



Bill Thilly '67 ScD '71, Professor of Biological Engineering, passes away at 79

On Dec. 24, 2024, Professor William Thilly '67 ScD '71 of Course 20 (Bioengineering) passed away at 79. A professor of genetics, toxicology, and biological engineering, his research in the health effects of environmental contaminants led to the development of widely-used assays that could detect several mutations in a single test.

Thilly spent most of his career at MIT: after studying biology as an undergraduate, he went on to receive a Doctor of Science (ScD) in nutritional biochemistry, and then joined the faculty in 1972 as an Assistant Professor of genetic toxicology. One of Thilly's most prominent research discoveries came soon after, in which he and his lab developed the TK6 assay, a test that reveals whether a given compound is likely to cause mutations in human cells. This assay is now commonly used by pharmaceutical companies to test the safety of new drug compounds.

From 1980 to 2001, Thilly led the Center for Environmental Health Sciences (CEHS) at MIT, during which he and his team

studied the biological consequences of burning fossil fuels. He also established MIT's first Superfund research program, which explores ways to protect people from hazardous environmental chemicals, and directly engaged with community members at its site in Woburn, Massachusetts.

Throughout his career, Thilly actively engaged with students and constantly encouraged them to think about the real-life impact of their research. His passion for supporting underserved students drove him to make generous financial contributions to scholarship funds and personally take trips to historically Black universities to recruit more applicants to MIT. While a student at MIT himself, he left another lasting impact in a world far outside biology – the breakfast cereal industry. As an intern at Kellogg's in 1965, he invented a cereal with dried apple and cinnamon that would later become Apple Jacks.

— Lucy Cai

Three from MIT named Schwarzman Scholars

By Sabine Chu

On Jan. 15, the Schwarzman Scholars Program announced its tenth cohort, including three from MIT. Scholars pursue a fully funded, one-year master's degree at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. Per the scholarship's website, the Schwarzman Scholars Program is intended to create leaders and form "global relationships that can be activated over a lifetime."

MIT-affiliated awardees were Andrii Zahorodnii '24, Yutao Gong MBA/SM '25, and Brandon Man SM '25. Zahorodnii will graduate with concurrent SB and MEng degrees in Course 6-9 (Computation and Cognition).

At MIT, Zahorodnii has pursued research in both neural networks and cognitive science at the Meta-Consciousness Group and Fiete Lab, as well as founding the Ukraine Leadership and Technology Academy. Before coming to MIT, Gong studied at Duke University and worked at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). She is pursuing two master's degrees in the Sloan School of Management and Course 1 (Civil-Environmental Engineering) as a Leaders for Global Operations (LGO) fellow. Man is a master's student in Course 2 (Mechanical Engineering) and the cofounder of the startup Sequator, which describes itself as the "data engine for carbon markets." These three students will join 147 others representing 38 countries.

Over email, Gong answered The Tech's questions about the Schwarzman Scholarship application process, her thoughts on receiving the scholarship, and goals as a scholar. Answers have been edited lightly for clarity.

TT: What was the application process like for this scholarship? Why did you choose to apply?

Gong: The application process is different for Chinese passport holders versus other countries. I hold a Chinese passport. It includes two main essays (one about leadership, and the other is a personal statement), short essays, a one-minute video introduction, and recommendation letters among other miscellaneous stuff. This application was due in mid-May 2024.

Then, they flew around 100 people to Tsinghua in early July for an in-person interview—each person has 25 minutes with a panel of around seven interviewers, then a luncheon to socialize with interviewers and other candidates. We also stayed a night at the college. We found out the results in late August.

I grew up in China but have mainly been spending time in the U.S. since college—I would love to learn more about the issues this country is currently facing as it's my motherland, especially together with like-minded peers with different backgrounds. The Schwarzman Scholarship feels like the perfect opportunity to do so.

TT: How did you feel when you learned you were chosen for this award?

Gong: Honestly, a mix of feelings—very excited because it's a competitive program and there are many aspects of it I very much look forward to, but I also felt a sense of uncertainty. I am in the middle of my MBA program, and still feel unsure about what I want to do in the long run. Moving back to China for a year after I have built a network here (not only professional connections but also great friends, some of whom mean a tremendous lot to me) feels like a leap of faith. On top of that, I still plan to return to the U.S. after the program for work, but my eligibility to work (visa, etc) will be less certain compared to starting work in the U.S. right after graduation.

What eased this uncertainty to some extent is hope from the long-

term perspective—having spent so much time in China and the U.S., I am certain that my ultimate career/life trajectory will be somewhere between the two countries, or if I'm lucky, bridging the two countries. I am confident that being a Schwarzman Scholar will lay an important and firm foundation for me to achieve my long-term goal, which probably outweighs the short-term hassles. Similarly, for personal relationships—a lifelong relationship should be able to withstand one year of separation!

TT: What do you hope to accomplish as a Schwarzman Scholar, and how does this feed into your long-term goals? How has your time at MIT or beforehand contributed to these goals?

Gong: I am very passionate about sustainable development, particularly energy transition. I worked at BCG for three years before coming to MIT as an LGO fellow, so my approach to this issue is predominantly from the business perspective, but both the project work at BCG and classes I've taken at MIT have made me realize that government and regulation plays a huge part in the energy transition. I want to equip myself with knowledge in business, technology, and policy—BCG and MIT helped me achieve the first two, and I hope I will achieve the third at Schwarzman.

In addition, I have had ample exposure to the manufacturing and industrials sector from both projects at BCG and the LGO program—I think this sector will play a huge role in achieving sustainable development in the future, and I'm grateful to have had the chance to build lots of connections and some extent of expertise in this sector.

TT: Do you have any advice for students interested in this scholarship?

Gong: Don't be intimidated by a rejection! This is my second time applying.



