

## **iMigration**

THE END OF IMMIGRATION AND THE RISE OF A NEW GLOBAL PHENOMENON

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Smashwords Edition, February 2012

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“So, Where Are You From?”

I’ve struggled with this question and resulting self-identity issues for the larger portion of my life. Am I from Russia, Canada, USA, or China? Who am I and where is home? I’ve been through hell to find an answer that satisfied me. Then suddenly, something started clicking. The puzzle was finally solved and everything in the past made sense. Through sheer luck, coincidence, intuition, and events beyond my control, I have stumbled upon an idea that resolved it all. *The Solution*. Many of you will not accept it, but at least I want you to be aware of it. No matter what, it will not be kept secret.

PART I: iMIGRATION

# Chapter 1: iMigration

The purpose of this book is to present a new framework of thinking regarding global human migration patterns. The concept of *immigration* is quickly becoming outdated and a new concept, *iMigration*, is necessary to capture the important changes taking place.

*iMigration* can be seen as an evolution of migration trends on our planet over the past several centuries, the next step after immigration. There are, however, big differences and distinctions between those two concepts. *iMigration* is not merely an add-on, it is a whole new game.

Why am I, of all the people, writing this book? Well, having been an immigrant several times as both a child and an adult, I have experienced immigration and all that comes with it from the inside.

Pursuing the global lifestyle, however, forced me to be faced with contradictions between my thinking and my experiences. Simply put, a lot of things stopped making sense, and it took years to resolve those conflicts.

*iMigration* presents solutions to many problems faced by truly global citizens by introducing a radically new belief system. It's a view of the world that is quite different from what is commonly accepted. This belief system assumes that my present mobile lifestyle is not unique and "bad" in any way, but rather is normal and perfectly suited for my personality.

How did this belief system come about? What made the stars align?

Rather simply, this change in thinking was a result of a year of smashing success that comes not from money or fame, but from finding my own place in this world and experiencing all life has to offer. Suddenly, all of the dots in my past were connected.

*iMigration* demolishes the old beliefs and dogmas that were hurting and haunting me, that made my life miserable, and replaces them with concepts that empower and motivate me. I hope this book can do the same for you.

There was a time I felt ashamed of my flip-flopping behavior and an apparent inability to "settle-down". Not anymore.

I have been extremely lucky to have experienced the difficulties that I had, to be able to resolve them for myself and to share these solutions with others.

Others might call us, *iMigrants*, unstable, even crazy, and that's understandable. Instead of stability, our identity is rooted in shifts. We live and breathe change since repeated change is the only thing we ever experienced. I am convinced that I would be a completely different person had I lived in the same small town all my life. My whole "worldview" would have been a "small-town view" instead. I can't even imagine it. Who would that person, the "small-town" Andrei be? Someone else, but definitely not who I am right now.

Besides iMigration, this book introduces some other original concepts that I hope you will find helpful. If they seem too utopian, abstract, or theoretical, please forgive me. Let me assure you that I enjoy not just building castles in the sky, but also building sand castles on the beach. I try to remain grounded and only entertain thoughts that are useful in the present moment, not simply engineering a mental monstrosity.

Why has this new iMigration framework been so empowering for me? To me, power is the ability to first, see options, and second, to be able to choose among them.

It all comes down to thinking about yourself. If you think you are “abnormal”, that will have a disempowering effect on you. Everything else being constant, if you instead think you are the “new normal”, that will have an empowering effect on you. Why think negatively when you can think positively?

It is my strong belief that iMigrants are the prototypical citizens of the future, even though they comprise only a tiny fraction of the typical citizens of the present.

There is a warning I have to make here though. iMigration is not for everyone. Unless you fully embrace this lifestyle, there is a big risk your present beliefs will not only hold you back from maximum achievement, but will actually make your life miserable. I have seen people who are bitter and resentful instead of being happy and fulfilled, simply because they choose focus on the negative aspects of this kind of life. There was a time I was one of them.

They blame everything and everyone for their suffering while being stuck in a downward spiral of negativity. Attitude is everything, and if you’re familiar with the Law of Attraction, you know that negative attitude attracts negative circumstances.

Yes, it *can and does* get quite rough sometimes, but that’s part of the adventure. One of the goals of this book is to give you solutions for dealing with difficult periods, minimizing the pain, and moving on.

### <Identity Shift

As the plane begins its final decent into Chicago’s O’Hare airport, I begin to change my identity.

It all starts by emptying the contents of my wallet. Let’s see, what do I have there this time, after a year spent in China? Several red one hundred RMB bills, Jiao Tong University photo ID card, ICBC UnionPay debit card, Shanghai Public Transit Card, and even a Yoga membership card. I replace the papers one by one. Chinese money needs to be replaced with several twenty dollar bills. Got to have some cash just in case! University ID needs to be replaced with my Missouri Driver’s License, which acts both as an ID and a “private” transit card in this land. My single debit card needs to be replaced with two alternatives: a US Bank Visa debit card and a Capital One credit card. And finally, my Yoga card needs to be replaced with an Anthem Blue Cross health insurance card.

All right, done with the wallet! Now is a good time to take out my cell phone, and replace the China Mobile SIM card with a T-Mobile one.

As soon as I am done with the physical stuff, I have to get to work on the mental stuff. It's extremely important to make sure I don't say anything that might get me in trouble with the immigration officials.

First, I have to remember where I live right now. After all, I have to play a role of the US Permanent Resident, so I have to actually reside at some US address. I make sure to freshly review and memorize my former address in St. Louis, the apartment I moved out of last year, and also the address on my driver's license.

The fact that I didn't get any sleep during the fourteen hour trans-pacific flight doesn't help the matter. I don't know whether the feelings of anxiety and depression come from sleep deprivation or from the anticipation of having to go through checkpoints.

After the plane lands and I go through endless hallways, I am greeted by huge lines at the immigration clearance. As usual, I try to guess, based just on looks, which immigration official is the friendliest and is in good mood today.

The line is moving very slowly, and soon the loudspeakers announce that the IT system is misbehaving, having some kind of networking problems, slowing down the whole process to a crawl. People get nervous, with some worried about missing connecting flights. I have a connecting flight to St. Louis too, in just an hour, but I don't care about that. As long as I can get past this immigration obstacle, I will be a happy guy. Finally, after what seems like forever, it's my turn. I've got to stay calm and confident now, and not screw this up.

I walk up to the booth and present my Canadian passport and US Permanent Resident card, aka the Green Card.

"How long have you been outside the USA?" asks the bored official in a customarily authoritative voice. "Since April", I answer truthfully. What I don't mention, of course, is that my last visit only lasted around a week.

"What have you been doing in China?" - "Studying Mandarin", I answer truthfully again. "Do you have a job here in USA?" - "No, I am not working right now".

It's the fault of that darn slow IT system, I keep thinking to myself, that's why he keeps asking me those endless questions, dragging out the interrogation. "How did you receive your Green Card?" - "My parents came over on an H1B visa, and I got it through them."

"So you were born in Russia, then got to Canada, then came over to United States, and now you're studying Chinese? Crazy...".

With these words he finally puts an “Admitted - Department of Homeland Security - U.S. Customs and Border Protection” stamp in my passport and I am free to go. Got through, let the new adventure begin!

### <What is iMigration?

iMigration is a cross-cultural global phenomenon, not confined to any single country, a group of countries, or a continent. People who experience immigration are called immigrants. By the same token, people experiencing and living the iMigration lifestyle are called *iMigrants*.

iMigrants are not defined by any single race, age, culture, religion, education level, or nationality groups. Their best unifying traits are mobility, a hunger to learn, open-mindedness, and a desire for action. They want to get the most out of life, to experience it to the fullest. They are the new breed, a new generation of truly global citizens, citizens of the world.

Perhaps the best way to define iMigration and understand what it’s all about is to compare and contrast it to the centuries-old trend of *immigration* while introducing new helpful terms along the way. Let’s look at common traits of individuals actively engaged in iMigration.

### < iMigrant Common Traits



	Immigrants	iMigrants
Lifestyle Goal	To find a single best place in the world to live, and then settle down there	To find a single best place in the world to live <i>for the current stage in life</i> , and then move on
Attitude towards Change	Change is hard and painful, but something everyone must go through in the adaptation phase	Change is exciting and thrilling, something to look forward to in a new adventure
Home	Have one home	Have several Home Bases around the world, feeling at home
Career	Try to adapt to local employment situation and expectations	“Pluggable” around the world with their set of tools and skills
Work	Work continuously until retirement, being stuck in the rat race	Spread their retirement over the working years, escaping the rat race at least half the time
Money & Time	Value money over time. Spend time to earn money. Spend money to accumulate material possessions	Value time over money. Spend some time to earn money. Spend money to enjoy more free time. Accumulate life experiences
Social Life	Have a homogeneous social circle of other immigrants	Have a diverse social circle of immigrants, iMigrants, and locals
Culture	Try to understand and fit the expectations of the local culture	Try to <i>experience</i> the local culture by immersion, while being themselves
Security	Value comfort, security and stability above all	Value personal growth and learning above all, realizing security is an illusion. Embrace conscious discomfort
Self-esteem	Realize they will never completely fit in, and keep quiet	Assume their present life is normal and perfect. Express themselves with confidence

You could say iMigrants are just serial immigrants, in the sense that they repeatedly experience immigration. But in actuality their beliefs are so different that while moving their whole perception of reality is quite different. They don't experience immigration, but rather iMigration.

What other trends are common in the growing tribe of iMigrants relative to the general population? Even more importantly, which traits do *potential* iMigrants exhibit? Who is likely to become an iMigrant in the future, based on present character, behavior and values?

**Action.** iMigrants thrive on action. People with the action habit don't complain, don't criticize, don't over-analyze, they just do. They don't expect knowledge, or anything else, to be just handed down to them, or for a system to take care of them. They are pro-active and take responsibility for their lives. And the results just flow.

A guy from Australia in my Chinese class at Jiao Tong University comes to mind. He just moved to Shanghai with his wife, started a new job, bought a car (quickly learning to navigate chaotic traffic) and was really excited about learning Mandarin.

In fact, he was so serious about it he dropped out during the first month! Why so? Not because he was a bad student, it's just that he was learning much faster on his own, independently. I remember him telling how in just one day filled with conversations with locals he filled sheets of paper with dozens of frequently used words that he was now studying. He is precisely the kind of a guy who has the action habit that generates results.

**Adventure.** iMigrants don't like to settle because settling down inevitably leads to a lifestyle of routine and boredom. If actions become repetitive it's time for change, it's time to get moving. Being constantly on the move certainly adds elements of unpredictability to one's life, but it is this spirit of adventure, of diving into the unknown, that keeps us alive and thriving.

The day I quit my job at an advertising agency in St. Louis one of the managers asked me: "So what exactly are you going to be doing once you get to China? Do you have a job lined up?" As you can guess, my answers to these two questions were "Don't know" and "Nope". If I knew what was going to happen next, it wouldn't be an adventure anymore. Over-planning is the worst enemy of creativity and spontaneity.

You've probably heard a thousand times that the journey is more important than the destination. iMigrants take it one step further: *The journey is all there is*. The destination doesn't matter. Only the journey does.

**Being Pluggable vs. Plugged-In.** iMigrants can easily get a job in most locations around the world. But just because they *can*, doesn't mean they *do*.

**Change.** iMigrants embrace change and thrive on change.

**Comfort.** iMigrants prefer the conscious discomfort that comes along with learning and growth rather than the cushy comfort that comes along with stability and stagnation. They realize that comfort also equals vulnerability to change.

The more you get used to present conditions, the more painful any change in circumstances will be. The more you embrace change, the less comfort you will require.

**Culture Shock.** What immigrants often face after the initial euphoria of reaching the new land is a long transition and assimilation period, a time filled with confusion, self-doubt, and fear of the unknown. Unlike most immigrants, during the cultural transition period iMigrants do not fall into depression. In fact, the transition period is the best time of their life.

**Experiencing.** iMigrants value experiencing reality over understanding it. They experience life unfolding around them without trying, in vain, to understand the infinite complexity of chaos. They don't waste their time trying to fit-in and conform to social norms, choosing instead to enjoy the experience of a unique environment, unique location, unique moment in time, and a unique stage of their life, never to be repeated again. They also don't waste their time accumulating material possessions, preferring to rent rather than own.

iMigrants realize they can never really own anything, since they cannot own time itself. They value time above money. Having time, it is always possible to earn money. But having money, it is impossible to create time. Billionaires die too. Time becomes the most precious, invaluable resource. Time that can either be used to experience life to the fullest, or squandered without notice. As a Chinese proverb solemnly states, “Time and Tide wait for no man”.

**Home Base.** iMigrants consider the whole planet Earth as their home, and view the world as their oyster. Instead of having a single “home”, they have several home bases they can always return to. Keeping the bare minimum of material possessions at their home bases allows them the freedom to keep exploring, without the burden of extra baggage.

**Independence.** iMigrants are never ordered where to go. That makes them quite different from “Expats” and “Military Brats” who place faith and authority in the system (corporate or government) and expect the system to take care of them. iMigrant don’t like to be assigned, they prefer to be the seekers. Individual, and not the system call the shots.

**Living.** iMigrants differentiate living as opposed to merely existing. It is hard to explicitly define the difference between the two, but you know you’re really alive when you feel it. The same way you can tell when life slowly slides into a predictable routine, when it stops being an adventure, when days become chores that have to be done, the same way you can tell when life becomes uncertain, shrouded in mystery of the unknown, full of surprises every step of the way. It takes effort and courage to stop merely existing and start living, to get out of habitual loops of complacency, but it is absolutely worth it.

**Money & Work.** To an iMigrant it is an axiom that it is possible to live on half of your salary or less with creative money-saving solutions that are realistic and easy to implement (read more on these solutions in the Tools and Skills section of the book). Saving money is a guaranteed way to escape the rat race and gain time, freedom, and mobility which are priceless.

iMigrants don’t assign work the god-like status so common in modern workaholic societies. They realize that work is nothing but an exchange of social value, and choose not to exchange all of their time for money and material possessions. They exchange the minimum required and then enjoy an abundance of free time to make the most out of their lives.

**Settling Down.** iMigrants don’t settle and don’t set settling down as a goal. They challenge the basic assumption that selecting one place and settling there is the best way to live. iMigrants fully enjoy their present location but don’t get tied down to it. They relocate based on changing life circumstances and better opportunities. Over a lifetime, They live in many awesome places.

In essence, iMigrants thrive on change and mobility, not being content with stability and comfort of modern civilization. They don’t like to be tied down to a single

location or anything that resembles a life-long commitment. They also question the traditional expectations that society places on them.

iMigrants have to get creative when answering meaningless questions like “Where are you from?” or my personal favorite “When will you go back home?” For people who are not iMigrants, these questions seem really basic, and they expect a short and clear-cut answer. Should I answer the former question by saying I am from “Russia, Canada, USA, and China?” Or should I answer by giving an even longer list of cities I’ve lived in? The latter one is even more difficult. I am already home! Should I list my home bases instead and tell them of my plans to visit them in the future?

iMigrants are more likely to be renters than buyers of real estate. They are more likely to exhibit a job-hopping behavior rather than stick to a stable full-time job. They love independence and are entrepreneurial, starting their own businesses rather than building a career at a large corporation. They dislike small talk, office politics and other types of ass-licking. They embrace opportunity and risk, choosing not to cling to comfort and security. They are mostly young, but with some notable exceptions.

Of course, these characteristics are simply averages. There are always exceptions. I often meet individuals who don’t fit the stereotypical image of an iMigrant, yet possessing the same spirit of looking at the world with no boundaries.

After seeing both ups and downs, I realize that the benefits of my lifestyle far outweigh the drawbacks. When I fully embrace it, I embrace who I am. Instead of asking the question “What is the meaning of life?”, I ask “What is the life of meaning?” And to me, the life of meaning is the life of memorable experiences.

### **<A Note to Skeptics**

If you’ve read this far, you might have some doubts about the whole idea of iMigration. Is it real or is it just a figment of my imagination? Is it useful in practice, or is it just another theoretical abstraction? These are valid concerns.

As any theory, the iMigration framework has its limitations.

First, as any rationality framework, it is a simplification of reality, and not reality itself. iMigration is not a photograph, but rather a painting reflecting my inner vision of the world.

Secondly, this framework was born based on my own subjective experiences. My direct experience, being biased, might not reflect the ultimate truth. There is a saying “a wise man learns from other’s mistakes, while a fool from his own”. As much as I learn from others, the best lessons, the ones that really stick, come from direct experience. Reader beware.

As a social theory, iMigration has descriptive powers, but lacks predictive power. That is, I am uncertain if iMigration can predict future shifts in human migration flows.

Why did I have to invent a new concept instead of just using existing one's? The old concepts, like immigration, the old vocabulary did not make sense describing my present life. Creation of a new belief system is like the appearance of a new computer language, allowing you to solve existing problems in an easier way.

What's with the name "iMigration"? Are you tired of hearing about the latest iThing? Me too. I am not a big fan of passing fads. But it's the best description that combines both "Migration" and the individual choice to do it. The "I" does matter. I don't iMigrate for the benefit of humanity, I do it for myself.

Does iMigration have any practical value? Will it work for you? Ultimately, I don't know. It works beautifully for me. How do I know if it hasn't been due to blind luck?

I have to admit here that the last few years have been the best years of my life. Of course luck has played a role, but there is a saying that captures the essence of luck and chance in our lives so well: "Luck favors those who Try". If I didn't try, if I didn't go for it, I would not have gotten lucky. This book shows you what is it exactly what I did in order to capture all that luck.

Theories are great only if they can easily be put into practice *by others*. The point of this book is not to show that I have some kind of a special talent or skills to live globally. The goal is the opposite: to show you that it's not that difficult at all. You can do the same too. You don't have to force yourself to be someone else, try to become average, or have to fit-in. Instead of embracing the mediocre, you can leverage and embrace your uniqueness. The world is yours.

## Chapter 2: The New Normal

## <Push and Pull Motivation

Human migration is a given. It occurred since the beginning of times, since the Homo Sapiens roamed the African savannah.

Historically, migration happened as a result of some kind of a “Push”. Disease, hunger, or war was a brutal motivation to initiate human migration. In modern times, the “Push” motivation became gentler, involving social upheavals such as revolutions, economic collapses, and other social instabilities that do not threaten the very survival of individuals, yet make people move.

It is the “Push” (Famines, World Wars, Communist dictatorships) type of a migration that created the great waves of immigration America experienced in the last two hundred years.

Here is a great quote from Washington Examiner article “An End to Immigration”: “If you go back in American history, you will find that very few if anyone predicted that our great migrations—the great surges of immigration and of internal migration—would occur, and very few predicted when those migrations would abruptly end, as they usually do.”

Globalization changed everything. The world is now more prosperous, more peaceful, and more predictable than ever before. What’s even more fascinating is that the world is also becoming more and more homogeneous at a rapid pace, erasing the huge differences in lifestyles that once existed. As a consequence, there is very little “Push” motivation for people to migrate too far away. Let me give you an example.

A village on the outskirts of a megacity A is actually half a world away from that city in terms of lifestyle. Megacity B, physically half a world away, is very similar in lifestyle to megacity A. A resident of megacity A wouldn’t experience much change moving half a world away to megacity B, while a villager moving a few miles would see his whole lifestyle turned upside down.

Here are a couple of questions for you to ponder. Would there be any “Push” for a megacity A resident to move to megacity B? Furthermore, what kind of a “Push” is required for a villager to move half way around the world to megacity B instead of moving to near-by megacity A?

The “Push” motivation has to be a catastrophe. The motivation for people, living in the 21st century in a prosperous, connected world, to move somewhere is likely to be a different type of a motivation. Instead of being forced by the “Push”, they are more likely to be lured by the “Pull” type of a motivation.

Just as a “Push” type of a motivation is a characteristic of an immigrant, so is the “Pull” type natural for an iMigrant. What we are witnessing with the spread of globalization is the end of the forced movement of people and the rise of the willing conscious choice: the end of immigration and its replacement by iMigration.

It's this phenomenon that will make the waves of human migration in this century look quite different from the past.

So what kind of "Pull" motivates the flocks of iMigrants flying around the world?

### <The Big O: Opportunity

One of the best reasons to embrace the global lifestyle is access to more opportunities. Opportunities in all areas of life - education, career, retirement, adventure are multiplied when you start looking outside the "country" box. You simply have more to choose from, and more variety means better chances you will find a perfect match.

Hunting for opportunity means getting better deals, squeezing the most out of your time, money, and other limited resources. It's natural for us humans to desire a better life, and being dedicated to self-centered, individual pursuit of happiness is nothing to be ashamed of.

Understand that I am not talking about over-achievers here (smart, strong, wealthy). I am talking about regular people who are just a little more open-minded than the rest. From teenagers to grandmas, this new tribe doesn't like to limit its options in a quest for happiness - globally.

To make myself clear, let's go from general to the specific, and from theory to practice.

### <Education

A decade ago, when I graduated high school in St. Louis, Missouri, I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to study in college. Computer Science major was a natural choice since I was interested in programming for many years. But I had absolutely no idea *where* I wanted to study to get my degree. All I knew was that I wanted a top-notch education, to be taught by distinguished professors and surrounded by smart students. I wanted to be challenged. It is my philosophy that the best environment to learn and grow is where you are closer to the bottom of the class than to the top of the class rank-wise. My grades in high school and on standardized tests were pretty good, enough to get me admitted to an Ivy League school in the US, but not enough to get a scholarship.

At the time, my parents did not have the finances to pay \$40,000 for tuition at a top university. So I decided to compromise, going to a local community college for the first year, with the hope of transferring to a "real" university later on. Community college tuition was around \$2,500 and was almost fully covered by a state scholarship I managed to get. It was cheap, almost free, but it didn't solve my problem.

I was still at the top of the class, and I was still under-challenged, under-motivated, bored. I had to do something, and I had to do something drastic. I had to escape. But how, what could I do? Maybe go study somewhere exotic like Hawaii or Alaska to spice



things up? It seemed like my only alternative, considering financial restraints, was to be stuck at the low level of the mediocre US public education system.

Then I suddenly realized that I don't have to constrain myself to the US education system. My thinking was boxed, limiting me to only considering opportunities within the USA. As soon as I realized that, an answer to the question of what I really wanted to do popped up.

What I really wanted to do was to go back to my motherland of Russia and get my higher education in a system that always stimulated and challenged me, the system I missed so much. As soon as the general solution presented itself, the details were figured out without much difficulty.

The next semester, I started as a freshman student at the Lomonosov Moscow State University, at the faculty of Computational Mathematics and Cybernetics. Being a student at the top university in Russia only cost me \$2,500 per year, the same as a community college back in the States. The disciplines I would study, math and programming, were completely transferable world-wide, making me free to pursue career opportunities globally upon graduation. And being a foreigner, I didn't even have to take the rigid entrance exams! Talk about a good deal.

Suddenly, I was not at the top of the class anymore! In fact, I had to struggle to just pass the tests and the final exams. Suddenly, I was living in the environment where other people were smarter than me, some of them being the best in the world at what they do. It was tough, but it was exactly what I wanted.

Having completed my education, I was naturally drawn to start applying the huge baggage of knowledge acquired in earlier years. I worked at a couple of software jobs while studying in Moscow, giving me a pretty good idea of what that career entailed. I was satisfied with some aspects of my job and dissatisfied with others, but that made no difference in my decision of what to do next after graduation.

### <Geo-Arbitrage

What made the difference was opportunity. I packed my bags and left Russia in favor of the United States. The reason was simple: money. I was not satisfied working in Moscow and getting less than \$1000 per month, knowing that someone somewhere was doing exactly the same job and getting paid at least triple the amount. The opportunity to earn a lot of money was too tempting to miss. How could I waste it?

Call it geo-arbitrage, currency misevaluation, economic competitiveness, whatever, but it's a fact that people get paid hugely ranging sums of money for the same work solely based on where they are located. You can spend a lifetime analyzing the varied reasons for these discrepancies, or instead you could just act on them when you see them.

Yes, it's not fair, but who said life was fair? And who is to say you should not take advantage of the opportunities, no matter how far away they are from where you presently live? There is nobody stopping you.

If one side of the money coin can be viewed as the "Earning" part, the other side is the "Spending" part. After all, there is no point in earning if you never spend, so those two go hand in hand. However, spending money should be viewed as a separate opportunity. You can earn money in one place, save it, and spend it in another, taking advantage of the same phenomenon discussed above. Simply put, a dollar can go much further in a different locale, with its value "stretching" as you take it somewhere else.

As you might have guessed, I practice geo-arbitrage heavily on the Spending side as well. The money that I earned while working in St. Louis, USA could be spent anywhere in the world, but I chose to spend it in Shanghai, China. Here is what I got as a result, setting a monthly budget of \$2,000.

The lifestyle I enjoyed is best described as "living like a King". In Shanghai, China's biggest city, I was dining out in restaurants not just once a day, but every meal of the day, never having to cook. I was taking taxis everywhere around the city when I felt like it. Going to massage several times a week. Never had to clean my apartment either, with full housecleaning arranged once per week. Talking about the apartment, it was a cozy furnished one bedroom in one of the best neighborhoods in the city, right in the center of it all. Oh, I almost forgot. That price also included full-time language study tuition at one of the most prestigious universities in China, weekend excursions around the city and neighboring provinces, etc. You get the picture.

To achieve a comparable lifestyle in the United States, I would have to move to the American version of the "center of it all", Manhattan. And if you've ever been to Manhattan, you know just how expensive that place is. To live "like a king", it would cost me at least \$10,000 per month, or five times more than in Shanghai. Talk about a deal.

Now the critics, and there are always critics when you start living life on your own terms instead of blindly following the herd, will scream "But you're spending money that you earned in the United States!", like I'm committing a crime. Yes, I use one system to earn money and another system to spend it in. I take advantage of cost of living differences to achieve my dream lifestyle.

But so does every multinational corporation! The goal of every corporation, of course, is to make money. The only reason global trade exists is profit. It is the job of Fortune 500 CEOs to scout the various places around the world where resources, including labor, are relatively cheap and to build systems that utilize those resources to make products that could be sold at a profit somewhere else. They analyze differences between various systems and try to find a good complimentary match.

Take Wal-mart, for instance. It's founders, the Walton family, became billionaires because they took advantage of utilizing dirt-cheap Chinese labor to produce a wide

variety of household goods to satisfy the insatiable appetite of American consumers. It was a win-win deal. Chinese wanted to develop their industry and to grow their economy, and Americans wanted to enjoy an abundance of household goods. Remember, nobody is being exploited in a free market transaction. Every purchase, every deal is a win-win, no matter where in the world you're spending your cash. Sam Walton saw the opportunity and acted on it. You could do the same too!

In fact, you as an individual have many advantages in navigating a global landscape. Big companies are visible and therefore face greater scrutiny. You can stay under the radar and enjoy life free of worry of competition and of lawsuits. In fact, you are even more agile than a big behemoth corporation, you have even greater flexibility and mobility.

Ignore the hypocrites who object to your global thinking and your ambitious hunt for opportunities. You are the CEO of your life, the captain of your own ship, and you are free to fully embrace what the world has to offer.

### <Business

Mark is a calm good-natured guy who exudes self-confidence. He is in his early thirties and has a muscular toned body of someone who spends a lot of time in a gym. Mark was born in Michigan but spent most of his life in New York City. His education and early career included work in biochemistry, specifically genetic engineering, but after a while he decided this was not the right path for him. He realized that his true interests and passion laid in finance and started working as an investment advisor for a firm in New Jersey.

Meanwhile, his brother, who got transferred to China from the US by a large multinational corporation, was telling him how much fun he had working and living in Shanghai for the last several years. Eventually, Mark decided to dive-in and see for himself.

Mark was my classmate for two semesters at Jiao Tong, and I've got to tell you he is pretty serious about studying Mandarin. Typing all the teacher's points in a spreadsheet on his Mac Book, he does not hesitate to ask questions, be it the intricacies of Chinese grammar or peculiar cultural customs. But studying the language is not all that he is focused on, preferring to juggle several balls at the same time.

Studying for an advanced level international CFA (Chartered Financial Analyst) certification, his sights are set on starting his own investment management company. Mark wants to find his niche, specializing in China to USA financial services. He is very well aware of potential business opportunities in Shanghai, with Shanghai destined to become the world's financial center. Possessing true American spirit, Mark weighs risks and rewards carefully, and then takes action. What's the downside, and what's the upside?

## <Career Mobility

One of the benefits of living a mobile lifestyle is that you not only have more options to advance in your present career, but have more freedom to experiment in an entirely different field, to try your hand at something new.

