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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

LANGUAGE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

An autobiographic study  
of  
a second language learner



BY

ZHOU WU

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

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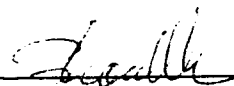
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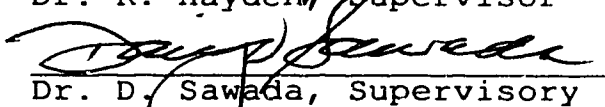



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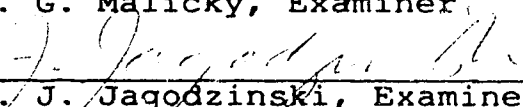
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Dr. R. Hayden, Supervisor

  
Dr. D. Sawada, Supervisory

  
Dr. H. Garfinkle, Supervisory

  
Dr. G. Malicky, Examiner

  
Dr. J. Jagodzinski, Examiner

  
Dr. S. Weber, External Examiner

April 13/93  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated, with love and respect, to my best friend Chuck Chamberlin, from whom I had the good fortune to learn how life can be rich and meaningful to oneself and to many others.

## **ABSTRACT**

Philosophers of different schools of thought have recognized the vital important relationship between language, thinking and human society. In this autobiographic study, I had a narrative exploration of my own experiences of learning English a second language as well as coping with life change in Canadian society. My study shows that second language learning is a complicated process in which not only linguistic knowledge is involved, but also one's value system, culture, and history play vital important roles. Along with my language growth, I also examined the profound personal changes I went through. These changes include the change of my way of seeing the world and seeing my own self. In this process, I was able to re-organize my inner world, and redirect my actions towards the outer world. I hold that these changes are inevitable, and to me, they are even more important than my language growth.

My study also explored the function of consciousness in language learning and life changes. I reviewed the paradigmatic changes of my consciousness in the new linguistic and social environment, and how the development of my consciousness influenced my language learning and coping with new life. In my view, the essence of learning is the constant development of the learner's consciousness towards learning tasks. With this view, I proposed a

model of second language teaching in which consciousness building is an important part. This consciousness building does not only include one's consciousness of the linguistic aspects of learning, but also the social-cultural aspects of learning.

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## **PREFACE**

As you read my thesis, you will see that my English is not that of a native speaker. Because the thesis addresses my journey as a second language learner, a decision was made in conjunction with my supervisory committee not to edit my language but rather to allow my second language learner's voice to speak for my meaning.

To keep my English language unedited in this thesis is to keep the uniqueness of my thinking. I believe that how I told my stories is equally valuable to my readers as what stories I told. In this way, my thesis can reveal much more of me and my life than I intended.

The function of language in shaping people's thinking has been a controversial issue for decades. The well known Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis elaborated that the grammatical structures and vocabulary content of a language profoundly influences the manner in which man perceives himself, the universe and his relationship to it. The language we learn as children significantly influences, even determines to a large extent, our respective conceptions regarding the nature of reality.

In the process of my writing, I realized how my language affected my way of thinking, and affected the formation of this

thesis. It happened particularly in the part I wrote about my history in China. I found that there were a lot of things English language just could not describe. I had to create a bunch of new words and expressions to represent a totally different way of life and thinking. My readers may also feel that was the part not easy to understand. I asked some native speakers for help. However, the suggestions were sometimes not very satisfactory to me. I realized that the Chinese language is part of that way of my life. It is so embedded in Chinese culture that I can hardly tell it was the way of life that created that language or that language facilitated that special way of life.

I often wonder what this thesis would be like if I did it in Chinese. It would certainly be very different. Now I have done it in a sort of language that can be called Chinese-English. It has lost a lot of uniqueness of my Chinese way of thinking. However, I would say that it is still very different from being written in native English. I hope my readers are not annoyed or confused by the distractions of some language problems.

## CHAPTER 1

### AN INTRODUCTION

My own learning experience of English tells me that learning a second language is by no means an easy task. In a very long process of struggling, I gradually accumulated my knowledge of the language, practised my skills day by day and progressed bit by bit. I experimented with different sounds, memorized countless words and phrases, and figured out ambiguous sentence structures. I often summarized learning experiences, tried to measure the progress, and searched for more effective learning methods. In this process, I built up a different consciousness of language learning, and often, I made different conclusions of what learning a second language is at different stages of my language development. My understanding of the nature of second language learning is continuously changing.

I also found similar things happened to others. Among the second language learners I knew or know, who were either my former classmates, my former students, or are my fellow immigrants in Canada, and my students now, people often have a very different understanding of what learning a second language is. To some of them, more or less as I did, learning a second language is simply absorbing and commanding a large quantity of vocabulary. So long as they know enough words, they will have no difficulty communicating with people. To some others, they are convinced that language form is the most important thing to learn. When they get to know how to put words in correct sequences, they have learned how to express

themselves. However, to other people, learning a second language is more complicated than either of the above two versions. But still, these people emphasize different aspects of learning and develop different consciousness in these different aspects of learning. I wonder how these differences in learners' beliefs and consciousness in learning a second language make a difference in the results of their learning achievements?

Some examples seem to indicate the differences made by having or lacking a certain consciousness in language development. Anguo had been in Canada for many years. He was very fluent in speaking English and had pretty good communication skills. However, his sentence structures were very poor and evidenced little improvement for years. Was it the lack of a certain consciousness in English structures in him that prevented him from acquiring more knowledge of English sentence structures? Beili seemed to be over confident of her English. Though she had a very strong accent, she did not even believe that anybody would catch her as a non-native speaker. Is this the lack of certain phonetic consciousness? Cassero had not been in Canada for long and her English was very limited. However she was very smart in picking up certain useful expressions such as slang and idioms. Sometimes, she surprised people by using them so appropriately. Was there anything we can call "idiomatic consciousness" that led her to this particular success? David and Eilaine were a native English speaking couple. They developed very different strategies when speaking to foreigners. David took for

granted that his listeners knew what he knew and thought in the same way as he did. When he was not understood, he always spoke louder and repeated the same words, whereas Eilaine would rather give lots of cultural explanations and paraphrases. She was the one who communicated better most of the time. Though they were both native speakers of English, Eilaine certainly possessed greater communicative competence. Was this because of the differences between their social-cultural consciousness in communication?

In the social-cultural aspects of language, I feel that the role of a learner's consciousness in learning is more complicated. The formation of a certain consciousness, the change of one's consciousness, as well as the development of a new consciousness are often determined by many different factors, including one's history, education, living environment, social needs, personality, age, etc. However, the differences a different consciousness makes are obvious.

Fudou believed that social cultural knowledge was an important part of language learning. To him, learning a second language opened up his mind and enlarged his horizon of thinking. Therefore, he was very active in socialization and acculturation. Gan, on the other hand, ignored this part of language learning. She consciously or subconsciously resisted being exposed to different cultural values and ways of thinking. Her attitude to the new culture and different ways of life was often very negative. Hanilo even felt learning a second language and another culture could alienate her

from her own way of life, disturb the peace of her mind, and make her lose her uniqueness in cultural thinking and rational, moral judgement.

Sometimes, certain ways of thinking came from generations before. In China, young people who are learning foreign languages, especially western languages, are often told to be on the alert to the foreign influences in their thinking. While some foreign languages spoken in China, such as English, Japanese, Russian, French, German, Portuguese, etc., are regarded as the stigmas of foreign invasions the Chinese miserably experienced in history; cultural invasion remains the fear in many Chinese minds. A saying in China is: "One gets his shoes wet inevitably if he walks along the river side often". Learning one of those foreign languages is believed to make the person contaminated and in a vulnerable position to fall into that "poisonous water." In Chinese universities, people often call the student in the foreign languages departments "foreigners" even though they have never stepped on any foreign soil. What effect does a new language create on the learner who is caught in cultural conflict?

Consciousness can be changed, and perhaps is ever changing. This might lead to personal change as well. It is suspected that learning a second language even changes one's personality or self identity. To some people, the changes they went through might not be realized. Some other people may be more conscious of these changes. Some people welcome changes and some reject them. What



makes different attitudes toward personal changes? What differences do different consciousness and attitudes make to the learner and learning?

These are the observations, reflections and questions accumulating in my mind in the past years. They challenge me to venture into this area of research. I think it is quite important for language researchers to study the social-psychological changes of people who are learning another language along with their life changes. How are they conscious of these changes and what are their attitudes to the changes? How do we help the learners by understanding their changes?

## CHAPTER 2.

### A PERSONAL INQUIRY

#### A. Myself as Learner, Teacher and Researcher

"You could not discover the limits of the self, even by travelling along every path: so deep a logos does it have" (Haralitus, quoted by Olney, 1972, p.7)

As a beginning, I chose to study my own learning experience. Why should I tell people about myself? I am not a famous person whose life is interesting to millions of others. In my life stories, there are not many heart-thrilling adventures to attract curious readers. Even my English is not so fluent for people to enjoy the literary talent of language. Then why bother writing about myself, an ordinary person's ordinary life?

In the area of my study, English as a second language, I have a lot of contact with immigrants and second language learners. Seeing them struggle with the new language and the new life, their suffering and their joys, their frustration and their progress, I can know there are vast continents in this area for second language researchers to explore. Then why do I leave so many people and interesting topics of research behind, only to choose studying myself?

Perhaps, the simplest and most straight forward answer to these questions is: I know no one else better than I know myself. And also, I know there is something unique in my experience to bring to this study.

First of all, in the past few years, I have been a new

immigrant in Canada. I went through a long process of cultural adjustment and language growth. Today, this process is still going on. My experiences of being an immigrant and second language learner form an important part of my practical knowledge in this area.

Secondly, I also worked as a second language teacher. I taught English as a second language in a university's adult program for a few months, and I am teaching in an English-Chinese bilingual program in an elementary school now. This gives me the chance to see other people's struggles in coping with a new life and the new language.

Throughout this period of time, I have also been doing my graduate degrees in the field of English as a second language. That is my third role to play--a researcher in second language education. My study in the university gives me the opportunity to constantly reflect on, and evaluate the contemporary research findings in this field with my fresh life experiences and observations.

Janesick (1981 p.15) notes that "Any scientific understanding of human action, at whatever level of ordering or generality, must begin with, and be built upon an understanding of the everyday life of the members performing those actions." The multi-positions and multi-perspectives I have will enable me to gain an immediate possession of research data. I have been feeling very strongly that my every day life is full of meaningful experiences for the

study of second language learning and life change in a new culture. Quite often, some passing thoughts and scattered reflections on those life experiences vanished in a few minutes. What was left in my mind is a strong suggestion that there is a big treasure there for me to discover. I often feel guilty letting these rich research data pass by without being fully examined. To recollect and explore these meanings of my life, I would say that no one can do the work for me. I may need other people's insight in understanding my own self better. However, a large part of me cannot be observed and understood by anyone else until it is examined and revealed by me first.

I do feel it is unique for me to be a learner, teacher and researcher, all three roles in one person in this investigation of ESL learning. It gives me multi-perspectives and special insight in understanding ESL learners and their learning. It is a common problem that communication would not be successful between a teacher and a student, between a researcher and his or her research subject. In this case, they all try hard to be in the other's shoes and try to know what the other knows. Now, being a learner, teacher, and researcher in one, I can function in different statuses, and shift perspectives. It is not only more convenient, but it will also be more productive.

This is very different from an outsider studying other people as research subjects. Butt and Raymond (1985 p.72) observes that how researchers see the thoughts and actions of the research

subjects may be affected by "the disadvantage of a lack of experience of the phenomena concerned and a lack of personal knowledge of the participants' perceptions, motives, and intentions." Being a researcher and research subject at the same time may ultimately overcome this lack of experience and personal knowledge.

When studying other people's life experience in research, I am more or less in the position of seeing a movie in a theatre. If I can find a good seat and watch very carefully, I may get a better view of the revealing story. However, what I can do is limited to interpreting the meaning through others' presentation of the events. My access to the life experience to be studied is mostly second-hand.

When I am studying my own self, I get a direct view of the event. I am no longer in a theatre. I am in a three dimension world with not only sound and colour, but also smell, taste, physical touch and the sensual feeling of reality. I can experience things outsiders may never experience. I can have feelings that go beyond words. To study myself, I am a unique person in a unique position.

This can also be justified by Peirce's study of semiotics. He stated that man's life is enveloped in symbolic forms. In semiotic terms, "meanings are translations of signs, in conformity to a code . . . in which sign systems function as sign vehicles for other sign systems." (Uexkull p.168) Then the interpersonal communication is "a jump of meaning from one sign system to another. The jump

results in a Bedeutungskoppelung, a coupling of heterogeneous sign systems by way of a code." (p.170) But it is characteristic of a "jump" that the landing may not be precise as the code system in one person's mind might be quite different from that in another's. That is why the contemporary qualitative methodologist puts interpretation of data as a central issue for research. Though different theories have been elaborated on interpretation ranging from the ancient Hermeneutics to post-modernists' deconstruction, misunderstanding and distortion of meaning is still the nightmare of many qualitative researchers. In its worst form, there is what Reinharz (1979) termed the "rape model of research" (p.35), which characterizes the use of alienating and exploitative research inquiry by the researcher to impose meanings on the subjects.

Studying my own life experience does not necessarily mean I have to ignore the life experience of others. My encountering of other people and their life experience naturally become part of my own life experience. What I know of other people's lives helps me understand my own life, and by the same token, my own life experience helps me to understand others'.

## **B. Autobiographic Narrative**

This study is going to use autobiographic narrative as the basic research instrument in search for the meaning of my own life as a second language learner. Autobiography in the past two decades has emerged to redirect both theory and practice in a heterogeneous

collection of educational endeavour. This form of narrative has been widely used in teaching students personal, expressive writing, used for teacher preparation to invite students to reflect upon their own personal and educational experiences, and is also recommended as the way of discovering sources of personal conflict and motivation. One wing of the academic discipline of curriculum theory has come to rely increasingly on autobiography as a key conceptual and methodological plank in its platform for reconceptualizing the field (Graham 1989, p.92).

One feature that makes autobiography popular is that:

"for the common reader, autobiography, taken by and large, is the most appealing form of literature. . . true to say that autobiography is the literature that most immediately and deeply engages our interest and holds it and that in the end seems to mean the most to us because it brings an increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place of the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition. (Olney, 1972, p.7)

Perhaps, what is more important is, as William Reid (1978) believes, that the move "seems in tune with the general intellectual climate." (p.105) Autobiography, as an example of what Jerome Bruner (1987) calls "self-narrative" (p.11), has come to be seen as another form of thought, a "mode of cognitive functioning" (p.11) of equal validity and importance as the kind of thinking that goes into constructing logical inductive arguments.

Autobiographies deal with the formation of an individual consciousness through his or her experience. Birren (1987) concludes that "writing an autobiography puts the contradictions,

paradoxes and ambivalence of life into perspective". ( P.91) Butt and Raymond (1985) discuss further: "They (autobiographies) go beyond a description of events in one's life into the narrative sense to a deeper examination of patterns underlying one's history of living, to reflection, to psycho-analysis." (p.63)

In addition, they suggest:

"The way of knowing is not visual or auditory, as such, but experimental without impersonal distance. It is personal, a direct confrontation of self, things, and events, therefore it is sensate "hot knowledge" in the broadest sense. It is the opposite of education-by others, in the didactic sense; in the end adults find education-by-others alienating. Autobiography provides one alternate paradigm for the education of adults wherein the power and responsibility belongs to the persons in the process. It also has the property of linking self knowledge to action, through a conscientization process that propels the learner/teacher to action, thereby integrating thought and action, theory and practice. This property is rare among most epistemologies dominant in society today (p.87).

The function of autobiographic study is seen as providing the potential for liberating teacher from hidden knots through the process of conscientization (Butt p.84). In Graham's words (1989): "Autobiography implies a spiritual revolution" (p.95).

### C. The Process of the Research

Life can only be understood backward; but it must be lived forwards." (Birren quoted from Kierkegaard, 1987, p.91)

The work of writing autobiographic research is full of frustrations as well as enjoyment. My past life was not a ready text well written by the ellipse of time, and what I was going to do was not simply to tell my reader what I had done. Graham (1989) quoted Gusdorf's conclusion:



It is not the task of autobiography to show us the stages of the individual's life--that should be left to the historian or biographer---but rather to reveal to us the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale. There is never any end to our dialogue with ourselves in search of our own absolutes, the ground of our being. Like Jacob, we continue to wrestle with our angel; in reality, however, we grapple only with ourselves, or with the shadow of a self that can never finally be laid hold of or subdued. (p.97)

In my inquiry, I found every foot of my past has its meaning. Not only was the meaning hidden for discovery, but also the meaning of my past was changing in the context of my current life. I needed to go back and forth to negotiate new understandings. Now, I see my past very differently from five years ago when I came to Canada. I also see my own past differently now from the time I started the research. I bet I will see it even more differently after I have this thesis finally completed. This discovery of hidden meaning in fact is a "constructing and reconstructing of my self" (Kennedy, 1992). Whenever some new meaning of my past is found, it adds to my life today. When I am digging deeper in my past, I am widening my vision for my future. This process is just as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe "A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories (p.4). Bateson (1990) elaborates: "Composing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to find meaning to the present" (p. 29-30).

Narrative inquiry is not a linear work, either. To engage in narrative inquiry, then is to engage in multilayered research

(Berthoff, 1987). Though my thesis has a beginning and an end, actually, the first chapter was written last, and the last chapter carries ideas from my proposal. It was through this moving backward and forward in time and space, I embraced my past reality first, and then freed myself from the reality for a better grasp of the reality. As Greene (1988) claims: "One's reality, rather than being fixed and predefined, is a perpetual emergent, becoming increasingly multiplex, as more perspectives are taken, more texts are opened, more friendships are made.(p.23).

Quite often, I found that stories were nested within stories, and concepts nested within concepts. By putting them in lines, I had to reluctantly give up some things that I treasured, in order not to confuse my readers. In a certain sense, it is not possible to put one's life in words. Though my past life is not very long, and there is nothing extra-ordinary in my life, still I could only handle one single aspect of my life for this occasion. Even on this single aspect, there is still a gap between what I wrote and what I wanted to write.

However, it is not always that my pen lags behind my mind. Sometimes, the pen took the lead in thinking. This happens even right now when I am writing this very paragraph. I had no such understanding of the relationship between the pen and thinking until I finished the last paragraph. The new reflection just popped up on the tip of my pen. A pen is like a cane in the hand of a blind man. I poked it in this direction and that direction, and

finally I found where to go.

When I was a teenager in China, my father advised me not to write down anything about myself, or about my thinking, not even those things about my family life, my reflections on society, my relationship with friends, classmates, teachers, etc. Anything could be used against me for political purposes. I liked to think, but always kept my thinking in mind. Particularly, I seldom wrote about myself, not even diaries. Since I started this journey of self inquiry, I have tasted the power of self-reflection on paper. I used to think while walking. Now, when I think, I would like to sit down and have a pen in hand. I wonder how much I missed of me before I did this research. This autobiographic study is a study of self understanding, self realization, self conscientization and self liberation. It has led to my empowerment and opened a lot of possibilities to my future.

#### **D. Reflections On the Method**

We imagine that it is through a felt moment of awareness with the way we are making sense of our world, of how we are living and telling our stories, that lead us to what we call here awakening. This felt moment of awareness may not be one moment in time but may be more of an ongoing sense of unease, a sense of unease as we recognize that our way of living and telling our stories is not the best way or a sense of unease as we recognize that others have other ways of living and telling their stories, stories that might be possibilities for our lives. (Clandinin and Connelly, p.7, in press)

Though my own personal growth through this inquiry is one important part of the research product, as an educational

endeavour, this thesis is not only written for myself. Throughout the research, I had kept in mind other readers of my stories. I wrote and explored my past for those who study or help second language learners. It is also for those, like me, who are facing cultural shock and second language learning themselves. Furthermore, I am also writing for all educators in general. I believe in this thesis there is much beyond second language learning, but learning and growing in general.

Every individual is unique and has a different history. My stories would not be identical to any other human being. Therefore, this inquiry is not intended to find out the general laws that apply to all learners. However, as Montaigne elaborates: "Each man bears the entire form of man's estate: chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition." (quoted by Olney, 1972, p.86) The understanding of one individual case does add to the body of knowledge of what the nature of learning is. Cooper (1991) testifies:

As chroniclers of our own stories, we write to create ourselves, to give voice to our experiences, to learn who we are and who we have been. Our diaries become the stories of our journeys through life, stories that are both instructive and transforming in the telling and the listening. These stories, these myriad voices, then serve to instruct and transform society, to add to the collective voice we call culture. Diarists, then, both as researchers and research subjects, begin to heal themselves and the split society has created between subject and object. Thus diaries, these small, insignificant objects filled with the simple words of our lives, can serve to make us whole. (p.111)

I hope that through the reflection of my learning experience,

I can add to the research literature some information of how human consciousness can be related to one's language growth and what is the relationship between language growth and personal growth.

One of the common criticism against autobiographic research is its subjectivity. In conducting this autobiography, I have no intention of avoiding the involvement of my subjectivity into my judgement. I feel that like any other kinds of research, either qualitative research or quantitative research, the researcher's subjectivity can never be excluded.

Salner (1986) argues that human science researchers reject the empiricists' habit of acting as though an observational "space" exists between the researcher/observer and the objects of study. He continues: "The observer and the observed are both part of an interactional system in which neither subject nor object can be defined without reference to the other . . . the observer and the observed phenomenon as an interacting unit in which each is the 'cause' of the other." (p.110) No matter whom a researcher studies, others or oneself, one is still in this interacting unit with one's subject studied. "Both subjectivism and objectivism are viewed by human science researchers as myths" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Bollnow (1974) elaborates,

Life experiences, forms of spiritual sensitivity, indeed, most broadly individual talents and capacities are what alone permit us to see things correctly, for they alone make possible our penetration into the reality to be investigated. . . these forms of subjectivity are not limitations and hindrances but organs of knowledge which provide access to reality. This sort of

subjectivity is unavoidable; it is the necessary precondition for knowledge. (p.7)

When I wrote the proposal for my research, I did feel this subjectivity as a problem. I cautioned: "However, I do realize that there is a danger of running into an arbitrary subjectivity in the research. One major disadvantage of using autobiography as a method is that the meaning is only negotiated within the writer's own self." (Wu, 1991a p.64) Then I quoted Graham's stand: "Graham (1989) observes that the autobiographic writer may be limited by 'the dominant autobiographic truth, which is the vision or pattern or meaning of life which the autobiographer has at the moment of writing his autobiography' (p.99). . . 'The lack of comparative viewpoints and the exchange of meaning from people to people may limit the writer within its ego. It is true that one form of self results in one form of autobiography' (Graham, p.100)".

However, today I see it in a different light. The task of the autobiographical writer is to find out his or her socialization and cultural assumptions. Therefore, the autobiographic study is another way of overcoming the limit of one's ego. The comparison of viewpoints and the exchange of meaning from people to people can still happen if a researcher takes good advantage of his or her environment. Reading other people's writing, including others' autobiographies is certainly one possibility. Talking to people, or sharing the writing with other people is also very beneficial. Even though, I feel autobiographic research does not have to emphasize

the comparison of viewpoints and the exchange of meaning from people to people at the stage of writing, because for an autobiography, the comparison of viewpoints and the exchange of meaning from people to people will happen later, when the writing goes to its destiny, its readers.

My point is that autobiographic research is a different kind of research. Its validity can not be judged by the criteria of other kinds of research. It has its own strength, the strength that other kinds of research do not have, i.e., the researcher's closeness to the research subject and his or her real life experiences.

Graham's claim (1989) that "one form of self results in one form of autobiography" (p.100) may not be the limit of autobiographic research. We all live in the limit of our ego. No matter what kind of research we conduct, "Mind is never free of precommitment. There is no innocent eye, nor is there one that penetrates aboriginal reality" (Bruner, 1988, p. 582). Perhaps, the autobiography's single perspective is a good thing. In our contemporary world, in which education, news media, advertising, and propaganda are very effective in spreading dominant ideologies, we need to see the uniqueness of individuals' different perspectives.

In defence of my autobiographic writing, I would venture some criticism of certain contemporary thoughts on human science research. I feel too much is emphasized on methodology. A research method is a tool. Like any other tool, it is created for making

things. We have to decide what we want to make before we pick up the right tool. In our modern world, tools become more and more sophisticated. Then, it is often not the product that decides the tools, but that what tools we have decide what we can make.

The same thing happens in conducting human research. As we talk too much about those popular and perhaps also generally accepted research instruments such as ethnography, phenomenology, critical theory, autobiography, etc., we often dare not think about what we want to do for research before thinking about what methods are available. This is different from how our ancestors created tools. To them, anything can be a tool, a piece of stone, a crack of bone or a stripe of leather. Nobody criticized them if they did not use the right tool so long as they made something that could improve their lives.

In our age of technology, we have standardized our tools, and so thus our products. This standardization sometimes causes us troubles. August Dvorak invented a new computer keyboard layout which is faster and more comfortable than the Qwerty layout. However, the Qwerty keyboard has already been standardized. The new design has very little chance to succeed.

I am not arguing that we should destroy all the rules in our society. However, in our human research, when a new method is being used, the researcher perhaps has to spend more time on the rationale of his or her method than on the research per se. Why can not we let the research product speak for itself? Is it not totally



up-side-down that we judge the research method to approve the research product, instead of judging the research product to approve the method?

This part of the methodology rationale is the beginning part in this thesis. In fact, it is the last part I write for this research. In other words, I had finished most of my autobiographic writing before I seriously dealt with the methodology of the research. Is this rare? I did hear some people write their thesis in this order. Is it right? I think so, if we evaluate the research product to approve the research method, but not the other way round.

When I started seriously thinking about doing this research, I knew a lot of things could be done. In fact, the decision was made almost intuitively a long time before. This intuitive feeling surfaces from life experiences, from my daily encounters with reality. I knew I could find something valuable because I saw them, I smelled them and I felt them passing by me every day. I had put an eye on them for quite a long time, but just had no chance to sit down and examine them carefully. I knew I was going to do it sooner or later. It was worthier than many other things I could do. Perhaps there were some other of my life decisions made in this way.

In this research, I tell lots of my personal stories and give a lot of my own reflections. I also put down some of my reflections on other people's life and learning. I examine some theories, and

raise some theories of my own. It is not totally narrative. It is not purely autobiographical either. Why this way? It is because when I was doing it, I felt I was learning, improving, and my understanding and my consciousness were growing. I wrote them also because I felt they made sense to me, and I would like to see if they make sense to others. The process of doing this is already self-evident to me that it is worth doing. If that, why do I have to care so much about if this piece of writing would fit into one authorized method? If the purpose of doing research is to understand life and therefore to improve life, I am convinced that my research has already done that.