REGAINING CONFIDENCE
CAMPUS LIFE, p. 3

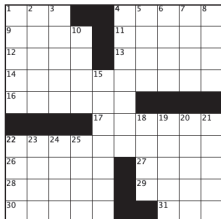
ICE AND FIRE
CAMPUS LIFE, p. 8



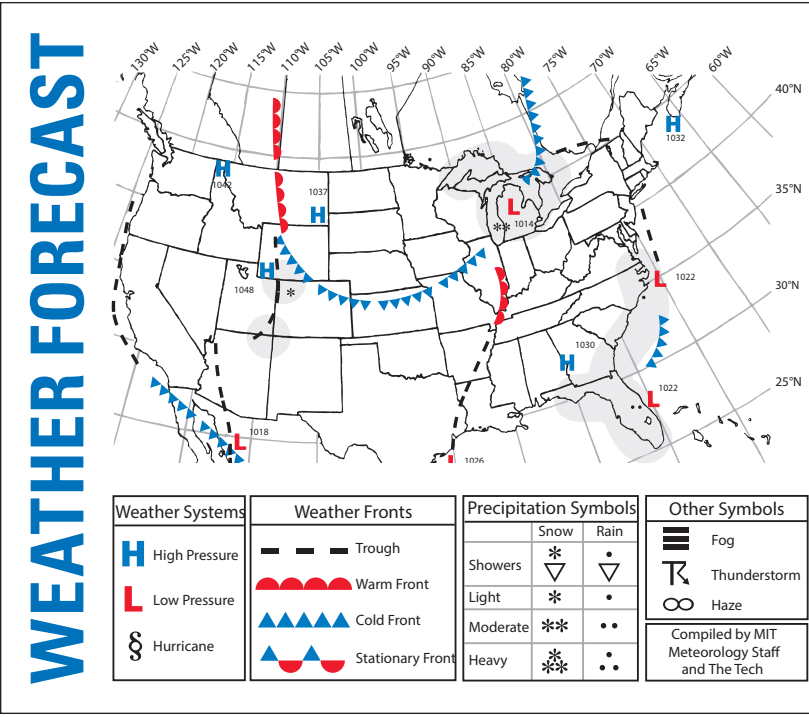
THE ART OF BAKING
ARTS, p. 4

HOMESSEEKING
ARTS, p. 5

WORLD & NATION:
BIDEN LEGACY, CITIZENSHIP ORDER, CLIMATE PACT
WORLD LEADERS, TARIFF THREATS, BORDER EMERGENCY.
WORLD & NATION, p. 6



SECTIONS
Campus Life3
Arts4
Fun Pages5
World & Nation . . .6



Warming up for the Weekend

By Lou Lahn
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

After a stretch of really chilly weather, the weekend looks to be warming up a bit, though evening lows are still well below freezing. The snow may be on its way out with the warmer weather, so take the opportunity to get out and enjoy some winter beauty while it lasts! A walk along the Charles River esplanade may be a great way to get outside for a while.

JANUARY 23 SITUATION FOR NOON (ET)

Extended Forecast

Today: Mostly cloudy. High around 28°F (). South-west wind around 7-11 mph.

Tonight: Mostly clear. Low around 20°F (). West wind around 10 mph.

Friday: Sunny. High around 30°F (). West wind around 10-14 mph.

Saturday: Sunny. High around 27°F () and low around 21°F (). West wind 9-13 mph.

Sunday: Mostly sunny. High around 35°F () and low around 25°F (). West wind 14-16 mph.

MIT SIPB launches the beta version of OpenGrades, a fully anonymous course evaluation platform

OpenGrades has seen over 1300 reviews distributed over 500 different classes

By Boheng Cao and Vivian Hir

On Dec. 12, 2024, MIT's Student Information Processing Board (SIPB) launched a beta version of OpenGrades, a platform where students can anonymously share information about classes at MIT since Fall 2021. On OpenGrades, users can post class reviews and numeric or letter grades they received in their classes. Additionally, users can submit class-specific documents that include syllabi and assignments, information that is currently inaccessible on the Institute's subject evaluation reports.

Senior Mohamed Suufi '25 began developing OpenGrades in June 2022. What motivated Suufi to develop OpenGrades was his dissatisfaction with the MIT's course evaluations. The reports consist of numerical ratings of various questions on a scale from 1 to 7; student feedback and other information like grade cutoffs are not published. "What does it mean that you rated the class 5 out of 7?" Suufi said. "What cost you those two points?"

As a result, information such as grade cutoffs often involve asking previous students who took the class. However, Suufi noted that it was hard to pinpoint exact answers. For instance, he recalled his frustration when upperclassmen "told me [the cut-off was] like a 70" for a particular class but others "told me it's a 60." Suufi also mentioned challenges in obtaining other types

of information like tips and advice because knowledge about a class primarily gets passed down by word of mouth. "There's so much information that's just lost, and the only way it gets down is from seniors to freshmen," Suufi said. "So I wanted to fix that."

Besides issues with the course evaluation system, another factor that inspired Suufi to start OpenGrades was encountering the Harvard Syllabus Explorer when he cross-registered at Harvard. The Syllabus Explorer allows students to search and download course syllabi regardless of their class registration status. This accessible feature inspired Suufi to replicate this tool when developing OpenGrades. "I was like, 'why don't we have that?'" Suufi said.

After spending two years developing the code base for OpenGrades, Suufi collaborated with SIPB for testing and troubleshooting in the later stages of development before its initial release in Dec. 2024. SIPB Chair Inna Voloshchuk '27 and SIPB Keyholder Diego Temkin '26 helped with the project.

As of this writing, OpenGrades has over 600 activated users, with 1350 reviews distributed over some 500 unique classes. Yet only around 400 of these reviews are what Suufi considers full reviews. According to Suufi, full reviews are defined as reviews that contain class-specific details, rather than just a grade or a short text. First-year undergraduates account for more than one-

third of the users, while graduate students make up just 2%.