What if you simply fell-into your present career by chance, and feel like it's not the right one for you? At the same time, you might not yet know what *is* the right kind of work for you, the one that will bring you joy, fulfillment and excitement every day. The only way to figure out is to experiment. Being an iMigrant allows you to easily do that kind of experimentation, while also having a lot of fun.

Staying in the same country, it might be very difficult to dabble in various occupations unrelated to your primary career, creating a sense of being stuck without chance of escape.

In my life I have reached certain heights in the software engineering career early on, but as the years went by, the work became more and more repetitive. I felt like I was turning into a robot, a machine performing purely mechanical tasks without even thinking. I wanted to do something else, something more creative and something involving more human interaction.

Being a teacher has long been a little dream on the back of my mind. In the US, switching from an engineering career and trying something new, like being a teacher, would not be easy. Even becoming a teacher in my own field of software development would require facing a rigid educational system, facing strict requirements like having a Masters degree (which I don't happen to have), competing with other candidates for the same limited positions and so on.

In China, on the other hand, being a foreigner made me an exception to rigid hiring rules. It was a piece of cake to find a software teaching job at a university. I didn't have to apply for an existing position, in fact the position was created specifically for me! In China I could even become an English teacher, something I would never be able to pull off in USA or Canada with my heavy Russian accent.

When thinking of unique career opportunities, Mike comes to mind. Just as Mark, Mike was one of my classmates at the university who stood out of the crowd.

Curly-haired, wide-eyed, and dark-skinned, he looks to be of southern European, perhaps Italian or Greek descent. Growing up in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a well-to-do suburb of Miami, he went to get his college degree in Orlando, a few hour's drive north. College years were one of the best, he says, telling me that the University of Central Florida was the ultimate party school. Upon graduating with a degree in finance, however, Mike found himself facing the worst job market in a generation. But unlike others who love complaining about the lousy state of the economy, he chose a different route and simply moved to a place with a booming economy - Shanghai, China. Heck, why not?

Like many newcomers, Mike started studying Chinese at the university, but on his own terms. He could care less about reading and writing characters, so he simply skips those classes. He is only interested in improving his conversational skills and therefore focuses all of his energy on spoken Mandarin. And, being a baseball player, he's got plenty of energy.

He is extremely social, and, just like me, likes to hang out not just with foreigners, but also with the locals. Mike loves discussing American politics, the democrats and the republicans, but trusts neither. He keeps all of his savings in Chinese RMB, doubting the stability of the dollar.

Mike's strategy of focusing on speaking, in less than a year, made him understand and talk to Chinese at a level well beyond all other students.

While having a time of his life, learning and experiencing a new culture, Mike has also started his own business coaching baseball lessons to Chinese sports fans (the game of baseball is somewhat of a novel concept here). And he has even bigger ambitions for the future, planning to franchise the sport of baseball across all of China, with professional teams in each major city.

In Mike's own words: "What have I got to lose? Worst case, I can always get a job here as an English teacher to pay the bills."

### <Adventure

There used to be a time when my younger cousin Vitaly was as local a person as I could imagine. Born and raised in an industrial town of Orsk, Russia in the steppes of the southern Urals, he didn't fly by airplane until well into his twenties. With his difficulties communicating in English, I had long written him off as a global adventurer. Boy, was I wrong.

In the spring of 2010, inspired by his short trip to visit me in China, Vitaly took off for a rock festival in the southern republic of Abkhazia, met some like-minded friends there, and proceeded hitchhiking across southern Russia and Ukraine, staying close to the coast of Black Sea. In the popular resort towns, he managed to get by with fun jobs like being a surfing instructor.

Vitaly fell in love with the spontaneous on-the-road lifestyle so much that his new favorite saying became "one *wrong* step, and you've reached your goal".

There is something magical about the people like Vitaly who are inspired by life. Not just inspired by what they do for a living, but inspired by their very existence, by life itself. They have dreams of the future, but fully embrace the present moment, exuding tremendous positive energy that rubs off on you like an infectious laugh.

After his Black Sea escapade, I figured Vitaly would return back to his home base in the Urals and get a normal job, take a break from adventure, maybe even settle down. Wrong again!

When I last talked to him, Vitaly sounded as excited as ever. Renovating his apartment, he plans to rent it out and escape the long Russian winter in Dahab, Egypt, a Mecca for backpackers and one of the top diving and windsurfing destinations in the world. Having recently fallen in love with windsurfing, Vitaly wants to earn a living as a windsurfing instructor. With a seasonal flood of tourists to Egypt, he'll have plenty of work.

Vitaly has a dream of sailing around the world on a yacht, and you can bet someday he will achieve it. Why? Because he is not stopping in his hunt for adventure. And now he is no longer limited by the boundaries of his native "country", his hunt is global.

### <Escaping Local Limits

Sometimes the Push and the Pull motivations are not strong enough to make you move, yet by staying put you are making the wrong choice. I see people stuck in such situations all the time.

While I don't envy the masses of inhabitants of the megacities caught in the rat race, I pity the common mentality of small-town folks. You could describe it as either close-mindedness or powerlessness.

When they describe their problems, their life situation, there is a note of hopelessness in their voice. They seem completely resigned to their circumstances. In megacities, people observe the fast pace of change and have at least a glimmer of hope of a better future, of more opportunities.

Small towns with their slow pace of life create a tendency for people to think of reality as fixed. Seeing little change in the external world, they accept their life, fate, and their place in the world. This kind of "slave mentality" is very pervasive and hard to change.

It is quite true that people do not change themselves, it is the environment that shapes people. Be we can choose to change our environment, a power many people deny having, perhaps fearing change itself.

I have a cousin, Sasha, who lives in a small mining town of Asbest, Russia. Since childhood he always dreamed of living in Yekaterinburg, a big city and a capital of the Ural mountains region. I feel his excitement when he talks about the big city, and even some envy for its residents.

Yet he doesn't move, being surrounded by people, including his parents and grandparents, who tell him things like "Oh, it's really dangerous in a big city, you will be robbed of any money you make". Or "the big city is too expensive, you'll never earn enough to make a decent living". With advice like this his social circle keeps him stuck, because they are stuck themselves.

I once heard a friend, who was my roommate in Moscow, complain about the dire living conditions in his home village deep in central Russia. He described in great detail the poverty, joblessness and lack of opportunity in the village.

Being my natural self, I asked casually him “So if the conditions are so bad, why don’t they just move to a better place?” My friend replied, with some anger and irritation in his voice, “Andrei, why is your solution always to move? What if they don’t want to move?!”

Well, if they don’t want to move, why keep complaining about bad local conditions? Complaining isn’t going to improve anything, much less let them escape negative, limiting circumstances.

### <Culture: Dealing with Averages

*“Common Sense is a bunch of misconceptions that you learn by the age of 18” - Albert Einstein*

How do iMigrants deal with people around them, people whose beliefs and lifestyles are completely different, and especially people who tell you how you “should” live your life?

Let’s begin by dissecting a phenomenon called “Culture”. What is culture anyway?

You could say culture refers to traits or behavior of an *average* individual. But there is no person who is exactly *average*, such a person doesn’t exist. In reality, culture is a commonly-accepted generalization. It’s a stereotype.

What does it mean to be an “American” anyway? Let’s look at a statement “Americans Love Cars”, which is commonly considered to be true, to be an element of American culture. It is certainly true for a majority of American citizens, who indeed love to drive autos. It is a necessary part of a majority’s lifestyle, who can’t imagine life without a car. But my sister, for example, doesn’t have a car and has no plans to acquire one, even though she can easily afford it. She prefers to take public transit in St. Louis, Missouri. She is an American citizen too.

It’s obvious that culture has little to do with our individual lives. Yet we cannot deny the existence of the majority and the predominant beliefs of the population we live in. The majority does make itself visible and does make itself heard simply because those are the people you walk by on the street, observe on the subway, and have lunch with at work. No matter how closed our intimate social circle is, we can never completely avoid social interactions with the rest of society.

If we cannot deny the existence of the majority, shouldn’t we try to adopt their habits? Yes and No.

Whatever culture I come into frequent contact with, I try to adopt its best traits and beliefs, disregarding or ignoring the worst. For instance, I borrow the intellectual depth of the Russian culture, while ignoring the deeply-rooted racist and xenophobic

traits. In the American culture, it is the entrepreneurial can-do spirit that strikes me the most, while I place little value on the materialistic over-consumption mentality. “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is a part of the USA brand that resonates with me on a global level, without being confined to any “country” borders. I appreciate the ancient wisdom of the Chinese and the richness of their cultural heritage, especially the language, but I disregard their tendency for a blind belief in authority.

Instead of thinking about the world as consisting of various cultures, iMigrants look at it in terms of lifestyles. Cultures are stereotypes that have roots in nationality and are polluted by associations with country brands and geographic boundaries. Lifestyles, however, have roots in individuality and have no borders nor countries associated with them. It is lifestyles that define individuals, not what their passport says.

As a consequence, I do not identify myself with any single culture. What that means in practice is that if I hear a person on the street speaking Russian, that doesn't mean I feel some kind of close connection to them, making it more likely to befriend them.

My friends come from all over the world, speak different languages, and I don't care what their passport says. I care what their values and lifestyles are. I have a closer sense of connection and feel drawn to people who are intelligent, curious, and adventurous. A culture doesn't have anything to do with it.

### **<Mobility Generational Gap**

iMigration equals Mobility. Mobility on a global scale.

Right now we are just witnessing the birth of the Mobility phenomenon. However, there is no doubt that with accelerated globalization and appearance of enticing opportunities, the allure of Mobility will be on the rise.

The world is likely to be split between two groups - those who never move and iMigrants who are constantly on the move, rather than having a large portion of people in between (immigrants) who move only once.

There will come a time when moving from country to country will be considered just as normal, natural and easy as moving between states and provinces within a country right now. Nothing unusual, just life with all of its twists and turns. It's just what mobile people do for various reasons and nothing to be concerned about.

You would not have to get a permission from anyone, including the government, in order to move. You wouldn't need a visa because there would be no such thing as a visa. No questions would be asked at the border checkpoints because there would be no checkpoints. Freedom of global movement will be considered a basic human right. Just as gender and racial discrimination in the civilized world is a thing of the past, officially at least, so will the geographic and mobility discriminations.

But as bright as the future looks, we still live in the present. And it is in the present that we have to interact with the majority who don't understand us. Especially



difficult is dealing with people who are close to you, yet belonging to a different generation.

Explaining the iMigration lifestyle to parents is just as futile as explaining immigration to grandparents. It's a generational gap in thinking about mobility! Too many of the assumptions the older generation of immigrants hold are no longer correct. The world is changing so fast that each generation can only hold on to its own vision of reality.

For my parents, moving from one country to another was extraordinarily difficult, a true feat of accomplishment. It was just as difficult as moving from one city to another, in the same country, for grandparents. And for my great-grandparents, moving from a village to a nearby city seemed nearly impossible.

Over generations, not just the geographic scale of movement has changed, but basic principles as well. Don't expect older generations to grasp those principles.

Many parents, especially in more traditional societies, where family bonds are much stronger than in the independent-minded American culture, have lots of issues with the global iMigrant lifestyle. Some of them are simply not used to seeing their kids only once or twice a year. Others want to impose their own values and control their children's lives on a daily basis, and that's kind of hard to do over the phone...

Often times parents are hypocritical, accusing their children of leaving them behind and of being selfish in their pursuits. My parents are that way. "How can you leave us here all alone [by choosing to go to China instead of getting US Citizenship]", they scream hysterically, almost in tears, forgetting that they did the same thing to their own parents when immigrating from Russia to Canada. They too left them behind and went half way around the world in an ego-driven pursuit. Even worse, they intended to re-settle permanently, while iMigrants never consider completely abandoning their home base.

There is no magical, quick and easy way to deal with those conflicts, something that would leave both sides happy. The worst thing you can do is try to please everybody. You have got to choose. How much do you value your own freedom? How much do you value pleasing parents? If you cannot do both at the same time, is pleasing your parents worth losing your own individual freedom? For me the answer is an absolute No.

I simply tell my parents that I am an adult and that I am living my own life. I am making my own decisions and I am willing to suffer the consequences of my actions. I consciously choose to live life on my own terms and value my freedom and happiness over suffering while pleasing others.

### **<Where is Home & What is Home**

It was very late in the evening and I was tired after spending 14 hours walking miles around the Shanghai World Expo. Spending several of those hours waiting in long lines at the pavilions, I dreaded waiting at another, final line right outside the gate - the

taxi line. Because the line was not inside, but outside the expo, it did not have the usual white plastic fence to keep it orderly. A couple of traffic policemen were shouting orders to passengers and taxi drivers to prevent chaos and line-jumping. Luckily, the line was moving quickly, with a dozen or so empty taxis arriving every minute.

Getting into the brand new Volkswagen SUV, the official taxi for the Expo, I automatically blurted out the address “Fanyu Lu, Jiao Tong Daxue”. The taxi took off, with the driver casually asking me whether I visited any popular pavilions like UK or UAE. Sleepily, I told him some of the highlights of the day.

Glued to the passenger side dashboard, as required, was his taxi driver license, with a photo and an ID. Casually glancing at it, my sleepiness suddenly went away, replaced with awe and curiosity. The ID was around 3,000, which, knowing a bit about the way this system works in Shanghai, told me a lot. When getting a taxi license, every new driver is given his own unique non-transferable ID, to verify identity and for occasional passenger complaints. The numbers are consecutive, with the most recent ones well over 300,000. All of the other taxis I took had numbers above 100,000, indicating relatively high turnover in the taxi business. This driver was one of the few remaining old dogs, driving a cab since the 80’s.

We chatted while I was snacking on the leftovers of my expo survival pack - a mixture of peanuts with raisins. We talked about the old times - Shanghai before private cars and traffic jams, before skyscrapers and sky-high real estate prices, before the flood of foreigners and the glamour of the Expo. Of course, with my very basic knowledge of the language most details of the conversation had to be filled by imagination, but nonetheless it was extremely engaging.

Suddenly, for the first time in a long, long time, for the first time in the last 15 years, I felt at home. I felt like I really belonged at this point and place in time. Belonged right here, and right now. In this present moment. Something shifted deep within. I was alive again.

### **<Home Base**

What most people, including immigrants, consider to be “Home”, iMigrants consider to be a “Home Base”.

Immigrants, relocating abroad, consider it a permanent move, and try to take as many material possessions, as much stuff with them, as humanely possible. They are leaving their old Home forever and need to establish a new Home from scratch. What they can’t take with them, they sell or give away to the relatives.

When my parents were leaving Russia to immigrate to Canada, they sold our house in Yekaterinburg and packed as much baggage per person as was allowed by airlines at that time, forty kilos per person! In addition, before leaving, they sent a dozen cases filled with their collection of books to Toronto. There was no coming back, so our treasured goods had to make the move with us. After all, there was only one Home.

iMigrants, on the contrary, don't limit themselves to one "Home", preferring instead to establish several Home Bases around the world.

To define a Home Base, let's look at what associations comes to mind for the word "Home"? A place that is familiar, safe and secure, where you know the people, the customs, the rules. A place where others know you.

What associations come to mind for the word "Base"? A base is something solid, physical, well grounded, permanent. Something you can count on to be there upon coming back. A storage of supplies available for your taking. A place to lick your wounds, sort of.

So what exactly is a Home Base? It is a combination of a "Home" and a "Base" concepts.

A Home Base is a geographical location you can always return to when the going gets tough or when you need to rest, recharge, and replenish your resources before embarking on future worldwide adventures. It is your regional anchor, consisting of a social circle of relatives and friends. It is a place you have a deep emotional connection to, a place with lots of memories to cherish. A place where you are familiar with the language and the culture to the point of being very accustomed to daily life. A place where you could easily find employment and support yourself. A place where you will always be accepted no matter what. A place to reassess priorities in life and figure out where to go next.

For instance, my home base in Europe is Moscow, my home base in America is St. Louis, and my home base in Asia is Shanghai.

What are the advantages of having several Home Bases instead of having a single "Home"? Home Bases simply give you more options and make it easier, psychologically and in other ways, to embrace the global lifestyle.

Moving half way around the world, you never have to consider your move permanent, like immigrants do, and never have to sever the ties. You don't anticipate you will never see your friends and relatives again, and thus have no pain of detachment. On the opposite, you tell them you will be back someday and you keep in touch while you're away.

iMigrants like to explore new locations, but they don't hesitate going back to their home bases. They don't look at it as going "back", just as you can never go back in time. It's always forward motion, a new stage in life, new challenges, and new opportunities.

Home bases are great for storing your material possessions. While you're away on a new adventure, you can store all of the stuff you've accumulated over the years like cars, furniture, clothing, and electronics. By leaving them at the home base, without trying to drag it all with you, you free yourself from all that extra physical and mental baggage. You detach yourself from all that "stuff", creating space and freedom.

Establishing a new home base doesn't have to take years. Shanghai became my home base just several months after I moved there. It all depends on how much you want to immerse yourself into the new environment, and how deep your new attachments are.

## PART II: PLANET A

## Chapter 3: Countries Do Not Exist

Now let me tell you something that they don't teach in school. Something that you might have intuitively suspected for a long time, but haven't heard anyone else say. Luckily, here I am willing to say it loud and clear:

## **COUNTRIES DO NOT EXIST!**

Well, you might ask, if countries do not exist, what does exist then? The answer is simple: Brands. Brands and Systems. Brands like McDonald's, Coca-Cola, New Zealand... Did I just say New Zealand? Oops...

Well, what's behind brands? Systems. Systems refer to highly complex socio-economic structures that exist under the umbrella of a brand, they are the inner workings of a brand.

For instance, under the McDonald's brand is a socio-economic system consisting of thousands of restaurants around the world, hundreds of thousands of employees, consistent product line, franchising agreements, supplier relationships, and so on.

Brands use advertising to increase awareness and focus on creating memorable experiences for their followers. Remember the McDonald's Play Place for kids? The goal is to cultivate positive emotions associated with the brand to make new customers repeat, life-long clients.

Brands are symbolized in our minds by names (labels) and visual symbols. For example, under the McDonald's brand is represented by symbols such as the Golden Arches, Red Roofs, and Clowns.

To give you another example, the Soviet Union brand was symbolized by a Red Flag with Hammer and Sickle, Lenin, and Kremlin.

The Soviet Union system consisted of millions of employees in a multitude of industries, in fact covering the whole population (non-conformists were jailed), tied by an ideological framework. This system was characterized by its minimized contact with the rest of the world and a centrally-planned decision-making process, administered by the communist party.

You might have problems throwing away the "Country" concept and looking at the world as Brands and Systems. One objection you might immediately have is this: "I don't live in a brand. I live in a country. How can I possibly live inside a brand?"

Of course you don't live in a brand. It's the other way around. The brand lives inside you. If you were an impartial observer, you would simply have awareness of the brand "USA" and associations that come with it (think American flag, the Constitution, the President). However, if you are a loyal US citizen, you pledge allegiance to it, you identify with it, it becomes a part of your self-identity.

From a standpoint of an objective model of reality, we live as physical beings somewhere on planet Earth. Our exact location can be expressed as a set of coordinates, of degrees of latitude and longitude, independent of any brands.

Government systems, however, use coordinates to claim “ownership” of huge territories of land with entire populations, millions, sometimes billions of human beings living there. Then they use your allegiance to the brand as a claim on you, issuing you a certificate of citizenship.

Why do the government systems succeed so well in creating lasting attachments to their brands? Because it’s easy for them to create a skewed model of reality in young and innocent minds.

The brainwashing starts at an early age, when in school you are shown colorful political maps with solid lines, emphasizing boundaries, and labels, emphasizing brands. They put a national flag on the wall of the classroom and on every textbook and make you listen to a national anthem every morning.

Governments use schools as marketing machines to promote the brand to the general public. We all know advertisers don’t want us to think anything bad or controversial about the brand, right?

It’s only later in life that we learn, by experience, that all we’ve been taught is nothing but a bunch of stereotypes in order to perpetuate the status quo and to protect existing systems.

Being critical of the mainstream education, it’s humbling to think that our worldview is always an oversimplification, no matter what we learn.

Nonetheless, Our human mind loves brands. In fact, without brands it wouldn’t be able to function. Why? System complexity.

The systems behind brands are so huge and complicated that they are nearly impossible to analyze, much less completely hold in our mind for even a second. Brands however, act as necessary mental shortcuts that reduce rational complexity to an aura - a small collection of images and ideas/associations that bypass rationality and go directly to the emotional/subconscious level of perception.

Why are brands so crucial in analyzing human migration?

Without having direct personal experience, when deciding on moving to a new location, we have to rely on second-hand information about it. That second-hand information includes facts, images, and the reactions of other people around us when we talk about our plans.

Because there is potentially an infinite amount of information to consider, and not enough time, that second-hand information is processed by our brain to create a brand associated to a new location. It is precisely that brand that influences our decision making before the move.



## <Canada vs. New Zealand

In the spring of 1995 my parents were eager to finally escape Russia. After years of endless bureaucracy and waiting, we were soon to be able to leave this harsh land behind and move on to greener pastures. The only problem was: we didn't know where we were going.

Almost simultaneously, both the Canadian and the New Zealand embassy approved our immigration applications, and were willing to accept us, the whole family, into their promise lands. So now parents had to make a difficult choice, since we couldn't do both.

We have never been to either of those countries, so all of our information was second-hand.

The few books we found showed us some pictures of the largest cities and the beautiful sceneries of both countries. They were also full with statistics, like GDP per capita, population, birthrates, climate etc. Much of the stats, however, were meaningless to us by themselves. We needed something visual to associate the numbers to.

Looking at the world map and the globe was a lot more exciting. Here we could see how big, how far away, and where exactly those places were.

Canada was huge, but New Zealand tiny. Canada was on a continent, and next to a superpower of the United States, but New Zealand was on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Canada was in the north hemisphere, same as Russia, but New Zealand in the south, meaning winters and summers would be strangely reversed. Climate was warmer in coastal New Zealand, but that would mean we would never see the snow. What if we missed the snow?

Both countries, settled and built by immigrants, were multicultural environments friendly to newcomers.

Without a doubt, New Zealand seemed more exotic. But also without a doubt, Canada seemed a lot more well-known. Canada was much bigger, and for us that was important. Bigger felt safer. Bigger felt richer. Bigger felt like we had more options. For us at that time, bigger meant better.

All of the rational knowledge, all of the myths, stereotypes, generalizations, hearsay, intuition were compressed into a powerful emotional aura of the Brand.

And in our minds, Canada brand was better than New Zealand brand. Our fate was sealed.

## <The China Brand

China is a rapidly rising brand. Events related to China are making headlines around the world, and awareness of China is at an all-time high. Its rise is similar to the rise

of the United States and Japan brands in the second part of twentieth century, but on a much larger scale.

Coupled with the fact that this rise cannot only be witnessed, but even participated in makes China an extremely exciting destination to iMigrants. To observe change, to analyze, to have the opportunity of being part of it - that is the spirit of adventure, the spirit of life.

China is so huge and diverse that it is better to be viewed as a microcosm, a world in itself, containing processes and interactions that provide a blueprint for the rest of the world to follow. How the Chinese government deals with massive social change is a spectacle to be seen and marveled at. Much can be learned by other governments about how to create peaceful and productive interactions between separate systems by looking at China's history in the last thirty years.

Just consider the "1 country - 2 systems" principle in operation between Mainland China and Hong Kong. China brand is seen, at least by the mainland government, as a single entity, a country. Under the one China brand, however, are two distinct systems. They are two systems of government - the Mainland China government and the Hong Kong government. These two systems, having evolved separately for much of their existence (for one hundred years until 1997 Hong Kong was a British territory), are quite different. Hong Kong has its own legal system, freedom of speech, its own currency, its own border, its own immigration policies, etc. Even traffic rules are different: cars drive on the left side in HK! And yet the two systems not only coexist, but prosper together.

Another interesting case of interaction between systems under the China brand is that of Macau, a small city-state near Hong Kong that was a Portuguese colony until 1999. Macau maintains its own legal system, education system, police force, monetary system, customs policy, and immigration policy. Both Chinese and Portuguese are Macau's official languages.

Now let me remind you that gambling is forbidden by law anywhere on the territory of mainland China. There are no casinos and no slot machines. Gambling doesn't adhere to the strict moral code of the China's Communist Party, and therefore you can't have it!

Macau's "antiquated" legal system, inherited from Portugal, however, allows gambling.

Leveraging this one systemic difference, Macau has built a brand for itself as the gambling Mecca for Chinese, a place for both billionaire tycoons and middle class office workers looking to roll the dice. Every year it enjoys the ever-increasing flood of tourists, and is working hard to please their tastes.

Macau now has major companies from around the world investing billions to build huge casino resorts that will rival Las Vegas. Sands, Venetian, MGM Grand, Wynn - they are all there. And all because of what? A historical legal technicality...

## <Jerry

Jerry is one of those people who have an aura of success all around them. He is always smiling and is extremely social. It's hard to figure out if smiling and positive attitude is the result of his success or if it's the other way around, being the cause of his success.

While other students are struggling to get an internship job at any company, he is already working at a well-known foreign consulting company. And no, that's not because of some generous outside help. Jerry comes from a remote mountainous area of China's Fujian province and his parents are not rich. He helps himself.

But being positive and self-reliant is not the only special thing about Jerry. What's really special is that he knows he has options in life. Many options. He doesn't always choose the good option, sometimes patiently waiting for the best. He is not hesitant to decline good opportunities, knowing there will be many more.

I first met Jerry in Shanghai when he was finishing up his research for a Master's degree in biology. He showed me around his lab - filled with computers, high-tech microscopes and always-present smell of mice. At that time he was contemplating where to continue his studies for a PhD.

Fast forward half a year, and Jerry tells me he decided to study at a prestigious university in Hong Kong. His research would focus on finding the cure for diabetes. But that's not all that is special about his choice.

He also declined an offer to study at Columbia University in New York, an Ivy League school. Explaining the decision, Jerry says he wanted to continue on the consulting career path after getting the PhD, but Columbia required him to do at least 5 years of research, while the university in Hong Kong only 3 years. Plus, he says, the opportunities in consulting in Hong Kong and Shanghai are no worse than those in New York. To Jerry, the future career potential looks brighter in China.

Jerry's decision shocked me as well as the Columbia faculty. Think hard about the implications.

The days when American universities could pick and choose among the best students from around the world are over. They no longer have the monopoly on attracting top talent, even from developing regions of the world like China.

Consider that most foreign research students end up settling down in USA after completing their studies, getting jobs and establishing families, eventually becoming citizens, and you will begin to see the magnitude of this shift. Think not about the short term, but the enormous long term repercussions of the decline of the USA brand.

Of course, for every Jerry who declines there are still a dozen others who would be more than happy to take his spot. But they are not Jerry...

## <Brand Marketing

Other than being taught in school, how do brands enter our awareness?

The answer is simple: marketing.

For marketers, treating a country as a brand is not a novel concept. There are even PR agencies specializing exclusively in the field of “Nation Branding”, promoting the global awareness of a country-brand.

The truth is, in our day and age, the competition for our individual attention is cutthroat. There are too many brands spending huge amounts of money on advertising to reach our awareness.

Of course, as any businessman will tell you, the most effective marketing is word-of-mouth. The best product markets itself.

United States government doesn't need to spend money advertising its advantages. People around the world already know the US generally has a high standard of living and a tolerance for newcomers. Over decades, those two systemic advantages made the USA the most powerful brand in the world for immigrants and still attract millions.

Instead trying to appeal to the general public, some brands focus on creating buzz in niche markets. They strive to be the best in the world at something.

When Dubai built Burj Dubai, the tallest skyscraper in the world, thousands of architecture fans around the world took notice.

New brands that haven't yet achieved word-of-mouth have to get creative and do something special, grandiose, and remarkable to get noticed. Some succeed throwing money on one-off, high-impact events.

Saudi Arabia spent over \$100,000,000 to build an outlandish pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. And you know what? The Chinese noticed!

The pavilion attracted huge media coverage, and as a result turned into the most popular pavilion at the Expo. On an average day, the waiting line to visit it was over 4 hours long. One day the pavilion set an Expo record of having to stand 8 hours in the scorching heat to have a privilege of visiting it. With over 70 million visitors to the Expo, and continuous media coverage to more than a billion people, don't you think the increased awareness will pay off for Saudi Arabia in the long run?

## <Brand Symbol

The President is an important symbol of a brand. What's peculiar though, is how differently the majority of people treat the president, a representative of a government system, from the CEO, who represents a business system.

While waiting in a checkout lane at the supermarket recently, I couldn't help but pay attention to the Globe tabloid with a photograph of Obama on the front page and a screaming title "Birthplace Cover-Up: Obama's Secret Life Exposed!" I never read yellow press, but the cover with sub-headings like "Phony Social Security number" and "African family he's hiding" made me unable to resist the curiosity, so I picked up a copy.

