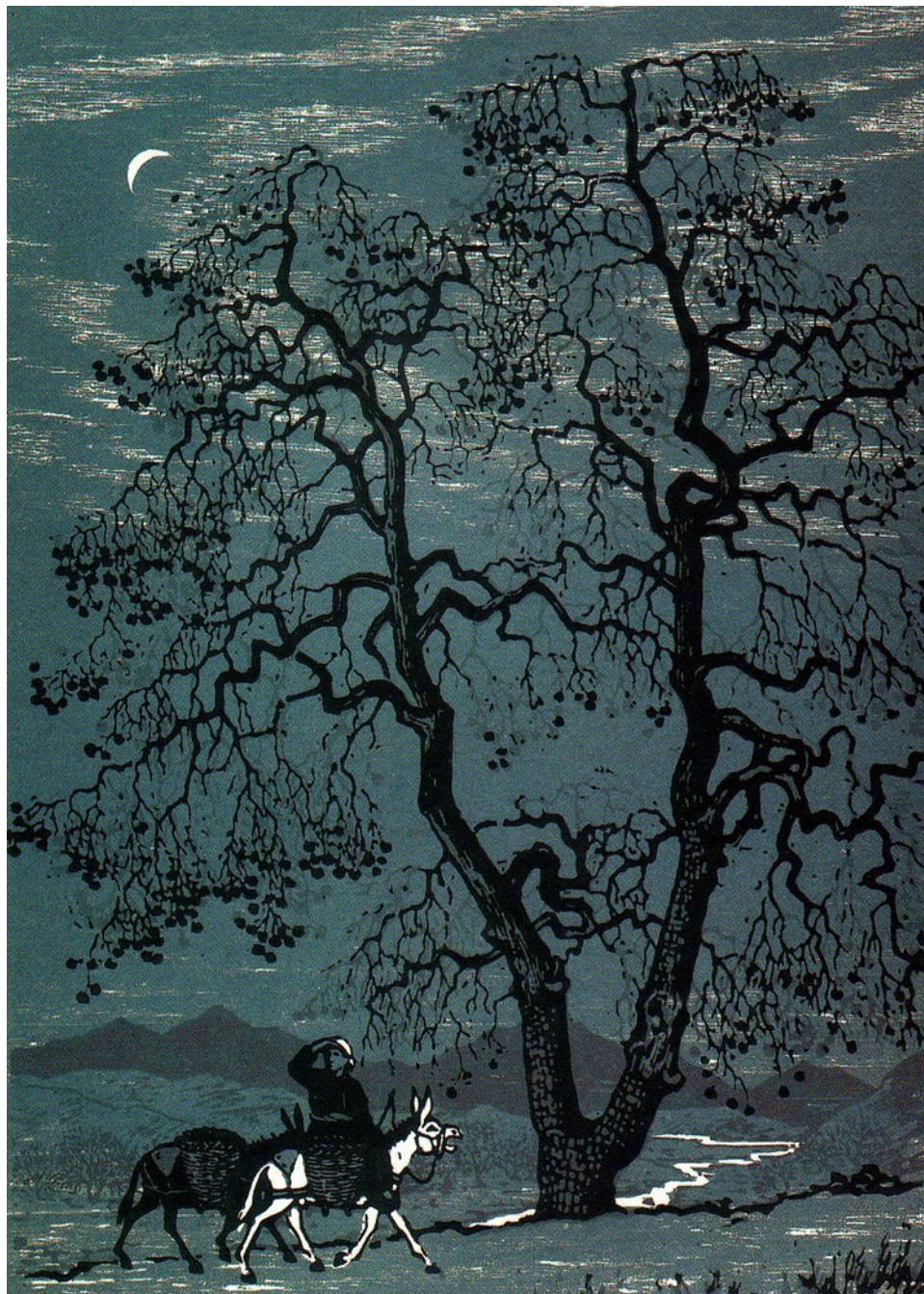
by Kate A. Bour

---

Faded walls  
line overflowing  
cobblestone footpaths,  
while a jade river catching the sunlight  
meanders lazily between.  
We step in and out  
of forgotten mansions,  
forgotten lives,  
forgotten relevance.  
Like its history,  
we move on.

Too early  
for rapeseed,  
we sit contentedly,  
looking out  
at the emerald terraces  
spread before us,  
imagining  
a former reality  
before a tourist season  
before fame  
when Wu Yuan was just  
a sprawling  
secret  
garden.





“Dawn,” woodcut by Li Qun. China National Museum of Arts Collection.

## Eight Scenes from Gifu

by Jason Emde

Under the subdued electric lamp in my tiny triangular office at home, I unfold a map of Gifu and spread it on my desk, reading it like oracle bones or turtle plastrons. Reassembling the scenes and sites. Yanagase. The Nagara River. Ryogo, where I lived with Ima for four years. My little apartment in Hakusan-cho. Kyomachi: marriage and sons, Maho and Joe and Sasha. Ikedamachi, where we've ended up. For now.

I put on my shoes and go for a walk to think about death and distance and my twenty-two years of life in the city.

§

Jed emailed me:

*Went to see Stan yesterday. Arriving in the hallway outside his room, a strange sight approached in the form of a bloated, balding guy the colour of a parsnip, with his eyes slightly bulging and bloodshot. He really is a bizarre sight. Geoff was there, and we talked in the hall a few minutes while Stan was back in his room getting hooked back up to the various tubes they have inserted all over his arms.*

*Details are sketchy, and I'm not sure if this is because Stan is actually refusing to divulge info, or because no one will simply come straight out and ask him what the doctors have told him. Clearly it's liver/kidneys, but from what I gather Stan has not actually told anyone the specific diagnosis or prognosis.*

*Talking to him he was still cracking jokes, etc., and he seems relatively OK with what's happening, but I can never tell with Stan. He's more or less on a liquid diet, and they're pumping him full of all kinds of IV stuff, but I have no idea what's actually going on. He's very tired/weak, but I would think that's to be expected given the circumstances.*



*I made sure to tell him, looking straight in his eyes, that you love him very much and want him well, and I saw, for a moment, a real pang of love and longing on his face. It did him good to hear it, even if it was coming from me.*

§

Memory palaces are ancient Roman retention tricks where you imagine a building or route you know well—the house where you grew up, your daily commute—and select a number of specific locations. Having picked the places, you then put the things you want to remember—numbers, names, Japanese vocabulary, shopping list items, anything you want—one by one in each place, making them as memorable as possible: wine dripping from the ceiling in the bathroom, plums ricocheting around the furnace. Then, to remember the items, you mentally walk through your palace, from location to location, and look at them. Most people can only keep seven to nine things in their short-term memory at a time, but, using a memory palace, I habitually remember twenty, easily. And more space is always available; all you need to do is add supplementary palaces. When I'm finished remembering, I walk back through my palace, scrubbing each location so it's empty and ready for the next list.

My brother recently sent me a letter, writing about a nighttime walk he took around our old neighborhood. He brought the street back to me, the feeling of those nights, that particular kind of valley cold, the sound of walking on compacted street snow, the Styrofoam squeak of it. And the street brought back the house, the house at night in winter, the Christmas tree lights glowing in the dark living room, the carpet we used to have, the floor squeak just in front of the kitchen doorway, the compound smells of home, specific bits of furniture, the mask from Zimbabwe hung on the back of the fireplace. I use that house for my own memory palace and I walk through it all the time, upstairs, downstairs, remembering it and using it to remember things.

§

Bats swoop against the darkening blue as I walk south and east, past Meigo Elementary School, where my sons go, and Hongo Park, where they play, and mysterious decrepit apartment buildings and dark quiet houses and brightly lit convenience stores. Either there are no zoning laws in Japan or they're feebly enforced, which means Japanese cities are always a jumbled, entropic mishmash. Here a factory, here a veterinarian, here a Shinto shrine, here a public bath, here the Dolphin Resort love hotel, where I romped with Maho, once, before we got married. A pair of weathered, plastic dolphins leap on the carpark roof. Two thousand, four hundred, and ninety yen for a throw, 3990 yen for an overnight stay.

Empty streets, empty restaurants and bars. Everybody scared of the coronavirus. Everybody staying home.

§

Where'd we make it to together anyway, Stan? After all our coffee shop plans and visions, our reveries and trances? Hometown Vernon covered many times over, mostly on foot: the alley where you gave me the lowdown, downtown, Coldstream, up and down Pleasant Valley Road a million times, the cadet camp where we worked in the summer, summer camps, Pumphouse Beach, Polson Park. Vancouver a few times, to see Dylan and R.E.M. Looking for weed on Commercial Drive so we could blast and watch Muhammad Ali videos in your ropey rented room. Penticton, Kelowna, Salmon Arm . . . Very provincial, very small town and stuck, weren't we? Did we ever make it to America together at all? But we did wander around Gifu when you came to see me from Guangzhou: Bier Hall, the omelette restaurant in the station where our hangovers disqualified us from humanity, Meiji Mura, Ima taking our picture in front of Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel, reassembled brick by brick after its move from Tokyo. Maps and talk and far-reaching future plans. But we missed each other in New York by a decade and when I finally got to China you'd been dead for three years.

