

Joshua Michals

Sentencing Remarks

I have to sentence you for the murder of Zhe Wang on 20th March 2024, an offence of which you were convicted by a jury on 8th December 2025.

She was 31 years of age at the time of her death. The evidence adduced at the trial showed her to have been a hugely talented writer, a gentle and kindly young woman, private, hypersensitive and somewhat emotionally fragile, and she was clearly greatly loved by her family and friends.

This case is a terrible tragedy for her and her family, from whom I have received a very moving victim impact statement, and it is equally a terrible tragedy for you and your family and I have noted that your parents were in court throughout the entirety of the trial.

You are 26 years of age, you were 24 at the time of these events. You are an American citizen from Chicago where you took a degree in cinematography. You came to London in September 2023 to do a 1 year masters in the same subject at Goldsmith's college. It was here, at the very outset of your respective courses that you met Z who was doing a course in creative writing. She was a native of China.

You quickly struck up a friendship and it is apparent from the whats app messages that passed between you that you became very sweet on each other, although after a few weeks your romantic interest in her evidently waned; up to that point you had not been intimate.

There followed a period of about 3 ½ months when you were in frequent messaging contact but did not meet up with one another.

It is apparent, however, that she was keen to rekindle matters between you and in due course of time she offered you what she termed in the messages as a 'surprise' which was for the 2 of you to have sex, which you did on 23rd February.

You were to tell the jury that this was not very successful, and moreover that during the sex the condom that you had been using came off. Although you did not ejaculate, this was a matter about which you both became concerned, in her case not least because , as you knew from earlier messages that you had exchanged, she was not keen on babies and under no circumstances wanted to have a child.

In the event you persuaded her to take the morning after pill. I put it in that way because she had particular sensitivities about medication generally to which in the past, as she told you, she had had adverse reactions.

Within a few days she developed a rash in her bladder area and she became convinced that she had a sexually transmitted disease. You went over to see her and were of the firm view that it was really quite trivial and covered a very small area but your reassurances to her in this regard fell on deaf ears. She was adamant that she wanted you to have tests but you were disinclined to do so and made various excuses all of which in reality were utterly feeble.

Given how important you knew this was to her and how easily you could have put her mind at rest by having a test, in my judgment this showed a real lack of sensitivity and selfishness on your part.

Whilst on that subject I should add that in the early stages of your relationship, when you were contemplating being intimate with one another (although at the time it came to nothing), she made it clear that she wanted you to be tested for any sexual diseases, a matter about which she was most insistent. You had in fact had tests in America two or three years earlier which were clear. As you would readily have appreciated, these tests were substantially out of

date and of no value, not least having regard to the fact that you had had sexual relations with someone else in the interim. When you obtained these test results you sent a screenshot of them to her but you removed the dates. Given what you knew to be her sensitivities on this subject, this was in my judgment an unkind and cynical act of deception on your part.

To return to the narrative, it is clear from the messages that passed between you over the ensuing two to three weeks that she became increasingly disturbed and upset about the whole situation to the point where she spoke about the fact that it was like she was having a breakdown and felt suicidal. Viewed objectively this was a complete overreaction but, as you well knew, she was a hypersensitive individual as exemplified by her germaphobia which she took to considerable extremes.

On the evening of 20th March 2024 you went over to her address, I fully accept, with the intention of calming her down and to assuaging her emotions. It was during that fateful 50 minutes or so whilst you were at her flat that you killed her.

Only you know what happened. It is clear from the verdict of the jury that they rejected your account, not one that you volunteered to the police, which was that upon your arrival at her flat she was cold and distant towards you, you immediately went to the toilet; on coming out she confronted you with a knife and everything that you then did occurred against the background of your struggle in gaining control of the knife and defending yourself as she tried to get it back from you.

In the ensuing struggle you inflicted 2 serious wounds to her face with what I am satisfied must have been one of her kitchen knives which caused huge amounts of bleeding and in the case of 'wound 2', as it was called during the trial, involved the use of severe force. This proliferation of blood did not bring you to your senses.

These wounds alone would not have caused her death but using your forearm, I am satisfied with considerable force, you then throttled her causing 2 fractures to her hyoid bone and fractures to her thyroid cartilage. I am in no doubt that the scratch marks to your neck occurred whilst you did this and whilst she was desperately fighting for her life. It was a combination of these injuries that led to her death. Your guesstimation that you did this for between 15-20 seconds is one that I reject having regard to the expert evidence in the case, particularly that of Professor White.

When she was no longer moving you were to say that you believed her to be dead; and yet, in my judgment, callously and thinking only of yourself you took absolutely no steps to check her pulse or her breathing or to attempt to revive her and nor did you call the emergency services.

In fact on the medical evidence I consider that it is extremely likely that she was still alive and that you had called for help, she may very well still be so today.

When you got home you still didn't call the emergency services. What you did was to delete the copious quantity of whats app messages that had passed between the 2 of you in the time that you had known one another. You rang your father in America and it wasn't until about 3 hours later that you called 999.