Despite some bugs upon its release, OpenGrades has been received positively by students. Ekaterina Tiukhtikova '28 noted its helpfulness in filling out spring pre-registration, and Grayson Bertaina '25 supported its goal of academic transparency and "would have utilized it heavily" as a first-year had it been available earlier. Sydney Saenz '26 said that some of their classes are "very secretive" about cutoffs, adding that "OpenGrades could let me know where I stand grade-wise in a class."

While OpenGrade's 200 weekly users and steadily accumulating reviews have "definitely surprised" Suufi, some of its popularity still stems from a Dormspam raffle incentive that ended on January 15. To retain interest, Suufi has considered establishing long-term cash incentives or making site access contingent on a certain number of reviews per semester.

He also thinks that stigma around sharing grades, especially grades below an A, has stifled some interest and inflated grade averages on the site. Despite this, he holds hope that increased OpenGrades usage will normalize grade transparency at MIT. "I think all these data points are very valuable, especially when they deviate from what is considered okay," Suufi said. According to Suufi, the new OpenGrades feature allowing for direct grade report uploads is expected

to ease this normalization.

One of OpenGrade's defining characteristics is its anonymity for student reviewers and the lack of access to faculty, as this is enforced by MIT Touchstone login. Unlike traditional course evaluations, OpenGrade reviews are visible to students and invisible to professors. When confronted with the possibility that instructors might see leaked reviews, Suufi expressed doubt that any student would be "tight [enough] with their professor."He also did not support the possibility that reviews could be "trace[d] back to an individual student." In case of abuse, Suufi added a report button that flags suspicious or inaccurate reviews. But it has seen no use so far.

As for future directions, Suufi will focus on attracting students, particularly upper-classmen and graduate students that can review less frequently taken upper-division classes. In this vein, he hopes to separate reviews for undergraduate and graduate versions of the same classes, which frequently have different assignments and grade cutoffs. In addition, Suufi plans to make some usage statistics public and design a file-hosting system to store syllabi. Finally, he plans to grant recent alumni and past affiliates access to the website.

"It's relatively new to the MIT community," Suufi said. "But I think over time, I hope more people are open to sharing information about classes or their grades."

Regaining confidence, one step at a time

Small fish in a big pond

By Vivian Hir
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

"MIT makes you look down on yourself so much, which makes me feel like it was not worth going to this school," my mom texted in the family group chat a month ago. "This place destroyed your self-confidence and gave you too much pressure."

My mom texted this after I confessed feeling imposter syndrome at MIT. I was livid when I saw her text. I wanted to counter her statement by saying that going to MIT was worth it and overall positive, but I didn't know how to respond at the moment. The next morning, I fired back in the group chat, saying "Ok enough my self-confidence would have been destroyed at Stanford."

In hindsight, what my mom said wasn't wrong. She had a point. I like to think of MIT as the place that made me become more resilient and comfortable with failure. I must admit, however, that being a small fish in a big pond here has made me lose so much self-confidence that I am not sure how long it will take me to regain confidence after I graduate.

What made my self-confidence reach an all-time low in my MIT career was that senior fall was my worst semester academically. In one of my classes, I struggled significantly on the exams and problem sets that I worried about failing the class. In another class, my midterm grade dropped significantly from the first to second midterm; it was unlike anything I experienced before. These series of events made me wonder if this semester was just an unfortunate one, or that my next semester was

doomed to experience the same fate.

It wasn't until last semester that I realized how important it was to have self-confidence. In high school, I knew that I had some issues with self-confidence, but it was nowhere as bad as now. My academic performance might have been similar regardless, but I am sure that my low self-confidence made things worse. Worse in the sense that I had a hard time overcoming setbacks and struggled with motivation. How I viewed myself also affected my mental health, as I felt depressed and hopeless at times about my academic situation.

My low self-confidence made me feel so drained at the end of the year that I came to this dark realization: no one else can help me become more confident except myself. In other words, I need to learn how to become best friends with myself. If I don't change, the internalized thoughts I have can affect my mindset and actions, so much that it can change my future outcomes, for better or for worse. Therefore, it is critical for me to have a basic level of confidence.

Although my family and friends can say positive things about me, it's how I perceive myself that shapes my self-confidence in the end. On a similar note, I can acquire more accolades and achievements that would make me feel better, but that wouldn't necessarily help me gain self-confidence in the long run.

As a result, one question I had throughout last semester was "how do I regain confidence?" Unfortunately, I never came closer to an answer by the end. I tried to find confidence from my strengths outside

of academics, like running long distances and writing articles that my friends enjoyed reading. But I would always retort these thoughts by saying that no one in graduate school or the corporate world cares about these aspects about me, because they are not directly related to my career or academics.

Perhaps it is being in the MIT bubble that makes finding self-confidence so hard. As a small fish in a big pond, I constantly compare myself with others, even though it obviously doesn't do much good to me. But it is hard to not compare myself when I am surrounded by people who are one of the best scientists and engineers in the country and world.

Sometimes, I remind myself that the student body at MIT is not representative of the average population, but that barely reassures me. Most of the time, I ignore that fact, and return to feeling bad about being below average academically at MIT.

It's as if the only things that would give me self-confidence are factors that would validate my intelligence and competency, traits that are emphasized a lot not only at MIT, but in the job market. This narrow mindset bothered me a lot, but I struggled to truly seek confidence from other things. The question occupied my mind throughout winter break, causing me to make regaining confidence one of my New Year's resolutions.

When I wrote out this New Year's resolution in my YearCompass booklet [1], I was aware that sticking to this resolution would require changing the way I talked to myself subconsciously, which is a significant undertaking. Logically speaking,

practicing self-compassion should be easy, yet it is so hard. I read articles online about how to be more confident, but they didn't really feel helpful or insightful.

What made me feel closer to answering this big question of regaining confidence during winter break was when I chose to run right after I woke up, as I didn't have time in the afternoon for running. Being at home made me return to an earlier sleep schedule, and I naturally woke up before 8 a.m. that day. As I ran, I felt happy about starting the day with a 5k run because this choice required exerting some self-discipline, a trait that I admittedly lacked at times during the fall semester. The last time I decided to run in the morning out of choice had been in late August.