The above reflections on the nature of research and research methodology were also a result of my autobiographic journey's achievement. It is the last paradigm of my consciousness development described in Chapter V, that enables me to break from seeking for absolute truth, and black-white polarities of thinking. With opened eyes, I see no natural laws governing human activities, including research. "Acceptance or rejection of a practice or theory comes about because a community is persuaded. Even research specialists do not judge a conclusion as it stands alone; they judge its compatibility with a network of prevailing beliefs. (Cronback, 1988, p.6)

Before I came to Canada, one thing I appreciated in the Western social science research was its scientific nature. I admired its objectivity and accuracy based on statistical methods.

Now I feel perhaps we need to introduce some oriental ways of thinking in our theoretical inquiries. Oriental philosophers advocate holistic and intuitive thinking. Though they are not so logical and analytical, they do often make sense and help us understand life and the world in a different perspective.

A person's daily life, no matter what he or she does, is a process of struggling in understanding one's environment and human relationships. Can we call each of our lives a project of research? Are people's deep thoughts, reflections, or even brief observations and comments research findings? Of course they only make sense to certain people in certain contexts. So is our formal theoretical research. Many of our human science theories were well accepted for a while and badly condemned later.

On the other hand, I still believe that we can argue whether a research study is better or worse. It is the same as we evaluate our lives differently. Again, when we make judgements, we use different criteria based on different value systems. It is always impossible to find universal criteria to distinguish good and bad research. To me, I tried my best to do a better research study and leave it to my readers to judge its value.

### CHAPTER 3

#### A THEORY OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Thomas Kuhn (1970) elaborates a theory of paradigms. A paradigm refers to the shared assumptions and practices among a community of scholars in a given field. It governs not a subject matter but a group of practitioners. Giroux (1979) observes that "paradigms are related to the nexus of social and political values in the larger society. People are socialized in the dominant culture and work within certain paradigms. Within each paradigm, the dominant ideology is unchallenged". (p.264) Kuhn's theory breaks the myth of objective truth and lead to the formulation of new paradigms of thinking.

With the great interest in human consciousness and Kuhn's theory, I was lucky to be able to attend Dr. H. Garfinkles's Educational Foundation course, Ed. Fnd. 526, in the University of Alberta. Garfinkle used Kuhn's theory to examine the development of science, technology and different schools of philosophy in a historical perspective and created a theory of human consciousness development. He suggests that the development of human consciousness in history has gone through many paradigms in a hierarchical order, with each paradigm taking about seventy-five years. In each of these seventy-five years in our history, human beings developed a new way of thinking based on the previous achievements.

I found his model of human consciousness a very powerful

instrument for examining the development of human consciousness. Through lots of personal contact with him, I began to use his insights in examining my own consciousness development, and to examine theoretical development of second language teaching. Though I do not totally agree with Garfinkle's model, I certainly owe a lot to him for structuring my thinking in this thesis. As his theory is to be published, I feel it necessary to present the basic elements of this theoretical model to my readers. The following explanations of the theory are the summaries of my notes taken in the course and in our conversations. I trust they are the correct interpretation of his ideas.

#### **A. 1425-1500 Common Sense**

The thinking in the period is characterized as rational, formal, logical thinking. This is the time during which most of the western population still lived in a pastoral life. Farming land, little cottages, cattle, churches are characteristic of the common life. This way of life had not changed for hundreds of years. A scholar then could bury himself in books, totally divorced from life experience in seeking of the inner harmony of "knowledge" itself. He or she might enjoy grammar, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, harmony of music or astronomy, the "knowledge" passed on from generation to generation. "Behaviour" is used to describe the level of human consciousness at this period of time. The teaching and learning of knowledge centred upon rule following,

drilling, imitating and memorizing. The role of the students was one of passivity. Very little of self-reflection was encouraged. The knowledge students learned had little to do with actual life, with the understanding of their world, and with the improvement of their existence. It became a luxurious pursuit of a few elites. In addition, the learning itself was tedious, dull, and of little personal interest.

Behaviourist psychology was developed much later than 1425. However, it shared the spirit of 1425 level of thinking. It was developed further to a theoretical system which, more or less, still controls school practice, in great parts of the world. While knowledge taught in today's schools is quite different from that of the 1425, the way this knowledge is treated in the classroom reflects old fashioned 1425 thinking, i.e. it is the knowledge that can only be passively accepted through imitating, drilling, and memorizing. In this mode of education, the learner is the slave of the well established knowledge system. There is little demand for the mental powers of reflection, creation, or criticism.

#### **B. 1500-1575 Descriptive Consciousness**

The paradigm of 1500 is a great change from that of 1425. After 1500, experimental science was started. The methods of experimentation, observation and measurement were used for understanding and discovery. Scientific instruments , such as the telescope, extended the common senses of human beings. People

started to seek objective facts, hard evidence, instead of simply relying on their own subjective reasoning. This is the start of positivistic thinking which demands a higher level of consciousness. The passive human behaviour of 1425 changed to conscious endeavour. This new trend of thinking made a great contribution to the later development of science and technology. Human beings really started to see carefully what the world they were living in was like.

This level of consciousness has great implications for education. At the 1500 level of consciousness, education should no longer treat students as bags for knowledge. The purpose of education becomes increasing students' life experience--learning through actual sensory experience; learning through hands-on activities. Efforts have been made in education for realizing these principles. Most of them came much later than 1500, and many of them were the efforts made in our contemporary world.

The publication of French encyclopedias with rich illustrations of pictures to give the readers a vivid visual experience is one of the early attempts. John Dewey's experimental schools gave full emphasis to the role of sensory experiences in successful learning. Montessori Schools, Catherin Stern's math education for low I.Q. children, etc., used these principles to develop the series of methods, such as using flashcards, Cuisinaire rods, etc., which successfully developing this new paradigm in education. Today, the importance of learning through experience is

more and more realized. But still for much of our education, the 1425 level of teaching is dominant.

### **C. 1575-1650 Reflective Consciousness**

The next seventy-five years, 1575 to 1650 saw the further development of human consciousness. While people learned to observe, experiment and measure the factual objectivity of the world at the 1500 level of thinking, in the next seventy-five years, they opened the realm of the counterfactual world. They were not simply attending to the experiments, observing and measuring what happened, they also tried to predict what might happen, and at what conditions they would or would not happen. They formed hypothesis, made predictions, sought for the explanations and posed the alternatives. In this way, a descriptive consciousness of 1500 was replaced by a reflective consciousness, self-consciousness. This research orientation is widely used in the universities today. Graduate students are encouraged to make their own hypotheses and to design their own research endeavour to test them.

However this level of thinking has had little impact on our current school teaching. School teachers may arrange some of the scientific experiments, but these experiments usually are not desired by the students themselves, and what they can do is just to follow the procedure step by step until they get the expected result. While the students are not decision makers, their consciousness is still at the level of 1500.



#### **D. 1650-1725, Theoretical consciousness**

The human consciousness at the level of 1650 to 1725 came to a new stage. After 1575's hypothesizing and rule making, people in 1650 started to generalize the rules made for special cases and tested their suitability to other occasions. As a chief philosopher at this level of thinking, Kant introduced the notion of "category paradigm". To decide whether a subjective alternative is correct, one has to determine its applicability to others. Leibnitz introduced the notion of synthesis. This generalizing and synthesizing led to the making of theories, general laws. Therefore, people came to some universal, general, scientific consciousness. They needed a combination of empirical data to make sure that people's consciousness had the same kind of common references by which reality could be tested.

By combining these common references or frameworks, one is theorizing. In this process, people learn to know that by grouping their experiences into some kind of conceptual frameworks, they are making disciplines of knowledge. Knowledge itself is holistic, but it can be analyzed into disciplines. Their experience is a part of disciplinary knowledge and the discipline is a part of totality of knowledge. This is the climax of positivism. This orientation is still dominant in most fields of study in science and technology, and even in the social sciences.

The result of this theoretic orientation is great. Human beings since then have built up their knowledge system, with its

deliberate categories, such as physics, chemistry, electronics, etc. Scientific research conducted in different areas churned out more sophisticated theories and fell into the relative categories of the system. This development of theory is the basis of the accelerating modern technology which has changed the face of our world completely over a very short period of time.

Despite its great achievement, this level of thinking is not cultivated in our schools. Though scientific theories, as the achievements of the 1650 level of human consciousness, are taught in our schools throughout their years of education, human beings in our classrooms are no longer the creators of these theories. Rather, these human-made theories become the master of human beings, who accept them, mostly rather passively, as absolute truth, which in turn becomes the purpose of learning. The rigid system of the knowledge with its division of subjects controls the curriculum, textbooks and teacher-student behaviours in the classrooms. Mostly students are awed by this colossus, tired of learning it and know little of what its use is.

#### **E. 1725-1800, Historical Consciousness**

At the level of 1725 to 1800, people started to look at developments of events in a historical context. A lot of books written then included the word "origin" in the titles. The Origin of Language, The origin of civil society, etc. By relating the past and present in term of their stages of development, people

projected the next steps to predict and create the future. This is the start of a historical consciousness. It is also a critical consciousness, as people no longer took their social conditions for granted, and accepted their fate as is. They realized that every cultural phenomenon is historically conditioned. Italian philosopher Vico wrote the book "New Science History", in which he argues that what was historically created can be historically changed, because what is historical is man made.

This level of thinking challenges 1650 level of thinking which assumed the existence of general laws. To accept the existence of universal truth is the denial of the change of time in which things become out-moded. The laws discovered by man may become general and widely applicable in certain circumstances, but there is a time they may not function as universal. 1725 level of thinking is revolutionary, as it is a break from the positivistic tradition developed since 1500. In this new paradigm, many basic assumptions people used to hold have to be re-examined critically.

Scientific knowledge in the paradigm of positivism is general laws, but put in a historical context, it is not absolutely true. It is also historically conditioned. Take Newton's theory of physics and Einstein's theory of relativity as examples, both are right in their own context, and neither of them can take the place of the other.

Our schools today are not treating knowledge in this way. Nor are our universities. Positivism is still dominant in our education

at all its levels. As discussed earlier, the textbook knowledge with its rigid system, controls our curriculum thinking and school activities, and thus makes learning a passive activity of accepting, receiving, instead of one of critical reflection and creation. This viewpoint conditions the people to accept the status quo. Whatever it is, they go along with it. Positivistic thinking produces an ideal atmosphere of social reproduction instead of social change.

This happened with the absence of a higher level of consciousness, a consciousness of independent, critical thinking in the context of historical development. Positivistic thinking makes people believe that there are always universal natural laws. Every human effort has to conform to these laws. The power of objectivity overwhelms the human will which greatly narrows thinking. People tend to believe that what already exists is just right and should be accepted, at least, lived up to.

#### **F. 1800-1875, Social-critical Consciousness**

In this period of history, Darwin developed his theory of evolution. This is a revolution in thinking, though Darwin himself may not have realized it. Unlike the 1725 level of historical consciousness, which mainly dealt with the individual development, the 1800 level of thinking started to study the development of the groups. At this level of thinking, people needed a consciousness of cross-cultural comparisons. Darwin's theory of evolution is not

only the study of the development of one species of life. It followed closely various kinds of development among the lives of different species on the earth and compared these developments so as to arrive at a comprehensive theory of how changes occur. The changes in Darwin's evolutionary theory is not a kind of recycling, repetition or reproduction as the physical or chemical changes studied at the 1650 level of thinking. Before 1800, all the theories in natural and social sciences were the theories of reproduction, i.e., the changes are only those of phases in its recycles of repetition, instead of the changes of nature, as a spiral cycle of rising development.

In this period of 1800 to 1875, the Bourgeoisie emerged as a ruling class, as Marx called it a "class for itself." Instead of dealing with individuals, the Bourgeoisie had to deal with collectives--the whole society. In doing so, they also needed a new language to be able to deal with it. This happened in different fields of studies characterized by pluralism and relativism.

In logic, the Aristotian tradition was either-or two valued logic. After 1800, people started to develop different pluralistic logic. In the areas of arts, people also saw poetical plurals, rhetorical plurals. In science, new developments further rejected the universal law of the 1650 level. In geometry, ideas shifted from one geometry to many geometries, such as Gauss's Non-equal Geometry. Mathematics prior to 1800 was of single-counting-units nature. In 1800 set theory and non-conited algebra emerged. All

these were treated as absolutes in the past. People began to challenge the way of thinking that had existed in the West from Greeks up to 1800. They realized that there are no absolute truths. They are true only for working purposes, in different contexts. Today, more and more people have realized the importance of pluralism. But narrow nationalism, racism, exclusive religionism, etc., still widely exist.

#### **G. 1875-1950 Ideology Critique Consciousness**

In this period of time Freud and other psychologists developed what is called depth psychology. The idea is to bring what is subconscious to consciousness. People may have an intuitive sense of what to do and what not to do, which is called by Planié passive knowing. Psychoanalysis attempts to make the subconscious conscious, since as long as it is hidden in the subconscious, nothing can be done about it.

Subconsciousness is also culturally conditioned. The Frankfurt School, which emerged in this period of time, started a critique of the unconscious assumptions of the western civilization. It combined Marxist social criticism with Freud's depth psychology, and developed a higher level of human consciousness--ideology critique consciousness. Therefore, a historical and cross-cultural comparative are an important part of social analysis to bring what is subconscious to consciousness. What is important is still to

develop a critical consciousness.

Gramsci was deeply concerned about the changing modes of domination in the industrial countries. He (1971) claimed that social control in these countries was exercised less through the use of physical force such as army, police, etc. The distribution of an elaborate system of norms and imperatives were used instead to lend institutional authority a degree of unity and certainty and provide it with an apparent universality and legitimation. This form of control is called "ideological hegemony" by Gramsci. This form of control not only manipulated consciousness but also saturated and constituted the daily experiences that shaped one's behaviour.

Giroux (1979) points out how "ideological hegemony" is related to education--"educational practitioners can be viewed as not only products of history but as producers of history as well. And it is this dynamic process of socialization that links them and the schools in which they work to the larger society." (p.275) And Wood (1984) examines hidden curriculum of schooling and notes it emphasizes the routine, rewards rule-governed behaviour, and values conformity over independence in reflecting our limited conception of democracy. He concludes schools reproduce the necessary human capital to maintain existing social relations. These authors call for critical thinking and developing a better understanding of the political nature of schooling and the role they might play in shaping it. Thus conscious effort is made to bring about change.

## H. 1950-2025 Conscientization

This paradigm of human consciousness can best be represented by Paulo Freire's (1985) term "conscientization". (p.67) Conscientization is to raise the consciousness of the oppressed. Friere believes that becoming literate is part of the process of becoming self-critical about the historically constructed nature of one's experience. For Freire, language and power are inextricably intertwined and provide a fundamental dimension of human agency and social transformation. Pualo Freire, as an educational theorist, insists on the political nature of all education. But his theory of liberation link-up between education and the broader arena of struggle, pointing to a viable politics of emancipation.

After 1800, the development of human consciousness came to the stage of conscience not just consciousness itself. This change is accompanied by or, we may say, brought about by different emancipations in our society. 1800 to 1875 saw the emancipation movement of working class as the oppressed. From 1875 to 1950, most of the colonial countries were emancipated. In 1950 to 2025, we are in the age of woman's liberation against patriarchal domination. The essence of this liberation is still the rising of women's consciousness. The change to the equal opportunities and equal pay will not make women really equal to men unless they are conscientizing themselves.

Dr. Garfinkle's theory of human consciousness goes beyond the contemporary world and predicts the future. According to him the



next consciousness is ecological consciousness and human beings' understanding of life and the world will come to non-anthropocentrism and take all the living species and the whole world into consideration.

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Because of the limit of the space, I only take the most basic part of this theory to serve my own purpose in the study of the paradigmatic changes of my own consciousness in the past few years of second language learning. In my opinion, Garfinkle's theoretical model is only one way of seeing the phenomena of human consciousness. The same phenomena can be seen in many different ways, and I am sure that this model will face criticism. The historical divisions of those consciousness, in my opinion are metaphors, and cannot be taken as objective truth. The merit of this theory is to single out these consciousness and bring full attention to their development. It is this theory that lead me to see the importance of human consciousness in second language learning. I do not feel that I need to defend this theory in order to legitimate my own theory. Instead, in my study I also hold a critical attitude to examine this theory.

## CHAPTER 4

### A JOURNEY TO MY PAST

Once I had a conversation with a Canadian lady who had just finished teaching in a Chinese university for two years. We talked a lot about Chinese culture, Chinese tradition, and the Chinese way of thinking. This is one of my major interests. I explored the mono-lingual and mono-cultural society of China, and how it effects Chinese thinking. This Canadian lady just had experienced a lot in China, and understood what I meant. She asked me: "I wonder how you got out all of this, and became critical of your own tradition?" Her question startled me for a moment. I knew I was often critical of certain Chinese mentality, but I never thought I had got out of it. Did she mean that most Chinese people do not think as I did, and that I had already distinguished myself from my people? Maybe she did not, but it did strike me that way. Her remark stayed in my mind for a long, long time. I ask myself again and again, "Where am I? And who am I now?"

I knew I was changing a lot in the past few years since I came to Canada. But I really had no idea how far I had gone. Generally, I had always been satisfied with my change. I felt that the few years of crosscultural experience tremendously enriched my thinking, and I was a more mature man. This is exactly what I wanted, and what I came here for. However, when I suddenly realized how far I had gone, I felt threatened.

I realized that I had been developing a new system of

thinking, though I was not quite sure what it was. It was not simply a new personal belief or political stand. It was changing me completely. It was affecting my daily behaviours of doing my job, getting along with people, and directing my future. I felt strongly that this change was so big for me to absorb in the regular basis. I needed to set some time for a complete review of the changes I had gone through and to find out the meaning of this unprecedented change of my life. This was not an easy job. In the jumbled events of my history, I had to find out the thread of the development of my consciousness, its paradigmatic changes and the causes of the changes. Though not every change has something to do with my second language learning and crosscultural experience, these changes all connect to my formation today. Therefore my new journey of this personal inquiring into my past has to be traced back to the first step of my life.

#### **A. The First Paradigm, A Sheet of White Paper**

I was born in a northeast city in China in 1950. It was the second year after the birth of communist China. In my thirty-seven years of experience in China, politics was a very important part of my life. It played an important role in the formation of my thinking. The overthrow of the Chinese nationalist regime and the establishment of the People's Republic of China was called "liberation", as the Chinese people were said to have been liberated from the oppression of "the three big mountains", i.e.,

imperialism, feudalism, and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Red is the symbol of revolution. Children like me were called "born under the red flag, and brought up under the red flag". We were "the flowers of the motherland and the successors of revolution". Probably, the first sight I caught after I came to the world was Chairman Mao, because his portrait was hung everywhere, even in the hospital in which I was born. The first words I learned to read was "I love Chairman Mao." "I love the Communist Party", "I love socialism." And this kind of political education continued throughout my schooling.

Communist education is often called "brainwashing" by westerners. However, there is actually nothing to wash in the brains of my generation. As Chairman Mao said: "The youth is a sheet of blank paper, on which it is good to write the newest and the most beautiful pages of words and to paint the newest pictures." Brainwashing sounds very passive, as it indicates an operation which is imposed upon the unwilling victims. Yet the communist education to me and to the other children of my generation was by no means that way. To be born into such an environment, communist ideology was just as natural as the sun rising from the east and setting in the west. There was no resistance to the political doctrines and to me they were as true as the Bible to a Puritan. I was totally convinced that the communist doctrine was the only truth in the world, and that I should totally devote myself to this holy cause of revolution.

To retell the stories of my past, I am going to step into my past paradigms of consciousness, and speak in my voice at age 15, not in the voice of myself as the adult I am today. The following passages in this chapter are reconceptualization of my thinking starting from 1965. At that time, I was a junior high school student. They are not real diaries written at that time. My comments in my adult voice of today will be in the boxes just like this paragraph.

July 21, 1965

### Red Rocks

Again, I read the last part of the novel "The Red Rocks". This is the fifth time I read it, but still I was deeply moved. Every time I opened the book, I found my eyes were blurred by tears. A lump was in my throat and my hands got wet. My breath seemed becoming synchronized with the development of the story. Sometimes it held for so long, and sometimes it gasped intensely and heavily. It seemed that my blood was boiling. The emotion stirred up took a long, long time to calm down.

There is no doubt that I never read a book that touched me so much before. There were some other books that I loved very much, though. I could remember when I read Felna's "Mysterious Island", I even forgot my lunch. I kept reading until I found I did not have enough strength to hold it. I loved "The Dream of the Red Mason", a Chinese "Romeo and Julia", and the Number One classic novel generally accepted in China. When the heroine Lin Daiyu died, I felt the end of the world had come. However, these books cannot be

compared with "The Red Rocks". "Mysterious Island" only satisfied my naive curiosity as a child. "The Dream of the Red Mansion" led me to the petty-bourgeois frail sentiments. Yet "The Red Rocks" gave me the power of thinking, and raised my consciousness.

"The Red Rocks" is a novel based on a true story. In the 1940s, the Koumindang secret police built a prison in the mountains in Sichuan province. Most of the prisoners were communists who were caught during their underground struggles for the people's liberation. There they were cruelly tortured to make them confess or tell the secrets which could lead to the capture of other Party members. The Koumintang Agents had more than one hundred different kinds of instruments for torturing. But just like what Stalin said: "Communists are made of iron and steel". They conducted heroic struggles against the enemies in that most dangerous situation. Many of them were executed or beaten to death. The last group of them were murdered just a few hours before the people's liberation army came. The book likened those martyrs to the red rocks on the mountains which are immortal.

Every time I read it, disquieting thoughts surged in my mind. We owe so much to those revolutionary martyrs. It is because of their dedication, the sacrifice of their own lives, that the three big mountains over Chinese people, imperialism, feudalism and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie were overthrown, and we, the new generation can enjoy our happy life now.

July, 29, 1965

### Learning from Lei Feng

We have been learning from Lei Feng for a long time.<sup>1</sup> Lei Feng followed the Party's line every minute. He likened himself to a little screw. Wherever the Party put him on the "big machine of revolution", he would work there and keep stainless forever. He worked whole-heartedly for the Party and the people. He used his spare time to help a disabled old lady every day for years. When he heard one of his comrade's family in the countryside was attacked by a serious natural disaster, he mailed all his bank saving to them without giving his name. Now everybody knows Lei Feng; the whole nation is learning from Lei Feng.

The Party taught us that to learn from Lei Feng, we should learn from his spirit of "oblivious of himself". In the new style of society which our party wants to build, everybody works for others while all others work for him in response. Self is a evil thing which we should get rid of. It is the product of capitalist private ownership. When everybody in this world becomes selfishless, we will then arrive at our great goal of the communist ideal. Thus we should fight against every flash of self-thinking in our life, and contribute without any reservation to the country and the people.

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<sup>1</sup> Lei Feng was a soldier in the Chinese People's Liberation Army. In 1963, after he died in an accident, the Party set him as the model for the whole nation to learn from. He was said to follow the Party conscientiously and serve the people whole-heartedly.

My friends and I did try that. Every Sunday, we went to an lonely old man, and helped him with house work. When we saw that our classroom needed decoration, we brought flowers from our homes in the evening. The next day the teacher and the students were so happy to see these beautiful flowers, but no one knew who brought them.

I could not always do what I should. Sometimes I had trouble keeping myself attentive in the class, or being too lazy to finish homework. But I tried to think about the revolutionary martyrs, about the bitterness of the old society. This reminded me that I was not studying for myself or for my parents. I study for my country and for the realization of our communist goal. Keeping this in mind, I found I could work much harder.

**August 12, 1965**

### **Class Struggles**

We just finished the "class education" in school last month. The teacher told us that human history was a history of class struggle, i.e. the exploited classes continuously fought against the exploiting classes. This education period was also called "Remembering the bitterness of yesterday and thinking of the sweetness of today". In the old society, the majority of people were proletarians. They were cruelly exploited. They made everything in the world, but they had nothing of their own. They often died of hunger. Several old workers were invited to talk to



us. They were child labourers in the old society when they were at our age. They were forced to work more than fourteen hours a day. Some of them showed us the scars they bear on their body, which was the result of the foreman's whipping. Then the teacher asked us to bring the stories of how our own families suffered in the old society. Almost every one of us had a bitter story about our parents living in the old China. We got to know that the exploiting classes, the capitalists, landlords and bureaucrats in the old regime, everywhere in the world are equally evil and cruel. "All the crows in the world are black." A few students from the exploiting class families determined to draw a line from their families and stand on the side of the people.

In the last few months, especially after I read "The Red Rocks" I feel I have grown up quite fast. I no longer fool around in the play ground or browse among books in the library. Now I think a lot every day. Though I am still a teenager, I have built up my consciousness of class struggle and I have realized my sacred historical responsibility for human beings. Now we are living in the "sweetness" of the new society. However Chairman Mao told us that the overthrown exploiting classes will never give up their attempts to restore capitalism in China. They still exist in hide and wait for the chance to come.

The restoration of capitalism means that we will be cruelly exploited again. It also means that thousands or millions of people will be murdered from the enemies' revenge. This already happened

in Hungary in 1956. The restoration of capitalism also means that the blood of the countless revolutionary martyrs in the past decades was shed in vain. For us there is nothing more important than to make sure that the colour of our country will never change.

The defeated exploiting class are not isolated. They have the support of the outside world. Today, we are surrounded by the hostile capitalist countries. The U.S. imperialists failed to blockade China. Through the Korean War, they got to know that they could not defeat us by force. They lay their hope on the peaceful evolution to capitalism in our second generation. That is why we, the young generation, should be conscious of our historical responsibility and become the successors of revolution. This is the party's expectation to us young people. We can never let the party down.

**September 3, 1965**

#### **Marxism is the Natural Law**

In today's political lessons, the teacher told us that everything in the world is governed by natural laws. Like Newton's law of gravitativity and Darwin's evolution, our human world is also governed by the natural laws. These laws were discovered by Marx and Engles, and further developed by Lenin and Chairman Mao. Marx predicted that capitalism will be replaced by socialism. Sooner or later, the whole world will realize communism, which is the lofty ideal of mankind. This great goal is inevitable.

The teacher told us that Marxism is the greatest truth human beings have ever had. Because it is so great, it is not easy for us to understand what Marx wrote. But our leader Chairman Mao understands it best. This can be proved by the victories in our party's history. Those who did not understand it well and who did not know how to use it in the Chinese condition led the revolution to the brink of failure. It was Mao who led the party out of the crisis, and succeeded step by step. So long as we following Chairman Mao and the Party under his leadership, we will always keep on the road of genuine Marxism, and our victory is guaranteed.

