

# **Wu Xinran, I am sorry**

**I HUMBLY BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS.**

**I BELIEVE YOU ARE REAL.**

by Charles Dermer (2023)

This is the record of an unusual social media interaction that I had with, apparently, a very attractive Chinese woman who works in LA. At least I think my correspondent was a Chinese woman. The entire interaction takes place in the shadows of the online world, where identity is assumed and discarded at will. But of her I believe.

And yet it moves.

I will leave it to the reader to decide if my correspondent is a prankster, an AI/chatbot, a CCP plant, or a real flesh and blood human being. If the latter, and I believe it is, then I behaved abominably—well, I was cold and cut off communication. I confess my error, and in lieu of penance, relay my side of the events in the forlorn hope of tracking down this alleged person.

Before entering headlong into the story, we should note that one doesn't enter a forest in formation, but instead singly, cautiously, surveilling the environment and gathering information and confidence. So there will be some background.

In brief, this is another in my series of unfortunate events with women, now exceeding 3. They balance the fortune of my wife, family and married life. Hanging over the scene are bad events from 7 years earlier centering around another woman which affected our marriage in a not altogether positive way. But we set that aside.

Now I am 68 years old. I suppose at this age I should withdraw from society and life, and prepare for my final exit.

Or maybe I should try to shed some wisdom on these comically dark times, assuming that I accumulated any understanding during my lifespan on this planet.

Dubious assumption, to be sure.

By picking up pen and paper (tapping on a keyboard, actually), I engage again in that most virtuous of vices, writing.

Still, better to shed wisdom than to shed blood, though I may do neither.

OK.

A persistent conceit in our times and probably all times is that these are the end times. Parallel with the decline of the human body is the presumption that history has reached a new stage, tending towards disintegration, heavy with ruin. And a good case can be made that our era is the closing parenthesis of the 500 year Enlightenment.

We are nothing special to our ancestors generations hence. And all the petty dramas that add up to a single human life are lost in the feral drive to pass on genetic material, perpetuate the species and destroy rivals. History is the force of love against loss, the force of desire against death. There can be no steady solution to the human demographic equation save complete annihilation. Management of a society is inherently unstable, mired in the totality of individuals' backgrounds and choices.

With this in mind (even if you disagree), we return to the point.

We live in a physical world of hard reality, where you should be on your best behavior or you could face legal consequences even if, as is so rarely the case, you are completely innocent. Resentments and scrapes with the law go hand-in-hand. I've had no fewer than three, none of which, I can authoritatively say, was entirely pleasant (and all of which involved, surprise, a female).

There are worlds out there that but for life's misfortunes we would never have visited.

Such is the state of my mind that I have adopted rule #13 for life (after cleaning up my bedroom and walking upright): “Do what it takes to avoid getting arrested.”

We are trapped in a body that must be fed and maintained. We serfs serve. I have been affluent prole, intellectual kulak, pensioner, petit bourgeois. Today I am the humble servant of my stuff and my desires, a useless eater. My body is my master, and I its slave. Thirst, desire, drives, the need for social interaction. The humble hunger of sex and food.

And beyond the simple physical, as charming as it is, and with an indefinitely long line of successes leading to us, we the present, still alive, have to deal in the last 20 years with a second reality, the cyber world. We inhabit the world of virtual reality, no less real, *and even more real*, than the land of meat and potatoes. Cyber avatars don't get hungry, but the humans overseeing the avatars live in the moist robot space, the space governed by physical reality and party politics.

And who are these humans?

The full communication channel into the virtual world is intermediated by a screen. It is the portal to the virtual universe. It provides a second reality that can overtake the first. I live perhaps half my waking life in front of a screen.

What subject is not discussed? Kinky sex, psychedelic drugs, lower marginal taxes, demographic collapse, the electoral college, trans folx, Roger Stone, AOC, MTG, BTG. The deep fakes are passing through the uncanny valley. Chat-GPT deep-fakes can't be too far behind.

Interesting that Meta flamed out (for now). People still find human connection and communication more rewarding than interacting with their virtual counterparts. But maybe their iconography is just ugly.

Here is my tale about meeting someone online and never being sure if she is real, and becoming emotionally involved in the course of a conversation and a few pictures.

I think she is real. I believe she is real.

If she's real, I treated her badly. I think she is [real]. No Turing test is that convincing.

I wonder if I would pass a Turing test.

I'm going to jot down my thoughts on the events that took place two days ago [now weeks ago]. My heart was broken—twice, and on the same day! First by a (likely) woman I've never met—Wu Xinran—and with whom I only communicated online by facebook messenger app. Yes, she is real, but she disappeared. Not by simply blocking me, but she disappeared altogether.

Heartbreak 2 was my wife's piano playing. I remember being [word describing the timeless sensation that music can induce—maybe Xinran's word "ethereal" is what I'm looking for, so "in an ethereal state"] when Bea played the Rachmaninoff (opus 3 Prelude) on the 7 foot Yamaha grand, only to be brought rudely back to reality.

Bea's not getting that one.

That was Saturday, March 18th, the day after St. Patrick Day. I didn't have a hangover, though, as I am (mostly) not drinking for Lent.

That morning, Beatrice, Bea, my wife of 36 years, was out exercising, so I took advantage of the opportunity to check facebook on her computer.

I've been on a Mac now 7 years since I retired, and my wife is on Windows. Bea had two screens open, which added to the confusion. I ended up closing two of her browser windows, namely the Google browser and Safari. I couldn't restore them (like you can on a Mac). So I had no choice but to confess my (crime, sin, indiscretion, no

problem) to her. We have no secrets from each other, but then how would one know?

Bea, sorry, but I closed some windows on your desktop. Why? Well, I was trying to check facebook to see if my Chinese female correspondent blocked me (having told Bea about her when we first started corresponding). I can't do it from my machine if I'm blocked (I think). My facebook sock puppets were scrubbed, so I'd have to make a new one to check.

And I accidentally closed some of your browser windows.

Hmm...

And that was it, or all I remember. But I still have the transcript and the pictures to prove that she is real and, I believe, true.

Yeah, sure, I was an asshole. I guess. But why would any beautiful young woman (34 yo, birthday in fall of 1989, as I recall from her now deleted FB profile—half my age!) want anything to do with me? What's going on with that?

In the military (I was a fed civilian on a DoD installation), we don't say "if I tell you I'd have to kill you." Easier not telling. We do say, "a spy is most likely to come in the shape of a woman."

That's pretty easy to remember, too.

And China being China, maybe it's an intel job.

Are you really going with that? You're not important enough to have a real-life honey pot. Who do you think you are, Eric Swalwell? She's just a lonely girl from Shanghai, now in the US, looking for a husband. Looking in the wrong place, sadly.

As the morning wore on, I had a growing realization that I had lost Xinran forever. My guitar playing suffered as a result. But in the afternoon, Bea and I were going to a piano show at American

University. I was going to be the voice of frugality, making sure Bea didn't make a rash purchase. We thought we'd be looking at grand pianos in the \$10-20K range. Some have been used a year at AU, some are brand new.

