

NON- FICTION

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In the non-fiction section, we feel the warmth and coldness of human emotions and the tension of reality in literature through the authors' profound brushstrokes. In Andrea's article, we can see her journey of not adapting to the environment, missing her home in Beijing, and gradually adapting to this place when she came to Zhuhai. Skyler feels the fleeting regret and sadness of life by attending her grandfather's funeral. Letitia gradually understood the principle of going out and exploring more possibilities during a journey in "Departures, Returns, and Everything in Between." "Lost in Hong Kong" describes how Hazel and her friends gain different experiences through their journey in Hong Kong, as they learn that the journey does not need to take a single way, as long as one enjoys every moment of the trip. In "Why do I Like Shower Time," Hazel found that talking to herself can help her better understand herself, which is a prerequisite for becoming a better her. In "Belated Remorse," she unexpectedly experiences the mother daughter refund period and realized that it was impossible for anyone to be fully omniscient over their own life, thinking that maybe the essence of existence is in its unpredictability. All these events are talking about change and uniqueness, yet all these events are full of illusion, which is their lucid dream. These articles are quite touching.

NON-FICTION

Lost in Hong Kong: Two Cherished Journeys

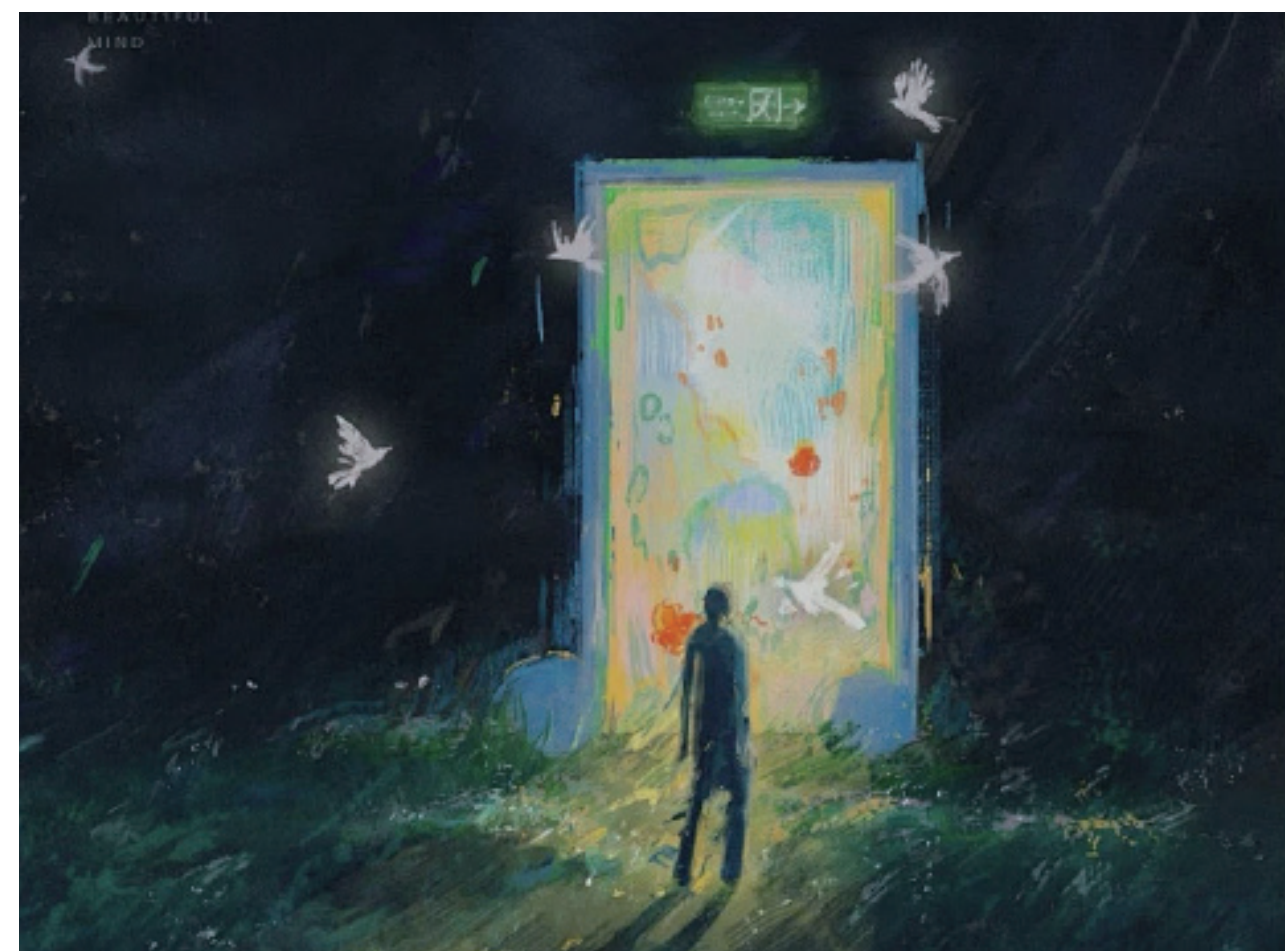
Leo Niu, Karin Peng, Joanna Wang, Hazel Zhou