We also have our international responsibilities. We should liberate the two thirds of the world population who are still suffering in the capitalist countries, such as U.S. England, France, West Germany, Canada. I saw the pictures of those countries in the newspaper that while the rich enjoy their modern life of cars, big houses, etc., the poor people were begging in the street. Shabby, homeless old people spent nights outside in winters. In the United States, black people were burnt by the Ku Klux Klan. Several white policemen were twisting and clubbing a young black man. We shall never forget that those people are still living in the man-eating society, longing for liberation.

**October 5, 1965**

### **The First Day in the Countryside**

These days we are working in the countryside helping peasants

doing harvest. This is the first time I left home, and the first time I am in the countryside. Chairman Mao said that intellectuals should learn from working people. The school organized this activity of seven days visit. We all live in the homes of peasants. Every day we work with them in the field, and eat with their families.

It is a people's commune. About fifty households in this village all belong to the same commune. I was not surprised to see that most of the houses in the village are very small and shaky, made of straw and mud. The roads are not paved, and there is only one telephone in the whole village, as I know that our country is still very poor, especially in the countryside and the remote areas. Due to the hundred years of foreign powers' plunder and the evil rule of the corrupt government in the old society, our country is very backward.

What I did not anticipate is that life in the country is so hard. The family I am living with has five people but they all share the only blanket when they sleep. Some bread made of corn flour accompanied with onions and pickles is all they have for dinner. They have almost no furniture in their home; there is no glass in the windows; they are covered with paper.

Seeing the bad living conditions of peasants now, I can imagine more vividly what kind of miserable life they led in the old society. The party secretary of the village told us that tremendous changes have taken place in this village since

liberation. In the old society, his family had only one pair of pants. All his brothers and sisters died of hunger. Most of the land in this village belonged to one landlord. He committed a lot of crimes with the support of the local police station. He was executed by the new government. His big house now is the commune office. Once we came across his wife who was working under surveillance. That was the first time I saw a living class enemy. I was also surprised that some peasants had very low class consciousness. They said they ate and worked in both the old society and the new in the same way. The change mattered nothing to them.

**October 6, 1965**

### **The Inner Struggle**

This is the fifth day working in the countryside. I found that the hard life in the countryside is unbearable to me. The first night, I was bitten by fleas all over. My body was covered with itching swells. The food is so hard to swallow, and what is swallowed is so hard to digest. I am eating less and less each day and always feel hungry. The days become so long working in the field. Though we just do the simplest and lightest work for the peasants, still that makes me exhausted. I miss home from the second day. And this week of seven days drags on like a year.

Tears rolled out of my eyes. I wiped them quickly for fear of being seen. Perhaps this is just what we called petty-bourgeois

frail sentiments. And that is why the Party sent me here. I need to be tempered by hard work. On the other hand I found I really could not stand such a kind of life any longer.

Nowadays, the Party is calling on the young people to go and settle down in the countryside, in the remote areas, and in the places where the country needs us most. Some high school students willingly gave up their chances of going to the universities and their comfortable life in the cities and choice to work as a life long peasant. Their deeds were highly praised by the party. The day I saw them wearing the big red flowers (which symbolized their glory) on their chest passing through the hailing crowds who saw them off, and got onto the train, I was so moved that I almost decided to go with them. Now I feel it was lucky I did not.

I am really experiencing what is called "the inner struggle". Our political teacher said "when you experience the inner struggle, it is the moment that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are fighting to win you. You should be very careful where you stand." Again I think of the martyrs in "The Red Rock". Though my life is hard here, it is not as hard as theirs, let alone they give up their lives. It is much more difficult to get rid of selfishness than I expected. I regret that I was not born in the years of revolutionary wars. If that were the case, I would easily fight and die heroically on the battle field. That is much easier than doing hard work day by day with great patience.

## B. The Second Paradigm, The Start of My Critical Thinking

In the fall of 1966, "The Great Cultural Revolution" took place in China. At the time, I was just about to graduate from the junior high school. Like most of the Chinese, particularly the young people, I knew nothing about the serious power struggle between the top Chinese Communist leaders. What I was told was that the Cultural Revolution was a unprecedented ideological revolution, which is vitally important for the transformation of the society. With great revolutionary zeal, I was immediately drawn into this movement.

June 20, 1966

I am too excited to sleep tonight, thought it is almost midnight now. I should write down my feeling before this historical day is gone.

I was very tired at the time I went to bed tonight. We were supposed to have high-school entrance examinations tomorrow. These examinations are so important to me, that if my scores are not high enough for the key high schools, I will definitely lose my chance to get into a university later. That means I would not have a intellectual future for my whole life.

It was eleven o'clock. Lying in bed, I was still thinking about those math formulas. I heard the radio in my parents room. After the solemn music of "The East is Red", the pronouncer's voice knocked on my ears: ". . . Examinations in our schools cannot evaluate the true knowledge of the students. They cannot examine

students' ability in problem analyzing and solving. They lead our young people to be book worms divorced from proletarian politics, from the worker and peasant masses and from practice. They also become the instrument of bourgeois intellectuals to dominate our school and to suppress students' initiatives and creativeness. Our great teacher, great leader, great commander, and great helmsman Chairman Mao instructed that all the examination in education be banned. This is effective immediately. . . ."

I found myself immediately jumping from the bed shouting "Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!". With tears in my eye, I heard the radio continued: "No one else in the world could have such great insight and make such courageous decisions. He stands high and sees far, designing the future of our country for hundreds and thousands of years to come".

Now I am thinking about what happened in the last few days in the school. At the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao called on us young people to "dare to think, dare to struggle, and dare to throw the emperor out of his throne." He gave us "The Four Great Democracies" which are "speaking out freely, airing views fully, holding great debates and writing big-character posters". He asked us to use critical thinking to challenge almost every thing.

I used to think that everything written in books was right and true; every thing teachers said was correct. But in the last few days, I and other Red Guards are challenging them.



According to the newspaper, some bourgeois representatives in education exercised a revisionist educational line against Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. Those people controlled most of our educational system. We were taught the knowledge made by bourgeoisie though we were in socialist schools. Instead of teaching us to become social transformers, they taught us to be the slaves of disciplines, the slaves of books, the slaves of authorities, and the slaves of the existing social system.

I got the answer why I always had trouble with lessons and examinations in school. The school did not teach us the true knowledge we need. Instead of learning the ability to analyze and solve problems, we were taught to become book worms. The theories in the textbook could not be connected with life and practice. This explains why some university graduates majoring in electricity could not even fix a light at home.

I had my own experience as well. Some subjects to me were so hard. It was just because I had no interests in them. What is the use of learning English? All the English speaking countries are our enemies. We will never get a chance to speak to any of them unless we meet in a battlefield. Besides we always talk about grammar. It is so boring. I like science anyhow, particularly electricity. But the things taught in the class are so little and so simple. I know much more than that.

Since I fell in love with fixing radios, I have read much on the subject. I had no teacher to help me at all. But I learned so

much. In reading these books, I found my knowledge of mathematics was not enough. Then I found the relevant math books to read. I got to understand math for senior high students when I was only in second year junior high. And I spent only a few days to learn what would have cost me months if it had been taught in school.

The school always tried to tell us that knowledge had to be systematic. Does that make sense? I could remember well that on the first day of my junior high school, we had half an hour of silent reading. I opened the new Language Arts textbook. The first lesson was about how workers built a dam. I found it was very boring. I flipped over the pages, and found that the last lesson about the Korean War was more interesting. But as soon as I started reading, a harsh voice came from behind: "Stand up!" With my heart trembling, I rose and found it was the school principal who was inspecting. "Look at him! What a good student he is" he said to the class satirically. "Today is your first day in this school, but you have come to the last lesson. How did you learn the rest of the book in a few minutes." Just for this little "fault", I was ordered to stand in front of the class for fifteen minutes.

Why is it so important that we have to learn all the other lessons before I can look at the last one? It is only now that I can understand that the principal as well as most of the teachers are the executives of the bourgeois educational line. They certainly did not want us to be independent thinkers but the slaves of the system.

Chairman Mao is the wisest and most insightful leader of our country. When Chairman Mao's niece told him about a "bad" student in her class, who failed the examinations and never followed the teacher, Chairman Mao said insightfully that he might be the best student in the class. He might be full of bright ideas and independent thinking which were not appreciated by the existing system. It was not the student's fault but the fault of the system. Now Chairman Mao gave us the right to change our education. There are really a lot in school that we must change.

**December 19, 1966**

The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution has taken place for half a year now. I never anticipated that in my life time, I could experience such a great political event, and be involved in such a great social transformation. I had dreamed of being born in the time of revolutionary war. Now I am in a period that has equally far-reaching significance in human history.

In the last few months, we stopped the regular classes in school. We started heated debates on what a genuine proletarian education should be. It was the first time the principals, teachers and other authorities carefully listened to us. It was the first time we, students made changes in schools.

When I first heard of the words "socialism vs. capitalism" and "class struggle" in the political lessons before the Cultural Revolution, I thought I had learnt a lot. I even believed that I

had developed a "class consciousness". Now I know how shallow and naive I was then. It was only through this true class struggle that I know what class struggle is.

When Chairman Mao said that "Class struggles go on every day, every minute and everywhere in our society", I was wondering how come I could not see them. I looked at my surroundings, the school, the community, wherever I went. They seemed to be very peaceful and harmonious. I was told that some class enemies who survived formed secret organizations and plotted to overthrow the people's government. That sounded very scary. And I never heard of any of my acquaintances being involved or even witnessing anything like that. It was also said that some enemies lured children by offering candies and then told them stories or taught them verses to spread feudalism or bourgeois ideology. Once we found an old man was selling some books about gods and ghosts. To us it was the superstition our Party called on people to wipe out in the country. We reported it to the teacher, but it seemed that she did not pay enough attention to it. That was about the most serious class struggle I ever noticed in the society.

Now, since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, I gradually understand what class struggle means in the socialist setting. The counter-revolutionaries in China are not like what I thought as the scattered and isolated individuals or groups who made some faint cries and attempts. Class struggle is everywhere in our life. And it is conducted in a large scale in almost every

field, industry, agriculture, scientific research, medical care, education, etc. It is particularly serious in the cultural areas such as literature, mass media, education, social sciences. Most of these class enemies have power. They are Party members, government officials, or academic authorities. The headquarters of bourgeoisie is not outside the Party, but inside. And their chief leader is nobody but the vice chairman of the Party, Chairman of the national Government, Liu Shaoqi, the number two leader in our country.

It is hard to believe, but it is the fact. For years, those "capitalist roaders" within the Party and the government are criticizing the Party and Chairman Mao's correct leadership. They controlled mass medium and most of the local governments. Some intellectuals used essays, novels and plays to throw innuendos, viciously attacking Chairman Mao's Party line. Liu Shaoqi, when he became the Chairman of the government, followed Helshaof's Soviet Union's revisionist model of socialism. Instead of relying on the broad masses of working people, he depended on a few so-called authorities in science and technology. He advocated a diplomatic policy of surrendering to imperialism. He did not support the armed struggle of the exploited people in the world. He even said exploitation is good, and necessary. There is even more startling facts that he betrayed the Party at the very beginning of the revolution. For decades, he was the representative of the international imperialism and the defeated domestic bourgeoisie.

After that, Chairman Mao asked us to go out of the schools to

"see the world and brave the storm". We became full participants in the Cultural Revolution. We know this was an unprecedented revolution in human history. Though we have overthrown the exploiting class and established a new China, we are still surrounded by feudalist, capitalist traditions. To build a completely new society, we need to sweep clean the filthy mire left over by the old world. These things are in every field of our life.

In literature and arts, very few of the works reflect class struggles and the productive struggle of our people. The world is created by working people, but novels, plays, operas, are filled with emperors and kings, generals and ministers, scholars and beauties. That is why Chairman Mao asked us to "reverse the reversal history, and let workers, peasants and soldiers step on to the stage of history". Some Red Guards went to the libraries. They burned the books that spread feudalist and bourgeois thinking. Some went to theatres. They destroyed costumes and props. Some went to the street to pick up anything they can identify as the Four Olds: old ideology, old culture, old customs and old conventions. Armed with Chairman Mao's thought, with a dauntless revolutionary pioneering spirit, we put daring above everything else.

### **C. The Third Paradigm, Building a Strong Self-thinking**

During that period of the Cultural Revolution, "consciousness" and "critical thinking" were the popular words repeatedly used in Chinese politics. The Red Guards

were told to building up their "consciousness of class struggle" and use their initiatives to critically examine everything in the society. I believe that was how I started to challenge what I used to take for granted. However, my critical thinking and consciousness then was based on a single absolute "truth", i.e. Mao's thought. Under this truth and being deprived of any other information and diversity in thinking, my consciousness was no more than superstition.

The critical thinking in the Cultural Revolution led China to the edge of civil war in 1967 and 1968. Each of different fractions of the Red Guard claimed that they hold the genuine Mao's thought and began to fight against each other. In 1968, Chairman Mao saw the end of the Red Guard's missions, and sent us to the countryside to be "re-educated" by the working people. This new life experience gave me the chance to see the world and life carefully. This was also the period I started to feel the need of having a strong self thinking. It was only after I built a strong self, that I began to step into some real critical thought.

November 2, 1972

I am sure some of my friends got drunk tonight. They talked and laughed so loudly. And suddenly, some one started crying. The room was seized by a dense sad mood. In a minute, I found we were all crying. We did cry with deep grief.

This is the fourth anniversary of our coming to this farm. To celebrate it, we bought wine and food. We are from the same school in Harbin and all went through thick and thin together in this farm on the border far from our homes and parents. I could still remember how we came to this place four years ago.

In the fall of 1966, the great Cultural Revolution was at its climax. Chairman Mao called on the "educated young people to go to the countryside and the mountain areas. He said "the countryside is

a vast world where the educated young people can use their talent to accomplish much". He also pointed out that "the educated young people should go to the countryside to receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants<sup>2</sup>". In response to his call, thousands and thousands Red Guards and other high school students went to the countryside to settle down in different parts of the country.

To settle down in the countryside is not a new idea to me. My inner struggle of sacrificing myself to the hard life of the countryside went on until the Great Cultural Revolution started. At the time, to join in the Cultural Revolution was a more urgent need of the country and the Party. Now Chairman Mao called on us to go there again. My desire revived. I knew that the countryside was still as backward as before, and life was still as hard as before. However this time, three factors made me make up my mind.

First, my revolutionary enthusiasm was still very strong after two years of revolution. I was determined to overcome all the difficulties and hardship to devote my life to the backward countryside. Secondly, something happened in the Cultural Revolution which made it difficult for me to adjust. With the deepening of the revolution, more and more people were identified

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<sup>2</sup>. After liberation, peasants in China were classified according to their economic situation before liberation into five classes, i.e. poor peasants, lower-middle peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants and landlords. The policy of the communist party is to rely on the poor and middle class peasants, unite middle class peasants and to suppress landlords and rich peasants.



as class enemies. In schools, almost all the principals and other leaders were regarded as the "capitalist roaders", because they were the executors of Liu Shaoqi's revisionist educational line. Many teachers as well, particularly, those who did evil things in the old society and those who were the reactionary academic authorities. They were not only criticized, but also physically punished.

Beating became more and more frequent and more and more severe. In some schools, teachers or principals were beaten to death. I had a very hard time whenever I was in such meetings. I knew they were enemies and there should be no any mercy shown to them. Yet I found I was always moving to the back of the room, trying not to be involved. Some people certainly realized this. I was confronted with resentful glances sometimes. I also heard some remarks criticizing those cowards who showed their petty-bourgeois weakness. The comments sounded like they were directed to me.

I hated myself. I did not know why I paid sympathy to the class enemies. Those enemies were often very stubborn. Their files showed that they were policemen, army officials or secret agents of the Koumintang regime before liberation. But they refused to admit that they did the evil things to people then. We all knew that those kinds of people in the old society killed communists and common people relentlessly. I did hate them, but I just could not gather up my courage to fight them face to face. I knew there was still bourgeois thinking in my mind. I need to be re-educated in

the countryside.

With respect to the third factor, something happened in my own family which was more depressing. A close friend of my father was suddenly arrested. He was found having written many letters to his relatives in Hongkong to find ways of escaping from the country. This is the most serious crime of treason. He was also found to have taken a lot of photos of the important industrial construction sites under cover of his profession as a civil engineer. This was the proof that he was preparing secret information about our country for the enemies outside. Unfortunately, he confessed that the camera was borrowed from my father.

Having relatives outside the country is always a big problem. If you are not suspected of being a foreign spy, at least you are subject to bourgeois influence from them through correspondence. My grandfather lived in the United States, and my uncle in Hongkong. After the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, my father decided not to write to them any more. But still we felt a potential crisis was brewing. My father burned all the photographs of them, and we destroyed all the things they mailed to us before. However we did not expect that the trouble would come from a friend.

I know my parents were innocent. They both love the Party and the country. They would not even think of doing anything bad to the country. But they were suspected of working for a foreign intelligence agency. They were asked to report to the police, write about their history, our relatives outside, and our connection to

them. Though my parents did not suffer physically like a lot of identified enemies, they suffered mentally very much, and there were always the danger of becoming class enemies. Because of this, I felt even more pressure in the organization of Red Guard from the school. This also made me decide to leave home. It happened that some of my best friends also decided to go. We chose to go together.

The day I left home was very gloomy. I found a suitcase, and picked the things I felt I would need. My parents could not help me at home. They had too much trouble to care for themselves. I waited for them until the last minute. But neither of them came back. I walked to the train station. It was already dark. I knew my Mom would come home from that direction. I looked carefully. I did find her. She walked very fast, probably she was going to see me before I left. I called her and said: "Mom, I am leaving!" In the darkness I could not see her well. I expected that she would have a lot to say to me. But she just said one word: "OK!" and then turned away. She knew I was not just going to travel for a few days. I was going to settle down there for my life. Three years ago I first talked to her about my desire to go to the countryside. She immediately burst to tears. It seemed she would fight desperately to keep me home. But this time, she did not even have much to say to me.

We came to a farm which used to be a labour camp for prisoners. As the conflicts between the Soviet Union and China became more and more tense, the prisoners of this border camp were

all removed. Thousands of young school students from big cities were sent here. It is now called an Army Farm. Army officers were sent to train us. Though we were not in uniforms, we were actually leading an army life. We were prepared to fight against the Soviet invasion.

But our routine of life was still farming in the field. We had a slogan "Go all out for socialist construction." In the busiest seasons, we got up at 2:30 am., got to the field before dawn, and worked until it was too dark to see in the evening. We called it "Start and finish in the dark. Three meals in the open." In the hot summer, we worked under the sun at the temperature of over 30 centigrade. Often we had competition between groups, and saw which group worked faster. The sweat ran over me just like in a shower. In cold winters we sat on the tractor trailers bumping in the mud road for three or four hours to the mountains to collect wood. Our feet were frozen feeling like being chewed by a cat.

Even though, hard work was the easier part of life this time. The most unbearable thing now was being controlled. When we came, we thought we were Red Guards coming to spread revolution and transform the backward countryside. But after we got here, we found we became the objects of revolution. No one called us Red Guards any more. We became the petty bourgeoisie who needed to be re-educated. Once we were transferred to a very remote camp. The army officer addressed us: "To get rid of your filthy thoughts of bourgeois liberalization, you need to be tempered by hard life. You

should taste the same way of life we had during the war. It is ten kilometres from here. You need to walk there yourselves. There is no transportation for your luggage. Carry them as we did in the war. There will be no heating there either. If you have revolutionary spirit inside, you will not be frozen." We got there, and found a big empty house. The door of the house could not be shut. Twenty of us young guys huddled together to keep ourselves warm. The next morning I found I could not get up because my hair was frozen to the wall.

We tried to argue. Some resisted the orders. They were detained for violating the disciplines. Disciplines, lots of disciplines. We were not allowed to date. We were not even allowed to go back home to see our parents after several months of work. Once we decided to escape. But we were far from the railway station. Soon they caught us and brought us back. In a public meeting held to criticize us, we were forced to make self criticism in front of the large audience.

Since then, I found my revolutionary zeal had all gone. Like a herd of sheep, we were being whipped, driven and tamed. I could hardly feel like a revolutionary pioneer as I did when I was a Red Guard. Those days, one thing came to my mind very often. That is "ME". It had been a negative word since I was born. I try to distance from it. I try to forget it completely. But now, I find I was getting closer and closer to it. I no longer hated it. I am working for it.

I think and think and think about "ME", my past, my life in the farm now and my possible future. Did I ever have any expectations of my future? Yes. I loved science, astronomy first, and then electronics. I wish I could become a scientist. But these wishes were buried deep later by my revolutionary fever. Now I feel I have a burning desire for some kind of self accomplishment. Whenever I think about my future, I get a strong feeling that I have to do something for it. I cannot let my life drift like this any more.

Sometimes I feel I am heading in a dangerous direction. Personal accomplishment is called "bourgeois ambition" criticized by the Party frequently. Many movies displayed that people with such ambitions ended up becoming class enemies. On the other hand, I feel that people seem to be developing more and more self concerns and self interests these days. The revolutionary purity is already gone.

In the public meetings, everybody sounded like echoing the Party documents; however, in private, they had endless complaints. Here we met the "poor and lower middle peasants". They were supposed to possess the best qualities of working people, and we came to receive their re-education. To our surprise, some of them called us stupid to work that hard, and taught us how to loaf on the job. Among those leaders and party members, who are called the "vanguards of revolution", I even found they slandered each other and made conspiracies against each other in their power struggles.

The change of positions among our school graduates also happened. Some become leaders sitting in the offices, making plans and telling others what to do, whereas others, such as me, are still told everyday what to do and what not to do. If you have a silver tongue to win the favour of the leaders, you rise. If not, you sink. I used to think we are in a paradise. Now I found we are in the jungle, and the law here is the fittest survive.

Some of us educated young people from the cities mysteriously disappeared. There were more and more such cases. Finally we found they had moved back to cities. When we left the cities, our registrations as city residents were cancelled. We were not allowed to move back any more. But those people's parents had power, connections, or money. They found ways to bring their children back. This soon became an epidemic. Everybody was trying to find his own way home.

There are fewer and fewer educated youth here now. Some of my best friends left as well. This made me pay attention to another group of people, those who used to be invisible to me. They are the released prisoners who had served their sentences here before we came. All of them were from Beijing, the capital of the nation. After they completed their term of imprisonment, they were not allowed to go back to Beijing. Instead, they had to settle down here. In China, released prisoners are treated not much differently from the real prisoners. They are called "Second Class Prisoners". Once you were in jail, you have no chance to return to your normal

life. I thought they were all criminals such as robbers, rapists, or counter-revolutionaries. This time I got the chance to know them more. To me, many of them had not even committed any crimes.

A young guy had got involved in some street gangs in Beijing. His parents worried he would commit some crimes one day and sent him to the police for help. The police then sent him here for two years forced labour. Now he has been here for six years. One day, some educated youth who heard he was good at boxing deliberately stirred up a fight against him in order to win the fame of superiority. He was reluctant to fight but was finally dragged in. When the leaders came, they did not even bother asking who should be blamed. He was locked up and waited for a public criticism meeting. Whenever the people of this group did something "wrong", it was called the new move of class struggle. And then, they would be punished. That night I heard him sobbing. I used to think they were devils from the hell. Now I realized that they are human too.

A lady who used to be a movie actress had a love affair with an army officer, who had a wife. She was convicted of breaking the army serviceman's marriage, which was a serious crime in China and was sent here for forced labour. Partially because of her personality, she would not like to keep quiet and lower her head like other second class prisoners did everyday. As a result, she was the target of class struggle all year round.

The one who impressed me most was a former university fine arts student. He came to my attention because when I first saw him,



he was walking on his knees. I thought he was crippled, but a few days later, he stood up and did hard work. I was told he just escaped and was caught. He could not walk because his foot was injured by punishment. During the four years I am here, he escaped seven times. Each time he was caught and punished more severely. A few weeks ago, he failed his last attempt of escaping. He splashed gasoline in his room and committed suicide by burning himself.

I got the chance to talk to his best friend, another second class prisoner. He told me though he behaved like a iron-hearted person, actually he was very soft inside. Whenever he wrote to his parents in Beijing, he always told them he was a good man here. He said to them the leader trusted him and often praised him. He could not go back home because he loved this place and was always busy working. I never thought a man like him also needed a good name. He had no dignity in this world at all. But it seemed he still wanted it. Perhaps it was just because of his thirst for dignity and self value that urged him to escape and to end his life.

The other day I was assigned to clean a storage room. In a big trunk, I found a lot of music scores, albums, paintings, technical books, etc. They really did not fit in this place. They should belong to a university. I asked some one who has been here for years. He told me that these things belonged to the prisoners. Lots of them were intellectuals who were artists, musicians, scientists, professors. Every item had a long story about those people. Among them included some very famous authors. I did not

know such a remote farm had witnessed so much human misfortune. The dark side of the society reveals in front of me.

Then what about myself? Is my fate better than those first class and second class prisoners? Am I also a prisoner myself? How much freedom do I have? How much value am I given? How much dignity can I enjoy? Those revolutionary martyrs who died in the jails of the old society wanted more innocents to die in the jails of a new society? I was told to forget my own self. I was told my own interests should be subordinate to the interests of revolution. What is this revolution? Is it a joke? Is it a lie? I don't want to be fooled and taken advantage of any more. I need to think. I need to find answers myself. I used to believe that we have found all the answers of human society from Marxism, Leninism and Mao Tuetong Thought. Now I know it is far from that simple. No one can find answers for me. If I want to know, I have to learn to teach myself. I used to think that Chairman Mao and the Communist Party were the saviours of the world and its people. Now I know no one is going to save me. If I want to change my fate, if I want to be free, I have to be the saviour of my own. This is the time I can see the value of my own.

#### D. The Forth Paradigm, Critical Thinking and the Regained Social Consciousness

Having built up a strong self thinking, I found I came to a new stage of critical thinking. From that time, I really started observing and thinking and making my own judgements. I was lucky to be enroled in a college to study English in 1973, after five years of working in the farm. English was like a small opening window through which I could see a lot of the rest of the world. College life also gave me the opportunity to meet more educated people, and exchange our thinking. This caused a transition of the paradigm from the self-consciousness of fighting for my own future, to the new social consciousness of fighting for the future of all the people in the country.