"Lying to America, cover-up, fraud, investigation, evidence, scandal, scam, fake, felony, broke the law, phony, ..." are the labels in the article attached to Obama by journalists, private investigators and insiders.

The special report makes several allegations, specifically that Obama's social security number, judging by the first three digits, was issued by the state of Connecticut sometime between 1977 and 1979, during the time he was residing in Hawaii and also attending college in California, making it impossible for his SSN to be legitimate. The report stresses that the fake SSN is just one part in an elaborate scheme to conceal that he is not a natural born U.S. citizen, and therefore not eligible to serve as President of the United States and its Commander-in-Chief under the U.S. Constitution.

Sources in the report also point to Obama's attempts to hide his Kenyan heritage, and his refusal to release his Hawaiian birth certificate. Obama's grandmother, cousins and other relatives in Africa all insist they were present at his birth in Kenya. To Obama's outrage, one of his cousins is even writing a book about this!

Whether the allegations are true or false is not the real issue here. The real issue is that people doubt his ability to do a good job as President of the United States based solely on his place of birth! And that is what's really disturbing.

After all, nobody cares where a CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation is born, do they? Nobody doubts that CEO's ability to manage a huge corporation compared to his American-born counterpart, do they?

Oh, it's unconstitutional, you say! Excuse me, what year was the Constitution written? Don't you think the world has changed quite a bit since the eighteenth century?

The fact that tabloids print this stuff means people are buying it! People, in this day and age, still believe that it matters "where you came from", isn't that just incredible?

This kind of thinking is pervasive among the older generation, with investment sage Warren Buffett thanking his luck for being born in the United States, instead of somewhere in India, implying that is what has allowed him to become the richest man in the world.

But the world has changed since Buffett's generation, and the rules of the game are different now. The richest person in fifty years will not be saying the same things.

No, the majority screams, but it's different for the President! The President is a symbol, the President represents the mighty USA brand to the citizens and the whole world, the President has to be a saint!

Well here's the thing. It's not different. The President is the CEO of a system called the U.S. Federal Government and has to obviously project an aura of competency and excellence. But it's not just the image he represents for US citizens that's important. Remember, brands are global.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's the image the president, as a symbol of the brand, presents to the outside world that's even more important. And Obama, no matter what his birthplace actually is, is the perfect symbol of America in the global arena.

### <Borders Do Not Exist

Nature is the best place to un-plug, to escape the trappings of modern civilization. One of my favorite places to do that during the summer, when I'm in the US, is to go canoeing up north in Minnesota. It's quite appropriate that "The land of 10,000 lakes" is the official motto of that state, with several hundred of them located in Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness - a huge park that delivers everything it promises by its name.

BWCAW is right on the United States/Canada border with more than half of its area made up of lakes, created by the movement of ice during the last ice age. Canoe is the only transportation allowed in the area, and the most practical one anyway, as the lakes are often isolated from each other and have different elevations.

How wild is it? Well, the nearest town of Ely, pop. 5,000, is about 30 miles away. Permits are required to start your voyage, to keep it wild and un-crowded.

Loonies, deer, fox, berries, mushrooms and fish, absence of motor boats, no people to spoil nature - what more could you want?

Since many lakes, especially the more beautiful smaller ones, are not connected to larger lake systems, the only way to sail to them is... well, to pull the canoe out of the water onto the shore, pick it up, place it on your shoulders, and hike the trail through the forest until you reach another lake and can paddle again.

Sounds easy, right? It's easy all right, until you're tired as a dog and have a heavy canoe crushing your neck. Expect at least five of those portages per day to test your strength, and endurance.

There is one portage I remember particularly well, nicknamed the Portage from Hell by tourists, consisting of a 1km hike through a swamp. With your hands busy balancing the canoe or carrying the gear, mosquitoes enjoy eating you alive. Wahoo, did it feel good to leave that one behind and get on the open water again!

One evening my dad and I set up camp on the shore of a tiny lake. Looking at the map, it turned out we were right on the USA-Canada border. The other shore of this

lake, less than a hundred feet away, was Canada! It looked pretty much the same as our shore, and there was nothing and no one to prevent us from simply swimming there.

Perhaps that was the moment I realized that borders do not really exist, except in our imagination. The line on the map did not exist in physical reality. The map was not the territory.

Driving back to Ely, I noticed a small brown building on the side of the highway with a sign saying "US Customs and Immigration". The countryside version of a border checkpoint did not look nearly as authoritative or threatening as the crowded airport ones.

And the best thing, it was optional. It wasn't blocking the road, but was rather a voluntary drive-in, just in case you're coming from Canada and need something to declare.

It's lovely that way, don't you think? If you want to check-in with the Big Brother, you check-in. If not, just drive by!

## Chapter 4: Systems Analysis



## <Windows 95

At 6 am on a chilly cloudy August morning my Dad and I were already standing at the Keele street bus stop, waiting for the first bus. Our goal - to visit the CN Tower, Toronto's best known landmark, and at that time also the tallest building in the world.

It's been several months since we came to Canada, about the time parents realized that nobody is going to *give* them a job here, and that money doesn't grow on trees in the land of dreams...

Our arrival shopping spree was over and we as a family had to watch our finances very carefully, as future suddenly looked awfully uncertain. But we still wanted to explore the city and were on the lookout for new adventures.

One day when reading the Toronto Star newspaper, Dad noticed an ad for the global launch of Windows 95 by Microsoft. As part of the launch celebrations, the "Where Do You Want To Go Today?" software giant rented out the CN Tower for the whole weekend and was giving out several thousand free "early bird" passes to those who managed to wake up and get there before the crowds. We jumped on the idea, as the regular admission price for us was a prohibitively high luxury splurge.

Fifteen years later, it's hard to describe the excitement literally "in the air" at that event. The main observation deck of the tower, at 350 meters above ground, had terrific views of downtown Toronto skyline and lake Ontario, and really make everyone feel on top of the world. It felt like the PC revolution was unfolding right before our eyes.

Several floors were packed with latest software and hardware. Hundreds of sleek black IBM desktops, complete with joysticks, trackballs and stereo systems were real attention grabbers. They had the ultra-powerful Intel Pentium 166Mhz processors, 32MB of RAM, and huge hard drives. These machines, costing well over \$4,000, were a generation ahead of our plain white 486 PC at home. Style-wise and technology-wise, everything was so out-of-this-world! Such a rush!

But state of the art hardware, of course, was only a complement to the real reason the party was held - the unveiling of Windows 95 Operating System. Compared to its predecessor Windows 3.1, Windows 95 was not just an improvement, but a smashing breakthrough, a revolution.

Nothing like this has ever been created before. The mysterious "Start" button with a Windows logo on it beckoned attention, with Microsoft promising unparalleled ease of use of the new OS.

The demo PCs were loaded with software like Microsoft Encarta and Fury 3 to showcase its multimedia capabilities and stunning 3D graphics.

And it was a breakthrough not just for Microsoft, but for the whole personal computer industry. Computers were finally *accessible*, in the broadest sense of that word, not just to governments, corporations, or universities. They were no longer tools just for the rich businessmen or nerds.

With Windows 95 platform, computers were now intuitive enough to belong in every home - just click the Start button and follow from there. Their productivity, educational and entertainment benefits were obvious. PCs were hip, cool and had enormous mass appeal.

And this revolution was truly global. Running the same software, PCs could be used anywhere in the world in exactly the same way.

### <A World of Systems

As important as brands are for decision making, let's not forget that behind every brand there is system, and it is systems we actually interact with on a daily basis.

If you live in a modern civilization, you're surrounded by a multitude of highly complex systems, no matter where you are. Else how would you read this book?

Why do systems exist in the first place? Why not live our lives without systems at all?

Systems exist to make our reality predictable and our lives more comfortable, to have something we can count on. We, part of the golden billion, take systems that provide electricity, tap water, and transportation for granted.

Systems also exist to gain efficiency from the separation of labor in modern society. Disorganized and unmotivated labor force is highly unproductive. Savages don't need systems and cavemen can't build skyscrapers.

In a broader sense, systems exist because they are useful to somebody.

How are systems born? What makes them grow? How do systems interact with each other? Do systems age? And what causes systems to disappear? These are all fascinating questions to explore.

### <System Creation

No matter what system we take, be it a social or economic system like a government or a business, or even a system of rationality such as a language or a theory, there was a time when that system did not exist.

Why was it created then? Couldn't the world go on without it?

After all, no system is created in a vacuum. At the time of any system creation, there are already a multitude of other systems serving the population. If the world was truly stable, if the world was unchangeable and predictable, then existing systems would satisfy all our needs and wants, and no new system would need to be created. But the world is not like that.

Change is the mighty force that causes new systems to be created. It is change that makes existing systems obsolete and it is change that creates openings for new systems to be born.

What kind of change are we talking about? People are born and die on this planet every day, yet that by itself does not lead to system creation nor destruction. The world goes on with or without you and me, with its systems largely unaffected.

Technological breakthroughs often become catalysts for new system creation. Without advances in semiconductors (Moore's law!) that made personal computers possible, Microsoft would never have been created. Without creation of the internet, Google would not be possible. These business systems flourished by allowing people to easily access the potential of new technology.

Ambition and greed play a large role as well. Entrepreneurs' desire for profit results in creation of millions of new business systems worldwide every year. Why do startups get created in the first place? Entrepreneurs perceive a need for a new system that is better than any existing one, so they take a risk in creating such a system to challenge the established businesses.

Fear is just as potent as greed for new system creation. When the Soviet Union launched the first satellite called Sputnik into orbit in 1957, American newspapers came out with headlines warning of a new "Red Moon" in the sky, potentially capable of spying and bombing American cities. That fear is what started the Space Race and led to the creation of NASA, a huge new system with hundreds of thousands of employees.

Most newly created systems, however, do not survive for longer than a couple of years. In the world of small business, the failure rate is 95% during the first three years. It turns out nobody is interested in using a new system just because it is brand new. Why do some new systems manage not only to survive, but to grow beyond anyone's imagination?

Short answer: System Advantages. What are the benefits of a new system to the people expected to use it? Will the advantages be worthwhile for them to switch, to abandon existing systems they have been using for years? Not many new systems can give good answers to these questions, but those that do have real advantages are usually not forgotten. Good news travels fast, and when a new system is truly superior to others, it grows quickly.

In the late 90's, online search was dominated by portals like Excite and AltaVista. It was considered common sense that search functionality by itself was not that important, compared to the whole bundle of useful features such as news, email, weather, and others. Search by itself didn't make money, and therefore was neglected by the portals.

Then Google came along and ate the portal's lunch. Almost overnight, it became the leading search engine, throwing Excite and AltaVista into the dustbin of history.

Why was Google able to capture market share so quickly? Simply put, it was a much better system with several clear advantages.

Its user interface was not cluttered, unlike that of the confusing portals. Google had no ugly and annoying flashing banner ads, instead displaying non-intrusive and search-relevant text ads. It had more intelligent and faster search algorithms. Compared to competitors, Google had systemic advantages on every front.

The lightening-fast growth of Google shows just how little loyalty people have to existing brands and systems when presented with a clearly superior alternative.

Why do so many new systems seem to come out of “nowhere”? Why aren’t existing systems, with financial firepower and thousands of employees, pursuing new opportunities for growth?

Size. The larger the system, the more inflexible it is. Large and successful systems have less motivation to experiment and try something new. They stagnate precisely because they are risk-averse. Microsoft, with billions of dollars in the bank and an army of the smartest programmers in the world, did not create the first web browser, little-known Netscape did.

It turns out the best place for the magic of new system birth and creation, for the hatching of breakthrough ideas, for the inspired tinkering and experimentation, and potentially for radically changing the world is your basement!

### **<Government vs. Business Systems**

Looking at business systems in the fast-changing tech sphere, we can see in how new systems are created, grow, stagnate, and decline over the span of just a few years.

The rapid systemic change of the tech world is a microcosm of processes happening in other areas of human life. Why is it so much faster? Because people have weaker attachment to technology than to objects in a physical world. It’s much easier to start using a new search engine than it is to move from one continent to another.

Government systems can seem rock-solid, but they are not immune to the similar change processes as businesses, change just takes longer for them to play out. What can be observed in almost real-time in a business system can stretch over hundreds of years in a government system.

The creation of a government system follows the same basic principles as any business system. It has to be useful to somebody and it has to be superior to an existing system.

For instance, there was no such system as the government of the United States of America before July 4, 1776. For centuries, Britain ruled over the colonies.

But with every decade, the British government system was getting less and less useful to the colonists. It was taxing them and imposing import tariffs without proper

representation. Colonies grew in population and industry, becoming self-sufficient, but the existing government system did not pay attention to those changes and didn't care about them.

The motivation for people to “switch”, to adopt a new system, was getting stronger and stronger.

Eventually, colonists realized that a new system, independent of the British King, would serve them much better. The moment came when at a risk of losing their lives, they revolted, and established a new system of government.

Ultimately, after more than one hundred and fifty years, the new government system grew to overshadow Britain in size and power.

Again, the new system was created only because it was useful to the colonists and only because it was superior to the old system. It was created as a result of change and survived and grew by being better adapted to the local environment.

While the creation of a government system follows the same basic principles as that of business system, things quickly diverge beyond that point.

The most important difference between government and business is that a government system tries to please the entire population within a geographical area, while a business tries to serve just a subset of the population interested in its products or services. We say there is a market for a product or a service a business provides, but we usually don't talk about a “market” for government.

Governments generalize their services to the entire population. As a result, governments work well in a mostly homogeneous population that has similar tastes and behaviors. With population becoming more diverse, government action, by trying to achieve the impossible goal of ‘pleasing everyone’, starts hurting large swaths of society.

A business would never do such a silly thing. Businesses focus their efforts on serving certain categories of people and ignore everyone else. As a result, businesses are much more efficient than governments.

Just look at the public school system. The quality of its education is low precisely because it tries to provide education to everyone in the same way. Good students or bad students, fast learners or slow learners, ambitious or lazy, all receive the same instruction, sit in the same classrooms, and take the same standardized tests. The focus is on the average and the results are sub-par.

Private schools are better because they are targeted to a certain segment of the population: upper middle-class and the rich. They focus on the demands of that group, like being accepted to an Ivy-League university upon graduation. Private schools place higher requirements on students and invest more effort into teaching, pushing the students to succeed. The result is that the private system is more efficient in reaching its goal - providing high-quality education.

There is another reason businesses provide higher quality products and services than governments. They understand how competitive the field for their products is. After all, the business revenues and profits depend directly on customer satisfaction, while a government gets its revenues by force - through taxes. Citizens do influence governments, but indirectly - by voting, while consumers influence businesses directly - by voting with their wallets. It's easy to see which influence is more effective.

Large business systems are global in scale and thinking. Raw materials are mined in one corner of the world, shipped half a world away, processed, then used in the manufacture of consumer goods, which are then shipped to another corner, and then distributed to retailers before finally reaching us, consumers.

Governments, on the other hand, are inherently local. Historically, individual geographical mobility was an exception, not the norm, so governments were built on a principle of people being attached, tied to the land. Governments assume that if you reside in their area of jurisdiction, you reside there permanently.

This kind of land-based thinking is pervasive in government systems of all levels. From small municipalities to huge federal governments, government systems still box their thinking in a sovereignty model involving "ownership" of disparate chunks of land. While we live in the age of global systems, governments still insist they own a share of all commercial activity on "their" ground through taxation, both business and personal, justifying taxes and huge military expenditures as a necessity to protect the land.

Governments perpetuate the Border myth, wanting us to believe there still exists such a thing as a "national economy". When they mention a business as "contributing to a local economy", it makes me want to puke. All right local economy believers, I hope you never shop in Wal-mart, drive cars, use computers or watch TV!

Finally, governments attempt to own a part of you and me through "citizenship". It's as if a business would say "since you've been a loyal customer for so long, we will now consider you to be a customer for life. We will be counting on you for our revenues and profits in the decades ahead. Congratulations!"

### <Global Hotspots

The vast majority of people on earth are highly resistant to change.

They live in places like St. Louis, Missouri. These places are average, dull, unexciting, utterly predictable and in return attract people who crave stability and security. These are what are called "good places to raise kids".

They are the very definition of "Mediocristan", as described in Nassim Taleb's book "The Black Swan". Geologically speaking, the ground seems solid if you're on a continent somewhere in the middle of a tectonic plate.

But then there are places on the edges, on the fault lines of tectonic plates. This is where you hear the rumblings of one plate pushing into another, this is where

earthquakes and volcanoes occur, and where mountains are formed. These are the regions of seismic activity, the regions of greatest social and systemic change, the regions that attract iMigrants.

I call such regions “Global Hotspots”.

Global - ‘cause people flock here from around the world. Hotspots - because of greatest systemic change and growth, including rapid population, job and infrastructure growth, all processes that reinforce each other. They are places where breakthroughs are made and like seismic waves, ripple across the society, forcing a questioning of old beliefs and assumptions.

It is here that we can see the creation, from scratch, of new brands and a multitude of systems behind that brand. To watch a new system being born, to participate and benefit from its creation, and to be around other people who share the excitement - that’s what is fascinating for iMigrants and what makes them fall in love with global hotspots.

One example of such a hotspot is Silicon Valley in California, the birthplace of PC and internet revolutions. Advances made here are felt around the world. This is a place where inflows of new people, new ideas, and venture capital create the right environment for tech breakthroughs to occur.

People who are crazy about technology come here, despite the high cost of living. They are attracted, like bees to honey, to the high-stimulation environment, and their action in turn creates the positive upward spiral necessary for hotspot growth and evolution.

Global hotspots often seem to appear out of nowhere. They are former swamps (Shanghai, Orlando), deserts (Dubai), and fishing villages (Shenzhen). Their rise seems to be propelled by a mysterious combination of forces impossible to comprehend, yet their appearance is not random. When we look closely, the initial systemic advantages are clear.

Shenzhen was right on the border with Hong Kong and also had a natural deep-water harbor. Orlando had cheap plentiful land and warm climate. Dubai was a trading hub for the region long before it really took off. Shanghai was at the mouth of Yangtze river. Toronto, in the middle of twentieth century, was much smaller than Montreal, but yet was the largest English-speaking city in the country.

Initial systemic advantages do matter since they give birth to the positive upward spiral that makes a backwater grow into a global hotspot.

An interesting question arises then. Can a global hotspot be designed and engineered, can it be created at will, can the megacity of the future be planned in advance?

## <System Evolution

Large systems, especially government systems, rarely evolve, much like dinosaurs who didn't become better adapted to a rapidly changing environment until it was too late. Most large systems stagnate, being oblivious to the changes in the outside world, and end up being violently replaced by new systems after wars, revolutions, and other calamities.

The world has plentiful examples of rapid social change. Unfortunately, often this change degenerates into bloody power struggles. Are millions of lost humans lives worth the cause, no matter how noble?

If we accept that social change is inevitable, if we accept that no system works forever, is there an intelligent way to approach it? Is there a way to "retire" a system instead of slaughtering it, a way that doesn't involve a seismic shift in society, but rather a steady gradual shift?

Fortunately, yes. It is possible to turn a big ship around, but it takes honesty and courage to accept that the existing system is no longer working. It takes vision to design a new system, and leadership to change an existing system.

Perhaps the best modern day example of peaceful social change on a massive scale is China. Nowhere was change approached more wisely and more carefully than in China during the last three decades. When in the late 1970's Deng Xiaoping proclaimed the famous slogan "To Get Rich is Glorious", nothing changed in the physical world, yet it marked a major inflection point in the thinking of billions.

After decades of forceful experimentation, including the failed Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Chinese leaders realized that communist ideals did not work in practice. Trying to achieve even the basics, such as simply feeding the population, using the methods of centrally planned economy turned into a disaster. The West, meanwhile, was prospering under the capitalist system of private enterprise and limited government involvement.

Chinese government was faced with two big questions. First, would the western economic model work in China? And secondly, even if it did work, how to achieve a gradual shift to the free market, without throwing society into turmoil during the transition process?

The only way to answer these questions was to run a free-market experiment on a small scale. If something went wrong and the new system failed, the overall damage to the old system would be minimal. But if it succeeded, the road to capitalism would be wide open.

China was on its knees compared to the West and there was nothing to lose by trying.

Enter Shenzhen, the pilot testing ground of the new system, ground zero for China's economic reforms. A small fishing village near Hong Kong, it was picked as the site of the first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), established in 1980.



By calling Shenzhen an SEZ the government meant every word of it. It was a physically guarded Zone, being separate from China mainland by a barbed-wire fence. There were several exit/entry checkpoints on the few roads entering the zone, and only people with special resident permits were allowed in.

Inside the Zone a new government, overseeing a new political, economic and legal system was set up, allowing for private businesses, investments and capital accumulation, and the holding of private property. The SEZ was truly a country within a country, or a system within a system, or one country - two systems, call it as you like, but no doubt it was Special. And it quickly became a miracle.

1980s witnessed explosive manufacturing growth, fueled by cheap labor and investments from Hong Kong. Shenzhen became the epitome of change, an example for the rest of China to follow. People were flooding into the city, with its population passing the 1 million mark. Famous as a place of opportunity, it became the only city in southern China to speak Mandarin, not Cantonese, as people were coming not just from the neighboring areas, but from all over China.

1990s witnessed explosive urban growth, described by newspapers as “a new high rise every day, a new street every three days”. Shenzhen, now dubbed “China’s answer to Hong Kong” became a huge construction site with forests of cranes, its population passing 5 million people.

2000s witnessed explosive technology, financial, and service sector growth. Companies like Huawei, ZTE, and Tencent became rising stars on the global telecom arena. With population nearing 10 million, it is already the richest and most modern city in China.

The epitome of China’s success, Shenzhen now has ambitious plans to eventually merge with Hong Kong, creating the third richest megacity in the world, behind only Tokyo and New York...

## Chapter 5: Immigration System

## <Greyhound Bus

Ah, the absurdity of immigration laws of the modern world! If you've ever dealt with the antiquated legal systems governments use to filter newcomers, I'm sure you have your own nightmare story to tell.

As for my own varied interactions with such systems, one particular incident stands out. It happened, I believe, during my first year in the United States, which would be 1999, when I was still in high school. Our family had just moved from Toronto, Canada to St. Louis, USA, with my father getting a job at Anheuser-Busch through a consulting company that sponsored his H1-B work visa. Everyone in the family was a Canadian citizen, but from the standpoint of the US legal system we were all considered "Aliens".

To add to the problem, we were not "Permanent Resident" Aliens. We were temporary aliens. That is, our status in the United States, our permission and right to live here, depended on parents keeping their jobs. With the internet bubble still expanding, IT jobs were plentiful, but nonetheless parents had a deeply-rooted fear of unemployment, perhaps from spending an extended period of time on welfare in Canada.

My mother dreamed of buying a house, but how could the family risk taking on a mortgage without having a permanent resident status, when we could simply be kicked out, deported from the country if parents lost their jobs during a recession? This uncertainty made us extremely anxious to get our Green Cards as soon as possible, but there was nothing we could do to speed up the working of the government machine. Getting a GC was a lengthy process taking years.

In the meantime, we had to play the idiotic "intent" game with the government. If you are lucky enough to be unfamiliar with it, the game is set up like this: when you enter the country as a temporary resident, until you become a permanent resident you should "behave", in the government's eyes, as a temporary one. That is, you should not have the intent of becoming a permanent resident.

In essence, the government wanted us to pretend to be someone we're not. And the government wanted proof.

To receive temporary work authorization and to comply with the terms of her TN visa, my mother had to fly from St. Louis to Detroit every few months. She would fly to Detroit in the morning, take a cab from the airport to Windsor, Ontario (a city across the river on the other side of the border), and then return through the border checkpoint to get her visa renewed. In the afternoon she would catch a flight back to St. Louis. How's that for a price of Liberty?

As much as the parents' visa situation was complicated, we the kids were in some kind of an additional legal limbo. To comply with god-knows-what immigration laws, me and my sister had to go to Canada and re-enter the United States. Yes, we had to

cross the border simply to get a stamp in a passport, so that we could be qualified to get our green cards and finally become “resident aliens”.

Whereas for my mother going to the border was an expensive day trip, we the kids were in school and not in a big hurry, so parents decided to save money and instead of an airplane use a somewhat slower form of transportation: a bus. Greyhound bus.

And if you’ve never taken Greyhound, the iconic American bus line, you’re surely missing out on some unique experiences. Yes, Greyhound is quite cheap for short distances under a thousand miles, but there are good reasons for this.

Your typical Greyhound bus station is usually located on the outskirts of downtown closer to the ghetto, to serve a diverse crowd of people not having a car, unemployed, European college students, inmates just released from jail, aspiring rap stars and so on.

The St. Louis station was in a historic dilapidated building to the north of downtown, with beggars both inside and outside. It was crowded with blacks and Hispanics, with whites a tiny minority. Taking a piss in a bathroom, I saw a sign inside the urinal with sage advice: “Say No To Drugs!”

The snack joint in the station sold the junkiest food on the planet. Burgers, hotdogs, and other greasy, oily wonders of manufactured food smelled even worse than food from high-school cafeteria, suppressing any appetite.

My sister and I started our journey in the afternoon, arriving to Chicago at night, and waiting a few more hours for the next bus to Detroit. Without getting any kind of normal sleep, we arrived to Detroit in the morning, ready to conquer the border.

Taking the first taxi we could find on the empty streets of the gray ghetto neighborhood, I told the driver we needed to go to Canada and come back using the Ambassador bridge in downtown Detroit.

The driver, an elderly black guy, couldn’t quite understand why we would want to do such a thing. What he did understand was that we didn’t have a clue about the local surroundings. So he was happy to begin driving us around in circles to run up the meter.

Remember, that was the age before cell-phones, where no outside help or info was available.

We budgeted only 40 bucks for the taxi roundtrip, and still needed to buy bus tickets back to St. Louis, making running out of cash a rather unpleasant alternative. I started getting nervous and yelled at the driver, until he finally got us to the damn bridge and made a quick hop across the river.

The US border checkpoint officials were pretty amused of our intentions and maneuvers, disclosed by the clueless cabbie, that definitely followed the letter, but not the spirit of the law.

“Your parents sent you kids to Detroit all by yourself to do this?!” bemused the guards. Apparently it was not a frequent occurrence. At that point I was rather freaked out and didn’t care much about what they thought as long as we got our legal paperwork done.

Arriving back to the Greyhound station, and cursing at the huge \$80 taxi bill, we luckily still had cash left over to buy tickets back to St. Louis and got back home the next day, exhausted but happy to successfully accomplish the mission.

The law firm that advised my parents had another surprise in store. It unexpectedly charged \$5000 in legal fees for “helping” to supervise the green card application procedure, in such a way that to dispute that charge would put the green card process of the entire family at risk. Nice Christmas present!

### <The Power of Migration

Governments are a peculiar kind of social systems. They act like they are in charge, but in reality the government needs you more than you need the government.

A lot of people assume that governments are all-powerful god-like entities that have full control over what’s going on in society. These myths are perpetuated by various government rules and regulations, crackdowns and restrictions, making government seem omnipotent. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Governments are fragile. They could be overthrown anytime by a war, revolution, economic collapse, or any other kind of a social earthquake. Just look at the world history in the last 100 years, and extrapolate that to the chaos of the next 100. To treat government as something stable and unshakeable, to put your faith in the government is a big mistake.

If you think of a government as something above yourself, something that has power and control over you, something that decides how you will live your life, you are giving your power away. But if you realize that the government needs you more than you need the government, then you get your power back. The lesson is simple: don’t give your power away to the system!

Realize that in this century, brands and systems compete for our attention. Just look around, there is advertising everywhere. We, the citizens of the world, the iMigrants, are the ones who call the shots and decide what system to be a part of. Worst case, a system only has the power to reject us, but the same system doesn’t have any power to *keep* us.

Think about it this way: brands are vying for our attention and want us to like them because brands need us as consumers. Without customers, no business and no brand can survive. I don’t like the Coca-Cola brand, and that’s why I don’t drink coke. But there are people who do drink coke, otherwise the brand would disappear. Coca-Cola spends billions of dollars each year on marketing around the world. So do governments like New Zealand’s. They *get* branding.

The point is: Neither Coca-Cola nor New Zealand have the power to make me their customer or keep me as a customer if I don't want to. They are the ones who have to please me, and not the other way around.

I got some harsh words for those over-confident and arrogant systems like the United States federal government, a system that benefited tremendously by the huge immigration inflows of the last two centuries. The immigration factor that worked for the benefit of the system can reverse suddenly, and the same trends that caused it to rise to the top can bring it to its demise.

