



# A Voice in Every Wind

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# About the Author- Qun Wang

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- Dr. Wang was born in Beijing China., and grew up in Shanghai.
- He received his B.A. and M.A. in English from East China Normal University in 1979 and 1982. In a fortunate turn of events, Dr. Wang was able to come to America and received his Ph.D from the University of Oregon in 1990.
- During his time at CSUMB, Dr. Wang has developed the popular English Subject Matter Preparation program for those who are on the path to becoming teachers. He is also the concentration advisor for Literary Film Studies, and teaches a myriad of upper and lower division Human Communication courses.
- Dr. Wang has also published over 80 articles and book chapters, including those found in *A Voice in Every Wind*, *An In-Depth Study of African American Playwright: August Wilson*, and *Race, Gender, and Class: Asian American Voices*. Dr. Wang is also one of the founding members of the Arthur Miller Society and Race, Gender, and Class Studies Association.



# A Voice in Every Wind-Brief Story Overviews

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*Angels of the Magpie Bridge*- This short story tells the tale of Lu Ping, a Chinese college student in Beijing who has made friends with American foreign exchange students. The American students introduce him to topics and things that are illegal or taboo in China, including pornography. He relates his circumstance with the folklore of the magpie bridge, where the Queen Mother of the Western Skies separated the married Altair and Vega due to her dislike of their marriage. The magpie angels were moved by their sorrow, though, and constructed a bridge so that the two could meet once every year directly after the Chinese Lunar year. Ping states that the Americans are these angels, as they allow very different cultures to find a common intersection

*A Coffee Maker*- This short story describes Chinese student Wang Ying's encounter with American accountant Sam Zuravsky in China. Sam's company in California had shipped him a coffee maker, and he needed to take a translator with him to see if the coffee maker was at the customs office. Initially, Ying is turned off by Sam's direct and blunt behavior, but his antics slowly start to grow on him. Things come to a climax when Sam thanks Ying for helping him with the situation, and takes him out to a Western restaurant. Ying drinks too much, and finds himself in Sam's apartment the next morning. Ying realizes that his bond with Sam has grown immensely since they first met, and both share a mutual respect for one another. As Sam prepares to leave the country he gives Ying a letter. Inside is a note alongside a blank check for Ying to pursue his studies in America.

# Overviews Continued

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*Double Exposure* - Focusing on Lu Ping's previous experiences, revolving around a dinner with Jenny's Family, is able to show his disorientation and struggle understanding a foreign nation. Ping constantly second guesses his actions in every situation, making rice with his friend, whether or not to side with Jenny's Parents, if he should make a pass towards Jenny, and finally the nightmarish flashback to the Chinese Cultural Revolution. While this chapter edges the concepts of sexuality it also reflects a self-identity crisis, wanting to be someone you're not and attempting to hold onto yourself at the same time. The dinner with Jenny ends with Ping thanking the family for their hospitality and fears he will not see them again. This last farewell mimics the farewell to what appears to be Ping's mother in China, where he nervously sides with the communists leaving his loved one alone.

*A Room With A View*- The author uses novel techniques— play with title, flashback, suspense, and an open ending to describe this story of liberation, courage, and freedom from corruption of humanity. The room, in *A Room With A View*, is a metaphor for perspective, mindset, and freedom. The room is too nice for the main character to be at home in China. He imagines soldiers, flashing back to a Chinese t.v. show involving how soldiers murder people and thinks, "how can I fight an invisible enemy and win?". This idea suggests the traumatization he and others have experienced in China, by the government, etc. He recalls his mother's suicide, another trope for freedom from an "invisible enemy". He draws a connection between reality and imagination, and how funeral music represents the link between the two to him, it is life or death. He recalls the three guides and five virtues that have instilled Chinese family values for centuries, suggesting the sense of unbending, patriarchal customs, and tradition that China proclaims. An old man says, "There won't be any peace if rules are broken" and rapes a woman whose child he murdered. Soldiers begin to invade the land outside the room as a civil rebellion takes place, people standing up for what they believe in are wounded by soldiers. The character's mind is freed when he sees others standing up for, and dying for what they believe in. The author writes, "He didn't care what others thought anymore", suggesting that the character has achieved freedom and courage to do what he needs and wants to do. "Endure and you'll have peace; Be content and you'll always be happy.", the character realizes, has become a Chinese motto of empty, controlling, words.