As I ran back to my house, I realized that one way to increase my confidence is to develop and maintain strong habits. One of the main sources of unhappiness last semester was the dreadful feeling that my academic success was out of my control because the hours I was putting in did not correlate with promising results. Although I worked hard in my classes, in hindsight I had some room for improvement in terms of study and learning habits. Building good habits like time management and focus is a choice I can make and can be achieved if I am determined and proactive.

Spring semester may not be easier, but one thing that is under my control is whether I want to develop good habits. By developing better habits in academics and life, I have confidence that these changes will indirectly translate to more self-confidence.



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The Tech is collecting successful application essays (hint: yours!).

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The Art of Baking with Flour Bakery Founder Joanne Chang

Chang: “I wanted to wake up excited to go to work... Now, I find things I do every day that inspire me.”

By Leona Gottselig

“I wanted to wake up excited to go to work... Now, I find things I do every day that inspire me.”

On the evening of Thursday, Jan. 16, Joanne Chang, the owner of Flour Bakery + Cafe (known to MIT students as Flour) and James Beard Award-winning pastry chef, hosted the MIT Arts Scholars community for The Art of Baking, a relaxed conversation with Chang on her background and journey to becoming one of the most celebrated chefs in Boston and beyond. She shared stories about her Harvard education, her challenging switch in career paths from consultant to cook, and lessons learned on how to successfully lead teams, craft recipes as a home baker, and navigate bakery entrepreneurship.

Chang admitted that she did not always want to be a chef. She studied Applied Mathematics and Economics at Harvard University and baked for fun on the side. She joked, “I would bake chocolate chip cookies for my applied math study groups... so people would help me in exchange.”

Chang went on to graduate with honors and worked for two years in management consulting, following the path she had created for herself at Harvard. “I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do,” she said, but “in my spare time I was always cooking and baking.” She would frequently invite friends over to her apartment in Somerville and host dinner parties with all her culinary creations.

She realized she did not want to continue consulting long term, and decided to pursue cooking. She wrote letters to four restaurants in Boston; by a stroke of luck, she got a call back from one with an open position because someone had just quit.

She was hired at Biba in Boston to make “bar food,” cooking chicken wings and scallion pancakes. Chang was eager to work in the restaurant business, but had doubts about her decision. “It was a labor-intensive, hot, difficult job... sometimes it felt like it was a mistake,” In spite of this, Chang persevered and was promoted. She began to notice the pastry chef’s dessert station and took a special interest in baking. Today, she advises anyone who wants to open a bakery or restaurant to “get your foot in the door” by working at one and making connections with the chefs and managers.

Chang’s interest in baking eventually



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAYNA YUN CHOU

Joanne Chang discusses her journey to starting Flour with the MIT Arts Scholars program, at the Erie St. Flour location on Thursday Jan. 16.

inspired her to take the leap to open the original Flour Bakery + Cafe in the South End. And for six years, she ran the bakery. Although she loved her work, it wasn’t all easy. At times, she “even wanted to sell it.” But Flour’s popularity continued to grow. Chang strived to foster an environment where her staff could make people’s days. “The world is about that connection,” she said. In 2007, a second Flour location opened. Today, Chang owns nine Flour locations in Boston and Cambridge and is planning to open a tenth location this spring in Boston Common.

As Flour has expanded, Chang has developed recipes, expanded her menu, and written cookbooks. She has also opened a restaurant with her husband and is leading a growing team of employees.

Chang chatted with the audience about how she learned to be a good home baker. She recommends finding cookbooks and experimenting with them, which taught her to “understand the proportions and reactions that work.” Practice, she stated, will “build your toolkit” of baking knowl-

edge. Baking is an art form, but it also requires precision and experimentation.

Chang’s time working at restaurants helped her amass foundational knowledge of many recipes, which aided in recipe and menu creation. In fact, Chang’s triple chocolate mousse cake is inspired by a recipe from the first restaurant she worked at. She now has a pastry chef who provides additional expertise. In a process of trial and error, he brings many variations of recipes. The duo tastes them together and then makes changes.

Flour might never have had a savory menu if it were not for a critical, early decision by Chang. Originally, she wanted Flour to be a patisserie, serving only pastries and sweets. But, she received advice from a fellow chef, who told her, “You’ll be working hard anyways, why not expand your menu... give people a reason to come for lunch?” With this in mind, she changed her business plan and decided to serve sandwiches in addition to her baked goods.

As Flour grew, she began to miss the

experience of training employees as she had done at her first location. She began to write cookbooks to draw on her love of teaching. She now has published five cookbooks, four of which focus on baking, and is working on a sixth about cookies.

Chang’s story and amazing success is inspiring: pursue what fuels your passion and makes you excited to wake up every morning. On a leap of faith, she switched paths from management consulting to the culinary arts, and found an incredibly rewarding career. Just from hearing Chang talk about Flour, I can tell that she truly loves what she does. Chang’s stories were met with a warm round of applause. Inspired students lined up to take photos with her and thanked her for motivating them to pursue careers they truly love.

The MIT Arts Scholars program organized the event, and provides MIT students access to exclusive art-related events, including concerts and museum tours. For more information, consult the Arts Scholars website or contact Rayna Yun Chou.

Sol. to Brief Intermission from page 5

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8
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Karissa Chen debuts her first novel, Homeseeking, at the Harvard Book Store

Chen shares the inspiration and research behind her book in a conversation moderated by Celeste Ng, New York Times bestselling author.

By Lucy Cai

On Jan. 13, Karissa Chen visited the Harvard Book Store to introduce her debut novel, Homeseeking. In a conversation moderated by Celeste Ng, the New York Times bestselling author of Little Fires Everywhere and Everything I Never Told You captivated the audience with a moving excerpt and reflected on the research behind the novel and the photo that inspired her to write it.

