

# You Have Nothing to Lose but Your Shame

## My Manifesto on Communism, Science, and Life

When I was a little boy growing up in a river valley of Guangdong Province, my mother used to regale me every night with the exploits of Our Wise Helmsman, Deng Xiaoping, and as a special treat tell me the story of the brave worker who made seventy-two jet engines out of broken baby carriages before heroically dying in the Korean War of Capitalist Oppression. But after my mother had gone to sleep, my wizened old grandmother would whisper me legends that she had heard in her childhood of dragons, demons, and emperors. My favorite tale was that of the Three Foolish Monkeys, virtually identical to the American story of the Three Little Pigs. In it, the first two monkeys are devoured by the clever tiger, after imprudently constructing their hovels out of clay and twigs. But the third monkey, remembering his Confucius, builds his house out of bamboo, turns the tiger into stir fry, and is blessed for a thousand generations. One day I made the mistake of telling my mother how much I loved this story, and how I hoped that when I grew up I too could be a teller of tales—or at least build a separate house for our large number of pet monkeys. My mother turned on me with fire in her eyes:

“How can you listen to this foreign propaganda? All you need to know are Four Precepts of Anti-Spiritual Pollution! When you grow up, you no become writer; you become hydrological engineer like your father, his father, and his father before him!”

That day I realized two things: peculiarly, my mother would speak broken English even when talking in Chinese, and more importantly, Science was destined to rule my life with an iron fist.

After the Great Helmsman commissioned my father to build a dam that subsequently inundated our village and destroyed our meager livelihood, my mother decided to flee with my grandmother and me to America. We stowed away in a con-

tainer ship carrying black market Hermès Jelly Kellies, made our way across the country by boxcar thanks to some friendly hobos, and ended up in an unventilated sweatshop on Mulberry Street sewing plus-size women’s tracksuits for export. Yet my mother never gave up her dream of seeing me a scientist: she finagled me into a prestigious public school in an outer borough (let’s call it “B\_\_\_x Science”) and badgered me every day about my progress.

But I slumbered through the after-school advanced organometallic chemistry sessions. Indeed, my penchant for writing comic sketches about my teachers and pasty, round-eyed Caucasian classmates only grew stronger. I wanted to be an irreverent wit, an Oscar Wilde minus the Irishness or flagrant homosexuality, who left people in stitches with his clever repartee and one-line zingers. And Science, with its cold, calculating grasp and icy rationality, had no place in my future plans.

My mother almost disowned me when I got into Yale.

“So, you too good to go to MIT, that it?” she shouted vituperatively. “What you do now? Major in English, be out on street like bum! Economy in downturn you know! And what with this stupid little ugly dog!” she cried, pointing to Handsome Dan. “Give me a little ginger, little hoisin sauce...”

“Mom!” I interjected in dismay. “Mocking those of Asian extraction for eating dogs is *so* politically-incorrect!”

But as my mother stormed from the room, my ancient grandmother pressed into my hands a small booklet that we were planning to burn for fuel to heat our decrepit apartment. ‘The *Yale Record*’ was the title of this magazine, and as I flipped through its pages I realized that Americans must treasure this volume like the Chinese treasure the Little Red Book, only they don’t deport you to the deserts of Xinjiang

Province if it’s not in your back pocket at all times. I vowed to seek out those wise cadres who ran *The Record* and aid them in instilling correct thought among the people.

My first semester at Yale saw some minor hitches. For example, when I tried to sign up for English 125, Major English Poets, I accidentally enrolled in Physics 825, Major Czechoslovakian Contributions to Quantum Mechanics. Boy, was my face red when I realized that the class was attempting to perform nuclear fusion instead of reading Chaucer!

Yet in the end, it all worked out for me. Being shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in Chemistry took care of my pesky Group IV requirement. And, after winning “Junkyard Wars,” I gained the confidence to befriend the people in my entryway and go to the screw with that foxy Taiwanese girl in Branford. So I guess Science isn’t that bad after all—it did get me to where I am today. Oh, and I joined *The Record* as well. The kind people there took me in and fed me free Yorkside pizza. They’re like a family to me. The sort of family that makes you sign over the deed to your house to them. But I like my new friends. They told me that if I work hard and fly right, then maybe I one day I can ascend to the pinnacle of power—editor-in-chief.

**KAU**