The population growth can quickly change into population decline. The inflow of immigrants can easily change into the outflow of emigrants. The accumulation of capital can be rapidly replaced by capital flight.

Unlike the massive federal systems, smaller local governments get this. They know who the taxpayers are, who pays the sales and property taxes, and who can move away if the local government doesn't serve their needs.

In summer of 1999 me and my dad drove our Toyota Corolla from Canada to our new home in the USA - St. Louis, Missouri. Compared to Toronto, a thriving and colorful city, downtown St. Louis made not just a bleak, but a downright depressing impression. I even told my mom and sister, still staying behind, to be ready for disappointment.

Downtown seemed eerily empty, with half of its grey and brown buildings abandoned. Huge skyscrapers, some over 20 stories high, were just standing there with boarded up entrances and dusty windows. I've never seen anything like it. The city of St. Louis has seen the worst of the rapid flight to the suburbs, with its population declining from almost one million in the 1950's to around three hundred thousand five decades later. That is the power of migration.

The federal government officials, of course, are blind to the changing world. They not only do not understand the changes happening outside the system, they are not even interested in those changes. They think those changes do not concern them, since they are protected by the system. But they forget to ask the bigger question: who is protecting the system itself?

Vote with your wallet. Vote with your feet. If there ever was a solution to the problem of arrogant government, this is it. Choose the system that feels right for you at present. You call the shots, and no government can stop you.

### <Shadow iMigrants

One way of dealing with the idiocy of an immigration system is to simply ignore the system. People doing so, whom the government calls "illegal immigrants", should really be called *shadow iMigrants*.

"Shadow", because they stay in the shadow of the official government system, bypassing the visa and immigration paperwork and official border entry points into the

country. In the United States, that would be someone working without a Social Security Number, also called working on “cash”.

There is nothing wrong with that. Shadow iMigrants don't pay taxes, but they also don't have the social safety nets that the taxpayers have. If they get paid below minimum wage, then that's the wage that has been determined by the market for their labor. It's fair game.

Shadow iMigrants see opportunity and take action, without bothering to tell the government about it. And the only reason they don't tell the government is that the government would say “you're not good enough, get out of here”, as the government considers itself a superior judge in deciding who is or who is not fit to live in a certain location. By labeling them “illegal”, the government reserves the right to arrest, throw in jail, and deport them. In reality, the government almost never does such a brutal and cruel thing. Well why not?

Imagine yourself driving through California's Central Valley, the epitome of America's industrial agriculture, where mass production of cheap food is pushed to its limits. The air is thick with the smell of cow dung and chemical fertilizers. You drive up to a farm with countless rows of strawberries stretching half a mile long. You see dozens of strawberry pickers patiently collecting strawberries, basking in the heat.

Now imagine all of them being middle-class white collar office workers. Something is not right with this picture, isn't it? To fix the picture, the strawberry pickers would need to be dark-skinned, straw-hat wearing Mexicans, who don't speak English and are likely working there illegally!

The truth is, those “illegals” are not criminals, they are the ones who are doing all the hard work! If the government were to suddenly deport millions of those workers, who would be left to work the farms and what wages would they demand for that kind of back-breaking labor?

Shadow iMigrants are a lot smarter than any government in judging the real market demand for their labor. I recently stumbled upon an article in Florida Today about Mexicans going back home after the housing bubble burst.

If they see benefits for themselves, they come. The same is true for the legitimate businesses that hire them. If the business sees the benefit of hiring an “illegal” without the government involvement, the business does it. It's the true, undistorted market forces of supply and demand, pure capitalism at its best. And it's all win-win, as nobody is forced to enter in an employment transaction.

Shadow iMigrants are present not only in the United States, but all over the world. They are the Tajiks working on constructions sites in Moscow and rural migrants working the service jobs in Shanghai. Neither have the official registration or the hukou and neither complain of being forced to work, since migrating was their own decision based on the opportunity to achieve personal gain.

## <Gaming the System

Large systems are hierarchical by nature. They are comprised of layers logically built on top of each other to separate distinct responsibilities. For instance, a software system might consist of a User Interface layer, a Middle tier, and a Data Access layer.

In the same way, government systems separate their functions by using the National, Regional and Local levels of hierarchy.

Even within a single hierarchy, separate levels of government treat you very differently. It's as if, when looked with different-colored glasses, they see various aspects of you, forgetting that in the end they are analyzing the same human being.

For instance, from a point of view of the State of Missouri, where my St. Louis home base is located, I am a full-fledged Resident. I have the same driver's license as everyone else. I can live there, I can get a job, I can buy a house, I can marry, etc. The state government treats me as a human.

Not so on a higher level. From the point of view of the US Federal Government, I am a "Resident Alien"! As a result of this labeling, I am not treated as a human anymore, and can be denied entry into the United States and stripped of my resident status at any time. By calling me an "Alien", the government is legally and morally justified in denying me basic human rights.

Knowing that large systems almost never treat us as whole human beings is a sad realization indeed. However, learning a particular system's idiosyncrasies and blind spots can give us hidden advantages. iMigrants game the system by presenting only certain aspects of themselves as needed while keeping quiet about the rest.

I know a girl, let's call her Diana as I don't want her to be compromised, who has both Canadian and Hong Kong passports, while living in Shanghai, China. In case you didn't know it, China does not allow dual citizenship. That is, if you are a Chinese and then become a citizen of another country, you have to give up your Chinese citizenship and lose your Chinese national status. But Hong Kong, being a special administrative region, has different rules.

Having a Hong Kong ID allows Diana to freely live on Mainland China, as long as she keeps quiet to the local authorities about her Canadian citizenship. Enjoying the same advantages given to the locals, she at the same time keeps the option of moving to the West.

In effect, Diana has achieved the prohibited dual citizenship by finding a way to present herself as being exclusively Chinese to the Chinese government. She gamed the system.

Diana is not alone. Millions of people know that the present global nation-state system is broken and doesn't account for the mobility of the modern world. What's really sad is that such discussions are mostly confined to private kitchen



conversations, with people involved being too afraid to openly say it for fear of being punished by the system.

For Christ's sake, I can't even use the real names of some of my friends in this book, since that would make them liable to prosecution by various government systems they have to please. Don't you think that's really messed up?

iMigrants are not criminals. It's just that their lives are not well described by current laws. All they want is freedom and mobility, but the present world is not set up to allow them to do it legally.

That's why iMigrants silently game the system, avoiding open confrontation so as not to attract the wrath of the monster.

### <Denied

In January of 2008, while trying to get my online startup off the ground in Los Angeles, I decided to invite my cousin Vitaly from Russia for a visit. I haven't seen him in several years and couldn't wait to show him the best of the American West. Glittering casinos of Las Vegas, staggering depths of Grand Canyon, cracked flatness of Death Valley - I planned to cover it all on a once-in-a-lifetime road trip.

Air tickets were cheap in the winter, and I was prepared to pay the full \$800 roundtrip flight fare from Moscow to LA. Vitaly reserved air tickets and applied for the travel visa at the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg with an invitation from me, explaining the reasons for his trip and my willingness to pay for all his travel expenses.

After several days he had an in-person interview at the embassy where he was told his visa application is denied. Denied because he couldn't prove that he has strong enough ties to Russia. Denied despite him holding an engineering job. Denied despite the fact he owns an apartment in Yekaterinburg. Denied despite him not being able to speak English. Denied despite me taking an obligation for whatever might happen to him during the trip.

I still remember the angst I felt that January, walking along the beach in Santa Monica, realizing there was nothing I could do. The feeling of being absolutely powerless against the system. All of my dreams and plans were in effect worthless, since they could be destroyed by a bureaucrat who is supposed to be serving me, who I have to pay taxes to support.

There is one point that governments around the world don't seem to get. Those who you don't want to come, will come anyway.

There are tens of millions of shadow iMigrants, whom the government calls "illegal aliens" residing in the United States. They don't care about the US Federal Government and its rules. They don't care about visas, immigration laws and other legal BS. They see the opportunity and seize it, without asking for permission. They know that borders, more often than not, do not exist in physical reality, and that

there is no wall with barbed wire around the United States. There are many ways of getting into a country, the simplest of which is just hiking there across the desert. Nothing to prevent them if they are determined to do so.

What about preventing unwanted “aliens” from flying in from overseas, shouldn’t the airport border checkpoints take care of that? Well, let’s follow that train of thought for a moment.

Supposedly, Vitaly was denied a visa because he didn’t have close-enough ties to Russia and government officials were afraid that by giving him a visa, they would risk him staying in the United States illegally instead of returning back to Yekaterinburg.

But if he really wanted to stay in United States illegally, what would have prevented him from getting a visa to Mexico, flying there first, and then hiking across the border like millions of others do? Nothing.

Again, if Vitaly really wanted to get to United States, the government would not be able to stop him. He would find a way in.

In truth, Vitaly never wanted to live as an illegal in the United States (he has much better things to do), thus the only thing a visa denial did was to prevent him from taking a legitimate travel trip to California. In Vitaly’s case, the government action didn’t prevent a negative outcome, it prevented a positive one!

Worse yet, yes, the government of the United States not only prevented my cousin to spend money on its territory but also damaged the United States brand in both his and my eyes. Do you ever see a private business doing that, turning customers away in such a manner?

Controlling migration among countries through border checkpoints is an absurdity. It is the equivalent of having border checkpoints between every state in the USA.

Say you drive up to the Illinois border and get rejected, for any reason. Well, wouldn’t that spoil your image of Illinois then? You might never think of going there anymore, with 50 other states to choose from. Or you might get inside the state by avoiding the checkpoint altogether: driving on a smaller highway or just taking a hike through the woods...

Same could be said not just of travel, but work restrictions and denials.

If a government wants to attract highly-skilled professionals instead of manual laborers, why set restrictions on their entry? One example of such a restriction is the H1-B visa program, that only allows a certain number, currently around 50,000, of such visas to be granted per year. The demand from local businesses to hire well-qualified foreigners is so huge that the visa quota is completely exhausted in the first days of the calendar year. If you couldn’t squeeze through on time, well then, no luck for you. Wait another year and hope for better chances in this lottery.

The government interferes with the market economy, with the natural forces of supply and demand, pretending to know better than private businesses “what’s good for the country”. It’s well known, however, that governments never really understand the markets and are never as efficient as the markets, so how are governments to be trusted in determining who is and who is not allowed in?

There are natural social and economic boundaries to migration that work beautifully without any government intervention. Where do you think an uneducated Mexican farmer would go: San Francisco, with its sky-high prices and yappy tech workers, or California’s Central Valley, an agricultural environment with plenty of work for him to do?

By asserting its authority all the government does is damage its brand in the eyes of future newcomers. Building a brand is about long-term vision, but politicians only care about the next elections, the results of which are determined by voters who have no clue of America’s place on the global arena.

Governments seem to forget that those who you are counting on to come in the future might not come if you create barriers for them in the present. Seeing how arrogantly the government treats them, potential iMigrants might choose to explore career options in other high-tech centers with friendlier attitudes. Long-term, the labor restrictions will affect the competitiveness of American businesses and accelerate the decline of the USA brand.

### <Why I Will Never Become a U.S. Citizen

*“Be the change that you want to see in the world” - mother Teresa*

In the Fall of 2008 I had an option of becoming a US Citizen. After filling out N-400, the citizenship application form, I sadly realized that I am not eligible because of spending years in Russia while getting my education. In fact, filing that application, without lying, risked not just the denial of citizenship, but risked my Green Card being taken away and me being deported for spending too much time “overseas”. Not enough allegiance.

Let’s look at some of the items on that form to see where the problems are. I definitely have issues with a lot of things there. Many of these questions, some of which are true pearls, if I dared to answer them truthfully, would immediately disqualify me from citizenship.

### Time Outside the United States

The whole section is devoted to this, making me list all of my trips that lasted more than 24 hours outside the US in the last 5 years, with precision to the level of days! The government wants to confine me to its “own” land, restricting my freedom of mobility by using the “world with borders” mentality. Are you a Global Citizen? Stop! You are not eligible to apply for naturalization.

Have you ever claimed to be a US Citizen, in writing or any other way?

Sure, I've claimed to being an American before, when it made sense to present myself that way to other people. As mentioned earlier in the book, I take the best of what is associated with being an American and ignore the worst.

Have you ever been associated in any way, directly or indirectly, with the communist party?

Yes, my grandfather was a devout communist. And what's the importance of that, again?

Have you ever been a member of a terrorist organization?

I guess government intelligence is a contradiction in terms.

Good Moral Character

Have you ever been a habitual drunkard?

Sure I have, during my college years. But do you really expect me to tell you that?

Have you ever lied to any U.S. Government official to gain entry or admission into the United States?

How else would it be possible to pass the border checkpoints so many times while living the global lifestyle? I either lied or told half-truths, being careful not to trigger any follow-up questions that could lead to me being denied entry or worse, being deported and permanently blacklisted by the system.

Have you ever left the United States to avoid being drafted into the U.S. Armed Forces?

No, but would do so without hesitation in case of another Vietnam.

Do you support the Constitution and form of government of the United States?

Sure I support the Constitution, but that doesn't mean I support the present form of the US government! As a Russian saying goes: "Can you please separate the flies from the meatballs?"

Notwithstanding the questions, the gist and the spirit of the application for US Citizenship comes right at the end, in the form of the Oath of Allegiance:

*I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;*

*that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic;*

*that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;*

*that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;*

*that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law;*

*that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and*

*that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.*

I don't know about you, but most people I see around me on the ground in the United States seem to pledge a lot more allegiance to their paycheck, their 6-pack of Budweiser, and to their ass than to the items in the Oath.

And yet I am expected to be an obedient saint, to prove to the system that I'm a good sheep... Until a system gives me a piece of paper called a passport. Then I can forget about all that, become a drunkard and a communist, evade taxes, desert the US during a war, lie to the government, and generally behave like people who are already citizens and are not afraid of their citizenship being taken away, people who treat citizenship for what it really is: a bunch of bureaucratic bullshit.

I could have lied. I could have faked faith and allegiance. I could have been part of the herd like everyone else, pretending to be a good sheep ready to serve the system. I could have gamed the system. But this time, I decided not to.

The reason I refuse to become a US Citizen is that the US Citizenship shows everything that's wrong in the modern world, with its present nation-state system. A Russian or a Chinese immigration system is no better than an American one. It is the whole global nation-state system, without a unifying world government that would treat people as global citizens, that is wrong.

I can do little to change the way the world works. Government systems don't listen to me. They are not even aware of me, as I am no more than a record in a database for them. But at least what I *can* do is to consciously withdraw my support for systems I do not consider just.

If I can't change something, at least I don't want to be enabling it. And by going through the motions and agreeing with the system, I am perpetuating the system's existence.

US Citizenship is not a matter of life and death, but rather of convenience and some future considerations. On principle, I am going to sacrifice those practical things. There is a price to pay for my decision, and I am willing to pay it.



## Chapter 6: Social Earthquakes

## <1991-1993

Tanks roll on the streets of Moscow. Soviet Union ceases to exist. The whole society is thrown into turmoil.

Being a child in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the details of the faraway past are blurry, but I distinctly remember the chaotic atmosphere of those times. Yes, they were THE times; I wish I could go back to re-live them as an adult...

Speaking of adults, in August of 1991 adults around me were huddled in front of TV sets, while at the same time listening intently to radio reports from Western Europe, stations like BBC and Radio Svoboda.

With various government forces fighting for control, information from the outside was often more reliable and objective than from internal media sources. That information, however, did not make comprehending events that were occurring any easier. It was vain to try to figure out what the changes in the external world would mean to our lives.

But what did actually occur? What actually occurred was the collapse of the “Soviet Union” brand. And soon after that, system failure on multiple levels.

As the government suddenly removed itself from the equation and gave free reign to capitalism, the smooth transition to the market economy that so many people dreamed about turned into chaos.

Lacking support, the old centrally planned economic system simply stopped functioning. Without orders from the “top” to produce, many factories suddenly had no customers, forcing them to resort to barter schemes to get at least something in return for their products.

Local conditions could get quite bad. Many towns that relied on a single industry got hit the worst, with the whole city being out of work because the factory lost its only customer - the government. There was nothing else to do and no money flowing in. Some factories kept producing “on autopilot”, without sales, and paid their workers’ salary not with money, but with factory products.

I remember passing through a small factory town, a station on the railroad line leading to Moscow called Gus-Hrustalny, translated literally as “Goose-Crystal”, where in the early 90’s residents crowded the platform, trying to sell crystal ware, dishes and souvenirs, dirt cheap, to the passengers of passing trains. They didn’t have a choice since the factory paid them their salary in crystal ware... And you can’t eat that.

During the hasty reforms, most state-owned enterprises were privatized, with their shares, called Vouchers, distributed in equal portions among the general population. Now everyone owned a piece of the “riches of the country”. It’s a plan that worked



great in theory, but in practice nobody had a clue as to how much each share was worth. Many sold their vouchers on the black market for as little as a bottle of vodka.

Another level of system failure was financial.

The newly-formed democratic government, facing a lack of revenues and mounting obligations, decided to add liquidity to the financial system and turned up the printing presses. Hyperinflation appeared without warning, wiping out people's lifetime savings in the blink of an eye. With zero trust in the ruble, individuals and companies quickly switch to transacting in the then-almighty US Dollar.

Perhaps the greatest, the most devastating failures, however, were implicit. These are the assumptions that underlie the workings of any society, the invisible glue that holds it together.

Pessimism is a contagious disease, the spread of which creates a breakdown of social relationships, a downward spiral that is hard to escape.

With the government safety net suddenly disappearing, people stop believing in social security, an idea that others would help in a difficult situation, and resort to growing potatoes on tiny plots of land to provide "food security" during the harsh winters.

Many people went into denial, refusing to accept that the old times were gone forever and are not coming back. Trying to escape reality, they indulged in a strong nostalgic longing for the safety and security of the past, often with the help of cheap alcohol.

The retired generation got hit the hardest, lost everything. All of their savings were wiped out in hyperinflation, but what was the most humiliating was that their beliefs of what is right and wrong were questioned. It turned out the truth of their beliefs was not absolute after all. Their thinking was invalidated, their ideologies abandoned. The younger generations no longer respected them and didn't care about their advice. That's what was really devastating.

History, which is nothing more than a commonly-accepted simplified interpretation of the past, was being re-written in real-time, making our school history teachers focus on ancient Rome and Greece, preferring not to talk about the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the current events.

I call it system failure on social level. This type of failure is not easily quantified, but felt the most, and that is the failure of trust and confidence. Confidence in government, confidence in society, confidence in people around you, confidence in the future. Do you know what it's like to live in a society of fear and mutual distrust? I do, and it's not fun. It's scary.

With government weak, power quickly transitions to organized crime, in a process called the Great Criminal Revolution. Mafia controls businesses and collects taxes, giving out the ultimate punishment for non-compliance: death. Hardly a day goes by

without reports of mafia gun shootings or arson among various clans fighting for control.

Non-organized crime skyrockets too - from pickpockets to burglaries and murders. To protect themselves, common people rush to install bars on windows and metal doors. People are afraid, very afraid.

I am not yet old enough to react to those events myself, but I do observe other adults' reactions. I soak up the fear and confusion.

Parents, teachers, passers-by on the street, people everywhere are confused and depressed. There is no hope in the future. People think it will only get worse, not better. Society feels like an endless winter - cold, dark and without hope.

### <Social Earthquakes

Social earthquakes are unexpected rare events that make a rubble out of mind constructs.

The collapse of Soviet Union was just one of such events that I happened to witness. It is not even remotely easy to analyze, but nonetheless I will attempt this task.

I want you to become familiar with the concept of a Social Earthquake not because you will see it often in your life. On the opposite, I hope you never have to experience it. But precisely because these events are so rare, their impact on your life and life of others around you is so huge.

Social earthquakes occur when our deeply-rooted beliefs are suddenly contradicted by experience. It is those contradictory interactions that cause seismic shifts in our beliefs about the rest of the world and create ripple effects such as wars and revolutions.

How can that happen? Isn't the physical world we live in governed by immutable scientific laws? It is, if you are grounded in the objective model of reality. But the thing is, it is our subjective *interpretation* of that reality, of the physical world that can undergo a dramatic change in a short period of time.

I'd like to call this individual interpretation of reality a Social System. Why not just call it society?

Society is an extremely difficult thing to define. Is it a single living organism, composed of multitudes of individuals, acting as cooperative cells? Or is society just an illusion? What's clear is that society, with billions of people and interactions among them, is infinitely complex.

To grapple with this complexity, let's forget about the society monster and rather focus on a single individual's perception of society. What does each of us see?

What each of us possesses is a set of intuitive assumptions about how society works. You can call it a model of reality, a dream world, or a social system.

A social system is an individual's view of the world and his expectations of results of interactions with other humans. This internal belief system is extremely important since individuals take action and interact with the outside world based on their beliefs. Social systems are obviously subjective and are in a state of constant refinement based on new inputs. You could say that any social system is a belief system reconfirmed by interaction.

Simple acts like taking a walk on the street, going shopping or showing up for work are all examples of our daily social interactions, and all are guided by our expectations of how we and others should behave in different contexts.

In a civilized world, those daily social interactions are practically inevitable. They either re-confirm our beliefs (more often) or contradict them (much less often). Usually, our present model of reality is quite refined, resulting in very few surprises, making our internal individual social system fairly stable. Our lives seem quite predictable and our beliefs become deeply-rooted. We start to take them for granted, forgetting that they are simply assumptions.

The problem is that our social system, to a large extent, does not exist in a physical world. What seems like solid ground might not be "solid" at all.

For instance, I can go to an ATM and withdraw "money" that I earned years ago. This "money" thing is actually a mind construct. What actually exists in a physical world? Records in a database and pieces of paper. But my social system is based on assumptions that these bits and pieces have enduring value and I expect society to honor its promised obligations. This trust allows me to "save money", that is to accumulate IOU's from the rest of society.

During a social earthquake the physical world stays in place, but what matters is that the human assumptions change. What is the human value placed on a number in a bank account, the value assigned to a gold coin, the value assigned to an ideology, belief system, or a rationality framework?

Can these "social" values, perceptions, and expectations ever be constant? No.

A social system can never escape that sort of human subjectivity, making it inherently unstable.

The collapse of USSR instilled in me a distrust of any man-made system and a permanent sense of instability of social systems.

Any system that largely does not exist in a physical world is under suspicion, including belief systems like religions and ideologies; economic systems, be they centrally planned or market-based; and political systems, be they communist or democratic. Any system of knowledge is especially vulnerable, such as a scientific system, legal system, or a technology system and other systems that exist largely in our minds.

## < Shaky Foundations: Main Causes of Social Earthquakes

Now let us ponder why social earthquakes occur. For social earthquakes to occur, that is for the mental constructs to crumble, those mental constructs have to exist in the first place. What are the causes of such strong and often erroneous beliefs? Why and how can we be fooled by our self-created social systems? How can our well-refined model of reality simply stop working? Why are humans so bad at predicting the future?

### Erroneous Beliefs

The foundations of any social system lie in deeply-rooted human beliefs, the majority of which are adopted during childhood. They are beliefs that people take for granted and don't question. And it is exactly those beliefs, when being questioned, that cause the massive Social Earthquakes.

An example of such a belief from several hundred years ago is that the earth is flat. For thousands of years, people had no doubt about it. It's what they observed, therefore it must be true. It took Magellan to sail around the world in order to destroy that belief.

Einstein's theory of relativity challenged the belief that time and space are absolute and radically changed the view of the universe we live in. Einstein published his paper on the theory of relativity in 1905, yet it took years for other physicists to even consider accepting his radical ideas. Even a decade later, some prominent physicists disregarded his assumptions of how the universe worked, since they were so counter-intuitive and went against their day-to-day observations. But other scientists who adopted the new beliefs made breakthroughs that changed the course of humanity.

### Authority

Blind faith and trust in authority, the belief that someone else "knows" better than us. This includes well-known figures such as the president, figures that project competence and confidence.

It is obvious that Obama's or Putin's knowledge about the massive government systems, their inner workings, hierarchies of management, etc. is quite limited, yet they are still regarded as authorities on national issues, as people who understand how the government works, and as someone who can be trusted in managing it.

Ask any worker in a large corporation whether the CEO has a clue as to what's really happening on the ground level, about the challenges of their specific jobs, and they will most certainly answer that no, the CEO doesn't have a clue. But ask them the same question about another company's CEO or about the president, and the results are quite different.

People crave and constantly search for authority, they want someone to understand the world better than they do, they want someone to rely on, someone to be a superstar and a judge, and thus often idolize leaders who are nothing more than good-looking empty suits.

## **Illusion of Power and Control, Hierarchical Thinking**

Belief that those who are higher than us on the “social ladder” have power and control over our lives and over the future of society. Or on the other hand, belief that we have power and control over those who are “below” us on the social ladder. Belief that authority controls the world, either by means of force or clever incentives.

## **Belief that We Know a Lot**

Our life experience seems so vast and so diverse that it is very easy to be deluded into thinking that we “know” how the world works. But what do we actually know first-hand, beyond our tiny sliver of subjective experience? Much of what we “know” about the world is just an extrapolation based on blind trust and faith in the knowledge of other humans.

## **Disregard of System Complexity**

Why can't we predict future social earthquakes? Simply because we cannot correctly assess the present system complexity. Our model of the present reality is a very rough simplification and estimation, the stories we tell ourselves about the world and our place in it before we go to bed.

On my bookshelf there is an important book you will never find on the bestseller lists. The book is so obscure and rarely used that not even every library has a copy. There is nothing secret in it. It's titled “United States Government Manual” and contains a general overview of the United States Federal Government - one of the largest systems in the world with millions of employees.

Why will this book never become a best-seller? The answer is simple: people do not like to be made aware of system complexity.

Why isn't it studied at schools? Again, not to scare the kids with complexity. Better to entertain them with short, easily comprehensible stories about the founding fathers...

And because people don't like complexity, they simply ignore it. The mind always looks for islands of stability in the ocean of life, as it is simply impossible for it to analyze the myriads of systems around us.

## **Disregard of System Fragility**

Since the ancient times, people tried to protect existing systems and to fortify them against the onslaught of enemies. They built huge barriers, like the Chinese Great Wall, and slept soundly, believing they are safe and secure. Of course, just one breach allowed invading armies to go through and conquer the peaceful communities.

Present defense systems are a lot more complicated but share the same fault - just one vulnerability is enough to bring them down... Think WikiLeaks.

The rise of technology increases system complexity, creating the risk of a spectacular Chernobyl-like meltdown. Technology gives systems leverage, but leverage also

increases risk. As financial speculators can attest, leverage is a B\*tch on the downside.

### **Disregard of Relative Values**

No system exists in a vacuum, and no system is insulated from changes happening in the rest of the world. Systems are constantly being judged on their *relative* utility, no matter how good or bad they are in absolute terms.

It's quite possible Soviet Union would not have collapsed if not for the prosperity of the West, which made a market-based economy enormously more appealing than a centrally-planned one. Or put it in a simpler way, it doesn't matter how much milk your cow provides, as long as it provides more than a neighbor's cow.

### **Intelligent Design**

Belief that society, even though it is infinitely complex, is an intelligent self-regulating mechanism. In the economic sphere, such theories are abundant: economists love to talk about market efficiency, the invisible forces of supply and demand, and the resulting attainment of perfect equilibrium.

### **Belief in Rationality**

Numbers reflect seismic shifts, they don't cause them. People who try to quantify natural phenomena often forget this, mistaking correlation with causation.

### **Worry About the Expected**

People worry a lot about potential future problems, making an elephant out of a fly, while ignoring the impact of the truly unknown. Y2K as a scare was widely expected, but proved insignificant. 9/11 came out of the blue and was earth-shattering.

### **Herd Instinct**

Group-think, safety-in-numbers, following the follower, enough said.

### **Not In My Lifetime and Definitely Not in My Backyard = "This Time Is Different" & "It's Different Here"**

Belief that massive changes happen in many places around the world, but are unlikely to happen when and where we live.

So many Americans seem naïve in that respect, forgetting the death of the inner city, a truly seismic shift that resulted in creation of a new, unimaginable before concept, a Suburb. Not city, not a village, but a suburb.

If you asked someone in 1950 about the population trend of the city of St. Louis, different people would give you different predictions. Yet nobody would say the question is irrelevant. Right now, it is. The "city" part of St. Louis is just a small part of the metro area. Who knows, half a century later the concept of suburbia might become meaningless too, being replaced by a new kind of living arrangements.

