



CHANGE

One changes, and almost without realizing it. This becomes clear when we find out that the diet is more or less green, or more or less red than before, and we notice that the company of people from this side of the world feels good, and we begin to have troubles finding the correct words in our native language, which doesn't matter because we already know other words and other ways to say the same thing.

Many things change. Our preferences for things and flavors and bodies and aromas change. I still believe that it is possible to go back and feel that things work well, but not for everybody. Actually, things work well, what doesn't work well are those who go back, because of course we return different, and in the sea of the cultural monochrome of before, one disappears without anyone noticing.

My Usanian friend told me that few months ago when he returned to Montana, after ten years living in China. And he also told me that there is a time to leave. It reminded me of that Spanish man, a professor of literature, who hated everything in his foreign environment and died without having returned to his homeland. "Do you want some advice?," he asked –I didn't want it but he gave it to me anyway. "Take the next plane back to your homeland or you will never leave this island." And, I don't know, apparently he was right.

So, yeah, my Usanian friend reminded me of that professor. The first time we spoke, I am referring now about my Usanian friend, he told me that he wouldn't fight me because, judging by the way I stand when talking to another human being, I could cause him some concussion that would leave him a vegetable for life. That might be true, but I prefer not to fight. It's dangerous, and although one might win the fight, the blows that one receives hurt, and in the end, you may be the one to blame. So, I chose peace instead.

I thought the same of him. He was a bit shorter than me, bald, and had a wide back. Each shoulder was almost the

size of my head. In Montana, he had cut firewood from the age of five until he turned thirty and came to China following his girlfriend, married her, had kids, and gained weight –both of them.

I think that's why they stopped having sex, because they stopped liking each other. She became fat and flaccid, and he also became fat out of drinking too much beer, and because they never talked about the issue, to avoid conflict, they became the physical representation of the Ciguanaba and Cipitillo effect. Otherwise, they were both beautiful people.

By the time I met him, he and his wife had been complaining about each other for a couple of years. She cursed women with firm bodies, and he, slender men who walked with their backs straight, and wore ironed shirts.

But as I was saying, this friend, a very good friend indeed, who would put his humanity in danger to protect a fellow human being in danger, looked like he could put a bull to sleep with one punch. So, it was also clear to me that I wouldn't fight him either. Luckily we became very good friends. I was very sad when he returned to Montana.

So, yeah, I was saying that one changes. This Usanian friend also changed. And although he returned to his homeland with his partner in life, with whom he fights daily, he told me that he feels like a stranger in his own land. China got into his mind and palate deep enough.

I understood him very well when he told me that there was little he could contribute to in a conversation with the locals, referring to the Usanians, who worry about local issues, and pills and countries they have never visited. Things that are now meaningless for my friend.

So this friend, "el gringuito" as I dearly call him, feels more alone in his homeland than in the foreign country that hosted him for ten years.

And this happens because one changes. In my case, I feel much at home at my sister's house, but that is because she has the ability to accept the world in its form and substance, and well, she has no problems with expressing her points of views, and she manages people very well, which makes her look like as if she has traveled the entire world. Not everyone is that lucky though, but I am.

That does not mean that I have not changed. Twenty-five years of exile made me a person different from those of my youth. And now that I have returned to my land of exile, I have felt the almost natal affinity I have with those who live in Shanghai, and I do not mean only the locals.

It's true that here, love dresses in many different colors, but I came to realize that love could also have a single familiar tone every day. The colorfulness of love, as I see it now that I have returned, seems not to be in the rainbow of temporary options, but in the affinity of two colors that, when mixed, unite their individual nuances, and create an infinite range of tints and tones that recreate themselves with each daily encounter.

I thought it was not possible, but now I believe that you can create a rainbow from a bicolor set.

So, yeah, I was saying that one changes, and it's good to realize that life, and triumph, and things of value, exist in small spaces, perhaps far from the homeland.

It could be from afar, and in the togetherness of two different colors, that life puts on the road the people to whom we truly belong, and with that, when we realize this universal magic, we stop being afraid of change and bicolor unions, and so we take off, free and in the company of that one other color, to live life as broad and pure as it is.