

The Windownesian

Chapter 4

As the Tree Rooted



1997: First Migration Wave started and thousands, millions left Hong Kong.

2020: Second Migration Wave started, 90000 left Hong Kong.

August 2027: The government announced several draft laws including The Speech Laws.

September 2027:

On my journey from my home in Yuen Long Tai Tong to the school, I take the MTR bus K66 to the train station. By the side of the road there is my church, the Yuen Long Baptist Church. Next to the church there is an old house. So old, predictably from the last century. The dull grey makes it stick out from our bright silver church and the modern houses nearby it. It has two stories, built with dark grey stone. At the right side of the house, A rather large tree grows out from the house's first floor window, and heights taller than the house. The house, the tree, they grow together.

It is Thursday, the 9th. Meander is interviewing a very distinguished person, the Vice Secretary for Education on the Issue of Children Education. She works part-time as a host for the radio broadcast “The People”. Now,

education is a topic I am highly interested in, but fail to join. Because, well...

Anyway, with everyone in position, the programme starts.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to ‘The People’, guardian of your voice and your right to information. I am your host Meander Lee.

Recently, our city Hong Kong has seen changes in different aspects, and education is one of them. With the Education Bureau announcing some reformation of school curriculum in primary schools, we as ‘The People’ want to know why. Today, we are honoured to have with us, the Vice Secretary for Education Ms Teresa Tam. Welcome Ms Tam.”

“Glad to be here Meander.”

“So, big new Ms Tam, big news. The EDB is now reforming child education. Can you briefly tell us what is it about?”

“Sure Meander. Traditionally, childhood education is very institutional. We teach kids knowledge, expecting them to finish homeworks and having exams constantly. I am not saying we should not have done these, but there have been criticisms on what to include for primary schools. Children are facing immense pressure they should not have been facing. The reformation intends to alleviate these problems. The amount of homework is restricted, lesson times are shortened for extra-curricular activities, teaching is revised to be more well-rounded. In short, education is less academic-oriented.”

“That surely is a huge change. But Ms Tam, why would the EDB make such changes? I mean, yes, we see a lot of pressure on children. But what exactly motivates such changes?”

“Many organizations, psychologists, and educators have been doing research on children development. And many point out that, despite dealing with knowledge is still essential, education shall do more for children. Since it is their first years of development, learning from textbooks is not the only way. Classroom education shall motivate students, expand their horizon, and encourage mastering self-discipline and life skills. Well, theories aside, the actual reason is that a few years ago, government officials were invited by our country China to pay a visit. Children in China since 2021 are not required to be doing much homework and are having non-academic developments. Spending a week with them opened our eyes. Despite not seeing them recite much from lessons, their children are the most competent learners we see. Then we visited Sweden, where education is more flexible and concerns more about whole-person development. It is since then we decide, children don’t need two exams and two uniform tests per year with loads of homework. Instead, we need to work on a well-rounded education.”

“It seems that learning from the better does help,” Meander comments. “We would say that we take inspiration on what education should have been, for there has never been a solid answer. For that our education system

originated from the Industrial Age where people had to sit in rows and complete tasks with measurable outcomes. That is something over 150 years ago.”

“Yea, someone I know once suggested a conspiracy about school that, schools were actually set to keep the children in check when their parents are working. Then in order not to bore the kids, they start to draft all kinds of lectures to kids just to keep them entertained.”

“He may not be so far from the truth,” and they both laugh.

“Anyway, we have only briefly talked about the reformation,” Meander addresses Ms Tam, “but what are some of the details of this reformation?”

“Not quite of a reform, but making small adjustments to achieve big effects. There are two directions we are following to solve their respective issues. To begin with, it is the hardware of the school, issue the knowledge side. The academic pressures need no introduction. The amount of homework will be reduced to less than 20 per week, meanwhile providing guidelines to teachers on effectively assigning homework based on updated studies.