Published on Jan. 7, Homeseeking is a historical fiction novel that follows the story of two lovers, Suchi and Haiwen, as they meet in childhood and are torn apart by the Chinese Civil War. When Haiwen enlists in the Nationalist army in 1947 and leaves for Taiwan, he doesn’t expect to be gone for decades. “Following Suchi and Haiwen across decades, borders, and lifetimes,” the book is a story of family, sacrifice, and the power of enduring love.

Though Homeseeking is Karissa Chen’s first novel, it is not her first creative endeavor or by far. Her fiction and essays have been published in magazines like The Atlantic, Eater, and The Cut. She is also the current editor-in-chief of Hyphen Magazine, which is dedicated to Asian American stories. Previously, Chen served as the senior fiction editor at The Rumpus, an online literary magazine.

The event kicked off with an excerpt: Chen read from the second chapter of her book, a three-and-a-half page scene set in a 99 Ranch Market in Los Angeles in 2008, where Haiwen meets Suchi for the last time. The scene follows Haiwen as he sees her across the grocery store floor and cautiously approaches, having “mistaken so many women for Suchi over the last four decades.” It turns out that Suchi has just moved to LA

a couple of years ago to help take care of her grandchildren. A brief conversation ensues, where the two share small talk on Haiwen’s recently passed wife, Linyee, and his new American name, Howard.

The scene was both beautifully written and beautifully read. Chen’s descriptions of the setting and the characters place readers squarely in the midst of the scene. A frequent customer of Asian grocery stores myself, it was easy for me to imagine the Korean melons Suchi is occupied with when Haiwen sees her, “their skins the color of lemon curd.”

Chen’s portrayal of lost love is convincing: though the interaction is brief, both the familiarity and distance between them is clear. Suchi speaks to Haiwen in Shanghaiese, their childhood dialect, and an “aching relief” runs through him. Yet time has made them foreign to one another: “People call me Howard now,” Haiwen says, and Suchi struggles to pronounce his new name. Chen read this dialogue with empathy for both characters, resulting in an enrapturing experience.

Ng followed with questions about the book’s origins. “The genesis of this book really came for me all the way back in 2005,” Chen explained. “My grandfather had passed away then, and we were going through his things, and we found this photograph of him weeping in front of his mother’s grave.” For Chen, her grandfather had always been a stoic Asian grandfather, so to see him weep haunted her. She knew her grandfather was separated from his family at 19, but she didn’t know the context of the story, and this compelled her to start doing research.

She learned about the Chinese Civil War, a military conflict in the late 1940s between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chi-

nese Communist Party (CCP) that the CCP ultimately won. Her grandfather was one of 2 million people, some as young as twenty, who fled Mainland China for Taiwan to help set up a new government, believing they would stay for only a few years. Most ended up staying for decades. As Chen lamented, they “had left behind families, children, parents, lovers, [and] wives.” The more Chen understood her grandfather’s story, the more she realized there were other stories like his.

To research the stories of these people who had left behind their lives in China, Chen went to Taiwan to learn more. Though she had hoped to interview Nationalist Party members who were members of this exodus, she found that she was too late. The soldiers of that generation had already passed away or weren’t in good health, and many were unwilling to talk about their experiences. “Instead,” Chen stated, “I found people who were willing to talk about their parents... or even grandparents, in some cases.”

Chen found that these generations were much more willing to talk about what had happened; they, too, were trying to put the pieces together. “People would say they found out all kinds of things about their fathers that they didn’t know because their fathers never wanted to talk about it.” Some of Chen’s interviewees even found out in their forties that their fathers had a whole other family.

When asked how much of this history she knew before researching the book, Chen admitted that she didn’t know much. “I didn’t really know that there was a Chinese civil war... I didn’t know about the history of how the Nationalists ended up in Taiwan. There’s so little that I knew, which is such a shame, because it’s my own his-

tory.” Ng added, “We really don’t learn any of that in school.”

Another unique feature of Homeseeking, beyond its historical backdrop, is its timeline: Chen tells Suchi’s story forwards, from childhood to old age, and Haiwen’s story backwards. Though Chen believes the structure works well, she struggled with it: “For a while, I was really stalled out because I didn’t know what the structure was going to be like.” At a month-long writer’s residency, she came to a revelation while listening to Jason Robert Brown’s “Last Five Years” album, a musical about a couple getting divorced. The first song starts with the woman singing about the end of her marriage, and the next song features the man singing about their first date. They eventually meet in the middle, and then separate again. Chen thought, “Wait a second, I think this could work for the book, because it not only works on a structural level... but it works thematically.” Suchi, whose storyline runs forwards, prohibits herself from dwelling on the past; Haiwen, whose storyline runs backwards, regrets what could have been.

Karissa Chen is not yet planning any future projects. Having just had a baby, her next goal is to work on photo books of him, which Ng called “a beautiful full circle, because this book started with a photo of [Chen’s] grandfather.” Though Homeseeking is a work of fiction, what Chen hopes readers will take away is that Suchi and Haiwen’s story exemplifies the experiences of real immigrants who went through the same hardships. “Sometimes we can react to immigrants and refugees with suspicion or impatience,” she stated. “I just always hope that at the very least, this book can make you a little more empathetic to that struggle... and understand that there’s a lot that we don’t see.”

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Brief Intermission

by Manaal Mohammed '25
Solution, page 4

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8
9			10		11			
12					13			
14				15				
16								
				17		18	19	20
22	23	24	25					
26						27		
28						29		
30							31	

Across

- 01 Potential alcohol alternative
- 04 Flag pin location
- 09 It can come in sheets
- 11 Radiate
- 12 Skillful
- 13 Halfhearted
- 14 Fresh start, perhaps
- 16 Crayola headquarters city
- 17 Hot rice porridge
- 22 Play it cool
- 26 Knucklehead
- 27 Popular boba tea flavor
- 28 _____ computing
- 29 Fine deposit
- 30 Decline
- 31 “Science Guy” Bill

Down

- 01 Blessing over a meal
- 02 Speak in Spanish
- 03 Two of the humors
- 04 “Uh...no”
- 05 Skating jump
- 06 Cocoon stage
- 07 Tweak
- 08 Story starter
- 10 Without ice, say
- 15 “Not possible!”
- 18 Grape and Brazil, e.g.
- 19 “Settlers of Catan” resource
- 20 Too soon
- 21 Mexican street corn
- 22 Some movie theaters
- 23 Pepsi, for one
- 24 “High School Musical” love interest
- 25 Person or place, say

We get you the tickets.
You get us the review.

