

CREATIVE SPACEForced *Hong Bao*

ZHAOHUI SU

Curiously,  
The consultation turned abruptly.

Somehow,  
The doctor switched the conversation to “*Hong Bao*,”  
Which means “Red Envelope”<sup>\*</sup> in China,  
Which means thinly disguised bribes in practice.

Interestingly,  
He mentioned how his patients always force *Hong Bao* on him,  
So much so that he often has to accept them for goodwill.  
Which means that he takes bribes often.

Slowly,  
She mentioned that she also works at the university,  
With which the hospital is affiliated.  
Which means that she is no ordinary patient.  
Which means that she has unforeseen sway.

Confidently,  
She discussed her research on healthcare corruption,  
And she asked if he is interested in being interviewed,  
As a victim of forced *Hong Bao*, of course.  
Which means that she is no regular colleague.  
Which means that she has even greater power.

Finally,  
She gently offered her help to lessen his burden,  
Just in case he wants to get rid of all the forced *Hong Bao*.  
She casually disclosed that she knows anti-corruption hotlines by heart,  
And that there is a new government website for returning bribes anonymously.  
Which means that she is not only not forcing *Hong Bao* on him,  
But that she is also helping him to part with them for good.

Curiously,  
The consultation turned abruptly.

*\*Note: The term Hong Bao literally translates to “red packet” or “red envelope.” In Chinese culture, it represents a profound duality: it is both a sacred cultural tradition of goodwill (eg, used customarily in China to give money as gifts to friends and family members on festival days like the Lunar New Year) and, in modern contexts, a notorious vehicle for bribery and corruption.*

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