The Death of A Rumorer
——In Memory of Doctor Li Wenliang (1986-2020)

He signed “能” (I can) and “明白” (I understand),
dipped in the red inkpad, and fingerprinted
on the LETTER OF ADMONITION
issued by the Wuhan Police Bureau.

He was a rumorer, the very first one
to scare people on December 30th, 2019:
“There are seven SARS-like patients confirmed
at the Wuhan Central Hospital. Be careful!”

In spite of his confession in front of the police,
He told a journalist later in an interview:
“A healthy society shouldn’t have one voice only!”
What an unrepentant weasel!

Thank goodness he died! On February 7th, 2020,
after infected by the virus during his work
as an ophthalmologist. Now he had no chance
to quibble or pretend his innocence.

He is a rumorer, forever, on his tombstone,
signed and fingerprinted by himself.

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A Wuhan Family’s Chinese New Year
——In Memory of Chang Kai (1964-2020) and His Family

I cook the New Year’s Eve reunion dinner myself, very rare for me as a busy film director. Originally, I had the dinner all arranged in a luxury hotel, but it was cancelled, for the city was locked down. Everyone quarantined at home.

But my parents are happy to taste the dishes made by their son—braised Wuchang fish for “wealthy”, home-cured chicken for “lucky”, and lotus root pork rib soup (their favorite). We have Chinese wine, toast to the new year.

The next morning, my son calls from the UK to give us new year’s greetings. My father asks me to teach him how to send an electronic red envelope to his grandson through Wechat.

Soon after, my father started to cough, and a fever, and difficult breathing. I don’t believe. I don’t believe. He also got it?

The first hospital is flooded by patients. So is the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh...

My parents were doctors before retirement. I also know numerous doctor friends. I call, I call, I call, I call, I call Emergency. I call Police.

In the last hospital, I knee on the floor, begging and crying. Useless—too many people have done it.

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On the third day of the new year,  
my sister came to take care of our father.  
On the tenth day of the new year,  
my father died in his own bed.  
On the fifteenth day of the new year,  
my mother died in the same bed.  
On the twenty-first day of the new year,  
I didn’t know  
my sister died in the same afternoon  
with me.
Immunity


Those people are older.

Those people have preconditions.

Those people are alien.

Those people are unlucky.

Those people buy wild animals.

Those people eat bats!

Those people are Kung Pao chicken.

Those people are pepperoni pizzas.

Those people manufactured the virus!

No, no face mask. (Out of stock anyway!)


And it’s just like a cold! Why panic?

Let’s cruise! Let’s party. Let’s marathon.

Let’s school. Let’s subway. Let’s Corona beer!

Wash your hands. That’s it!


Not today!
After the Pandemic

I was in my last year of middle school, when SARS ran amuck in 2003.

I was supposed to concentrate on the high school entrance exam prep during the quarantine. But I was thrilled by *The Count of Monte Cristo*, reading under the covers in bed with a flashlight.

My home was sour enough to faint a roach. People believed vinegar can kill the virus.

The disaster ended soon, as expected. Scientists confirmed the culprit—guozili (the masked palm civets), who transferred the virus from bats to human.

All the guozili were killed for their sin to marry SARS.

Medical staff who died on duty were awarded the title of Revolutionary Martyrs.

Most people were satisfied with the government measures. Chinese economy still grew by 8%.

I didn’t pay much attention to the abandoned temporary hospitals.

I went back to school, high school, college, went abroad for graduate school, got married, gave birth to children who are second-generation Chinese Americans.

Maybe SARS did the same at her last gasp, birthing an orphan, who is now a 17-year-old avenger, *COVID-19*. 
Quarantine

I’m sure he has forgotten
how he’d quarantined
peacefully in my womb
for nine months.

Now we’re quarantined
with chicken flying, dog jumping
in a womb-like home,
waiting for rebirth.

I try to teach him to play
fan hua sheng (a string game),
just like he toyed
the umbilical cord.