We now have room in the living room for a grand piano, ever since I had a storage shed built in our backyard, and the garage cleaned out and converted into a studio.

*Bea plays beautifully.*

We have a place in the house to move our upright (Kohler and Chase, New York; company now defunct). We'll give it to our daughter and her husband when they get a house.

As with so much in real life, this begins with a facebook post. I don't use FB too much these days except for pinnacle events in my life (our daughter got married last year, so I definitely had to announce that). I keep a few posts public to herald my existence to the outside world. I've been on it since about 2010, and I now have some 350 so-called friends on FB. I stopped using it much because it's an old people's platform. But since I'm old, I still allow myself to use it. Nevertheless, I mostly lurk on Twitter and Substack these days.

As I was saying, I keep a few posts public, and the last such post was my Mother's 90th birthday and a picture of mom's 5 generations: mom (Deloras), Susan, Kyra, Rayshanna, and baby Ahlani. That was around September 7th, 2021. Mom was a depression-era baby, born in 1931, in Minatare, Nebraska or whereabouts. The party was flat because of Covid, and hampered me from speaking to Susan and her clan, but it was a blessing to see mom. That was the last time she was really lucid.

Since it's public, anyone can comment on the post, and I've included below a readout of a section of the comments where my correspondent, who later called herself Wu Xinran, contacted me through the screen name Lu Cy. My FB post is still public. The Lu Cy profile has long since disappeared.

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Tony Yepes**

How is your day going

- 

**Lu Cy**

Hello, it seems that your family is very happy, can you tell me the secret to keep happy?

- 

**Lu Cy**

Hello sir, I hope I didn't disturb you. Can I ask you a question?

**Charles Dermer**

Sure, but why don't you use the messenger?

6w

- 

**Lu Cy**

**Charles Dermer** I have sent a message to your messenger, you can check your messenger.

**Charles Dermer**

I didn't receive it. Perhaps you have to be a facebook friend. I just sent a friend request.

**Charles Dermer**

Just received it.

- 

**Lu Cy**

**Charles Dermer** I have successfully added you, it was nice to chat with you on Messenger.

•  
•

C\_\_\_\_\_ G\_\_\_\_\_ Congratulations  
to all

**Li Ke Han**

**You are always on my recommendation list and I am so impressed with your posts. I like to be active and I like to find a sense of humor in it, maybe you can add me as a friend so we can get to know each other, anyway I sincerely wish you all the best**

Notice the two correspondents at the bookends of this selection, who are not FB friends, but are interested in friendship. Notice the almost disarming innocence of Lu Cy's messages.

I received, as I recall, a notification for Lu Cy's message, but not for the others. Right after we had the little convo above, this post received several (~10) likes, which I found odd. There must be a FB algorithm that recycles an old post on other friends' feeds when its comments section is active.

Now I think we need to change the subject a bit.

Never discount the power of female attractiveness to confuse the male heterosexual mind. Such are the thoughts when I saw the profile picture of Lu Cy, a higher resolution version of which I had the foresight to download.





## Lu Cy

January 31  
Jan 31, 2023, 7:18 PM



What a beauty! And one has to be rich to dress so shabbily! This is just a cheap trick, like my lovely French correspondent who quickly disappeared (I knew she was fake, though).

Whereas if you wanted a picture to depict the feminine archetype of the collective unconscious as an early 21st-century Chinese ingenue, it would be hard to improve.

I did a google image search of the photo but only came up with hits for the jacket.

On her FB page were some quirky things, but there was a full-face photo, maybe professionally made, of a striking businesswoman believably 34 years of age blooming from the woman above at 25 or so. Sadly, I did not have the foresight to download that photo. This remains a regret, but Xinran sent me some photos in our chat that I have, and include in the correspondence.

I don't have much of a social life, but of what there is, some is inhabited by FB friend requests. About once every month or two, I receive a friend request from an anonymous self-proclaimed female (as I note in the chat). I usually accept the friendship and check out their timeline. If their time on FB amounts to less than a year or if the bosom in the photos seem [ed: is "bosom" singular or plural?] too augmented, I unfriend. Once a long time ago I had a random female friend whose photos showed her with salacious affect, much pleasing to the male gaze, but she apparently found what she was looking for and I've not heard of her (or looked) since.



For instance (to wit), the day before receiving my message from Lu Cy, I had this exchange on my iPhone. From it, you will experience my cold midwestern American blood (I guess I'm not a nice guy).

I am not the type to strike up a friendship with a person who is a complete stranger, but apparently there are some people who look for love that way, or maybe just Platonic friendship—no need to jump to conclusions.

Well, this is the conversation that left me heartbroken and in a writing mood. Makes me feel like playing some guitar too.

I hope you enjoy it. For some reason the Lu on Lu Cy got cut off in the headers to each message.

Lu Cy had an unusual FB timeline, with non-Asian (white) people before 2017, and then perhaps a dozen items posted by Xinran within the last year or so. It was hard to know how many FB friends she had, because the count was hidden, but clearly not many, as she only had a few likes on her posts, which included several by me.

If I were less suspicious, if I were more open, how would things have changed?

I'm probably destroying confidences by publishing this, since the allegedly factual Wu Xinran has property rights to her image and to her words. But then she would have to announce herself. I think according to (federal? state?) law she has legal ownership to her intellectual property provided that she can be found to exist. And then we restart our communication, I guess. Following my apologies, of course.

Maybe it would bankrupt me, but what better way to exit than with a broken heart attack?

So this is the background to today's story. What follows is our communication, unedited. Two instances of deleted messages occurred when I messed up framing the thought found in the subsequent message. I anonymized the name of my friend K\_\_ to preserve her privacy.

I successfully downloaded the conversation we had on FB's messenger app before Wu Xinran's words were permanently deleted from my archived chat in FB. The conversation is complete with typos which, it pains me to say, are often on my part. Wu Xinran writes English with a female Chinese accent.

Some thoughts follow the chat.

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Cy



Hello sir, I hope I didn't disturb you. Can I ask you a question?

Enter

February 1  
Feb 1, 2023, 12:03 PM

You sent

Of course.

Enter

Cy



Nice to chat with you on the messenger, I am from China, a developing country, and now living in Beverly Hills, LA.

Enter

You sent

Good for you. What question do you have?

Enter

Cy



When I saw your post on your Facebook, I found that your family is very harmonious. Can you tell me the secret of happiness?

Enter

You sent

Appearances are deceiving. Our family has also had its share of difficulties (divorce, mental illness) and tragedy (a grand nephew of mine was murdered). There is no secret to happiness. The best one can do is find a life partner who controls one's worst impulses and provide a separate but complementary world outlook. Second, is that children takes one's concerns out of the present and into the future, when one is no longer around. Sorry, these thoughts are trite, well known, but nonetheless true.

