

## Those who can escape Shanghai

Written by Zitu Kinoshita 千千  
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Many Shanghainese were shocked to see images of Taiwanese actor Lee Li-chun (李立群) wandering freely around Taiwan and visiting restaurants as he pleased. This shattered Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda.

Just a few months ago, Lee was starving together with other people in Shanghai, including myself, during the lockdown. He learned his first lesson about how to run away from China: Keep your mouth shut and do not blame the CCP, even if you are at death's door.

Chinese citizens no longer trust the authorities, given that the draconian “zero COVID” restrictions were implemented without warning.

After several residential areas in Shanghai were shut down due to a spate of positive cases, rumors of another lockdown are circulating, and Shanghainese have once again begun to stockpile food, with the memories of two hellish months locked up at home with barely enough food to eat still at the forefront of our minds.

As rumors abound, supermarkets are being cleared out and people are grabbing whatever is left on the shelves. Nobody wants to risk being caught out like last time.

In today's Shanghai, the most malicious curse you can place on another person is not some pithy phrase spoken in a Subei dialect, but is instead: “Enjoy your retirement in a quarantine cabin.”

Confirmed cases are no longer being sent to public gymnasiums and temporary quarantine camps with one lavatory per 1,000 people; most are being quarantined inside converted shipping containers.

Open to the elements amid scorching 40°C heat last week, one such container quarantine camp in Shanghai's Huangpu District experienced a power outage and was left without air conditioning. For the people trapped inside those radiating metal boxes, it must have felt like a

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modern form of the “hot pillar” torture treatment used in ancient China.

The Shanghai government recently introduced a new rule requiring two polymerase chain reaction tests every three days in certain districts, a nasty reminder of the daily testing regime in March. In this sweltering heat, being forced out of bed at 6am after a fitful night's sleep by megaphone-wielding health officials is a fresh form of torture to endure.

Still, I am one of the lucky ones. I have not lost my income. On the day that the lockdown was lifted last month, the streets were a flurry of activity as the owners of shops and restaurants immediately began to hurriedly pack up and move out. They will not be coming back.

Today, I can count the remaining stores and restaurants in my area on the fingers of one hand. One street is completely empty.

It is richly ironic that tech companies such as Bilibili, Alibaba, ByteDance, miHoYo and Meituan are all proud of offering high pay, albeit under an environment of long working hours. What did they provide their employees during the lockdown? Layoffs. At the end of the lockdown, employees simply returned to their offices to collect their personal belongings.

Now these companies cannot afford to keep staff on the payroll anymore, all because of these draconian and insane COVID-19 restrictions.

Engineers such as myself are in a better position than blue-collar workers, especially those who were sent to quarantine camps or were infected by COVID-19. No factory will now accept them. It is not that the factory owners are unenlightened. If just one positive case is discovered, the entire factory would be shut down for another week. They simply cannot take the losses anymore.

Readers will probably find it hard to believe that there is a “do not mention the lockdown” rule in Shanghai. Seriously, it is true.

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The official name for this period is “whole city activity freeze.” You also cannot share your experience with your friends living in other areas of China who went into lockdown after Shanghai.

Whether using Tencent or Yealink for videoconferencing, the session will immediately end if the word “lockdown” is mentioned. China’s artificial-intelligence-driven automated censorship really is first-class.

If the CCP brings back its extreme and unscientific controls for one of the mild, flu-like COVID-19 variants, it will kill the economy and make everybody here even more miserable.

There are some people who are advocating for another lockdown — including a person who lost their mother, who could have survived had she not been prevented from being sent to a hospital by the lockdown.

Many people are determined to leave China for a free country, even if that means accepting a lower wage.

The elites clearly prefer a normal life too, as Lee has demonstrated by returning to Taiwan with his tail between his legs.

*Zitu Kinosita is the pseudonym of a Chinese engineer who previously attended a university in Taiwan.*

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