§

Standing outside Maison Mieru, thinking about sex and suicide. The bluish-gray apartment building in Hakusan-cho where I lived for two years after the breakup with Ima. Apartment 201. My tidy rooms on the second floor. Tidy rooms for a disordered, squalid period. Where I was living when my father visited Japan the first time, six months after my mother died. Across the street, then: a profoundly suspicious and dilapidated twenty-four-hour goldfish shop, a picture of which I used on the cover of my first book.

The Beatles poster in the entranceway, the postcard of Proust in the washroom. My desk in the corner. The ashtray that was a wooden wrist and hand, the palm cupped to hold the ashes. Bookcases, there, and the futons in the tatami room, under the dragon kite a friend got for me in Indonesia. A picture of Ima in a black bra on the table by the wall.

Somebody else lives in 201 now. Laundry hangs in the window.

§

Did you know what was coming, Stan? Did you refuse to let your doctor tell anybody what was going on in order to spare us all the awful knowledge? Was that your last, graceful gift? I bet it was.

§

I didn't even know until recently that Guangzhou used to be known as Canton. Lots I didn't know about China. I didn't particularly share Stan's interest; I don't think I was even all that interested in Japan by then. I didn't know about 20,000 chests of opium dumped into water-filled trenches, sprinkled with salt and lime, and flushed out to sea. I didn't know the Chinese proverb that says *A peasant must stand a long time on a hillside with his mouth open before a roast duck flies in.* I'd never pictured a eunuch carrying that night's concubine into the emperor's

bedroom because, with her bound feet, she can barely walk. I'd never heard about struggle sessions. I didn't know about blood merchants and corpse walkers.

All the books I've read in the past four or five years to try and understand your love for China, Stan. To tighten my grip. To reassemble the picture, put you in the landscape. The stacks of China books in my little triangular room at home—would you approve? Nobody to talk to about them but you.

§

Other walks, other roving and safaris and pilgrimages. Gloating over my joy, afoot in Manhattan. Walking through Mérida's soft dark, happy, watching a street musician wipe rain off his guitar. Slipping through San Francisco at three in the morning past and among lifeless homeless doorway heaps, arguments, staggerings, superb buildings, strippers in sexless hoods cutting home fast with hands crammed in cautious pockets. Rambling a deserted tumbledown section of the Great Wall with Max and Patrick and Rachael, the sky full of Mongol wind. Dawdling in the Big Within of the Forbidden City. Drifting, distressed, through Birkenau. Tramping to Trafalgar Square with no money and a busted nose. Trudging from downtown Seattle to the shore of Lake Washington just to see Kurt Cobain's house. Walking 1200 kilometers around Shikoku with my father, our staffs clicking on the roads and paths, to murmur the Heart Sutra at the eighty-eight temples. Gleeful over every ambled inch of Paris.

Everywhere I go I just walk around, interested in and content with random observation, figures in the landscape, ghost signs, graveyards, pipes, wires, banjaxed buildings, broken stuff, buckets of rust and steam, alleys, doorways, dim lamps burning in second-story windows . . .

§

“Stan's sudden death at the age of 42 has greatly saddened his friends and family. He died on October 28th, 2013 in the Vernon Jubilee Hospital, where he was born August 21st, 1971.”

## §

Polish kitchen confabs left you chatter-marked and exasperated, didn't they, Stan? Your ancient parents: first-generation immigrants. Dense language and Catholic stuff. Slavonic pressures. Only child, too. Plump kid—all that Polish grub—and glasses. Your patient, amused intelligence. Self-effacing at school, in the park, on Suicide Hill, unassertive everywhere, slinking, invisible, into the pool hall. Passing through like that, unobtrusive, till China. What happened there? You got so skinny. A few contented years, then hauled home by parental decline, hauled back to Vernon where you turned into glass, or straw, Vernon without Geoff or me, Pleasant Valley Road where you got fat and got stripped of all ambition and try. Hiding in the house still clamorous with phantom prattle, disappointed Poles still giving you shit. You could hear their voices, you said, displeased with your possible moves. Finally: October death and ashes and gone. All sealed, at last, in a handful of graves and photographs, in the little vase you gave me, in the tightness in my chest, in our jokes vanished forever, in my pens full of sundown and cry.

## §

Smell Sweet North, apartment 105. The Ima period. Ima, with her gravelly, broken-china voice and exciting appetites. Our six years together ending not in marriage and children but recrimination, sadness, tears, defeat. I was living here the summer Stan visited from Guangzhou. Up there: the window to the room where I giggled with Stan on the floor, both of us loaded, his first night in town. I played him Dylan's "Things Have Changed," which was new and which he hadn't heard.

"He's so fucking *good*," Stan said, with genuine awe.

The building's grimier than before. Rain-stained. Apartment 105 is empty; the mailbox is full of crap. I go around into the alley and peer through the sliding doors to the main downstairs room where I sat with Ima and Stan and friends

from all over and drank and roared and did and said all kinds of blue, indelicate little things in a four-year-long stratovolcanic spree, all of us light and alive.

§

I've always walked, partly from lanky, long-legged enjoyment and partly because I hate cars and have never had a driving license. My dad's house is a couple of kilometers from downtown Vernon and I routinely walked down Highway 97 and in, past the cadet camp where Stan and I worked in the summertime, past Jubilee Hospital, past where Friday's Arcade used to be. No gadgets. Just my grandfather's long legs and some smokes.

My first writing triumph came about because of walking. When I was in grade six I had a *Vernon Daily News* paper route; it took an hour or so, start to finish. That Christmas there was a short story contest at school. We were shown a picture of a stern, almost medieval-looking Santa Claus astride a horse in a snowy forest. I picked up and started delivering my papers, step by step working out not only the story but each sentence, starting at the beginning over and over again and building and adding with each repetition. By the time I finished my papers I'd finished and memorized the whole story. I went home and wrote it down and won the contest. The prize was a gift certificate for a bookstore downtown.

Ever since then I've more or less believed that walking *is* writing.

§

Jed emailed me:

*I hope you don't think this stupid, but I'm going to track down a copy of On the Road, then I'm going to write your name in it and leave it at the grave. I'm not sure if this is for you or me, but I feel the need to do something on your behalf. The gesture is from me to Stan (and you), but the thing itself is meant to connect the two of you*



*physically. Yes, neither of you are here/there at the grave, but you'll both be in the book itself, and I'd feel honoured to place it there.*

§

My very first place in Gifu, a house owned by the company I worked for then: gone. Demolished and replaced. The last time I went by there I didn't recognize the street at all.

§

Swapping books, recommending books, talking books with Stan for decades. Ted Mark, Céline, Robert K. Massie, Kawabata Yasunari, Kerouac. What a treat to turn him on to *On the Road*. From Japan I sent him a collection of Dazai Osamu autobiographical short stories called *Self Portraits*, which had floored me. The next time I saw Stan we both quoted the same line at the same time, the final sentence of a story called "No Kidding": "My suicide was postponed for another month."

Dazai, a drunk and a drug addict, was only 21 when he botched a love suicide—the woman died, but Dazai survived. There were multiple subsequent attempts. In 1948, drinking heavily, coughing up blood, unable to sleep, and at the peak of his popularity and success, Dazai and his mistress threw themselves into the Tamagawa Canal in Tokyo. Their bodies were discovered almost a week later, on June 19, Dazai's birthday.

The last time I saw Stan was when my wife, Maho, myself, and our son Joe flew to Canada for my brother's wedding. Joe was not even two at the time and doesn't remember but for me it was like he was meeting John Lennon or Muhammad Ali. My dad took pictures of Stan and me sitting in the backyard in our neckties with our backs to the lake, laughing over David Foster Wallace's *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, which Stan'd never read. I gave him my copy and got it back two years later in a box of books packed up by the guy who handled his estate.

§

Mizobata Park: *mizo*, meaning ditch or channel, and *bata*, meaning flag or banner. The trees are leafless, the branches bleakly coral-like. It's not spring yet. But it's getting there.

I proposed to Maho on a bench in this park in the summer of 2006. Maho, with her charming, shambling walk, her gleeful laugh, her zip and zing. And she said yes and I put a ring of my mother's on her finger and we went to the Bier Hall for a celebratory drink.

Joe and Sasha dreamed up, right on this bench.

Ditch Flag Park at night in March. Traffic sounds. The clanging bell of the nearby Meitetsu line train crossing. No voices.

§

I never fought with Stan. We fussed exactly once, over insufficient correspondence on his end. He hated writing letters or emails and it got on my nerves and I gave him hell and he apologized and promised to try harder. But nothing really changed. By the end he wasn't even opening his mail. Both of his parents were dead and he'd become a virtual recluse in the cluttered house on Pleasant Valley Road. *Hikikomori* in Japanese. Abnormal avoidance of social contact.

Because of Stan's lack of written communication I only have a handful of letters and emails to examine and study but, because of his aversion to writing and resulting unskillfulness, they don't sound like him at all.

§

Twenty-five years since I left Canada. All the things I wasn't there for, all the things I missed. My sister's wedding. My mother dying. The things that changed. Stan's downfall and death.