Enter

Cy

Glad to hear your opinion, it seems that every happy family has some sad things, but it is not known, I am so sorry to hear the news of your grandnephew, is the country you live in the United States?

Enter

Cy



I agree with you about the marriage of your family, and the education of your children.

Enter

You sent

Yes, I live in Alexandria, VA.

Enter

Cy



Seeing your profile, are you a good scientist?

Enter

February 1  
Feb 1, 2023, 12:49 PM

You sent

If you would like to continue this conversation, please send me your FaceTime information.

Enter

Cy



Sorry, I usually use WhatsApp or Google Mail, I rarely use Face Time, I'm just a little curious about this area, and of course if you feel that what you're doing will involve your trade secrets or is not good to talk about, I understand very well. Because some information type things are very sensitive.

Enter

You sent



I think we should conclude this chat. Nice talking with you!

Enter

Cy



I enjoyed the conversation with you too, will you have any good plans for today? I hope you have a productive day today.

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 12:00 PM

Cy



Good morning, I hope you have a great day today.

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 3:28 PM

You sent

I hope you also have a good day. I just sent a link to join a Room in Facebook, but it seems my browser is not supported. If you want to continue this conversation, I need to verify your identity, or at least that you are a real person and not an AI/bot. Sorry to be suspicious, but if you are as pretty as your profile picture suggests, you have no need for me. So if you cannot do FaceTime, even for 5 minutes to confirm identity, let us go our separate way. Thank you.

Enter

Cy



I just tried it and the browser doesn't support it. When I first started talking to you, I told you that I am interested in the secret of your happiness at home, I don't have any purpose, and when we get to know each other better, I will communicate with you via video.

Enter

You sent

All right. Tell me please what it was like growing up in Shanghai, and what is your Chinese name (I can't read Chinese, so just the phonetic spelling).

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 4:03 PM

Cy



Nowadays, Shanghai is a city that can be compared to Los Angeles, and it is known as the Magic City of China. In my memory, in those days Shanghai was known as Shanghai Tang, where the old social customs were very serious. Since I was a child, my parents taught me that when a person is educated and knowledgeable, he or she will be respected, so I always studied hard and did not play too much during my study years.

Enter

Cy



In my impression, I remember a very deep thing, is that when I was eight years old, I went to my grandparents' house to play, when my grandparents lived in the countryside, in the countryside is the most, the pond and some small animals, every time my grandfather would take me, to catch some lobsters and loaches in the pond. Every time my body was dirty, I returned to my grandparents, put some warm water in the water basin, to clean my body stains, after cleaning, ran to the yard and chased some puppies and ducks around, like a crazy child, chasing puppies, accidentally fell, thighs and arms are bleeding. I cried so loudly in pain that my grandparents rushed out of the house. Grandma used some clothes to wrap the wound and grandpa rushed me to the nearest clinic. I was really scared at that time.

Enter

Cy



My Chinese name is wuxinran

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 4:41 PM

You sent

That's a lovely memory, Wu Xinran, even if it was painful at the time. I don't understand. Are you from Shanghai or Guangdong? According to your facebook profile, you studied at Beijing (Remnin U.), not Shanghai. What years did you live in Shanghai? If you have more questions for me, I guess it's your turn.

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 4:57 PM

Cy



That's a fond memory. My grandparents raised me until 2010, when my grandfather passed away due to aging health. In the summer of 2012, my grandmother also missed my grandfather due to health issues, and for a while, every day my grandmother ate very little. In those two years, I lost two of my dearest people. I have always lived in Shanghai, and my parents work in both Guangdong and Hong Kong, so I go to Guangdong often.

Enter

Cy



Everyone has different experiences, some happy, some sad, just a lot of people are used to putting a smile on their face. Face life with a smile.

Enter

You sent

Agreed--"face life with a smile." That is a beautiful thought. So sorry to hear that your grandparents are no longer with you. One of the dearest persons in my life was my father's mother. Perhaps we can continue the conversation tomorrow--I will be doing other things now that it is getting late. Bye for now!

Enter

February 2  
Feb 2, 2023, 6:58 PM

Cy



Well, let's talk about that tomorrow and wish you all the best today.

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 12:29 PM

Cy



Good morning, I hope you have a great day today.

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 1:04 PM

You sent

Good day, Wu Xinran. I also wish that you have a wonderful day.

Enter

Cy



I'm sorry, I've been talking to you for a few days and I still don't know your name, can you tell me what your name is? Because I don't even know how to call you.



Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 1:55 PM

You sent

Well, if you wish to be formal (since we've never met in person or by Zoom), Mr. Dermer is fine. My given name is Charles, and my friends call me Chuck. Chuck is fine. Am I properly addressing you as Wu Xinran?

Enter

Cy



Yeah, sure, that's what my friends call me, nice to see you Chuck, it's Friday, I don't really have anything to do, usually on Mondays, I go to the salon and check some bills, and numbers, how about you, what are your plans for today?

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 3:11 PM

You sent

I'm recording some of my songs. So you work in a beauty salon, Wu Xinran?

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 3:36 PM

Cy



Yes, I have a salon in Los Angeles with 15 employees now, and that song you recorded, it should be very good. If you record it successfully, can you give me a listen? Haha!

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 4:04 PM

You sent

Congratulations on your business! That must keep you very busy, yet you still have time to talk with strangers



! Here is a song from my previous album that I recorded in a studio (I composed all the songs) and worked with other musicians and singers. Now I am trying to produce and record an album in my garage studio. Hope you like it! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbGcQ0ssrk>

Enter

Cy



When I finish my work in the evening, I listen carefully to your songs, is that why you are busy every day?

Enter

You sent

No, I am not so busy; this is mostly a hobby. If you like the sound, I can send you a CD, but you can find all the songs online, because they immediately get pirated or put online (like this one).

Enter

Cy



Yes, during break time, I like to go to the music room, put on my headphones, and play a piano piece that I like to listen to. When the piano music plays, the mind has been kept in an ethereal state, emanating everything I want to express through the sound of the piano.

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 5:59 PM

You sent

Nice thought! I agree with you. Piano is a beautiful instrument (my wife plays classical piano, though not professionally). Have a nice day!--we're about to start our evening, so I'll be signing off for now.

Enter

February 3  
Feb 3, 2023, 6:59 PM

Cy



It seems your wife is also very fond of musical instruments, you could try you have your wife play the piano while you edit the song, that might work better, usually at night, how are you going to do it?

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 9:31 AM

You sent

Good morning, Wu Xinran (or would you prefer Xinran Wu?). My wife and I have tried playing music together, but it never works. Plus my music is more guitar-oriented than keyboard- or piano-centered. That was a beautiful picture of yourself you posted on facebook. You must have many boyfriends, or are you married? I hope you liked my song. Have a great day!

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 11:50 AM

Cy



Good morning Chuck, the photos shared on Facebook are just an everyday part of my life, I don't have a boyfriend, but I had a failed marriage, I love your songs, have a great weekend.

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 12:08 PM

You sent

Thank you, Wu Xinran. May you also have a great weekend!