Lesson times are reduced to only before lunch. These are not ridiculous changes, many countries such as China and nations in Europe are adapting these ideas. The second problem is the after school activities. We have research concluding that over 95% of parents have the habit of arranging interest classes for their children. This gets us thinking, why don’t schools contribute part of this as well? Therefore, we have the general plan to allocate afternoon time for children to choose skill-development, whether it is mastering a music

instrument, a sport, or creative writing. Of course there will be freetime after lunch, enabling spare time for children to either take some rest, or to sharpen their skills or play with peers. In the end, we train students to be skilled in areas other than academics. Oh and one more thing, Hong Kong students always have the stigma of being high score and low ability. We need to start dealing with that. Every Friday afternoon, there will be some sort of a ‘life-skill course’ training kids to pack clothes, operate everyday machines, tie shoes, cook simple things, so on and so forth. On Saturdays, students are led by mentors to take them hiking or doing group activities, with the goal to enhance social and problem-solving skills. Sometimes, students will pay visit to some companies to intrigue their interest in various industries. In short, we are equipping children to be versatile, and provide professional aid in everything they need as a child.”

“Now that sounds like some sort of school I would like to attend. Quite a shame I was born too early. And oh, before I forget, this is not just your average radio. ‘The People’ values your voice. Should you have any questions for our guest Ms Tam here, feel free to message us via our CloudSound The People 2027 one word lowercase. Now back to our topic. One thing we need to confront, Ms Tam, is that our education system has been running on the mode we used to for decades already, are there any obstacles you foresee? Or let’s say, is there any opposing voices commenting on perhaps the feasibility of shortening class time and adding extra-curricular activities”

“I was a teacher before I applied for this post. The criticisms we have, are always from parents. And now that I am in an administrative position, these are from teachers. And yes, they care about the feasibility of the reformation. Because it may increase the workload of both parents and teachers, for that they have more to care about the children. Now there are a few things I would like to clarify. One, we do add more elements in school education, but we intend to balance it with reduced lesson time. For teachers, adding more extra-curricular activities would surely be stressful, only when they need to take duties outside teaching. We, have thought of these too. Teachers and event coordinators responsible for the student development we add, are two separated roles. In fact, with plenty of young adults graduating and looking for jobs, we can train these next generations to lead the interest classes and activities mentioned. By the way, this reformation is also considerate to our youths, who possibly migrate because they cannot see job opportunities, as studies suggest, that they can still develop here. Future schools will be big, both physically meaning adding room for these activity coordinators and rhetorically means giving a chance for further development of children and helpers. About the possible complaints of parents, I know better than to solve it. So what we can do is to provide everything, and let children decide.”

“Wow, so if I end up not being a journalist, which is my dream, I can run a school campus TV. Nice,” Meander comments, “but there is another issue I must address. Education is still a system. We expect students to proceed to

secondary school, then university, then society. Now with the knowledge part gone, what are we based on when we assess the ability of children when they apply for secondary school?"

"I would like to stress that the knowledge part is still here, just that we don't take multiple exams a year, instead just one or two. That should provide enough for assessing their academic competence. Yet passing down knowledge is only the basic objective of childhood education. In the end, we prepare children to step into society, and society is not solely constructed by knowledge. This is the main reason why we need a reformation to better equip children with all kinds of skill sets, and it first starts with a more suitable education. In fact, a few years prior to this interview, we have experimented the ideas in several top-ranking primary schools. The result is satisfying and a good proportion of their graduates successfully enroll in top secondary schools, proving that our plans are feasible. Also, schools shall not only teach knowledge 24/7 and expect their students to memorize all. Rather than shoving knowledge, we would rather prepare them to be self-disciplined, well-developed and suitable for what's to come in their later years."

"Wow. Now we have the first question. Kevin Yeung asks 'what is your ideal of education?' Ms Tam?"

"That sounds more like a question in a job interview," Ms Tam laughs, "well, not in the government anyway. We are politicians, not educators. Wait, where am I? Yes, my ideals. Like I said, passing down knowledge is just a

primary goal. Education shall, do more than that. We are preparing children and teenagers for the future. Education is really broad. But the education system I appreciate the most is A level. One thing out of it is that, this system doesn't keep students in academics. Students have a compulsory exam in form 5, and see if they are suitable for further study. If not, youth have the chance to develop in other aspects. Looking back, that's how prestigious people of our society started their career. And capable students move on and have exams in form 7, and move on to university. That is the system I actually like, and might bring back one day. So that students won't be barred from only one way of achievement."