I was barely even there the last time with Stan, both of us weaving on drunken sidewalks outside the Kal Hotel bar, saying goodbye, goodbye, goodbye again.

§

Tamamiya Street, with the Bier Hall's little sign on the right-hand side just after you turn off the street that leads to the station. Tamamiya's full of bars and *yakitori* shops and *izakayas* but the hub and heart of my big drinking days was always the Bier Hall. I heard about it soon after I moved to Gifu from a Japanese teacher I worked with. She'd met her husband, an Englishman, there.

"I poked a hole in his condom with a pin," she confided, "so I'd get pregnant and he'd marry me."

Small, dim, murmurous, elegantly simple. Gray brick and wood. Stan and I headed straight to the Bier Hall as soon as we got back to Gifu from the airport. He was high on China, still in that beautiful *allokataplixis* phase, that other-wonder phase, and he talked at length and animatedly about Mao Zedong and Guangzhou and subterranean caves and all kinds of stuff. He'd brought me a Mao lighter that flashed and beeped and some unspeakably foul Chinese cigarettes and we yakked and smoked and drank, trusting, companionable, sympathetic. It was wonderful to see him there on his Bier Hall stool, smiling. We drank well together. Always did.

Stan's face of pleasure. He'd escaped Vernon, escaped his parents, plunged into China, gotten his first-ever girlfriend, and was now telling me about the tribulations of Mao's personal physician, gross and funny stories about taking care of a man once described as "the anal leader of an oral people."

§

Stan was cremated and his remains interred in Pleasant Valley Cemetery, which is a fifteen-minute walk down Pleasant Valley Road from his house. In the end my friend couldn't get free and didn't get far.

§

*Well my friend, how are things in old Japan?*

*Was reading your book just after you left. Sitting outside of Starbucks enjoying a cup of coffee, the sun on my back etc, when this semi-crippled giant, his body collapsing under the strain of its outsized proportions, with whom I'd already exchanged a few words on naval history, sat down. Well, kind of exchanged words, he knew an awful lot about parts of naval history, and went on about civil war ironclads and ancient galleys. Given that I had just read Castles of Steel and Dreadnought I piped in a few bits of WWI naval bits.*

*Anyway, he certainly loved to talk and I feared he would start in again and completely distract me from getting back to the book. So he sat down, even that quite a process, since he must be approaching 8 feet and used an enormous walker that had handlebars up to my armpits. Moments later he asked me what I was reading. I told him that my friend had just published his first book and this was it. So, he said, a new writer on the road. I smiled, thinking how strangely appropriate that was.*

§

Geoff messaged me from Vernon: *Stan passed away about an hour ago.*

We never got any final information from the hospital about what it was exactly that killed him. Nephritic difficulties? Something he picked up in China? Hepatitis? Booze? Speculation and conjecture, sad and hopeless.

I know what it was. He gave up. He let go. He let go on me.

§

Kyomachi: the Chiko Building. *Chiko* is written with characters that mean *a thousand clear and shining lights*. Maho and I started out in an apartment on

the fourth floor, 405, after we got engaged. Concupiscent years. When Joe and then Sasha arrived, we rented additional apartments, the one across from 405 and another apartment two floors down. One for sleeping, one for cooking and eating and playing, one for dada and his books. Joe and Sasha learning to walk and talk and read; kiddy tumult and hullabaloo in all directions. Incense fuming on the kitchen table. A view of Gifu Castle out the toilet window.

We were still living in Chiko when Stan died. I got the news from Geoff at work, in the staff room at school, and felt a shooting pain in my stomach, like I'd been stabbed. I made it through the day and went home and read the shit out of *Green Eggs and Ham* to Joe and went upstairs to 405 and got drunk, a real pang of love and longing on my face.

Chiko, run-down when Maho and I moved in fourteen years ago, is in pretty rough shape and mostly empty these days. I pad up the cracked concrete steps to the top floor. The hallways are open to the air; long wires protect them from birds. I stand in the exact spot, between the doors to 405 and 406, where I smoked my last-ever cigarette, just before Joe was born. I stand there with my mouth open, waiting for a roast duck to fly in.

§

Walking with Stan around Vernon, down Pleasant Valley to the bar in the Kal. Up on the roof of a downtown store, talking. Goofing in Jim's Place over coffee for hours and hours. Walking from my wedding ceremony in dad's backyard to a lakeside bar for the reception, Stan and Geoff and me, passing Geoff's flask back and forth. Stan crying on the swings at Bearisto Elementary School, unhappily home from China, his parents unwell, the girl gone, his heart broken. Stan spangled all over the city, everywhere I look, every time I go. I walk into him. There he is. There. Here.

§

Jed emailed me:

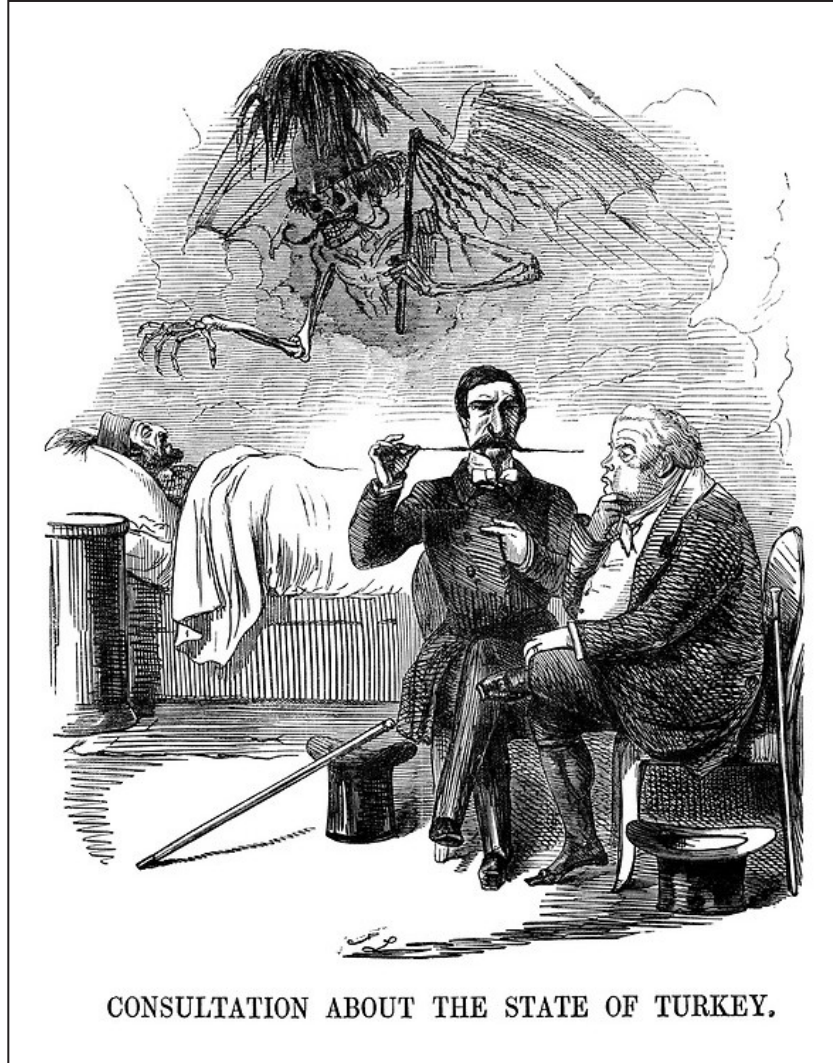


*Have been out of town and sick with cold, but finally managed to get these pics off my phone to send you. The night before, as I was putting Sam to bed, I told him we were going to visit Stan at the cemetery the next day. Just a quick mention as we snuggled him into bed. Next day, as we pulled in, Sam said "Is this the cemetery?" So I said yes, and we drove up to Stan's plot. In the car I wrote in the book, and as I was doing this Sam kept asking, over and over again, "Where's Stan? Where's Stan?"*

*We got out and I asked Sam if he wanted to put the book on the grave, and he did. We then sat on the wet grass for a few minutes and he kept asking where Stan was. So I told him Stan was all over the place, in the sky, and the trees, and the grass, but that not everyone knew he was there. We knew, though, so it was good to come here to visit him. Sam seemed content with that, and we then walked across the grass to watch a couple of yard guys digging an irrigation ditch with a small back-hoe, which Sam thought was pretty cool.*

§

And I move lightly over the map, remembering. ☹



Political cartoon depicting Turkey as a patient sick in bed while representatives of France and Britain discuss its fate. *Punch*, September 17, 1853.

## What Is the Real “Sick Man”?

By Joyce Liao (廖菁菁)

The headline “China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia” published by the *Wall Street Journal* on February 3 inflamed public rage in China. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs required an official apology from the *Journal* but received little response. The following steps taken by both governments to restrict the other’s media have escalated and the rising tension has aroused extensive concern.

Simply with a glimpse at the title, Chinese people were strongly exasperated. Some went so far as to deplore this as a “malicious insult” to China with obvious racism, denouncing the “American arrogance” behind it. For some in the West, though, this title was a smart pun for the COVID-19 period. They were confused by China’s “overreaction” and might have felt it kind of ridiculous that the Chinese were asking for an apology.