Enter

Cy



Do you have any good plans for this weekend?

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 1:26 PM

You sent

Yes, my wife and I are going to an art show this afternoon, and I have a singer over tomorrow to play some music. Very sorry to hear you had a failed marriage. Was that in China? It's hard to understand. Do you have plans?

Enter

Cy



Yes, the marriage ended in China. Is there a singer coming to perform with you guys tomorrow? Cool, I'm sure you guys will make it, you and your wife must be very happy. I'm going to the gym this afternoon for yoga, looks like you've had a busy day, haha.

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 6:46 PM

You sent

Hi Wu Xinran, the singer will come over (I think--we haven't set a time yet), but only play music with me. My wife plays solo piano. We went to the art show, but didn't find any paintings we liked. That's great that you take yoga; it's something I always wanted to do. My daughter even got me a pass for yoga lessons, but the pandemic got in the way. I hope your weekend is enjoyable.

Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 7:27 PM

Cy





Yes, I have finished my yoga practice and feel comfortable, now I am going to take a rest and then go to my uncle and aunt's house for dinner. My aunt and uncle have prepared a lot of dumplings at home because today is the last day of the Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, a festival of dumplings, which means reunion, and I will share them with you when I get to my aunt and uncle's house.

Enter

Cy







Enter

February 4  
Feb 4, 2023, 9:41 PM

Cy





Enter

Cy



Do you know what this is, Charles?

Enter

February 4

Feb 4, 2023, 10:12 PM

You sent

Hello Xinran, I assume they are dumplings. They look different than the steamed or fried dumplings we get from our favorite Chinese restaurant, but I expect they are also delicious.

Thank you for the photos that you took at the gym. You are very beautiful, and I don't understand why you spend time talking with me when you could have many men near your age to choose from. I appreciate your attention, and if you want to continue talking, that is fine, but I will also understand if you choose a better way to use your time. Well, it's nice to have a friend from China (actually, the parents of the woman who is coming over tomorrow to play music with me are from Hong Kong).

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 10:35 AM

Cy



Nice talking to you Chuck, I hope you have a great weekend today, these are Lantern Festival dumplings, meaning reunion with family, not the kind of dumplings you get at Chinese restaurants, of course when you go to a restaurant you can ask the waiter, or he can explain it to you, haha. My conversation with you really felt like a greeting from a friend, and to get a better understanding of western culture, and history. Are you going to play with that musician today?

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 11:37 AM

You sent

Hi Xinran, and thank you for giving me a glimpse of Chinese culture and upbringing. You must have seen extraordinary changes during your lifetime. I have also seen major changes in the US during my lifetime, though sadly, they are not always for the good of the nation. Sure, I would be glad to inform you of what I know of American culture, though you must recognize that it is only my perspective, though I have lived in 6 different states for more than a year each, giving me perhaps a more balanced outlook than many Americans

who remain in their home state. I am glad to hear that you have family in LA. Indeed, I did my undergraduate study at the Claremont Colleges (30 miles east of LA), and lived 17 years in California (Claremont, San Diego, and the San Francisco bay area).

Yes, my friend of 7 years, K\_\_ (I don't know her family name, just her married surname). She is a good singer, and we've played music to people on several occasions. She is supposed to arrive at noon, so I'll let you know what our new direction in music is (we haven't seen each other for about a month).

Have a great day!

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 11:53 AM

Cy



It just makes each other more aware of the city, or country, in which the other lives. In my lifetime, I have witnessed the growth of many cities, and the decline of corporate culture, and the rapid development of China, from once lagging feet, has been moving forward. At the same time for the American culture, I have been slowly understanding, I know that most American children, are in adulthood, rely on their own knowledge, or efforts to create a better life, in China many adult children, even in their thirties, have not been to find a job, has been relying on family help to get through life, this is the gap in contrast, Chinese parents from childhood, began to teach Chinese parents start teaching their children to work hard when they



grow up in order to survive in society, and to deposit the money they earn in the bank to get some of the income, but most Americans teach their children from a young age that they can get income by investing in real estate, as well as stocks and funds, and this is the difference.

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 5:56 PM

You sent

You unsent a message

Enter

You sent

You unsent a message

Enter

You sent

Hi Wu Xinran, I don't have an opinion about Chinese education and parenting methods, though we are told in the West that it is very strict and geared toward memorization and facts. Moreover, social media is highly restricted, even turned off from 11 pm to 7 am. But this might

be US propaganda. I would be reluctant to generalize about American education methods. Parents have a range of education--public education, private schools (though one needs to be quite wealthy), religious schools and home schooling. We, as parents, certainly never encouraged our son and daughter to invest in stocks, but rather to get a good education and work hard. It seems it worked out successfully, and both our son and daughter have good jobs and our daughter continues her education while working to get an advanced degree in public health. Probably the key factor is having two parents strongly involved with their children upbringing, but letting them free to choose their direction in life once they "leave the nest." Asian Americans are well-known for having well-disciplined and intelligent children, probably a result of their heritage. It is a difficult problem to find the best method and all parents have to find the way that works best.

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 7:47 PM

Cy



I agree with you that education in China is very strict from elementary school to middle school to high school and college, again there are some private schools in China that are very expensive but most parents teach their children to study hard so that you can have a good job when you grow up. The place where the most work is done in China is in factories, which house many, many young people as well as middle-aged people, and that's what happens when you don't have an education. I'm glad I listened to my parents at the time and

kept studying hard to expand my knowledge. Most of the Americans who live near me, they instill some investment ideas, and knowledge concepts in their children when they are young, which I admire.

Enter

February 5  
Feb 5, 2023, 10:24 PM

You sent

It sounds like you had very good parents, and grandparents. You will have to tell me why you decided to come to the US, and how it differed from what you expected from growing up in China. Have a nice evening! I will be calling it a day now.

Enter

Cy



2011 - 2013 Young, fearless, new, confused, and in Washington D.C. I went to Delaware Rehoboth Beach with my brothers and sisters, and I still remember a big plate of Old Bay Jumbo Shrimp with extra sweetness and super creamy ice cream. During the semester, I went to the Atlantic City Casino, stayed at the closed Trump's Taj Mahal,

walked the broad walk, saw the decorations of different casinos, and tasted oysters from different regions; during winter break, I went to Universal Orlando Disney Studios and took Cruise to the Bahamas. On weekends, I also went to New York to have morning tea, went to Flushing underground food court, and ate Nanxiang Xiao Long Bao; I was offered Napoleon in Taipan, and I like it very much even now. This was my first experience in the United States.