"I am too young to experience A level. Next we have KY Yip asking 'With the number of children dwindling, and migration is starting, are you confident that we can sustain childhood education?' Those are really practical issues. Ms Tam?"

"Well yes, the drop of students is a problem. The birth rate is getting lower and lower. Also, people are starting to move to other countries, we do see many schools shutting down. But I don't see this as an impossible obstacle. How about we use this set back to our advantage. Now that we have fewer and fewer students, that means small class teaching is encouraged if schools don't want to get closed. Now that class size is smaller, teachers and coaches have more time to get to know their students. And with that, have more spaces to move further

in education. I have no comment about migrating. Yet in troubled times, we can see the need to move on, and to improve.”

“Last question. Harold Tam asks ‘as an educator, are you planning to migrate?’ That’s personal. I want to hear about it.”

“I am a Vice Secretary, just a policy-maker, not quite an educator. Yet I have been to enough countries to know that sometimes other places are claimed to be better than us, because they have a more flexible education system. That said, I don’t see the need to migrate. I mean, Hong Kong education might not be the most successful in education. But with the reformation, we can be competent like other cities. I myself am not planning to move away. I still have hope in this city, and the people in it. And we as the policy makers shall make the first move.”

“I see. I wish to know more, Ms Tam, but this is the end of the programme. Thank you Ms Tam for joining us.”

“The pleasure is mine.”

“And thank you audience for tuning in. This has been ‘The People’, and this is your host Meander Lee, signing off.”

And that, is the interview I missed. That is because Meander’s cousin Kelvin is returning from Taiwan with his wife Mei Ling and their kids. Well, someone has to look after those children. Then a series of events happened. The

Chug-a-lug falls and rises, Bobby is taken away and returns intact. Everything is back to normal.

In the late afternoon, the sun sets, showering golden lights to the Victoria Harbour. The tall silver buildings bath in Grandpa Solar's touch. The river, if it can be called a river, shines like gold. From where I am sitting next to the room's window, I can see from left to right the pink Cultural centre and the elderly clock tower, the angular modern glassy Arc de Triomphe known as the legislative council, the pink boxy liberation army headquarter, and the IFC, intersecting with numerous white and silver familiar towers I cannot name, all dwell in the hue of faint yellow. The warm breeze of September blows, but it can never reach our room. Well, that's because...

“Hey Bobby, can you open the windows?” I ask the windownesian.

“I have the ability to, but I have no intention.”

“Fine. May I ask if I can get permission to open the windows?”

“You are already asking,” he replies. The Chug-a-lug really should have chosen a less stubborn person to fall on.

I sigh, “okay, can I open the windows?”

“No,” says Bobby, “You can see the view clearly, I cannot see the reason why you need to. Besides, too much oxygen makes me sick.”

“I can ask father to help you,” Alex the AI suggests, who has been enjoying our conversation. By ‘father’ he means the creator who built this AI.

I know better than to argue with these two. With Meander appearing at the door, that signals my time to leave the stuffy chamber, and leave windownesian and AI to enjoy their weekend.

“Wait, you are saying that the scientist is not dissecting him or using him to conduct any experiment?” Zedekiah asks me on the way to his home, “not even the slightest of taking blood samples after knowing who he is?”

It is Friday night, and it is a tradition for Meander, me, Athena and Zedekiah to have dinner together in one of our homes. And tonight Zedekiah’s family is the host.

“Well, he returns healthy and intact,” I respond, “at least he seems to be. And oh, he gets upgraded to adapt to water, so splash attacks don’t work on him anymore.”

“Yeah, but he is still the windownesian,” Meander says.

“Oh, what a shame they didn’t dissect him,” Zedekiah expresses, “great opportunity missed.”

“You are just too addicted to alien videos don’t you,” Athena smacks him in the head.

“What, I am just kidding. Anyway, we are here.”