Leo is a person who is somewhat obsessive about planning, believing that making plans in advance is the prerequisite for an efficient life. Therefore, before traveling, Leo always likes to make as meticulous a plan as possible, from modes of transportation to accommodations, from tourist attractions to the travel time between locations, and from mid-journey rest periods to daily wake-up times. Leo tirelessly includes these detailed aspects in his plans. As a result, although Leo is keen on visiting unfamiliar places, he has never been caught off guard.

In March, Leo was going to attend a conference at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and he planned to stay an extra day in Hong Kong after the conference. As usual, Leo opened various travel guide websites and electronic maps to plan his trip. Soon, the day arrived, and with 1,000 Hong Kong dollars withdrawn in advance in Zhuhai and an Octopus card, Leo smoothly went through his conference and vacation—except for the cramped 7-square-meter room he spent 300 dollars to stay in, everything else went according to plan.

“Are you also going to Hong Kong?” Leo asked a week before the reading week, just back from Hong Kong, as he listened to the girls talking about their travel plans.

“Yes! But we haven’t really prepared much...” Hazel and Karin, sitting beside Leo, were



imagining their vacation with hearts full of excitement.

Hearing this, Leo frowned. He did understand the difficulty of navigating Hong Kong's complex road network—a challenge not easily met without preparation. He was all too aware of the girls' poor sense of direction, and he knew that they couldn't get their bearings even with the help of a map, let alone in Hong Kong, a rather unfamiliar place. Oh, kind-hearted Leo, help these girls out! After that, Leo took the initiative. He asked Hazel and Karin about their expected travel routes and told them some local travel tips,

such as exchanging Hong Kong dollars in advance, activating mobile roaming, and avoiding staying in expensive yet dilapidated guesthouses—mentioning this, Leo swallowed hard, clearly not wanting to recall that night's experience.

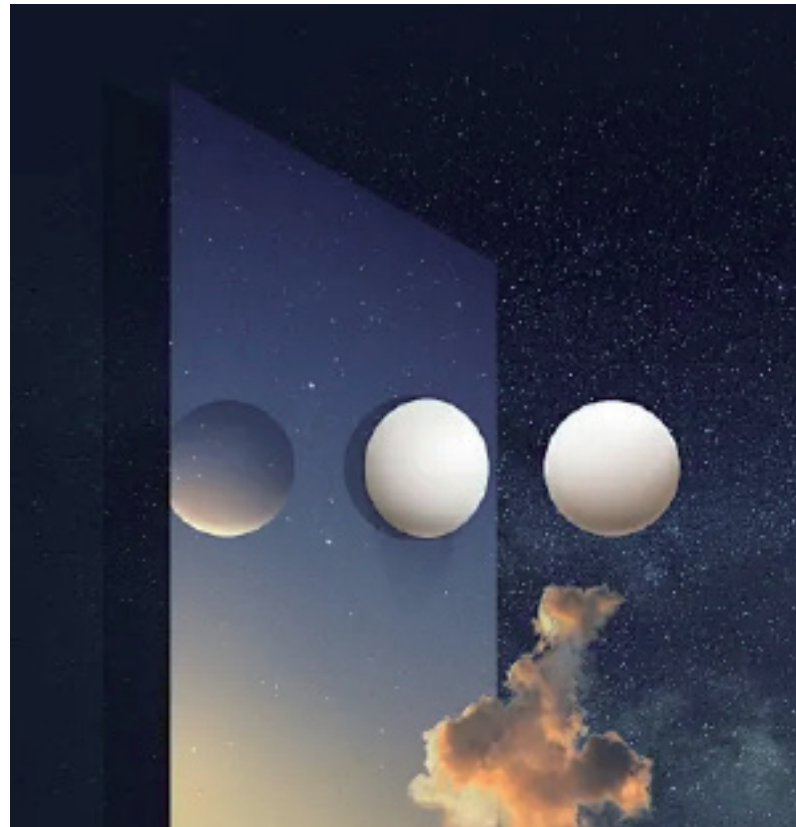
Feeling as though he had advised the girls like a big brother, Leo left reassured.

