

and an unbroken line of trucks pushing their way along the main street, heavy with construction material for new buildings in the old village. You could somehow sense that everyone was excited for the future, that things were changing, and that this was the little town that could. That may have been whimsical thinking on my part, but it was very much how I felt at the time.

Sad memory

A sad memory of China came later on the same day. Our team met and interviewed Yi Dade, a fisherman who had managed to do very well for himself. That was not the case for many other farmers, many of whom have been increasingly left behind by China's economic development. So there was much for Mr. Yi to be thankful for. Unfortunately, his successful fisheries business had caught the attention of local gangs, who bribed officials, and proceeded to seize his property on the banks of the river.

The showdown took place during a birthday party for one of Mr. Yi's sons. Two boatloads of men armed with machetes, poles, and axes drew up, jumped ashore, and attacked family and friends. In 15 minutes, Mr. Yi's fortunes had changed. His second son was dead, and his fourth had severe blows to the head that meant permanent brain damage. This was lawlessness in China, a land where some officials look the other way.

Yi Dade told me his tale while his wife sat next to him, weeping quietly and whispering repeatedly to herself, "My son was just a child." Incredibly, someone had thought to take pictures as evidence in the aftermath of the attack, and I examined the photographs of the stunned victims, the bright red of fresh blood pouring from their heads, confused expressions on their faces. Their bewildered looks seemed to ask, "How could this possibly happen to us? How could our government allow something like this to happen?"

China is a country of contradictions. One minute you marvel at the speedy transformation, the new wealth, the great hope of many. Another minute, and in this case powerfully felt because it can all happen in one day, you're disgusted

by the corruption, the systemic problems of a one-party authoritarian state, and the trampling of individual human rights and dignity.

Millionaires to paupers

That is what I have tried to capture in my five years crisscrossing the country. For a couple of years there, our team was on the road somewhere in China every week. We've spoken to everyone from millionaires to paupers.

Along with manmade news and happenings, there have also been major natural disasters, most notably the 2008 Sichuan earthquake which killed 70,000. But there was also the lesser-known high altitude Yushu earthquake on the Tibetan plateau. That hit in 2010, and I remember Tibetans from the time telling us how admirably hard the People's Liberation Army soldiers had worked during rescue efforts. There was real respect for the Han Chinese soldiers, many of them from poor backgrounds themselves.

The local Tibetans had been won over a fair bit, but the government missed the opportunity to build bridges when reconstruction efforts flailed, funds for survivors were siphoned off by corrupt officials, and authorities lapsed to their hardline selves. Today, Yushu is yet another place off-limits to foreign journalists, part of a huge area placed under lockdown following a string of self-immolations by Tibetans protesting China's rule. From the initial excitement of witnessing how the ethnic divide could be narrowed, the story of Yushu had turned bitter, and relations between Tibetans and Han Chinese there are at a new low.

Missed opportunities

It is precisely these sorts of conflicts, of good and bad decisions, of missed opportunities, that the country needs to take a hard look at in this critical political year. They've played out locally in the stories I have examined, but issues such as corruption and the rule of law weave from the fisherman, Yi Dade, through to the Tibetan victims of the Yushu earthquake, and all the way up to the country's political leadership.

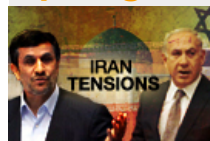
In Beijing it plays out on the grand scale, with the Bo Xilai scandal or the recent Chen Guangcheng case. But all of it is related, and it will be up to the Communist Party to make the leap. By that, I mean that the party needs to establish real rule of law and an independent legal system. The corruption problem solves itself once the law is worth more than the paper it is printed on. Many of the stories I've worked on over the years have simply spun around the fact that the laws, presumably passed by some officials who believed in them, have not been enforced.

The only way to do any of this will take audacity, because the party would have to place itself and its members under the same independent and impartial system. Leaders are not unaware of this dilemma - that's why things have been so slow and commentators, both inside and outside the country, have talked

"China has a lot going for it, and that is especially felt when you've spent so much time talking to the people there. They can be incredibly resilient, despite the fact that some have definitely received the short end of the stick."

- Melissa Chan

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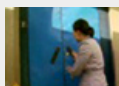
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so rocky and commentators, both inside and outside the country, have talked about what kind of institutional reforms need to start taking place.

China has a lot going for it, and that is especially felt when you've spent so much time talking to the people there. They can be incredibly resilient, despite the fact that some have definitely received the short end of the stick. Like any country, people also worry and complain, and like journalists on any beat, I've looked at those worries and complaints. It's part of the process of making a place I love a better one for its people.

I hope to be back in China one day, sooner rather than later. As for the government's decision to revoke my press credentials, I'd like my final note not to sound bitter or angry, because I don't want to look back a few years from now and read this piece and see myself having been like that. I don't deny I've been both at some points in recent days, but those sorts of feelings are best left to fade away, rather than stick around for the record.

After all, one expulsion cannot take away the incredibly fun, instructive, heart-breaking and heart-warming five years of almost 400 reports I've filed. That's a lot of stories on a lot of subjects from a lot of places in the country. And I'm grateful to have had this life-changing opportunity.

Source: Al Jazeera

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Table with 4 columns: People, Country, City, Organisation. Lists names like Yi Dade, Melissa Chan Al Jazeera, Hong Lei, Chen Guangcheng and topics like China, Tibet, Chongqing, Beijing, Communist Party, Liberation Army, Foreign Ministry.

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Real-time updating is **enabled**. (Pause)

 **Leon** 9 hours ago

Class.


China losing a great advocate for her people.

Thanks to Melissa for so so many laughs, tears and fears.