Zedekiah rings the doorbell, and his sister Rona comes to greet us. The Chan family is a typical family. The father Uncle Ben is sitting idly on the sofa watching the news channel, the mother Aunt Mary is retrieving the clothes she

has been hanging. Rona is in her room and not showing up other than to open the door for us. No one in the house is talking. The house is at its simplest design. A TV and a sofa in the sitting room, a large table in the dining area, and nothing, not even decoration or style. Just, house. Visiting them almost gives you the feeling of intruding into someone's everyday boredom. Well, not for this family. Rona is a leader in the social movement, and Zedekiah is a medical person frequently appearing in those situations. According to what I know, their parents don't support them. Their own room is actually a huge contrast to the dull living room, filled with posters and keepsakes of all themes. Meander and Athena quickly head to the kitchen with the groceries. They are cooking tonight. Usually we take up some of the housework everytime we visit. The girls cook and the boys wash the dishes. Frankly I am a bit jealous of the girls, they get things to do when Zedekiah and I have to wait for dinner in an awkward situation in which no one talks except for the news reporter. I don't think waiting in Zedekiah's room would be a good idea since we are now guests, so we sit on the sofa, watching TV with uncle.

“Last month the government announced several draft laws including the Speech Laws. Live here in the legislative council, Chief executive Tsang is meeting the press conference...”

The government is holding a press conference to explain the laws.

“This is a new step of national security. In the past we had laws to protect our city and nation from military and physical threats. Now we are expanding the idea of security to ideology... Many countries, cities, have been promoting different national safety laws in recent years... Any potentially dangerous ideas and publications shall be monitored before they can create an impact...No, not everything will be banned...I recognize that according to the suddenly rising immigration rate since last month, there is a fear in the public. I am here to urge our people to be calm. Certain laws only apply to a tiny fraction of dissidents...As for the new Speech Laws, regulations are set only to ensure not only our nation is physically safe, but also mentally healthy...we are keeping a better check on information flow, to prevent more conflicts and lead us to prosperity...We are forming a Monitor committee to keep track of publications and speeches...This is a necessary...Don’t worry, there will be a well thought-out guidelines of what would be inappropriate.”

“That is just ridiculous,” Rona suddenly appears at the kitchen door, whipping a bowl of something, “this doesn’t make sense. I mean, the Speech Law is way too much.”

“Rona,” Aunt Mary orders her daughter, “get back in the kitchen.”
“Why shall I shut up? Ma, it is about our own future, our own freedom. Look, despite what the government says, their final goal is to control. Now that they are also monitoring speech too?”

“Not to mention that their guidelines are never clear and can be changed upon the leader’s will,” Zedekiah comments.

“Yea exactly!”

“Ao Feng, Yi Yong, be quiet!” Their mother urges them.

“But ma, this is not something complicated, this is something simple,” Rona starts arguing, “the government always does something wrong, or at least there are rooms for improvement. They need media and voices to tell them, that they are wrong. Now they are monitoring speeches, we need to fight or else we will lose everything.”

“I don’t know sis, but with this law, it seems that they will be targeting many people. Many people will be doomed, innocent people will be doomed,” says Zedekiah, “those are the people I care of.”

“People do wrong things, need to get punished to reach justice,” the father says, with a tone of about to explode from rage.

“Ba, that’s the problem. If the government intends to stop any opposing ideas, they are setting the rules, and rules can be of their favor. The possible consequences can be huge. Soon the media will be existing only with one voice, that is not good. Athena, take this bowl for me.”

“Where are you going sis?”

“To arrange a meeting.”

“Stand!” the father says loudly, “I don’t mind you having your own thoughts. But you shall not do it with a protest, you will be bothering others.”

“Ba!” Rona turns and shouts, “I know you don’t like what I am doing, you never have been. But I need to do this, so that the government knows it is wrong.”

Uncle Ben walks to her, and stands facing her. This is going to be disastrous.

“Umm...Rona,” Athena says from the kitchen, “I need your help with the pot here!” She is actually finding an excuse to draw her away.

Zedekiah silently reaches for the remote control, and lowers the volume. And so the father goes back to his sofa, the daughter in the kitchen, and everything back to normal.

The TV is playing in the background when we are eating, no one makes a sound. No one does anything other than eating. The news is reporting the new figures of people leaving the city.