However, things could not be so smooth as Leo had anticipated.

The mishap occurred as soon as the two girls just arrived in Hong Kong.

"Why can't I connect to the internet? I've already turned on international roaming!" exclaimed Karin anxiously, staring at her phone, which was buffering with the spinning Google Maps loading sign. But Hazel appeared much calmer. She was so familiar with her scatterbrained friend. "Have you activated it?" she asked, in a cool manner. "Oops! I haven't!" Hazel did nothing but close her eyes. This was so typical! Such incidents occurred almost daily in their lives, to the point where she no longer felt shocked by Karin's antics.

After arriving at a local restaurant in the city center by bus, Hazel, and Karin began to prepare to indulge in the local cuisine. A troubling thought crossed Hazel's mind when the waiter handed them a paper menu. "Why isn't there an option for online ordering? I've seen people ordering on WeChat before!" she whispered to Karin. Watching Karin place the order swiftly, Hazel had to express her concern slowly. "What if we can't use Alipay? We only have 40 HKD in cash." Karin's actions visibly paused, and they exchanged glances. "We should confirm with that guy," said Karin. "Excuse me, sir. Can we pay with Alipay here?" "No,



Octopus card or cash only," came the reply. This answer felt like a pair of hands pushing the two girls into an icy cellar. Despite the dishes being promptly served by the waiter, they were unable to pick up their utensils to enjoy them. What can we do now? They read the same question in each other's eyes. "I heard people can top up Octopus cards at 7-Eleven. I'll give it a try," Karin said before hastily leaving.

"Hey! Can you help me top up my Octopus card?" Karin asked as she briskly entered the nearest 7-Eleven, handing over cash and the card. The cashier looked hesitantly at the four paper money. "I'm sorry, miss. Our minimum top-up is 50 HKD."

"What to do now!" Karin typed on the phone, sending angry messages, "The minimum is 50 HKD! We're short of that 10!" Watching Karin's hopeless steps approaching from outside, Hazel seemed to envision them being arrested by the police for not having enough money to pay. "I just saw a place across the street, where you can exchange Alipay for Hong Kong dollars!" Karin grabbed Hazel's shoulder, pulling her out of the dreadful fantasy. "I'm afraid the staff might suspect we don't have money to eat. You go this time."

Hazel picked up her phone and rushed out. Fortunately, although there was a slight discrepancy due to the informal exchange rate, at least they managed to get the cash they needed to leave the restaurant.

With a thousand HKD in hand, technically 850 HKD left after paying for the lunch, Hazel and Karin saw themselves as the richest people in the world. Holding a wad of cash, they walked along the narrow sidewalk confidently, as if striding on the stage. They downloaded an app called "City Mapper" and teased that it was so much more useful than the Google app that Leo recommended.

They shuffled through the bustling streets, following the map at first. Sometimes they stumbled upon a more interesting alley, with more attractive signs and graffiti. Forgetting the guidance of their navigation, they bore in unnamed alleys, as if destinations did not exist. Then they accidentally came across the biggest shopping mall K11, the iconic Victoria Harbor, the famous filming location of lots of Hong Kong crime movies, the Yau Ma Tei Police Station... With their legs sore and aching, they decided to return to the hotel they had booked.