## **Worst Case, the Government Will...**

Belief that government systems will always be able to prevent systemic collapse and bail out the smaller systems underneath them. Two problems: first, this bailout does not always happen. Second: who is going to bail out the system at the top level? The government can bail out the banks, but who will bail out the government?

## **<Gold Bug**

While social earthquakes make a rubble out of mind constructs, they do not destroy everything. They can easily send brands and systems into the dustbin of history, but are powerless when it comes to our deepest attachments - attachments to the Physical and Concrete.

There is one extraordinary asset that held up to countless social earthquakes over thousands of years. Wars, revolutions, no matter what happened to the government or society, this asset stayed valuable. It is gold.

Why does gold never become worthless? What makes it precious? This shiny metal doesn't rust, is widely used for jewelry and industrial purposes, and is easily transportable. Moreover, it is difficult to extract and therefore is perpetually scarce. To give you an idea, all of the gold mined in human history would not even completely fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool. All of these things make gold extremely valuable, with one ounce (around 30 grams) of this metal currently trading at over \$1,000 USD.

People everywhere value gold no matter what, thus making gold the universal store of value. It has been used as a medium of exchange since the beginning of human history, and has also been used as a standard for many currencies, including the newer Digital Currencies.

During childhood, I used to spend every summer in Chukari - a small village nestled in the gently rolling hills of the southern Ural mountains. My grandparents had a "dacha" there, Russian for a summer home, a place to escape the noise and pollution of the city and get closer to nature.

Chukari is also the origin of Gavrilov family, with my great-grandparents living there up until their death. I often visited their two-storey house, made of wood and stone, so old that it had a permanent smell of... smell of a very old house with very old people living in it, you know. The house was filled with antiques such as a pre-WWI Zinger sewing machine from Germany and other relics.

Grandparents liked to tell a "treasure" story associated with the house. When it was purchased by Gavrilov family in the 1920's, they decided upon a renovation. During a thorough renovation and re-building they stumbled upon a box, apparently hidden there by the previous owner years ago. Excitedly, they opened the box, expecting to be rewarded by treasures of the past.

Imagine their utter astonishment and frustration when they discovered a pile of banknotes, Tsar rubles, a fortune at the time of this “klad” creation before 1917, but completely worthless in the Soviet era. If, only if the treasure creators put golden rubles instead of the paper ones, the value of the treasure would be preserved!

“How silly could they be?” laughed my grandparents. Just a few years later, it was my grandparents turn to be silly, as they lost their life’s savings, this time not in the form of paper rubles, but in the form of electronic rubles stored in a bank, in the hyperinflation that followed the collapse of USSR.

Somehow people think the past does not apply to present circumstances. Many people think that *now* is special, *now* is different, *now* is much more stable and predictable. Are people fooled by the technological advances and confuse them with advances in *society*, or lack of thereof? Do they really believe social earthquakes will not happen in the future?

I will admit that I am a die-hard gold “bug”, someone who keeps part of his savings as a stash of gold coins, hidden away, hoping I would never have to sell them, unless there is a sudden unpredictable change in the world order. I never believe in things like 401Ks, Social Security, pensions, and any other paper promises of future comfort and stability.

The portability of gold makes it even better than real estate during social (and physical!) earthquakes.

Real estate becomes illiquid when conditions like a natural disaster, economic depression, war, or a revolution are descended on your city. When you have no choice but to leave, you can’t take real estate with you, no matter how much you love your house or an apartment. And during bad times, everyone else wants to sell too, so real estate becomes worthless.

In fact, many governments are envious of gold’s success as a store of value, compared to the many failures of government-issued paper assets, such as currency and bonds. In the United States, private individual gold ownership was actually forbidden during the Great Depression. In the 1970’s the government altogether untied the dollar from the golden standard, making it a fiat currency without intrinsic value.

Gold has a largely symbolic meaning of wealth, power, and success, but that’s what matters. Humans “get” gold, without having to be convinced of its value. You can say that “Gold” is a permanent indestructible brand, superior due to its innate attraction.

Gold is often ridiculed by modern economists as a relic of the past, something that is far below the means that the civilized society uses in this day and age. They are right in many respects, except for the moments when society stops being civilized and turns to chaos. It’s in those moments that all the modern stores of value are wiped out, but gold still shines.

It’s history that gives me respect for gold. For as soon as we forget the past, it tends to repeat itself.



## <iMigrants and Future Social Earthquakes

It's no secret that we live in times of accelerating change. As staggering as the change of beliefs of past century has been, this century is unlikely to be any more peaceful.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century will see as many social earthquakes as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they will be just as massive, just as unexpected and just as profound.

There is well-known story of a director of the U.S. Patent Office who in 1899 urged the president to close the office, claiming that "everything that can be invented had already been invented"! Unfortunately, this is how the majority of people think. They think the world we live in is already so modern, so sophisticated, and so advanced that hardly anything radically new can happen.

What would that official say if you were to tell him about just one of the forthcoming inventions of the next century: airplanes, mass production of cars, radio, television, atomic bomb, human space travel, personal computer, internet, and telecom revolutions?

What would he say if you mentioned some other notable social earthquakes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as WWI, rise of Hitler, WWII, , the rise of United States as a world economic superpower, the rise and the collapse of Soviet Union?

How could anyone predict the vast shifts that were about to occur? Just as the real "physical" earthquakes, social earthquakes are truly unpredictable. You can try to predict their likelihood, and you can identify the fault lines as ideological friction or difference in beliefs, but you can never predict the exact timing of events.

While we can't predict the specific time or form of future social earthquakes, we can bank on them to keep occurring. There is doubt there will be more in the future.

In fact, iMigrants comprise a population that is least vulnerable to chaotic change. They are agile, they love change and are ready for it. There is a school of thought that says most life happens in the valleys, not on the mountain peaks. To iMigrants however, most life happens in the volcanoes & earthquakes, the rest is just existence!

My life's timeline included important systemic shifts, and I adapted so well that I crave more of the same. I've seen so many "black swans" in my life that they now seem the norm rather than the exception. Anywhere you look, there is the mysterious, the unknown and the unpredictable. The longer I live, the more I realize that maybe we should base our lives around social earthquakes, instead of basing them on illusions of stability?

Smooth sailing on the sea of life is now fraught with hurricanes that seem to be more frequent... Global warming, anyone? What do we do to cope with those changes in an uncertain world? Be the captains of our own ship.

iMigrants don't focus on the downside, but rather seek the benefits arising from social earthquakes. Social earthquakes present many once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, for instance a financial crisis can overshoot on the downside and create an enormous value for the buck. This is the perfect time to buy and to invest.

If you had the guts to buy an apartment in Moscow in the early 1990's, when tanks were rolling on the streets, you would see its dollar value increase 100-fold over the next 20 years. As Warren Buffet said, "be fearful when others are greedy, and be greedy when others are fearful".

If you feel it unethical to profit from other people's loss, social earthquakes are a good time to help those in need. That's what Soros did.

Around 1992, my dad unexpectedly received a research grant in the amount of 500 US dollars from George Soros, an eccentric billionaire whose philanthropic fancy at that time was an effort to help sustain science in the failing Soviet bloc. To give you an idea of just how huge that grant seemed, consider that at that time my dad's salary at the institute was around \$40/month.

In the summer of 1993 our family took a vacation to the Black Sea in Ukraine, consisting of two days travel by train, renting an apartment by the sea for a week, and eating unlimited amount of fruits, a real luxury for us northerners. Total cost of this dream vacation for a family of four? Less than \$100.

iMigration phenomenon by itself could be the cause of future social earthquakes, as human mobility adds an element of instability, uncertainty to the systems that are geographically tied down to one place.

The lesson is simple. You'd Better Get Ready For Change.

# PART III: TOOLS & SKILLS

## Chapter 7: Tools & Skills

“The recipe for success is really simple. Double your rate of failure. “

*Thomas Watson, founder of IBM*

How do you make the most out of iMigrant lifestyle without getting stuck in the mud?

The strategies are infinite and possibilities unbounded, but one distinction is crucial: the difference between Tools and Skills. Many people confuse the two and as a result end up getting stuck in the never-ending race to improve their “skills”. It’s a tempting strategy because it’s popular, and it’s popular because it’s much easier than its alternative: taking direct action.

### <Tools and Skills

Knowledge, Time, and Money are the major resources available to all of us. These resources are all Tools. The only Skill you have is *taking action*. If you are not taking action with your tools, you have exactly *zero* skills.

It’s not that tools are not important, they are. But tools are only useful when you use them. Without action, they are worthless.

Many people classify Knowledge as a Skill. You often hear about someone having the right skill-set for a job. Job postings for many IT positions often list dozens of the latest buzz-word technologies as a requirement. What all of those companies actually want though, is someone who can *use* those technologies, not just “know” them.

That’s why on my software engineering resume all the things that prove my “knowledge”: the certifications, education degrees, and programming languages take up only 10% of the resume right at the end. And 90% of the resume describes the actual experience of using all that knowledge, the stuff employers really look at. They want to see proof of your *ability to take action*, as that is the best predictor of your future performance.

Again, Action is the only Skill.

Why is this distinction so significant? Because people get easily caught up in Tools-for-Tools cycles that can take many forms, one of which is Study-for-Study. Many young adults study in high school because they think they need it to go to college. Then they study in college because they think they need it to get a job. Then they get their Masters degree thinking they need it to advance in their future careers. Some people even get their Ph. D. on an auto-pilot.

People spend massive amounts of time and money acquiring knowledge, believing they are acquiring valuable skills and giving them justification to keep doing more of the same. In actuality, they are acquiring more and more tools and are being sucked into the muddy circular Tools-for-Tools cycle. While using Tools (Time, Money) to acquire more Tools (Knowledge), they are never using the additional knowledge being added to the toolbox. Forget all the “Knowledge is power” horseshit they teach at school. Knowledge is nothing without action.

Having a tool is not nearly as important as using a tool. Also, having the best, the most expensive tool is not nearly as important as simply having a working tool.

Imagine yourself owning a house full of furniture, electronics, and hundreds of little miscellaneous things scattered around. Owning all of that makes you feel cozy and comfortable. You also have a basement and a garage, storing all the old things you purchased a long time ago and don't use anymore. These are all the tools you've accumulated throughout your lifetime.

On any given day, going out of your house to interact with the outside world, you can only take one backpack full of tools with you. Taking more and more tools makes the backpack too heavy, making you move more slowly. Trying to stuff more tools in additional bags, along with the backpack, ties your hands, restricting your freedom of movement. The more you try to take with you, the more tired you become along the way. Instead of the tools helping you on your journey, they slow you down.

But if you only take bare necessities, you become faster, you can do more, you gain freedom to take action.

If you get stuck in the Tools-for-Tools cycle, you will not have time to get out of the house and explore the outside world. You will have zero Skills. And if you're not enjoying this cycle, it can really spoil the quality of life.

The thing that keeps people stuck in such cycles is a dream that someday in the future they will escape, acquire freedom, and finally make it big. That all the sacrifices they make right now will be worthwhile in the end.

Another reason people get suckered in such cycles is because "everybody is doing it". Yes, everybody is doing it, but is everybody getting the results they want? Or is everybody getting the average, mediocre, sub-par results?

iMigrants prefer Tools-for-Experiences cycles instead.

To think about it, what is the meaning of Tools by themselves? What's the meaning of Time, Knowledge, and Money?

To give us the ultimate, abundant experience of life. The experience of free time, when you can enjoy watching a majestic sunset for an hour. The experience of knowledge, of enjoying a deeply intellectual life. The experience of money, giving a sense of freedom, independence, and opportunity. The experience of being alive.

### <Study-4-Study

Education is not a good substitute for action, even though the education system itself might lead you to think otherwise. There is a danger in getting stuck in a study-for-study cycle, especially one involving accumulation of degrees and diplomas.

Because college degrees are not just socially acceptable, but encouraged by society, many people spend years of their lives studying something they don't care about and will never use. Sounds familiar? I am guilty of this too, along with a majority of my college classmates. How many of them were genuinely interested in computer science, their major, to the point of moving on to advanced research in that field and

using newly-acquired theoretical knowledge? I know of just a few, less than 1% of several hundred students in our faculty. Yet we studied for years to get a college degree instead of going directly into the workforce and using our existing programming skills, which most students had since high-school.

An educator's favorite argument is that it's necessary to get a degree even if you don't end up applying the knowledge you've learned since a degree is a proof of your diligence to other people. I agree that an honest degree is a proof of your energy, persistence, and ability to follow the rules. But what educators don't tell you is that a degree is not the only way to prove those qualities. And for some people, it is by far not the best way to proceed. This applies not just to college degree, but to any type of an official diploma or certificate.

### **3 Changes in 3 Days**

There is no period in my life that I hated more than High School. It was boring, it was a waste of time, and it felt like being stuck in prison. Of course, there is no one to blame but myself for making those years miserable instead of fantastic. What would I do if I could go back in time to my 16-year old self?

I would make three very simple changes that in just a few days would radically transform my life.

The first change would be to stop doing what I hated, that is to stop going to school. Yes, dropping out of school, as crazy as it might sound, would be a great choice in my situation, freeing up time for more action.

The second change would be to quickly find some sort of a minimum-wage fast-food job. Having one would allow me to move out and live independently from parents.

Why fast-food, and not some other work like sales? Manual work is dumb, requires no thinking, and clears the mind and lets it rest, allowing it to burst with creativity and productivity after work. Instead of using my mental energy during work hours, I would enjoy an amazing intellectual life in the evenings, working on my own projects.

And a third change would be to start doing what I loved doing, which at that time was computer programming. I loved both learning about it and practicing it. I could do both by picking up freelance projects on the internet, in the process not just learning and improving my skills, but building a career reputation.

The first year or two my freelance programming work would not bring too much money, but as I would gain practical experience, proficiency, and reputation, the income would go up significantly, allowing me to eventually naturally transition to full-time software development and stop doing the minimum-wage monkey job.

My career would advance to the similar level I had after graduating from high school and then college, but a lot faster, taking two or three years instead of a decade. More importantly, I would not waste precious time being bored to death, studying something I didn't care about to get that piece of paper called "diploma".

Action, action and more action. You think that's a strategy for failure? There are plenty of college and even high-school dropouts without money and without connections who became millionaires to prove you wrong.

What would your 3 changes be if you could go back a decade into the past?

### <Language Exchange

What is language exchange and why getting involved in it such a good idea? The short answer is: it is a way to study a foreign language and at the same time a unique opportunity to experience the local culture and meet new people.

If you're studying a new language, language exchange is a great way to practice all of the textbook material that gets poured at you in the classroom. The unfortunate truth about the classroom environment is that by itself it is really boring and predictable. Instead of having live face-to-face conversations, you are confined to practicing pre-written monologues and dialogues. Of course, you can always hire a private tutor to help you along, but it is fairly expensive and too business-like.

The solution is to find a person who is eager to teach you a foreign language while you, in exchange, teach them your native language. Language exchange involves direct exchange of value without money being involved, making it more informal and more fun.

More importantly though, language exchange is a great way to meet new people and get to know the local culture. What I've noticed a lot in interactions with classmates is that they tend to hang around people of their origins. For example, in a foreign environment Russian students would mostly socialize with other Russians. As a consequence, they do not become fully immersed in the local language and culture. Is this what you really want from your global adventures?

But how do you find other people interested in doing language exchange with you? It's quite simple.

Upon my arrival to China, I posted this message in the English section of the Jiao Tong University online forum and got about a dozen responses in the first week:

**TITLE: An American looking for language study partners**

**Hi, my name is Andrei and I'm a new student here at SJTU (Xuhui campus).**

**To complement my language studies, I want to practice conversational Mandarin Chinese. In exchange, I will teach you how to speak American English.**

**It's a win-win deal.**

**If you're interested, please call me 137-6443-0514 (or email [andrei.gavrilov@gmail.com](mailto:andrei.gavrilov@gmail.com)) to schedule a meeting on campus.**

**Thanks, Andrei**



I must tell you I couldn't have been happier with the outcome. This was one of the rare times in life where 1% of action generates 99% of results.

I've met my girlfriend Carrie and other people who became my very good friends. They pursue various degrees, have different interests and hobbies, and come from all corners of China. I've learned a lot about their life and their aspirations. This is the kind of invaluable learning that you can never get with a textbook or a classroom. Don't miss it!

<Jacky

**Fall 2009**

“Qing wen, Tushuguan zai nar?”\* Excuse me, where is the Library?

I am practicing speaking Mandarin with my new friend Jacky, whom I met for language exchange in Shanghai. It is a sunny September day and we are walking through the sprawling suburban campus of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Jacky grew up in Haikou, the capital of the tropical Hainan province in Southern China. In high school he excelled in chemistry, competing in Olympiads at the national level. His achievements allowed him to be admitted to one of the most prestigious universities in China to continue his studies. He enjoyed learning and doing research during his undergraduate years, and also engaged in extracurricular activities, playing basketball and dancing.

However, graduation brought the harsh reality of little market demand for his Chemical Engineering degree. The best job he could find was at a chemical factory in the far-away suburb of Shanghai, paying less than \$500 per month. After working at that job for four months, he realized a couple things. First, the job was boring and unfulfilling. Second, there was little chance for advancement if he stayed put.

Then he made an important decision. A decision not to settle. A decision to quit.

Jacky's immediate goal was to study for the upcoming IELTS and TOEFL exams that measure English proficiency, a necessary step for applying for post-graduate study programs overseas.

**Winter 2010, half a year later**

The sky is grey outside and it's cold in the dorm room without the central heating. I sit with my jacket on and sip hot green tea, trying to learn the rules of the popular Chinese card game, Dou Di Zhu.

I feel sorry for Jacky.

His savings are running out, and he still has to pay college tuition loans every month. He sadly tells me he's been applying for universities in the UK, Japan, USA, and Canada but so far that hasn't gotten him anywhere. In two weeks he has a video interview in Beijing with a US university, and he is anxious his spoken English isn't

good enough to pass it. There will be a dozen others competing for the same spot. I advise him to be confident and express his good-natured self during the interview, instead of trying hard to achieve the impossible task of speaking perfect English.

### Summer 2010

“Hey, my GPS is acting funny, it tells me I’ve arrived at the destination but this doesn’t look like your apartment at all!” I shout into my cell phone. Driving down from St. Louis to Florida, I decided to make a detour and meet Jacky, who is now living in a college town of Bloomington, Indiana.

It’s exciting to see each other half way around the world. What could be more joyful than to see someone realize their dreams? We go out to buy pizza and beer and then head to the Chinese party next door, celebrating with other students who just arrived to study for their Master’s and Ph. D’s.

I am happy Jacky’s efforts paid off in spades. Not only is he doing advanced research in chemistry, but he is getting paid for it about four times as much as on the former factory job back in Shanghai. And he has even bigger plans for the future. He truly knows the value of not giving up.

### <Love Failure

Yes, we all know that only action generates results, and yet... Yet there are so many perfectly valid reasons for not taking action! Like not being good enough, not being ready, or simply a reluctance to risk failure.

If you want to try something new, there will be no shortage of convincing evidence that you will most likely fail. In short, there is always an excuse to stay put.

Do you think I would ever take off on a China adventure if I kept commiserating about the constant pain resulting from carpal-tunnel syndrome in my wrist? If I listened to all the relatives telling me that I’m making the biggest mistake of my life? Hell no.

Do you think I would have written this book if I listened to all the negative perfectionist bullshit in my head, to all the grammar Nazis and spelling Police, and focused on all the obstacles needed to be overcome? Hell no.

Do you think I would have gotten an English Teaching job in China if I started my interviews with “Hi ! Firstly, I would like to apologize for my bad English. I’m not a native English speaker...”? If I took to heart my American friends making fun of my Eastern European accent and was seriously concerned about it while looking for a job? Hell no.

Get used to people telling you that you will fail. Get used to self-doubt. Get used to the suffering of physical pain. Accept negativity as given, ignore it, and take action anyway. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!

The possibility of failure by itself is enough to stop many people from taking action.

People fear failure like plague. They are afraid of being seen as incompetent, of being an embarrassment in the eyes of others, of taking a hit to self-image and self-esteem. Fear of failure is the number one reason for inaction and a justification for being stuck in the mud.

But what if you are taking action but not getting the results that you want? Remember that a negative outcome is also an outcome and a necessary lesson to learn. Accept that many of your actions will lead to failure, and keep going anyway.

Success is not a good teacher. When everything goes as planned and you always achieve what you expected exactly as envisioned, you are not learning anything new.

Failure, on the other hand, is a great teacher of valuable lessons. Come to think of it, all of the major successes in my life were the result of huge past failures.

Fail a lot. Fail often.

## Chapter 8: Contribution

*“I don’t have a career, I have a life”*

*Anonymous*

## <Conversations with Grandma

“Andrei, why aren’t you working?” is a question my grandmother, who lives in a small town near Moscow, Russia, asks me every time I call her. She is a doctor, and to her work is everything; it is the meaning of life itself. “Life is meant to be lived for others!” she categorically declares, her preaches falling on deaf ears. Working double shifts throughout most of her life, even at the age of 75 she still keeps a part-time job as a social worker, counseling the disabled.

I know it’s not because of the money. How could it be, when she habitually spends so little that even a part of her tiny pension goes to savings. She doesn’t have to work, but she cannot imagine simply living without working, living without contributing to others. I don’t argue with her because I understand her point of view. She is not the kind of person who would use ownership of material possessions or money to make her voice heard, and certainly not over-consumption as an argument.

Growing up in the poverty of post-war years, she was a straight-A student. Her father was a self-made man of many talents, and was expecting nothing less than excellence from his children. After high-school, he convinced her to pursue medicine instead of following her natural inclinations of math and music. Med school was extremely difficult, one of the worst periods of life by her own accounts.

Grandma has a lot of memories of her early work years, being sent to a small village in the Kazakh steppes in the 1950’s right after graduation. She was the only doctor in the village and had to do absolutely everything herself, from helping to give birth to stitching bloody cuts, often in the middle of the night. Yet while working, she found her inner self: every day helping others overcome their difficulties and pain, connecting and healing, encouraging and inspiring. She found a meaning in contribution.

Sometimes I have feelings of self-doubt, thinking that maybe, just maybe, there is a line of work that would give meaning to my life just like it has for my grandma. But every day around me I see people who do not enjoy what they are doing, who do not place their heart and soul, their life’s meaning in their work, and I keep wondering “Are they really all wrong?” Is it possible that all of them could find something to do that they would be doing just as passionately as my grandmother?

There is nothing wrong with my grandmother’s philosophy, but in my own life, because so far I haven’t found a deep meaning in contribution, I chose to follow a different path. Not the path of maximum contribution to others, but the path of maximum life experience. Instead of centering my life around contribution and living for others, I find meaning in living a lifestyle uniquely designed to make me happy. Yes, I live for myself, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

My Dad says “I will work until death”. I say “I will live until death”.

The choice is yours. You can contribute the maximum possible, spending all of your time and energy for the benefit of others. Or you can contribute the bare minimum, enough to ensure your basic survival, and leaving all that extra time and energy for your own individual pursuits.

Labels attached to either end of the spectrum, such as a “workaholic” (think doctors and lawyers) or a “lazy bum” shouldn’t bother you. You are free to choose your level of contribution to society and nobody can force you to change that choice.

Your contribution doesn't have to be creative. You can do something dumb, like flipping burgers at McDonalds or coding software.

But your life experience can and should be. This is the field to truly unleash your imagination, your self-expression, your potential as a human. Separate what the rest of the world wants from you and what you want from the rest of the world. This duality is necessary for any creative person who also needs to pay the bills.

For me personally, I like to alternate periods of maximum contribution with periods of maximum life experience and enjoyment. Over a lifetime, that creates a medium-level of contribution and plenty of joy as well!

Many over-contributors label this attitude as selfish. But as a good saying goes, “Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.”

### <You are Not Unique

Driving to the interview in Pasadena, California on a cloudy and rainy day in the spring of 2008, my somber mood was a good reflection of the weather. The interview was one of those show-up interviews at a consulting agency that didn’t matter much, not like the interviews at “real” companies. Still, I had to dress up in a suit to make a good impression, just in case anyone cared. With the economy sliding into a deep recession, there were no better options.

At the agency, after waiting half an hour at the reception, the first thing they made me do was take two multiple-choice computer tests. Typical tech tests, you know, with questions asking irrelevant details that could be googled in a minute in any real work environment. Of course, they don’t let you use the internet during these tests to test your true “knowledge”. What a good substitute of intelligence testing, don’t you think? Might as well test you on the recitation of a reference manual.

Right after the tests, with my brain tired and foggy, the receptionist printed out the scorecard and handed me over to the next person, a well-dressed Asian guy with an aura of superiority around him. He starts the conversation by pointing to the test results and telling me I was in the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile of all the test-takers. “Not bad”, I think to myself, as I felt I did much worse.

Not surprisingly, he has a different conclusion: “Look, you’re not unique. We have 10 people like you applying for every single position.” Frustrated, I start telling him

about my various accomplishments, like starting my own online business, but he quickly interrupts “Corporations don’t care about that. They only care about corporate experience.”

Then he inquired about my salary expectations, and I tell my standard asking rate of \$60/hour. Right away, he goes on to prove that with my level of knowledge and experience I could only expect \$40/hour. “How interesting”, I think to myself, knowing that the corporate rates are in the \$80-100/hour range. “These guys want to keep more than half of my salary to themselves...”

Of course, none of these tactics are new to me: having to take an absurd test, being dumbed-down and de-motivated during the process, and then cheated on the salary. Making you feel like a nobody, while behind your back marketing you to corporations as a top-notch professional. It’s all pretty standard sleazy agent industry practices with the goal of squeezing the maximum profit out of every job applicant. Business as usual.

Still, I walk out of that interview miserable and depressed. What a blow to my ego if I still remember this episode years later... This thing really got under my skin. How dare they tell me that I am not unique? I AM unique!

The silver lining to this story, though, is that I now take “You are Not Unique” as a compliment ;-)

### January 2010

My cousin Vitaly is sitting beside me at the back of the classroom with his video camera. Vitaly is not a student and is not supposed to be here, but I brought him as a guest anyway. It’s the end of the semester, right before the finals, and the room is packed and noisy. This class is our Chinese reading and grammar class at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and students come from all over the world: Europe, America, Africa... A colorful crowd. Being the middle of January, and Shanghai not having central heating, it’s cold inside the building, but the atmosphere is red-hot energetic.

Our young and lovely teacher walks in and begins the lesson, fluently switching back and forth between English and Chinese. She skillfully immerses the whole class into the subject matter, engaging us into conversation and giving exam preparation tips. I forget about Vitaly for a while, but eventually notice him becoming somewhat restless. With a confused look on his face, he asks me, in Russian, “So, are they always teaching Chinese using English here?” Suddenly I understand his frustration. Vitaly doesn’t know English.

To me, it seemed a given that any foreigner venturing into China knew English. Knowledge of English is the norm that I took for granted. Vitaly is the exception. Vitaly is not Pluggable.

## <Being Pluggable

How can being non-unique be an awesome thing for any iMigrant? Why is it to your advantage to be easily replaceable? Let's try to find the answers to these questions by introducing the concept of Pluggability.

I like to use the analogy of electrical plugs and sockets to illustrate this important point. For example, my Sony Vaio laptop accepts 100 to 240 Volts of electricity as input and can function pretty well within this voltage range. Bought in the USA, it works exactly the same in Russia and in China. Each of these countries, however, has their own electricity networks and differently shaped electrical sockets. The original plug simply does not fit in. So how could I plug it in?

Of course you know the answer - using a plug adapter. A plug adapter allows me to insert my laptop plug on one end and simply re-routes electricity to the differently shaped (local) other end that plugs directly into the wall socket. With the help of the right adapter, the plug fits in, and the laptop becomes pluggable around the world.

Using the electricity analogy for our human lives, the plug, obviously, is not you, but rather an invisible part of you. To make this fun, imagine your plug to be an invisible missing tail that disappeared in the process of evolution. Something you always carry around with you without even noticing. It's your point of interaction with the outside world. A socket is a job somewhere that provides you the necessary electricity (money) to live on. A plug adapter is a set of tools and skills you possess that makes it possible to get that job.

Schematically, the interaction looks like this:

You <> Plug <> Plug Adapter <> Socket <> Local/Global Social & Economic System

Let's define a person to be Pluggable if they are able to easily find a paying job in another corner of the world using a set of tools and skills they currently possess. If you don't have the right plug adapter, you won't be able to get that job.

Do I consider myself Pluggable? Absolutely. I've found jobs in Russia, USA, and China without much difficulty. You could say my plug adapter is very versatile, allowing me to function well in various corners of the world. It also accepts a wide range of voltage current, with me being able to live on as little as \$200/month.