Enter

February 6

Feb 6, 2023, 10:36 AM

You sent

Good morning, Xinran. Thank you for describing your first impressions of the US. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Is your whole family in the US now, or do your parents still reside in Shanghai? Actually, the question I was most curious about was how different you found the US compared to your expectations from growing up in China. I have never been to China, though I have been to Japan four times, and it was quite different compared to what I expected (recognizing how superficial impressions can be if one does not live in a country for a long time). I expected hard-working and grim people, but found instead a very cheerful atmosphere. The older people were very friendly to Americans, which was surprising given the history between the US and Japan, whereas the younger people seemed rather hostile. Technologically, it seemed far advanced to the US (trains run on time—once I boarded a wrong train because the one I meant to take arrived only 2 minutes after the one I mistakenly took). Well, every country and civilization holds its own surprises, and my best experience was in an Islamic country—Morocco—though maybe that was because I went as a tourist rather than on business.

Best wishes for a good day!

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 11:49 AM

Cy



Good morning Chuck, I'm glad you said that because in those days my family wasn't very well off so my parents only had one daughter and as far as I can remember my parents went to work in Guangdong and Shanghai when I was 8 or 9 years old to continue their careers in the Chinese culture compared to the American culture. China starts teaching children from a young age that learning is the primary goal and only by learning well can they get a foothold in society Compared to the United States, there is freedom of speech and the ability to grow up independently as an adult, I have always agreed with the American culture and education.

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 12:32 PM

You sent

Hello Xinran, I don't understand. You said that you want to Rehoboth Beach with your brothers and sisters, but now you are saying you are an only child. What do you mean?

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 1:23 PM

Cy



This may be a cultural difference, I'm talking to you, it's a senior brother, a senior sister, that is, my senior in school is a little older than me, so you can understand?

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 2:49 PM

You sent

I understand now, Xinran. You were with other students on your trip that you refer to as brothers and sisters. Yes, I suspected there was a

difference in translation. It sounds like you had a rewarding experience in your introduction to the US. May all your experiences be pleasant!

Enter

Cy



Yes, I was with other students, called siblings, and there were some differences in translation. This is my first experience in the U.S. Do you have any good plans for today?

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 3:27 PM

You sent

No, doing nothing except playing guitar and surfing the web. How about you?

Enter

Cy



I'm at work today, because a new week has started, I have to check some finances at the salon, and some documents, not very busy, do you usually browse some videos about music, or songs when you are online? It seems we are all the same people, always trying to learn and enrich our knowledge.

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 5:39 PM

You sent

I do browse music videos--I'm trying to improve my fingerpicking technique now. Yes, we should never stop trying to improve ourselves, even (maybe especially) when we get older.

Enter

February 6  
Feb 6, 2023, 7:16 PM

Cy





Learning music videos on the browser is a good choice, learning is endless, we can never let our knowledge always stay in one place, didn't you play songs with Ms. K\_\_ from Shanghai yesterday?

Enter

February 6

Feb 6, 2023, 9:57 PM

You sent

Absolutely right. Learning should be a lifelong pursuit. Yes, my friend K\_\_ came over yesterday (her parents are from Hong Kong, but she was born and raised in the US), and we played music and decided on some new songs for a party that K\_\_ is planing to have in June. Have a nice evening!

Enter

Cy



Looking forward to your new song with K\_\_\_, have a beautiful evening and by the way, do you usually use messengers to communicate?

Enter

February 7  
Feb 7, 2023, 9:07 AM

You sent

Hi Xinran, good morning. I mostly use text, email, or zoom. (even phone calls!) Have a great day!

Enter

February 7  
Feb 7, 2023, 11:31 AM

Cy



Chuck, good morning, hope you have a good day today, do you usually use Google mail or?

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 3:24 PM

Cy



Charles my friend, are you busy today?

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 4:02 PM

You sent

Hello, Xinran, no I am not busy. Perhaps it is time to end our correspondence. If you really as beautiful as your pictures, as well as overseeing a salon of 15 employees, then I have trouble understanding why you want to talk with me inasmuch as you should have many men trying to engage your attention. And if your pictures

are not you, then...that's a problem. It was wonderful having a conversation and learning about your life in China. I hope you learned something from me. I wish you all the best.

Enter

Cy



Are we not friends? My acquaintance with you is sometimes the solitude of fate, I don't feel that I have achieved something in my career, it's just that I think that communicating with you makes one more comfortable because we have something in common. On Facebook, yes there are a lot of men who harass me, so when I sleep, I usually put my phone in Do Not Disturb mode, I mostly use WhatsApp because my family and friends are on it and I don't get harassed on it, can you understand that?

Enter

Cy



When I told you that women in the East are not as open as women in the West, I thought you understood me and knew what kind of person I was.

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 4:24 PM

You sent

Yes, we are facebook friends which is quite different than friends in real life. And no, I would never want to harass you or do anything to make you feel uncomfortable. But there is a puzzle I do not understand. I look through your FB timeline, and there is a long gap between 2017 and 2020. The posts from 2017 and the profile pictures are of a different person. It says you were born in 1987, which makes you 34. You look much younger in your recent pictures.

Enter

Cy



Because usually when I sleep at night, I do my daily beauty routine to protect my skin, I can certainly understand that you are not trying to harass me or will do something to make me uncomfortable because in China, it is not allowed to download and use Facebook, you can ask Xiao K\_\_. This is the account my aunt's mother always used when she was in the US, but since she passed away in 2018 I have been using this account to remember my aunt's mother, I called her grandma, she was very nice to me when I first arrived and she used to love pets, that's why I didn't delete these photos, I wanted to keep the memories. [...]

Enter

February 8

Feb 8, 2023, 5:21 PM

You sent

Thank you, Xinran. I understand now. And that is a very nice thing to do to keep your aunt's mother's memory alive. When you say Xiao K\_\_, are you referring to my friend K\_\_? I thought Xiao refers to small or little, but maybe I misunderstand.

I am sorry to be so suspicious, but I receive strange requests from women about every 2 months on facebook, though mostly they have a very short FB timeline so I suspect their motives are not pure. Indeed, I received a text the day before you contacted me asking very

personal questions before I ended the conversation. Well I trust you are communicating in good faith, and we can continue our chat if you like.

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 8:43 PM

Cy



I also get a lot of harassment from strange men on Facebook, so I resent those people. I always miss how nice my grandparents were to me because it was the first time I lived in America for so long and I was curious about a lot of things I wasn't familiar with and when I had a question I didn't understand I would ask my grandmother and she would patiently help me. And we were all good people, so there didn't seem to be an agenda. I hope you can understand what I mean.

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 10:17 PM

You sent

I think I understand what you mean. Grandparents are so important for the proper development of children! Well, if I can provide any insight into the American way, or if you think it is helpful to talk with me, I am happy to do so. Have a good evening!

Enter

February 8  
Feb 8, 2023, 10:35 PM

Cy



Of course, it was a pleasure to have a pleasant exchange with you every day, and I hope you have a pleasant evening.

Enter

February 9  
Feb 9, 2023, 11:00 AM

You sent

Good morning, Xinran. I hope you have a great day!



Enter

February 9  
Feb 9, 2023, 11:54 AM

Cy



Good morning Charles, I hope you have a great day, what are your plans for today?