"Holy cow..." two girls standing in front of a magnificent hotel, like a castle of Disney Land. With months wide open, they couldn't believe their eyes.

"You sure we are in the right hotel...?"

"Sure..."

"You said how much per person a night?"

"Around 200 RMB..."

"How much is Leo's shabby hotel a night?"

“300 I believe...”

Laughter burst out, with Leo sneezing at the school dorm.

It was the night that only Leo got hurt.

The girls settled down in the spacious hotel room, with soft quilts and floor-to-ceiling windows illuminating the beautiful twinkling night view of Hong Kong. They sprayed perfume in the air, named “Summer,” which they had just bought at K11 today. The perfume carried the refreshing scent of grapefruit, a smell of summer nights. Enveloped in the fragrance, they fell into a sweet, dark dreamland.

Back on campus, Leo, Hazel, and Karin met with their mutual friend Joanna, talking about their short trips, and their two distinct attitudes.

“I believe I’ll still prepare for the trip for the next time,” Leo said, unyieldingly.

“Come on, Leo. You know we have a great time!” uttered Karin, with Hazel’s agreement, “without even a little plan.”

“But it was like a heart attack! I can’t afford it!”

“Joanna, what do you think? which one will you choose?” The gaze of three was fixated on her.

Giving affirmed eyes to Leo, Joanna expressed her thoughts, “Hmmm...you know...you both have pros. Your well-planned trip does keep everything on track.”

“Of course! I prepare all the important things in advance!” Paused for a second, Leo swallowed hard again for a while, “well...despite the shabby hotel and Google Map with no use.”

“I’m with you actually, preparing detailed plans in advance may provide you a sense of security.” “Thank you, Joanna!” Leo stressed the words. “There is one person who gets me!”

“We’ll still tick to spontaneous trips anyhow.” The girls shrugged.

“Anyway, as long as we can enjoy every moment of the trip. Traveling step by step could ensure a rewarding experience,” Joanna said, with crooked eyes. “but getting lost is also a kind of pleasure, isn’t it?”

“Agree.”

“Approve!”



February 8th, Cloudy, with Slight Rain

Skyler Tang

On February 8th, a gloomy day with a persistent drizzle, I went to Wuxi and attended a funeral for my grandfather, who passed away on the evening of February 5th, 2023. It wasn't sudden bad news, my grandfather had been sick for years and had been in and out of different nursing homes during my junior and senior years in high school, and finally settled down in a nursing home established by a friend from my grandmother's church group. They stayed in Wuxi for three or four years, I have only been there a total of three times, the first time was at the beginning of the epidemic, and despite the difficulties we met, we still managed to pay a New Year's visit; the second time is during the Spring Festival this year, the nursing home suddenly notified us of the deterioration of grandfather's condition, may not last more than a week, my father bought the train ticket immediately, and we rushed from Shanghai to Wuxi for possibly one last look of him; and finally the third time, February 8th, it was the funeral.

The funeral was on a mountain in Wuxi, I took part in the entire procedure from the farewell to the cremation, to the burial. At the very beginning, my uncle and his family were half an hour late, which delayed the start of the farewell ceremony for some time. I sat on the stone steps of the funeral parlor and watched the guests coming and going, one or two kind-looking ones came and introduced themselves to me as being from the church and friends of Grandma's. I didn't know how to reply so I just repeatedly nodded my head.

When it was time to enter the mortuary to see my grandfather for the last time, I was shocked by the sight of the mortuary. Although my father had told us in advance that my grandmother had not booked a farewell hall for only a few guests. I was overwhelmed by the chaos. It is a quite small room with several bodies on carts wrapped in yellow body bags. Those carts were placed so randomly around the room that the staff had to constantly weave in and out of the crowds, and we were even bumped into by other carts on their way to the cremation room.

Finally, we found ourselves a place at a corner, and my grandmother led the church people to sing a song I never heard before. During the wait for the cremation, I felt sick. I felt like there was cotton in my throat and I could not spit it out or swallow it. I kept staring until someone called me to pick up the ashes.