Are you Pluggable? If you already have a job, then you are certainly plugged-in. However, being plugged-in doesn't necessarily make you pluggable. If you have skills unique to your geographical location, you are plugged-in into the local economy. That would be the case of a fisherman living on an island in South Pacific, speaking only the language of his tribe, and only knowing how to catch one kind of fish. Take him to another location, and he is not going to "fit-in". The problem? He is too unique.

It's having non-unique, standard skills that makes you easily pluggable into the global economy.



What's the most widely used Plug Adapter in the world? Undoubtedly, the English language. No matter where you come from and where you're going, the English language can be of tremendous help for communicating with others. It is a standard that's hard to beat. In fact, if you are reading this book in English, the language it's originally written in, then you are already Pluggable.

Now you might raise objections that just knowing the English language is not enough to survive in other parts of the world, but have you actually tried? Teaching English is not easy, but it might be an adventure you will never forget!

The good news is, you are a lot more pluggable than you think you are.

There was a time when I considered my software engineering background as a real advantage over other professions when it came to leading a global lifestyle. After all, the operating systems and programming languages used around the world are exactly the same. There is a Russian saying "Programmer, even in Africa, is a Programmer".

I could choose locations around the world that would give me opportunities to code software, and felt sorry for those other unlucky fellows like lawyers and architects who didn't have those options due to the more specific, local nature of their professions.

It turned out I was wrong.

In China I met a lawyer from Canary Islands (a territory of Spain) who managed to get a job at a European multinational in Shanghai without knowing Chinese language. How is it possible, I asked her, to work as a lawyer here when the Chinese legal system is vastly different from that of Spain? She explained that at her job she is mostly dealing with international law and trade transactions. Moreover, she said, her knowledge of French and German made her even more valuable for the firm.

Attending a friend's wedding in Beijing, I spoke to an architect from Netherlands who worked in China for the last seven years. "What type of architecture do you specialize in?", I inquired. "Ah, I do designs for various projects... Whatever the company wants from me", he replied, going on to explain that due to China's massive construction boom there is a great demand for any kind of western/foreign architecture. I asked him if he studied any Chinese language while here. "Nope, didn't get around to it" was his reply. Knowing English was enough to prosper in China.

Don't be unique, don't be irreplaceable. Instead, be pluggable and enjoy the ultimate freedom!

### <Negativity

Your greatest obstacle to contribution is not being not good enough, but "thinking" that you are not good enough. The mind is its own worst enemy, and negativity is just one of its manifestations. To any iMigrant, negative thinking is enemy number one.

I catch myself thinking negatively so often that it is no doubt an ingrained habit. It begins with analyzing a “*problem*”. The problem with the “*problem*” is that it’s usually imaginary, existing only in the future, and therefore existing only in my mind.

For instance, I imagine a scene where I’m being interviewed for a job as an English teacher.

The interviewer asks me various questions, and among them the most difficult of all, the monster question: “Is English your Native language?”

You see, all the other questions like my level of education, my grades, and my nationality are easy, and I can answer them without hesitation. But I don’t know how to answer the monster question.

If I answer it truthfully, then the answer would be “Well, it’s almost native” or “It is half-native” and then would go on to explain that I immigrated to Canada at the age of 12. Then my mind draws an angry look on the interviewer’s face and a harsh reply: “Then you’re not qualified for this job. We’re only interested in native speakers!”

If I lie, the issue might still come up through my eastern European accent. Or I would have to explain why my Canadian passport says “Place of Birth: Asbest, Russia”.

No matter how I answer, there could be negative consequences. That is the root of the “*problem*”.

Of course, the real problem is negative thinking itself. Why does my mind like to dwell on scenarios with negative outcomes that have not occurred yet and might never occur? What is the root cause of this negative thinking? Is it the problem with self-worth? Is it the fear of the future? The fear of uncertainty?

Let’s say the monster interview materializes. Would that be so horrible as to obsess about? If I can’t get that particular job, I can always find another one with less stringent requirements.

Additionally, why should I hide my background? After all, my English teachers in Russia didn’t have English as their native language either, yet they were good teachers. As a teacher, it’s not the perfection that matters, but your relative level of knowledge compared to your students and the effort you put in to narrow that gap.

Why do I paint such negative pictures? Why do I always consider worst-case scenarios, focusing exclusively on the downside, and not just let life and time unfold as they would? Am I simply a pessimist?

What if the real problem is my mind’s suffering of trying to achieve the impossible, that is to control and to predict the future?

Ultimately, I cannot predict the outcome of my actions. I do not control the outside world. I do not even understand it. My predictions are skewed and biased, and my vision of the future is simply a projection of the past, it’s like driving forward while

looking in the rear-view mirror. The solution would then be to accept that I cannot predict the future, and live peacefully with it. And the consequence would be to take my thoughts about the future with a grain of salt.

*\*FYI, the monster interview never materialized. In fact, I got my job as an English teacher in Shanghai with no face-to-face interview at all.*

## <Happiness

*“Happiness is nothing but a proper amount of tension in the nervous system” - Anonymous*

I remember those dreary days well.

My first “real” high-paying job after college was at the St. Louis office of the financial and news behemoth that is Reuters. Its large campus was located on Olive street, surrounded by suburban sprawl. Being tired of sitting in front of the computer and the persistent boredom of the job, I often walked around the office park at lunch. Most of the land was occupied not by office buildings but rather by parking lots to accommodate all the white collars working there. At least there were sidewalks to walk on.

Ah, the feeling of utter hopelessness during those walks. There was no escape. This was not college anymore, this was not going to end in a couple of years. This was normal working life, life I had been prepped for by years of schooling and university, and I hated every minute of it. It was not at all what I had expected. The work was not challenging me in any way. It was just way too easy. It was the epitome of the “monkey job” in its high-tech 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent.

I was deeply unhappy. Many of my coworkers seemed bored and unhappy too, but they were resigned to it. It seemed like that is the way my whole future life would be, and it made me feel miserable... Of course, drinking Coke and eating lunches at the Aramark cafeteria certainly added to the misery, ruining my body’s health.

But why was I so unhappy? Isn’t it everyone’s dream to have a cushy no-pressure job?

I was unhappy because I didn’t have tension. There was no struggle and there was no chase. That’s why I loved those difficult high-pressure fast-paced jobs like working at an advertising agency or being a teacher. Life, and work, should not be simple, otherwise it becomes mere existence.

In any major city, there are thousands of jobs you could do. The problem becomes not finding a job, but choosing among the endless possibilities. Which job is the best for you? Which is the most interesting, the most fun, the most fulfilling, the most engaging? Which job lets, or better yet, forces(!) you to grow as a person?

Contribute in a way that doesn’t make you bored, do something that scares you, even if you feel you’re not ready for it yet.

If you don't find meaning in your contribution, at least find challenge in it.

## Chapter 9: Money

Gurus, passive income yada, yada, yada , online business, yada, yada, yada multiple income streams yada, yada, yada, stay-at-home mom makes \$7000 in two weeks, yada, yada, yada ...

Heard this before?

iMigration can change your life, but it is not a Get-Rich-Quick scheme. You might not need a lot of money to iMigrate, but you still need that 1 quai to buy 1 bowl of rice, right?

Let's be realistic and accept that while yes, miracles do exist and do work for some, they are the best-case scenarios that work only 1% of the time. I've been there and done it, believing in and pursuing luck, and yet the results were sub-par or non-existent. If it's too good to be true, it probably isn't.

What do you do if you are not lucky, and the river of money does not flow your way? What do you do if you can't get into that top 1%? Give up on the dreams of a global lifestyle altogether, accept that life is not fair and suck it up?

### <Living Globally on Minimum Wage

My friends are often surprised at my lifestyle, inquiring how on earth am I able to afford it. "There is no magic", I tell them. I just save for a year or two while working and those savings finance my future adventures. "Eh," they tell me with a slight note of jealousy in their voice, "We wish we could afford to go to all those exotic places too, but we will never be able to save so much money. We are not software engineers and do not earn nearly as much as you do..."

What surprises me is that many of my friends live in the US and therefore are part of the Golden Billion. In addition, they earn far more than the minimum wage. Surely there is no reason why they should not be able to save enough money to escape the rat race at least once in a while to see the world. I tell them it's possible to achieve a global lifestyle even with their income, but they categorically deny it.

There are persistent myths out there that living a truly global lifestyle is the domain of rich and famous. In reality, all it takes is drive and determination.

Let's crunch some numbers and see what could be done on the lowest of incomes - the minimum wage, which is, as of 2011, \$7.25 per hour. There is nothing wrong in being right at the bottom of the career ladder, I've been there too.

Working 8 hours per day for an average of 22 days per month, your gross monthly income would be \$1,276. Working 12 months per year, your gross yearly pay would be \$15,312.

Let's aim to save \$6,000 per year, after tax. A fairly ambitious goal for a minimum-wage earner, don't you think? It's doable, but you need to be open-minded and creative.

What can you do with six thousand dollars? For 6K, you can, for instance, vagabond around China for 6 months. The possibilities are endless, and no, you do not have to live in a cave to achieve that!

What you do need to do is drastically cut the Big 3 expenses: Rent, Food, and Transportation.

Before considering cutting expenses, there is an important choice you have to make: location. Not just the state you live in, but the city you live in and the neighborhood you live in. Geographical location is much more important for someone living on minimum wage, trying to do more with less, than for someone earning an average salary. Let's just look at major expenses:

**Rent:** You will have to live with roommates. Relax, not three people per room like I lived in my college dorm in Moscow. You will enjoy the privacy of your own bedroom, living in a two or three bedroom apartment, townhouse, or even a detached house. Choose the right location, close to transit and near major shopping center, but not in the most expensive part of the town. That way, your monthly share of rent, including utilities, should come to no more than \$300. I do not advocate living with parents. How much is your emotional and psychological freedom worth to you?

**Food:** Get a job at a restaurant. Seriously. Again, I don't mean you have to start eating leftovers. Most restaurants let their employees eat at a big discount. When I worked at Steak 'n Shake in St. Louis, I could eat all I wanted at 2/3 off menu price. That way, your restaurant budget of \$100/month will be the equivalent of spending \$300/month dining out. But of course, dining out all the time is not a healthy choice. You will want to be cooking at home too. Set a grocery budget of \$70/month and center your dishes around staple foods like rice, beans and potatoes. No need to become vegetarian, but please, for the sake of your health, balance your hearty restaurant meals. Sticking to this strategy, your monthly food expenses should come out to no more than \$170.

**Transportation:** Get rid of your car. Yes, I know, if you already own one, this will be tough to swallow. But no matter how much you love it, a private car is one of the biggest money suckers there is. Total monthly costs of insurance, gas, parking, tolls, oil changes, breakdowns, property taxes, etc. come out to at least \$200/month. And that's assuming you have a paid-off brand new car.

Instead of relying on a car, you will rely on walking (free), biking (free), and public transit (cheap). Without a car, the maximum monthly transportation expense should be no more than \$70.

At the end of each month, subtracting 15% of \$1,276 for taxes (\$191), your net income would be \$1,085. A modest paycheck to be sure, but living on \$585, we can still save \$500.

Totaling up the Big 3 expenses comes out to \$540, leaving \$45 of extra spending money. With that extra you can treat yourself anyway you like. For instance, \$10 per

month will give you 100 minutes of nationwide cell phone coverage through T-mobile. Remember, having a cell phone was a luxury just a decade ago...

Now that we've looked at how to drastically cut the Big 3 expenses, you can see how the choice of location becomes crucial for success.

When living in Los Angeles, California in 2007, I paid \$800 a month to live with roommates in a pretty rough neighborhood. The difference in monthly rent (\$800 vs. \$300) between LA and St. Louis is around \$500 - the entire amount of the savings goal!

So for those of you living in expensive coastal areas like LA, SF, or Manhattan, it will obviously be a struggle to just get by, much less save anything on a minimum wage. The only solution in that situation is to move.

Even in a reasonably priced metro area, your specific location is also important. Without a car, you wouldn't want to be trapped in the suburbs. Suburbs were not designed around people, they were designed around cars. Choose a location close to a major business center with good public transit links like bus and subway. That way not only do you have diverse job options, but many places to go to relax on weekends.

Working a physical menial job is actually not that bad, compared to being stuck in a cubicle in front of the computer screen. When I worked for minimum wage washing dishes, every night after work my body was aching tired, but my mind felt extremely fresh and alert. Intellectual activities like reading became much more pleasurable and enjoyable. The *quality* of time off-work is an oft-neglected factor when people get stuck in the endless pursuit of more and more money.

But wait, speaking of money, it gets even better! It turns out you can get all of that income tax you've paid back. And no, you don't have to cheat the government on your tax return. To see how, let's look at that \$15,312 yearly gross income figure again. When someone mentions yearly income, you probably imagine full calendar year that starts at the beginning of January and goes on until the end of December, right? If you work the whole calendar year, then you have to pay income taxes on the full \$15,312. But what if we look at a year differently?

What if instead of starting work on January 1, you start working on July 1, working summer-to-summer? Then your earnings for the full work year will be exactly the same, but they will be split equally between two calendar years. For instance, if you start working in the summer of 2010, continue working until the summer of 2011, and then start your 6 month adventure, your earnings are \$7,656 for calendar year 2010 and \$7,656 for calendar year 2011, which means that your federal income tax will be exactly \$0 for both 2010 and 2011, according to the official IRS website.

What about state income tax? Well, if you live in a state like Florida or Nevada, you don't need to pay any state income tax at all! If you live in a state like Missouri, you would still need to pay state income tax, but the rate is usually less than 3% for a minimum wage salary.



Of course, the monthly taxes of \$191 will still be withheld from your paycheck, but you will get them back in the spring of 2011 and 2012 as tax refunds in the equal amounts of (\$191x6) \$1,146. Not bad for a minimum wage earner. Use this bonus to indulge yourself, buy the latest gadgets, add to your savings, or whatever.

Following the strategy of working summer-to-summer with a much higher level of income, I am used to receiving tax refund checks of more than \$4,000. Don't just work hard, work smart too.

### <The Pursuit of Money is the Root of...

...Common Sense.

Not every iMigrant is a twenty-something roaming the world in search of adventure. Many people do it to advance their careers and purely out of financial reasons, that is to make more money. Some might label such behavior as greed, but I see nothing wrong with it. I've done it many times myself to replenish my bank account, saving up for future adventures. If there is an exceptional opportunity to honestly earn much more money somewhere else in the world, wouldn't you consider it too?

Igor is a married man in his fifties with grown-up children. He lives in a nice house in the suburbs of Toronto, having immigrated to Canada from Kazakhstan in the 90's, like many others fleeing after the collapse of USSR. He is a construction engineer, specializing in sewage systems design. Unlike most other immigrants, he had no trouble integrating into Canadian workplace upon arrival. His job places him well into the upper middle class, and with Toronto's seemingly endless strong demand for housing Igor is quite confident of his future. He loves the stability of his career.

Yet when the opportunity came to relocate half way around the world to Dubai, UAE in 2007, Igor decided to go for it. For the next two years, he worked as a contractor on the Palms Islands project, one of the mega-projects for the ultra-rich that are sprouting around Dubai like mushrooms after the rain. His wife also went with him, finding a job as an accountant at the same construction company. Their salary, much higher than in Toronto, combined with Emirates zero income taxes, effectively doubled their income. With company-paid housing, it was easy to save around \$100K, allowing them to completely pay off their mortgage upon return to Canada, enjoying the freedom of zero debt and financial independence. Not bad for a couple years of work, don't you think?

Extra money, being the primary motivator, was not the only benefit. Immersion into the Middle East culture of the Arab world was an unexpected adventure. Upon his return to Canada, Igor now has a deeper appreciation for the multicultural acceptance of Canadian "mosaic"-like society, versus the strictness of the Arab world.

Would he do it again if he had a chance? Absolutely.

## <Andrei's Finances

With money, I like to keep things as simple as possible. Here is an actual spreadsheet I use to keep track of all of my finances, as of August 2010, right before my iMigration to Cape Canaveral, Florida, USA.

### Andrei's Finances

<b>Cash</b>		<b>\$30,300</b>
	Capital One MMA	\$24,500
	US Bank Checking	\$4,500
	Cash	\$300
	ICBC	\$300
	Yandex	\$700
<b>Budget</b>		
	Florida	<b>\$10,000</b>
	China Vagabonding	\$6,000
	Book	\$2,000
	Relatives travel	\$3,000
	Unplanned extra cash	\$4,300
<b>Reserves</b>		
	Honda Civic 2006	\$8,000
	Gold (17 ounces)	\$17,000
	Cash	\$5,000
<b>Credit</b>		
	Capital One MasterCard	\$11,700

As you can see, it's all organized in just four sections, namely Cash, Budget, Reserves, and Credit.

The Cash section contains "liquid" sources of money, available within a couple of days anywhere around the world. I have accounts in the US, Russia and China, all accessible through online banking.

The Budget section is more fun, as this is where I plan my future expenditures. I expect to spend around \$10K while living in Florida the next half a year and then another \$6K travelling in China afterwards. Two thousand dollars are set aside for expenses related to writing, editing and self-publishing this book. "Relatives travel" is money I set aside to invite my relatives to visit me wherever I happen to live, for instance money to pay for my cousin Vitaly's air tickets to fly from Moscow to Shanghai in January 2010 came from this fund.

The Reserves section contains cash to be used during hard times, and assets that should only be liquidated in a true emergency. Of course, every year my car depreciates and gold keeps going up!

Last but not least is the Credit section with my MasterCard, used for daily purchases, but with the balance paid off in full every month. Good as something to fall back on temporarily, but not a good way to get into long-term debt.

Notice that I keep my money spread across different asset classes around the world to avoid being wiped out by the next social earthquake. Also notice the absence of debt and leverage.

I update my finances once a month to make sure I'm not going over the budgets and store the spreadsheet online in Google Docs. Google Docs keeps an archive of any changes to the spreadsheet, making past comparisons easy.

Notice that my financial spreadsheet is neither a balance sheet nor an income statement, which are used in formal accounting. Why not? Those standard statements do not reflect my individual view on my own financial life.

Not only is each financial situation unique, but everyone's *view* of their financial situation is unique. To paraphrase, not only is the number in your bank account different from mine, but those numbers have different meanings to you and me.

That's why I don't use standard statements or software like MS Money, choosing to create a custom spreadsheet instead. Instead of viewing my finances through a standard lens, I created a view that makes most sense to me and only me.

It is a view that considers money as a tool and a set of actions that this tool can help accomplish. The tool by itself is worthless without application, that's why I like to view tools and actions on the same page. Your view would be different. Maybe you even use a different medium that makes more sense to you, like using pink sticky notes on a fridge door instead of a spreadsheet. Hey, it's just money!

## Chapter 10: Stuff

*“The things you own, they end up owning you.”*

*Fight Club*

Imagine yourself owning a house full of furniture, electronics, and hundreds of other miscellaneous things scattered around. Owning all of that makes you feel cozy and comfortable. You also have a basement and a garage, storing all the old things you purchased a long time ago and don't use anymore. These are all the tools you've accumulated throughout your lifetime.

On any given day, going out of your house to interact with the outside world, you can only take one backpack full of tools with you. Taking more and more tools makes the backpack too heavy, making you move more slowly. Trying to stuff more tools in additional bags ties your hands, restricting your freedom of movement. The more you try to take with you, the more tired you become along the way. Instead of the tools helping you on your journey, they slow you down. This is the curse of owning too much stuff.

Just as everyone else, iMigrants struggle with attachment to stuff.

It's easy to be swayed by shiny toys. Before going to China, I pondered whether to take my car with me from St. Louis to Shanghai. Yes, I seriously considered shipping it in a container, paying thousands in shipping costs and huge import taxes. To Shanghai, where driving would be a nightmare and where taxis are so cheap and plentiful!?

To prevent material possessions from becoming a drag on mobility, we have to adopt the right mindset. The trick is to leave all the extra stuff at home bases, letting go of it for a while. No worries, no hassle.

In the end, all we really need is fulfillment in our lives, not more junk from Sky-Mall magazine. Don't fall for the junk. Pursue the real thing.

### <Accumulation

On a sunny Saturday morning me and my friend Grace are glad to meet at our favorite café. This time though, we won't be drinking tea for 3 hours. Instead, we head out and take the newly built subway line 9 that takes us to suburban Songjiang district of Shanghai. Today we want to pay a visit to Dr. Chen, a retired physics professor from Jiao Tong University.

Dr. Chen is an elderly gentleman in his seventies, but he doesn't use his age as an excuse to be inactive. It happened through his initiative that we first met. One day me and Grace were lunching in a crowded restaurant, when Dr. Chen approached us and introduced himself. He happened to be sitting nearby and overheard our conversation, and wanted to practice English. He even offered to pay me good money for every lesson, but I declined.

It turned out Dr. Chen was in the process of writing a book about China's involvement in World War II. But not only that, he was writing it in English! His English reading and writing skills were great, even though he did complain about the difficulty of reading classical works from nineteenth century, but speaking proved quite a challenge, as there was no one around he could practice with. I couldn't quite figure out why he

wanted to improve his speaking abilities, but it turned out his whole family was already living in the US and he was considering moving there someday as well.

After several weekends of language exchange, Dr. Chen invited us to visit his home, so we decided to take him up on the offer.

We met on the subway platform in Songjiang and took a short ten minute walk to his apartment. There were actually two apartments on the same floor. Two large two-bedroom apartments in a new building, luxuriously furnished and decorated, with sparkly clean kitchens and bathrooms. There was only one surprise - nobody lived in them, they were empty.

Dr. Chen owns them outright, purchased with his and his family's savings. He considers the apartments as investments and doesn't care to rent them out. As for himself, he lives in a third, smaller apartment, the one given to him by a university. That one is to be used for the actual living. These are more than that - these are prized possessions.

The fact that they are standing empty doesn't bother him. These are boom times, and real estate prices in China are rising every year, while rent prices are stagnant. Dr. Chen even offered me to live in one of the apartments rent free, which I politely declined.

As the fridges were empty, we decided to have dinner at a restaurant, and for now just enjoy the soymilk. I've got to tell you, there is nothing like the freshly made soymilk, when the yellow soybeans, soaked in water overnight, are crushed in a blender. The soymilk is gray with foamy cream at the top. Natural, healthy and delicious. None of that Starbucks stuff even compares.

Watching a wide screen TV while sitting in a leather sofa and sipping the soymilk, there was a lot to ponder... Why do people accumulate stuff? Do things serve as an anchor of safety and security in the ocean of life, or are merely toys to gratify the ego?

### <Basement

Being an iMigrant, it still amazes me what an enormous amount of stuff I have accumulated over the years at each of my home bases.

The least amount is located in my grandmother's apartment near Moscow, even though I lived there for four years while getting my Bachelors degree. The reason is simple - during college, I lived in the dorm, so the basic living environment was already provided. Also, I wasn't earning any money and lived on a tiny allowance provided by parents. No money "in" equals no material crap "out"! After graduating, right before moving back to the States, I sold the computer and stereo system to my roommates, so the only things left at my grandma's apartment was a bunch of old winter clothing, slowly being eaten away by the mole...

Shanghai has the second biggest stash of my stuff. Luckily, I lived in a furnished apartment, but furnished in China meant having the crappiest appliances possible, so instead of arguing with the landlord to get them replaced, I invested in a new microwave and an LCD TV. All of that, plus a small pile of clothing is now stored in my girlfriend's apartment.

By far the biggest stash is located in St. Louis, Missouri, in the basement of my parent's house. Yes, a typical American basement, a mostly underground floor with just a couple tiny windows. The basement's floor and the walls are concrete and it has that persistent smell of stale damp air.

There are dozens of huge plastic and carton boxes storing all the "wealth". Piles of decade-old clothing bought me by parents that I never liked wearing anyways. Chances of being useful to me again - zero. Dishes, old socks, shirts, trousers, stinky running shoes, digital cameras, mp3 players, hard drives, souvenirs, old mice, connectors and converters, cups and memorabilia mugs, coffee filters, flags, postcards and envelopes. And that's just the little stuff that doesn't include old sofas, beds, stereo systems, computers, monitors, scanners, etc.

Where did it all come from? I guess I needed it at one time, that's why it got purchased. More importantly, once acquired, why did I stop using it? I guess I replaced it with the latest and greatest, newer and better stuff. I pride myself on being a minimalist, and yet end up over-consuming!

Digging through all of it before starting my Florida adventure, I realized just how little of all of that stuff I really need. Most of the goods in the basement are destined to stay there forever...

### <Poverty

Our cruise ship docked in a bay surrounded by lush palm-covered hills of the Dominican Republic. It's the end of December, and as locals tell us, this is as cold as it gets here in the tropics: +25C. Me, my sister and mom disembark the ship at a rocky shore and together with other tourists hire a minivan to take us to the nearest beach. I remember that drive well.

This was, by far, the poorest place I've ever been to. The road itself seemed to be the symbol - originally asphalted, it was so cracked and full of huge mud puddles that the driving pattern resembled "stop and go" traffic. The last time I saw a road that bad was in a village nestled deep in central Russia. No wonder then that Dominican Republic was one of the few islands in the Caribbean that had visa-free entry for Russian tourists. There was absolutely no danger of any Russian permanently staying here!

The bumpy ride was at soothed by an old Toyota Sienna minivan, the perfect vehicle for navigating the debris. Along the road I could see people living in various conditions, some even having nice tidy homes and old American cars imported from the continent.

The vast majority, however, seemed to be living in tiny huts - constructions whose only purpose seemed to be to protect the inhabitants against the rain. There certainly was no central water line, much less sewage, as evidenced by big piles of blue 20-liter water bottles used to deliver clean drinking water. My memory might be failing me, but I don't recall any signs that these huts were supplied electricity.

The foreign physical environment was quite a shock for me, yet the real shocker came by looking at people who actually *lived* in these huts. They were peaceful and just plain happy. They had a lot of free time and they truly enjoyed it. Sitting near the road, unhurried, staring into the forest of palms and the ocean. Socializing with others outside the small taverns. Living their lives without the "rat-race" goals and ambitions, one day at a time. Was that the poverty that so many in the "civilized" world try to escape, the poverty that so many fear?

### <Over-Consumption

You've probably heard from the media that we, part of the golden billion, live in a "Consumption Society". It sounds so soothing and reassuring. After all, what's so bad about healthy consumption? What the media doesn't tell you, however, is that most Americans live in a society dominated by massive Over-Consumption. Just look at all that fat walking around Wal-mart!

While writing this book, I had a chance to experience two Florida cities, Orlando and Cape Canaveral (aka "Cape Surf" or just Cape), with me living the creative artist life near the beach while my girlfriend worked at Disney World sixty miles inland.

If Orlando is the epitome of new America, Cape Canaveral is a stronghold of the old one.

Around fifty years ago, in the nineteen sixties, these two cities were quite similar. Orlando was a center of Orange county, a major farming region of... Oranges. Cape Canaveral was a small vacation town on the coast.

In later decades the cities took different paths. Orlando embraced the new American slogan "Bigger is Better" with a vengeance, and grew from a small town into a sprawling metropolis of more than two million people. Cape Canaveral, meanwhile, stayed pretty much the same, with a population of slightly more than ten thousand.

Cape Canaveral is a town that seems to be permanently stuck in the sixties. It's a place that has character. A quintessential beach town, just like the ones you see in black-and-white movies. Nobody is ever in a hurry here. In Cape Surf, it's perfectly normal to see half-naked people walking on the street. Can't blame them, as from anywhere in town the beach is only a few minutes' walk away, and yes, a lot of people are actually walking and biking here. I barely needed to use my car, only for occasional grocery shopping.

By the way, people don't do that much shopping here, while shopping seems to be the main entertainment in Orlando. Outlet malls, outlet malls, and more outlet malls.



In Orlando, the bigger house is better house. Bigger car is better car. Bigger store is better store. In effect, Orlando is just a reflection of changes in American society over the last two generations.

In Cape Canaveral, the average house is a small one storey bungalow, yet many homes have their own unique character. Some are surrounded by lush vegetation and look like they're set in a tropical forest. Some have hammocks, fishing nets and sea shells as decorations. Some have ancient RV's parked in the front yard, with deflated tires and bumper stickers like "I belong to this city". Some are just plain charming.

An average car here is old and somewhat beaten down, costing twice or three times as little as a new one. Even the fire trucks are much smaller here.

The town doesn't have a Wal-Mart or a Target, stores here are local small businesses. Every week I bought fresh fish, catch of the day, at a small shop at the port. It actually tasted like real fish, unlike the farm-raised junk sold at supermarkets.

And of course, the beach, how much it changes everything! The natural beauty, with the wind, the waves, the sand in constant interaction that could only be experienced but not described... Para gliders... Fishermen... Pelicans... That's life!