In my perspective, behind this media and diplomatic event is in fact a cultural misconception. I earnestly suggest a better understanding between both sides. To that end, let’s walk in each other’s shoes to carefully examine the origin of the phrase “sick man” as well as its connotations in China and the West, respectively.

As a Chinese myself, I well understand that there are deep reasons behind Chinese public rage. In the Chinese cultural context, “the sick man of Asia” or “the sick man of the East” is directly related to the Opium Wars and China’s hundred-year history of being colonized. During that time, many Chinese suffered from weak physical and mental conditions due to opium addiction.

The connection between “sick man” and the national history of humiliation is ingrained in the minds of Chinese. As a result, Chinese people are very sensitive about the aforementioned title and, without getting a proper apology, felt even more offended by “American arrogance.”

However, most Chinese don’t know that “sick man” is far from an exclusive epithet for China. In fact, the term “sick man” originated in 1853 when Tsar Nicholas I of Russia first described the declining Ottoman Empire as “the sick man of Europe,” mainly referring to its economic issues. In 1895, the Chinese

scholar Yan Fu first used the term *bingfu* to describe the Chinese Qing Empire that faced social, economic, and political upheavals.<sup>†</sup> *Bingfu* in Chinese literally means “patient.” The following year, the British-run Shanghai-based newspaper *North China Daily News* first called China “sick man” in an English article, referring to the country rather than its people.

Interestingly, the first person to make a direct connection between the term “sick man” and opium addiction in China was Liang Qichao, an advocate of domestic reforms around the end of the nineteenth century. He is highly regarded in Chinese history, with household sayings such as “if the youth are strong, the country is strong.” He also translated “sick man” as *bingfu*. In his work *Xinminshuo* (Theory of new people), he went further to connect the “sickness” of China the country with the physical sickness of Chinese people due to opium addiction, calling for change in China. Since then, the phrase “sick man” has held a strongly negative connotation of shame and insult. Today, it is a synonym of the dark history of the Opium Wars.

In contrast, “sick man” has been used in the West throughout history to describe many countries without any direct connection to the Chinese Opium Wars. Recently, the phrase has been used regularly by the media to discuss global issues.

To offer just a few examples from Western countries: “Germany Becomes the Sick Man of Europe” appeared in *Fox Business Network* on October 5, 2019; the *Financial Times* published “Britain Is Once Again the Sick Man of Europe” on April 18, 2019; even the United States was previously called “the sick man of the developed world” by *Bloomberg News* on August 1, 2017.

In the past few years, there have been instances of the phrase being used to describe other Asian countries as well: the Philippines was referred to as “the sick man of Asia” by the *Nikkei Asian Review* and the *New Straits Times* published “Is Singapore the New Sick Man of Asia?”

The *Wall Street Journal* itself published an article titled “The Sick Man of Europe Is Europe” in May 2019. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps

---

<sup>†</sup> Information on this page came in part from the following articles:  
[https://book.ifeng.com/a/20150319/13447\\_0.shtml](https://book.ifeng.com/a/20150319/13447_0.shtml)  
[http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2020-02/29/content\\_75758222.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2020-02/29/content_75758222.htm)

the sick man of the world is now the world. Global collaboration is needed to deal with this extremely challenging global issue.

So, in recent years, “sick man” was used in the media mainly to describe economic issues, which is in accordance with its origin regarding the Ottoman Empire’s economic crisis. However, in China, the phrase is never used to talk about economic issues; instead, it’s always linked to the Opium Wars and national insult. For Chinese people, it’s hard to believe that this connotation is not shared by the mainstream in the West.

But as I read carefully through “China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia” in the *Wall Street Journal*, I didn’t find traces of “malicious insult” to China. The article examines short-term and long-term influences of COVID-19 on the Chinese and global economies with an objective and analytical tone. Intriguingly, at the end of the article, it discusses “black swans” of the twenty-first century, including the 9/11 event, Trump, Brexit, and the coronavirus, warning about “black swans” yet to come. As shown in these details, the article’s stance tends to be relatively neutral.

To sum up, I believe we’d better reexamine the “sick man” event by analyzing meanings of “sick man” under different historical and cultural contexts. Then people in the West would probably understand China’s “overreaction” is not without reasons, whereas the Chinese would eventually realize that this phrase could have a different meaning in the West.

This event is merely one instance of cultural differences between the East and the West, a topic with much to be discussed. Personally, I believe it might not only be a historic event in the area of media and diplomacy, but might also become a typical case cited by cultural anthropologists. In this age of globalization, the issue of cultural differences is worthy of attention in our international interactions. It requires from both sides mutual understanding as well as respect. 🤝



## “病夫”之我见<sup>†</sup>

廖菁菁

2月3日，《华尔街日报》头版刊登了题为《中国是真正的亚洲病夫》一文，在中国引起群情激愤。中国外交部要求该报公开道歉，却如同石沉大海。随后双方政府就对方媒体采取的限制措施不断升级，引起了广泛关注。

初看文章标题，许多中国人便出离愤怒，有人将它定性为“带有鲜明的种族主义歧视色彩”的“辱华事件”，并对“美式傲慢”进行强烈谴责。而对一些西方人而言，在新冠肺炎疫情暴发期间，这个标题是个恰当的双关语。他们对中国人的“小题大做”感到莫名其妙，认为道歉之说有点荒唐可笑。

在我看来，这一媒体和外交事件的背后其实是一种文化误解。我想真诚地呼吁大家增进相互了解。为此，我们不妨换位思考，仔细探究“病夫”一词的由来及其在中国和西方各自的内涵。

身为中国人，我很清楚这一事件在国内激起公愤的根源。在中国文化语境里，“亚洲病夫”或“东亚病夫”直接联系到鸦片战争和国家百年殖民史。那时，许多中国人因吸食鸦片成瘾而身心羸弱。中国人把“病夫”与民族屈辱史的这种联系牢牢地印记在心里，因此对前述标题特别敏感。在未得到适当道歉的情况下，中国人更觉为“美式傲慢”所冒犯。

然而，多数国人并不知道“病夫”远非专指中国。事实上，“病夫”一词起源于1853年，当时俄国沙皇尼古拉斯一世首次将日益衰落的奥斯曼帝国描述为“欧洲病夫”，主要指其经济问题。最早于1895年著名学者严复用“病夫”来形容面临社会动荡、经济崩塌和政权混乱的清政府。次年，一名英国作者在上海的英文报纸《字林西报》(North China Daily News)中也称“中国是病夫”，但没有说“中国是病夫”。

有趣的是，最早明确将“病夫”和鸦片成瘾紧密相连的是十九世纪末国内改革的倡导者梁启超。梁启超在中国历史上享有盛誉，“少年强则国强”是其家喻户晓的名言。他将“sick man”译为“病夫”，并

---

<sup>†</sup> 作者翻译 (Translation by the author)

在著作《新民说》里感叹“其人皆为病夫，其国安得不为病国也！”，主张改造国家要从改造国民性做起。从此“病夫”被赋予了强烈的羞辱性含义，如今已经成为鸦片战争那段屈辱历史的代名词。

相比之下，西方人用“病夫”形容过众多国家，但始终与中国鸦片战争没有什么关系。近期，媒体常用这个词来讨论各国的问题。以几个西方国家为例：2019年10月5日，《德国成为欧洲病夫》出现在福克斯商业网上；2019年4月18日，《金融时报》发表了《英国再次成为欧洲病夫》；甚至连美国也曾在2017年8月1日被彭博新闻社称为“发达国家中的病夫”。近年来，戴上“病夫”帽子的亚洲国家也不乏其例：菲律宾被《日经亚洲评论》指为“亚洲病夫”，《新海峡时报》刊登《新加坡是新的亚洲病夫吗？》。

《华尔街日报》还曾在2019年5月发表了一篇题为《欧洲病夫就是欧洲》的文章。随着新冠疫情快速蔓延并席卷全球，也许当下的世界病夫就该是整个世界了，更加需要各国通力合作，以应对这一前所未有的全球性挑战。

纵观近年来媒体上“病夫”一词，均指一个国家或地区经济发展面临严峻问题，与其形容奥斯曼帝国经济危机的最初含义是一致的。然而，这个词在中国从未用于谈论经济问题，而是与鸦片战争、民族屈辱息息相关。对中国人来说，很难相信西方主流社会不了解这一特殊内涵。

我仔细阅读了《中国是真正的亚洲病夫》原文，文章相对客观地分析了疫情暴发对中国乃至世界经济的短期和长期影响，字里行间并没有“恶意辱华”的痕迹。耐人寻味的是，文章结尾处谈论了二十一世纪的“黑天鹅”事件，列举了从911事件到特朗普上台、从英国脱欧到冠状病毒肆虐，警告全球仍可能存在黑天鹅风险。从这些细节可以看出文章的立场应该是相对中立的。