As we made our way to the cemetery, the rain had stopped, but the clouds still hung low, casting a gray pall over the proceedings. When we arrived, the church people fenced off my grandfather's grave and put my father, uncle, and grandmother in the center. I stood away from the crowd with my mum hearing the priest reading his eulogy. After the priest spoke, the rest of the people began to sing a soft, unfamiliar hymn along with the accordion accompaniment. In the distance, a sharp pop of firecrackers from another funeral broke the silence. I looked

at the source of the sound and it was another group of people having a traditional Chinese funeral ceremony. The song reached the climax with a mingled sound of the accordion and the firecracker and then all the noise returned to peace.

The funeral came to an end through a luncheon. At the dinner table, my grandmother was laughing and joking with the church people as they loudly discussed permaculture. My uncle joined the conversation excitedly and talked about something about politics and religion. I felt an intense wave of dizziness again. The voices of people talking seemed to become distant and close. I had to leave and find a quiet place.

In the bathroom, I couldn't help but see my grandfather's images as I listened to the laughter coming from the other room. My grandfather was an extreme introvert. He didn't have many friends, and I'd never heard of him having any religious beliefs throughout his whole life. His only hobbies were his old erhu and a red radio. I knew the radio was in a white drawer in his house in Shanghai and the erhu was next to the TV in the living room. My grandfather was a man of few words, but every time he would silently take out his old erhu and play a song for me at my wish, I could see the pride and joy in his eyes. The first time we visited him in Wuxi, he told us he wanted to go back to Shanghai, the place his family and friends were in, and that he wanted to die in his hometown, in his home, but he never realized his wish on his deathbed. His funeral was surrounded by people he did not know and music he did not like.

Back at the lunch table, my grandmother and uncle were still chatting with those guests from the church in full swing. They seemed to have already put grandfather's passing away behind them. And as for me, there was nothing more I knew about him. All of a sudden, I could barely hold my tears. It was like I could see him, his presence fading away.

Departures, Returns, and Everything in Between

Letitia Zhang

I have noticed a frequently appearing theme throughout the whole Children's Literature course, which is about departures and returns. For instance, Alice leaves her sister out of boredom but finally "found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister"; Peter the rabbit departs from his siblings to explore Mr. McGregor's garden, and ends up going home and having the camomile tea. Children, by their very nature, seem to have a tendency to leave home and take adventures. In their eyes, the family may mean monotonous schedules and strict rules, so the action of "departure" is seemingly more out of the pursuit of freedom and autonomy. But my first experience of leaving home alone has taught me that, "departure" is far from a simple decision, and it is the return after various experiences that teaches one to truly embrace the complexity and diversity of the world.

When I was only a little girl, I started to dream about leaving home. It is not just what Max does in *Where the Wild Things Are* that he imagines a place that doesn't exist and leaves because he was fighting with his mom (though I did run away from home many times after being scolded by my parents), I am more "realistic." To be more specific, I want to leave home to explore the REAL world.

I am not sure where the idea came from. Probably since I was taken on my first air travel to Hong Kong Disneyland, I assumed that the rest of the world should be as wonderful as Disney, where princesses waving at me all along the way. Anyway, this was the reason why when I got the news that my school choir was planning to go to Europe for a singing competition, I immediately begged my parents to allow me to join. My parents of course said no at first, after all, I was only nine by then, and I never had a single experience of being abroad, let alone on myself.

To this day, it is still a miracle that my parents finally agreed. I cannot remember all the details of that trip clearly, but I assume the parting scene at the airport customs must be very much like the beginning of *From the Minotaur*. My parents were like King Aegeus, reluctant but unable to change anything, thinking I could probably die in a foreign country; while I was Theseus, with "bold, tender, and compassionate" all in my face. I promised to call them every day, so it would be less miserable for them than poor King Aegeus to wait for "those dismal sails" on a cliff.