### <Inflatable Life

It's easier to *do* more when you *have* less. "Having" means possessing something, owning something, being attached and bogged down by it. What I've figured with time is to take as little stuff as possible on my new adventures, when I'm away from a home base.

iMigrating to Florida to write this book while staying close to my girlfriend, I knew I needed to rent my own apartment. My previous experience with roommates in LA was not too bad, but I realized that creative work is better done in complete privacy.

Instead of renting a U-Haul and trying to cram all that furniture from my parent's basement, I decided to take a gamble and see if I could make the whole move in my small Honda Civic coupe. That meant taking only the basics and special items that I really love. There was no need to move everything else a thousand miles.

It took a while to fully settle down in my newly rented apartment near the beach in Cape Canaveral. After 2 weeks, the cozy one-bedroom apartment had everything I needed for comfortable living. It was not cluttered, but not empty either. It had exactly what I needed, nothing more and nothing less.

A nice and soft queen-size inflatable bed in the bedroom. Cooking utensils and a rice cooker in the kitchen. A foldable dining table, two folding chairs, my favorite collapsible triangular computer table, a wooden bookshelf, and a cot for occasional guests in the living room. And a couple dozen little things too, like a new shower curtain for my bathroom, most of them so cheap and easily replaceable they're not worth mentioning. Many of the items were bought at the nearest Target for cheap, for example, a bright corner "immigrant" lamp cost only \$10. With less than \$300 in total

move-in furnishing costs, I didn't feel enslaved by the goods in my apartment. The goods served me, and not the other way around.

After 8 months, the stuff that didn't fit into my car on the way back to St. Louis, I just gave away to the neighbors without regrets.

It's what my Dad called "Andrei's Inflatable Life", and I am proud of it. I don't need a lot of stuff to be happy. Less is truly More.

## Chapter 11: Media Sapiens

Every day, while hurrying to work, I pass a street corner with a newsstand. It has dozens of newspapers and magazines, with shiny covers showing pictures of beautiful girls, fast cars, and business gurus. Why do people buy them? For knowledge, entertainment, or just to fill time? To place someone as their authority or to escape the reality of the present moment? Why do we consume media? “You are what you eat” is true for both body and mind. How do we stop eating junk and transition to something more organic? These are fascinating questions to explore.

Whenever I pass without stopping, the owner, trying to get my attention, makes a loud noise, resembling a “Hoo” or a “Woo”. I glance at him, when I’m in good mood, and pay more attention to the old guy than to the magazines.

It wasn’t always like this. There was a time when I was addicted to media, when I couldn’t live without it, when I was a typical modern-day Media Sapiens. Having been cured of this disease, I look back with regrets. It’s hard to say which aspect of media is the worst: wasted time, biased info, or information overload, but it’s easy to see how much of a harmful influence media had on my life.

What’s clear is that you have to be *very* careful with media. Media is everywhere, it’s cheap or free, and it is extremely addictive. Just like junk food, it can be conveniently consumed by sitting on a couch without doing much more than lifting a finger to change a channel, click a link, or turn a page.

The basic premise of media is to provide you with knowledge that you otherwise wouldn’t have obtained by direct observation. However, the world is so vast that there are simply too many things happening at any given moment. If media tried to provide you all of that information simply as “knowledge”, you would be overwhelmed. Therefore, one of the main objectives of media is to “simplify” information.

Information, however, in and of itself, has no value. Any public library has more books than you will be able to read in a lifetime. So the second objective of a media business is to entertain. That is the only way people will be coming back for more.

## <News

The only guaranteed way to gain repeat customers is to get them addicted to your product, to create a belief that you need the latest fix. The way this addiction is accomplished in the media business is by a paradigm called “NEWS”. By making sure you’re being fed by the *latest* information, the media ensures the obsolescence of past information with the passage of time, thus creating the endless cycle of “reading the news every day to know what’s new”.

“If it Bleeds, it Leads” is the motto of media. News is sensationalist, informing us of what happens 1% of the time, without telling us about the other 99%, which is how most of our life is spent.

The world is huge, and as a consequence something tragic is always happening to someone somewhere. Did you know that, according to World Health Organization, 500,000 people are on airplanes at any one time. That's how big the world is! Sure, sometimes airplanes do crash, and make great news headlines. But the vast majority of airplanes never crash, in fact air travel is one of the safest modes of transportation. Media business would present it otherwise by not reporting the averages, only the rare outlier events. If you look at the world through the eyes of news, the picture of reality gets really skewed.

News plays on the perceptions, generalizations and stereotypes of the masses and it also creates the herd mentality. Haven't you seen it on the news?! It gives validity and a reference point for discussions on topics people are clueless about.

News is extremely shallow, but gives you an illusion of "knowing" what happens in the whole world. It simplifies reality for those naïve people who want to "understand" what's going on, making them feel better. But don't be fooled, what the news reports is actually a tiny fraction of what really happens, not to mention the mind-boggling complexity of what really happens.

News overloads you with information, much of it consisting of countless details of existing trends. By focusing on existing trends, the media miss the seismic shifts that actually create new trends. Reporting on existing trends also makes the news very repetitive. If you've actually worked in a news business, you know that most news is created using templates like "Stock X rose the most, outperforming the general market by Y%". X and Y are substituted at the end of each day by querying a database that records such data. The variables and the names change, but the templates stay the same.

The news loves to create a sense of urgency. It wants you to believe that because something has "just happened!" then it must be important.

Much of the information news provides is non-actionable. Don't fool yourself that by reading about a hurricane and feeling pity for its victims you are helping someone. Your mere awareness of the events does not change the events and does not help anyone. Better use your time elsewhere where you can actually make a difference.

I stopped watching the news in the summer of 2007 and don't sweat it. It's impossible to miss a truly extraordinary event, since everyone around you starts talking about it right away. Sometimes a funny thing happens - friends and relatives call me from around the world to report on a news that is supposedly happening where I live, such as fires, earthquakes, surprise Obama visit, and other events blown out of proportion, without me being aware of it at all!

### **<Fighting Internet Addiction**

One of the major problems facing a 21st century human is information overload and specifically internet addiction. Of course, it's not THE largest problem humanity has to face, and on surface doesn't look like it could compete for attention with problems

like hunger and war. However, it is a new problem that people just a generation ago didn't have, and the speed of how fast it's spreading is alarming. More than a billion people have access to the internet, and a lot of them are addicted.

It's sad when you invite friends, visiting from out-of-state, over to your apartment *for the first time*, and they bring a laptop or a smart-phone with them and the very first thing they ask when they step in the door is: "How do I connect to your wireless network?"

What is an addiction? To me, an addiction is simply something that takes away more than it gives. In case of the internet, web surfing takes away an enormous amount of time, hours per day. But it's not just the time. More importantly, excessive internet surfing takes away concentration and energy, making you feel exhausted and irritated at the end of the day. It's also more difficult to fall asleep and the quality of sleep is lower.

What does the internet give in exchange? Mostly, it is a quick way to get news and other instant entertainment like blog articles and YouTube videos. Information-wise, books can provide more insight and depth than most things found online. But it's the always-on surfing and browsing that really fuels the fire of an addiction. The problem is the temptation that is created when something is just one click away. Even checking out five random links can easily take an hour of time without you even noticing it.

There are several ways to control internet usage. Software like WatchDog and WorkTime can help by keeping track of your online activity, warning of overuse, and shutting down the browser, or even the computer when necessary. In my case, however, software methods were ineffective in fighting the addiction. As a saying goes "A problem cannot be solved by the same level of awareness that created it".

Surprisingly, a much simpler method did the trick: Start Using Sticky Notes.

That's right, those yellow 3M post-it notes that you'll find in every office. I discovered they are extremely useful in bringing me back into the physical reality of my room, and away from virtual reality of the screen. Before opening a browser, I would write out the exact purpose of my internet session, by listing the tasks that should be accomplished. It would be fairly detailed, like "- check Email" or "- research acupuncture on Wikipedia". I would stick the note on the desk right next to my laptop. After completing the items in the note one by one, I would check them off and close the browser window.

By training myself to get from the virtual world back into the physical world *before* opening a browser window, I gain the valuable seconds of increased awareness during which I can catch my breath, re-evaluate the necessity of the task at hand and stop before it's too late and I am already submerged in the internet ocean of information. Internet is a great tool, and so is a knife. Be careful not to cut parts of yourself inadvertently.

Remember, if it's one click away, the addiction will stay!

### <Leverage

On an average day around 150,000 people die on this planet from various causes. Even more are born every day, with Earth's population rapidly growing. September 11, 2001 was just one of the days that was no exception to this metric, with approximately 150 thousand people dying, give or take a few thousand. Yet it was not an average day.

There is one thing terrorists are extremely good at, and that is using leverage. Not only are they good at sniffing out the weakest links of the modern society, they find the links which, if broken, will create the biggest seismic waves in our perception of the world and generate the most change in existing systems. To achieve maximum exposure, terrorists don't just attack the systems, they attack brands and their symbols like Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Addicted to enormous power provided by leverage, they do not stop.

To achieve evil goals, terrorists use fear, leveraged by technology and media, as a weapon.

Choosing an airplane turns out choosing a very common method of transportation that many of us fly several times per year. Choosing to destroy an office skyscraper turns out choosing a workplace for millions of us. Choosing to use suicide bombers who do not fit an image of a typical jungle guerilla warrior turns out using someone who could be your neighbor next door.

See the pattern yet? It is the fear that danger is not somewhere on the other side of the world, where wars are being fought by a highly trained military, but the fear that danger is among us and there is nowhere to hide. Sowing the seeds of fear and distrust in every one of us, terrorists change the world one scared person at a time...

Terrorists love media. Media provides massive leverage, and terrorists don't even have to do anything to leverage the media, as the media eagerly leverages the terrorists, showing us graphic images and video of a disaster, often in real-time.

Paradoxically, it is the media that gives terrorists enormous power. How else could a few dozen people scare billions?

### <Subjective Reality

Are you a Media Sapiens? Want to find out what is it like to live without media? Want to experience a different version of reality?

If only it were as simple as turning the media OFF... Actually, it is that simple! What's difficult is bearing the consequences and implications. In effect, you have to change your view of the world and your life in it, to change your model of reality.

I've done multiple trials of living without TV, internet and books for extended periods of time, and during those periods often felt as a recovering addict with my world turned upside down.

To get a sense of how strange living without media feels, imagine that you go buy a newspaper and the front page is blank except for the notice: "We're sorry, but nothing new happened in the world today. Please come back tomorrow." You would think it is some kind of a prank, right? There is just no possible way that Nothing in the world changed. Something must have changed, and you've got to know about it, right? Wrong!

Something happening Somewhere is a good way to hide the emptiness of one's own life, to hide the fact that Nothing is happening Here. News is a not just a powerful drug, but also a surrogate.

Turning off the media might open a painful void in your life, revealing just how unfulfilled it is. Releasing several hours of time and attention that is usually consumed by media every day, you suddenly acquire a lot of freedom. Now that you have all this free time, what do you do with it?

If you are already happily pursuing your dreams, then you just keep doing more of that. But what if you discover, to your utter astonishment, that you are deeply unhappy? Now you have to do the difficult inner soul searching to find out what the next step in life should be.

Responsibility is the other end of the freedom stick. Now that the rest of the world is blank, you are the one who is responsible for making the news. When your old reality is shut off, you have to create a new reality for yourself from scratch.

Instead of passively observing change, you have to initiate change. Instead of watching the news, you have to create the news. Instead of reacting to change caused by others, you have to become the change that others react to. You become the VIP, and what you do, not what you think, becomes important.

Are you ready to be freed from the firm grip of media? Are you ready to create your own reality? The best way to find out is to try...



## Chapter 12: Diving In

*“Time and tide wait for no man”*

*Ancient Chinese Proverb*

## <Going for the Dreams

“Why did you go to China?” is a question people often ask me. The answer is simple: “Because it was my dream.” The difficult internal question that nobody else will ask is “Why didn’t I go to China for so long?”

I first became fascinated with China around 1999, and took off on my China adventure in 2009, so that’s a decade of waiting until the big leap. 10 years from having a dream to making it a reality is kind of long, don’t you think?

I still can’t find a good answer to that question. I did try after all, studying Mandarin for a few months in 2003 and travelling there in 2004, which only wetted my appetite. During those years, China has always been on my mind, with images of growing cities and mushrooming skyscrapers, fascinating culture and language. THE place of change and growth, the place to be.

And yet I always treated my dream more like a fantasy, something that would surely happen someday, but not now. Now I had more important things to do. Now I had to graduate high-school. Now I had to go to college. Now I had to find a job, make money, advance in my career. Now I had serious things to do in life, and fantasies are for the future and future only. I’ll get to them when the time is right. Sounds familiar?

It turned out the time was never right. In September 2009 I finally went to China with an injured arm, a disgust for my career, and a few months before I could apply to get my US citizenship, ruining my chance of receiving it. Needless to say, I’ve learned a few lessons during the preceding decade.

You got to go for your dreams and dive into the unknown, no matter what.

There will always be problems. There will always be things that you *have* to do. These are all excuses. The best time to dive-in is now.

Re-discover yourself, think and live outside the box, experience the thrill of the unknown. Make a bet, take a risk, and face your destiny up front.

Don’t be shy, go full-in, buy a 1-way ticket.

That there will be obstacles and setbacks on your journey is pretty much guaranteed, but this is not a reason to delay it. Do you want to merely exist, or do you want to LIVE?

No matter how much you read, books will never prepare you for reality. Life should be lived from experience to books, and not the other way around.

Don’t be afraid of the unknown, don’t be afraid of change. You could stay under a rock, and yet change would come. We need change, we desire change, we can’t live without change. We ARE change.

Do crazy things you dream about. Don't delay. Tomorrow is not guaranteed.

<Message from Vit

**SUCH THINGS ARE HAPPENING, BRO!**

Right now I'm getting a new passport, the old one has expired.. and taking off to a place called Dahab, Egypt to winter there working as a windsurfing instructor. This is a new and **TOTALLY IMMERSIVE WIND-DEPENDENT ACTIVITY!!** I'm already surfing at an intermediate level, so the work is lined up for the winter. There's gonna be enough fun to do at least until next spring.. I'm travelling to the max, figure this is the best way to get closer to my dream: sailing around the world.

You could say that this summer was the first time in my life when I really understood **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE UNDER THE SUN, SOCIALIZING WITH SUPER-POSITIVE, SUPER-ACTIVE PEOPLE**, and most importantly **TAKING ACTION** (in this case doing windsurfing training, acquiring new, very needed career for my future path).

Creativity is multifaceted and surprising in its **NEVER EXPECTED MANIFESTATIONS** - I'm still thankful to you that you showed by example how to run off into the unknown, it's unimaginable!

Details, as usual, upon meet-up...

**BROTHER ;)**

<Surf's Up!

*Los Angeles, California, October 2007*

One sunny day, while living in LA and enjoying my many day-trip explorations of Southern California, I visited Huntington Beach, a small town that's famous for being the self-proclaimed "Surf Capital of the World".

It was windy at the beach and the waves were huge, coming from a storm far away in the Pacific. What was most unusual was that the wind was blowing not from the ocean, but from the shore. Called the Santa Ana winds, they only form under unique conditions in the fall, and blow the hot air desert with vicious force. The winds made the waves very peculiar, with their skinny tops first forming naturally inclined towards the shore, but then blown by the wind in the opposite direction in a spectacular fireworks-like fashion.

Being scared of the waves that were taller than me when breaking on the sandy shores, I did not dare to swim. It was also hard to walk or even stay on the beach during this sand-storm, with sand getting into my ears and nose.

Instead I followed the crowd of visitors onto the pier. From there I could observe a dozen surfers battling the ten-foot waves that looked like greenish-blue walls of water. At any given time, only one or two of them managed to ride the big wave, with the rest being either not ready, too late or too early in their attempts. Some were just floating, recovering from being wiped out.

But the surfers were there, where the real action was, and I was just a looker, along with a crowd of people. In surfing and in other challenging pursuits, 99 out of 100 people are watchers, enjoying the show from a distance. They are being entertained, but do they even have a clue what the real experience is like there, in the waves?

Driving back home I saw tumbleweed happily rolling away across the wide avenues of Orange County, like this was its native territory. Such is the diversity of nature. There are plants that thrive with the wind, and then there are people who thrive on challenges, thrive on change.

Surf's Up! Are you a surfer or a looker?

### <Fear the Ego

*"To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, and be nothing." Elbert Hubbard*

People naturally fear change. Since change, ultimately, results in the unknown, many people embrace the status quo and rationalize staying put as a way of avoiding risk. And once you start looking, risks are everywhere!

Not that long ago, taking risks meant certain death. We humans are hard-wired to be scared and behave like our life is at stake. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Have you ever been hungry for an extended period of time? I have, during the Master Cleanse, a program that involves drinking lemonade for 10 days straight while eating nothing. If you want to test your willpower, feel your senses of taste and smell for real, and truly understand your animal nature, this is it.

While on the Master Cleanse, the abundance of food around me quickly became apparent. Walking around downtown St. Louis during lunch, it was impossible not to notice just how much people are leaving on the table after dining out. French fries, pasta, bread - barely touched. Talk about a safety net...

Just how many social safety nets does our society have? Credit cards, relatives and friends, government welfare, the salvation army - even if you exhaust all of them, there will still be plenty of uneaten food left on those restaurant tables...

Let's admit it, basic survival in the civilized world is pathetically easy. If you are part of the golden billion, taking financial risks is absolutely safe. Survival is simply not an issue worthy of consideration.

Taking risks is so easy in present day and age, the age of prosperity and abundance, that there really is no good excuse for not trying something new. When you consider potential missed opportunities it becomes clear that truly, the biggest risk is not taking one.

So why do so many people remain stuck in the same unfulfilling patterns and don't make changes to their lives, afraid to dive-in? What is it that people fear?

Perhaps what most people really fear is losing face, of being looked down upon and criticized, of being called a loser. The fear of being wrong instead of right. There it is, finally, the real fear, the fear of hurting the ego!

Nobody cares about our ego except the ego itself. It's the ego that creates a mental monster out of an inconvenience. It's the ego that wants you to play it safe. It's the ego that should really be feared. Conquer it, and you are free.

### <1 Day Notice

Quitting a job is one of the easiest things to do to begin a new adventure, yet emotionally, it has always been a difficult step. Physically, all you have to do is type up a short email and click "Send", but emotionally you have to let go of a multitude of attachments. No matter how difficult this step might seem, it has to be done.

Even when I hated my job and was eager to escape, quitting always aroused big mood swings. Nervousness and fear, exhilaration and happiness - all experienced on the same day. Quitting is a point of no return, a point that will change the people you meet every day, will change your habits and perhaps even self-identity. Quitting is the end of an era.

I rarely remember the regular days at work, they all seem to blur into one, but the last day always stands out in memory. Below is a journal entry written right after I quit my job before going to China:

*St. Louis, Missouri, May 30 2009*

Yesterday I gave my one-day notice at work and couldn't be happier. I was a little bit scared at first, knowing that usually people give two-week notices when they leave, and wasn't sure of the response. However, my worries were completely unfounded. The notice was very well received by others and I accomplished everything that needed to be done that day. Some of the things on my last day TO-DO list included:

- e-mailing the one-day notice to my team members, my bosses, and to former colleagues
- meeting with the boss to discuss the future of a project I was working on
- happy hour lunch at a nearby restaurant
- packing all the little stuff in my cubicle that belonged to me (keyboard, mouse, headphones, etc.)
- fixing several last-minute bugs requested by the business team and doing a production build
- cleaning up my computer from all the personal data and gigabytes of other files
- filling out last-week time-sheets and reports

People were congratulating me and wished best of luck in my new adventures. I even sensed a little bit of jealousy of me being able to afford a two-year mini-retirement while others don't have that luxury. The only person frustrated of me quitting was Jack, who would be left the only software developer on the team and would definitely be swamped with work. Oh well, they can always hire someone else. It's a nasty recession out there, there are so many professionals out of work who would be begging to get my spot!

Overall, it was an awesome day. Here's a few of the responses I received after giving my one-day notice:

*– I'm sad to see you go but wish you the best of luck in the future. Keep in touch.*

*– It's been a pleasure working with you, you will be missed! What a fun time, have fun in your travels!*

*– Sounds exciting, Andrei. Best of luck to you.*

*– Thank you so much for the note. I am disappointed to learn that you are moving on, but what fabulous plans you have!*

*– Sorry to see you leaving but a 2 year retirement sounds awesome!*

*– All the best to you, my friend. It was a pleasure having you as a member of my team, and I wish you every success.  
Be safe in your travels, and please stay in touch.*

Here is the email that started it all:

### **Andrei Moving On**

**Yes, I am leaving my job at O&B and starting a 2-year mini-retirement :-). My new adventures will take me to China and probably beyond. I am also quitting the software development field and will be exploring other career paths in the future.**

**Thank you all for keeping me onboard for the last year, through the difficult times for the DM team and through the two moves. I really appreciate that.**

**My last day at O&B will be today, May 29, 2009.**

**If you want to keep in touch, email me: [andrei.gavrilov@gmail.com](mailto:andrei.gavrilov@gmail.com).**

**Thanks,  
Andrei**

## <On the Ground in Shanghai

Nothing can replace the experience of diving into the unknown.

Once you dive in, something magical happens: time slows down and you become very aware of the present moment, of the miracle of being alive.

It's impossible to know in advance how a real adventure will turn out. Trying to predict the future is like trying to guess what would happen to a moving car while looking in the rear view mirror. What we think of as the future is nothing but a skewed projection of the past. And if you really knew what would happen, what would be the point? It's not an adventure if you know how it will end up...

Don't over-plan. Lose control, let reality unfold in all imaginable and unimaginable ways.

It will be rough at times. Don't fight the chaos of contradictory emotions, they too shall pass. What's unfamiliar the first day will become routine on the seventh.

Diving into China, in just one month I was fully immersed into the environment, culture of Shanghai. I made new friends, met my girlfriend, enrolled in university classes, explored the city, and grew tremendously as a person. No boredom, no downtime, every day mattered. Life was a game, and I was a player.

Someday, just buy a one-way ticket, go for it, and see for yourself. Dreams can and do come true.

**Sept. 1, 2009, notes from my journal, unedited**

**1<sup>st</sup> day in China, or rather the 1<sup>st</sup> night**

- can't fall asleep because of jet-lag, feeling shocked and overwhelmed. Really didn't expect the culture shock to be so severe.
- noticing more dirt and pollution in comparison
- smells and sounds are different, cars driving like crazy
- at night, the city looks more foreign and unfamiliar

Guess it would take a few days to get used to my apartment. It's not a bad apartment, but still not up to USA standards. It is:

- a lot smaller, with a bedroom bigger than a living room, why?
- only has a shower with no bathtub
- old building with no elevator to 5<sup>th</sup> floor
- sliding kitchen door that blocks the bathroom when you open it

- feels like a studio, not a 1-br, but the furniture is wooden and sturdy
- dirty common areas in the building that remind me of “pod’ezd” in Russia, but no graffiti

On the bright side, what’s important is that the apartment is fairly quiet and doesn’t have any toxic chemical smells. It also has a small washer so that I can do my own laundry.

Really surprised at the initial shock, but the CSA staff has been tremendously helpful:

- Program Manager meeting me at the airport and driving to the apartment in his car
- PM speaks good English
- check-in to the apartment and showing how appliances work, taking me to the store to buy bed sheets and water
- apartment is right near the entrance to the university campus, which is great
- “welcome pack” with a dictionary, Shanghai map, travel guide, and a working cell phone!

To tell the truth, I am feeling some anxiety and depression at the moment. Guess it would take a few days to get used to the new environment...

**Sept. 7, 2009, note from my journal 1 week later**

Wow. That’s all I can say. It’s been just a few days here in China, but it seems like ages have passed. The things that I wrote in my notebook less than a week ago now look as really old memories.



## PART IV: PLANET B

## Chapter 13: Planet B

This is the time to dream wild. What would an ideal world look like for an iMigrant, a truly global citizen? If we call our present times in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as Planet A, what would Planet B, decades in the future, be like?

On Planet B, every person would have a Global Passport. This Global Passport might not be called a passport at all, since there would be no borders to pass through. Rather, it would be a picture ID, containing biometric information uniquely identifying you as individual. This smart card would also contain your medical information and act as an electronic wallet. Money stored on your ID would be in the form of a global digital currency, easily convertible to local currencies if the need arises.

The global ID would replace everything you carry in your wallet right now: paper money, driver license, credit cards, medical insurance card, transit cards and of course, your conventional passport.

It would identify you for the relevant government departments, such as for social security and taxation purposes, and also for private businesses. You would choose which information on your card to make public, and which information requires your permission to use.

The information on the card would also be securely stored in databases around the world. If the card is ever lost or stolen, all of your identity information would still be accessible, ready to be used with proper biometrics.

Your “profile” could be loaded on any kind of device, such as a computer or an iPhone. A new device could be created *specifically* for the convenience of holding your identity, containing biometric scanners, GPS, connection to the internet and other features useful in daily life.

On Planet B, every person would be treated as a Global Citizen - a human being with inalienable rights to live, work, and travel anywhere, and have the freedom to change these at any time. No more passports, visas, green cards, or any other barriers to mobility, to being a true citizen of the world.

#### <From A to B

The sad truth is that right now we all live on planet A. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not fully support mobility. Article 13 of UDHR states:

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence *within the borders of each State*.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including *his own*, and to return to *his country*.

With the vast majority of people still thinking of the world using the nation-state framework, iMigrants have to struggle to comply with existing government rules and regulations while pursuing a global lifestyle. Either they jump through the official hoops, or they have to stay in the shadow and be labeled “illegal”.

What is the likely path from Planet A to Planet B?

One is a dramatic event, such as World War III, affecting the majority of the world's population, and in the aftermath resulting in a creation of a world government. Let's hope such a thing will never occur. It's a disastrous scenario, nonetheless resulting in people finally waking up and saying "enough is enough".

The other is a gradual, evolutionary shift over decades, taking the form of a peaceful transition from one set of systems to another. In this way the new supporting systems are created organically, without the "shock therapy" of revolutions and financial meltdowns. What are the necessary ingredients for this "perfect solution" to materialize?

First, let's recognize that the gradual approach could occur both with or without existing government cooperation.

Cooperation with existing government systems is a solution that is not as far-fetched as you might think. It would be easy to implement, provide great benefits to both participants and government systems, and protect the existing world order. It is actually in the government's self-interest to choose the Coop way. How would it be implemented?

The wisdom of Chinese economic reformers comes to mind. In the early 80's they tested a new, market-based economic system on a small subset of a population inside the special economic zones, making sure it works before introducing the new capitalist system to the rest of China.

In the same way, a Global Passport could be issued by an international body such as UN to a small group of people, perhaps several thousand enthusiasts. Then the lives and behavior of the test group would be observed. Existing government systems, such as exit-entry systems, taxation systems, and others would collect the information and forward it for further analysis, with the new system changed and tweaked accordingly before being introduced to a wider audience.

Technology for a biometric global passport already exists and is used around the world. For instance, at the Luohu border crossing in Shenzhen, China, Hong Kong residents with Chinese citizenship use only a biometric ID card and a thumb print reader to cross the border.

Good things take time... A gradual approach would let the new global passport system evolve with increasing number of participants, and would reduce the risk of social earthquakes.

But how exactly might such a system be set up to prevent abuse of existing government systems? Is such a global cooperation even possible? Can a world with an existing nation-state framework become border-free?

## <Border-Free World

The reason why borders, checkpoints, and other obstacles to mobility still exist here on Planet A is because governments promise too much to too many people. The promises of getting something for nothing are tempting to believe. This mentality creates a “nanny state” that only select few are allowed to join, with significant resources spent on keeping the outsiders out.

A classic example of government system abuse is that of a welfare mom living entirely on government handouts. Many on welfare are so-called “white trash”: people who live in trailer parks, consume large amounts of alcohol, and live a life as messy as piles of garbage strewn around their backyards.

The problem is, if the government takes care of you and takes off the pressure of making the ends meet, then you have no motivation to work anymore. Safety nets are dangerous precisely because of the “entitlement” factor, where people start relying on external help instead of their own resourcefulness.

As unfair and absurd present government systems are, I am not advocating abusing the government, treating it as a one-way life support without contribution. It is exactly this type of government abuse that leads to government systems becoming humongous, unresponsive, and oppressive.

In 1995, Canada established a visa-free entry with the Czech Republic. Pretty soon, jumbo jets full of Czechs started arriving in Toronto. Well, wasn't that great, wasn't that the intended result of easy visa regime?