Enter

February 9  
Feb 9, 2023, 12:46 PM

You sent

Hi Xinran, just taking it easy today. Playing guitar, reading, listening to music. What are your plans?

Enter

February 9  
Feb 9, 2023, 1:43 PM

Cy



I'll be taking a day off at home today, as my stomach has been hurting a bit since last night, and maybe in the afternoon I'll sit on the balcony for a while, read a book and listen to some songs with my headphones on. Your plans for today look very laid back.

Enter

February 9

Feb 9, 2023, 6:05 PM

You sent

I hope there is nothing serious with your stomach, and you are better soon. I spent the day trying to record one of my songs. It's coming along. Yes, it was a very laid back day.

Enter

February 9

Feb 9, 2023, 6:31 PM

Cy



Did you record a song today? Of course if you want to share it with me, I'd love to, my stomach gets very sore these days every month.

Enter

February 9

Feb 9, 2023, 10:51 PM

You sent

Except for ballads, recording a song requires laying down a lot of tracks. Since I don't play bass or keyboards well, I have to enter all the notes one by one, so it is a bit tedious. I'm trying to record one song a week. I'll probably have to work all day on it tomorrow to finish this song. After it's done, I'll send you a file. I hope your stomach stops hurting. Have a nice evening! Bedtime for me.

Enter

Cy



Ok, I hope you can finish the song tomorrow, when you recorded it, did you have it in you to let all the people in the world hear you? I just made a cup of brown sugar water to drink, this will not be very painful, have a good night and I should go take a shower and get a facial and go to bed.

Enter

February 10  
Feb 10, 2023, 10:37 AM

You sent

Good morning, Xinran. I hope you had a restful night sleep and your stomach feels better. It sounds like your period, but I don't wish to pry. After I get a song recorded to my satisfaction, I will send it to you. Playing music is my main plan for the day.

Enter

Cy



Of course my friend Charles my tummy is much better after drinking some brown sugar water last night, hope you have a productive day today. Looking forward to your new song.

Enter

February 11  
Feb 11, 2023, 11:42 AM

Cy



Good morning Charles, I hope you managed to record your song yesterday and I wish you a great Saturday.

Enter

February 11  
Feb 11, 2023, 12:00 PM

You sent

Good morning, Xinran, still working on the song. I went to hear some music last night. I hope you have a wonderful weekend too.

Enter

Cy



OK, Charles, then I'll leave you to write your song, you get busy and write to me when you have time. I wish you success in advance.

Enter

February 12  
Feb 12, 2023, 10:01 PM

Cy



Are you having a busy day? My friend Charles, are you watching today's Super Bowl game? Or are you recording your new song.

Enter

February 13  
Feb 13, 2023, 8:46 AM

You sent

Hi Xinran, yes, we watched the Super Bowl last evening with some long time friends we had over for dinner. It was a good game and good half-time show. Did you enjoy it? Today the only thing I have to do is complete a letter of recommendation for a colleague who is applying for a professorship in physics at a Michigan university. Other than that, I will play some music. How about you? Will you be busy with your salon?

Enter

February 13  
Feb 13, 2023, 10:48 AM

Cy



Yes Charles, I watched the Super Bowl at Linda's yesterday for a while and by halftime I was home because I don't like to stay up late. Looks like you had a good day yesterday and had a great time with your friends, looks like you will be busy again today but very full, I have to go to the store today to take care of some paperwork.

Enter

February 14  
Feb 14, 2023, 1:05 PM

Cy



Good morning my friend Charles did you have a busy day yesterday? I hope you had a wonderful Valentine's Day with your wife today.

Enter

You sent

Hello Xinran, yes, we are going to have a nice Valentine's Day dinner--steak and baked potatoes (very traditional). I hope you have a



valentine/close friend to enjoy the day with. No, I'm not so busy, just goofing around with my music. btw, who is Linda? Have a great day!

Enter

February 14  
Feb 14, 2023, 1:29 PM

Cy



I don't have a lover or a close friend today, I have to work today, I'll go to my aunt and uncle's house for dinner in the evening and then go home for a beauty treatment, do you usually chat by messenger?

Enter

February 16  
Feb 16, 2023, 2:41 PM

Cy



Have you been very busy lately? My friend Charles, it seems you haven't responded to my messages.

Enter

You sent

Hi Xinran, no I haven't been busy. If you want to talk, send me your iphone number and we can FaceTime. Thanks.

Enter

Cy



I usually use WhatsApp or US Telegraph, and Google Ring Chat, don't you use any of these? My friend Charles

Enter

February 16

Feb 16, 2023, 3:10 PM

You sent

No, I'm afraid I don't use any of those.

Enter

Cy



In the US, most of my family and friends use these chat apps because it's safe and no one can harass you, but Facebook and Messenger are different and we often get a lot of weird and harassing messages.

Enter

You sent

Well, ok, maybe I'll try and install one of those or figure out how these work. In fact, I am a little preoccupied until next Monday--I'm hosting a party and going downtown for a rally. Perhaps we can pickup our conversations then? Thanks, my friend Xinran.

Enter

February 16  
Feb 16, 2023, 3:38 PM

Cy



Of course, my friend Charles , you can install a software so we don't have to worry about being harassed by anyone and when you are busy at work you can send me a message and I look forward to our conversations.

Enter

February 19 at 3:59 PM  
Feb 19, 2023, 3:59 PM

Cy



Looks like, Charles my friend, you usually use Facebook very little as you haven't replied to me in a few days, I hope you had a nice day during the busy weekend.

Enter

February 20 at 2:09 PM  
Feb 20, 2023, 2:09 PM

Cy



Today is a holiday break, and I hope your busy work day is over. My friend Charles

Enter

You sent

Hello Xinran. I am retired, actually, so it's all the same for me. I had a nice weekend. We hosted a party, and I went down to an anti-war rally (which was rather sad in terms of attendance). Did you have a nice weekend? I was curious about your time in Beijing. What was it like?

Enter

Cy



Have you forgotten that I now live in Los Angeles and not according to Beijing time, it's 11:19 a.m. in L.A. I'm glad to hear that you had a good weekend and that you weren't very happy about the party for what reason.

Enter

You sent

Yes, I know you live now in LA. I was asking about when you attended Renmin U in Beijing. What was it like living in the big city? I've heard it is very smoggy. Our party was fine. It was the anti-war rally that was poorly attended.

Enter

February 20 at 2:43 PM

Feb 20, 2023, 2:43 PM

Someone replied to you

Original message:

Yes, I know you live now in LA. I was asking about when you attended Ren...



Beijing is a capital country, so there are strict control, most people were very simple, at that time many people through hard to learn knowledge and culture, is to have a stable job in the future, I remember in the People's University, there was a very deep impression, at that time is my beauty academic ranking in the first few in the class, when the teacher asked me to speak on the podium, I was very nervous, their own mind, originally know how to say words, all forget, look at the classmates very embarrassed, this is also my first speech on stage, the class also saw my nervous, has been clapping to cheer me, and did not laugh at the bottom. When the teacher asked me to speak at the podium, I was so nervous that I forgot all the words in my own mind, which I knew how to say, and looked at my classmates very embarrassed, which was also my first speech on the stage. But now Beijing is not so wonderful.