June 24, 1976

Tomorrow I will graduate from Qiqihar Teacher's College. After three years' study in the Department of Foreign Languages, I will soon be a English teacher. This certainly is a major change in my life. After these years of English learning, what does English as a foreign language mean to me?

"One gets his shoes wet inevitably if he walks along the river often". This Chinese saying is often used to liken people who learn a foreign language, which could make the learner contaminated and vulnerable to the exposure of foreign 'virus'."

The word "China" in Chinese means "the country in the centre of the world". Whether China should open its door to the rest of the world is debated for hundreds of years. In Qing Dynasty, the last kingdom in Chinses modern history, there was the

westernization movement. But it was defeated by a coup before it got power to make substantial changes. Chinese Nationalists period before the Communists took over was the time China was closest to the western world. There were even scholars who tried to testify that "the American Moon was rounder than the Chinese Moon". But these periods were relatively temporary in modern history. Their voice was very faint. The phrase "the American Moon was rounder than the Chinese Moon" was not only used as a laughing stock, but also used as a stick waved against those who still dare to claim that there were something better outside. In this period of more than a hundred year's Chinese modern history, almost all the famous Chinese translators who introduced western literature and culture to China died in violence.

After 1949, communist China witnessed the overall exclusion of the western influences. Almost everything western was counted as imperialism. An independent China meant a China without anything western. In schools and universities, there were no western studies. Even the names of the western scientists were seldom mentioned. Western languages, including English were banned in schools and universities for more than a decade.

I was born in the year of the Korean war. At the time, very few Chinese understood that Chinese soldiers was fighting against the armies sent by the United Nations. They knew they were fighting against the Americans, and Americans were called "devils". Children in China heard so much about how the Chinese army fought against

the Americans, that "Chinese vs. Americans" became the substitute of "good vs. bad". Once I saw a Russian movie, which was about the war against German invasion. I was asked to tell my little friends the story of it. At the age of 7, I did not even know what Russians and German were. I told them it was the Chinese fighting against Americans. It happened that an adult overheard it. He laughed and joked: "How comes that the Chinese had such big noses?"

In the 1950s, the foreign country that was China's friend was the Soviet Union. Russians were the "big brother". In the Chinese textbooks, if the things were not invented by Chinese, it must be invented by Russians. To a lot of Chinese, Marx and Engles were Russians.

English was banned in all the schools and universities after 1949. At that time, the only foreign language that was taught in schools were Russian. In the early 1960s, Sino-Soviet relationship deteriorated. China felt its isolation. It was only after then that China started teaching English as a foreign language in schools and universities.

Both my parents knew English. My grand father moved to the United States in 1920s, and lived there for more than forty years. He sent back the money he earned through hard work in his laundry shop near New York to support his family. My father was brought up in Hongkong and had most of his schooling in Hongkong. He learned English in schools and university before liberation. My mother was sent to English missionary schools. She learned her English from

the native speakers. After liberation, she was a high school teacher of mathematics. After 1960, when English was restored in China, she was assigned to teach English.

Though my parents never spoke English at home, English was not totally strange to me since I was a little child. I remember I enjoyed flipping the big books of my father. Being an civil engineer, he had a lot of English books of architecture. I liked to look at those beautiful pictures of baroque, gothic and modern buildings in them. I also came across several English story books. I saw some very interesting illustrations in them and was very curious about these unknown stories.

It was stated earlier that in China it was a general belief that learning a foreign language and being exposed to a foreign culture inevitably contaminated the person and turned this person against his or her own culture. This statement is not true, at least, in the case of my parents. Both of them learned English and were exposed to western culture. However, they were never very critical of the Chinese tradition and culture. I never heard them challenging the government either. My mother was in Christian missionary schools for many years, but she never even got to believe in God. In 1960, my father got the chance to visit my grandmother in Hongkong. At the time Hongkong was in the large scale of construction. He got very good job offers and many of his relatives and friends persuaded him to stay. But he went back to China, to the country he loved and was devoted to, but also the

country in which he and his family were suffering from the most serious starvation due to the natural disasters and wrong economic policies.

My parents always told me to listen to the Party and conform to the system. When they read the critical remarks in my letters from the farm, they were very worried, and wrote very frequently to me to correct my dangerous thinking. My rejection of communism came from my own life experience, but also from the communist education. The Communist Party told us that the old world was bad and the outside world was bad too. The only one that was the idealist. From the very beginning of my life, I was convinced that the world should be an ideal one and could be an ideal one. When I saw that the reality was just the opposite, I was not only disillusioned, but also was very passionate to seek for social change.

This does not mean that I got no influence from my family in the later change of my thinking. I was in the minority of children in China who got to know more about the outside world. We got letters, photographs and mail from the United States and Hongkong. I remember well that in 1960, when I was ten, China was in a long period of famine. My uncle mailed food to us from Hongkong. When we opened the parcel, it was such a surprise to see that all these cans of food in the mail were made in China. We thought that we were starving because China had not produced enough food for its people. Then we got to know that the people outside the country were eating Chinese food while we were starving.

Some photographs of my grandfather showed that he stood in front of a house which looked quite like his home or he sat in a car which he must be driving. Also he always looked very healthy and happy. Usually my parents told me that my grandfather had a very hard life in the United States. He was exploited just like the poor workers in old China. It was only because the U.S. dollar was much more valuable that he was able to support his family in Hongkong for so many years with his very limited income. I did believe that. But sometimes I had a sneaking suspicion because in my mind the poor people should be homeless, in rags and also look very sad. Was it possible that being poor in different countries could mean different things?

My parents also talked about the universities in old China. They said at that time, the professors often openly criticized the nationalist government in the classes. What I knew was that the nationalists had a lot of secret agents in universities and other places. They often secretly arrested or assassinated the political dissidents. No one dared to criticize the government at that time. But my parents said the nationalists adopted some of the systems from the western world, so they allowed some democracy in the universities. Which was true?

They sometimes also talked about how Americans helped Chinese to fight against the Japanese invasion. Our teacher told us that only the Red Army of the Soviet Union had helped China in that war. The United States did not even fight seriously during the World War



Two. It always tried to push the war to the Soviet Union, and waited for the Red Army to defeat German and Japanese. These were also recorded in history books. Why did my parents say that?

Questions like these had been in my mind for long time. I noticed the discrepancies. During the Cultural Revolution, some children reported their parents's counter-revolutionary statements or activities to the authorities. Some of them were very like what my parents said. I did not do that because I knew that would ruin them if I did the same. It was also because I believed that they did love the Party and the country, though they still needed to transform their bourgeois thinking. I did not start to try hard to make sense of these contradictions I heard until very late. During the Cultural Revolution, I thought I had developed critical consciousness, and began to challenge every thing like other Red Guards. But we never challenged the cultural Revolution itself. I did not challenge the communist propaganda either. It was interesting that these pieces of knowledge which differed from the authority were kept in mind uninvestigated until I developed new consciousness.

This new consciousness was my self consciousness. When I realized the value of my own self, and became consciously working for my own future, I found myself really starting to challenge what I had never challenged. This happened when I was in the last year of my farm life. I realized that I needed to have my own independent thinking, instead of following authorities. Such

contradicted information became more interesting and stimulating than the official information. At that time, there was very limited information available. But finally I got a good resource, i.e., foreign radio broadcasting.

Actually, this was a very dangerous thing to do. For years in China, listening to the "enemy's radio" was a serious crime, which could put the person in jail. At that time, several of us, young farmers, slept in one big bed. That was to say we all lined up in the position of pillow to pillow. But I had a little ear phone with my radio, and I hid it under my blanket. In this way, I was able to listen to broadcasts of the Voice of America, B.B.C., Radio Moscow (which was also an enemy radio then), N.H.K. (Japanese radio), etc. These broadcasts were all in the Chinese language. I listened to them very often without being found.

Listening to these radio broadcasts opened up a new world for me. I soon came to the conclusion that all of the Chinese official media were propaganda serving for their politics. There was no reliability in them at all. Radio Moscow was propaganda too. It always criticized Chinese government. I did not like to listen to it more because it did sound like an enemy radio, and I felt more threatened to listen to it. Western radios were objective. They seldom criticized things in China. They talked about facts.

Listening to those radios also sparked my motivation to learn English. At that time, the Voice of America was often jammed. But when it turned to English language, the jam was gone. Sometimes, I

got the English teaching programs in these radio stations. I wondered if I could learn English again so I could listen to them in English directly.

As a matter of fact, I was never really interested in learning English before that. When my mother started teaching English in a high school in 1962, I often heard her playing some records of spoken English at home. She bought a set of records produced in China. As they were played again and again, I was very familiar with the sound. I could even recite some of them fluently, but did not even know a word in them. My mother had tried to teach me. However I found it very boring, as they all talked about the things in China, and mostly about our political life in China.

In 1963, I entered junior high school. That was the first time I had English class. The teacher was very glad to know that my mother taught English, as very few of us had parents who knew English. She made me the monitor to take the lead of English study in the class. But I really disappointed her as I never attended her class seriously and my English scores were no better than the average.

It was different this time when I picked up English again. I found I tried to use every minute for it. Every morning, we had one hour of what was called "Everyday Reading". It was the compulsory time set for reading Chairman Mao's works. In this hour no one dared to do anything else, but holding the red covered Chairman Mao's book. I bought an English translation of Chairman Mao's book.

At that time. the only English books available in the book stores were Mao's books. They were also red covered just like the Chinese ones. I read them every morning, people seldom noticed it. I did not try very hard to avoid being found, because they were really Mao's books, and I was reading him.

Reading Chairman Mao's book should be more boring than learning English in high school. High school English before the Cultural Revolution still had some interesting stories and tales from the English speaking countries. But Mao's books had one advantage for me. I was very familiar with the content. I could recite some of the articles in them. So when I read them in English, I seldom needed to look at the dictionary. Soon I could recite some of them in English.

Perhaps, more motivation came from my self consciousness. Before I realized the importance of my self control of my own future, I was like a sailboat blown by the wind and a drift in the current. Now I was holding the steering wheel, and consciously heading to my self actualization. I found this became a powerful drive for me to do whatever I felt I needed. In the following few months, I also picked up my high school textbooks of math, physics, chemistry etc. I felt I needed to save my life by saving my time. I did not know exactly what my future would be. But I knew I needed to get prepared for the chances to come.

The chance did come. In 1972, Chairman Mao instructed that the universities be restored. In 1973, I was enroled by Qiqihar

teacher's college to study English as my major. Taking English as my career was actually not my best choice. I liked to be in the field of science and technology. At that time, many Chinese did not like to study social sciences, such as philosophy, history, politics, etc. It was because these areas were very political. There was no freedom of scientific inquiry or independent thinking allowed. To be in these areas was to become the speakers of the government. And even worse, people were very likely to fall victims in the political changes which was always unpredictable. On the other hand, some people took these studies as the ladders to climb onto the top of the bureaucracy. Students from those departments were often assigned to the government offices. In a totalitarian society, power is everything. It is very attractive to a lot of people in China, but certainly not to me.

Language studies, including Chinese language as well as foreign languages belong to social sciences as well in China. A lot of people wanted to be in foreign languages departments, because that was the way leading to those very privileged positions of diplomatic and foreign trade officials. But teaching English in schools was a totally different story. After the Cultural Revolution, people had seen how teachers were criticized, humiliated and even persecuted to death. They also saw that teachers did the hard work but got very low pay. They even found in this land of the great teacher Confucius, teachers were no longer respected as they had been in thousands of years of history. Very

few people wanted to be teachers. I did not either.

At that time, political criteria was more important than the academic criteria in enrolling university students. I was not a party member, and my family background was not good either. This made me at the bottom of the list of the candidates, though I got very high scores in the entrance examinations. The following anecdote may show how academic scores were not an important factor of the enrolment.

Candidates who wanted to be in foreign language majors had to take an oral examination according to the rule. I was taken to a room with four examiners. One of them asked me in Chinese if I could say something to them in English. Any thing I liked. I recited Chairman Mao's article "Serve the People" in English to them. That was what I learned in the farm and I was very fluent in it. They all seemed to be satisfied and told me to wait for the decision. I was admitted and I became a student of that college. I happened to meet one of the four examiners who tested me. He said to me with a smile: "Tell you the truth. On that day none of us in that room really knew any English. But we were asked to do that. Anyway, we all agreed that you spoke fluently." My lord! If I have had spoken Korean to them that day, I would probably have also passed that exam!

Another absurd thing I saw in the university was that whoever studied hard and got better achievements would be criticized as a bourgeois careerist. It was said that we were not there with a bag

to fill in with knowledge. Our three historical responsibilities in the university were: to attend the university, to run the university, and to transform the university with Mao Tsuetung thought. In this political atmosphere, there emerged a lot of opportunists who had Marxist slogans on the tips of their tongues, but never revealed what they were up to inside. They criticized academic competition. Instead, a political competition was rampant. Those who criticized others' as bourgeois ambitionists tried every way to get up-hand politically by defeating their competitors politically. They knew that if they could become party member and hold power in hand, they could decide their future. Those who were powerless would be sent back to the countryside to teach schools, whereas those political winners could escape the fate of being a teacher and became political leaders in big cities.

Life became more complicated here than in the countryside. Dealing with land on the farm was not easy. But it was even harder to deal with the living objects of human beings. Here everybody had to put on a false face. Even if you did not want to be a party member, still you needed to write your application frequently, and report your thinking (not honestly though) to the party secretary periodically. Because how the leaders judged your political attitude would decide where to assign you after your graduation.

Gradually, I found I could not fulfil my self accomplishment in such a political atmosphere. To become successful in any field in this country meant that you had to give up your honesty and

innocence, and be more and more involved in the dirty political tricks. If you were not successful in politics, you could not have any professional success in any areas. I came to the conclusion that if there were no change of this system, there would be no any decent future for my own.

Not everybody liked to tell lies. At least I found one who spoke about it openly. We became very good friends, and he gave me lot of influence later. He was my professor. Once we had a class discussion on "Being Red and Specialized". This was the slogan in China since 1960s. "Red" meant being politically sound, in other words following the Party closely. During the Cultural Revolution it meant particularly being actively involved in class struggles. Being specialized meant becoming experts in one's profession. This slogan meant that one should not be simply specialized in his or her own profession, but also be "red" in politics. At the time when I was in the university, it was argued that so long as you were "red", you would automatically become specialized, as a correct line of ideology was the guarantee of one's professional improvement. At that time, nobody even dared to say that being "specialized" was equally important. But in the class discussion that day, our professor did.

He argued that if being "specialized" was not important, why did people go to a surgeon for an operation instead of turning to a party secretary! The next morning, a big poster was put on the hallway, criticizing him encouraging students to become "White and



Specialized" instead of being "Red". Everybody knew what "White" meant. It was the symbol of bourgeoisie, capitalism, and the overthrown Chinese Nationalist rule. We often used the term "White Terror" to mean the "cruel suppression" against the revolution of the old regime. We all understood what serious consequence this poster would bring to the professor.

At the time, some of our students, including me were very sympathetic to him. We tried every way to help him pass that crisis. I and he established very good relationship after that. We two often talked for the whole night, and the topic of conversation was politics. I was very impressed by his wide range of knowledge and his sharpness in thinking. However his wife did worry that we had gone too far in talking about these very sensitive things.

Perhaps, this was what I benefited most in the three year of my college life. I met those people, the professors and some students, who had more sophisticated thinking, and who did not only challenged the system but also studied the system carefully. I also got a lot of books to read. The English department had something which was forbidden outside, such as some foreign journals and audio-visual materials. Those things all challenge my old thinking, and brought fresh knowledge to me. We even got a chance to speak English with foreigners.

In our last year, the college arranged for us to practice oral English in the international harbour in Tianjin, where we worked as waiters and shop clerks in the harbour to find the chance

to talk to the foreign sailors. That was the first time we got some real contact with foreigners. Those things impressed us most. We found that the "small Japanese" were no longer small. As it had been generally noticed that Japanese were relatively smaller than Chinese, but also because the Japanese invasion in the World War Two, a lot of Chinese called Japanese "Small Japanese". But this time, we found most of the Japanese in the harbour were quite tall. They also looked very healthy and strong. There, we were told that the average Japanese growth had been dramatically increasing since the war, because of the high nutrition food they had.

The other thing we heard was that those Asian countries and regions such as South Korea, Hongkong, Taiwan, and Singapore had become well developed. People's living standards were much higher. This should have happened in the socialist countries such as China, North Korea, or North Vietnam, because we said that our system was superior. But we found people from socialist countries were very poor. We saw the sailors from Poland which hardly had any coins in their pocket. They called themselves from "poor land".

At that time, meeting foreigners was very political and sensitive to Chinese. We were warned not to talk about things like the country's military information, Party and government personnel changes, any figures regarding industry, agriculture, and other fields. We were even warned not to discuss life style and religion. Another discipline was each of us could not talk to foreigners alone. We were told that was for our own good, because in case we

were subject to any investigation, we could testify for each other that we did not release national secrecy or said anything that harmed the country. When the foreign sailors heard of this, they laughed and said it was not for us to testify for each other but also for us to watch each other. This was something we did not realize at the moment. Talking to those foreigners gave us very different points of view of seeing things.

We talked to a Norway captain about Vietnam War, which was going on then. We said according to Chairman Mao's thought that imperialism was a paper tiger which did not have real power. The thing that decided the result of wars was not weapons, but man's spirit. In this sense, a small country could defeat a big country. The captain disagreed. He argued that if the big countries such as China and U.S.S.R. were not behind Vietnam, Vietnam would have been defeated long ago. His argument may sound very natural to the westerners, but to the people like us at that moment, in a close China with very little information, it was very fresh and striking. Many things we experienced there might have had an explosive effect in my thinking and ultimately accelerated the change of my belief and value.

I would say that taking English as my career really opened up the world to me. Though I did not choose to take it myself, I do not regret this. In the past few years in the college, and then to become a school teacher of English, and later teaching in the Teachers'

University in Foreign Languages Department, I found I went through a process of self enrichment. My mind is shifted from focusing on a myself career and self accomplishment to the much broader attentions of human existence. I found I also adjusted my own principles of morality. I no longer believe that the fulfilment of self accomplishment is the most important thing to me, especially if it is at the cost of my good conscience. I would not conform to the evil communist system in exchange for the success of my own career. I would rather be a fighter for social justice, equality and progress.

It is strange that in some sense I have gone through a circle and come back to the point where I started. That is the point of my belief of human emancipation and self sacrifice, when I was a high school student. But at that time, I was simple minded and did not know to whom and how I should sacrifice. In this period after I started learning English, I read a lot of books in politics, history, philosophy. I had a lot of friends with whom we exchange ideas. I found I had well formed my own individual thinking.

## **E. Paradigm Five, Initial Cross-cultural Consciousness**

### **1) Moving as Life Change**

In 1983, I was teaching in the Foreign Languages Education Department of a Teacher's University in China. I suddenly got a chance to work as a interpreter for a Chinese delegation visiting West Germany. I did not know German, but I was asked to translate in English because the Germans we would meet could all speak English.

I knew that would become a very great experience in my life, because I had never stepped onto any foreign land until then. The mobility of Chinese people's life is usually quite limited compared to that of Westerners. Most people settle in one place and live there generation after generation. Travelling is not frequent either. Those few changes of travelling in my past always give me very rich experience and deep memory. Most strikingly, they also mark the major changes in my life.

My mother told me that when I was one year old, she took me to my grandmother's home in south China for a visit. Before we left, I could hardly say any words. On the train, I suddenly pointed to a nearby passenger and said: "old man". That was the first time I really spoke. As soon as we got to my grandmother's house after more than thirty hours of train ride, I surprised everybody by uttering a long sentence: "There are no electric lights in Grandmother's home."

When I was sixteen, I lived in my aunt's home in Canton in

south China for two month. When I came back, I found I had grew three inches in about two months. People who knew me well said that my voice had changed. Some one even said that the way I walked, and talked were all different. I got some new manner and personality.

These might be exaggerated. But I knew how different I became. I developed a lot of new interests and abilities. I had a new view of my own capacity. That visit seemed to have turned a new page of my life. I want to call it the start of my own "Renaissance".

We used to have an organ and a violin at home. I had tried my hands on them for a few times but failed to learn to play. After that I did not even dare to touch them any more. But in my aunt's home, I saw my cousins playing, which gave me new incentive. Coming back from my aunt's home, I got new incentives to learn them. I started and the progress was so fast that I soon could not only play these two but also many other keyboard and string instruments such as accordion, Chinese erhu, dulcimer, etc.

I liked drawing. My aunt's family appreciated my art work highly. This motivated me to take it more seriously. I then started learning oil painting and traditional Chinese ink painting. There were no professionals to teach me. I followed the instructions of the books and practised myself. My achievements in arts were recognized by professionals. This gave me the chances to paint for street advertising and political campaigns. I almost took art as my career.

Probably, I cannot gave all the merits of my personal

development to some short visits and travelling. However, living with different people, experiencing different ways of life, (in some degree, they are different cultures) did enrich my thinking tremendously. This served as chemical catalysts to bring about changes in life and personal development.

The even bigger changes I went through were during my life in the farm. I would say that without it, I would have been a totally different person. Though I experienced a lot of bitterness, I never regret that I took that part of life and I always believed that it was the best part of my education I have ever received.

## **2) Before I left for Germany**

I feel that short visit of three months is very significant to me. It was my first sight and taste of a western country. It really enriched me because I experienced so many differences of culture, tradition, way of life, and social-economic system.

Visiting a foreign country can be a very unusual experience to most of the people in the world. However, to a Chinese who had always been living in China, visiting a western world is really much more than the words "unusual experience" can describe. The western world is called "the hell" by some Chinese, and "the heaven" by some others. Living in their isolated world, Chinese seldom think that they really share the same planet with rest of the world. The walls between them and the rest of the world are always seen as impassable. I was really the luckiest to get the

opportunity to see the outside of China.

Just a few days after I was told to get prepared for the visit, every one around me heard of the news, in the university I was teaching then and in the neighbourhood where I lived. Some people saw me as a hero. My friends were very proud of introducing me to others by telling them: "He is going to visit **Western Germany** next month!" And immediately I was met with the looks in awe.

To some Chinese, the Western world was the heaven. They knew that the westerners were rich. They lived in deluxe houses with cars, telephones, and other sophisticated modern facilities such as refrigerators, electrical stoves, washing machines, and even domestic robots.

Besides congratulations, I also got a lot of advice. Many people told me that I had to be very careful in the western world, where murder, explosion, robbery, and kidnapping were the routines of daily life. I was also advised not to enter the public washrooms, because public washrooms charged money. At that time, most members of Chinese delegations were not given foreign currency and only the leaders of the group held the money. Therefore, if I could not afford to pay for the bathroom, I would not be allowed to go out.

The most frequent warnings I heard were political ones. At the time of 1983, China was already in its seventh year of economical reform. The "Red Terror" of the Cultural Revolution was gone. Politically, some people became quite open minded and open



speaking. There were even articles on magazines criticizing Marxism. However, the majority were still living in the fear. Those who had experienced various political campaigns in the last thirty years told young people that they had been spoiled too much, and that a new purge was just at the corner.

I was told that the Chinese secret agents working for the government was everywhere in the world. What I said in Germany might all be recorded and reported back to China. The party secretary gave me a lesson. He sounded even graver. He told me that the western intelligent agents would work hard on us to squeeze out the secret information about our nation. The western capitalists would also play tricks and lay traps in order to win in business negotiations. He cited several examples of how money and women were involved to bribe and blackmail the Chinese delegations, and how some of them fell victims without knowing the serious consequences. Then he emphasized: "You are the interpreter of the delegation, the only one who can communicate directly with people in your visit. If they want to get something from your group, it is definitely through your mouth. You have to put a lock on your lips. Not to mention anything that can be used against our country. Modern technology enables foreign intelligence agencies to figure out everything they want just from our plain daily conversations. Numbers are always the most important information our enemies want. You should not mention any figures of our national defence, economic development, education, population. market prices . . ."

I already had enough knowledge to know what he said was not true at all. As a matter of fact, he sounded so ridiculous that it made me think he was joking. I laughed and told him that I had a very poor memory of numbers. I could not even remember the date of my wife's birthday. Besides, I added, any dumb foreign intelligence agencies knew much more numbers about China than an ordinary teacher of English could know. But he immediately confirmed that he was serious. He said: "What is important is your political stand. What you do always shows on which side you stand." This made me on alert: anything I do there could be used against me, even if I am very careful.

Those warnings did overshadowed my jubilation. My mother persuaded me to give up this trip. But I knew how important this trip was to me. I knew I needed to tell myself quite often that I had to be cautious not to do anything which would cause me serious troubles when I got back home. However, in Germany I actually never stopped searching for the answers of the social and political questions which I had kept in mind for years. I held "Seeing is believing". I had been quite skeptical of communist propaganda, about the capitalist world for a couple of years. Now it was the opportunity for me to see with my own eyes what it was like. How could I give up this precious opportunity so easily.

### **3) Experiencing Germany**

My experience of West Germany was extra-ordinary. Almost every

minute was exciting to me, and I felt every minute was learning too. The first thing that impressed us most was the speed of German life. Right after we stepped on to the land of that country in Frankfurt airport, we were seated into a minibus. The driver helped us with the seat belts which we never saw before. Bonded into that belt, I had a feeling that the coming journey was an adventure with danger. When we got onto Autobahn, many of us felt car sick as we had never experienced such high speed. Riding on the highway with other fast moving traffic made me feel I was part of this swift running machine, and not only did I have to adjust my watch to German time, but also had I to adjust to the German pace.

The first few days schedule was very full. Telephone appointments, punctuation on meetings, fast food, effective management. All of these were in sharp contrast with the slow moving of Chinese life. In China, it was quite usual that people arrived at their work ten or fifteen minutes late, chatted with each other for a while, and then started working. When the morning newspaper came, people working in offices would like to read paper and have some tea. After lunch, most of people are used to having a nap for half an hour or even longer. In the afternoon, some would even leave their work to do some shopping.

Germans told us that their trains run one hundred kilometres an hour. When they heard that Chinese trains mostly only run about forty kilometres, they laughed and joked that they could pick up flowers on the side of the railways. Some of them who had been to

China gave some other examples. Chinese telephones were like toys. You shout into it but got no answers. It took a week to have an ordered pizza delivered to their hotel room. I knew they did not mean to hurt us by saying those things, but I felt disgraced. Most Chinese feel that the reputation of the nation is more important than their own as individuals.

In the 1950s, we had the slogan for the country's economic development: "Catching up with Great Britain in three years, and surpass the United States in five years." Though nobody talked about that later, I still believed that was only a matter of time. Yet now I realized how slow we were. How could we catch up with anybody if we moved much more slowly?