综上所述，我认为应以不同历史和文化背景下“病夫”的含义为出发点，重新审视“病夫事件”。这样，西方人多半就能理解中国人的反应并不“过度”，而中国人也终将意识到该词在西方可以内涵迥异。

东西方文化差异一直是经久不衰的话题，本次事件仅是其中一例。依我之见，这可能不仅是媒体和外交领域的一个历史性事件，而且将成为文化人类学家援用的经典案例。在当今全球化的时代，国际交流日趋密切，文化差异的问题也会更加突出。这需要交往双方对彼此多一些了解，也给彼此多一分尊重。☺

## Portfolio

Joseph Stern

*The photographs on the following pages are an attempt to capture the ways in which rapid change impacts the urban poor in China. The velocity of change is unprecedented—many of the elderly here today were born in one of the poorest countries in the world and lived through civil war, the Japanese invasion, the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the age of reform, the digitalization of contemporary life, and now the rise of China as a world power. The urban poor facilitate that change. They come from the traditional parts of China to construct the modern ones, surviving by creating a world they do not wholly belong in.*







Elderly couple in Xuhui  
Shanghai, 2019







Woman resting  
outside a restaurant  
Xiamen, 2019







Man in a room in  
Xiaonanmen  
Shanghai, 2019







Front door in  
Xiaonanmen  
Shanghai, 2019







Modern skyscraper  
being built in  
the West Bund  
Shanghai, 2019







Two signs in  
an urban village:  
UNDER EXCAVATION –  
DO NOT ENTER  
and PEOPLE HERE  
Shanghai, 2019





Street sweeper outside KFC | Shanghai, 2019





Motorbike repair shop in Xuhui | Shanghai, 2019







Two workers get a rest  
Shanghai, 2010







Elderly man at height of  
coronavirus pandemic  
Shanghai, 2020







Musicians at work  
Shanxi, 2019



Weekend stroll | Shanghai, 2019



## Interview

### Coronavirus Chronicles

*Like the cross-cultural theme mentioned in the Editor's Note above, this interview was neither planned nor arranged. In late January, when the first news of the coronavirus began trickling out, I thought of a friend who is from Wuhan. I sent a WeChat message to inquire about my friend's family. Thus began a conversation that continued into late spring. Sometime in May, while browsing through these messages, I realized they formed an interesting "real-time" chronicle of the spread of the virus. Besides the details of everyday life during a pandemic, one can clearly see how the focus shifts from a mostly localized crisis in China to a nationwide crisis in the United States.*

*I contacted my friend to see if I might use our chats as a kind of interview for this issue. Given the reaction to the publication of Fang Fang's Wuhan Diary,<sup>†</sup> we both knew it was a touchy subject. Nothing terribly negative or accusatory was written (or intended) by either of us, but I knew the very act of talking frankly about the pandemic might be seen in a negative light by some in today's environment. We discussed whether to use it at all, and if so, how to edit it; in the end, we settled on what appears on the following pages. First, most references to topics other than the pandemic were omitted (so some passages might seem disjointed). Then anything that might be deemed negative or controversial were removed (admittedly arbitrary and tricky, as one person's censorship is inherently different from another's). Finally, all personal details that could identify my friend were removed (since the last thing I wanted was to cause trouble for this person). Location, workplace, age, and even gender are deliberately missing. The one thing the reader knows is that my friend teaches somewhere in China. Thus, I am identified in the interview by my initials and my friend by the title "Teacher." I tried to recreate it here as an authentic series of WeChat messages, using the same colors and emojis that the app uses. Since our chats were informal, I only edited them where necessary to clarify the meaning. —Ed.*

---

<sup>†</sup> Fang Fang is the pen name of an author in Wuhan who documented life during the lockdown there with regular posts to social media, which were published in English as *Wuhan Diary*. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/world/asia/coronavirus-china-fang-fang-author.html>.

January 20, 2020

BK

Hi! How are you? I hope you had a good fall semester. I keep reading about this new virus in Wuhan that seems to be getting worse. Terrible timing with all the traveling for Spring Festival. I hope none of your family or friends are affected by it. Are you going there for Spring Festival? If so, be very careful. Or maybe your parents are coming to visit you. I hope you have a nice time together wherever you celebrate it! 🇨🇳

January 25, 2020

TEACHER

Hi, Happy New Year! nice to hear from you. i am now here by myself. i planned to go back home on the last day of 2019, but the airport was closed. so i have to change the plan and stay here.

it is very serious here. all my relatives have cancelled the from-house-to-house-拜年 this year. My parents are all in my hometown and spend the New Year by themselves. it is weird. but staying here is ok for me too. Now i have stayed in doors for about 15 days. Now in China all the news is about the coronavirus pneumonia. when i look out at the bridge it seems ok, and the cars are coming here and there. When i check the news it sounds horrible.

in 2003 i was in college in Wuhan. the impression of SARS is still so clear in my head. now the second round comes. people do not learn lessons.

i was in a bad mood and not sure whether to go back home for the holiday or not so i did not use wechat for a long time and devoted myself into translating a book. when i saw the message you sent, i thought back a little while, actually at that time, not so many news on the disease, and i was unaware of it and i stayed in the provincial library for three days. then the day when Wuhan began to shut down the city, i first realized that it maybe serious, because at that time not so much news on it. the officials should all be punished, because they arrested the eight people who said it was serious to the public and announced it was ok and would not transfer from people to people. Now they are wrong. all the big cities in Hubei province have stopped the public transportation. it is unbelievable. Basically, now all the people i know are all ok, never hear any bad news. i think it will get better in the coming two weeks.

i dare not go out to the public places too, for the past two weeks, many people came to our province and today nine people have been diagnosed. the hospital near our school has diagnosed one. but i have bought enough food to stay indoors for two weeks. i think if we delay the opening of the school, maybe it is good. all the people are saying that not pork (because of the pig epidemic) but masks are the most popular New Year goods. A lot of jokes appear in Wechat. that is good, we need not wait for the fake news of the CV.



Thank you for your warm care message. now i am older and have a better understanding of this world but have doubts about the meaning of existence and hope everything will be good.

TEACHER

how are you and your wife? where are you now?

January 27, 2020

BK

Hi. Thanks for your long reply. I'm sorry to hear you couldn't celebrate Spring Festival with your family, but glad to hear they are all fine. Every day's news brings things to a higher level. I just read that Li Keqiang visited Wuhan today. I hope all the efforts pay off soon and this gets under control and stops spreading. So far, five cases have been confirmed in the U.S., but none in New York, where we are. Actually, I would be surprised if it were not here by now. It's likely someone has it already but doesn't have any symptoms, so it hasn't been diagnosed. We are good, thank you.

[TEACHER sent video of Chinese prime minister Li Keqiang visiting Wuhan]

This is Li. Wuhan people asked him to say Wuhan cheer up

TEACHER

i have stayed indoors for 5 days



BK

I just read there was one death there from the virus, so be careful! 🤧💪

January 28, 2020

the dead person is from Wuhan

TEACHER

it is so hard to stay in an apartment alone

i do not know the meaning of existence. for the past years i have been working hard to earn money but now i think money is nothing. having a happy family is important. food is plenty, it is hard to be starved to death.

life is so hard, living in the countryside seems ok too

old people should have some kids so that we can have more care

it is cold here these days. just 12 degrees during the night, it is unbelievable

[TEACHER sent a video about virus updates and media reaction in America]

BK

That video you sent is kind of unfortunate. The longest clip was of Trevor Noah, who is the host of a late-night program focused on comedy. So he feels a need to joke, but in my opinion, this health crisis is not something to joke about. He should have left that topic alone and focused on the impeachment of our terrible president -- plenty to joke about there. 😊

That temperature is cold for your area. Stay warm and take care. Hopefully, both the weather and the health scare will improve soon.

January 29, 2020

the sun came out today in the morning, the temperature will be higher in the coming days.

TEACHER

it is hard to stay indoors all the time without going out

we have to wait until February 8 and ten more days to wait for

have you heard any news on why the provincial GV did not take the emergency measures at the beginning? people are saying that the officials are stupid but yesterday i heard that it was because local officials did not get the permit from the central officials. what is the truth?

BK

Hi. I read in a couple of articles that there was a big provincial meeting of Hubei leaders in Wuhan in mid-January, and the officials did not want any negative news to cast a shadow on it. So they kept it quiet, probably hoping it would not get worse. I can't find the articles now so I don't know the source; that could have just been speculation. But in general the system is set up so local and provincial officials try not to have anything negative that might reflect poorly on them. As do the national officials, really. It's human nature for everyone to do that (especially politicians in any system), but part of the problem is there is no other outlet for disseminating information when it all gets funneled through one source.

The Washington Post reported that all universities and schools in Beijing are now shut indefinitely until things improve.

Don't know if you saw my post a few minutes ago, but researchers at Johns Hopkins University are mapping the spread and known cases of the virus here:

<https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

## Interview: Coronavirus Chronicles

[TEACHER sent a link to a website]

i can open the map<sup>†</sup>

TEACHER

the website i sent to you shows the daily-renewed infected numbers in China

for the past two days, each day more than two thousand people were reported. today the number increase is not so sharp. so i think it is better. and hope it will be better

[TEACHER sent a photo of outdoors from the apartment window]

today is sunshine

TEACHER

BK

Yes, I hope it's slowing down.