# Overviews Continued

Fortune's Fool- *Fortune's Fool* tells the story of Jeff Leong, a graduate student at Mid-Willamette University who is called at the last minute by the International Students Office to give a speech to the Knights Club for a \$150 dollar honorarium. Jeff is surprised and shocked because he knows nothing about the club, but he makes an effort to submerge himself in it anyway. Throughout Jeff's speech, he tells the story of how he landed upon a series of several fortunes that allowed him to be successful in America as a Chinese International student, such as his job at the Student Cafeteria Center, through which he meets Tom, a person who will become a very crucial aspect to Jeff being able to attend school in the United States. Jeff also goes into detail of how difficult it is for international students, specifically Chinese, to become fully submerged and a part of American culture and ideals, because they are so often overlooked in the education system. The story ends with a recounting of a school shooting conducted by a Chinese International student, via news clips, and the reasonings behind the homicide suicide. Qun ends the story leaving the readers to ponder whether the American Dream and ideal is actually fit for all who come to America looking for a better life, and how Asian American students are treated as others within the school system or ignored completely.

A Voice In Every Wind- The passage starts with Chen Wei, a graduate student at Mid-Willamette University, caught finding himself having to listen to his drunk friend, Gao Yong, ramble about wanting Wei to publish his diary and while simultaneously talking to him about the direction he should take in his career as a creative writer. The first section ends with Wei introducing the rest of the story as various entries from Yongs now successfully published diary. Yongs diary entries express his struggle as a Chinese Students in American Schooling and the hurdles and leaps he has to go through to receive the same treatment he thinks a native would already be offered. Yong also goes through periods of being grateful for the experiences and opportunities that being in America provides, but he also sees the difficulties it possesses for students like him.

# Identify Central Themes

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*Double Exposure* - One central theme in this book is the identity crisis felt by both international exchange students and first generation immigrants in the U.S. In *Double Exposure*, Lu Ping expresses the guilt he feels about preferring to use a fork over chopsticks when eating steamed dumplings, as well as his embarrassment at not being able to cook fried rice. Finally, he recalls betraying his mother to the Communists in China, an act that got him into East China University, which in turn allowed him to study abroad in the U.S. All of these contributed to the conflict he felt inside: Was he Chinese or American? Was he a Communist or a member of his family?

# Identify Central Themes Continued

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Fortune's Fool- In Fortune's Fool, Liu Ping has an encounter where he feels as though his status as a Chinese International student has affected the way in which he has been able to complete his education, because the Chinese language, as well as the Chinese study of American literature, is not recognized as being a justifiable and valid requirement the same way in which the Russian language or study is. In the Registrar's Office, he finds himself disagreeing with the graduate student advisor on his language requirement for the university, and in that moment senses a feeling of 'otherness' or outcasting because of his language education overseas. In the story, he even comments on the unfairness in the advisors explanations, saying, "...if Russian was on the list, Japanese and Chinese should be, too. Until very recently, the Russians, for goodness' sake, had considered Western literature "capitalist propaganda".' Pings acknowledgement of the ostracization eastern cultures face in the presence of European and western culture helps to solidify the disconnect he sometimes feels in his position.

