

# THE NATURE OF CHANGE

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## Philosophical Musings

**Bo Hou**

### Change?

*All that you touch**You change.**All that you change**Changes you.**The only lasting truth**Is Change**God**Is Change.**—Parable of the Sower*

**W**hat is change? This is the question that I raised after reading this poem from my English class. Is change inevitable? This is the second question that followed up.

This poem makes sense to me in terms of the inevitability of change. We always change from time to time, and distance to distance. I am standing in my room right now, and if I leave my room in the next second, my position changes. From child to teenager, my height and weight changes; my knowledge expands (a different kind of change); and my language skills may change as well. Everything about me changes as time passes by. The-next-second me is probably not exactly the same as me at present, which applies to every object in the world. Therefore, change does seem inevitable. And only change itself is unchangeable.

But how about the repetition of changes? Isn't it unchangeable too? It is true that a tree seed changes all the time from seed to shoot, to low tree, to high tree, and to death. But if we consider the growing process of a tree seed as a whole, then the process itself repeats for uncountable times; When the seed grows into a tree and then to death, the seed from the dead tree will repeat the same process and grow

into a mature tree, which then dies and leaves a seed to grow. . . . The same applies to seasons; from spring to summer to autumn to winter and then to spring again. If we consider some repeatable changes as a whole, then they also seem unchangeable.

However, the reason why these changes are called changes is because they are changes to us, or me as an individual. How about for the people, animals or creatures not perceiving these changes? Are the changes that we perceive still changes to them? If a color-blind person does not perceive the change in color of the traffic light, if a pigeon does not notice its change in location, if a plant does not (arguable not able to) notice global warming, are those changes still applicable to them, or only to us, for whom I assume know the color, location and global warming changes? Is change objective or subjective? If there is an objective change, then this change is perceived from what perspective—an assumed perfectly healthy human being's perspective, God's perspective, or the universe's perspective?

### Should we trust history? What's the meaning of learning history?

There are two definitions of history: history as a subject and history as things that happened in the past. In this discussion, I will use the latter definition of history. If we understand history as things that happened in the past, then history is all about experiences, ours', yours', and our ancestors'—collective experiences.

Can we trust our experiences? Or can we trust the way we record our experiences? As I have mentioned in the previous posts, experiences are not trustworthy, but it's our only way to understand the world, as the basis of our knowledge. I will talk more about the second question—the way we record our experiences.

First, what's the meaning of recording our past experiences? Generally speaking, it is to prevent us from making the same mistake again. For this purpose, we have to record the past as carefully as possible, with as many details as we can. However, some people or institutions (especially the government) use it for another purpose: shaping our standpoint of politics, economics, and cultures for their benefits. Our past shapes our understanding of the present.

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And our present determines our future. Therefore, who controls the past controls the future, according to 1984. For this purpose, the tone of the recording language should be emotionally biased; the content that is against the purpose should be ignored or blurred; and some “true stories” should be invented to defame opponents or hostile countries, which reduces the authenticity of the information. I agree that the first way of recording history is better and should be trusted. The key concern, however, is we don’t know in which way the history we have now are recorded. If we consider those made-up history “facts” as real, then we will lose the meaning of learning history, which cannot help us at all.

Besides, even though we assume that history is recorded in the first relatively objective way, it still inevitably has its biases based on different starting points of narration. Once we decided a starting point for recording history, we have already, consciously or unconsciously, chosen the perspective that we are going to narrate, which may cause different conclusions with different biases. “For example, a writer on relations between the United States and Japan can start with Hiroshima, or he can start with Pearl Harbor. Even precisely identical narratives of events would look very different, if they start with the one or the other” (Lewis 1999).

Then, what’s the meaning of learning history if we know there are so many inevitable biases in our history? I am convinced by Lewis’s two reasons: “In the first place, it would mean leaving history to the falsifiers, unchallenged and unchecked, because they will not desist even if we do. And in the second place, more serious, we cannot abandon history, because whatever we may say about it, the historical process continues-not just versions or narratives or whatever

may be the fashionable term, but historical processes which continue to shape the present and affect the future” (Lewis 1999). We still need history to guide the direction of our future and we don’t have any other alternatives as far as I know. Even though these two reasons are not perfectly satisfactory, they are the best reasons that I have for learning history.

