

Locked inside an internet rehab centre. Also, cheese

From Roots by fern <roots@watchfern.com>

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To Jamie <fullerton_jamie@hotmail.com>

My Day at a Chinese Internet Addiction Camp

+ How Greece Won the Cheese War



Illustration based on a photograph by Giulia Marchi



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Taking Things a Little Too Far

Most of us have been told to spend less time online. By our parents, self-help gurus, oooor perhaps our therapist.

In China, so-called internet addiction is handled, well, with a different degree of intensity. Our writer Jamie visited a Chinese internet addiction rehab centre to experience it for himself.

The rehab center more closely resembled a prison camp (perhaps you've seen our 2024 video on the subject), and they fittingly didn't want to let him go anymore.

After that, we figured you could use a story about cheese. Specifically about one of the GOAT's, *Feta*. Sorry.

Enjoy,
-Jonas

My Day at a Chinese Internet Addiction Camp



Photo: Giulia Marchi

In 2015 I was consigned to an internet addiction rehab centre in Beijing.

An ex-soldier with biceps like veiny melons locked my phone in a cupboard, then ordered me to put on shorts and a camo t-shirt. A stern nurse attached cold electrodes to my scalp. She said the electrode test would show how “depressed” my brain was.

Tao Ran, founder of the China Young Mental Development Base, had agreed to grant me access and have me treated as a patient. You might recognise Tao from our [video](#) investigating Chinese internet addiction camps.

My plan back then was also to investigate these centres, where allegations of violence [swirled](#). Things soon went wrong.

Inside the centre I met teenagers sent there by exasperated parents attempting to break their kids’ gaming obsessions. Under the hawkish eye of the ex-soldier, who was managing the place during my visit, the teens couldn’t speak openly to me without fear of repercussions.

One young patient quietly described the place as “a brainwash”. Patients slept in bunk beds, went to anti-internet lectures, and weren’t allowed to leave the complex. Tao told me that a group of patients once escaped, but were apprehended at a nearby gaming cafe.



The atmosphere landed somewhere between hyper-strict boarding school and army barracks. In the concrete courtyard I saw the ex-soldier punch a boy in the chest, to stop him giggling. Another boy said a drillmaster had tied him up because he'd argued about not being able to call his mum.

The ex-soldier got angry at the patients telling me this stuff, and locked me in a bedroom. After an hour of him threatening me through the padlocked metal door, I was released and fled the complex.

Tao claimed the centre had an internet addiction cure rate of up to 90 percent. If I had a ripped ex-army type waving his fists at me, I'd probably follow orders to quit gaming forever, too.

Eleven years on, Tao is still operating a centre that gives broader mental health treatment. Six-month "growth training camps" are offered.

One day was enough for me.

Written & researched by Jamie Fullerton, edited by Jonas. Illustrations by Nikki and Maximilian Rauscher.

Our Latest Video

In our latest video, we travel to London to investigate a “super embassy”.



The name might sound cool. But it might have more power than it lets on. We examine the building plans, and meet a Hong Kong activist who fears what the embassy could mean for people like her. A story of suspected espionage, diplomatic power, and people who thought they had escaped Beijing’s reach.



How Greece Won the Cheese War



A cheese that generates nearly [€1 billion](#) a year and only one country in Europe is allowed to [name](#) it.

Homer's *Odyssey* mentions it. Poseidon's son, Polyphemus, supposedly made it in a cave from sheep's and [goat's milk](#). In the book, they say it tasted [salty](#).

Eventually, the cheese was named [Feta](#).

Greek citizens began lobbying their government for exclusive rights over the cheese in [1989](#). In 2002, the European Commission gave them a "[Protected Designation of Origin](#)." It is the same protection given to Italian Parma ham, and [Ardennes ham](#).

The rules are specific.

To be called Feta, the cheese must be made from at least 70% sheep's [milk](#). No additives. [No colouring](#). Just like how Champagne can only come from Champagne in France, now, Feta can only come from certain parts of [Greece](#).

Denmark, France, and Germany were not pleased. They were selling their own versions of the [cheese](#).

Denmark vowed to keep fighting. In 2005, they went to court with Germany to remove the protection. They lost. They kept exporting it as Feta outside the EU anyway, hoping to exploit the loophole that the protection only covered the EU.

In 2019, the Commission took Denmark to court. Greece joined the suit. So did Cyprus, who were looking for its own protection over Halloumi, which it has since received. Three years later, the court warned Denmark to stop immediately, or the European Commission could seek financial damages.

Countries outside Europe simply ignore the rules. The USA manufactures the cheese with cow's milk.

Sacrilege.

Australia and New Zealand produce their own domestic versions. In Canada, only older brands are allowed to use the name.

Denmark still makes it. They just have to call it salad cubes.

Written & researched by Shikhar Talwar, edited by Jonas. Illustration by Maximilian Rauscher.

Our colleagues at Veritasium are trying something new.

Their videos usually cover science topics, things like physics and math. In case you live under a rock: they are very good. But as the world gets more complex, they keep finding important stories that don't quite fit on their main channel. Stories that are less about physics and math and more about how our society and global systems work.

So they are launching an all-new channel called InGenius. As fern viewers, we thought you might be interested in that. Their first video is out now on YouTube. Go check it out:



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