Look at all those green trees! I'm jealous. 🙄 Actually, I shouldn't complain. We've had a pretty mild winter for this area.

the trees are green all year round 🤔 i just want to have a walk outside. staying indoors by myself needs a lot of patience

TEACHER

it is nearly 1:00 am there, right? get a good sleep and do not begin to sleep too late, keeping healthy is the most important thing in the world

wear a mask when you go out, and stay safe.

January 30, 2020

the website you sent cannot be opened on my computer. i think computer link has been blocked and wechat link is ok. i do not know whether life is harder or easier when something is blocked.

TEACHER

BK

How are your family and friends back in Wuhan doing?

<sup>†</sup> This refers to opening the link on a cell phone.

January 31, 2020

my family are good and stay at home. they are in the countryside which has vast piece of land and is very safe. Friends are all good and have not heard of any bad news. basically good.

TEACHER

people are beginning to go back to cities to work

it may become urgent again. it seems this staying at home last for a long long time

BK

I'm glad your family and friends are safe and in an area of less density.

it is horrible yesterday more than 2000 people have been confirmed

TEACHER

February 8, 2020

BK

Hi. I haven't contacted you in a while. How are things there -- still the same? What do you hear from your family and friends in Wuhan?

every day the confirmed cases are still increasing by around three thousand all over China. still serious. my parents and sister's family are all good and relatives are all good too.

TEACHER

the education department requires us to teach online, which is a headache. it is too complex to teach online

we are all studying the software. the confirmed number is increasing here too.

yesterday it was reported that two weeks ago two doctors in a nearby city treated one patient with high fever who came from Hubei and then they did not take any measures to take care of themselves and treated more than seven hundred patients for the following two weeks. then they were diagnosed and were confirmed to be infected so all the seven hundred people are asked to stay by themselves and the GV is trying to find all the people. Now we are in a serious situation too. it is just unbelievable and unbearable.

[TEACHER sent several links and a video]



the virus can stay in air by itself. we are not allowed to walk on the streets. the roads are all blocked out from city to city too

TEACHER

experts said yesterday the Lantern Festival things would turn better, but no. stupid experts!

for two weeks i just went downstairs three times. staying indoors is too long 🙄

How about in America?

February 9, 2020

BK

Hi. I'm glad to hear you and your family are all well. It sounds like it's been a big disruption to life for everyone, whether infected or not. Better to be bored than sick, though, so keep staying inside like they say. You can read and watch videos as much as you like. 😊

How are you teaching your classes online? Are you using special software for it or just sending out lessons by Weixin? I'm curious to know the method you're using.

In America, life is pretty normal for most people. Only a handful have been diagnosed with the virus and they are getting treatment. Likewise, people who returned from Wuhan are under quarantine for 14 days. Other than that, the only difference so far is that face masks are all sold out many places. People don't really need them yet, but they're buying them up anyway out of a kind of panic. Doctors say they don't really help unless you already have the virus (to prevent coughing or sneezing from infecting others), but if you don't and want to be careful the best thing to do is wash your hands often.

February 11, 2020

Now the situation here is becoming serious. from today everybody is required to stay indoors for another 14 days. but news said that the hidden time of the virus is about 24 days. not sure what will happen next. the bad part is that food are not allowed to be shipped to city to sell by private sellers. maybe it will be hard to buy food in the coming days. but people can survive with enough rice.

TEACHER

we are learning how to use online teaching software. it is in chaos. some are recommended, like 超星、智慧树、中国大学MOOC. some software companies are developing the online study teaching techniques and have no chance to spread in school.now it is the perfect time to force everyone to use them.

TEACHER

but the technique is no good. we cannot upload the PPT or the videos. there are still ten more days before the online teaching starts, we still have enough time to learn more. i have been spending a lot of time learning these things

it is impossible to use phones to teach for the whole morning but apps can only be used in phones and classes can only be recorded on phones. it is unbelievable

i heard that American universities have been using online teaching for a long time. never attended one and not sure what it looks like. i think online teaching is just like TED talks. students listen and watch it and [!] have no idea what online discussion is what like

have you ever used online teaching? yesterday the primary schools and high schools used it. not much response on Wechat or on the news. fighting against the virus is still the number one thing here.

i hear that google chrome is good to use. i think the idea to use online teaching is good but no good technology to support this. tech companies are like amateur companies 🙄

i feel that every day is the weekend, few people on the road and no chance to meet people. my cooking skills have improved a lot but i still do not know how to steam 包子. so i make some 煎饼 🥞

i burnt the 煎饼 but still eatable and they taste good. feel quite happy about it 😊

it is not imaginable that i have to stay indoors for one whole month by myself. i can imagine that maybe i will go mad before the virus is gone. not know what my mindset now is.

BK

Hi. In the US, online teaching is pretty common, but it still is used mostly as a supplement to regular classes. At my old college, they called these "hybrid classes" (part online, part face-to-face). I've never taught a course entirely online, but I used to make my own website for material for my writing classes. I mostly used it to post handouts and instructions for students who missed class (much more common here than in China). But more and more classes are being offered entirely online so they never meet in a classroom.

The most common software used for this here is a program called Blackboard, and many colleges and universities subscribe to it (it costs money). Some others use a free program like Moodle, which I've also tried in the past. If you can access this, they have a demonstration:

BK

<https://moodle.org/demo/>

You can upload any kind of document to read, as well as multimedia files. The discussion usually is written, kind of in the form of a blog with comments. Students have to write a response to something they read/heard/watched, and often have to reply to others' responses as well. This is what they call online "discussion."

February 14, 2020

it is crazy to stay indoors all the time. i want to eat some other food but no place to buy. now i finally realize that i have not cooked so much for the past 16 years. i have been lazy for such a long time. now rice and rice every day. it is horrible. in the past there were so many kinds of food selling in the market.

after the leaders of Wuhan and Hubei are all changed. do not know when it will become better.

通知：按市委市政府要求，从今天开始，公安局巡逻队在街面上抓不带临时通行证出行的居民，并送到体育馆集中隔离，同时核对所在小区，并移交纪委监委倒查责任。请大家注意没有通行证一律不准出行！

no walking in the streets without a temporary permit back in my hometown

time seems endless

TEACHER

February 17, 2020

BK

Did you start your online classes today? If so, how did it go? I read an article in the Washington Post about all the primary and middle school students returning to classes today, working from home on their computers.

February 18, 2020

we have not started the new semester. it was planned to start on 24 February. now the postgraduates will begin on 24 February and the undergraduates will begin on March 2nd. so i will wait for another two weeks to start the new semester.

TEACHER

now the virus news discussion on Wechat groups are disappearing. it is very ironic that at the beginning every article was accusing the local GV and gradually turned to discuss the systematic problems and now to talk about the good measures taken to contain the virus. and some began to talk about the international situations. now i realize people's interest on one thing can hardly last more than twenty days. everything will disappear no matter how urgent or serious it once was and human beings are easily forgettable animals. it is a pity discovery.

TEACHER

Try to be happy is the most important thing in the world and be happy every day!

February 19, 2020

it seems that it is a long time to wait for the virus to disappear and we return to normal life. it is strange that people do not sell fish these days in the market. we have no fish. in order not to get too fat, i eat two meals a day. it seems ok that people eat two meals a day. i am good.

TEACHER

March 9, 2020

BK

Hi. How are you recently? I think you said online classes were supposed to start last week. How's it going? Did you figure out the program you need to use?

Things are picking up here now with the virus. Some schools and colleges are closing, and you probably heard about the stock market today.

March 10, 2020

Hi, i have been busy for these days, actually not busy, just a little anxious, because i have too many classes. six of us teachers chose the internet course for the students to watch but actually the internet course can be accessed any time not just on class time. this is hard so when it is class time, we have to stay in front of the computers to use a QQ group to teach online all the time, it is very tiring to sit for the whole morning because i have been staying indoors for more than 50 days. humans need physical exercises. and i feel quite alone because nobody talks with me all the time and just talks from internet. this is not a good feeling. the new semester really began this week and last week is the time for teachers and students to test the systems and internet to see whether it is good to use or not. Today is Tuesday and i have taught for two days.

TEACHER



i use 中国大学慕课 and QQ group audio and video calls to have online talks with students. Basically good but i want to find a better way to do it. today i learned that we can use PPT to record our voice of the teaching so i want to try it tomorrow to see whether i can use it too, so i need not meet the students online at class time.

TEACHER

i just read one article which said that the stock market was not good but not much description of it. now Chinese people are caring about when to begin to work and what they eat everyday. on Wechat moments, there is not much information about the stock market.