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The column consists of two pages, with Side A focused on US news and politics and Side B on topics of international concern. The articles featured here are abridged as to contain only their most essential points; readers are directed to read more about an article from its original publication.

Trump signs executive order recognizing only 2 sexes

President Trump signed a sweeping executive order Monday during his first hours in office recognizing only two sexes, male and female, and directing federal agencies to cease promotion of the concept of gender transition. The order, which Trump signed from the Oval Office, is part of a broader campaign promise to rid the nation of what he has called "transgender insanity" and reverse diversity and inclusion initiatives instituted by the Biden administration.

"As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders: male and female," Trump said Monday in his inaugural address.

— Brooke Migdon, FROM THE HILL
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

Marco Rubio unanimously confirmed as secretary of state

The Senate voted unanimously to confirm Sen. Marco Rubio as secretary of state on Monday, making him the first confirmed member of President Donald Trump's Cabinet in his second administration.

All 99 senators voted in favor of Rubio, including Rubio himself. There's currently one vacancy in the chamber due to Vice President J.D. Vance resigning in mid-January. Rubio, the first Hispanic American to hold the position, is expected to resign his position in the Senate shortly.

Rubio's experience as the top Republican on Senate Intelligence Committee gave his resume the necessary credentials to earn the public backing of a number of Democrats.

— Allison Pecorin & Shannon K. Kingston, FROM ABC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

Trump orders all federal DEI employees placed on paid leave starting Wednesday

The Trump administration is ordering all federal employees in diversity, equity and inclusion roles placed on paid leave by Wednesday evening, according to a new memo from the Office of Personnel Management.

The memo, issued Tuesday to heads of departments and agencies, sets a deadline of no later than 5 p.m. ET Wednesday to inform the employees that they will be put on paid administrative leave as the agencies prepare to close all DEI-related offices and programs and to remove all websites and social media accounts for such offices.

— Zoë Richards and Caroline Kenry, FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 22, 2025

Trump's last-minute decision to go big on Jan. 6 pardons took many allies by surprise

President Donald Trump's decision to pardon virtually every person charged in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol was made at the last minute as the inauguration approached — and it surprised some of his supporters and aides. "He is who he is," a person who worked on Trump's transition team told NBC News. "Expectations are sometimes set as best as can be expected, and sometimes they change quickly."

Two officials who worked on Trump's transition said the decision to do a sweeping pardon was made just days before the inauguration.

— Matt Dixon, Henry J. Gomez & Garrett Haake, FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 22, 2025

Trump pushes Hill GOP on recess appointments, debt limit

President Donald Trump prodded congressional leaders to consider recess appointments for his top nominees and expressed interest in trading California wildfire aid for a debt limit increase in a White House meeting Tuesday — resurfacing two controversial proposals floated during the returning president's transition.

The discussions, which were described by two people granted anonymity to describe the private talks, also touched on his proposal to exempt at least some tip income from federal taxes and his efforts more generally to extend tax cuts.

— Rachael Bade, Meredith Lee Hill & Jordain Carney, FROM POLITICO
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Trump sets out to erase Biden's legacy right after taking office

Zeke Miller, Chris Megerian & Michelle Price

FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Donald Trump began erasing Joe Biden's legacy immediately after taking office as the nation's 47th president, pardoning nearly all of his supporters who rioted at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and issuing a blizzard of executive orders that signal his desire to remake American institutions.

It was an aggressive start Monday for a returning president who feels emboldened and vindicated by his unprecedented political comeback. Four years after being voted out of the White House, Trump has a second chance to launch what he called "a golden age" for the country.

He signed orders for increasing border security, designating drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, limiting birthright citizenship, freezing new regulations and establishing a task force for reduc-

ing the size of the federal government. He also rescinded dozens of directives issued by Biden, including those relating to climate change and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Trump said that walking back into the already-remodeled Oval Office after his inauguration was "one of the better feelings I've ever had." Unlike during his first term, when new staff members scrambled to figure out what exactly their president was trying to achieve, Trump moved rapidly and methodically to advance his agenda Monday.

His first action after arriving at the White House was pardoning about 1,500 people charged in connection with the Jan. 6 attack, even if they had been convicted of assaulting police officers. Trump commuted the sentences of another 14 people, including leaders of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys.

The decision amounted to a sweeping cloak of impunity for

Trump supporters who upended the country's tradition of peaceful transfers of power by trying to overturn his election defeat four years ago. Trump described them as "hostages" and said he expected them to be freed shortly. A crowd gathered outside a Washington, D.C., jail to welcome their release.

Trump's inauguration combined formal ceremony and free-wheeling rhetoric, a reminder of how Trump can abide solemnity for only so long before going off script with a blend of humor and vitriol. Before leaving the White House for an evening of inaugural balls, Trump spent nearly an hour parrying questions by reporters.

He promised that tariffs on Canada and Mexico were coming, suggested that he might visit China and praised the decorators for the new look of his Oval Office. Among other changes, a portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt that had been hung by Biden was replaced with one of George Washington.

Twenty-two states sue to stop birthright citizenship order

Mattthias Schwartz & Mike Baker

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Attorneys general from 22 states sued President Trump in two federal district courts on Tuesday to block an executive order that refuses to recognize the U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants as citizens, the opening salvo in what promises to be a long legal battle over the Trump administration's immigration policies.