However, it turned out that I was the pathetic one. I started to miss everything when I woke up from the very first sleep on the long flight. Things got worse during the travel. I was exhausted from the time difference; long bus rides are too boring for a child without any means

of entertainment, and not to mention the feeling of facing the same western food every single day. According to a friend who traveled with me, "You cried an average of three times a day." And when I try to recall that trip myself, I feel like I could still smell the scent of damp cotton from the time I buried my head in the blanket, crying.

Therefore, for a long time, I viewed that trip as a total failure. All my previous ambitions turned into a joke when I even had to call my mom to ask her how the kettle worked. I came back home with a heavy heart, and if I were Theseus at that time, I would deliberately choose not to take down those black sails.

The return was thus a great comfort to me. I was secure and carefree when I was again surrounded by familiar faces and objects. This is why I envision another possibility when reading *The Sea-Thing Child*: what is the meaning of stepping out of the igloo, if the sea is not where I belong?

But later I read Robert Louis Stevenson's verses about how children turn the dull environment into all kinds of adventures in foreign lands; I was also moved by the ending of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, where the elder sister of Alice escapes the tedium of reality with a brief glimpse of wonderland. I related these pieces of work to myself, and it dawned on me that whenever I feel trapped in my current life, I also continuously think of my "departures", think of how a little girl once tried hard to embrace the outside world while managing to take care of herself: I remember imagining the incredibly low clouds in the Alps with my friends as different animals; buying a glass candy from an old Venetian glassblower; having picnics in the Black Forest and exchanging phone numbers with foreign children in my halting English...It turned out that I had unconsciously learned to find the sparkles of life during the struggle.

Theseus left his country not to escape but to shoulder his responsibilities. Therefore, the act of leaving is not simply about seeking comfort, but about offering life another option, reminding people that beyond personal troubles and confusion, there is another world full of possibilities. By fully experiencing it, we can regain the courage to return, to seek, and to departure again, continuing the long journey on the vast sea of our lives.

Belated Remorse

Hazel Zhou

One afternoon, a couple of women suddenly break into the gate of Education First Shanghai, the Asian Pacific headquarters of an English education institution. The elder one seems to be extremely angry, as seen from her flushed face. While the younger one, hiding behind her, clutches the wad of paper in her hand. Curiously, I pause, on my way to pretend to fetch water but actually stealing a break, as a bored intern.

“I demand to speak to your manager! Right now! Let me through!” shouts the elder one. What a conversation straight out of a drama! I feel like an extra in a show.

The story seems to emerge gradually during my wiretap. The elder one Mrs. Luo, and her daughter Ms. Xu have been fighting for their rights for several months. The dispute arose from a series of courses they purchased at EF last year, with the expectation of gaining the highest quality tutoring experience. However, due to unforeseen personal issues, they were not able to attend a single session of these courses they had paid for in advance. Now, they demand a

refund for these unused courses, while EF adamantly refuses to comply with their request.

“We put our hard-earned money with the expectation of receiving a high-quality education. We haven’t taken these courses. Why can’t we get our money back? That’s unfair to us, as the consumers.” says Mrs. Luo, with anger and frustration. That’s reasonable. I say to myself, silently. Ms. Xu agrees with her mother, “We tried so many times. We are not living in Shanghai. It takes us 4 hours to get here,” adds Ms. Xu, “A refund, or at least a compromise could help, but they have been unyielding in their stance.” She laments. That makes sense. I’ll ask for this little make-up too. These are the basics.

In response to the allegations, the spokesperson of EF defends their position, citing the terms and conditions outlined in the enrollment agreement. “While we empathize with Mrs. Luo and her daughter’s situation, our policy clearly states that refunds are not provided for courses that have already been paid for. We held the class as scheduled, but you didn’t attend.” states the spokesperson, “these are the items on our contract and you have signed your name. If you will be regretful one day, then why did you write down your name at that time?”

So, why? This question hit me like a tracking missile, standing on the edge of the crowd, diligently following the development of the event, assembling a fence-sitter.

“How could I have known that these things would happen at that time!” cries Mrs. Luo.

That’s it. People nowadays tend to readily sign their contracts, while later dispute certain details. It seems we often assume that bad things won’t happen to us, so just confidently sign our names. Our rights are not fluid, like the stream, so why do we later need to fight to uphold them? Take Mrs. Luo, for instance. How could she, in her eagerness to embrace knowledge, anticipate the possibility of not attending the courses? People cannot truly have omniscience over their own lives.