“Umm...moving to another city,” Meander can’t stand the silence, “moving to another city...”

“Because they cannot see hope in the city,” says Rona chewing vegetables, “and have to move away to get hope.”

“Yong, Feng, how about you guys migrate too?” says Aunt Mary, “you don’t seem to like staying here.”

“Ma,” Zedekiah says, “it is exactly because we love this city, we elect to stay and see if we can change things.”

“Then why are you guys,” Uncle Ben groans, “protest against the leader, destroy infrastructures, block streets, and hurt people?”

“Uncle,” I say, “technically only the first one is correct, they haven’t done the others.”

“I am not asking you.”

“But Auntie,” says Meander, “have you ever thought of migrating?”

“We actually love London,” Uncle Ben answers her, “the infrastructure is better, weather is more suitable for us, and it sounds better.”

“Then why...”

“It is too expensive,” Uncle Ben answers, “yes, the British government provides good service for you and your whole family. But half of your salary goes to taxes. Damn politics. Besides, this town, that town, it doesn’t make much of a difference. Whenever there is people, there is politics. Whenever there is politics, there are mistakes. Whenever there are mistakes, people don’t live well.”

“Wait,” Rona says to her father, “you actually agree with us about the government?”

“I would say,” Athena suggests, “the society is composed of stakeholders, and it is never easy to satisfy everyone’s request.”

“Yes, that too,” Uncle Ben says. “I don’t disagree on some ideals of you. But I don’t like how you do things. I just, don’t want to see you guys get into trouble like you always do.”

“I am done eating,” Uncle Ben leaves a set of empty tableware.

After dinner I help Zedekiah to wash the dishes. For whatever reason we have only at most five dishes, but the plates and bowls stack up to the ceiling. Quietly we wet them, soap them, wipe them and hang them one by one. The silence is uncomfortably long.

“So, you are not going to leave Hong Kong?” I hand a washed plate to Zedekiah.

“Quite impossible Jon,” he places the plate to its place, “Not for me. Migration happens because there is a need to move. Two things must happen to enable such a situation,” he gets a bowl from me. “One, all of the people in my social circle I know are gone. Two, I cannot sustain a job to feed myself.”

“Of which are the two problems you are going to face in a new place anyway.”

“Exactly. And you, will you leave?”

“I am not,” I grab a pot, “there are pretty much no reason for me to leave. I have been living here for more than twenty years. Yes, I have been to and appreciate other cities, but not feeling the urge to live there for long. I don’t know, I know no other way.”

“I won’t blame you. That’s my problem too,” Zedekiah says, “many of us do.”

On Saturday night at the end of the fellowship, we turn off all the lights, push in a birthday cake, and all sing a birthday song. We throw a surprise birthday party for Kyle.

When the lights are back on, he makes a wish and cuts the cake.

“So, what have you wished for?” asks Sandy.

“Wishes cannot be fulfilled if you spit them out,” says Adam.

“Well in fact,” Kyle starts distributing cakes, “I hope I can quickly adapt life in Australia.”

This puts us in silence and stop eating cake.

“So, you are moving away?” David asks the obvious.

“Next Wednesday, with my family. We have already made a decision.”

“But why?” asks Zedekiah, “you are not happy here?”

“Zed.” Athena utters.

“What, I am just asking.”

“Well, I am not. We are just doing this for my little sister Cindy. I have checked, Australia is a good place. We went there during Summer vacation and Cindy likes it.”

“Then how about the rest of your family?” Simone, our mentor asks.

“Dad has found a university there to continue publishing his work. Mum will quit her office work and take care of Cindy. I need to find a school. Since I am a migrant, I need to start from their high school to get to their college.”

“But, how about Belly and Button?” Meander asks, “you cannot take them away.”

“Right, my cats. That’s really a problem. Anyone want to adopt cats?”

Kyle is in another group, I don’t actually know him much. I only know, he likes sitting by the scenery meditating when we go to isolated campsites. He always insists on going to “Tam’s Rice Noodles” for dinner. He likes the song Give Thanks and chooses it every time he needs to share a song.