Eighteen states and two cities, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., challenged the order in Federal District Court in Massachusetts, arguing that birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment is "automatic" and that neither the president nor Congress has the constitutional authority to revise it. Four other states filed a second lawsuit in the Western District of Washington.

Mr. Trump's attempt to limit birthright citizenship was "extraordinary and extreme," said New Jersey's

attorney general, Matthew J. Platkin, who led one of the legal efforts along with the attorneys general from California and Massachusetts.

"Presidents are powerful," he said, "but he is not a king. He cannot rewrite the Constitution with a stroke of the pen."

Nick Brown, the attorney general in Washington, said Mr. Trump's order would deny citizenship to 150,000 newborn children each year.

"It would render them undocumented at birth. It could even render them citizens to no country at all," said Mr. Brown, whose state was joined by Oregon, Arizona and Illinois.

On Monday, in the opening hours of his second term as president, Mr. Trump signed an order declaring that future children born to undocumented immigrants would no longer be treated as citizens. The order would extend even to the children of some mothers in the country legally but temporarily, such as foreign students or tourists.

Mr. Trump's executive order

asserts that the children of such noncitizens are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States, and thus aren't covered by the 14th Amendment's longstanding constitutional guarantee.

The order flew in the face of more than 100 years of legal precedent, when the courts and the executive branch interpreted the 14th Amendment as guaranteeing citizenship to every baby born in the United States, regardless of their parents' legal status. The courts recognize only a few exceptions — such as the children of accredited diplomats, and children born in U.S. territory that is under the control of an occupying army.

"It's so outlandish that it's almost assured to be struck down," predicted Akhil Reed Amar, a professor at Yale Law School, who expressed shock at the order's breadth. Even former Vice President Kamala Harris, whose mother was a foreign student when she was born, might be impacted. "The person who drafted this order was not doing Donald Trump any favors."

Trump vows to leave Paris climate pact and 'drill, baby, drill'

Matt McGrath

FROM BBC
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

President Donald Trump has once again vowed to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement, the world's most important effort to tackle rising temperatures.

The first Trump administration made a similar move in 2017, but that step was promptly reversed on President Joe Biden's first day in office in 2021.

The US will now have to wait a year before it will be officially out of the pact. The White House announced a "national energy emergency," outlining a raft of changes that will reverse US climate regulations and boost oil and gas production.

It comes after global temperatures in 2024 rose more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels for the first time in a calendar year.

While the Paris agreement is not a legally binding treaty, it is the document that drives global co-operation to limit the causes of global

warming.

President Trump's antipathy to this co-operative approach was echoed in his statement in 2017 that he had been elected to "represent the people of Pittsburgh and not Paris."

This temperature threshold was established in the Paris agreement as a level beyond which the world would face extremely dangerous impacts.

The US will now join Iran, Yemen and Libya as the only countries to currently stand outside the agreement, which was signed 10 years ago in the French capital.

At the White House on Monday evening, Trump signed the order to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, including a letter to the United Nations explaining the decision.

He also announced a "national energy emergency" to reverse many of the Biden-era environmental regulations.

Trump called the Paris agreement a "ripoff" during a speech at the Capital One Arena in Washing-

World leaders welcome Trump's return to the White House

Helen Regan

FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

World leaders congratulated President Donald Trump on his inauguration Monday, with many urging stronger alliances or continued cooperation between their countries and the United States, in carefully crafted social media posts and statements.

Trump's return to the White House portends a seismic shake-up in international relations, with the new president immediately ordering the US' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and World Health Organization, as world leaders brace for new tariffs on goods and the impact of Trump's "America first" agenda.

Some populist leaders celebrated Trump's return, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who called the US president a "dear friend," and Hungary's Victor Orbán who declared, "now it's our turn to shine."

But not all the messages were congratulatory.

Some leaders expressed their anger at remarks Trump made during his Inauguration Day speech, or with the controversial raft of executive actions he signed almost immediately after entering the Oval Office.

Panama's President José Raúl Mulino rejected Trump's promise that the US would be "taking back" the Panama Canal. The vital waterway in Central America was built by the US but is now controlled by Panama.

"The Canal is and will continue to be Panama's," Mulino reiterated in a statement. "There is no presence of any nation in the world that interferes with our administration," he added, apparently referring to Trump's claim that China is "operating" the canal.

Other regional neighbors were also critical of Trump.

Cuba condemned Trump's decision to put the Communist-run island back on the US list of

state sponsors of terrorism, with its president calling the move, "an act of arrogance and disregard for the truth."

"This is not surprising. His goal is to continue strengthening the cruel economic war against Cuba for the purpose of domination," Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel wrote on X.

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez also issued a scathing response to the decision, saying Trump was "drunk with arrogance."

But outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau struck a more conciliatory tone, despite Trump's recent jibes about making Canada the 51st US state and indication that he will impose a 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico on February 1.

Trudeau congratulated Trump and said Canada looks forward to working with the new administration, "while protecting and defending the interests of Canadians."

Trump threatens tariffs on Mexico and Canada on Feb. 1

Kayla Tausche, Kevin Liptak, David Goldman & Elisabeth Buchwald

FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

President Donald Trump said in an Oval Office signing ceremony Monday evening that his administration will impose 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada on February 1, an extraordinary change in North American trade policy that could raise prices for American consumers.

Trump still outlined his broader trade policy for his second term in an executive action Monday. But that action — described by sources as a "placeholder" — doesn't institute new global tariffs that Trump promised on Day One.

As a candidate, Trump proposed sweeping and across-the-board tariffs: up to 20% on imports from all countries, with a 25% tax on goods from Mexico

and Canada, plus a punishing 60% levy on goods from China. He also pledged to use tariffs as a negotiating tool on other countries, including, for example, Denmark — putting pressure on the European nation to give control of Greenland to the United States.

Asked Monday at an Oval Office signing ceremony about tariffs on China, Trump noted extensive tariffs he imposed during his first administration were still in effect after former President Joe Biden largely left them in place. And on universal tariffs, Trump pointed, saying, "We may, but we're not ready for that just yet."