Enter

You sent

Well, we all have had times when we are embarrassed, but it sounds like you are a now very successful if you have 15 people working for you (and still have time to talk to me!). Why do you say that Beijing is not so wonderful now?

Enter

February 20 at 3:07 PM  
Feb 20, 2023, 3:07 PM

Cy



Charles because the salon does not require me to manage it personally, there are professional beauticians to serve the customers, so my time is not very busy, because nowadays in Beijing, the housing price and the standard of living, are countless times higher than the previous standard, just like most Americans, they work hard just to pay the monthly bills, and the mortgage, so such a life, can be very tiring, by the way your Have you finished downloading WhatsApp yet?

Enter

February 20 at 3:24 PM  
Feb 20, 2023, 3:24 PM

You sent



Xinran, it has been enjoyable talking with you and sharing your memories of China, but we now must end our conversations. Have a great life!

Enter

Cy



Okay, that's fine, you go about your business.

Enter

February 21 at 10:46 AM  
Feb 21, 2023, 10:46 AM

Cy



It's the start of a new day, Charles. For today's plan, in the early morning hours, I'm now going to go for my morning run, then go

home, take a shower, and drive to the office to sort out some paperwork, don't you?

Enter

February 22 at 1:00 PM  
Feb 22, 2023, 1:00 PM

Cy



Good morning Charles, looks like you've been a bit busy lately, if you're feeling tired, have a cup of coffee to refresh yourself, have a good day!

Enter

March 2 at 3:18 PM  
Mar 2, 2023, 3:18 PM

Cy



Thumbs up sign

This person is unavailable on Messenger.

[Account removed between March 2nd and 18th, 2023—CD]

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Google links to a student who says that her name Xinran (欣然) means “joy and happiness.” I don’t know if it’s a common name in China, but there are several Wu Xinran’s around the country, invariably of Chinese/Asian ethnicity. No photos match the picture of my friend Wu Xinran.

I performed numerous google and duck-duck go searches on Wu Xinran, Wu Xinran LA, Wu Xinran Beverly Hills, Wu Xinran Remnin. I also did facebook searches. No matches. The account Lu Cy associated with Wu Xinran is now completely disappeared from FB, even for those instances where she commented on my timeline. The Lu Cy account is named in the archived chat, but all of Wu Xinran’s words were expunged from my feed after a few weeks or so (giving me time to download the chat). I couldn’t do a LinkedIn search because I deleted my account after retiring, so there’s a potential lead there. Was she real? I think so. Lots of people reading this would think so. It is the most banal explanation. A well-educated Chinese

immigrant woman arrived in the US, who found success in business and is looking for love.

Two weeks after I stopped responding, on the morning of March 18th, 2023 to be precise, I had a profound urge to resume the conversation. Even if she *were* not real, even if she *were* an AI/chatbot (but she *is* real), the conversation was genuine. And yes, I did pick up on the fertility clues—dumplings in the shape of eggs, period, beauty treatments. I also picked up on her final message to me, a thumbs up sign that doubles as an up-yours sign.

It seems some messages contain their opposites.

I hope it is true and Wu Xinran identifies herself, and we can continue our conversation; to what end, who knows? Maybe only to chat. Her comments about growing up in China were quite interesting, something I don't get from other media.

I looked on the websites for cyber forensics, but unless they have some way to recover deleted FB accounts, I don't see anything from the chat that would positively identify her. I don't think the Wayback Machine would be of any help either.

Sun, Feb 5 at 7:44 PM

Hi Chuck, thanks for playing music today! I was telling [REDACTED] about the Chinese woman you befriended on FB and [REDACTED]'s first thought was that she was looking for a husband, too... 😏

Sun, Feb 5 at 8:59 PM

HA HA

What a shame that bigamy is illegal in the US 😂

Sun, Feb 5 at 10:07 PM

Sounds like the theme for your next song...



Photos: After 102 children, Ugandan villager says enough  
aljazeera.com

Then, there's this poor bastard.

Some would say lucky bastard

No Darwin award for him

I was made so aware of personally identifiable information in government, that I did not even ask for her gmail address or other PII. I was thinking all the time about my own security vulnerabilities.

Or is this another case of “conscience takes the credit for cold feet”? But then, had I continued the chat, where could it have gone? Cyber and electronic communications could help bridge the physical 3000 mile gap between DC and LA, but Xinran seems so pure. Can someone teetering on the cusp of being old really become emotionally attached to someone sight unseen, and maybe unreal? Remember, she offered to do video as we became more acquainted, but it never happened.

What if she were an emotional psy-ops tried out from the highest level by the CCP? No way! This is tin-foil material. Simply outlandish and unbelievable. Anyway, I haven’t heard that childhood memories are implanted in Chat-GPT chats yet. And can they chat with an ethnic accent?

Although I consider this highly improbable, I do recall a Scott Alexander essay on Slate Star Codex about a malevolent entity that manipulates and promotes viral content through something like Twitter or TikTok to distort the emotional state of a nation—a virality machine.

This episode was indeed a perturbation from my emotional equilibrium, though not particularly unpleasant. But it was a distraction.

And, to continue this absurd conspiracy hypothesis further, why do you suppose that I was specifically targeted? To test my vulnerabilities? Why me? I’m just a normal guy, with a PhD in theoretical physics, to be sure. But that life is long past.

Ever the doubter, it is still not vanishingly improbable that she was an AI/chatbot. Better to be too suspicious than to be exposed as a fool. A suspicious nature may help to avoid getting duped, but can hinder building and maintaining friendships. But a too-credulous nature

invites exploitation. I believe she is real. And she disappeared from my life leaving no trace. Yet she entered it unbidden, so I have some ownership of this content. I could even make a case that she violated my privacy, and caused me emotional distress. *I'm the victim here!* The psychological withdrawal was real, as I recall.

Yet it is already starting to fade. What bitter pleasure to be surprised by joy! Our psyches are encrusted with the emotional traumas that make up our life, each one fading, leaving behind personality marks and memory traces.

Anyone who reads this is right to ask whether this whole episode was simply pulled out of the author's imagination.

I only wish I could project so aptly the thoughts of another person, which I did not, as I affirm. If you'd like me to swear, I'll swear.

Yet we are taken into a world reflecting the multitudes populating the writer's imagination every time one reads a work of literature.

For my part, *my* world is mundane and unsurprising (in the best cases), except for my road trips to Mexico. I could no more project into the thought processes of a woman like Wu Xinran than we could the queen of France. Wu Xinran's insights into her life in China were fascinating, something I would have no way of conceiving.