Here the situation is getting better but i read some articles which said that America is getting worse and Americans do not like wearing facial masks. i just cannot understand why they do not wear masks if they are good to protect life! how are you? is it getting worse in New York? stay indoors as much as possible. Do you need some facial masks? it seems that there are plenty of facial masks now in the market. i have seen some people are selling masks in the Wechat moments. give me your address and i can send you some facial masks. We have DHL and can ship things among different countries, which is quite good! things just are beyond my imagination, because at the beginning, China was serious and other countries were so good and now China is getting better, other countries are getting worse. On the data platform i cannot find the number of the American confirmed cases. it is very strange that it does not show. Please stay safe. if America is not safe, you may come here, we have not had any confirmed cases for 18 days. it seems good here

BK

I will try to answer your questions. First, thanks for your kind offer to send face masks. We're fine for now. My wife has some that she wears to work, and I work from home so I don't need them. It's not that Americans don't like wearing them, but (a) they're not used to it as much and (b) medical experts have said not to unless you know you already have the virus. I know it's common in China to wear them for air quality in some big cities and in Japan for the common cold; Americans don't use them for either, so they don't really have a habit of it. Also, the experts said too many people buying them could cause a shortage for medical staff who really need them, so they advised not to. They said research shows they're not very effective in preventing someone from getting it, but do a better job to prevent spreading the virus if you already have it.

Good luck with your teaching. It sounds a little complicated if you have to stay in front of the camera the whole time. They should let you just record your lessons and upload them for students to access, and that's it. More universities here are starting to do the same.

BK

Harvard just announced today that students should stay home after spring break and all the rest of the semester's classes will be online. (Spring break is a week off in mid-March. Universities here usually start classes in January, have a week off in the middle, and end the spring semester in May.)

March 14, 2020

[TEACHER sent a video]

Take care ❤️☕😊

TEACHER

[TEACHER sent a photo that had been circulating on WeChat, which sarcastically noted the situation in America. It resembled a sign posted at a store and read as follows:

"VALUED CUSTOMERS:

Due to the recent outbreak of stupidity and panic-purchasing by complete idiots, the nation is currently experiencing a shortage of toilet paper and common sense.

We expect these supplies to be replenished once these sheep-minded morons have all starved to death in their homes, surrounded by toilet paper but without anything to eat.

Thank you for your patience.]"

it is said that Americans are crazy in shopping for toilet paper because they are afraid that the material will be used to make masks. is that true?

TEACHER

March 17, 2020

BK

疯了，对吧？😁 I don't know why they do it, but I don't think that's the reason. We're just hoarders. The same thing happens (on a lesser scale) with every snowstorm, no matter how big. Here's one attempt to explain it psychologically:

<https://www.boston.com/news/business/2020/03/13/toilet-paper-coronavirus>

zero risk bias is like a kind of promotion. i experienced such hoarding once when Japanese had a nuclear leakage accident. it was said that the radiation would come to China and salt could stop people from getting radiation. it was crazy. When i went to the market, i got nothing then i thought that i could go to school to eat salty food and the school would definitely provide salty dishes for students. i also called my father to ask him to buy some salt and he said there was no salt to sell in the market but he had got more than ten bags of salt. i was surprised that he was smarter than me. then he explained that salt was necessary for cooking so every time when he buys salt he will buy nearly twenty bags of salt. i think he is right. that talk left me a very deep impression on my mind. Now when i go to market to buy salt, i will buy three bags. last time i forgot that i have stored some salt and bought three more. now i have five bags of salt in my apartment 🤔

TEACHER

this pandemic virus had affected our life, i am worrying about my mortgage for the apartment in Wuhan. if all the countries close their borders and the economy will not develop and what will happen to our lives. it is beyond my imagination. yesterday i went to school and on the way i found that nearly one third of people on the road did not wear masks and seemed quite relaxed and i thought that maybe it would burst out again in China because overseas Chinese are rushing back and there are no good ways to control this.

BK

Do you know why salt helps? It's not actually the salt. Many countries add iodine to salt to prevent deficiency if you don't have enough in your diet. I don't know if salt in China has iodine.

if you need masks, tell me. i can send you some. just stay indoors and when going out, be sure to wear facial masks and wash hands first when getting back home.

TEACHER

BK

Thank you. So far we're okay.

maybe because of iodine, now on the package of the salt there is iodine salt (加碘盐) and non-iodine salt (非加碘盐).

TEACHER

i thought that was just a rumor. actually what can salt do with radiation?

Good that you have got some masks. yesterday i found that the city has DHL and we can send international express delivery here. China really develops quite fast for the past years.

BK

I think the thyroid gland is very sensitive to radiation and somehow iodine protects it. You can find details online.

Now they are talking about locking down New York City like Wuhan was.

i think to lock down a city is to prevent people with the virus from moving around to spread it. if people do not move around it will be ok

Then it is best to store some food, here the GV provides food and i know America has a small GV, will you get enough food? maybe business men want to earn money, they will be diligent to provide food too but it will be quite expensive? best to store some food and daily materials

TEACHER

BK

We have a lot, thanks. And there are laws against "price gouging" in an emergency. People and stores can be fined by the government if they hike up the price too high.

that sounds reasonable. to fine is a good way to regulate the market. but what if the business men refuse to sell food? one month ago, the facial masks here were sold at 30 yuan per one. normally it is 1 to 3 yuan per one. the customers sued the shops to the GV and the GV fined some shops, and then no shops sold any masks from then on. people had to buy online. sometimes things change fast.

maybe i am worried too much 🙄

TEACHER

BK

Most shops here are part of big companies and they want to make money, so they probably would sell them. They still make a profit at the normal price, and they make nothing if they don't sell it. Your story sounds like individual shop owners getting angry and trying to get revenge. It's petty.

your explanation sounds quite reasonable. at that time i was just angry with the customers who had sued the shops and with the shop owners who were too greedy. i thought that that the both sides were very stupid 🤔

TEACHER



BK

Have a great day. I'll talk to you later. It's nighttime here. 🌙  
Zzzz . . .

March 26, 2020

[TEACHER sent a link to an article about the military in American cities]

You and your wife are in New York? Are you good?

TEACHER

the news said that the army have arrived to control the movement of the city

BK

Hi. I haven't heard about that, but it probably refers to the National Guard. They are part of the military, but not active members. Each state has reserve members who meet once or twice a month to train and are used in case of emergencies. I think they can actually be used in military situations when needed, but mostly they are used to help with things like floods or hurricanes.

We're both fine, thanks. We don't go out at all.

April 3, 2020

BK

Hi. How much do face masks cost in the stores there now?

TEACHER

Hi, i have been thinking about the situation you are in now in New York. it must be horrible. keep strong and things will get better. Give me your address and i can send you some facial masks.

For the past weeks, i was in anxiety. Because it seems that i have lost my USB storage and i could not find it and i did not keep the PPT in my computer. i was in a mess because it means that i have to make PPT all by myself again. i was quite nervous for the first four weeks because we are required to put all the materials on the internet for the students to read. Now it is getting better. I promise that i will never have so many courses in the future. Money is important but my life is important too and anxiety is bad for health. Because of the virus, now i know life ranks No. 1. Money ranks No. next and next and next. To save money and have a very poor quality life is completely wrong. I think i shall thank the lost USB storage. It has changed my views toward life. I will not be like my parents and be a slave to life. Now i am a new person 🤩🤩🤩

You stay indoors and do not go out. If you have to go out, wear a hat and a facial mask and a pair of gloves and when you come back, put the hat and the gloves near the door with a window so that the wind will blow and immediately take off the clothes and put them into the washing machine and take a warm bath. Trump is an irresponsible person. he should have asked all people to stay indoors. Economy is next and life is first. He is not a good person. Take care and give me your address and i will send you masks when you wake up. Stay healthy and be good and happy! ❤️😊☕

TEACHER

April 4, 2020

BK

I'm really sorry to hear about the loss of your teaching files. I know how much work goes into something like that. And I agree about your new way of thinking about life and money! I've thought that way for a long time. We all need enough money to live on and pay the bills, have enough to eat, etc. But how sad I would feel at the end of my life if that's all I thought about and missed all the really wonderful things about life. If I focused only on money, I never would have gone to China (or become a teacher, for that matter) -- and that was life-changing. 😊

Thank you about the masks, but we have enough for now. I'm just checking for the future. Another friend in Shanghai said they are about 4 yuan per mask. Is that the same where you are? We gave some away to others since we had a lot and haven't been going out at all, but if it lasts a long time we might need to get more. New York is still getting worse. We have a good governor of the state, but the federal government under Trump is worse than useless. I'll let you know later if I need any. Stay well.

in the past, my colleagues bought the masks from a former student and sent the masks to their children who study in the UK or America and i know we can buy a lot of masks from that former student but i have never contacted her. i have asked my colleague to tell her that i want to buy facial masks from her, my colleague said she had sent her messages and asked me to wait but until this morning i have not got any information from her. 😊 I will try to see whether i can find other ways to know the price and buy the facial masks. 😊😊😊

TEACHER

[TEACHER sent screenshots of WeChats with colleagues about masks]

i have got the contact and she said that they are 1.5 yuan per piece, much cheaper than the price in Shanghai, how many do you want? in the past, it is blue but now it is green.

