

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Heals wound, and time heals

When we were squirrely anak-anak — about our grandchildren's age — our elders made a lot of us understanding and managing time. Not *time*, mind you, as in *time management*. Not as in, how we weekly lectured our teenagers on allotting this many hours for studying and for exercising, and that many hours for playing and sleeping. Not like that. Not at all.

Back home, we were schooled on Time with a cap T, as in a proper noun. Time as an active actor, central to every setting. Time, as if a character in a book or in a movie.

Time, our elder Auntie Kris told us, can move you to the next minute or to our next tomorrow; Time can take me back to last week or last year or the decade before that. At this very moment, Time can be elastic, or be stubborn — as when someone sets down a time certain, as in “you have an appointment with Dr. Chen at 2:20. Sharp.”

In the west, it's primarily this latter sense of time we have to work with. As in: Be there on time. Or else. Luckily, both my iPhone's calendar and my office MS Outlook stick to these time demands too.

A short while ago, to get to the intent of this column, a woman important to city governance took me aside. I cannot say exactly what hour or even what day this happened. To tell you the truth, I can't recall whether we talked a week or two weeks ago. But, to be sure, the time of our talk had a world of meaning. In that Old World elder auntie way.

By Old World, I mean those peoples rooted to their rich soil, loved by their

ancestors, and bonded by our common Creator. By old school elder, I'm referring to our Manado folk, those pribumi populating that crooked little finger of Sulawesi island. We have hooked four millennia of commerce in peoples and products from Ma Hind and from Mother China, from ummah Islamia and from the Christian west.

For our folk, the metaphysics of Time are as true as calendar time and clock time. We wear those big chunky Lucien Piccard, Seiko, and Tag Heuer as much for fashion statements as for their chronological utility.

Time to tell truth

But let me return to my story — *what* this Portland elder told me, blended into *when* she told it, resulted in turning our little moment into a world of meaning. Terima kasih, Ibu — and I offer my love, in thanks for it. She handily worked time, same as our traditional aunties do. Four stars, they'd flash her if score cards were issued.

Time was central to the meaning of her message.

During a break from our business, she said something like “I know this guy. He's mispronounced my name for about eight years now.”

I said “Oh.”

“He's been a newspaper columnist for a long time. In fact,” she said, “he's always been the reason I pick up that Asian paper. To read his column” — or something to that effect.

I said “Oh.”

Oh (by the way) is an Asian spacer. *Oh* is intended to let enough time, and all those uncertainties that arrive in time, to show

themselves. *Oh* allows highly adaptive ethnocultural types to know how to effectively work with what's coming, as our shared universe of causality unrolls. As mentioned earlier, our islanders are used to Yemini and Chinese merchants unpacking their wonders; we know all about Imperial European and Japanese navies arriving under angry steam.

Oh actually slows Time's flow. *Oh* lets me sense then sort my way through what to do next. Sinbad the Sailor offering Mokka coffee and Prophet Mohammed's Teachings (peace be upon him) is a very different proposition from, say, the Chrysanthemum Emperor off-loading his ferocious soldierboys.

It eventually occurred to me that my kind colleague, this veteran Portland civic activist, was talking about me. So, I said “Oh.”

Taking time to tell it

When finally we settled into a common groove, she asked about a sudden unkind turn I took in an essay about — as she put it “letting people call themselves what they want to call themselves, instead of what we call them.” Por example: Somali instead of Somalian, or Lao instead of Laotian, or Shi'a instead of Shi-ite. She was happy going along with this reasoning when, without warning, I went off the rails and got into denigrating women with crude references to “metermaids” and the like.

“Oh,” I said.

Sensing my disorientation — were this a world welterweight championship match, she would've clocked me, KO'd me, right then and there — pero instead, she said in substance, “Well, it was probably 10 or more years ago.” A generous gesture. Again, well-timed.

“Oh,” I said, because honestly, I cannot recall what I said last night or last week. “Umm, was it after 9/11?” I stalled, meaning after America aligned much more with our shared world of hurt. A date after which many writers giving voice to communities and countries often reeling from American carelessness, all backed off a bit. Eased up, just like my kind colleague was doing with me.

I said, “I'm sure you're right, saudara saya.” My sister. “Truly, I cannot remember.” You know, we've recently

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completed 1,000 *Asian Reporter* columns. But what matters most, is how you read what's written. I am responsible for outcomes bad and good, for caring for all our families.