## References

- Lewis, Bernard. 1999. “In Defense of History.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 143, no. 4: 573-587 .
- Butler, Octavia E. 2020. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Abrams Comicarts, 2020.

## Do you represent your country?

Does a government really represent its citizens’ will? Could an individual citizen represent its government? Could political identity cover up the individuality? These are the questions that I ponder about. Countries or nations are human inventions, abstract notions. It sounds interesting to me for people who dedicate all of their energy to an intangible notion.

These questions originate from my daily discussion with others in the US. “Hey, where do you come from?” “I am from China.” “Interesting. So what’s your opinion about China?” Usually, when a person asks for my opinions about my country, they always imply another question: are you either pro-government or anti-government? Polarization in politics is pervasive around the world, especially among teenagers, and in many countries prioritizing free speech. I have seen many instances of overreaction of people when they hear opposite political opinions from them, for ex-

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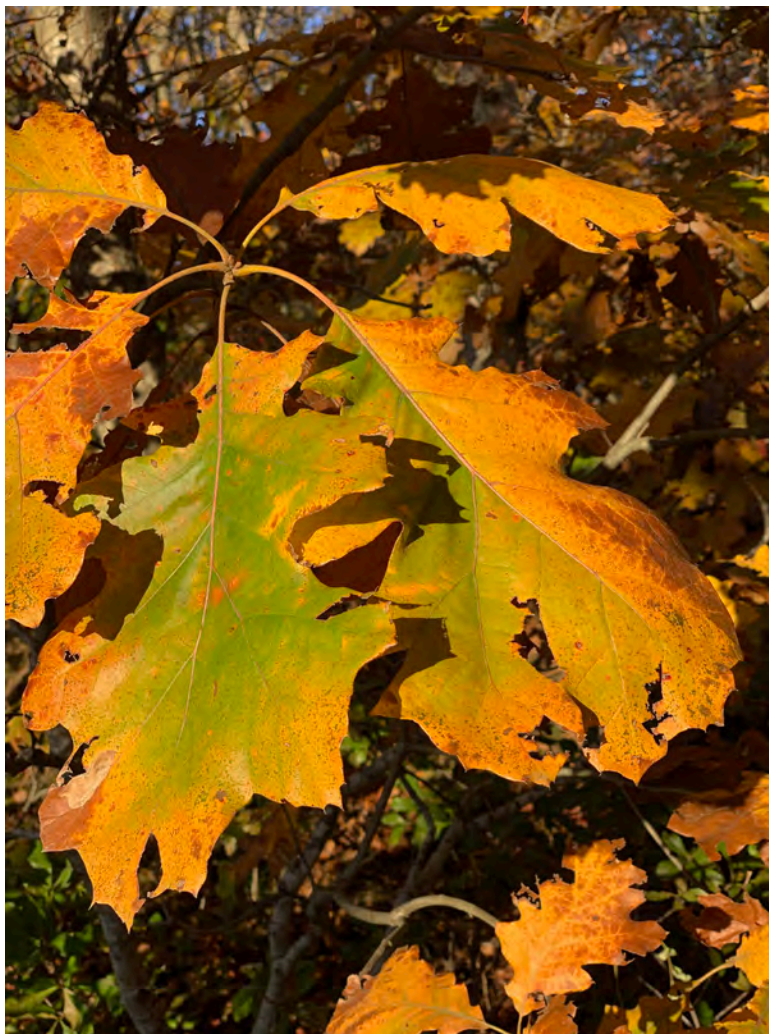
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ample mainland Chinese vs Hongkongers, Ukraines vs Russians and so on. It is shocking to me that people usually demonize those from the other political side, depicting them as monsters or evils, even though the people are aware that they are not. Actually, people from both sides are really friendly people in daily lives. It made me wonder why and how the political identity cover up our daily perception of an individual. And do we as ordinary citizens among millions in our country, with no executive power in the government, really know that much about our country's politics, for which only a limited number of government officials understand and usually prevent

updated information from being released to the public. Sometimes even those government leaders do not have a comprehensive understanding. Then what's the point of holding political debates with other ordinary citizens with limited knowledge or bias? Bias always exists. Even if I could read sources from multiple perspectives, I still have a bias, even though it is a less-biased bias. Does a government really represent its citizen's will? Could an individual citizen represent its government? Do we always know enough? Could political identity cover up the individuality? These are questions to be left for you.



DOES ANYTHING LAST?