People often took us as Japanese in West Germany, because there were many Japanese business people and tourists in Europe; seldom they met people from mainland China. Once we were looking at a shop window, a man pointed at the Japanese TVs and other electronic products in it and said to us, "They were made in your country." In Germany, we saw the power of Japanese products in the German market, as there were so many things made in Japan. I had very complicated feeling on this. First of all, like many Chinese, I tended to downplay Japanese success as the Japanese invasion of China still left a big scar in Chinese minds. We emphasized more of how much Japanese inherited Chinese culture and tradition, instead of their achievements. However during the trip in West Germany, I felt, more or less, proud of them as we were both Asians. They

seemed to have shown to the world for us that oriental do not have to be poor and backward. However this feeling created further humiliation. How could we Chinese share the pride of those whom we called "small Japanese"! We should be much better than them.

We met different kinds of Germans, big company bosses, technicians, and workers. We also had some contact with other people who were not in our business. We visited families, chatted with people in parks and restaurants, and played volleyball with a community club. I got the opportunity to meet some university professors, school teachers and children, and even two communist members in a factory. When I came back, I found I had so much to talk about that country.

Though I was told again that I should not draw a picture of that country that made Chinese people feel the western world is better, I felt I had the responsibility to tell my fellow Chinese what was going on outside. Sometimes I had to play some language games, using less sensitive words but got my message through.

People, especially my university students, liked to hear about what Germany was like. We talked about the magnificent sceneries, the amazing achievements of science and technology, people's daily life, human relationships, politics, most things I saw or heard there. People believed me and even took me as an authority of that country. Sometimes I even feel that they took me as a German or a best person to ask any questions about the western world. Some questions addressed to me required facts, some sought for

explanations, and some were very philosophical. Two students argued about what Germans look like. According to the movies they saw, one of them concluded that most of them are tall and slim with long faces. The other believed Germans are short and round-faced. They came to me for a final judgement. "Let's see what somebody who has really been to the country would say about this!" they said.

Most people who talked to me about Germany wanted to know more about how people lived there. "If people's life there is really that good as you just said, does that mean there are no poor people in that country at all?" I was asked. To answer this question, I told them the following anecdote. Once we saw a young girl in "rags" walking in the street with a can in her hand. She was begging money from the people passing by. She looked pale and sad and tired. Then she sat on the street exhausted. My audience was very eager to know if there are really beggars in that industrialized western country. Then I told them that the girl turned out to be collecting donations for an religious organization which was preparing a medical fund for the third world. "But why she could not afford decent clothing for herself?" Someone asked. "The way she was dressed was the latest fashion in West Germany." I told them. "Many young people like to make holes in their new jeans." Every one felt relieved and was delighted to hear that.

That was the year of serious economic recession in the western world. We say a lot of companies went bankrupt and people lost their jobs. I told my audience that being unemployed in the western

world was not as bad as we thought either. The communist education told people that unemployment means starving to death in the western world. What I saw there was that unemployment was usually temporary. And some people were unemployed not because they could not find a job, but they did not want to move to another city or did not like to do something different. They still had a lot of their own choices. Also, they had social welfare to keep them and their families warm and filled.

"What about the rich?"

My answer was that the rich people in West Germany were not like what we thought either. Most of them I saw worked hard. They did not swagger around with ferocious body guards as described in our books. Those bosses of companies I met did not even hire house keepers and did their own domestic work themselves. They were very polite to their inferiors. We also met a city mayor and several other important politicians. They appeared to us sincere and warm. There was no sign of their being powerful and arrogant, let alone suppressing workers on strike or assassinating union leaders as we had been told before. I told my audience that proletarians in West Germany were enjoying two days rest in each week, and as long as two months of summer holidays. Still they were striking to demand cutting two hours of work every day.

"What about Marxism and communists in Germany?"

I did tried to find an answer for this question when I was there. In a company of about eight hundred workers, there were only

two German Communist Party members. But we were told that they were radicals and often did crazy things. Though Germany is Marx's home country, seldom we met people who felt proud of him. We were taken to the border of East Germany, where we saw the big walls, live wire entanglement, mined no-man regions, and the fully armed soldiers. All these were set by the East German government, not for preventing the invasions from the west, but for controlling their own people from getting to the west.

We lived in a small town near the border for a few weeks. We heard so many sad stories about the life in East Germany from those people who just visited there or who knew things there, the lack of daily necessities in their market such as bread and nails, fighting for a seat in a restaurant, secret exchange of East German Marks to West German Marks on the black market, and the political control and persecution. Even so, East Germany was said to be the best in living standard among the eastern European countries.

In the airplane flying back to China, we reflected on Germany again. As we counted so many good things we saw there, we could hardly name anything that was bad to us. Finally we got one. That was pornography and prostitution, which was so conspicuous. Communist China was very proud of its success in wiping these things out completely. Even in this we found the difference from what we had assumed before. We thought these prostitutes were forced to be in that business like those women in old China who were sold to the brothels. Germans told us that prostitutes in



Germany chose that profession. They were rich and they drove most expensive cars.

One thing my party secretary said was correct, i.e., the importance of the interpreter's mouth. I found my translation in many ways influenced or even directed the thinking of the other members of the group though I did translate honestly. The nine other group members were all technicians, and most of them were young. They did not have as much background knowledge of the western world as I did. In the translation, I often gave them some explanations or suggestions of further questions in order to continue the conversations with our German hosts. I realized that these explanations and suggestions quite often led the directions of the conversation. That is to say that our team members often got to know what I wanted to know or what I wanted them to know.

When our Chinese team was together, I liked to start the conversations that could make my colleagues aware of some thing they had not paid enough attention to, or reflecting on some issues that we had discussed with Germans. This might have been subconsciously controlled by my instinct of being a teacher. I believed that I should make more and more Chinese understand the problems of the Chinese society under the dictatorship and our responsibilities of making social change. But I was careful enough not to show my intention.

At the end of our trip, a young woman in the group seemed to be looking for a conclusion. She noted what made West Germany an

advanced society was its "relationships of production". The terms "relationships of productions vs. the forces of production" are used by Marx to mean the relationship between the political system and economical development. Chinese had been taught that the socialist system has the superior "relationships of production" in the world, which releases the most of the "forces of production". In contrast, the "relationships of production" in the capitalist world hinders the development of the "forces of production". I noticed she used this more technical term to void pointing to the communist system directly. I winked at her, and that made her a little bit panic. Later I whispered to her: "You think socialism does not work! Don't worry, I won't tell anybody."

#### **4) Initial Cross-cultural Consciousness**

On the whole, the experience of this German visit had a reawakening, refreshing and reviving effect on me. The experience of another way of life and social system is like a catalyst in challenging my old beliefs and assumptions. The visit to West Germany convinced me that the "capitalist world" is far from being "moribund" as Lenin described. It was full of vitality and was developing at a very high speed. It is not like what Marx observes that the proletarians are digging the tombs for the capitalist, and there was no sign that the struggle between the two was life and death. On the contrary, the society was peaceful and well regulated. Human values were highly appreciated. Individuals were

well respected.

The German visit also gave me the chance to reflect on my own society. In comparison with the West Germany I saw, a question always obsessed me: "What is wrong with my own society?" At the time, the only answer I could arrive at was that the so called "socialism" in the form of dictatorship is the main objection of social development in China. The bad labels we gave to the capitalist world in fact are more suitable to my own country. The country is full of exploitation made by a few who impose their wills onto the majority and, who enjoy all the political and economic privileges. Because of this inequality, which is always depicted as perfect equality, people under the oppression are full of grievance, complaints, resentment and hatred. Economic competition in the capitalist world is not leading people to fight face to face against each other. But in the communist world, political competition made the country a jungle of "the fittest survive". Quarrelling and name calling in public is not the worst thing. More struggles were conducted in the darkness. Slandering, instigating, intriguing are everywhere.

Probably, the worst thing is that people living in such social conditions seldom become conscious of its problems, let alone finding what causes the problems and how to solve the problems. Having opportunities to see the diversity of the different social systems and cultures is definitely a best way to raise people's consciousness. If China is closed, it can last for thousands of

years with little change. However, if China keeps open, the change will come soon and no one can stop it.

I would say that the communist doctrines I had received in the past thirty years of communist education had been collapsing in me before I went to West Germany. This Germany trip shattered all its remaining myths in me. That was the climax of the development of my critical consciousness which started in the late period of my life in the farm. To reflect, this is a long period of about ten years. In this long period, I struggled, hesitated, and struggled again, moving from nonconsciousness to semi-consciousness and to consciousness. Often I was not sure if I was in the right track. Sometimes I even felt guilty, asking myself, "Am I doubting the undoubtable? Challenging the unchallengeable? Am I running into a very dangerous and evil road of moral deterioration?"

The dragging ten years of the Cultural Revolution made the whole nation suffer so much. In its late years, I had already become critical to it and its founder Mao Tse-tung. Yet when Mao died in 1976, I was still overwhelmed by the nation-wide atmosphere of grieving and mourning. I sobbed too, for a long long time. After that I often wonder how could I do it? I had been feeling more and more negative of him, blaming all the disasters to his mistakes. How could I feel so sorrow when we lost him?

I got this answer quite late. Though I had been developing more and more critical thinking against him, his image was still deeply implanted in me. The first words I learned were his name. I

believed him as our savoir, our God. How could I take him away easily which was the result of thirty years constant work on me? When he died, I felt a strong vacuum in me. For so long, he had been the founder of our country, supplier of both our physical and mental food. He made every decision for us. The eight hundred million people all depended on him. We said "Long live Chairman Mao!" every day. How could we imagine what our future would be without him?

I felt grieving for his death not only because I believed him, but also because a great part of me was created by him. I was part of Him and He was part of me for thirty years, how could I get rid of him overnight. I talked about the unconsciousness of many Chinese people; how can they be blamed? They live in a society of thousands of years of tradition. Life does not change very much in their life. Without a real physical experience of different culture, different social system, and different ways of life, how could we change their minds. Again, I need to emphasize what I just said. If China is closed, it can last for thousands of years with little change. However, if China keeps open, the change will come soon and no one can stop it.

Having been in Germany for only a few weeks, I did admit what I knew about that country was very superficial. But I believed in my own eyes. How come if what I saw with my own eyes could not be true? It was only after living in Canada for years that I began to understand how naive my eyes were to catch different aspects of

life of a different country and how shallow I was to make conclusions of that country so early.

Did I ever see anything negative in that country? What about the old men in messy clothes walking aimlessly in the streets of Frankfurt? I saw them in a passing glance when we hurried to the railway station that day. I thought about them several times later. Were they lonely and homeless? Or did they just happen to have drunk too much and lost their way home? I found I tended to reject the negative answers. I was always trying to draw a picture of West Germany as a perfect society in my mind.

Germans were very very friendly to us. I told every Chinese who asked me about this. It was said that many Germans did not like the Japanese because of the "Japanese aggressiveness" in occupying German market. But we were taken as the Japanese in West Germany for many times, and people always smiled broadly to us, said a lot of good words to us, and some even tried the Japanese greetings such as "Sa your na la!" to us. This was the example I often gave to my students in China. However, I was reluctant to tell some bad examples: we met a group of Sankkan who worked in Germany. They all said that Germans were too "cold". Once we were invited to a German family for dinner. When the cordial hostess talked about the Turkish people in Germany, she had so many negative words of them, their way of life and their religion. In the subway of Frankfurt, I saw the floors were littered and asked our Germany guide why people had such bad habits. That well educated Germany engineer

told us seriously that it was all done by the foreigners. No Germans had such habits.

We spent a lot of time in small towns. We found we did not need to worry about our safety there, as people said there were no crimes such as murder, robbery, theft in those areas for years. They did not even bother locking their doors. In big cities, we did not have any trouble either. But we were told again and again that safety in big cities was totally a different story. When I talked to people in China about the safety of Germany, I would like to give a lot of examples of how safe we felt being there. Mostly I ignored the fact that we were told being very careful in big cities.

#### **F. A Brief Review From the Present Perspective**

Looking back at the way my consciousness developed in my life before I came to Canada, I realize that I had gone through several paradigmatic shifts.

##### **1. Being a sheet of white of paper**

At this stage, I whole-heartedly accepted what I was being told. Under the communist education, I built up a strong sense of social responsibility and commitment. I believed that the fulfilment of my responsibilities and commitments relied on my self-sacrifice. The biggest part of self-sacrifice was self-denial and self-criticism.

## 2. Initial exposure of "critical thinking"

This is the period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Though my knowledge was very limited and my judgements were very naive, I got to know that authorities and what had been taken for granted can be challenged.

## 3. Realizing the need to be a strong individual.

At this stage, I came to understand the value of my own thought and being an individual of my own and started to struggle for self assertion and self accomplishment. In the process of becoming a stronger individual, I gradually built up my critical thinking. This critical thinking is different from stage 2. It is based on independent judgement and strong self consciousness.

## 4. The consciousness of social responsibility

This seemed to be the returning of the stage one, as I began to feel more strongly of my social responsibilities and commitment again. However, this newly developed social consciousness is different from stage one in nature. It is based on my individualized self-thinking. I came to know that the rights of individuals cannot be protected unless we all work together for a better social system. However, at this stage, I no longer believed that my social responsibilities should contradicted to my self interest. In contrary, I came to understand that a strong individual is the guarantee of one's social accomplishment.

Stage three saw the development of my critical thinking. The



characteristic of this critical thinking is the challenge of authorities, and the rejection of assumptions. I started to seek for truth by myself. At the beginning, I saw each of the new paradigm as the rejection of the previous ones. Yet, through looking back carefully, I could find that the new paradigms of thinking also embraced part of the previous ones, and are the further development of the previous ones.

However, in these paradigms I still believe that there must be absolute truth in the world. I still followed Marxist historical materialism. I tend to think that the world and life is still in black and white polarities. If socialism is not good, capitalism must be good. If capitalism is good, it must be an ideal society free of problems. I did not want to hear any criticism of the Western world. I saw West Germany as a perfect society. This also motivated me to come to Canada.

## CHAPTER 5

### CANADA, MY SECOND HOME

#### A. Who Am I and Where Am I Now?

In the summer of 1987, another major life change happened to me. I was admitted by a Canadian university to do my master degree in education. Leaving for Canada is very different from my visit to West Germany. Not only because that I would be in a foreign country for much a longer time, but also I was all by myself to survive culturally and economically. Even so, there were still things I did not anticipate.

I had no idea at that time that I would take this new land as my home and stay here for long. And since I decided to stay, life in Canada presented a totally different meaning to me from the first two years of my Canadian life. If I had left Canada before this change, I would have drawn a picture of Canada very differently from the one I am seeing today.

An American writer observes: "You can write a book about China after you are there for a week. However after a month of stay, you probably find that you can only write a few pages. And living there for a year, you may end up with writing nothing". I used to think what he said only applies to Chinese culture since its five thousand years of history and complex cultural tradition always present a mystery to its outsiders.

Many Chinese are proud of their past. They believe that North Americans with their merely two hundred years of history, are rich

in materials but shallow in thinking. Not until I experienced Canadian culture, could I fully appreciate this American writer's insight. Though I have been in Canada for five years, I found my understanding of Canadian way of life and thinking is still very superficial. I am still frustrated in adjusting to the new life. Every culture can be a black hole to its outsiders. It could even happen that the more you get to know it, the more you get lost in it.

On the other hand, looking back the journey I took in the past five years, I was surprised to see how far I have gone. I suddenly realized that Zhou Wu has ceased to exist. In his place, is another person who is called Joe Wu. It is not that the name was changed, but the whole person. Now I find I can hardly communicate with a lot of my fellow Chinese, my old friends, my former colleagues and sometimes even with myself. I have built up a new value system, a new belief and a new way of thinking which is alien to a lot of people. This great inner change has not been matched with the acquisition of new social and communicative skills. Quite often, I avoid exchanging ideas for fear of communication failure.

My old friends, who knew me as a strong opponent of Mao's tyranny and the terror of the cultural revolution, are surprised to hear that I talk about Mao's insight in the cultural revolution. My fellow Chinese feel terrified to know my new view of Chinese national unity. I am claiming the independence of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang province might not be a bad thing. My wife can hardly

accept my idea that there is nothing "right" or "wrong" in this world; "right" can be "wrong" and "wrong" can be "right". My philosophy of education sounds too radical, not only to my former Chinese colleagues, but even to many Canadian teachers and educators.

Not only is it difficult for me to communicate with others, I also find that there are two parts of me within my own self which do not communicate well. On the one hand, I am still like my old me, who is very emotional in social progress. I hate injustice, inequality, exploitation, and oppression. I still believe I should be a warrior of democracy, a liberator of the oppressed, and the conscientizer of those who are in unconsciousness. On the other hand, a new me is developing, who believes that every thing existing is natural in its own way. Therefore, every way of life or every way of thinking should be accepted and respected. No one should impose another way of life or thinking to others for whatever good reasons. What we need to do is to understand each other.

Anyway, the change I went through is tremendous and I am scared by this change. I feel that my crosscultural experiences in Canada stimulate this change every day, even every minute. And life is going on so fast. It is important for me to set enough time to sit down and review these changes, collect the scattered thoughts and reorganize myself. Through deep contemplation and consulting others' thinking, I may make myself consistent. Or may be I do not

have to be consistent, but just find out where I am, who I am and where I am heading to. Then I can make myself more conscious of my change and benefit more from the change.

This summary of self change can be important to others too. I will carefully evaluate the process of change that happened to me. What stimulated the changes, what was my attitude to the stimulation and changes, what difference the different attitudes made, how these changes linked to my previous thinking, what is the result of changes in my adjustment of new life in Canada? What is the effect of changes on my English language development? These are the questions many second language researchers are trying to find answers to.

Many immigrants may face the same kind of life change. By sharing my experience of change with them, they may compare the differences and similarities. We need to be more aware of changes, and find better ways to deal with the changes. Many adult immigrants feel threatened to have change. They believe change means they have to give up things valuable to them. Some are even afraid that they lose their own identity and are forced to become others who they do not want to be. Some others feel confident that they will never change, while they are changing every day.

In fact, everybody is ever changing in his or her life, wherever they live, or in whichever way they live. If change is treated positively, it is growth and enrichment. However, the crosscultural experience of immigrants often meet lots of

frustrations and difficulties in coping with their new life. Irritation and hostility are not unusual to many of them. Therefore some immigrants may feel that their change is negative and become resistant to changes. This attitude often hinders their second language development and cultural adjustment. I hope this writing of my own personal change may also benefit my fellow immigrants.

I am not saying that the way I went through should be the right way for other immigrants. People start from different points of life when they immigrate to Canada. Their different personal and cultural background make them have different needs, interests and expectations in this new land. Our difficulties and problems are also different. However, what is general is that crosscultural experience as life change is a good learning opportunity for every immigrant. Different attitudes toward this change, and different ways of treating this life change can make differences.

## **B. Initial Euphoria**

Studies (Johnson 1986) show that there are distinct states of personal adjustment which virtually everyone who lived abroad went through (no matter where they came from or what country they were living in). These stages are: (1) Initial Euphoria, (2) Irritability and Hostility, (3) Gradual Adjustment, and (4) Adaptation. (p.56)

For the first stage, most people begin with their new assignment with great expectation and a positive mind-set. If

anything, they come with expectations which are too high and attitudes that are too positive toward the host country and toward their own prospective experience in it. At this stage, anything new is intriguing and exciting. This is certainly true to me. But the word "initial" sounds like it is a brief period. To me, this initial euphoria lasted quite a long period.

It might be an interesting phenomenon for the psychologists to study. In my memory of the past events, weather often accompanies my visualization of the events. And it is always that the weather appeared in memory are in accordance with my feeling of the events. For example, if I recall a very bad experience, that was always a very gloomy sky or a rainy day.

The memory of my early days in Canada are always radiant and enchanting scene. Whenever I think about that period, a photograph I took then came to my mind. In the picture, I sat in the vast sunlit lawn in front of Corbett Hall, University of Alberta. The grass is green and lush. A bed of blooming flowers is right behind me. My face is beaming with smiles. I do not know if people's memories of their own past are mostly visual or not. It is certainly true for me. But what is interesting is that in my memory, those visual representations of my past events are quite often accompanied with the weather of that day. When my feeling of the event was delightful, the clear sky and beautiful sunshine would be recorded in the memory, and vice versa.

I came to Canada in late summer. But the winter of that year

in Edmonton was just reluctant to come. There was not any snow until Christmas. I am from a northern city of China. In my hometown, winters are usually in steady low temperature, coming by the mid of November until the end of February. The temperature usually keeps below minus ten centigrade with a long period of about minus twenty and there is no hope to get any day above zero. On the map of the world, I could see that the latitude of Edmonton is much higher than that of my hometown. In fact it is equal to the top north point of China, a place which we call North Pole Village. I could hardly imagine the winter here could be that warm. My Canadian friend said to me: "I am afraid you have been spoiled by this warm weather. You will learn what Edmonton winters are like!"

The same friend, who is an ardent proponent of social transformation, was also afraid that I would be spoiled by the tranquil refuge of the university environment. Whenever he heard me commenting on the good things I saw in Canada, he would remind me that there is also the other side of this society, the things that are not so desirable and positive. He told me that in this society there are still poor people who are homeless and hungry, and Canadian life is not all like what I had thought about.

He drove me to an area where poorer Edmontonians resided. The houses there are smaller than those in the other parts of Edmonton. However, my reflection on these small houses was totally different. What came to my mind was that if people living in these houses can also be called poor, they would be the richest if they were in



China. The poor people could still afford their houses. And any of these houses would be considered bigger and better than most of the Chinese homes.

Some of my fellow Chinese students compare Canada with China. We found a lot of things here were better than those in China. One of us said: "I could see Canada almost a perfect society. It soon will come to the stage of communism, for which we Chinese have been struggling to realize in China under the leadership of communist party".

Our communist education told us that human beings will inevitably go through certain stages in social development. Most countries in the world have gone through primitive society, slavery society, feudalist society and capitalist society. In some countries such as China, communist parties have set up a more advanced social system, i.e., socialist societies. Finally, human beings will realize the next stage, an ideal social system of communist society. The distribution of the products in the socialist system is "from each according to his ability, to each according to his work." While in the communist society, it is "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". Communism is a society where the material supplies are so abundant that everyone's material desire is satisfied. Therefore, private ownership will no longer exist. Selfishness as the product of private ownership will also disappear in that society. There will be no class struggle, no police and army either, because the whole

society will be in a perfect harmony.

Lenin and Stalin predicted that the Soviet Union would realize "communism" in 1960s, but they failed. Mao Tsetung told Chinese people in 1950s and 1960s that we had already seen the mast of the communist ship on the horizon. But during the Cultural Revolution, he lost his optimism and predicted that the true communism is still in a long long distance. He did not say how long. Some people joked about it and said that it is so long that perhaps no human beings can ever see it. After the Cultural Revolution, even the Party avoided mentioning it. The illusion was completely vanished. But it is a surprise that we found it more likely to happen in the capitalist Canada.

Our judgement of Canada as a communist candidate was not only based on its material wealth. It is also because we saw its social programs such as unemployment insurance, social welfare, health care, etc. These are the things that the communists always claim to be their own exclusively, and tell people that it is the proof of the superiority of their system.

Human relationship is another thing we appreciated in Canada. In this society, we found that the right of minorities are well protected. There is so much to offer from various social services and facilities to the handicapped, senior citizens, children and new immigrants. Though most people drive their own cars, public transit runs in all parts of the city with most of its buses empty most time in a day. It was just for the convenience of a few. We

also heard the strong voice of women. Their liberation movement is not only changing the society but also changing the language. Even those common terms of Man for human, he for both he and she, etc., are the targets of sexism. Women are really powerful to change their positions in the society.

I cannot tell what I cared for most in Canada when I just came. I certainly was very sensitive to people's attitude to me as a foreigner. What I experienced was that almost everybody I met was so warm and friendly. No matter they were the people whom I work with or just the strangers who showed me the ways in the streets or shop clerks. No matter if they were my superiors such as department chairman, professors or fellow students, they all made me feel I was respected and welcome.

It was the first time I heard of multiculturalism in Canada. At the time I had little idea of its history and how it would affect Canadian politics and constitution. I admired very much that a country could appreciate the cultural differences of its people. I heard of some incidents or criticism of racism and racial discrimination on TV and in the newspapers sometimes. Again I understood them in a different perspective. I saw them as the evidence of how the system guarantees that the rights of minorities are protected and also the evidence of public support of the equality of different races.

I enjoyed democracy here. My attention was particularly on how multi-party system works and how people make their decisions on

forming their governments and influencing policy making. I attended lots of meetings of election campaigns, academic lectures, and social issue discussions, etc. I saw controversial issues fully discussed and people were free to air their views on almost every thing from abortion to pornography, GST and Meechlake.

My life in Canada started in the university. I like that strong academic atmosphere here. I was immediately attracted by various courses in Faculty of Education, among which I love those more philosophical ones. I took them in hope of getting some answers to the social issues I had been contemplating for long time. This was the first time in my life that I was encouraged to think freely without any fear.

This was what I appreciated most in Canada. I remembered that in West Germany, I had met a Chinese student in Frankfurt University. He said to me that when he went back to Beijing to visit his family, he could hardly stay any longer than three days and then left. Nothing bothered him in Beijing in which he grew up, but the political control almost suffocated him. Now I could understand better what he had meant.

To me, the exploration and expansion of my thinking is the most important thing of my life. I really cannot see any meaning of life without this. Canadian university does supply very good conditions to meet the need of my mental thirst. I took many courses such as Education and social development in the Department of Educational Foundation. I found I always connected what I

learned with the reality of China. I was quite confident that what I was learning in Canada would be very valuable when I applied them to Chinese education. When I would go back to China, I could do much more than just teaching English as a second language.

I cannot say that I had not any problems with my new life in Canada. It was quite often that I feel I could not communicate well with Canadians because of language and lack of cultural background knowledge. I did not feel I had integrated into Canadian life either. Most of my time was spend in books, and the reflection of the reality of China. However, I did not feel that was a serious problem to me. I was satisfied with my Canadian life because I got what I wanted here. For about two years, I was still in my initial Euphoria.

This long lasting Euphoria is a contrast to my wife's experience in Canada. She came with my son in 1988, a year after me. While I was very glad to have my family reunion, I found she was very depressed to live in Canada. She had hardly any initial Euphoria, and came right into the irritation of culture shock.