# Which Story Do You Like The Best?

Tyler- *Angels of the Magpie Bridge* is one of my short favorite stories from this book, as I have read it multiple times throughout three of your different classes. I think it is very unique that you would integrate such a traditional piece of folklore and modify it to meet modern themes as it pertains to an international->domestic mindset. In particular, though, I like how you explore the innocence of the main character in stark contrast to the worldly American exchange students. By showing this captivation and pull towards something unknown and forbidden, American audiences can find a common ground and understand the mindsets of foreign exchange students and, to a greater extent, first generation immigrants as a whole.

Jeena- *A Voice in Every Wind* is my favorite short story from the book because it provides a very realistic and unchecked view into the difficulties that international students face when they come to America. Coupled with its raw humor and the realism in Gao Yongs Diary entries, *A Voice in Every Wind* helps give insight to the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and 'otherness' Chinese students feel while studying in America and making it on their own. However, he also goes through periods of self reflection and awareness where he is grateful for the opportunities and experience of being in America, while also leaning heavily on the American Dream ideal and that everyone can make it and become successful if they continue to work hard and give their all.

Tyrus- *Coffee Maker* is a short story that has an immense range of meanings from the adapting to a new mindset, a bond between two people, and seeking asylum from harsh social norms. While there is an ambiguity of sexualism in this story, I believe the focus is on a much broader topic of identity, and not just a sexual identity. The story is also able to set the stage of a historic period within China, and the mentality of a portion of the population. The ending of the story is what makes this story beautiful, and allows a window into Dr. Wangs life, which shows the amount of change he has endured.



# Which Story Do You Like The Best?

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Johnny: *Double Exposure* would have to be my favorite short story because it sounds like it will be about photography, but instead focuses on food for the first part, before recalling Lu Ping's betrayal of his mother to the Communists. I found the betrayal part especially fascinating, as his actions in that part are in direct opposition to my worldview (family above all, and anti-Communist to the bone), and it was interesting to read about how he dealt with that guilt, coupled with the uncertainty about his identity as evidenced by him knowing less about Chinese food than his American roommate.

Susan: *Angels of the Magpie bridge* is probably my favorite because it sounds like the beginning of love story. Not only between an exchange student and a new country and friends, but also the blossoming of a human being, which suggests an allowance for love to flourish. The liberation and self realization that the American students show Lu Ping, is indeed what humanity longs for and strives hard to reach such happiness in all aspects of life.

## Discuss The Portrayal of Characters' Sexuality in Some of the Stories. What Role Does it Play?

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In *The Coffee Maker*, Sam and Ying's sexuality is left intentionally ambiguous. When Sam and Ying arrive home from their dinner, Ying awakens to find that he is sleeping in Sam's apartment with the naked form of Sam in the doorway in front of him. Dr. Wang uses descriptive terms to describe the beauty of Sam's body, both before and after they have a (naked) wrestling match.

There are two possibilities as to the role of these characters' sexuality. First is the surface possibility that both characters are gay, and that Sam's actions have allowed Ying to realize that he is gay. The second possibility is much more symbolic in that Sam and Ying's interaction was one of Ying's first experiences with freedom. Ying states that with Sam, he didn't have to be phony or fake. He didn't have to worry about what the Government or his family thought. Moreover, he was free to act in a way that was natural to him. The exploration of sexuality, then, helped Ying to better understand the Western mindset and relate more to American individuals, including Sam.

Bonus: In which ways do these stories help further your understanding of international exchange students' experiences in the US in specific and those of the first generation immigrants in general?

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These stories helped further understanding of the experiences of first generation immigrants in general and international exchange students in particular using anecdotes about coffee, food and college to put a human face on the experiences and make them more relatable to American students.

Similarly, by looking at American commonplace concepts and items through a foreign lens, American readers are able to get a sense of how unknown these things are to people of a different culture. The Playboy magazine and sexual examples in *Angels* is an excellent example of this. An American is far more exposed to sexual imagery, terms, and discussions than an individual in a freedom-oppressed country like China. Therefore, Ping's reaction helps American readers better understand the mindsets of exchange students and first-generation immigrants.

# References

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