 Harold Tuaka and 7 more liked this Like Reply

 **pug_ster** 10 hours ago

Melissa Chan with her departing rant about how she thinks China should govern is exactly why she is a propagandist and not a journalist. Good riddens.

 Weixin Li and 4 more liked this Like Reply


 **Harold Tuaka** 39 minutes ago [in reply to pug_ster](#)

This from the person denying 'Black Jails' exist. I guess you are an expert on propoganda. Nationalism for breakfast?

2 people liked this. Like Reply


 **oscarino87** 10 hours ago

China's loss. Beautiful article.

 Aungsan and 3 more liked this Like Reply

 **Kc** 11 hours ago

Good ending note, Melissa. Best of luck!

 Frankie Leung and 3 more liked this Like Reply


 **Ken Fletcher** 9 hours ago

Beautiful article. So sad. You will be missed among those of us who love China, but also love the truth. And everyone knows who is in the wrong in this shameless situation. Including those in the wrong.


Thank you for the last five years and good luck for the future.


Bless you.

3 people liked this. Like Reply


 **Jet Age Hobo** 10 hours ago

Appreciate the article Mellisa. Felt the same way when we left China three years ago. A maddening love/hate relationship those of us who lived there feel for China.

 Frankie Leung and 2 more liked this Like Reply

 **Thelonious Mac** 11 hours ago

Great piece of journalism, and I seldom use that word for most news outlets. I was wondering something odd though. Does it make sense to refer to the Communist Party as a Party? Are there other parties? Isn't it just the Communist Dictatorship?

 Frankie Leung and 2 more liked this Like Reply


 **TiredOfBsToo** Top 50 12 hours ago

Time changes everything. Look at Viet Nam, the US fought it in the 60's and 70's and now trades with it regularly. Hopefully, one day the author will be allowed to return to a job and people she loved.


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 **Frankie Leung** 6 hours ago

I don't like to sound cynical. If you read chinese history, what you describe had happened for the 2000 years of history. The Chinese Communist Party is not going to disappear to-morrow. China will be muddling along as she did. Read some more Chinese history books and you will see what happen in front of you is what the historians having been documenting. I hope you can return to Asia, if not China, in the near future.


2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **OCTheo** 8 hours ago

Melissa! You're a great asset to Al Jazeera, an inspiration to all Chinese and a role model to every young, inspiring journalist.


Your years in China are one of great journalism. It is important to note that a government as powerful as China is afraid of you. As much as that gives people like me pleasure, I hope it strengthens your resolve never to given in to corrupt governments and institutions around the world.

Be strong! Be proud! You are a hero. And we are behind you 100%.

 Frankie Leung and 1 more liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)


 **何蟹** 9 hours ago

welcome back to china

 Frankie Leung and 1 more liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Raymond Ho** 12 hours ago

not sure if we have met at school but great job and keep it up! you can still cover china from hong kong or taiwan, at least for now

 Frankie Leung and 1 more liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Frankie Leung** 2 hours ago

Don't feel too bad. You may be posted to Taiwan, Singapore or Hong Kong in the future. You still can comment and watch China. Enjoy Stanford while you can.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Frankie Leung** 6 hours ago

Being expelled from China is a badge of honor as a journalist. I will offer you a job if you are desperate.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Frankie Leung** 7 hours ago

Melissa, you are my heroine. Come back to USA and write a book about what you witnessed and experienced. I will buy ten copies. Hope you like Stanford as much as I did.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Bee** 6 hours ago in reply to Frankie Leung


Obviously you are fascinated by her beauty instead of anything else. Go get a horse for your manly release

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **AI D** 13 hours ago

We fought them in Korea, then fought them in Viet Nam. I wonder where we will fight them next, probably in Korea again!


1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)


 **Irene Yue Zheng** 0 minutes ago


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You can state what you feel about China, but this is how China is. You don't want to stay, so you can go. It's not China's loss, but it might be your loss. If you don't think China's a good place to work, then you can have your choice. I don't believe a 1.6 billion people country can change because of anyone.

Like Reply



As Serag 10 hours ago

Ayman

Like Reply

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Reactions



noelsora 46 minutes ago

From Twitter

'Goodbye to China, country of contradictions' - Features - Al Jazeera English [@ajenglish](http://t.co/EYb1ljUZ)



NthCodePeter 48 minutes ago

From Twitter

MT: "Country of Contradictions" @melissakchan's goodbye to after China revoked her press credentials <http://t.co/gMV1tB1g> via @legalnomads



blackChinahand 49 minutes ago

From Twitter

One more retweet from JeromeBouchaud

RT @melissakchan: What do you write when you've left China after 5 years? My blog post, to the best of my ability: <http://t.co/AeVl2B4k>



AuclairBourgeoi 50 minutes ago

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filination 1 hour ago

From Twitter

RT @melissakchan: What do you write when you've left China after 5 years? My blog post, to the best of my ability: <http://t.co/mQ7JV0QC>



ullrich 1 hour ago

From Twitter

RT @alexco: 'Goodbye to China, country of contradictions' - Features - Al Jazeera English <http://t.co/g2lZKzjA>



Dave_as_Dave 1 hour ago

From Twitter

RT @lheron: RT @jilliancyork: Reflections on China from Al Jazeera's @melissakchan after expulsion from the country
<http://t.co/7KC0nRqx>



cryingame 1 hour ago

From Twitter

RT @jamesLmcgregor: 'Goodbye to China, country of contradictions' <http://t.co/yajO4YKs> Very classy goodbye from Melissa Chan



gallagher_photo 1 hour ago

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'Goodbye to China, country of contradictions' - Features - Al Jazeera English <http://t.co/bNoN3kFY>



amancool5 1 hour ago

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"@alexco: 'Goodbye to China, country of contradictions' - Features - Al Jazeera English <http://t.co/goHkSpXH>"



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