I had never noticed before that we had such a large difference in seeing life and the world. She never enjoyed listening to me talking about what is good in this country. Democracy and freedom did not have much to do with her. She did not complain much about this in China either. There was one topic we discussed a lot, i.e. safety of Edmonton life. I believed that life in Edmonton is very safe, and much safer than in China. But my wife said that living in

Canada was just like living in a haunted city. She listed so many murders, sexual assaults, other crimes and traffic accidents seen in newspapers and TV. To me, this is just because of the freedom of press in news media. I told her that in the democratic countries, "a dog bites a man" is not news, only "a man bites a dog" is reported. Chinese news media are never allowed to report anything bad. We never know how many are murdered or raped or killed by cars in a day in China.

When we argued, the wind seemed to be in her favour. We heard some criminals gunned down a police officer in Edmonton, fourteen girl students were massacred in Montreal, and serial killers in the United States, etc. I still could reason by saying that these were very bizarre incidents. Most of the murders happened in Edmonton were among the people who know each other. As ordinary people, such things would not likely to happen to us.

Then she talked about guns in the society. In China, no any individual is allowed to have a gun. She believes that severe control and capital punishment are necessary to make the society safe. The problem of Canada is just too much of freedom. However, what she criticized was just what I appreciated most. I argued that capital punishment in China killed a lot of innocents, especially political dissidents. Even if there are more people falling victims of crimes in Canada, it would still not match the number of people who became political victims in China. I believe that as nothing can be perfect in the world, a democratic society have to protect

people's freedom even at the cost of some innocent people's life. Then she retorted: "If innocent people are killed by political persecution in China and by criminals in North America, why do you insist that one is better than the other?" Our arguments became more philosophical and there was no sign that we could come to an agreement.

At the beginning, I could hardly believe that she really felt this society so dangerous. I thought she might just want to show her negative feeling of this place. But the things that happened told me that I was wrong. She really had this fear, and she worried a lot.

Once we went to see a movie. That was the first time we went to a Canadian theatre. Because of our economic condition and cultural difficulty in appreciating movies here, that was the first time we went to a movie for several months, as the result of my insistence that we should make up this part of life. But I did not anticipate that my wife had another thing to worry about in a theatre, i.e. our safety.

When we entered the theatre, she insisted that we find some seats along the aisles. I asked why. She said in case of fire or bombing, we could run out quickly. We went to movies in China very often. Chinese cinemas are always very crowded. It seems to me that we should have been much more careful in a place like that. But I never heard her complaining in China.

Not only did she feel unsafe sitting in the theatre, she dared

not go to the washroom in the cinema. She worried that someone might be hiding inside. It did happen in some public places in Edmonton. But similar things happened in China as well. Why she did not think that way before we came?

There might be many reasons that make her think that way. I believe one of them is her life change after coming to Canada. She was a school teacher for seventeen years in China. She was very successful and very proud of her achievements. When she came to join me, she gave up the job she loved so much. In Edmonton, she had to work to support the family. She took the job of being a janitor and a nanny. Neither work did she ever do before. Now she is working as a teacher aid in a school. She is very glad to turn towards the working environment she is familiar with. However, as she cannot teach in the school, this makes her miss her career even worse.

Not like me, being well protected in the tranquil university environment, she was thrown into the society right away. I did not understand her feeling until later I tried some jobs such as delivering pizza and being a small apartment manager. There I met very different kinds of people, especially those whose life was not that satisfactory. Working under that kind of condition, the feeling was so different. It was not only hard work and little pay that bothered me, but also the low self-esteem. Few people treated me with that kind of dignity I got in the university. Not until then did I see a different Canada, the other side of this world.



Then I started to see the world in a different way.

Many Chinese students who came to study in the University of Alberta brought their spouses here several months later just like I did. And most of their spouses work instead of studying. I found it is interesting that those students and their working spouses often have a big gap in viewing life in Canada. The former tend to be more positive and optimistic, whereas the latter are often more or less negative and pessimistic.

Besides working conditions and career, these spouses are mostly wives with less education than their student husbands who are doing their Ph.D. or at least Master's degree. Those wives' expectations in Canada may be quite different from their husbands. This may also result in different feelings in their initial stages of immigration. Anyway, initial euphoria is not a universal feeling for all immigrants. Its length and nature can vary greatly too.

### **C. Culture Shock, Coping with New Life**

In the spring of 1989, when I was still buried in books enjoying Paulo Friere's liberation education and contemplating how billions of Chinese can be conscientized through liberation education, many young Chinese students had already conscientized themselves and started that unprecedented pro-democratic movement for their liberation. I was so surprised and excited by the rapid development of the event. Following the news media, I was not only convinced that the victory was at the corner, but also felt that it

is already in hand.

However, the gunfire in Beijing not only shattered that upsurging mass movement, a hope of immediate victory, but also shattered my ideal and aspiration. What I least expected was that I suddenly found I could not even go back to my country, as I had become a political dissident because of my involvement in support of the students in China.

I came to Canada to fulfil my degrees in Teaching English as a Second language. I tried to finish my study and go back as soon as possible. In a period of less than twelve months, I took twelve courses, working as a research assistant in the department, also finished my thesis and got my master degree. I thought in two more years, I could finish my Ph.D. and go back to use what I had learned here.

The change of 1989 for me was really hard. Though I experienced quite a bit of life changes in my past, and some of them were very tough to me, this one was different indeed.

First of all, the future of China had become so much a part of my life. For decades, I have been carefully keeping a smouldering of hope for a fundamental social change. It developed very slowly, but it was steady and never gave away. My whole life seemed to go around it. Suddenly, this smouldering was blown to flames. It was like a blind man longing for light suddenly sees a rainbow. How could he let it go easily? I experienced an extreme excitement of jubilation. Yet in just a short period of about two weeks, this

excitement changed into intense tension, boiling rage, deep grief and despair. Like a falling rock, my emotion plumped from the clime~~ed~~ right into the bottom of dark valley.

I had always been feeling powerless of being a Chinese citizen in influencing Chinese politics. But never did I feel that incompetent before this time. We demonstrated, we collected donations, we sent back fliers. But I soon knew that nothing could we do to make any difference there. Nor did even world-wide condemnation and economic sanctions. What I did was only to comfort myself not to feel guilty seeing my brothers and sisters being killed or sent to prison, instead of me myself.

This wound of heart would take long time to heal. However, before I recovered from the deep sorrow and despair, I had to face another reality. My way going back to China had been cut. Choosing to give up one's home is always a hard decision. However, it was even harder to have no choices at all.

I had been living in Canada for about two years. In that two years, I enjoyed Canadian life and Canadian people. There were a lot of excitement living in the new culture. Every day, I felt I learned something new. However, my heart was still in China. I thought I was learning for my country. When I went back home, I would have more to offer to my people. Now I had to tell myself that I had to be prepared to stay at least for several years, and it is even possible for the rest of my life.

The night before I left China, my wife and I talked about our

future. I said I would not take long to finish my study and came back in two or three years at most. Suddenly, my friend Xiao Ma's family tragedy came to my mind. Xiao Ma's father was a Kaomitong army officer in old China. As Kaomintong's army was defeated in 1949, he had to leave his wife and baby son to flee to Taiwan. For thirty years, Xiao Ma and his mother got no information of where his father was, as China was completely closed from the rest of the world. The mother and son suffered a lot because they were the family of an escaped Kaomintong army officer. The mother endured all the discrimination and hardship of life to bring about the son. Also she still waited for Xiao Ma's father.

It was only thirty years later, China opened to the world again, that they got to know Xiao Ma's Father was still alive and lived in the United States. Their reunion was heart touching, but by no means a joyful one. The father had married again and got another family in Los Angeles.

At the moment, we both said that nothing similar would happen to bring the same fate to us. China was in the midst of reform then. Everything was improving. There was no reason to predict that it would happen. But who knows? In the past decades, one thing Chinese people learned from history was that nothing is predictable as nothing could be controlled by ordinary people.

I was lucky that my wife and son were able to come and join me before all this happened. However, I could not see my mother any more. She is over seventy now. I promised her that I would be back

in three years. Besides, there are also my sister's family and lots of friends.

It is luckier this time that we could still keep correspondence. However, I feel almost nothing can be said through letters. I used to spend a lot of time with my best friends sharing with each other our opinions on social issues. That was the thing that bound us together, and made us trusted friends. Now we do not want to put what we think in black and white to be intercepted by government agents. Occasionally, we dropped some hints. I hate to do that at the risk of my friends' safety at home. To some of my friends who are working in government offices, it is more likely to cause trouble to them having overseas letters. I have no choice but to stop our correspondence.

#### D. The New Meaning of Canada to Me

The impact of this sudden change on me was tremendous. Just overnight, I was separated from my relatives, friends, my career and my social responsibilities. I was uprooted from my cultural soil on which I feel confident and competent and know exactly what I want to do. Now I became a duckweed floating on the water in the places where I did not belong to and where I know so little about it. What do I do here?

Certainly there are a lot of things here I enjoy. The number one of them is learning in the university. I came to study in the field of teaching English as a second language. But soon I found

that there were a lot more interesting things for me to learn in a Canadian university. I am interested in philosophy of education, psychology, anthropology, social linguistics, political economy, history, to name only a few. I even considered doing my second and third ph. d. in some other fields. But I soon realized that I could not just do what I want here.

I had a family to support. My wife gave up her chance to study and had been doing all kinds of work to support me and our son for the past year. She worked as a nanny, janitor, paper carrier, etc. How could I let her endure all the hardship to let me study just for pleasure?

My son felt very bad when other children laughed at his second hand clothes bought from Value Village. Children even made songs teasing those who bought things in the less expensive stores such as Biway, Woolco and Sears. He also felt ashamed that his parents clean an apartment building and are not living in a house. I did not care about this before, as I knew this was all temporary. But now things are different.

It is so strange that as my immigration status changed, everything surrounding me changed. What happened to my eyes, and ears? I am now seeing and hearing a lot of things that I failed to see and hear before. Even those things I saw and experienced before changed their meanings to me. Now I realized how naive I was making so many conclusions of West Germany after being there for only a few weeks.

The new life-change greatly enlarged my life circle and enabled me to see much broader aspects of Canadian life rather than the previous university campus life. I got a job as a residential manager for a small apartment building. For doing this, we lived in a free suite as the payment of my work. In the building, I saw some very young and healthy people who know little reading and writing. They are either unemployed or do not want to work. Many people are alcoholic or drug addicted. They could not get along with people well, and often violate the laws. There are also single mothers on social welfare who cannot take care of their children well. I also saw those who are old and poor. Life to them is not easy. Native people have their own problems. The owners of the apartment buildings would not like to accept them as tenants, believing they could not afford rent and are trouble makers. I also heard more about the unskilled workers, especially those new immigrants, who have no Canadian education or training, have to do the hardest work but get the lowest pay.

The gap between rich and poor did not bother me very much before I really saw it and experienced it myself. I used to believe that equal payment and guaranteed permanent jobs caused the inefficiency in China. Chinese scientists do not work hard because they do not get paid better than the janitors. Professors have no incentives of doing research or teaching as the office secretaries may be assigned better houses. After economic reform in China, more and more people believe that only the capitalist market system can

make people work and the country rich. Competition for money is the fuel of social engine.

I thought about this issue for quite a long time when I was in China. Competition and material incentives seemed to be very effective in stimulating production and speed up economic growth. This had been proved by the economic reform after the cultural revolution. However, competition also creates a world of "fittest survive". In a undeveloped country like China with such a large population, free competition could possibly lead to thousands and thousands of people losing their "iron rice bowls" and fall into the ditch of extremely poor living condition, even facing starvation. This is a very hard choice. However, if we do not let some people get rich first, the whole nation would be in this endless suffering of slow motion, inefficiency and invitality. And everybody is in poverty.

Industrialized countries had gone through an age of savage competition when their capitalist economy started. Charles Dickens and lots of other authors vividly depicted that miserable world. China never really tasted capitalism since it went from feudalism directly into communism. Perhaps, we had to make up that lesson and start from the beginning. If there were no other better choices, we had to sacrifice some people who would be the losers of the competition in exchange for the prosperity of the whole society. This was my conclusion of the law of economic development. I thought I was rational. But my new experience challenges me.



Once I argued with a Canadian friend who has a very strong passion for social justice and human equality. He insisted that the government should take responsibility of helping the poor and decrease the gap between the rich and the poor. Using the examples in China, I tried to prove that the gap between the poor and the rich is necessary in order to keep people from being lazy. As we are very intimate friends, I ventured some words which I did not want to say. I claimed that some people have to be poor to keep the dynamics of the economic development.

We were washing dishes after dinner and he had a towel at hand for drying. What I said made him furious. He threw the towel at my face. I knew he might not be that angry at me. But it was hard for him to accept the gloomy "reality" I prescribed. I thought I was rational to think that way. However, some personal encounters made me more reasonable.

Once my wife's old bridge on her teeth suddenly broke. A sharp piece left there stuck out and hurt her mouth. I took her to a nearby dentist clinic. There was nothing complicated. It did not even take the dentist's one second to click the remaining denture out. I thought I could do that myself with a screw driver. But I worried my tools were not clean for that job. We were asked if we had insurance or not and of course we did not. At their mercy, we were charged less, i.e., twenty dollars for that one second work.

I did not feel angry at being exploited. I knew dentists were supposed to be paid in that way because they had their years'

training. I just felt sympathetic to my wife. She worked almost a whole day to get that twenty dollars. Was that second of the dentist work really worth that much in exchange of my wife's whole day?

Now it sounds quite true that a Chinese student who had experienced the hard work as cheap labour in Canada said: "I got to know now that all what the Communist Party told me about capitalism is lies, except one thing----exploitation." It was interesting that I heard these words not from an "exploited" but from an "exploiter", who was a Chinese restaurant owner and came from China about ten years before.

It happened that I walked into his restaurant for the application for a kitchen job. When I knew that he was from the same Chinese city, I immediately felt some kind of intimacy as Chinese culture values townsmanship very much, particularly in a foreign land so far from home. However, he was just the opposite.

He sounded very cold and just like a boss. "This is Canada, not China. You came to work for money and I run the restaurant also for money. So you need to do exactly what I want you to do. Though you will be hired to wash dishes, you have to do any other possible work including cleaning the toilets when we need you or when you do not have dishes to wash. People from China are used to the idea of class struggle. But here, no any class struggle is allowed. I am the boss, and my words are decree." I would say what he said was honest, but sounded too impersonal to me.

He did mention something personal about his own past. He talked about how hard he worked when he just came and finally owned his restaurant. Then he quoted those reflections of the Chinese student about exploitation in the capitalist world. He testified that exploitation is nothing wrong here. "Exploitation is the law and is all right!" he confirmed.

At the moment, I had lost all the interest working for him. The only interest left in me was to ask him when he came to believe that "Exploitation is all right". Was it when he was exploited or when he started exploiting others?

I left that restaurant and went into a pizza shop. Its advertisement said: "SIXTY DOLLARS ONE EVENING". Sixty is really big money for that kind of job. Yet I did not know that to get that sixty, I needed to work for an "evening" as long as fourteen hours.

I then changed to another Pizza store. There they paid six dollars for an hour of delivery, which was much better than the previous one. However, they hired a whole bunch of people like me for the busy hours in the busy days. We rushed to have the first one or two pizzas delivered and came back only to be told that the work of that evening was finished and we were all sent home. There was no guarantee of how many trips of delivery we could get for a night, and how many nights we could work in a week. When they wanted us, we had to be there, and as soon as the work was done, we were driven out of the door. I felt there was no any dignity working there. They talked to me like talking to a little boy. To

show I worked hard enough, I had to run all the time, grabbing the pizza box, picking some cokes, dashing out of the door to my car, and leaving as soon as possible. If they did not like me, they sent me home immediately or I got no work for the whole week or was even fired.

I am not saying that the above experiences are unbearably inhuman and cruel. I had much worse experiences in China, in fact. But now I no longer see Canada as perfect. I was stunned to realize that it took me so long to come to this point.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**  
**OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A FOREIGNER**

Following, I will include an article I wrote three years ago when I just experienced that dramatic life change of becoming a permanent resident of Canada. It is entitled THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A FOREIGNER (1991). As a phenomenological study, I tried to find the commonalities of human experiences. I interviewed a few people and tried to pick up the themes of their foreign experiences. But most of the themes to be discussed in this article were first of all my own personal experience, and verified by some others who had similar experiences as me.

Phenomenology as a method of human research is very effective in vividly depicting people's lived experience. Many people who had read this article told me that they felt the same way being foreigners in different countries. To me, phenomenology is like photographing. It makes time and change stand still, and gives a close look at certain aspects of life. It often reveals to its readers rich colours and all the details of human feeling. It certainly increases our understanding of the phenomena of human life.

However, I also feel that it is only one method of study. To understand human experiences and life more sufficiently,

phenomenology apparently lacks some other important dimensions, one of which was the historical dimension of human experience. We need also to study the causal relationship between changing life experience and the formation of human consciousness.

Reading this phenomenological study after three years of changing life experiences, I immediately realize how my understanding of the nature of being a foreigner was determined by the limit of my life experience, as well as the feeling and emotion at that moment.

Today, I still believe that what I wrote in that article were my true feelings. To carry the whole article in this thesis, my purposes are two fold. First, I want to help my readers to understand how frustrated a life can be living in a foreign land. Secondly, I would like to reveal the change of my perspectives. This is part of my consciousness development. Therefore, I expect that my readers benefit not only from what stories I tell, but also from the examination of how I tell them.

In examination of this article written three years ago, I put some more reflections in different parts of this writing. To separate them from the original document, I put the newly added texts in boxes as I did in chapter 4 and in this paragraph.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A FOREIGNER

Think thou how that this is not our home in this world,  
in which we are strangers, one not knowing another's  
speech and language.

The Diary of Samuel Ward, entry for May 13, 1595

Several years ago, I was in West Germany with a group of Chinese technicians on that business tour. That was the first time I had ever been to a foreign country. What I first experienced of West Germany was the excitement of magnificent scenery, the amazing achievements of science and technology, and wonderful exotic food. We had nothing to worry about as our group was always together and everything was arranged by our friendly German hosts. I did not even feel uncomfortable in this new culture until one afternoon when I found I had some time free for myself. I decided to go and buy a German-English dictionary in a nearby store. From the window of my hotel room, I could see this street very well. It was a downtown street with a lot of small shops on each side. I was sure that there would not be any difficulty for me to find a bookstore or a drugstore nearby. The street was not crowded, as seems to be always the case in that small town. People there were so polite and warm that they seemed to greet everybody passing by with the south German expression "Gruss Gott!". Thus, I found myself in the street all alone.

Strangely, just a few steps away from the hotel, I suddenly felt that my heart was pumping hard. What an unusual feeling! There seemed to be no reason for being nervous. I knew where to go and

how to get back at the moment. We had shopped in Germany several times, so I knew what to say to buy things. Then why panic? I even felt that my steps were not even and steady as usual. Or maybe the ground I stepped on was not usual? It was a little bit like being in a dream, and the surrounding was dazzling for a moment.

However, nothing happened to me in that adventure. I bought what I wanted and returned to the hotel safely. I still remember that when I came back to my door, I had a feeling of relief. That German hotel to me was equally foreign as the German streets I had just been in, with its Gothic style of architecture, old fashioned decorations and furniture, classic western music at the entrance, not to mention the smell of butter and cheese which accompanied me every minute. But I did seem to feel "home" there at that moment.

Now I am living in Canada as a foreigner. Such strong sensations never occur to me when I walk in the streets in Edmonton. But the feeling of discomfort arises on other occasions in my life here, which often makes me feel strongly that I am foreign. Of course, sometimes I feel "at home" living in this country. What struck me is that this kind of feeling of "at-homeness" is especially significant to me as a foreigner. When I am starting the journey to explore the meaning of being foreign, I find it is hard to separate it from the notion of home. Is the nature of being foreign simply the other side of being at home? Is foreignness the lack of homeness, as darkness is the lack of light? Am I struggling in the twilight between the darkness of



being "foreign" and the light of being "home"?

Two years later, I feel a lot more being at home now. Perhaps I am moving from the twilight to dawn. However, I am still often in the shadow of darkness. There are still a lot of areas of Canadian life that I am not familiar with. There are still many occasions in which I feel myself a total stranger and very embarrassed.

#### **A. The Darkness of Being Foreign**

Being a foreigner in Canada to me is not a bad experience at all. There are various kinds of excitement in leading a new life and experiencing a completely new world. It is especially valuable to share different cultural values and insights. What really bothers me is the feeling of being foreign within myself.

#### **The Awareness of Self**

An American coming to Japan made an interesting discovery about himself. He found he had a NOSE. He certainly had never thought of his American nose until he was surrounded by so many Japanese noses. To be a foreigner, one is always conscious of one's own self. This occurred to Wang right from the moment he stepped onto the Canadian Airliner flying to Vancouver.

The first time wearing a tie made me feel uncomfortable. I needed to loosen it again and again. This made me look at the western man sitting beside me.

I realized that my tie was not fixed in the same way as his. The knot I made was too small. And it was not as tight and neat as his. I tried to adjust it, but it always twisted to the right. I also found that my tie was hanging outside of my woollen shirt while the others all have theirs inside. With amusement I remembered how I had been impressed by my first "western" look when I put it on in front of the mirror in the Beijing Airport bathroom. The meal came. I had to hold my appetite to see how the others handled those forks and knives. They all put their napkins on their knees. Only babies need to do this in China. At night when I closed my eyes, I found that I was still watching myself from the top of my head to the heels of my feet. I realized that one of my feet often tapped the floor rhythmically. In fact this was a habit of mine. It had never bothered me. But this time it put me on the alert. Do foreigners behave this way? Am I bothering the lady sitting in front? What is the acceptable way of sleeping in a foreign airliner? Is it OK if I stretch freely?

This is like standing in front of a mirror. One notices a lot of things of oneself which one did not see before. A recognition of "me" occurs. This "me" is not the "self" one is familiar with. I am not only a stranger to others, but also becoming a stranger to myself.

Heidegger (cf. Packer, 1985) distinguished three distinct modes of engagement that people have with their surroundings by using the example of a hammer. When using a hammer, we have no need for focal awareness of ourselves and our tool. The skills and practices we bring to our activity are so familiar to us, that we are simply unaware of their existence. This is the ready-to-hand mode of activities. However, when some problem is encountered, such as the hammer may prove too heavy for the job, its weightiness becomes salient, this breakdown of action represents the unready-

to-hand mode. The present-at-hand mode is entered only when people detach themselves from an ongoing practical involvement in a project at hand. People have to "step back" and reflect. The hammer becomes an independent entity, removed from all tasks pursued. Heidegger gives a positive account of the ready-to-hand mode. In this mode, people's actions and their situations fit each other. Because this is the mode of direct practical engagement in which we actually do much of our everyday living, this task amounts, for him, to the same thing as describing a human being. It gives us the most primordial and direct access to human phenomena.

However, it is just this primordial and direct access to human phenomena that is lacking to foreigners. The tailored-fit relationship between people's actions and their situations no longer exists. They are constantly running into unready-to-hand situations and their action is always brought to the present-at-hand mode. The stepping back from "me" and recognition of "me" does not only create self reflection, but also self-conflict.

Linda talks about her self-consciousness in this paradoxical way: "On the one hand, I am always aware of what I am doing. My body which used to act automatically according to my will or without any consciousness is now like a puppet, always waiting for me to pull the controlling string. On the other hand, I am not sure of what I am doing. I need to get feedback. I need to know who I am by figuring out what image I have left in other's eyes. I cannot even make good judgements about myself. I need to get this sense

from others."

This is just like Schutz's (1971) explanation: " he who wants to use a map successfully has first of all to know his standpoint in two respects: its location on the ground and its representation on the map." A foreigner has to "face the fact that he lacks any status as a member of the social group he is about to join and is therefore unable to get a starting-point to take his bearings. He is, therefore, no longer permitted in considering himself as the centre of his social environment, and this fact causes again a dislocation of his contour lines of relevance" (p. 99).

Self awareness is an important part of the development of human consciousness. When I wrote this article, I did not treat it that positively. Today, in retrospect of my life change, I could find several periods in my life, in which, the sudden life change brought me into frustrations and therefore led me to more self-awareness. As a result, the stress made me think and raised my consciousness of life.

I could remember when I first settled down in the countryside after high school, I was so frustrated by the completely different way of life. I was very ignorant of country life and often became the laughingstock of others. In that period, I suddenly thought a lot. I could not sleep and took long walks in the field at night. Afterwards, I felt I had learned so much in that very short period of time. Without the life change and frustration particularly, I could never use my mind so efficiently and accomplished so much.

It is the same in my current cross-cultural experience. For years, I thought that I had become a mature man and seldom challenged myself again. The cultural shock made me look at myself intensely and I found a lot in me that I would have never found if I had not been in this frustration brought by the sudden change of life.

## **The Duality of Self**

Self-consciousness of being a foreigner always leads to the realization of the dissimilarities from the others, from the people's daily activities and social conventions. These ordinary social routines of one culture suddenly become awesome in the eyes of people from another culture. In fact, many people in their home culture would not mind if they find themselves different from others. They may even try hard to make themselves stand out, since difference could mean being distinguished, original, or ingenious. People who deliberately distinguish themselves from others can be satisfied with what they did, as they know what they want and they do things according to what they want. Even if they were not satisfied with what they did, they then can easily revert to the shared social norm.

This does not happen to foreigners. Foreigners usually only have the idea of conformity to the dominant culture, but do not know exactly how they can achieve that, and they feel they are not doing what they want. The worst thing is that they do not have a way to retreat either. The differences between themselves and others cannot be a luxury they want to enjoy, but a flaw they want to cover or get rid of.

The mirror a foreigner is facing is a distorting mirror. The figure in front of him or her is not what one has expected to see. One becomes very cautious and carefully adjusts oneself to make a better image. It is not an easy job at all.

Being a foreigner, I cannot satisfy myself with what I do. How could my eyes become so keen that I always see my own flaws? Not my eyes only, but also my ears. Before I came to Canada, I thought my English was good enough. I enjoyed my pronunciation and intonation, which won me the prize of the English Speaking Contest in my university. But now, when I hear my voice, I just hate it. If my ears have good reason to hate my mouth, my mouth also has good argument against my ears. How many times it missed the points of the jokes, and made the mouth too embarrassed to respond? How often the mouth had to ask to clarify the meaning not comprehended by the ears? My eyes cannot relax and trustfully look into the world either. How badly they see this new world. On the one hand they make a fuss of the trivial ordinary things which everybody takes for granted. On the other hand they overlook lots of important events and meaningful actions.

