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Dear Colleague:

As a child in China and Australia I used to catch colds frequently--cough, stuffed nose, constricted chest, the whole works. And yet colds in childhood have given me one of my fondest memories. I remember sitting up in bed, my mother unbuttoning my pyjamas, her cool hand rubbing Vick's ointment on my slightly feverish chest, the fragrance of camphor rising up to my momentarily cleared nostrils. Bliss! So imagine my pleasure and surprise when I read the following recall by the Irish writer Denis Donoghue. "I was often ill: nothing serious...colds and coughs, mainly. I was put to bed, and my mother came into the bedroom and rubbed Vick on my chest. It had, so far as I recall, no healing power, but the smell of Vick has remained one of my cherished memories. The rough cloth of my pyjamas is mixed in my memory with the feeling of the buttons as I buttoned up the pyjamas with the Vick still wet and sticky on my chest" (Warrenpoint, 1990).

Vick is a commercial product, and commercial products are supposed to be crass, totally devoid of oneiric power. And yet here we were, Denis and Yi-Fu, children at opposite ends of the globe having a similar experience, courtesy of the Corporate World, an experience so intensely human that it is recalled a-half century later by both of us when, you would think, we have better things to do, or deeper experiences to report. A Nigerian may also have had Vick lovingly applied to his chest. So, imagine this plausible scenario. The three of us attend a university-sponsored conference on "Ethnic Diversity." Over cups of coffee, when we should be reflecting dutifully on our unique heritages and differences, a chip on our shoulder in case we detect any suspicion of ethnic slur, all we can think of is Vick and our common humanity.

Best wishes,

*Yi-Fu*