Having been advised by your solicitor to go no comment in interview, in your later defence statement, submitted in September 2024, you completely omitted any reference to the fact that you had applied pressure to her neck with your forearm, which was clearly a very significant point of detail; nor did you say anything at all about an equally important part of your case, as put forward in your evidence, to the effect that wound 2 occurred when you swung your arm in a backhanded motion, and you were not conscious of the fact that you

had the knife in your hand. In my judgment these discrepancies, for which you had no adequate explanation, gave the lie to your account.

My conclusion is that you became enraged by the whole situation, and that howsoever the physical confrontation between you started, in a fury you lost complete control of your temper and your senses.

On the facts of this case I regard there being a narrow line between whether in your rage of the moment you intended to kill her or to cause her GBH, such that from a sentencing point of view it makes no real practical difference.

One of the factual issues that I need to address is how this incident began. You told the jury that this all started within a minute or so of arriving at her flat and that the confrontation only took about a minute.

It is submitted by your counsel that I should sentence you on the basis that Zhe confronted you with a knife and that you were motivated by self defence which went beyond that which was reasonable. For their part, in their most recent written submissions, the prosecution invite me to reject that approach.

In consideration of this issue I have been helpfully referred to the cases of King 2017 EWCA Crim 128 and Bertram 2003 EWCA Crim 2026. In my judgment, on the facts of this case, this is an issue which I need to resolve by reference to my evaluation of the evidence; reminding myself that I am bound to resolve the issue in your favour unless I am sure that your account in this regard is wrong.

When one considers the timings I am satisfied that your account simply does not add up.

You arrived at her address in an Uber at 19.17. Following the incident you called an Uber to take you home. It collected you at 20.06 but there is no evidence from Uber as to when it was

booked. You said that it took about 10 minutes to arrive. Taking your timings, you didn't call an Uber to take you back home until about half an hour or possibly more after you had killed her, during which time you said that you were pacing around, not understanding what had just happened. You also said to the jury, which would be understandable that you just couldn't stand being there.

The bottom line and the relevance of these timings is that I just do not accept as being at all credible that, making every allowance for the fact that you would have been in shock, you would have stuck around in that flat for all that time; which leads me to the sure conclusion that the incident did not start within a minute of your arrival and finish within a minute thereafter, as you were to tell the jury, which in turn undermines your account not just as to when it started and how long it took, but also how and why it started.

I have also given consideration to all of the character evidence that was placed before the jury in relation to Zhe, from (I think) no fewer than 10 witnesses who spoke in particular about her gentle nature, from which it is hard to credit that she would have attacked you with a knife, as you maintained in the course of your evidence.

Moreover, given the verdict of the jury who clearly disbelieved you, and the discrepancies in your defence statements as compared with your evidence to which I have already made reference, as well as the calculating and entirely self interested way in which you behaved after you had killed her, I am afraid that I find myself quite unable to accept your account both generally as well as particularly in relation to how this incident started.

As you will have been advised by your counsel, in this country the only sentence which can be imposed for an offence of murder is one of life imprisonment. I am required to impose a minimum term which you will in any event be required to serve in full before you will be

eligible to apply for parole. Whether or not parole will be granted at that time will depend entirely upon the view taken as to whether you continue to represent a danger to the public.

As to minimum terms, the relevant statute provides for different starting points. In your case I am satisfied that the appropriate starting point is 15 years.

I am required to consider both the aggravating and mitigating features of your case in determining whether or not that figure should be adjusted.

So far as aggravating features are concerned, there are the following:

1. At the time of this confrontation in the flat, she was in a highly emotional and vulnerable state, as you well knew from the messages that she had been sending you in the lead up to them;
2. You killed Zhe in her own home;
3. Following the violent confrontation between you, you took no steps to try and revive her nor to get help;
4. You then got rid of material evidence in order to cover your tracks; I am referring here to the knife and to Zhe's which you removed from the flat and dumped in a bin outside.

In my judgment these are serious matters which justify an increase from the 15 year starting point to in the region of 18 years.

As to mitigation, I take into account the following:

1. You are a man of previous good character;
2. Your many excellent character references which were read to the jury during the trial, which showed your actions on this night to have been wholly out of character;
3. The fact, as I accept, that what you did was in no way premeditated.

4. I also bear in mind that for such time as you are in custody here it will be extremely difficult, as it has been to date, for you to have visits from your family and friends who are all based in America.

I do not find myself able to accept Mr St Louis' submission that I should also regard your age as a mitigating feature.

At the time of these events you were 24 ½. I had the opportunity of observing you in the witness box over a period of 3 days during which I formed the view that you are both intelligent and articulate and of at least normal maturity for a man of your age, if not more so.

You chose to fight the case and as Miss Paget observed to the jury in the course of her closing address, throughout the course of your lengthy evidence, which took some 3 ½ days, you did not at any time show one iota of regret or remorse, although I make it clear that I do not add to your sentence on that account. I add that although Mr St Louis has told me that you are remorseful this can count for very little, coming as it does for the first time this morning.

Minimum term 16 years.

Less 678 days on remand = 14 years 42 days.

Statutory surcharge.