“Well, we are going to miss you,” Alice, our mentor, says to Kyle, “just promise me to find a good church, and visit us in Summer.”

“Or in Winter considering you will be in the Southern Hemisphere,” says Athena.

“I will, I promise. I will,” Kyle has finished his cake. “How about we go to Tam’s Rice Noodles for dinner?”

We cannot argue with his choice. We cannot decide what’s for dinner anyway.

We step out the main entrance of our church. Turn left, and walk on the concrete road with yellowish lights shining from the street lights. 10 pm is hardly anyone’s best time to hang out, not in the outskirts of Yuen Long town centre where trees are abundant enough to be rural. We walk our way to the collection of crossroads of traffic lights. Basically, cars from all zones would meet here and proceed their journey turning left to Yuen Long park and Ma Tin Tsuen, or turn right to town centre, Yoho mall and the highway to the heart of

Hong Kong. If you are standing on the safety island facing the town centre, people are going ahead to work, and returning back to home. After we pass through all the traffic lights, all five of them, we can reach the red-bricks patterned road and five more minutes we can reach city mall. And outside a restaurant on the way, I detect a familiar shadow.

“Meander, can you save me a seat,” I say, “I have something to do.” I approach the man I know for quite a time.

“Howard?”

“Oh hey, Jonathan. Long time no see!” my friend from secondary school greets me, “have you had dinner yet?”

“Just going to. It is surely long time no see. What are you doing right now?”

“Well, I have just graduated university.” Howard is one year older than me.

“Oh, so are you planning to study further?”

“Not really. I am going away. I want to go somewhere else.”

“Migration? To where?”

“Cambodia. Not exactly migration, but just some long travelling.”

“Wait a second, Cambodia?”

It is then my holophone rings, it’s Meander.

“Go, your friends and dinner needs you.”

“Right. Umm...Howd, when will you fly?”

“15th, Wednesday, 4pm.” That is the same time as Kyle’s.

“Save me a spot Howard, I will try to come.”

“Don’t make me wait for you wor.”

“Com’on, when have I ever let you down.”

“Quite always.”

“Very funny. See ya Howd.”

“See ya Jon.”

After dinner I head back to home. And as the bus passes my church, I see that old house again, flashing by the window. People have been wasting street lamps, to shine light on the house. A tree grows from inside the house to outside the house, expanding her branches once she breach the first floor’s windows. From somewhere I hear rumors that this house is going to be demolished. The house is binded with the tree, and the tree grows within the house. If the house stays it stays. If the house goes it goes.

Monday afternoon, after the lesson, Alex and I return to dormitory seeing Bobby using his own computer.

“That is the newest i17 Notepad?” Alex awes.

“It should be ‘that is’, Alex. And yes, the newest.”

“That computer with 8D digital image processing, three-diminsion display, top internet speed, VR connection and holo projection?” Alex is excited.

“Oh good,” I say, “you can search many things with it. Basically Alex but better.”

“I am sure I don’t have this new technology,” Alex responds.

“But why exactly do you need that Bobby? And how did you get it?” I ask.

“I cannot go anywhere I want because of oxygen everywhere. But I am curious about places other than this campus. So I want to see different cities, without the need of actually going out.”

“Wait, so can you find the best place with the least oxygen concentration and live there forever?” I say, half suggest half teasing.

Bobby’s eye’s shine, “I can move to a better place for myself?”

“Many people do,” I say, “it’s called migration.”

“Migration involves the movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, at a new location (geographic region),” Alex explains. “Humans do that for a long time, mostly because the original place is uninhabitable and have to ensure survival.”

“Do you really have to read out the words in blankets on Wikipedia as well?” Bobby asks rhetorically.

“I just read everything...”

I cut Alex off, “boys boys boys boys, will you migrate somewhere someday?”

“I don’t migrate,” Alex replies, “I am made on this Earth. Living place doesn’t matter to me.”

“Where else do I have to live?” replies Bobby, “I am alien here. I am technically already migrating. This world is not my world, this home is not my home.”

“You find a place with least oxygen, you migrate?” Alex asks him.

“It is a conditional sentence, mind the ‘if’ and ‘will’,” Bobby then turns to me, “you are human, where is the best place for me?”

