

**Excerpt and update from my autobiographical essay, Where I'm Coming From**

Soon after I turned 18, I got permission from the draft board to leave the country, and spent four months hitchhiking and visiting different cities across Europe. I traveled overseas again the

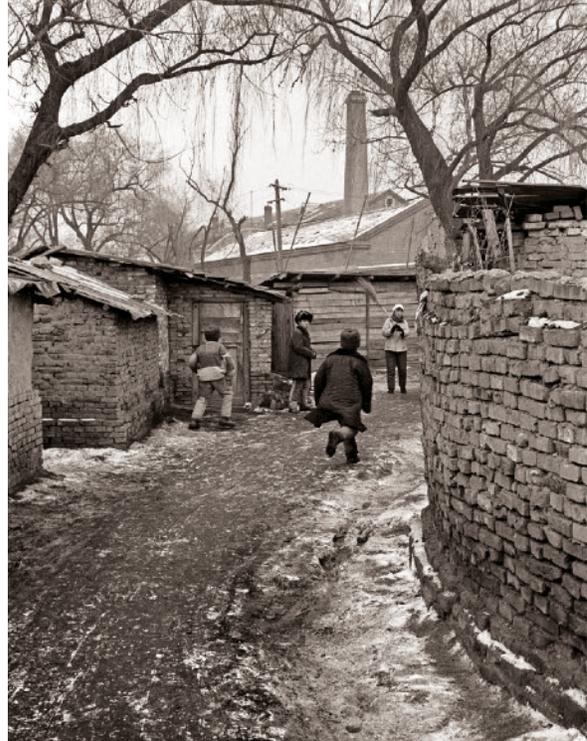


Doing pastel portraits on the street, in Copenhagen, September 1972.

following two years, soaking up the culture, and doing portraits on the street to help finance my travels.

From 1978 to 1981, I went around the world twice,

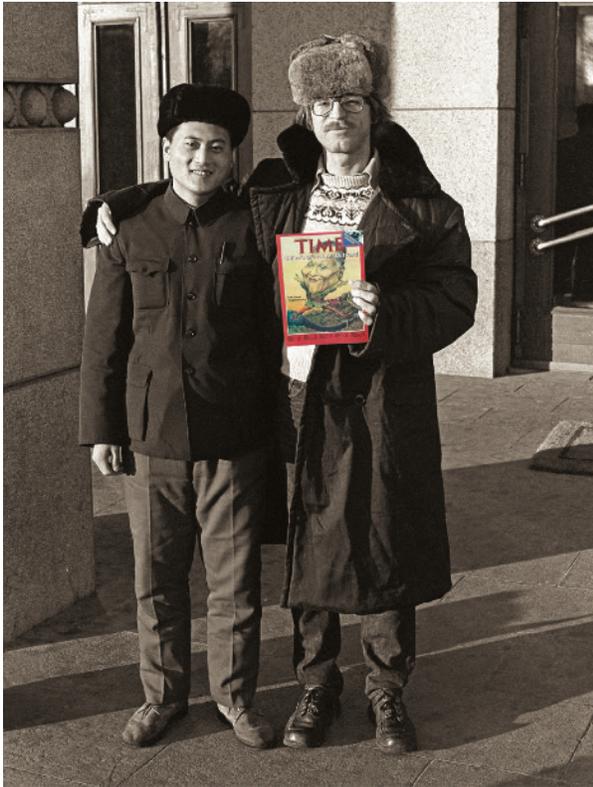
and worked as an artist in Paris. One of my most memorable experiences was in China, where people either ran away in terror, or stopped dead in their tracks to stare at me with dumbfounded curiosity. At that time, most Chinese lived in mud brick houses, and rode bicycles and donkey



Above: People fleeing from me, a “foreign devil,” on a frozen, dirt street in Jilin, Manchuria, China. December 1978.

Below: A few blocks away, in the main street. At first, every single person ran away, but after a while, all of them, along with many more, returned to have a closer look.





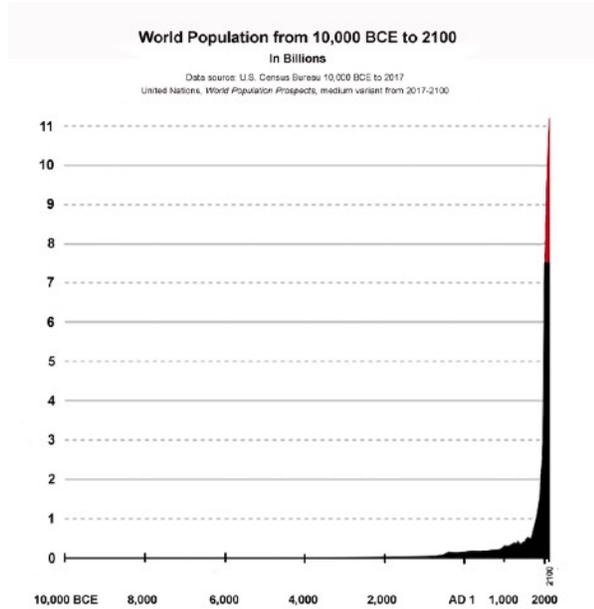
In Communist China, with one of our study tour's members, Mr. Wu. The suspiciously regarded Asian edition of Time Magazine that I brought from Japan, was titled "China's Great Leap Outward." It featured a caricature of soon-to-be paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, leaping over the Great Wall. December 1978.