Surprisingly, my reaction to this event seems to more focus on the life core. Perhaps life’s essence lies in its predictability. I conclude to myself.

“Beep, beep...” The phone in my hand suddenly burst a sharp ring, “Hazel, where are you? Why you are not here?” I grab my water bottle and dash towards the meeting room. If future risks are unavoidable, at least don’t let yourself fall into the predicament you create. “I’m coming now! Don’t mark me absent! Don’t deduct my salary!”



Why Do I like Shower Time?

Hazel Zhou

Most of the time before starting a shower, I just view it as a necessary task in my day, like a required schedule for labor reform prisoners. I always try my best to stall, doing things meaningless like browsing social media, with a sprawled posture, or sometimes even half taking off my clothes.

But the fact is I always take a much longer shower than others! This means that, although I shout to others that I hate taking a shower and I don't want to do it, I become an enemy of my mind when I step into the bathroom. Personally, I believe the dense water vapor needs to take the whole responsibility. The fatally attractive atmosphere produced by it makes me like a drunken person, with so many words to say, and no audience at all, making comments about everything or sharing ideas that I can't walk to others, sometimes my seamy side. The moment I step in, I will even prepare the topic I'd go to talk about like a fixed hobby, to the shower, the moist air, to my invisible fans, if there are so.

I found it several years ago that I was a crazy fan of talking to myself. The scenes could be varied, most of the time during shower time or before getting to sleep, or even just when standing in front of the mirror. I would become a super speaker! I still remember last night, I became the spokesperson for my favorite esports club. I gave an award thank-you speech to a global

audience, in the bathroom of UIC student dormitories.

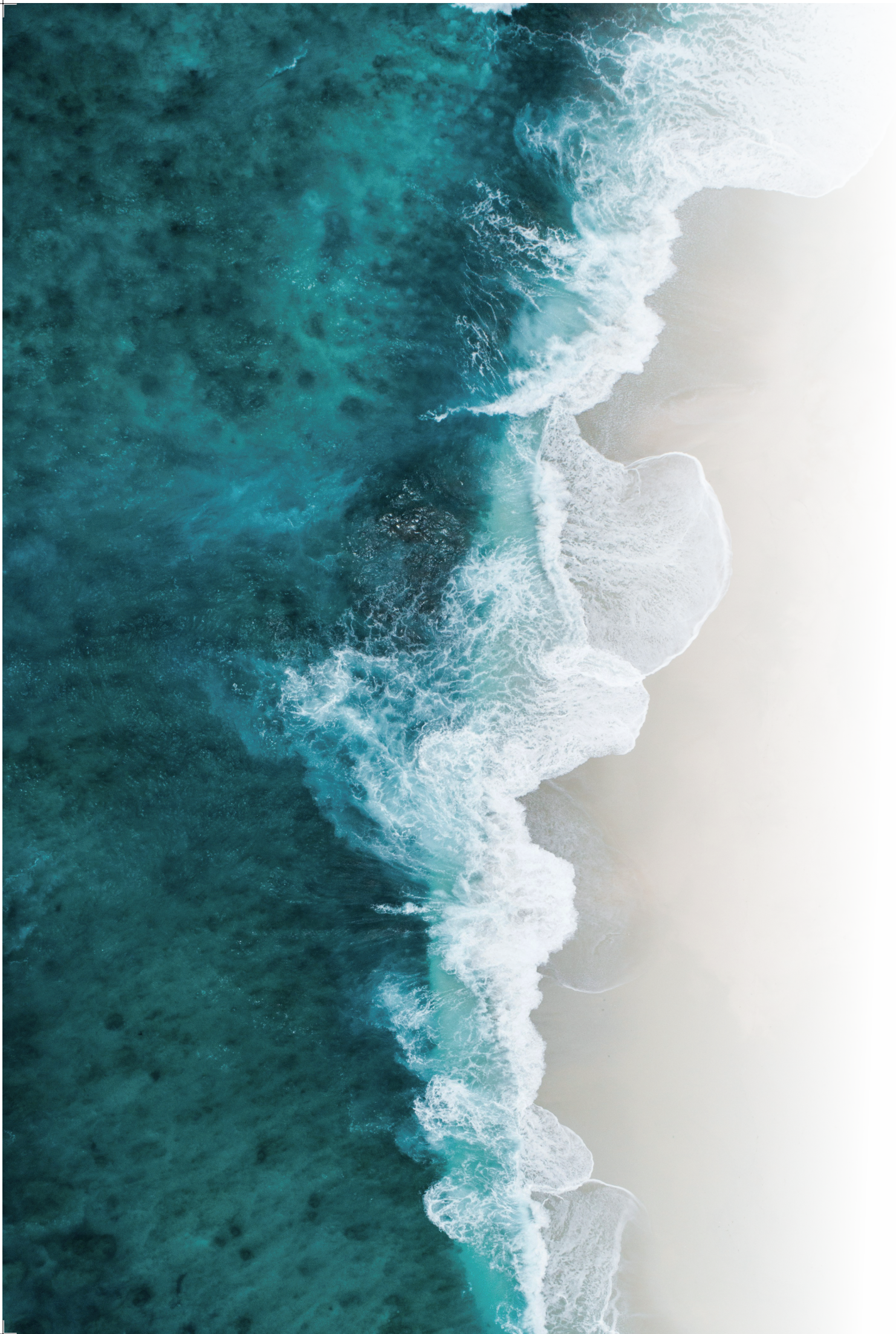
So far, I realize the thing I like is not taking a shower, honestly. The title should be Why do I like to talk to myself, while the shower is just a carrier. Perhaps, I want to allow myself to dive deeper into the topic I am thinking about, or I'm so dictatorial that I don't want to hear voices that are different from me, like an emperor.