“Oh, so that you can open the windows and we breathe freely,” I murmur. “Go to Hell, it has no oxygen.”

“I should go to hell?” he says excitedly, does get the hidden meaning. “Where is this hell?”

“You have a computer now,” I say to him, “search it. I am having lunch with Meander.”

As I leave I can hear Bobby’s voice, “there is fire. It must be hot. I cannot see the oxygen level. Why are there no comments on the internet about Hell?”

“We call Nature, en-va-ra-ment,” Wednesday, 15th, Professor Dawn Wong is wrapping up his Ecology lecture after reading some articles and short stories with us. “It is from the word en-va-ron. Anyone know the Chinese word for environ?”

I frankly can’t pay attention to this lecture, thinking that two of the people I know are moving away and I might not see them again for a long time.

“The chinese word is wan,” Alex says, “it means a circle ring or a loop.”

“Ah yes, a circle! It means circles of area, ex-panding from a centre. Look, it first from the concept of human city planning! In Beijing, we have wan, one wan, two wan, a lot of wans expanding from the very centre! In London, we have zone one, the very centre of the city. Then we have going outward, radiating off from a centre, zone 2, zone 3, zone 4, and they have 9 zones now. See, wan, is the environment, a surrounding. We use a human concept, to talk about nature! And ecology, is really close to another word, economy! Both with prefix, e-co! Having the same morpheme means it is about taking care of our household, and the surroundings around us. That, is how nature culture, one word, works! Any question?”

We don't even know what to ask.

“Let's see, Eric, how much time do we have? Five minutes. So, let me introduce a new word to you guys. De-te-re-o-lai-zay-sion. Type it out, Eric, d-e-t-e-r-r-i-t-o-r-i-a-l-i-z-a-t-i-o-n. Long word! Now, it means to de-terrialize yourself, and get away, from what you used to know! Now, you are all year 4 students. You are going to graduate. After you graduate, you may move on to be many things. Some may not even be related to English majors. And that's good. After I graduated undergrad, I went to be an assistant lawyer, to do things completely unrelated to English. This is de-te-re-o-lai-zay-sion. You move out of your comfort zone, your own wan. Well, good enough for a lesson. Now I have run out of things to say. So, if you have questions, just go to my office or see my TA Eric to talk to you about deterrialization. He's an expert! He

graduated first hon and went on to be an insurance agent, before studying English again! Well, good enough for a lesson. Bye bye class.”

Right after the lesson ends at early noon, I meet up with Meander, and travel to the airport. So that we can farewell Kyle. When we get off the bus at the airport, Kyle and our mentor Bronze are trying to push a cart of 2 very large luggage to an upward slope. I lend a hand, and push together. Finally the cart moves and gets smooth on the airport floor.

“My God what have you put in there, stones?” I ask.

“Yes. Well, my mother’s geological collection to be precise.”

“You should really tidy up things beforehand,” Bronze gestures with one hand. He is mute.

“Can’t blame you,” I say to Kyle, “these are not things you can get in Australia.”

Bronze pats my shoulder and points at a direction.

“Wow. You should really tidy up things beforehand, Kyle.” There are at least 30 suitcases and 4 large ones already waiting there.

Kyle’s family is there, alongside several of our and their parent’s fellowship members. His father is there checking a list. His mother is holding his sister. Bronze blows a whistle, and that summons Kyle’s father and some boys to unload the luggages for check in.

“So, you haven’t heard of an overseas relocation company?” Zedekiah asks as we unload the luggage.

“We move quite in a hurry,” says Kyle’s father, “doesn’t have time.”

“I thought the airport would charge a lot for these,” David says.

“The price is actually similar. Umm...Fiona, you may want to check-in this one.” Aunt Fiona is suddenly panicking, having no idea what to do with little Cindy.

“Auntie, may I,” Athena says, opening her arms to Cindy.

Kyle’s mother hands the two-year-old Cindy to Athena, and rushes to her luggage, leaving Athena toying with the little girl.

“That’s the last one,” Kyle’s father announced, “check your ID, we are leaving.”

We automatically form a circle around them, starting some last-minute chatting.