Not really. It turned out the planes were packed with Gypsies, a historically well-known non-productive class all too happy to enjoy the benefits of Canadian welfare. Right after getting off the plane, gypsies were filing for refugee status and applying for unemployment benefits en-masse.

Following a public outcry, the Canadian government quickly suspended the visa-free entry for all Czechs, ending the Gypsy invasion. The Czech government, insulted by this decision, in turn suspended the visa-free entry of Canadian citizens. This incident shows a fairly typical interaction between modern government systems.

It doesn't have to be this way. The world can be visa-free, as long as it is also entitlement-free.

If governments didn't make promises to newcomers, obliging to support them, they wouldn't have to be afraid of their arrival.

All that is necessary is the establishment of a simple pragmatic rule: *don't expect to get more from a government system than what you've contributed*. If you work and pay your taxes, then you can certainly expect to get back from the government the value you've contributed in one way or another, such as unemployment insurance, pension, public schools for children, etc. But why should a newcomer expect help if they have not contributed *anything* yet? Help needs to be deserved, otherwise it

becomes mooching, looting and freeloading. As soon as you start helping the freeloaders, you start cheating the people who *have* contributed by reducing the value they will get back from such a system. In effect, their contribution is being diluted among the masses, their value spread out to others who haven't deserved it. No wonder many people are upset with governments!

The No-Freeloading rule, even though it might seem a little harsh to some of you, has an amazing side effect - newcomers are always welcome, as the system is not required to help them.

Since newcomers cannot possibly burden a government system set up this way, borders between countries become unnecessary. The government would no longer be obliged to help someone just because they ended up on "their" land. You and I would benefit too, having unrestricted mobility without having to subsidize the freeloaders through heavy taxes.

But how can any humane government refuse the hordes of people begging for help when they are not just at the doorstep, but right on that government's territory, right on the carpet? If you let them in, how do you get them out if they don't fit in and can't survive? We can't let people starve in the streets, right?

There are many practical solutions to this problem. One would be to establish a system where your survival is guaranteed *not* to be the obligation of a government welcoming you.

In order to be admitted, instead of getting a visa all you would need to do would be to show proof of funds.

For instance, if you're flying, an open-ended return ticket back to the origin would be required, in addition to minimal travel money. Then, if at any point of your journey in foreign land, it turns out you can't make it (you can no longer sustain yourself financially) and turn to government for help, the government would simply send you back to where you came from, using your own reserve funds. That way, you can never be a burden to the government and therefore there is no reason for the government to refuse you entry to its territory.

On the other hand, once you're in, the government should not set up barriers to prevent you from contributing. If you manage to find a job, the government should be happy to welcome you as a taxpayer and a contributor, and not deny you the right to work simply because you don't fit some labor selection criteria.

Freedom of movement, freedom of contribution, and the absence of freeloading - it just makes sense, and it's all possible.

### <Efficient Government

When dealing with governments, it's a safe bet to say all of us are used to slowness, stupidity and bureaucracy of such systems compared to private businesses. But it doesn't have to be that way. It rarely happens and is quite a pleasant surprise when a

government system exceeds your expectations, but it does prove a point that government efficiency *can* be achieved.

Applying for a Shanghai residency permit to extend my visa, I had to pass a health check. “Damn it,” I thought, remembering unpleasant experiences with various healthcare systems. Not having any other options, I called and scheduled an appointment. First surprise: they actually spoke good English on the phone, still a relative rarity in China! I was also given a reservation number, a list of documents to bring with me, and directions to the Shanghai International Travel Healthcare Center.

Taking a taxi there, I really didn’t know what to expect, except for a huge waiting line... Wrong! There was no waiting line. Of course, there were other people there, but they had appointments scheduled for different times, eliminating overcrowding. Upon entering the clinic, I was asked my reservation number and checked-in to their IT system.

At the scheduled time I put on the blue plastic boot covers on my shoes and stepped onto the conveyer. Yes, factory conveyer is the best analogy to describe the most efficient and comprehensive health check I ever went through.

First room - height, weight, blood pressure. Second room - vision and hearing tests. Third room - ultrasound. Fourth room - radiology. Fifth room - blood tests. Bam, bam, bam - just like that. The whole examination was completed in half an hour. The center even offered to mail my report once the lab blood tests were done, but I was so excited that I picked it up in person three days later.

Along with copies of tests that I needed to get my visa, I also received the Health Examination Record - a professionally bound folder containing the results of my tests in both Mandarin and English, six pages in total, along with my photo and passport data!

Never in my life have I received a report as comprehensive and useful from any health care institution - neither in Russia, Canada, nor USA. I still keep the report and take it with me on all of my travels - this could be life-saving stuff in an emergency, unlike a “health insurance” card.

This was, by far, the most efficient health clinic I ever saw. The total cost of the most comprehensive overview of my health to date - less than \$100. Total time spent, including filling out an application and making a reservation: less than three hours.

The Shanghai health check is an example of a very well designed process with great implementation, achieving its objectives and delivering real value in a timely fashion - would you ever expect to hear that about a government institution?

### <System Cooperation

The tour bus chugs along slowly along the empty highway, with the driver excitedly telling us “Look at the tree behind that telephone pole, there is an eagle’s nest. It’s eight feet wide, and can fit an adult human!” “Oh, and look at the pond on the right

side, there is an alligator!” Listening to him and looking at the swamps outside the window, it feels like we’re on a safari tour.

In reality, this is a guided tour of the Kennedy Space Center in central Florida, the legendary site of the United States first rocket launch, manned space flight, and the Apollo program that put a man on the moon. We pass by the huge cube-like Vehicle Assembly Building, where the Space Shuttle gets attached to external fuel tanks, and continue on to the observation station to view the various launch pads. The driver tells us half-jokingly, half-bitterly that LC-39A will be the site of all the future Space Shuttle missions, of which there are only two left.

The government deemed Space Shuttle program too expensive to maintain, and will instead rely on private companies and even launches from Russia to deliver payloads to space.

We keep passing various landmarks. “And look right there, see that shiny tower? That is the new mobile launch complex that we are building. The government has cancelled the program it was to be used for, but the money has already been appropriated, so we’re building it and keeping it!”

It is the end of an era. Pointing at the broken water pipe and a flooded field near the road, the driver says this accident forced the tours to stop for the whole day.

The last stop on the tour is a factory-like building dedicated to the assembly of the modules bound for the International Space Station. Walking down the long bridge corridor, we are reminded of the high insulation requirements of the building to keep all the components sterile-clean. The workers inside wear surgical masks when doing the final component assembly.

I can see the inside of the factory from the second-floor observation deck. It’s Sunday and no workers are present. As we enter, the security guard shouts “Take all the pictures you want, but please turn off the flash!” Stunned, I inquire him “Isn’t this all secret?” “Nope,” he answers, grinning with golden teeth, “this is the largest global peace project ever”.

The irony of cooperating in space but keeping borders on the ground flashed through my head...

Before letting us off at the visitor center, the bus driver preached: “The total cost of the NASA space program was \$2.4 trillion, but never forget that everyone in this country, even on this planet, benefited from it.”

### **<War on Terror: A Wrong Direction?**

With Soviet Union collapsing and China abandoning communism ideologies, there is no longer a large-scale ideological “us vs. them” conflict in the world. The real difference now is between people who use violence to achieve their goals versus people who use peaceful means.



Undoubtedly, there are many violent people in this world. Luckily, a majority of them are dumb and spend most of their time locked up in jails. However, a few violent people are smart and leverage technology and media to influence the lives of billions.

This doesn't change the fact that the vast majority of people in the world are inherently good (doesn't mean they're not selfish). For every criminal there are hundreds of people who follow the rules, for every terrorist there are millions who embrace life, not death.

If you've flown an airplane or taken a subway in the last few years, you certainly know about the absurdity of security checks. Do we live in a world where a dozen terrorists can intimidate everyone else, and worse, keep them in fear for decades?

Can a dozen people throw back the progress of a civilization? Or have we simply become a civilization of cowards, where technological progress creates the illusion of social progress? Are we only concerned with the highly improbable downside, being blind to the upside possibilities?

Governments are building borders not to let "outsiders" in. Is this supposed to be a solution? Strengthening border checkpoints to attain security is akin to building a Chinese Great Wall, except even more delusional.

One possible solution to crime? Track-ability. One global system, open-sourced software and government. Everyone is tracked using GPS, with data securely stored. In case of a crime, the government court has the power to look at the "movement" logs and figure out what really happened. I don't know about you, but I personally prefer track-ability to crime.

If it's technologically possible, why don't the present governments do it? There is no incentive for government officials to be efficient, to actually do their job well and solve the problem once and for all. If the crime problem was really solved, what would millions of law enforcement officers do?

Governments are fighting futile wars with extremists, making them feel important and strengthening their radical belief systems. Biological warfare, chemical warfare, terrorists won't stop.

Are we, as humanity, building systems for the wrong people? Are we dominated by fear? Are we trying to attain unattainable - total safety and security and in the process squander the resources that could be used to unite, rather than separate, humanity?

If only a fraction of the resources spent on fighting wars and protecting their "own" land were used to create a real solution to fight crime and terror: a Global Government, the world would become a better, more peaceful place...



## Chapter 14: Global Government

*“And here is the Golden Rule: Whoever Has the Gold, Makes the Rules...”*

*Ancient Maxim*

I am not against governments per se. Government systems do fulfill an important role in setting the rules of the game and enforcing them. I wouldn't want the present levels of federal government to be completely eliminated at the risk of anarchy.

What I am against is the present form of governments organized as separate country-systems, also called nation-states, and treating people as such ("you either belong to my system or you're out!"). There is no doubt that there needs to be a unified global system that treats people as human beings no matter their place of birth or their geographical location. Their affiliation with a single or multiple country systems through Citizenship and Nationality should not affect their status as Global Citizens.

Can such a global system be created quickly? Not a chance.

Revolutions are for idiots. All a revolution does is replace one government system with another government system, without changing the paradigm of disjointed government systems.

I applaud the efforts of people who go to jail or even lose their lives to fight the existing oppressive government regimes, but their efforts are mostly futile. If only they could put just a fraction of their energy into creating new, better systems, the long-term results could be breathtaking and would not require so much personal sacrifice.

What needs to happen is an evolution in thinking that leads to creation of radically new forms of government that exist in parallel to existing government systems and complement their work, instead of fighting against them.

The idea of creating a world government is not new. Among others, Thoreau and Einstein declared themselves to be global citizens. After WWII, there was big interest in world federalism. People like Gary Davis created a furor by renouncing their citizenship and claiming to be Citizens of the World: <http://www.worldgovernment.org>. What they envisioned was a supranational entity at a highest level, unifying all existing governments.

The bad news is, despite understanding that a world government would bring enormous benefits, the nation-state paradigm has not changed. As a Russian saying goes, "the dogs are barking, but the caravan moves on..."

The reason is simple: lack of self-interest. Not only is there no motivation for existing government systems to change, but there is also no motivation for *individuals* to switch to a new system.

Let's face it, most of us live busy lives trying to make a living, to make the most out of the rules set for us and opportunities that existing systems are providing. We have neither time nor energy to change our government, with the only action the vast majority exercises is "voting". Neither do we have the time to try adopting new, unproven forms of government, that do not have present recognition and may or may not work in the future. The switching cost is too high.

Existing governments, by allowing us to earn money, give us an opportunity to indulge in instant gratification as a reward, and in return support themselves through taxation. The government acts as an intermediary in any financial transaction, either through sales or income taxes, taking a lion's share of value it did not create and often does not deserve.

This is what gives governments so much power. Not the slogans, not the history and traditions, not even the weapons. The Soviet Union had nukes, but still fell apart. Not democracy, as China's powerful rise clearly shows. It's the pursuit of selfish self-interest.

No matter what form the government takes, the ability to harness the pursuit of self-interest has to be ingrained in it in order for that government to prosper in an ego-driven world. The lesson is obvious: self-interest should be at the core of any new government system creation.

Therefore, the first step in establishing a global government should be the establishment of a new world currency. Only by having a separate currency can you have the freedom to stop supporting the government whose policies you do not agree with. Only then can you stop paying taxes in order to support a heavy bureaucratic system. If we stop feeding existing governments, their power will gradually diminish. This is the path of passive resistance practiced by Gandhi.

Is a global government based on a new world currency just a pipe dream? Should we sit and wait for the world to change, or forget about the possibility of Planet B ever coming to existence?

Luckily, No. There is hope, and it doesn't come from any kind of authority at the top. It comes from billions of individuals like you and me, and the systems we together can build.

In this final chapter of iMigration, I want to bring your attention to some exciting projects that act as blueprints for future world government. These projects show that dreams can, and do become reality.

### <Wikipedia

Online encyclopedia Wikipedia was created as an offshoot of a more "serious" project - Nupedia, where articles had to be created and peer-reviewed by experts with academic credentials. Wikipedia followed a different path - allowing everyone to contribute, no matter their skills, background or qualification.

What followed is one of the most startling examples of global cooperation that leverages technology in a positive direction. Imagine one of the biggest IT projects ever (its website receives hundreds of millions of visitors per month) managed by an organization with just a few dozen employees. This non-profit foundation runs a technical infrastructure that sustains a contribution platform where most of the work is done for free by an army of volunteers from around the world. It is truly an amazing

blueprint for future global cooperation in many areas. The spirit of Wikipedia is best expressed by its founder in this letter:

If everyone reading this donated a dollar, our annual fundraiser would be over in just a few days.

Not everyone can or will donate. And that's fine, because each year just enough people support Wikipedia with a small donation. If you feel it's your turn, please make a small donation of \$10, \$20, \$35 or whatever you can to keep Wikipedia free.

Most people don't know this, but I'm a volunteer.

I don't get paid a cent for my work at Wikipedia, and neither do our thousands of other volunteer authors and editors. When I founded Wikipedia, I could have made it into a for-profit company with advertising banners, but I decided to do something different.

Commerce is fine. Advertising is not evil. But it doesn't belong here. Not in Wikipedia.

Wikipedia is something special. It is like a library or a public park. It is like a temple for the mind. It is a place we can all go to think, to learn, to share our knowledge with others. It is a unique human project, the first of its kind in history. It is a humanitarian project to bring a free encyclopedia to every single person on the planet.

Every single person.

We're a small organization, and I've worked hard over the years to keep us lean and tight. We fulfill our mission, and leave waste to others.

To do this without resorting to advertising, we need you. It is you who keep this dream alive. It is you who have created Wikipedia. It is you who believe that a place of calm reflection and learning is worth having.

This year, please consider making a donation to protect and sustain Wikipedia.

Thanks,

Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia Founder

<WikiLeaks

PC and internet revolutions, while vastly improving communication, have not led to greater business and government transparency. WikiLeaks, a non-profit organization started in 2007 by Julian Assange, a former hacker, attempted to change that. Its motto is "We Open Governments", and open governments it did!

WikiLeaks became a media sensation of 2010 with its publication of Iraq and Afghanistan War Logs, and US Embassy Cables ("Cablegate"). It's a stunning case of extreme technological leverage used to bring millions of secret documents into the public sight. WikiLeaks claims that it "has released more classified intelligence documents than the rest of the world press combined." How did it pull off such a feat?

WikiLeaks website is a secure anonymous electronic drop box, allowing whistleblowers to submit sensitive information without their identity being compromised. After receiving confidential data, WikiLeaks acts as a publisher of both news and source material that serves as proof.

The information submitted is often so explosive that sources would risk being jailed or even executed if found out, so WikiLeaks takes source anonymity seriously, utilizing the latest cryptographic security to cover the tracks.

The WikiLeaks project is a diverse global group of people including journalists, software engineers, mathematicians, Chinese dissidents, and thousands of volunteers. The focus is on greater transparency, fighting for stronger democracies and against corruption, revealing war secrets, intelligence secrets, corporate corruption, internet censorship and human rights abuse worldwide.

The website <http://www.wikileaks.org> itself is hosted on servers spread around the world, and so far has withstood multiple attacks from hostile governments that tried to shut it down.

While WikiLeaks does not specifically target the US government, its most sensational leaks did involve the inner workings of the most powerful government in the world, making the US government WikiLeaks' enemy number one.

As a result of the leaks, WikiLeaks has been subject to a banking blockade, demonstrating the powerful ties of US Government to major financial institutions such as Bank of America, VISA, MasterCard, PayPal and Western Union. Since WikiLeaks core operations, including hosting, are funded by donations, the banking blockade is the government's way to choke WikiLeaks, as there are no legal grounds to fight it.

Since the blockade began, donations to WikiLeaks have fallen by 95%. Its homepage now states "We are forced to put all our efforts into raising funds to ensure our economic survival." Persecution by large systems, government or corporate, is part of the daily struggle of operating WikiLeaks.

## <Rospil

Rospil is a project dedicated to the fight against corruption in the Russian government, specifically targeting fraud in the use of federal funds by private subcontractors.

Rospil was started in early 2011 by Alexei Navalny - a lawyer known for his battles for corporate and government transparency, and infamous for categorizing the ruling United Russia political party as the "Party of Swindlers and Thieves".

The website <http://www.rospil.info> is often called Russian WikiLeaks, allowing users to anonymously submit any inside knowledge or info they have about corruption and discuss it.

In the first year of operation Rospil exposed corruption in over \$1 billion worth of tenders, revealing embezzlement and outright theft of public funds. But the project does more than just expose corruption. A team of four lawyers working for the project routinely files complaints with the Federal courts, pushing for punishments in the form of fines, disciplinary measures, and even jail time for government officials involved. Rospil doesn't just talk about corruption, it actually does something about it.

The project is funded by donations from thousands of people who want to contribute to the cause. So far it has collected more than \$300,000 in donations, more than enough to support its operations for the next year, paying for salaries and hosting.

To receive payments Rospil uses Yandex.Money, a popular Russian online digital currency system. Yandex.Money claims to protect the anonymity of senders, but it was recently discovered that the company was forced by the FSB (Russia's Federal Security Bureau) to reveal the identity of top 100 donors to Rospil.

Revealing corruption in one of the most corrupt countries in the world is a dangerous job, even when you have the public's backing.

Go to <http://www.rospil.info/about> and look at the faces of people working on this worthwhile project. These are real people who are not afraid to make their identity known while working against a powerful government, exposing corruption at the highest levels.

These young people are part of a new generation who have the courage to take a stand against a system, an attitude radically different from the mentality of fear inherited by majority from the Soviet Times. They will not tolerate living a life of fear.

## <Digital Currencies

What is a digital currency and why is it so exciting for an iMigrant?

As their name implies, digital currencies do not have any "paper" equivalent in the form of banknotes or bills. Being software-based allows electronic money to be instantly transferred around the world, bypassing the traditional banking system.

What backs the value of a digital currency? If a currency is not issued by a government, how can you possibly trust it?

Before I answer that question, think for a moment what actually backs the value of the US Dollar... The greatest value of the USD is in its worldwide acceptance, the dollar being a reserve currency and a basis for most international transactions. The value is in the network.

At present the USD is backed by trust in the US government, the trust that the government will not default on its obligations or hyper-inflate the dollar.



Of course, the trust in US dollar has been built over centuries, and no digital currency can dream of obtaining such reputation quickly.

Thus the earliest digital currencies like Webmoney, e-Gold and Liberty Dollar that originated with the explosive growth of the internet in the late 1990's were all backed by either precious metals or assets held in a conventional currency.

### <Webmoney

Webmoney is a value-transfer system utilizing online digital currencies, created in 1998 in the wake of Russian financial collapse. Its users have options of storing money in e-wallets denominated in currencies such as US Dollar, Russian Ruble, or Euro.

With a central office in Moscow, all of the deposits are backed by guarantor corporations based around the world in the legal jurisdictions of the currencies they are holding.

Webmoney has highly-secure desktop, online and even mobile-phone client applications, and an option to use biometric fingerprint identification for even greater security.

Webmoney became popular in Russia, CIS and Eastern European countries not just as a means of online shopping, but quick online money transfers to relatives abroad, an operation that was difficult using the traditional antiquated banking systems of these countries. Receiving money is free, for sending transfers Webmoney charges a commission of 0.8%.

It's important to point out that Webmoney is not anonymous. There is no need to have a bank account to use Webmoney, but a user's physical identity does need to be verified (I had to email a scan of my Russian passport to open an account).

Since its creation, Webmoney has experienced spectacular growth, with the total volume of transactions in 2010 surpassing \$9 billion. Webmoney now has over 12 million users, located in 70 countries throughout the world, according to the Digital Currency Magazine.

Despite its phenomenal success in Russia and CIS, Webmoney remains mostly a marginal regional player. It's not really connected to an international financial system, being pushed around by fierce competitors such as Western Union and tough government regulations.

### <E-Gold

The cautionary tale of the rise and fall of E-gold offers a glimpse into the dangers of operating a digital currency.

E-gold, standing for "Electronic-Gold", was started by doctor Douglas Jackson in Melbourne, Florida in 1996, in the midst of the internet revolution. E-gold is a quintessential Digital Gold Currency: it can be traded online, but at the same time is

100% backed by physical gold. The gold reserves backing the currency were stored in several bank vaults in London, Dubai, Canada and Switzerland and were audited by interdependent consultancies.

E-gold accounts could be opened anonymously and funds transferred instantly around the world, with purchases made by using “grams” of gold or smaller divisions. The company charged a small commission of less than 1% on transactions, which compared favorably to 3% charged by credit card companies.

These advantages over traditional banking systems made E-gold popular with individuals and small businesses around the world - according to Wikipedia, by 2003 E-gold had over 1 million accounts, with around half outside the US. By 2005, E-gold was second to PayPal in online payment industry.

In fact, E-gold became so successful that it was noticed by the US Federal Government.

In 2005, government Secret Service agents raided the company offices in Florida and froze its domestic bank accounts. It has been persecuted since then, and remains effectively shut down. What followed is a long legal battle with the government, still in progress. E-gold is not accepting any new accounts at this time.

In 2007, “a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C. indicted E-gold Ltd. and its owners on charges of money laundering, conspiracy, and operating an unlicensed money transmitting business,” reports Wikipedia.

“Douglas Jackson and his associates operated a sophisticated and widespread international money remitting business, unsupervised and unregulated by any entity in the world, which allowed for anonymous transfers of value at a click of a mouse,” said U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Taylor for the District of Columbia in a press release, according to a Wired Magazine article.

One economics professor is convinced that “Jackson’s radical dream, his goal of upsetting the economic status quo and overturning the government’s monopoly on money, is what really got E-Gold targeted.”

## <Bitcoin

Bitcoin is unlike anything the world of finance has ever seen. As a digital currency, it is a newcomer, an instant hit, a mystery and a legend. Created in 2009 by a brilliant mathematician and computer scientist hiding under the pseudonym of Satoshi Nakamoto, Bitcoin could potentially be the most important invention of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Its operational principles are so counter-intuitive to how a currency should work that skeptics doubt its very survival. And yet it works.

What is so eye-brow raising about Bitcoin? Bitcoin possess several key characteristics that make it stand out from the crowd of other digital currencies.

For starters, Bitcoin's value is not backed by any tangible asset, is not backed by any conventional currency, and is not backed by any institution, neither private nor government. Instead, Bitcoin is backed by... Math!

The aim of Bitcoin is to create an independent currency that would not require trust in a central government to operate. Throughout human history, government institutions in charge of money supply have been inflating fiat currencies, abusing the trust citizens place in them. I know of this abuse of trust first-hand, being witness to the hyperinflation of the early 1990s in Russia that wiped out the savings of my parents and grandparents. Thus, the motto of Bitcoin is "mistrust authority, trust mathematics".

Bitcoin's faith rests on a branch of mathematics called cryptography. The number of new Bitcoins that could ever enter circulation worldwide is fixed by a mathematical algorithm, preventing inflation from ever occurring. Protected by public-key cryptography and military-grade encryption, Bitcoin enjoys world-class security that other currencies can't even dream of. To break Bitcoin, an attacker would need to crack algorithms that were at the very foundation of cryptography for decades.

Bitcoin's only intrinsic value comes purely as being a medium of exchange. Bitcoin is valuable simply because many others are willing to accept it - the network effect.

Secondly, Bitcoin is decentralized. There is no single central bank that issues the digital currency - it is all handled by client software across the network. There is also no central server that processes transactions, and therefore no single point of failure.

Think Napster versus Bittorrent. Napster, the music sharing phenomenon of the late 90's, was based on a client-server technology, and was easily shut down after being sued by the record labels for copyright infringement. Bittorrent, a file sharing software, is instead based on Peer-to-Peer connectivity without any central server to shut down, and keeps prospering despite any attempts at a crackdown. To shut down Bittorrent, you would have to shut down the internet. Same with Bitcoin. Once it's out, there is no way to put the genie back in the bottle. Decentralization ensures that Bitcoin will never suffer the fate of e-Gold.

Thirdly, Bitcoin provides complete anonymity and privacy. No registration is required. No logins, no passwords, and no e-mail addresses are required in order to send or receive digital money. Just like with paper cash, transactions can be conducted by parties in complete privacy from the rest of the world, their records not accessible to any government. With Bitcoin, even the identity of the counter-party can remain an unknown. Welcome to the world of untraceable digital cash!

Fourthly, Bitcoin is built on the principle of complete transparency.

Bitcoin protocols, algorithms and software are all open-sourced, preventing corruption and hidden activities by publishers. There are now several desktop-based and web-based Bitcoin clients under development that utilize Bitcoin currency.

Last but not least, Bitcoin software is free. All transactions are also free - there are no commissions, taxes, or extra fees.

With all of these advantages over traditional currencies and even over other competing digital currencies, it's no wonder Bitcoin has experienced rapid growth since its inception. The market value of one BTC, a basic unit of Bitcoin currency, has increased from \$0.01 to over \$6.

Its enthusiastic community of users is growing by leaps and bounds, propelled entirely by word-of-mouth marketing. Bitcoin acceptance as money is also spreading, with Silk Road Marketplace filled with offers of goods and services that could be purchased with Bitcoins.

New projects that utilize Bitcoin appear monthly, such as the Global Bitcoin Stock Exchange to allow startup businesses to raise capital, along with Bitcoin banks and futures and options exchanges, allowing for a smooth operation of the new digital economy.

### <Blueprints

Is global government just a dream or could it be achieved with current technology and awareness levels? What other lessons can we learn from successful real-world projects already discussed in this chapter?

From the extreme efficiency of Wikipedia to the courageous efforts of WikiLeaks staff to the ingenuity of Bitcoin creators, we can see how technology creates the potential for new types of collaborative efforts on a global scale. It's only a matter of time before these projects fuse into some type of a new, never-before created system that could be the beginning of world government.

The infrastructure to create such a global government is rapidly being put in place. Where centralized projects stood no chance against a government attack, decentralization comes to rescue. Where financial channels could easily be blocked, anonymous digital currencies come to help. Work is now possible on global cooperative projects that just twenty years ago could not even be imagined.

We are living in a unique moment in history. Technological change is accelerating. Cryptography that in our parent's generation could only be used by military is now accessible to anyone with a smart phone. Disruptive technologies, such as P2P digital currencies, are already creating new reality. Globalization is also accelerating. These forces of change cannot be stopped, the process is irreversible.

Existing governments have to now learn new rules of the game.

They can no longer erect walls and borders, they can no longer prevent free flow of information and human communication like they did in the past.

Existing governments systems will have to adapt to these changes or die. They will, in turn, be replaced by new forms of government, better serving the citizens of the world. It will be survival of the fittest and evolution at its finest.

What will these new forms of government look like?

Uniting distinct ethnic/cultural/lingual regions under a common government has been done before, good instances are Canada (Quebec) and Switzerland. What hasn't been done is uniting a distinct population globally for the purpose of forming a government.

Why is the EU failing? Germans, on average, are not Greeks. Trying to create a system that would please both populations simply because they happen to geographically live next to each other is, frankly, quite dumb. As the saying goes, there is no single recipe for success, but there is a sure recipe for failure, and that is trying to please everyone at the same time...

I envision a world of multiple competing global government systems, with no geographical monopolies. People will choose among various government, contribution and taxation systems, based on their taste, not on their place of birth or geographical location. It will be quite similar to the way we look for a job right now, with the challenge of finding the right match.

If a government doesn't care about you, if it becomes too authoritarian, too bloated, too slow, too bureaucratic, etc. then you just dump it and switch to using a government system that's better. You will have a Fortune 500 list of top government systems to choose from, all competing for your business!

Is grassroots cooperation on a global scale possible? Absolutely. Can government transparency be achieved? Certainly. Can a project's funding be based on volunteers and donations? Definitely. Can a new global currency be developed without support from existing institutions? Hard to believe, but in fact, Yes.

The blueprints are out there, and the rest is up to us. iMigrants around the world, unite!

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