From Roman antiquity to modern neuroscience, memory championships, and the tales of polyglots, experts have understood the power of associating new memories with specific places. This memorization strategy is often called the method of loci, the art of memory, or the journey method—so called because the mind imagines new memories as vividly as possible in specific locations to which the mind can “journey” at a later moment.

This photo shows a student whose journey has taken him to a Chinese market. Like a boulder plopped into a brook, he remains while new people and culture flow all about him: Chinese characters incandesce with the light of luminaires as eyes are drawn to specific shops along this journey. A kaleidoscopic array of lights reflect upon shops filled with fruit and many other foods; their fragrance attracts the hungry and curious alike. Most locals saunter about, revealing body language at home with the comforts of the night market. Some people laugh, some buy, and at least one savors some tasty morsel. Now consider the student. He is not the only one wearing a backpack, but his peach-colored features make him stand out as much as his height. With hands placed in pockets, shoulders bent, and a gaze drawn partially inward, he seems observant and contemplative. For him, the market is new and worthy of deeper reflection.

His journey into a foreign market contains all the hallmarks of what the Roman mnemonists insisted made ideas memorable: a journey through an artful, novel, sensory-rich setting where each foreign phrase or concept was secured to a real home and place. Whether through travel or creative flights of the imagination, this scene might encourage us to fashion vivid and novel memories—remembering that memory is not simply the mind’s encyclopedic inventory of facts. It is a precious part of being human, a living soul with a unique identity and journey.