This process of inner conflict may lead to great distress. It is not simply that my ears hate my mouth, or my mouth hates my eyes. The inner conflict inhabits my entire being. This makes me feel that my own "self" is falling apart. Now I have two "me"s inside myself. A "me" with whom I am familiar and with whom I feel connected. This is the "me" I enjoyed and was proud of. And I am still proud of it and would not let it go. The other "me" is a stranger. It is like a distorted shadow which always appears whenever I am in the darkness of "foreignness." I cannot accept it since I do not like to. I cannot reject it either since it is part

of my own self. My old half hates my newly discovered half. It is also the newly acquired value that fights against the old value in my old half. To regain peace and confidence, a re-organization or reshaping of self is needed. This process is threatening, as one has to give up one's own identity, in order to accept this reincarnation.

In the past five years, I have re-organized and reshaped myself a lot. I have developed new consciousness, new attitudes, and even some new personal characters. However the frustrations of self conflict still goes on. As the result of this psychological process, I feel I lost quite a lot of my self-confidence.

I thought I used to be over confident of the function of human consciousness, believing I could accomplish any thing as long as I set up my mind to do so. This feeling might come from my success in several dramatic life changes in my past. However, this time, I got the message again and again that things are not as easy as I expected. What I feel most strongly is the lagging of the growth of my English language.

I thought I was very successful in learning English before I came to Canada. I became quite fluent even before I had commanded more than two thousand English words. I got some records produced by British Lingophone company. I listened to them every day. After a few weeks, my teachers told me that I had acquired some "very beautiful Lingophone accent". I was always the best student in the class. I was strong in almost every area of English learning, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

When I started teaching in the English Education Department in the University, I soon was recognized as one the most welcomed professors by the students. After running several high school English teachers' training programs, I also became popular among the school teachers in the city. My success gave me a lot of trust in my own ability. I did have difficulties and frustrations, particularly when I started something new. However, there

were always some sudden improvements I did not even expect to happen. I called them miracles.

When I came to Canada, I immediately realized that my English was badly in need of improvement. I thought I could learn very fast. I paid attention to pronunciation. I tried to use English as much as possible. I was confident that another miracle would come very soon. Unfortunately, this miracle has not come in the five years I am in Canada. I know I am improving every day, however, I am not satisfied with my achievements, particularly in pronunciation.

Not in language learning only, but also in other aspects of life did I feel my incompetence in coping with new life in Canada. In general, I am an introverted person. I am very shy and often feel uncomfortable with people. At the age of about ten, my mother once asked me to deliver a note to her school principal asking for a few days sick leave. I was so frightened to go to see a stranger, that I walked around the school for a long long time, and did not dare to enter. Finally I got a bright idea. I stuck the note on the school entrance and thought that the principal would pass by and see it.

As a school boy, I never talked to any girls (this was not very unusual in Chinese schools). But when I and my classmates were suddenly moved to the countryside after the Cultural Revolution to start our farm life, I found I was in a very stressful situation being so embarrassed in front of girls. But I tried hard to learn, and the miracle came. I soon learned the skills to cope with the problem.

For quite a long time, I had a great fear of speaking in front of big audiences. I was always quiet in meetings. If I had to say something, my heart pumped and my hands got wet. My whole face flushed like I was in a fever. After the speech, I always regretted what I thought of as "terrible mistakes" I made and suffered from then for a long, long time.

I made efforts to overcome this problem, after a period of trials, again, the miracle came and I became used to it gradually. Actually, I was quite confident to talk to people at meetings in the areas I am familiar with, especially on topics of my profession. However, I feel strongly since I came to Canada that the similar miracles do not come to me so easily.



Again, I often became too shy to talk to people in this new world. Canadians are used to eye contact when speaking to people. I suddenly found this bothered me very much. I felt particularly difficult to meet the intense eye contact of women in Canada. It often makes me panic-stricken. This became a chronic fear that I cannot get rid of. Consciously, I acknowledge that there is nothing to worry about. But I wonder why my consciousness cannot help me to get rid of the panic.

In my workplace, I always feel it difficult in building up intimate relationship with my colleagues. Because of the lack of my social skills, I am always very formal to people. I am afraid that people may get an impression that I am aloof, indifferent, and self-conceited. I tried to keep a smile on my face all the time and be very polite to others. But still I felt my behaviour was inappropriate and clumsy. This reminded me of a former classmate Liang when I was in the university in China.

Liang was brought up in a isolated remote area in the countryside. Because of the differences in social background, he was immediately distinguished from us. Liang always smiled and tried to be polite and close to people. But his efforts often looked very funny and silly to us. He obviously tried to learn and adjust, but whatever he did was funny and inappropriate. At the time I felt difficulty in understanding him. Why was Liang always so affected? How could not he behave more "natural" just like us? Everything was so simple and straight forward. It is only when I am in his shoes that I can understand him and become sympathetic to him.

On the other hand, realizing the resemblance between me and Liang, I felt the inferiority of myself living in Canadian society. I was very privileged in Chinese culture. My family background gave me all the gracefulness to be well accepted as a member of intellectual upper class in China. I can hardly accept this new reality of being similar to Liang. I am facing an overwhelming pressure of coping with a totally different life. I suspect that I am not young enough to meet the challenge and succeed. This is the first time I felt the pinch of my progressing age.

## **The Segmented Outer World**

The Ancient oriental philosophers such as the Taoists stressed the wholeness of the world. The sky, the earth, the spirit, the kingdom, all these things from ancient times arise from One, and all these are touched by the virtue of wholeness (Lao Tsu, 1972, Chapter 39). These ancient saints believed that wisdom emerges from the intuitive understanding of the world as a whole. Holistic thinking has also been advocated by Western thinkers such as Gestalt psychologists. They point out that the world cannot be possessed by cutting it into pieces. Without the grasp of the whole, the separate knowledge of parts is worthless. But foreigners living in a new country have no path to wholeness. For them, the holistic knowledge of that country and culture does not exist. Without such knowledge, it is impossible to make the connections among the separated events they have experienced. The world in their eyes remains fragmented.

Understanding a culture is like reading a text. People can experience a lot of fun from reading. But the Book of Culture is by no means an easy one. After the excitement of the first few pages, or maybe even just a few lines, the readers get frustrated by incomprehension. Second language learners are often annoyed by the interruption of new words, idiomatic expressions, unknown syntax structures in their reading. They cannot extract the meaning through the grasp of the context like most of the mature readers do. Often their attention is captured by the specific details such

as isolated words or sentences. As second language learners try hard to understand these details, they lose sight of the context of the whole. Similar things happen to foreigners who want to understand the new culture.

Sanyuo worked in a religious organization for settlement of new immigrants after he came from Hongkong. He knew what he was supposed to do and tried to do his best. But soon he felt that the limit of his knowledge about Canadian society seriously jeopardized his work. After a period of study, he got to know many different governmental, religious, and community organizations offices which were working for immigration, as well as the other social services closely related to immigrants' life, such as various kinds of educational and employment institutes. But still he did not understand how the whole system worked together, and why they functioned in that way. Though he had learned to follow the daily routines in his office, he felt he was behaving like a programmed machine. Without an intuitive understanding of the whole, he could not work intelligently and creatively.

An American writer observes: You can write a book about China after you are there for a week. However after a month of stay, you probably find that you can only write a few pages. And living there for a year, you may end up with writing nothing.

Many foreigners gradually realize, after a period of life experience in a foreign country, what naive conclusions about the new world they made when they first came. Even those specialists

who have majored in studying a certain foreign culture would still like to discuss with the native people in order to find out their bias or oversimplifications. The foreigner's vision is narrow. He or she is able to see the world only through holes, and thus, the world to them is segmented.

I discussed earlier the idea that experientially there exist two "me's" within the inner world of a foreigner. And this duality also exists in the outer world. A foreigner's new world contrasts sharply to his or her old world. When I was first attending classes at the Canadian university, I was often amazed by the Canadian students' active contribution to the class. It seemed that everyone of them talked like floating rivers, and their minds were soaring. They referred to various kinds of things in their life when they were discussing a single issue, whereas I mostly see the issue in an isolated way. I did read a lot. But I found that what I read only became meaningful when it connected to my past experience of my own country. In my mind, only that part of the world remained as a whole continent on which I could stand and move with freedom. My new world consisted of ice floats. I could recognize their existence as separated pieces, but they were too slippery for me to step on, nor was it possible for me to predict the directions of their movement.

Today the frustrations still exist and sometimes the new environment is still as scary to me. For example, Christmas is never a joyful festival to me. Though Christmas in my family is becoming more and more like a festival, we begin to set up our Christmas tree and lights, and we buy gifts for each other, it is mainly for our son. My wife and I still do not feel very much about it. Instead, Christmas often made us home sick. That day often reminds us how we celebrated Chinese New Year before we came. We also miss our relatives and friends in China.

During Christmas season, big stores in Edmonton often set up a corner with lots of Christmas decorations of Santa Claus, reindeers and sleighs, socks, sugar canes, Christmas trees, and snow flakes. Sometimes they came much earlier than I realized the coming of the Christmas. It happened in several years that I suddenly walked into a store and saw the strong red and green colours of Christmas decorations. I guess ordinary Canadians in these occasions would feel very delighted and joyful. But it is very strange to me that at the moment I felt somewhat threatened. I think it was because Christmas often gave me some extra stress. Christmas season is the period with lots of parties, visiting, gift-exchanging. These are the situations I am not very familiar with and often become very exhausted in coping with.

## **Me and the New World**

A foreigner who possesses a disorganized inner world and who inhabits an unconnected outer world finds everything paradoxical. On the one hand, the world the foreigner tries to understand collapses into pieces in front of him or her, and becomes so elusive to grasp. On the other hand, this new world still remains real, rigid, gigantic, and overwhelming, in front of which, the foreigner feels so tiny and weak.

The first foreign soil Wang stepped on was Vancouver, Canada.

It was a rainy evening when he walked through the downtown streets. To him that night, Vancouver was a cold and hard world. The cement of the street curbs, the steel rails of the stairways, and the concrete walls of the buildings were all rigid and solid, demonstrating their objective existence, and confirming for him that he was on foreign soil. The cool wet air did not soften that world a bit. Instead, he himself became stiffened. He never saw such big buildings. The buses, lightposts, and even the pedestrians all appeared much larger. This experience evoked remote memories of his childhood. He felt like a little boy again as he remembered lying down on the floor, staring at the big pieces of furniture like huge buildings all around him. The noise of the streets, with the flashing lights on the cars gave him the impression that he was confronting a powerful machine. He felt dwarfed, and sensed that he was a small child in this big, unknown, and powerful world.

Not everybody has such specific experiences of a strange place as Wang had. However, many people do feel shocked when they face an overwhelming culture. We do hear people say: "In this culture, I feel I am like a new born child." The encounter of a new cultural world is no less overwhelming than the encounter of a strange physical world.

When foreigners want to understand some problems of adult life in the host culture, they realize that they first have to know how the young are brought up in that culture. When they try to understand feminism as a woman's issue, they hear more about how

the society is dominated by men. When they want to join a group at a coffee table conversation, they find that they have to go back home to watch a TV program first. They may have read huge volumes of history, politics and economy of the country, but still find that the basic areas have not been touched yet. Indeed, they may even feel crippled as if they were blind and deaf. They may feel ignorant as if they were illiterate. They may feel incompetent as if they were old. They may feel naive as if they were children. And yet, they are not blind and deaf because they do have light and sound within themselves. They are not illiterate, because they do have their own literacy. They are not old as they have burning energy inside. They are not children as they have mature hearts. And a mature heart is an unyielding heart. It would not accept its current status. It will constantly seek for the light.

#### **B. The Light of "Homeness"**

While we can treat "darkness of being foreign" as a certain experiential quality, it is impossible to discuss the foreigner's sense of "homeness" without relating it to their "being foreign", just like we can never see a light without any shadows. Home to a foreigner may mean quite different things from the ordinary concept of home for the people who live in their own country. Again we see the duality exists. It is the duality of the foreigners' home as their old world, and the present home as their new world.

## Home as the Old World

The light in the heart of a foreigner is his or her old world, the world where he or she was brought up. To many foreigners, grass on "that side" of the hedge is always greener. In the remembrance of home, the cloudy skies, roaring storms and piercing cold all fade away, and what is left is a wonderland full of beautiful sunshine. Many people do not realize how patriotic they are until they are away from their country.

Of course not everybody is patriotic. However the passion of their home land is irresistible. Su had a narrow escape from China after the Tiananmen events in 1989. His memory of China was full of nightmares. He wrote about his homeland:

My country is what I have experienced. During the Cultural Revolution, my family and relatives had a very bad time. I was only fifteen, and I was demonstrated as the enemy to the public with my seventeen-year-old sister. All my family except my sister and me were in prison. After that I was sent to Hainan Island to do hard work for ten years. Though I had these bad experiences, I still wish I could go back. I worship land. On that piece of land, I feel cultural belongingness. I believe I could do much more there. I can not call it patriotism. But my affection is true. (Nineteen Nineties, 1989, p.11)

The feeling of "belonging" occurs to me frequently after I left my country. It could be caused by meeting someone from the home country. It may be triggered by a letter from home, a movie produced at home, a book about home, or even seeing or hearing the name of the home country. A piece of music can create strong feelings of emotion.



This happened to me when one day my wife suddenly tuned onto a radio station which was broadcasting a piece of traditional Chinese music. I was busy working at the moment. The music suddenly drew me to the radio. I put down my work. My wife was also standing there motionless. We looked at each other, and then both quietly sat down. We hushed our son, as if he could shatter the feeling. What a magic power that piece of music had! Our hearts trembled, echoing its beats, and the whole world at the moment was reverberating with its rhythm. I had listened to this song hundreds of times in China, but had never experienced a moment like this before.

In the music the walls that separated me from the outside world seemed to be crumbling, and gradually I emerged into the warmth of the surrounding. The music touched my roots. It brought me home. The music made me feel full and stable. Then I realized what belonging means. There is nothing political in its connotation, nothing racial, national, or geographic. This belonging is as down to earth and as pure as water. I feel a sense of belonging to that world for the simple reason that I am a part of it, and it is a part of me as well. In the new world, I am a drop of oil on the water. In contrast, in the old world, I am a part of this body of water. I feel my own power through the power of the whole.

The meaning of the old world to foreigners is often very elusive. It is very hard to measure its volume. This body of water

in the heart of a foreigner can be as vast as an ocean, as it often occupies his or her whole inner world. It may also crystallize to a valuable pearl, hanging like a drop on people's heart, and getting lost at times. To some people, the "old world" means their "home country". But sometimes it means "home town". And quite often a foreigner thinks about his or her own past home, or the people he or she loves. Perhaps mostly it is something beyond words. I am homesick, but I do not know what I am missing.

However vague and complicated the feeling of home is to a foreigner, he or she is constantly seeking for the light of homeness. Then what is the meaning of home to a foreigner in the new world? Again, it is quite elusive. The meaning of "home" in the new world is ever changing in the context of life, and the seeking of at-homeness is a long journey to go.

The cultural belongingness I discussed in this section does not only exist in those who consciously accept it. It may also work subconsciously in those who try to bury it. Some people may claim that they are critical or even reject their own cultural traditions. They may still be touched and become emotional in certain occasions connecting to their homeland.

I believe that I have wiped out nationalism from my mind. I realized how people's narrow nationalism was stirred up and manipulated in Chinese politics. People were told to love their country; however, behind it was the intention to create hatred to some other countries. We were taught to think that our long history of civilization was superior. Its purpose was to make us close our mind and blindly reject all the outside influence. In the struggle against communist propaganda in my mind, I conclude that patriotism can be very

negative. I do not allow myself to be too emotional about my country. Instead I believe in internationalism and humanism. I told myself that I was dedicated to the Chinese people and Chinese social progress. It is not simply because I am a Chinese and they are also Chinese, but because we are all human beings.

China, as a political unit, is not what I value very much. I think a unified China as a mono-lingual and mono-cultural society lacks diversity, pluralism and competition. China might have developed faster, if it had not been unified in this way two thousand years ago. The economic development of separated Hong Kong and Taiwan might be a proof of it. I also feel sorry for Tibetans and some other "minority nationalities". Their rights cannot be protected within the "Han" Chinese dominated society. Rationally, China should not be a name that will bring awful feelings to me. However, I find this rationality is separated from my subconscious feeling of belongingness to homeland. I realized this when I watched the Olympic games on TV. I found my heart often trembled with the performance of the Chinese team, and I even shed tears once the Chinese flag was raised and national anthem was played. The response was spontaneous. I also cheered Canadian teams. But the feeling was not that strong.

It is quite incomprehensible to me. In fact I am very critical of the way sports were treated in China. It was always regarded as a goal for national glories. The sportsmen worked hard, not for their own self-accomplishment, but for their country. The Chinese high-jumper Zhu Jian-hua broke the world record several times; however, when he failed in Los Angeles Olympics, he was condemned and criticized. It seemed that he had committed a crime to the country. It was much worse than Ben Johnston who failed his drug test. With all these in mind, I still feel that Chinese team is my team, and I do not understand myself.

### Home in the New World

Wendy and her cousins were supposed to meet at the railway station in Brussels. She struggled to get there by all means she could resort to. She consulted the tourist's handbook, looking at

the city map, trying to ask the people in English, which most of them did not understand. At the time, the city was as foreign to her as the darkness of a blind person. When she at last found the station and was united with her cousins, she suddenly felt herself at home. Even the same city which was so foreign to her moment ago suddenly became warm and full of sunshine to her. Just like the strange German hotel could make me feel at home for that short period, so the strange streets of an unknown city became her home instantly.

To me, the meaning of "homeness" is not only changing in the life context. The need for "at-homeness" is ever rising in my endless quest for at-homeness. And I can never be satisfied.

When I had just arrived in Canada, I felt so lonely in this strange world. I was extremely homesick. The warmth and friendship from other people became so valuable and I appreciated it even if it was just a greeting or a question of concern. Every kind of help or consideration touched my heart and created feelings of at-homeness. My best friend, Bill, kindly invited me to live in his home. It became my first home in Canada. Materially, I got what I needed. Spiritually, I received sincere friendship and parental care. But still, my need for "homeness" was not satisfied. I still felt homesick. I found I needed to spend sometime alone, either to go out walking for a while or shut myself in the office for hours to find relaxation or privacy. That seemed to mean more "homeness" to me.

Being alone turned out to be only a passing satisfaction for my rising needs of "homeness". I soon realized that I still need more human relations. Though my friend was very kind to me, and tried every way to make me feel at home, I knew I was a visitor there. Virtually I was not home. To me, at that moment, home meant the special intimacy of the human relationship which can only be facilitated by family members. I missed my wife and son badly.

My wife and my son did come and we soon set up our own home. Still my need for home could not be satisfied. My wife says often that she is homesick. I felt the same, and it is ever growing. Definitely, "home" at this time is no longer the family. Nor does it mean having our own shelter. At present, I have become quite familiar with this new land, and to some degree I have succeeded in my work here. I have made many friends. And I have also developed many interests and concerns about the events and future of this world. In other words, I share much common knowledge of this culture with the people here, just like what I had and what I did in my old world. But still I feel the need for "at-homeness." I still miss home.

This feeling even remains in those who have settled down in a foreign country for much longer than I. They say that the adding of years does not change much. The weight on the other side of the balance is always heavier. What changes is the meaning of home. As there are fewer people they miss and as the places they used to know and love disappear or change their appearances, they miss

really nothing but their past.

Everybody treasures his or her old days. But being foreigners, this past has special meaning. Those who stay in their own country have a continuous and consistent history. Yet a foreigner shares no past with the native people. In Schutz's word, "Seen from the point of view of the approached group, he is a man without a history" (1971, p.97). However from the point of view of the foreigner, his or her past has been severed and has become two unconnected pieces. Having undergone the disintegration and re-organization of his or her own self, and having established the new relationship with the world, the foreigner has gone through a profound change. This change is irreversible. To him or her, to recollect one's old memory is to dig out one's own identity, and to re-evaluate oneself in a new light. That is to say one has to find out the new connection between one's present existence and one's past, and make it meaningful to one's own future. Not many foreigners can complete this re-incarnation. Then the process of constantly seeking for "at-homeness" will last for ever, no matter that one is just longing for home, retreating to a protected corner as one's home, or striving to make the new world home.

I guess people reading this article will recognize the negative tune I had in depicting my life experience being a foreigner. When the article was written, I was in the valley of cultural shock. The negative side of my life experience dominated my thinking. What I wrote was

mostly the frustrated life experience of being a foreigner. When I wrote about the "darkness" and "light" for a foreigner, I mainly described myself as being in "darkness". The "light" to me was elusive and ever changing. I regarded it as a life long pursuit for a foreigner to seek for the light of "homeness".

I came to Canada in my middle age. I had been quite confident of myself and very satisfied with my past success. I thought I was mature enough and smart enough to cope with more life changes. However, the new life experience told me that my past experiences do not work so well in this new life. I have to find out new ways to cope with new problems. This is a big push to my inert and self-conceited ego. This push certainly made differences.

Today, I am seeing more and more of the positive side of being a foreigner. I see the cross-cultural experience as a unique opportunity for me to enrich myself. Through the constant encountering and comparison of different ways of thinking and different way of life, I have been challenging many assumptions and beliefs I hold for long time. This also led me to the writing of this thesis. In fact, one of the purposes of doing this autobiographic study is to discover more potential of this bright side of being of foreigner.

## CHAPTER 7

### CHANGING OF PERSPECTIVES

The cultural shock I experienced was a very educational period for me. I was surprised to see that after my immigration status was changed, the way I saw the Canadian society was also changed. This world used to be a perfect society to me. Now I started to see its flaws.

Furthermore, as soon as I found that Canada is not perfect, I suddenly see so many problems with it. These problems keep popping up in front of me one after another. Soon I came to another realization--not only Canada was not perfect, but it is in serious crisis. This big change of perspectives made me to re-examine my own belief system and way of thinking. As a result, I came to a new paradigm of thinking.

#### A. Social Crisis

When I argued with my wife about how safe living in Edmonton was, I knew there were murders, robberies, thefts, rapes here. But as I compared them with the safety in China, and social change of China is always my major concern, those crimes in Edmonton did not bother me much. It was also because that they did not happen to me or anyone I knew during that period of time.

However, once subsequently several suites in my apartment building were broken into one afternoon and lots of private property was stolen. The other day someone damaged all the washer



and dryers in the building's laundry room, just for stealing the coins in the machine. Police talked to me as the manager. A few days later, a man entered the video shop next door to our apartment at midnight. He stole all the money at knife point. The other day, someone was murdered in the building facing ours. My son's bicycle was also stolen. These events all occurred over a short period of time after we moved away from the university area and lived in a apartment building in Jasper Place.

The new life experiences also made me talk to more and more people about living safety in this city. The apartment building owner deplored the fact that ten years ago Edmontonians seldom heard of any crimes, and life was absolutely safe then. In just a few years, the city changed from a paradise to a murder capital. A neighbour who worked in a company selling home security systems told me that business there was really booming because of the deterioration of safety. More and more news about the sexual assault of children, gun shooting, Asian gangs, vandalism, prostitution, overworked police, etc., supports the feeling that the society is deteriorating.

It is still hard to compare living safety in Canada and China by statistics or rational analysis for a conclusion of which is better. However, emotionally I am starting to feel the same as I felt in China, i.e., a strong sense of crisis. Criminal incidents in Canada are no longer minor problems to me.

While I am developing more and more concerns for the social

problems here, I am starting to notice another social crisis in Canada--the breaking down of the traditional family structure. Family disputes, separation and divorces, single parents, school drop-outs, young offenders, these seem to be a sequence of a series of social problems that bother a lot of people in Canada and have serious consequences.

Before I came to Canada, I read a little about the dramatic change in the Western world since the 1960s sexual liberation. This social change was totally in conflict with Chinese tradition and value and was regarded as one more evil of the capitalist world. However, from my observations of Chinese family life, I thought it might not be a bad thing.

Young men and women in China usually keep a very large distance from each other. Their contacts in life and work are always very formal and cautious. Because of this, most of them do not have good chance to get to know each other, fall in love and get married.

Very few Chinese women older than 25 and men older than 27 remain single. If so, they are regarded as either physically or psychologically abnormal, or too bad to find a spouse. Therefore, when young people come to the age to be married but still do not have a fiancé, they are often introduced to a date by their relatives or friends. After a period of time of seeing each other, they may decide to get married or leave each other. Sexual life is absolutely forbidden before marriage.

The marriage orientated dating makes it very difficult for the young people to know each other well before they get married. Usually they would not like to date for long before reaching a decision of marriage, because it is regarded immoral by the society for a girl to have long term relationship with a man without getting married. On the other hand, when a young couple breaks after dating each other, it is always believed that the girl was the one who was dumped. Girls who failed dating with several men are usually not trusted and become more difficult to be married. Because of these moral codes, young people, especially women, do not have much choice before they get into the boat of marriage. And this boat of marriage does not anchor until its destiny.

Divorce is a very serious thing in China. Again, women are mostly the victims. A divorced woman is regarded as an unqualified wife or even immoral, no matter who divorced whom. Children of divorced family are also discriminated in the society. In my observation, though there are a lot of unhappy families, very few of them even try to divorce. The society and legal system keep very hard pressure to enforce family unity.

I had not realized this as a serious social problem until I saw the family dispute of my best friend Ho. Both Ho and his wife were very nice people. However, they just could not get along with each other. Their fight started in the first week and finally Ho demanded a divorce. However, the Chinese legal system then would not accept a divorce case unless both of the couple agree to

divorce. But Ho's wife did not.

My wife and I were their very trusted friends. They talked to us a lot about their suffering and asked for help. Being part of the Chinese society, we functioned very traditionally. We tried every way to persuade them to stay together like all their relatives and other friends did to them. As a result, they remained together for years and kept fighting for years. Finally, the wife got cancer. When she died, I realized that we had done something terribly wrong to them. I felt very guilty to both of them.

With this life experience, when I came to Canada, I appreciated very much of the Western way that couples have right to separate or divorce at their wills. I also praised young Canadians life style of dating each other freely, and live together for long time, before they make a mature decision that the person he or she wants to marry is really the right one. This view of sexual relationship is very untraditional and even unpopular in Chinese community in Canada. But I argued with my fellow Chinese.

However, my enlarged life circle gradually lead me to see the other side of the issue. There are so many divorces in Canada, and single parent families become a very large proportion of Canadian families. Not only sociologists, psychologists and educators are studying this new social phenomena, it is also frequently reflected on T.V., in movies, and in other forms of literature. Those popular T.V. comedies such as "Who Is the Boss", "Step by Step", "Full House", all reflect the same theme--a new reality of North American

family structure.

I made some new friends who were divorced. Their family changes are by no means comedies. I heard a lot of their sad stories. They suffered especially of being separated from their children. Some were moved to other cities, or even other countries. I could hardly imagine what it would like if I could not see my son any more.