No, Wu Xinran is real and this episode is a glimpse into the diorama that make up the psychopathology of everyday life ca. 2023 CE in consequence of modern technology. Her reality could be established —she *can* be found— rendering all these meandering thoughts moot and a little ridiculous. This makes me a bit nervous. Some cyber sleuth could probably easily locate her. And then I could send her a message. But that would be a good thing, if only to prove that I am not fabricating.

But she must be found, or my credibility is in doubt. But I think I still have my honor, for what it's worth, having never crossed the line in

the chat. (I crossed it—twice!—in 2016, to my lasting regret.) But keeping honor and losing a friend is no win.

Let us suppose, projecting into the future, that Xinran is never to be heard from again, never to be located. What then?

Then I could make the case that I invented her out of my imagination, amounting to a considerable literary achievement. But it would not be true.

I have a belief that she is real, and that one day she might contact me, and we can pick up where we left off. But if not? Fading embers of memory become lost if they are not recorded. Next to the spoken word and music, the written word is about as much as one can do to embalm a dying flame.

And what is this rhapsodizing over a woman that I have never met? She was rather persistent during our conversation. And she left me angry afterwards by deleting the Lu Cy account which she had pledged to maintain as a tribute to her aunt. (However, it is possible, I suppose, that she could have changed the name of the account on FB.)

Yet, when our chat ended I felt a sickness upon realizing she was gone, eerily similar to the feelings I had late-summer 2016. The void was the emptiness of love-spurned pains that no amount of rationalizing can ease or erase. Yet it can be recognized and psychoanalyzed—certainly by this age, at our age.

I just had to stop.

It was disrespectful to my wife to pursue these communications, and she (my wife) has to come first. Maybe that's why I shut off the chat.

Or maybe it is deep-seated anti-Asian prejudice. But this is an absurd charge. I've worked with lots of Asians and Asian-Americans (mostly men, it is true), with no problem. We are about to welcome a lovely Taiwanese-American woman into the family as our daughter-in-law.

Did the anti-Chinese tenor of our times spook me from carrying on the conversation? Explanations are rarely mono-variate and this could have had an effect. Do I have implicit anti-Asian prejudice?

Is it even worthwhile to pose questions that cannot be answered?

I was raised in a world where each person is to be judged as an individual, and not simply as members of groups based on immutable characteristics. With age (especially after reading the Bible), I've come to see that it's not that simple. Loyalties and genetic relations to family, clan, tribe, lineage, race, nation-state, kingdom of God, and other entities complicate the issue.

We're shackled ineluctably to our past and our facticity. But I harbor no prejudice against Chinese or, I would claim, to any group of individuals, as members of a group.

But you would say that, wouldn't you?

OK, to be honest, Shanghai has still not completely shed its 19th century image as a palace of intrigue where a couple of Chinese heavies with Fu Manchus muscle you into a barge and hold you for ransom. A 21st-century Shanghai could be a case of being led to a communications channel vulnerable to hacking, and the next thing you know is that your bank account is cleared out. (Yes, this thought really did occur to me in the course of our conversation.)

I may have ended the convo because of internalized misogyny, or fear of woman, which is something quite different from misogyny. The rose has thorns, but she also has horns. As I've learned. From experience.

Let's just suppose I never hear from her again, and then nothing changes. Time passes, life goes on, one generation rises up whilst another (my) generation passes away. Then it is like every person and people throughout all history fighting the implacable passage of time.



This piece of verbal lint will be swept away or lost in a computer file, at best entombed in a library of books with hordes of words never to be read again, little noted nor long remembered. Yet out of this morass a few words persevere, some harboring truth.

What truth out of this one? A peculiar and particular American walks into the Chinese shadows of the online world and flees back to Western civilization where he's more familiar with the rules and how to break them.

Americans like me, land of the free, have become suspicious to a fault. Well, if America loses its openness, there's still Mexico. Or maybe there are no truly free people left anymore, and we'd hate them if we found any.

Forget it Chuck, it's Chinatown.

And such ends the tale. Time crushes all, and in those moments before the walls close in, we grasp at the future. Xinran held a glimpse of the future, another person, new life. Maybe she saw that in me too. She was no troll, that's for sure. She just chose the wrong person.

It was lovely having the conversation with you, Xinran.

Epilog (April 17-18th):

I had my heart broken twice on March 18th (a record). On a logarithmic scale of 1 to 10, these were a 4 for the piano (down from 5 after getting to know the new piano), and a 7 for Wu Xinran. (My 2016 episode was an 8 or 9.) One or two heartbreaks per decade is typical.

Happily, the effects of both were short-lived. It is only one month later and I have nearly finished writing this down so I can forget about it.

Given my talent with women, I probably scared her away.

But she was quite persistent, as the timeline attests. And then, like a flame blown out by the wind, she disappeared...

I now live in the belief that Wu Xinran is real. Even if I were never to have contact with her again, her words and pictures prove that she is real. If I saw her again, though, I would behave differently, having now suspended my disbelief. I could even ask if she needs any money to invest in her beauty salon.

The piano, yes, the grand piano that we met in the Introduction, having been blown away by Bea playing the Rachmaninoff Prelude in C# minor, Op. 3 #1 on the 7-foot Yamaha at the AU showing. This was after playing many other smaller 6-ft. Yamaha CX pianos (which Bea favored), a Kawai, and some Christoforis. The salesman was polished and smooth, but all his oleaginous slick talk couldn't hide the sticker price: \$37K for the CXs and \$45K for the 7-foot grand. But \$15K of the price for the big Yamaha went to AU (allegedly), so we would also be supporting music at the university.

Abandoning all fiscal sanity, I promptly offered Bea \$20K if she got the big Yamaha (our accounts were separated in 2017). Bea, more level-headed than I, wanted to look elsewhere. The salesman informed us that although the show was ending on that day—Saturday—the pianos would be there until Tuesday if we changed our mind.

We went home. Bea did her due diligence, pulling up Form 990 for the outfit that sponsored the piano sale (Bea is a grants writer for nonprofits and tells me that all nonprofits' 990s are public.) Through accounting tricks and various other no-doubt legal legerdemain, apparently only about \$500 of the \$15K mentioned above would finally make it to AU. The salesman, who was CEO of a 3-person 501c(3) that included, like the board, other family members, made a healthy mid-6 figure salary.

Bea henceforth rejected any advice from me. She ignored any concerns and comments when she allowed me to accompany her

and our daughter on her second trip to a piano shop near Tyson's. I think she had made the choice on the first trip, and wanted our daughter along for affirmation and me along to drive.

We now have a 6-foot Wilhelm Schimmel grand. It was a big effort to move into our house, taking 3 good-sized guys. Nor was it cheap, in the mid-\$20Ks, but I didn't pitch in for this piano, so that makes me a winner.

Perhaps our daughter was right that the sound of a 7-foot Yamaha would have been too big for our house.

I'm learning to love it. Bea plays Philip Glass's *Morning Passages* from *The Hours* score, what can I say?, ethereally.

Thus ends the story.

Acknowledgements to my doodles Tingo and Pepper for companionship during the writing of this piece.



Bea with her new Schimmel