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When I was a young boy  
my best friend would say  
“if you dig a hole deep  
and in just the right way  
you’ll end up in China  
a land full of mystery  
of pandas and dragons  
and whole lots of history”



## Chapter 1 - The Frog at the Bottom of the Well



One day a turtle walked up to a circle of rocks and peered down into a well. “Hullo-o-o-o,” he shouted down.

But instead of the echo he was expecting to come back, he was met with a perky “Hi there!”

The turtle looked down and saw that at the bottom of the well, the sun was shining on a small frog lounging on a sand bank.

“What are you doing down there?” shouted the turtle. “Want to come up here and play?”

“No thanks.” responded the frog. “I’ve got everything I need down here. Sunshine. My own private beach. And dozens of bugs I can reach with my tongue whenever I’m hungry. Giant lotus leaves protect me from the rain. Nope. I’ve got everything I need right here.”

The turtle thought for a while and then queried. “Don’t you ever want to walk through mountains or forests to see new things? Wouldn’t you like to slide down sand dunes or listen to ocean waves crash on rocks? Have you ever followed a rainbow or tried to catch butterflies or enjoyed the multitude of colors and smells in flowers? I see new things every day when I go for my walks.

At that moment, the frog paused. He really didn’t have a response.

In Chinese, an idiom is called a Chéngyǔ. The idiom, 井底之蛙 (Pinyin - Jǐng Dǐ Zhī Wā) means “The Frog at the Bottom of the Well.”

I grew up with Aesop's fables. I knew that the fox really did covet the grapes that he dismissed as probably being sour anyway - very similar to the frog at the bottom of the well who came to the realization that he might not have it all. And, like the fox, the frog was too proud to admit it. One of my great surprises when I started to learn Chinese was the wealth of fables and idioms that are woven throughout the fabric of Chinese history and literature – many resembling stories I had grown up with.



I was born in Montana and grew up in Oklahoma. About the closest I ever came to China was eating sweet and sour pork at the Pagoda restaurant at the corner of 51st and Peoria in Tulsa. As life would have it, a few twists and turns set me on a course which would cause me to spend more than half of my life in China. It was through living in China and among Chinese people, I learned about China and Chinese – almost none of it through formal education.

The more I dug into China, the more “treasures” I uncovered. Poetry, philosophy, and language study opened doors into worlds I never knew existed. A few years ago, I wrote a poem about my personal journey through China I called “China Odyssey”, where I cracked open a few doors and windows, just wide enough to offer glimpses into the maze of China. With China being an ever more dominant player in the world we live in, I decided to expand the mission of my poem and open those doors and windows just a little bit wider.