“Take care alright.”

“We will be praying for you guys every day.”

“You can join us on Zoom if time allows.”

“Belly and Button will be safe and healthy in my home,” says Simone.

I see a familiar figure far from a few gates. I silently move away from the circle, and walk to the circle. He is wearing a really large mountain backpack, a black hip bag, and a medium suitcase.

“Your family is not bidding you goodbye?”

“They have, and they are in the toilet.” There is a long silence.

“May I ask...”

“Yes.”

“I have heard a lot of people migrating to UK, US, Australia, Taiwan, even Japan, but never Cambodia.”

“They are actually more developed than you think.”

“I mean, why a DSE top candidate with 30 marks would like to go to Cambodia? What are you doing there anyway?”

“Volunteer work. I will be working there on some large poverty alleviation projects.”

“But I thought you wanted to become a scholar.”

“I still am. But not in Hong Kong, never.”

“You don’t like Hong Kong? It is the place you’re born and grown in.”

“I’m not saying I don’t like Hong Kong. This is my home. It’s just that, I don’t like my city being too stressful and too restricted when we start our careers. Frankly I cannot see my future here, not now.”

“And you can see it in Cambodia?”

“I am an ambitious person. I want to make contributions in many ways. I have been to Cambodia and served this organization once. It is a place I would like to stay, at least over Hong Kong during these times. Don’t get me wrong, I

am going to miss this place. But I can see a better future out there.” His parents return back.

“It is time now,” Howard takes his suitcase, “bye mum. Bye dad.”

“Phonecall us every night,” his mum tells him.

“Goodbye, Jonathan Wills.”

He grabs everything, takes his passport and plane ticket out, and his back walks to the gate. At the entrance of the gate, he looks back and waves at us, then he emerges into the crowd. On another gate, the same thing is happening to Kyle’s family. They have lived in Hong Kong for years. Now they are away.

16th Thursday, Meander is interviewing Zedekiah’s sister Rona. Well, not exactly. Martin of ‘The People’ is interviewing her. And after the broadcast, we come forth to her.

“So sister,” Zedekiah asks, “that statement, ‘I was born here, grown here, if I have to be arrested, let it be here as well.’ is that just a cliche, or you really mean it.”

“I really mean it brother,” replies Rona. “Like it or not I belong here. Yes, I see a lot of things I loathe enough to protest for it. But meanwhile, there are things that I like.”

“So you are not planning to leave Hong Kong.” I state.

“Never,” she answers, “Hong Kong might not be the best, in various aspects if you compare it to other cities. Yet it is my home that I cannot leave

behind. Nothing, not a better future or a better place I have visited, can turn me away. For that my future is here, and I shall be active to shape it rather than to search from place to place.”

17th, Friday. I take the bus to return home after having dinner with Athena’s family and escorting Meander back to her home. In the middle of the journey, right outside the Yuen Long Baptist Church, the bus breaks down. It’s the last bus of the day. I have two choices. Either walk home, or head to Yuen Long commercial centre and take the minibus. Well, there is a third choice. I walk to that old building next to my church. Finally I can take a closer look. It is a small, tattered building, at least it looks small on the outside with a drastically shorter and thinner body compared to those next to it. Pretty sure she had its charm when it was built, but it no longer is. There is a plaque, a board-like sign right above its door. Written on it are two Chinese words I don’t actually know, 簥廬. And through the window of the first floor, a thick tree grows and her branches expand to the top of the house, taller than the house. She is obviously grown 75 degrees from the ground, heading outside the window. Clearly it is reaching out. Her early years must be dark. She cannot grow any further if she stays in the house. She saw sunlight outside, and felt that it would be her future, and she reached out. Who planted her here? Did the owner of the house plant her here, or did she as a seed landed into the house? Did she elect to grow here? Has she ever been jealous of other trees growing freely without a house trapping

them? I don't know. These do not matter anymore. If the house stays she stays, if the house goes, she will be removed. She reaches out to touch sunlight, to further grow into what it is. But she is rooted, she cannot move away from the house no matter if she likes it or not. I might not be so different from this tree.

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By The Sapient Sabre