Does talking to oneself mean he or she is a lonely person? This question suddenly comes to my mind at this moment. It might be more appropriate to give a well-informed answer from the perspective of psychology, less from me, a language student. I always believe the time I talk to myself is the most expected and cherished part of the day.

"Individual" is never equal to "lonely", in my personal idea. Self-communication could be more valuable than chatting with professionals, serving as a basic and stable foundation to exchange ideas with the outside world. It should be given priority to dig deeper innerly, and establish yourself, instead of soaking up information first.

Let's guess in today's shower time, who I am?





The Sea at Summer's End

Andrea Isabelle Andrade

It's fascinating how a single plane flight, train ride, car drive, or whatever means of transportation used to move from one place to another, can drastically alter one's thoughts. I guess the saying that the grass is greener on the other side will always stand true. Only yesterday, I was looking forward to leaving my family's apartment in Beijing after feeling trapped for the past three months. Not even 24 hours later and I was already homesick. I miss that apartment, the place that my family made into our home in a foreign city, in a foreign country. I miss my mother's cooking already, how I long to eat the meals she prepares for the family, as the four of us sit at our humble wooden dining table. Now I wonder why I desperately wished to escape those comforts—the people, the place, the routine that I've known for so long and have come to settle down in during the summer.

I ask myself this, now that I've left Beijing. Was my summer a wasted one? Were the moments spent with my family, all the unpleasantness included, after being away from them for a third of a year, not worth something? Granted that most of the days were mundane, spent indoors enduring the heat that provokes sweat to trickle down foreheads, electric fans turned on to counter the attack, and finding entertainment in the vast world that is the internet. The simple yet often overlooked pleasure of waking up late, enjoying a slow morning with a cup of coffee and an episode of the show being currently watched. The leisure of reading a book and then dozing off to an afternoon nap, and when awoken, a quick trip to the kitchen provides a treasure in the form of a snack.

However, I am no longer in Beijing. No longer surrounded by the familiar bustle of people going on their day-to-day. It's no longer my sister's rhythmic breaths that I hear beside me, instead they belong to my friend as she sleeps soundly. I can hear the mighty crash of the waves as they hit the shore and if I pull the curtains open, the night sky intermingled with the vast sea greets me. Funny, how the beach marks the end of my summer, when it's supposedly the epitome of summer.