The executive action signed Monday directed the secretaries of Commerce and Treasury and the United States Trade Representative to investigate the causes of America's trade deficits with foreign nations, to determine how to build an "External Revenue Service" to collect tariffs, to identify unfair trade practices and to review existing trade agreements

for potential improvements.

It also directs the government agencies to analyze how the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (the USMCA) signed by Trump in his first term is affecting American workers and businesses — and whether America should remain in the free trade agreement. Trump's action requires agencies to assess whether stricter US trade policy could successfully restrict the flow of fentanyl and the flow of undocumented migrants into the United States.

"Americans benefit from and deserve an America First trade policy," Trump's executive action said. "Therefore, I am establishing a robust and reinvigorated trade policy that promotes investment and productivity, enhances our Nation's industrial and technological advantages, defends our economic and national security, and — above all — benefits American workers, manufacturers, farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and businesses."

Trump declares national emergency at Mexico border

Zolan Kanno-Youngs

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

President Trump declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border on Monday, invoking special presidential powers that allow him to unilaterally unlock federal funding for border wall construction and potentially to deploy the military and National Guard to the border.

Mr. Trump took a similar step during his first term as a way to circumvent Congress and access billions of dollars that lawmakers refused to approve to build a wall along the border with Mexico. He once again empowered the military to support the Border Patrol with logistical planning, drone support and help procuring detention space.

But in a separate order, Mr. Trump appeared to go further by giving the military a specific responsibility over immigration enforcement. During Mr. Trump's first term, the military only sup-

ported immigration authorities but did not apprehend migrants. Mr. Trump now directed the Defense Department to come up with a plan in 30 days "to seal the borders and maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the United States by repelling forms of invasion, including unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities."

While details on the exact plans remained unclear, the directive for the military could run afoul of laws that limit the use of regular federal troops for domestic policing purposes.

As he did in his first term, Mr. Trump relied on the National Emergencies Act, a post-Watergate law that allows the president to declare a national emergency, which enhances his executive powers. The act was intended to enable the federal government to respond quickly to a crisis by creating exemptions to rules that would normally constrain the president.

Trump signs executive order to rename Gulf of Mexico, Denali

As part of a flurry of executive orders on President Trump's first day in office, the newly inaugurated president signed orders calling for renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America and changing the name of Denali back to Mount McKinley.

"America will reclaim its rightful place as the greatest, most powerful, most respected nation on earth inspiring the awe, admiration of the entire world," Mr. Trump said in his inauguration speech. "A short time from now, we will be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America and we will be restoring the name of a great president, William McKinley, to Mount McKinley, where it should be and where it belongs."

— Olivia Rinaldi & Caroline Linton, FROM CBS NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Trump announces US withdrawal from World Health Organization

President Donald Trump announced Monday he is withdrawing the US from the World Health Organization, in a significant move that drew criticism from public health experts on his first day back in the White House.

Trump has long been critical of the United Nations' health agency, and his administration formally began a withdrawal from the WHO in July 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic continued to spread. But four years ago, then-President Joe Biden halted the US' exit from the body tasked with coordinating the international response to health emergencies in one of his first actions after taking over the White House.

— Betsy Klein, FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Panama rejects Trump vow to 'take back' Panama Canal

Panama's president has rejected a plan by Donald Trump to "take back" the Panama Canal, telling his US counterpart the key trade route "is and will remain" in the country's hands. In his inaugural speech, President Trump claimed that Panama had "broken" a promise to remain neutral, alleging that "China is operating the Panama Canal".

President Jose Raul Mulino said he rejected Trump's words in their "entirety", adding there is "no presence of any nation in the world that interferes with our administration". The Panama Canal is one of the US's most important trade routes, with about 40% of all the country's container ships passing through the waterway between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

— Dearbail Jordan, FROM BBC
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 20, 2025

In Milei's Argentina, Trump sees a road map. What does it show?

Argentine President Javier Milei ran on stanching inflation, cutting federal spending and improving the economy. Sound familiar? President Donald Trump and members of his coterie have spent the run-up to his return to the White House heaping praise upon his Argentine counterpart. Trump has called him his "favorite president." Milei attended Trump's inauguration on Monday, joining him in the first moments of his second term at an event to which world leaders are not usually invited.

Milei, an antiestablishment ultra-capitalist, entered politics as an outsider, gained fame on television programs and is known for brash, sometimes outlandish antics and gravity-defying hair. The comparisons to Trump write themselves.

— Bryan Pietsch & David Feliba, FROM THE WASHINGTON POST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 21, 2025

Trump delivers fresh tariff threats against EU and China

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday vowed to hit the European Union with tariffs and said his administration was discussing a 10% punitive duty on Chinese imports because fentanyl is being sent from China to the U.S. via Mexico and Canada.

Trump voiced his latest tariff threats in remarks to reporters at the White House a day after taking office without immediately imposing tariffs as he had promised during his campaign.

Financial markets and trade groups exhaled briefly on Tuesday, but his latest comments underscored Trump's longstanding desire for broader duties and a new Feb. 1 deadline for 25% tariffs against Canada and Mexico, as well as duties on China and the EU.

— David Lawder & Andrea Shalal, FROM REUTERS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 22, 2025

U.S. expands expedited deportations beyond border areas as part of Trump crackdown

The Trump administration on Tuesday dramatically broadened the scope of expedited deportations, enacting a nationwide expansion of an immigration policy known as "expedited removal" that was previously limited to areas close to U.S. borders.

Expedited removal allows U.S. immigration officials to deport migrants who lack proper documents through a streamlined process that bypasses the lengthy and massively backlogged immigration court system. If those identified for expedited removal do not request asylum or fail to establish they may have a legitimate asylum case, they can be expeditiously deported, without an opportunity to see an immigration judge.

— Camilo Montoya-Galvez, FROM CBS NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MONTH DAY, YEAR