But soon he asked, again,
for swings and slides, the blue
mushrooms that spray water,
flamingos, guo bao rou (crispy
sweet and sour pork slices)
from the Chinese restaurant.

“So why can’t we go out?”

“Virus, invisible,
but everywhere.”

I swallowed the second half:
“and hatred,
especially for you,
an Asian face.”

Parents Hooray!!!

All the struggles are over now.

It doesn’t matter if you can’t afford the housing in the best school district. It makes no difference whether you live in New York city or a vast cornfield.

You don’t have to make choices among Tae Kwon Do, piano, violin, swimming, baseball, tennis, chess, or green for those more exquisite, such as horse-riding and skiing.

Thank the virus for eradicating bullying, inequity, peer pressure, and even English is no longer that important.

It becomes possible to raise a real Chinese man in the U.S.

My son doesn’t need to risk talking with strangers. They all become shadows with vague smiles 6 feet away.

Now, everyone looks similar and unreal on Zoom, just like Grandparents across the Pacific Ocean.
Health Code

In China, people need to report their health and travel info for 14 consecutive days. Then they’ll be graded and granted a Green or Yellow or Red QR code in their cellphones.

“Beep” “Beep” “Beep”...
The security guys at the entrance of your residential community, workplace, school, subway, shopping mall, scan your Green. Your ID number & photo jump out on his screen.

Don’t be surprised or attempt to argue if your code suddenly turns Yellow or Red one day. After all, you bought Tylenol in the pharmacy across the street, saw the pediatrician for a shot, chatted with old Wang in the market, picked up a package, and brought home your favorite bubble tea.

Now you become a risk to others, but it doesn’t need to bother anybody to force you to quarantine.

You’ll be automatically locked wherever you are, waiting to be Greened again.
If I Get Kicked Out Overnight

I'll donate our king-size mattress, two cribs and a sofa to Goodwill, free belongings for pick-up, drop the key at leasing office, gift my car to a friend.

Regardless of social distancing, I have to give my advisor a bear hug for teaching me equity, inclusion, diversity in the university classroom.

I’ll thank the department chair who offered me a faculty job (though I’m accused of being a thief, as an alien stands out in the open search, stealing a job from an American).

I’m not sure where we’ll home next. “Go back to China!” as they yelled. No choice amid the pandemic.

My American-born sons might be interested in coming back someday to this strange country.

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The Chinese Red

The Spring Festival is red.
Bride and groom are wearing red.

China has a red regime.
When two communists fall in love,
they are red lovers.

The emperor’s comments
on the officials’ reports
are in red.
The government-issued documents
are called Red Header.

Even a red armband
empowers ordinary people.
They’ll obtain the right
to break into your home,
overturn the table, rebuke you
for playing Mahjong with your neighbor,
violating the quarantine regulations.

But please be cautious!
Red is not always good.
You absolutely don’t want
a red health code in your cell phone,
which means a complete stop,
wait for 14 days to restart.

And you can’t write one’s name in red.
That’s for the decapitated prisoners only!
A Story Shared by My Taiwanese Friend

“If you don’t mind, could you please keep social distancing?”
At the checkout, I politely turned to another customer.
She took a few steps back, not offended by my words, I think.

But the cashier snapped, “You are so funny! You came from China!
You are the one who brought the virus here!”

“Excuse me, what did you say?”
“Nothing”, she said.

But when I asked again, she started yelling, inserted my credit card more than 3 times. “I need to talk to your manager!” “He’s not here!”
I rushed to the door, ready to leave.

“She is Chinese and dares to ask people to stay away from her!”
She roared. “What did you just say?” This time she repeated it louder and louder right to my face.

“Get out of the store”, she shouted, along with two other workers.
“Get out of the store!!” Some customers also joined.

“Calm down! Calm down, everyone!” I heard a young man’s voice before I held back my tears and slammed the door behind.

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A Killing in a Georgia Suburb

His death brought me back 10 years ago, when I was teaching Chinese in Lagos,

where a group of teen boys played football, two used tires on the ground as a goal. Their bare feet kicked up the dust, dribble, tackle, sprint, shoot. They shouted, laughed in Yoruba. One boy jogged to me, asked if I could take a picture with him.