solutions into one volume, *The Labors of Hercules: Modern Solutions to 12 Herculean Problems*. While still deep into the study of mythology, I thought it might be easy to compare the mythological struggles of Hercules with our modern problems. I'm still working on this book, but other careers emerged as a result of *The Labors of Hercules*, which I began researching and writing while working as a designer and builder in Los Angeles, after a productive career in fine art. In 1996, I proposed a choice-based marketable birth plan to the Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian governments, and met with various demographers on my third global circumnavigation in 1997 and 1998 that took me again to Asia and [Africa](#). The effects of global overpopulation—most apparent in developing countries—alarmed me. We complain about climate change, de-speciation, pollution, dwindling resources, overfishing, civil strife, wars, immigration, the refugee crisis, increasing regulation, and dozens of other issues, while rarely acknowledging that all of these problems are exacerbated by overpopulation, being constantly

carts on dirt streets, swept with stick brooms. As a stranger traveling in an insular land, marooned in the past, I got to see China before the one-child policy, gender equality, and economic reforms transformed it into the modern juggernaut it is today.

Living and traveling abroad gave me a different perspective on my own country. I could see how America is viewed by others by absorbing the local culture and making friends. It brought into focus that almost 96% of the world's people are not American, but certainly no less important. I had learned a little German while living in Vienna and Munich, and became semi-fluent in French during my two years in Paris. Later I would also learn basic Spanish while building houses in Los Angeles. Living among other people, understanding some of their language, and immersing myself in their culture, broke down my own cultural barriers and helped me to see people in other countries as they see themselves.

On Earth Day, 1994, I began a project to condense all the world's major problems and



A preventable tragedy is being ignored by our leaders: We are projected by the UN to increase our numbers by four billion in this century, and aggravate most of the world's problems, including global warming. Most will be desperately poor.

made worse by the huge global imbalance between births and deaths. Every day, 380,000 babies are born, but only 160,000 people die, leaving an additional 220,000 every day. Several factors contribute to complacency: 1. Overpopulation is relatively slow moving compared to daily news cycles. 2. Business interests encourage growing markets; 3. Those of us in developed countries see population

growth nearly reaching zero at home, and we tend to ignore how trends in the poor countries will affect all of us. 4. Many people ignore automation, increasingly longevity, and the fact that older populations correlate to greater prosperity, and conclude we need high levels of young people to take care of the old. 5. Ignorance of facts and causation: For example, Trump wants to build a wall to keep the world out, while cutting funding for family planning both here and abroad that will increase migration.

Politicians seem completely oblivious to the UN projection that Asia will add another billion people, and that Africa will add another three billion in this century. Huge waves of migrants will probably overwhelm democratic institutions thus increasing militarism and neo-fascist movements—one set of effects we can expect among a cascade of frightening consequences for every living thing on Earth. The worst effects will fall upon those living in the developing countries where gender inequality and poverty correlate to high birth rates. There are reasonable solutions that could be enacted now before it's too late, but the world is not paying attention.

Overpopulation severely impacts climate change. In this case, the [world has been well aware](#) of the problem of increasing carbon dioxide emissions due to burning fossil fuels for four decades, but American politicians have preferred to let their corporate masters in the oil-and-gas industry dictate policy. Like President Reagan, and all the Republican presidents since, Trump has disregarded the scientific consensus on the dangers of increasing carbon dioxide levels, promoted the worst carbon-emitting energy sources, and denigrated alternative energy. Republicans, often with Democratic acquiescence, have wreaked havoc on laws and institutions protecting the environment. In Reagan's case, he literally and symbolically had the 32 solar thermal panels,

which Carter had installed, removed from the roof of the White House. At the behest of fossil fuel companies, and despite hollow promises, President George H.W. Bush blocked an agreement at the Noordwijk conference in the Netherlands in November 1989 to set a hard, binding target of emissions reductions. Horrifically, and perhaps irrevocably, as much greenhouse gas has been emitted since that date, as in all of previous recorded human history. The oil-and-gas industry, which was well-versed on the dangers of climate change since the 1950s, also went all out in a disinformation campaign to influence Congress to quash the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 during the Clinton administration.

### China Today

In 2016 China's economy was growing at three times the US rate. In Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), which adjust Gross Domestic Products for price differences, China's economy has already exceeded the United States, and it produces 27% of the world's carbon emissions compared to 15% for the US. This is largely due to China being the world's leading manufacturing country.

Because her population was so young in 1978, demographic momentum caused by so many women not yet having borne children, allowed China's population to increase by more than 400 million since my first visit in 1978. In other words, even after instituting the One Child Policy, China added more than the combined current population of the United States and the United Kingdom.

Today, China is approaching zero population growth and the median age is around 37, similar to current U.S. demographics. China is now officially pro-natalist, but due to the rising standard of living, Chinese citizens (especially those in the cities) are content with sub-replacement fertility. Some Chinese officials fear that an aging population will spell an end to its meteoric economic rise.

This should not concern them unduly. China's rate of economic expansion was unsustainable because ever-expanding human populations are also not sustainable. With increasing automation, the rise of artificial intelligence, and potentially radical life extension, aging populations are a good thing in terms of standard of living: Monaco's median age is 53, Germany's is 47. Niger and Uganda's median age is 15. Germany will still be a rich country when the median age is 60.

Of greater concern is how China crushed its budding democracy movement in 1989 and house-arrested its reform-minded Premier Zhao Ziyang for the rest of his life. This was followed by increasing consolidation of single party rule and authoritarianism, as well as intellectual property theft and disrespect of international conventions. By transparently practicing what it preaches in

terms of democracy and rule of law the U.S. can mitigate China's bad behavior by example. The Trump administration's dual policy of sympathy for dictators, while exacerbating a military rivalry is not in anyone's interest.