“I am often taught,” I went on to say, “how to be better, by my wife, by our daughter. And now, you're teaching me.”

“Well, you know” — she said in substance, because really, dear readers, I cannot recall, not word for word, what she said, or what my beautiful wife or our bright daughter said one week, two months, or 20 years ago — “You know, I kind of knew that's how you'd respond,” she said. “And I knew that's what would make this conversation possible.”

And there you have it.

Time to make right

And therein, we have all of it. Everything our ancestors and elders tried and tried to tell us when we were squirrely anak-anak. Time is a major actor on our shared stage, an active agent in this grand production in which our pretty little planet is only one of a million-million spinning players. And at center stage, here's a community activist deftly handling Time as a proper noun.

She could've scored, like The Champ Mohammed Ali would've, like Brazil's Black Pearl Pelé surely would've, while their opponents were mesmerized by their mastery of time and space. Baam. Match over.

Instead, she slowed time, letting our achy earth take 20 or so turns around our generous suriya sun, allowing me to grow into a person who might properly hear the pain of her disappointment, enough time to allow her anger to take a role secondary to her turning into a teacher.

Big in Asia, Line app hopes cute factor will win worldwide

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“People express their emotion with the characters so the depth of the interaction is different,” Yoon said.

Stickers also made Line the rare mobile messenger that rakes in cash, first by selling stickers for \$2 a pack to mobile phone users and later by adding new businesses such as games and a taxi hailing service. Users can now sell stickers they make themselves to other Line users. There are more than 200,000 people around the world who do that.

Line Corp.'s net profit jumped 50 percent in 2014 to 126 billion won (\$112 million) on revenue of 670 billion won (\$594 million), according to its parent, South Korea's Naver Corp. The app was launched in June 2011.

Line also cashed in on the rock star popularity of its animal characters through mobile games and an animated TV show in Japan.

In China, the company hopes the stores and other ventures will put it in a strong starting position in case authorities ever relent on their blocking of the app.

The first Line Friends store in China will open in Shanghai's Xintiandi shopping district in May, selling Brown dolls, Cony pens, Sally mugs, and other goods such as kitchen utensils, stationary, jewelry, and toys.

“We hope to resume the Line app service someday” in China, Yoon said. “If the Line app is resumed at a time when our characters are well known, it would be a powerful launch. We hope that in the countries where the Line app is not used actively, Line characters would promote the app.”

Apart from stores, Line is in talks to open a virtual reality amusement park in China. The first such park, where visitors can explore a virtual space with Line characters, will open in Bangkok this summer.

Line is also negotiating with Hollywood producers to turn its cute characters into an animated film for theaters

or series for television.

Line spun off Line Friends last month to operate the character-related business independently from the company's app business.

Though analysts are skeptical about the app's future in China where Tencent's WeChat is dominant, they say the merchandizing business could be effective in the U.S. and Latin America.

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My Turn: The Dumpling Complex

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thing.

In the past, before discovering the dumpling shop, we would usually have a bag of factory-processed dumplings in the freezer, so we'd heat them up and bring them to “Yappy Hour.” With the store-bought dumplings in hand, we would attend the party and let everyone try them. Our neighbors, as dear as they are, know nothing about Chinese food. They may say they do, but they don't.

How do I know this? One by one, they would pick up the dumplings and dip them into ... sweet-and-sour sauce. Or ketchup. Or in one instance, heaven forbid —

a packet of spicy mustard sauce.

So naturally, seeing Maya cook up a pan of my beloved dumplings for “Yappy Hour” was just too much to bear.

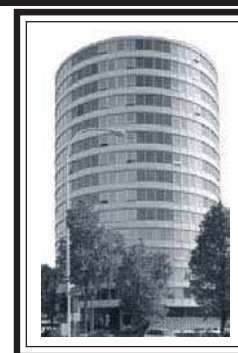
After blurting out the whole “dumpling-worthiness” thing, I think I followed with this: “If you think I'm going to let them dip my beautiful dumplings in a bowl of Tzatziki sauce, you're out of your mind!”

In the end, the dumplings were a big hit — inappropriate dipping sauces notwithstanding. But I tell you this: You can bet I'll always keep a small supply of frozen eggrolls in our freezer.

You can never be too careful.

“There is clearly an opportunity to take existing mobile properties to other channels and generate revenues,” said Jack Kent, director of mobile media research at IHS Technology.

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