He called me “Ayibo” (white person), though I’m categorized as “yellow” in the U.S.

I didn’t know Ahmard Arbery, but I did see him 10 years ago in Nigeria.
3 months ago, a man punched, kicked an Asian woman in the New York City subway, called her “diseased”, for wearing a mask.

Last week, a customer was asked to leave a Costco store after refused to wear a mask. He disputed, “I woke up in a free country!!”

Yesterday, I said hi to the black guy who’s sanitizing shopping carts in Walmart. “Thank you”, he said, “thank you for wearing the mask.” I smiled back, forgetting that he can’t see.

I really wanted to share with him my mom wore a face mask every day when I was in elementary school in Northeast China. She rode a high bicycle, with me sat on the rear rack. The heat exhaled from the mask frosted her glasses. In a sudden, we fell together on the rutted ice road, “Aiyou!!” (like ouch in English). Mom took off her mask, checked if I was injured. “I’m fine,” in the long pink down coat, wool hat, scarf, sheepskin mittens, red snow boots. Mom put on her mask, again. We lift up the bicycle, kept going to and/or from school.

Nobody ever thanked her for wearing a mask.

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Alternative Ways of Going back to China from the U.S.

China’s government launched its “Five One” policy in March in a bid to curb the COVID-19 crisis, limiting all domestic airlines to one international flight peer week to each country, while foreign airlines can fly into China no more than once per week, which makes millions of Chinese citizens get stuck overseas.

You can set up a grand goal—
become the first person
to swim across the Pacific Ocean.
Don’t forget to make a big fortune
by live streaming your journey!

Or you can take a ship, like the first
dispatch of 30 Chinese boys
(the Chinese Educational Mission) did in 1872.
Each of them had a long hair braid
behind their gown and mandarin jacket.

Or you can fly to Alaska, wait for ice
to be locked up on land and sea levels
drop, then walk back to Asia
across the legendary Bering Land Bridge.
If you’re lucky enough, you may make
an archaeological discovery, the footprints
of Native Americans 10,000 years ago.

Or you can dig, dig, and dig a tunnel
through the center of the earth, then
leap down to China in 40 mins,
inspired by Jules Verne’s words
in his science fiction in 1864.

What? All these ideas are stupid?
Okay, let me tell you the easiest way:
The next time when people yelled
“Go back to China!” , you must rush up,
beg them to spend one more minute,
show you how.
For me, the word is xenophobia, not racism, though I’m black haired, brown eyed, as fair skinned as white people, I’m called yellow.

In the BLM protest, people asked me, Why are you even here?

I heard the same question in Owens-Thomas House in Savannah, where a black woman served as a guide to a group of tourists, all white except me and my non-English-speaking parents.

I did my best to whisper in Chinese the parts I could understand: See the roll of mat under the bed? It’s for the slave to sleep on the floor, so she can take care of her master’s baby in the night.

Why are you guys here? The guide asked me with a smile at the end of the tour.

Well, we come to see the house.

I didn’t mention my interest in the history, a topic I may not be legitimated to touch, like a bleeding wound to be re-traumatized.
When We’re Waiting for Trump’s New High-Skill Immigration Restrictions

Mom disagrees with us buying a house unless we TRULY settle down (be able to work, retire and die somewhere).

That seems to be an impossible goal when both of us are still holding student visas, though our sons are American-born.

We’re even not qualified for a home loan, making “homeowner” a joke, but I do own a home in our rented apartment.

My husband has an obsession in buying a house, for that’s the only way we can install a high suction range-hood, which can keep us from tearing up when he cooks Kung Pao chicken, chili fried cabbage, spicy hot pot.

I also dream of a house with a small yard where I can plant some tomatoes, cucumbers, green onions several bamboos and a cauliflower. I want the branches and leaves bind us to the land, their roots run as deep as the foundation.