TEACHER

Interview: Coronavirus Chronicles

April 5, 2020

There are plenty of facial masks, i can send some to you. You give me your address? 😊😊😊

TEACHER

BK

Hi. I really don't need any right now. We still have a lot. I was just checking about the future. Thanks! 🙏

Today we have no classes, i thought we had classes and got up early and went online, only two students joined the classes and said that today there is no classes today. Now i have one free day 😞

TEACHER

April 6, 2020

Hi, Brian, If you need masks, the earlier, the better, because it takes time to ship them from here to you. Do you and your friends need them? Will you give me your address? They are not expensive but can protect people. The situation in New York is bad and stay indoors and be safe. Life is more important



TEACHER

April 10, 2020

[TEACHER sent a link to Chinese news site featuring, among others, Sen. Lindsey Graham]

is it true that American high officials constantly say that however many Americans die of the covid-19 the mistakes are on the Chinese GV?

TEACHER

April 12, 2020

BK

Hi, sorry for the late reply. I haven't heard that specific allegation, but I do know some people in the administration (Trump included) have insisted on calling the coronavirus the "Wuhan virus" or the "China virus." It's just to stir up trouble, rile up the racists, and most likely divert attention from their own shortcomings. It's always easier to blame someone else (especially a foreign entity) for things. The U.S. government does to it the Chinese government, and the Chinese government does it to the U.S. government. It's the same thing. In both countries, it gets nationalists worked up -- like a warped sense of patriotism. Here's a new English word for you, if you haven't heard it: jingoism.

April 28, 2020

Hi. Now America has been in a mess for a long time. How are you? Is everything good and fine? It is said that the students are coming back in May so we have to wear masks to have classroom classes which will be very strange and odd. In New York, the situation is not so good. Can you get enough food supply and have you got enough deposit to support you and your wife? Shall i send you some money to support? i hear from news that a lot of American people are out of a job and cannot buy food and they are calling out loud that they would rather catch the virus than suffer from starvation. I think those ones are stupid and they are shouting because they have not caught the virus. once they catch it, they will stop immediately. From this pandemic, i get a clear understanding that people all over the world are sometimes all so insane and unreasonable, even though it is hard to define what sanity and reason really mean. People shall save money for at least half a year food supply. i really do not understand why they do not save some money. The news said that they do not earn much. but why do people say America is a dream land and is a place for people to get rich? From this virus, i plan to save at least fifty thousand RMB forever in case of emergency. After this is over, you try to save some too and then no worry about future. How have you been? i am quite worried about you because New York is like Shanghai and Beijing and it is very expensive. i think if i live in Shanghai or Beijing for two months, i will definitely be struggling for a living. Hope you and your family and friends are all good and sound. Keep safe and healthy! The situation here in China seems to have returned to normal. But not sure what will happen after the students come back.

TEACHER

I think the reason why the GV plan to let the students come back is that they want to boost the economy. Once students leave their home and are on the way or in school, there will be expense and domestic consumption is one of the three motives to boost the economy. So it is a risk that is worth taking for the GV. How strange will it be that each of us wear masks walking on the campus like aliens. I think now the best thing for us is to keep a healthy mood and make every day a meaningful day for ourselves. If you need any help, please tell me and send me messages. ❤️ 😊

April 29, 2020

BK

Thank you! I'm really touched by your kind offer. Fortunately, we are fine for the time being. It's true that the pandemic has hit some people quite hard, in terms of both health and finances, but we have been lucky. We've been staying inside and are both able to work from home a little. If it lasts really long, we'll have to leave New York since, you're right, it's very expensive here.



BK

I'm glad to hear things are going well there -- enough so that you are able to resume classes in person. That's great. Is everyone being tested for the virus regularly, or are they just taking everyone's temperature when you enter buildings or something? How are they managing to resume things while being certain that another outbreak doesn't occur? And how is your family in Wuhan? Is everyone still okay there?

April 30, 2020

TEACHER

It is good that you are financially and physically good. i attended the 班主任 meeting this afternoon and learned that actually it is expensive to get people tested, only the students who are from the heavily-infected places will be tested and the result-waiting time will be seven days. the school is collecting the students' movement for the past two weeks before May 3rd. If they have no fever, they will come back. they will be picked up at the terminals and shipped to school directly and stay inside the school for one month without leaving the campus. i think the school is not ready for the students to come back but the provincial GV asked the school to do it. so now we are all forced to face the possibility of another outbreak. Bad GV!

everybody i know in Wuhan are all good. they are all newcomers for Wuhan. i think most of the local Wuhan people get infected because they know each other and frequently gather to celebrate this and that. newcomers have not many people to contact. at the beginning i did not feel good that the students are coming back. after the meeting, now i am more relaxed because it seems that we are going to have a crowded and orderly campus life. but the truth is that the risk is there. Now it seems that i am in a situation just like you in New York. But we do nothing about it now. So every country is the same, economy is more important than human life, continuous development and waste. 😞

I am going to sleep now. Tomorrow is May 1st, the 1st day of the five day Labor holiday. i will turn off my phone and sleep until i wake up naturally by myself tomorrow morning. Holiday time is good time. Good night 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊

May 16, 2020

BK

Hi, how are you these days? I hope you enjoyed your holiday two weeks ago and things are getting back to normal there. Are you teaching in person again on campus?

May 17, 2020

i am quite free and busy for the past week. do not know how to say it. from Monday to today Sunday. all the online classes are stopped and the students are coming back by proper arrangement, like local students come back on 9th and 10th because we have no reported cases for more than a month now, students in the safe provinces come back from 11th to 12th, and the most dangerous places from 13th to 15th. like this. i was arranged to welcome the students on 15th evening. before i went, i thought it was horrible but once i was there with another colleague, we were talking and laughing and saw young students are back. seemed not so horrible. so for the past week, i was in anxiety and then later felt relaxed but now still in a little anxiety. it is complex.

TEACHER

tomorrow we are going to have classroom classes and only half of the students will go to the classroom and the other half will study in the dorm, i just want to say stupid and crazy decision makers. i hate them. the students come back and no quarantine time and begin to have classes directly. we are on the frontline. tomorrow i have six classes. the key point is that the students do not wear masks on the campus. and walk here and there and play basketball. the policy is that all the students will be closed in the school for one month. if something bad happens, it is just limited to one campus. Local people will not be affected. i do not know what to say about it.

i had a busy day today. attended the postgraduate online interview from the morning until dusk. actually all the interviewing teachers did not wear facial masks. now our lives are left with the chances.

how is New York and you? i hear from the news that American policy is to flatten the curve policy. it sounds much [more] dangerous than the situation here on the campus. take care and safety is the first number one thing. i have to sleep early and i have six classes tomorrow. i need to have enough energy and immune system to keep myself healthy. i will write to you later to tell you what is going on here. Have a nice time and be safe! ❤️ 😊 ☕

BK

Thanks! Good luck and 加油 this week ! 💪 😊 😊

May 23, 2020

Today is Saturday. in the morning, i listened to three online lectures and in the evening, i listened to two online lectures. i like to listen to these free lectures and they can broaden my academic horizon. busy and happy. From Monday to Thursday morning, i had three and a half days classroom teaching with facial masks on. Basically good.

TEACHER

TEACHER

only half of the students attended the classes and they all wore facial masks. i heard from the students that once a student gets a fever, he or she will immediately be sent to the campus hotel to be checked and have a quarantine. before i started the classroom teaching, i felt angry and horrified about the school decisions to ask the students back. Once i am in the classroom, they are all young and pretty students and say 老师好. i immediately feel close to them. As time goes on, the fear is gradually disappearing. Now i feel much safer than before. but whenever i go out, i still wear facial masks. most people wear them too, but some do not wear. it seems that people have already learned what the virus is like and once they are asked to wear masks, they will wear. when they feel quite safe, they will not wear them, especially the local people. the cars and people are all on the streets and it is as busy as before. now, except that some people are wearing masks on the streets, [it's as if] nothing has happened before. It actually has already returned to normal life here now.

Now it seems that the virus news have just disappeared from our lives and people are beginning to live normal lives. Actually i quite value the past two months around the Spring Festival, people stayed indoors and share the same news about one city and the only worry is how to safely go downstairs and buy food. Now life has returned to normal. more worries are coming back. to go downstairs and buy food has become the most unimportant thing in the world. life is really like a stage where sometimes a drama can be on.

i just check the online data, it seems that each day more than twenty thousand people are still confirmed in America. in this situation, how can New York return to normal? that's a huge number. Can you go out easily now? what is it like in the place where you live now? this week is the national conference<sup>†</sup> time, no news on America, all is about the conference. big words and seems that the conference people are trying to save the people. Now here we have no confirmed case but we still wear masks. when you go out, wear a mask to keep safe.

It is too hot for the past three weeks. it seems that all the heat in the world is right here. during the day, bright sunlight, no wind; at night, bright street lights, no wind. 🥵

Have a nice weekend! all is well all the time! Good night.



<sup>†</sup> The National People's Congress, China's national legislature, which meets annually.

**Chinese Vinegar**  
by Seth Rosenman

---

In Shanxi the traveler will find  
no fortune cookies,  
sacred Wutai has  
no bath towels.

The hungry will find vinegar,  
learn it goes well  
with hot sauce  
from Louisiana  
on dumplings.