Probably, children suffer much more than their parents. In the apartment where I lived in, there were some single mothers. Most of them lived under the poverty line, and their children were not well taken care of. Once I saw a two year old locked in the room. He climbed onto a table, broke the glass window and got out. Not only was he cut, but also he was almost hit by a car. Another ten year old boy lost his key. He tried to get into their suite from balcony but fell down. He broke his leg.

Since teaching in Edmonton public schools, I found and heard of many children suffering from physical or emotional problems because of their family tragedies. Some children go to school with empty stomachs or without lunch. Some have serious behaviour problems, and some have very low academic achievements. Each individual case certainly is different from others, but one of the most common problems of these children is their family's breaking up.

I used to think that because of the much better opportunities for the young Canadians to get to know each other well before they

get married, there should be more marriage stability than in China, where it is often the case that husbands and wives start really knowing each other only after the marriage. However the fact is that the Canadian families are more fragile without the bondage of certain social codes. Chinese culture emphasizes more on family value. Some individuals have to satisfy their individual needs for other family members. Canadian culture emphasizes individualism. When the interests of individuals are in conflict, it is still some individuals who suffer. Probably, because Chinese culture sets more limits to the individual's interests and desires, there are less conflicts between individuals who live together. And therefore, there are less individuals who suffer.

I am not trying to prove that the Chinese family value is better than the Canadian's. I think I can write a strong argument against Chinese family tradition. What I feel important is that I got to see the problem from two different perspectives. Why did I see only one side of the reality before?

## **B. Environmental Crisis**

Environmental protection is another social issue that drew my attention in Canada. It also took me some time to realize the seriousness of the problem.

Once I visited an exhibition displayed by environmentalists in Edmonton. The display used very strong evidences to show the environmental crisis we are facing, and I was quite impressed.

However, what surprised me and made me think was the part of solutions the exhibition promoted. It called on people to drive less and use bicycles and buses and to limit the production and use of refrigerators and air-conditioning. What immediately came to my mind was that those people felt bored living in the comfortable modern life, and wanted to try something different. If they had experienced the hardships of life in under-developed countries, they would not have thought about getting rid of these great achievements of science and technology so easily.

The display also showed a series of environmentally friendly products, such as washable diapers which can be used again and again, long lasting grocery bags made of cloth instead of plastics, rechargeable drink bottles, soaps without chemicals, etc. Ironically, those products looked exactly the same as what have been used in China for years, and what Chinese are trying to replace.

For seven years in China before I came, I rode a bicycle for half an hour to get home after work every day, some times soaked in rains or frozen in ice and snow. At the time, my dream was to have a motorcycle. A car was too far beyond reach to ordinary Chinese. I also know what it was like to wash diapers several times a day. When some chemical products were first introduced to China, such as detergents, glass cleaners and kitchen liquid soaps, they made life so much easier. We heard that in the developed countries, people throw away plastic dishes after each meal, discard their

pens when finishing writing, and even buy a new camera for each role of film. What great wonders modern science can bring about to life!

When I came to Canada, it was not easy for me to understand and appreciate the efforts of Canadian environmentalists. It is such a large country with so few people and little industry, the environment is much better than in China. It is crazy to spend so much for environment protection and even at the cost of economic development and job opportunities. This is what I heard very often from our community, especially from those who are in the professions of science and technology as well as in business.

What taught me was the dedication of so many Canadian environmentalists and the publicity of environmental issues in the heated debates for governmental and industrial decisions. The daily life in Canada also convinces me that we are facing a environmental crisis.

The first day I went to the Canadian university, I was given a big pile of printed paper to read: University Catalogue, International Student Centre's brochures, housing in Edmonton, registration information, courses descriptions, etc. When I got to the place where I lived, I found a big pile of advertisements in the mailbox. The next morning, I saw the newspaper in Canada was so thick, whereas in China they were usually two pages each day.

I immediately understood what people meant when they told me that the western world was a world of information. However, I found



I was almost buried by the coming information every day. I hardly had any time to read them before they became garbage. This made me feel shameful. Paper and printing were very expensive in China, where they were first invented. Even the students did not have the opportunity to read what they should read because of the cost.

Not only did I understand that this is a world of information, but also this is a world of materials. I was surprised to see that people threw away those big things such as mattresses, T.V., bikes, desks, carpets, and even cars. Many of them were still good to use. In China, things are used for much longer time. They are fixed again and again. I can hardly recall any furniture we threw away for years living in China. However, after a few months, I found I had to do the same. The T.V. I bought from a garage sale was broken, and I bought another one. What to do with the old one? I knew it could be fixed, but I would not save much more money to fix it than to buy a new one. I wanted to give it to T.V. repair shops, but they were not interested in. I had to dump it in the garbage can.

There is so much garbage every day. Whenever I throw some out, I feel a big sense of relief. I know many of them are made of plastics, glass, alumina, etc. They will exist and occupy a space on our very limited living space of the earth for hundreds or even thousands of years! While we are dumping and dumping, the manufacturers are trying to produce more as fast as possible. The aggressive salesmen knock at every door to push for sales. And we,

as consumers, keep buying and buying. Every one has to live in this way, because our national economy is bound to this deteriorating cycle. If we stop, the whole society breaks down.

I had also heard of and felt a lot of pollution in China before I came. However, I did not know enough of how serious the problem was. At least, it was not one of the priorities I had in mind. I believed that what China needed most was science and democracy.

"Science and Democracy" was the slogan first raised by a group of young Chinese scholars in the May 4th New Culture Movement in 1919. Today, after seventy years, a lot of intellectuals still believe that they are the two major tasks for the Chinese to modernize our society.

To the general population of Chinese, there are still many people who are not very sure about democracy and do not want to be involved much in politics. However, nobody ever doubts about developing science and technology in China. People are very eager to modernize the country to reach the living standard of the industrialized world. "Modernization" became one of the most popular word in Chinese life. However, my new life experience makes me doubt about this undoubtable now.

While Chinese are pursuing the higher standard like Canadian life, many Canadians are considering moving back to the way similar to Chinese life. If so, should Chinese be more careful and learn the lessons of the industrialized countries before we move ahead?

I used to be so confident that our human society is in the process of progress as science and technology being the most important indicators. Now I realize that the world and our life are more complicated than I thought. The future of human beings is not predetermined in the ever rising civilization as Marxist education told me. If we are not careful enough, our ignorance and simple-mindedness someday will lead us to the irremediable mistakes and even the disasters which lead to the destruction of all our life on this planet.

While I am becoming more and more critical of the scientific efforts of human actions against nature, I am also starting to challenge another notion which I used to believe as unchallengeable, that is "scientific thinking". "Scientific" has become a very commonly used word in academic studies and in our daily life. It is the synonym of "good", "right", and "true". To say an idea, a statement, a theory or a plan is good, we often call it scientific. In our modern life, it has become self evident that scientific thinking is the correct way of thinking.

However, it was very fresh for me to notice in many courses I took in the Faculty of Education that "scientific" is becoming a very "negative" word. Scientific thinking is very narrow-minded because of the complexity of our life and society. Scientific research as a traditional way of research in social sciences is often seen as both inadequate and misleading.

### **C. Political Crisis**

One of the most conspicuous crisis in Canada probably is its constitutional crisis, as it drags along and draws so much public attention. It may also decide life or death of Canada as a country in the world.

Many people in Canada hated this never-ending political marathon. However, for quite a long time, I enjoyed it and celebrated it. I held it as a symbol of democracy and civilization. That cultural conflicts can be treated so peacefully never occurred in history before, and it is not happening in other parts of the world now. While people are saying that they are tired of this talking and talking, I would rather say that it is better than not being allowed to talk. It is much easier to solve the problem by force. And that is what they did and are still doing in China, former Soviet Union, Iraq, Thailand, Yugoslavia, Somalia, and most parts of the world.

I worshipped democracy. That was one of the reason that made me to come to Canada. I was so impressed by Canadian multiculturalism. It would not have happened, if it had not been for the very democratic environment that nurtures pluralism and open mindedness.

To me, this democratic environment can be seen almost everywhere in Canadian life. In the university, I was very impressed by the professor-student relationship. Students were allowed to participate in free discussions and there is always so

much in a course that is contributed by the students instead of from professors as the only resources of knowledge.

Being a student from another cultural background, I always feel the inadequacy of my knowledge and skills in fully functioning in a Canadian class. However, I found people are so willing to listen to me and appreciate my view. They regard my perspective as very unique and valuable in opening their vision.

I am particularly impressed by Canadians' self-confidence. This is certainly the result of democratic education. Those Canadian students are so willing to speak out and share their idea with others in classes. Not only the university students, I found people here, men or women, and even teenagers can speak out easily in classes, big meetings, TV interviews, etc. They ask questions, sharing their opinions and giving criticism. I seldom see any of them shy or hesitant in front of people, no matter they are strangers or a large audience.

In contrast, most of Chinese from mainland China feel embarrassed in front of people's attention. I myself am particularly so. Quite often when I am going to say something in a meeting, my heart pumps and hands get wet. When I start speaking, my voice trembles and face flushes. I had so many bad memories of these embarrassing moments.

Many Canadians would also admit that they have similar problems. But I would say that the difference is significant. Many other Chinese in Canada noticed this too. They pointed out that

event the high officials of Chinese government, TV pronouncers and professional performers in China usually would not behave very naturally and unrestrained, with ease and confidence in the important occasions such as in front of big audience or TV cameras. We even see the difference between the babies. A lot of Chinese babies are scared by strangers. They either cry or turn away from them. But this seldom is the case of Canadians babies. They are said to be born with the blood of self-confidence.

I would not agree with this genetic explanation. To me, Chinese cultural tradition and Chinese political system together nurtured self-criticism and self denial. In Canada, a professor can introduce himself by saying: "I am Golden Smith, University of Toronto." But a Chinese professor would do it differently. What he would say is: "I am Beijing University's Li Ming." In Chinese culture, the group is always more important than the individual.

Typical Chinese modesty also reflects this tradition of self-denial and self-criticism. In China, a speaker in a meeting would like to open his or her speech by saying: "As I have little talent and less learning, please give your precious advice and criticism!" This tradition is embedded so deeply in most of the Chinese that even those who have been living in Canada for decades still would not get rid of its influence.

Recently I attended a Chinese language teaching conference in Canada. An elder Chinese professor who has been teaching in a Manitoba university for many years stressed constantly in her

speech that she was only talking about her own personal opinions, and they might not be correct. Though the audience was very excited about what she said, she reminded us several times that if we felt not interested or were wasting time, it was still not too late to leave the room.

I am facing the same problem in the cultural adjustment. In Chinese tradition, people never take a compliment. When somebody says to me: "You speak good English!", I would always response very spontaneously by saying: "No. My English is very bad." I was reminded by several friends that this kind of answers does not sound polite to people, and I was told "Thank you!" would be a better answer. I tried, but it is very difficult to do so. Whenever I say "Thank you!", I always feel guilty. I feel I am too self-conceited to accept others' compliments. Mostly, I found I just kept quiet or gave a "Thank you!" in very low and uncertain voice.

A Chinese student leader, Chai Ling, who escaped from Tianamen massacre said that to develop democracy in China, we have to start from the family level. In Chinese, there is no such words that can be the counterpart of simple English words "brother" or "sister". We have "Gege" which means elder brother, and "Didi", younger brother. The distinction of age difference is important in Chinese culture because even if the brothers are just one year different, the elder is still more powerful, and the younger has to listen to him. The power relationship is certainly much more obvious between

generations in a family. With this deeply rooted non-democratic tradition, there must be a very long and tough road before Chinese arrive at the destiny of democracy.

My interest in democracy lead me observe carefully and reflect on Canadian democracy every day. After five years of life experience, I found my own understanding of the nature of democracy is changing.

First of all, I realize that democracy might be a goal or a principle, but there is nothing can be found in Canada or anywhere on earth that can be called genuine democracy, and perhaps there will never be any in the future. Democracy is always ambiguous. Its true meaning is ever changing.

It took me sometime to realize that in Canada, there are still plenty of non-democratic elements in the society. There might be more democratic ideas in universities and academic settings, but in the vast areas of life such as workplace, especially in the private companies, there is very little democracy existing. How could democracy function effectively when people work under the control of private ownership, and the security of their income is in the hands of others. And to secure one's income and therefore better life, it is so important to get hold of power in hand.

The first Canadian workplace which I worked in was a university office. I did not get myself prepared to think that I was no longer a student seeking for idealism, but an employee being hired to work for others. I was immediately reminded.



My boss, who was always very nice and friendly to me told me during a coffee break that workplaces in Canada are very different from university environment. "You will not find a boss who treats you like professors to students, believe me." This made me immediately realized that I was also facing a boss, though it was in a university office.

At the beginning, I dealt with the problems that occurred in the work like academic issues. I discussed with the boss, and showed my differences. But I soon realized that this was not academic discussions. I was expected to have the work done, only in certain way. I had no part in decision making.

Even my names were used differently. I had known my boss long before I was hired. She mostly called me my Chinese name "Wu Zhou", though most people were calling me "Joe". She kept calling me that way after I worked for her. However, for some time, whenever what I was doing did not meet the expectations or I was trying to make some differences, I found I was called my English name "Joe". I do like people call me "Joe", but the change of the way calling me seemed to be giving me a message: "Joe, you are not a foreign guest here now, I would like you to do it in our way, the Canadian way."

It was not a bad experience being reminded so politely in that way. I appreciated her very good advice and help in that period of time of work. What I am pointing out is the change of relationship under the new circumstance of being employed. All my later employers had some differences in the way of handling the

employer-employee relationship. However, the power and control always remain.

Schools are much better places for democracy. When my son finished his first Canadian school day, he told me that he would never go back to Chinese schools. It was not because the rooms and the desks and chairs are better, but because he had so much freedom here, and the teacher was so nice to him.

In China, the classroom was always teacher centred. The students were supposed to sit straight with their hand on their back and eyes staring on the teacher all the time. My son did not fit into that educational environment well and was often scolded by the teachers. As a result, he suffered from very low self-esteem, and had a very bad self-image. To move from a Chinese school to a Canadian one, he felt he was in a fantastic wonderland, garden of heaven. He immediately felt his value and strength because his talent in arts and his knowledge in history were highly appreciated. To him he was liberated.

However, this heaven of democracy is severely criticized by many Western educational theorists. The schools are criticized as enslaving students for social reproduction. The relationship between teachers and students is called oppression. And they call for emancipatory education. They want to liberate the schools where my son already felt liberated.

It was very hard for me to understand their stand at the beginning. But through careful study and reflection, I found I am

totally in agreement with the liberation educators. Though the schools are much better than those Chinese schools, seeing from more progressive point of view, it is still the same in nature of the traditional schools, where teachers control the knowledge and curriculum, and the students were only recipients of knowledge. I felt especially strong since I taught in Edmonton public schools. Every day I feel we are so far from initializing students for independent inquiry of knowledge, to become the responsible masters of their own fate. The school does function as a tool to enforce power relationship between students and teachers and authorities, and prepare them for the society generation after generation to be the slaves of the existing system.

Seeing democracy in Canadian education gives me a much better understanding of what the nature of democracy is. Democracy is nothing concrete and easily defined. It can never be fully achieved either. The heaven of democracy to my son can be the prison of control to others. The same reality is different being seen in different perspectives.

The same can be said to the democracy in the Canadian constitutional talks. It is a great democracy as people of different ethnic groups and cultural values can solve their problems peacefully without resorting to force. However, seeing from another perspective, the democracy in this round and round of constitutional debates exhibits very very low level of democracy and human consciousness. The nature of it is still the struggle for

power of one group of people against other groups. Throughout its course, it is full of ethnocentrism, selfishness, fear, misunderstanding and distortion of meanings. They talked about the "triple E" system. What is struggled for are all numbers of senates and representations of provinces. These have nothing to do with the effectiveness of the system. And perhaps nobody really cares about the efficiency at this point. With the power as the aim of the struggle, who cares the national unity and economic set-back?

Is this the democracy I should learn and bring back to China someday as a model for the Chinese? The answer is "yes" and "no". My Canadian experience constantly tells me that there is no perfect country and system in the world. First of all, we have to live with it, and on the other hand, we can never give up to improve our existence for the better.

#### **D. Economic Crisis**

Material wealth is one thing that impressed me most when I came to Canada. I saw the crystal skyscrapers downtown; sophisticated facilities in universities, hospitals, banks and libraries, people's houses and cars. In China, numbers used for money such as a school budget, a construction plan, or a city government department expenditure is often in thousands or tens of thousands. A million is a number seldom heard for counting money. But here in Canada, even a elementary school has a budget of two or three million Canadian dollars. And there is nothing strange to

hear billion used in the financial world. To me, money was abundant and everywhere in Canada. However, I heard so much talk of the shortage of money. Universities were shouting for money. The city development was squeezed by money cuts. And people complained of losing money because of inflation. How could people live with so much of money but see no money every day?

For the first couple of years in Canada, my family's monthly income was only a little more than one thousand dollars, well below the poverty line. With this money, we fed the whole family, supported our son in school, and I paid several thousand dollars tuition fees. However, we were still able to save quite a bit. It was not because we could not find any way to spend it, rather we felt we had to have some saving for security. Most of the other Chinese students and their families did the same.

It was hard for us to understand why a lot of Canadians with better incomes still could not make ends meet, or at least have no savings in the bank. One explanation is that poor people in North America are often in the situation in which they cannot predict their future and therefore lose hope. That is the reason why those people have very poor planning and financial management. However, it seems to me that it is just the opposite. Because of the better social welfare and political stability in Canada and North America, people generally have the feeling of safety and do not feel the need to take good care of their money. They would not go starving anyway. But people living in third world countries never feel safe.

If they do not have a savings for the bad years with natural disasters or wars, they are at risk.

My wife was very nervous when she came and found we had no any savings at all. She did not feel safe even after we got several thousand dollars in the bank. In an unfamiliar place, life is more unpredictable than when we were in China. We worked hard and saved hard, trying to make ourselves financially secure.

Groceries were the biggest part of our expenditure, but we could spend very little. Still we felt happy with our food. We never went to restaurants. We always shopped very carefully. Ordinary Canadians may never think that spending a dollar or two on a loaf of bread is a waste of money, but we bought twenty kilograms of wheat flour for four dollars in a store, and made our own bread for two months. When the prices of drinks were low, we bought a lot and put them in storage. We looked for coupons and sales in newspapers to save every penny possible.

Most of our clothing came from budget shops, where the prices of most items are less than ten percent of the prices when they were new. But still, we have some way to save more there. Every two or three months, they have a sale with every item at fifty percent off. We could always find clothes and shoes to fit us. I walked to the university with the clothing I wore worth less than ten dollars and nobody noticed. My wife said she chuckled when people mentioned to her: "I like your dress." or "Your new shirt looks so nice!" For other necessities, we went to garage sales or looked at "Bargain

Finders". We seldom went to second hand stores for furniture. We did not go to a car dealer for a used vehicle. We knew it would be more expensive there because the dealers make money from it.

We believed only hard work could make for better life. We tried many different kinds of jobs. We worked as the residential manager of an apartment building for free lodging. At the same time, we cleaned ten other apartment buildings in another complex. We delivered newspapers, worked in restaurants, and did baby sitting. When I came to Canada, I had only a few dollars in my pocket for making telephone calls. But in three years, we could buy a townhouse with a large downpayment. This sounds incredible to some people. But we did not win the lottery. We did not buy stocks or invest in any kind of business. All of our savings was from our hard work.

The owner of my apartment was an Italian immigrant. He came as a poor boy, and had experienced the hard life similar to ours. He often used my family as an example to teach his son. When we were moving out of his building, he said to me: "You guys always come and get money. But my son is still a big dummy."

Chinese culture values houses and land. In their tradition of the agricultural society, house and land are the basic means to make living. No matter how much money they have, they change it to a shelter or a piece of land. Wherever Chinese people live in the world, they manage to buy a house before they put their money anywhere else. Most Chinese in Edmonton live in their own houses.

In fact, this may indicate less of their wealth and success, but more of their tradition. "A bird needs its own nest", they say.

Some people may not understand how those people live, and think that they are too calculating. But from their perspective, this is the very natural way of life. They are simply doing what they did generation after generation. On the other hand, Chinese people have difficulty understanding other ways of life. They wonder why so many people live in apartments. "They have been in Canada for so long, but still renting? What poor financial management!"

In Chinese value, people also feel guilty to owe anybody any money. We even feel uncomfortable to have a large loan or mortgage from the bank. If I cannot afford it, why should I have it? People in China think every westerner must be rich. They travel around the world by airplane with video cameras. They live in luxury hotels and buy a lot of things. They must all have tens of thousands of dollars saved in the bank. It was a surprise to know that it was just the opposite. So many people in North America have tens of thousands in loans or mortgages from the bank. They may have a very good income, and choose to travel a lot or spend their time for sports or other hobbies. They would not try as hard as we do to pay our debts up as early as possible.

It usually takes quite a long time for people to understand and appreciate other ways of life. I found we are in the situation very similar to the cultural discrepancy between people of cities



and people living in the countryside. One of my university student was sent to teach in a very remote country school in China. He wrote to me that he and his wife who was also a university graduate from the city enjoyed the natural environment there very much. They would like to take a walk on the country roads every evening. The native people there could hardly accept their 'strange behaviours'. They commented: "Those city jerks do not fix their houses, do not work in their gardens and do not prepare for the winter, but waste their energy and time walking. What a shame!" The young couple were even more isolated from the villagers when they found a small lake nearby and started swimming in it. Many people turned away from them, especially women. They thought the couple were devils.

When I heard of their stories, I laughed at the country people's narrow-mindedness. A Chinese saying describes this kind of people as the frogs at the bottom of a well. They could only see a little piece of the sky from there, but conclude that the sky is small. Now I realize that we are also like those frogs when we could not understand why many Canadians go skiing, golfing and boating, instead of saving their money for something else. They were brought up in that way and it has become their basic needs of life just as natural as the young Chinese couple did walking and swimming.

## **E. Reflection**

My new life experience in Canada makes me realize the complexity

of life and human societies. It challenged my assumption that there is an ideal society in the world, that there are some ready made simple solutions for complex social problems. Such assumptions sound very naive to me now, but having been moulded by communist education, I did take the very naive idea for granted for many years. And I know that a lot of people in China still think in that way.

We used to rely too much on Marxism, Mao Tse-tong and the Communist Party, believing that they had led us to the only right way to the ideal society. Disappointed by Mao's Cultural Revolution, people turned to Deng Xiao-ping's economic reform and political pragmatism. Things in China suddenly switched to the other extreme. What was promoted by the Cultural Revolution are now all absolutely regarded as wrong. And the opposite became right. Revolutionary zeal which had prevailed for thirty years from 1950s to 1970s suddenly totally disappeared. People all rushed for money. In this game of money, there is no morality, no honesty, no discipline and no principles. Only money works and only money can save China. As a result, crimes, corruption, jealousy become rampant. Though people's living standard is higher, dissatisfaction and hatred is rising rapidly.

Facing the new chaos and confusion coming accompanying the reform, many people believe that what China needs is a new doctrine, some -ism that could lead us to a new social order and prosperity. They are also waiting for a new political giant, who is

more intelligent than Mao and Deng and who has the magic to wipe out all social maladies and create an ideal society.

My new cross-cultural experience told me that an ideal society simply does not exist in the world, and there would not be one in the future, either. Every country in the world has its own headaches. There is no simple solutions to the problems of China, nor to other parts of the world. Canadians are also facing their own problems. These problems seemed to be minor problems to me when I regarded myself as an outsider. However, many of them are critical of me now.

The broadening of life circle is certainly one of the major factors that brought about the change in my thinking. Changing my status from that of a visitor to permanent resident also changed my expectations of living in Canada. This changed my relationship with the people and environment here. My surroundings might still be the same, but my perspectives of them are different now. This change of perspectives challenged a lot of my old assumptions and beliefs.

I used to take the materialist stand and believed that reality and facts are primary, whereas human consciousness is secondary. Human perceptions and consciousness have to be correct reflections of the reality, just like undistorted images in mirrors.

Our Marxist education told us that the world is formed by matter, and matter determines human existence. Therefore, all the development in the world including the movement of stars and planet, the growth of plants, animals and human beings, the

historical development of human society, everything in the world is governed by some natural laws. These natural laws could not change according to human wills. Instead, the function of human consciousness was to find out the laws and conform to these laws. In this way, we could succeed in our struggles of life. Otherwise we would fail.

Under this principle, the correct way of seeing and understanding the world and social development was the way that agrees with natural law. We called this objectivism. Being objective meant to see the world correctly. As there is only one objective world and therefore one reality, there is only one correct way of seeing it.

Holding this belief, I never thought reality could be seen from different perspectives, and could hardly imagine it was natural that people see the same thing in different ways. In my mind, reality was reality, facts were facts. Everybody could and should see them in the same way---the one only correct way.

It was this belief that led me to think there was always a black and white distinction of good and bad, right and wrong. It was this belief that made me whole-heartedly devoted to communism first and then totally rejected it later. It was this belief that gave me the confidence that there should be a correct way of social development which was universal to all countries.

Now I realized that though the material world is independent of human perception, we may never get a clear picture of what it is

without the involvement of human emotion, intention and conceptualization. Furthermore, reality can never be separate from human existence as human activities always interact and change that reality. On the one hand, a person's intention, emotion, attitude determine how he or she sees and conceptualizes the reality. On the other hand, how he or she sees and conceptualizes the reality also determines his or her emotion, attitude, and the way he or she deals with reality. If there is really a natural law, it must be---  
EVERY ONE LIVES IN A DIFFERENT REALITY.

#### **F. The Significance of My New Paradigm of Thinking**

I am not sure how the readers of my thesis feel about the progress of my thinking. To me, this new paradigm of consciousness I have gained from my cross-cultural experiences is very significant. Casting away black-white polarity of thinking, and recognizing the complexity of the world, I broke through the tunnel vision of either-or alternatives, and come to see much more possibilities of life. I feel the power of this new consciousness.

##### **1) Cross-cultural Consciousness and My Changing Attitude Towards Reality and People**

By changing my way of thinking, this new paradigm of my consciousness changed my attitude to life and the world. It also changed the way I am related to the reality. And therefore, my new consciousness offers a totally new world to me.

The new consciousness is also changing my attitude towards people. Though I believe that I am generally an understanding person, and easy to get along with, there was one area in which I used to be very intolerant to differences, politics.

With the value system in which I was brought up in China, I believed that politics was struggle, the struggle between a group of good people and a group of bad people. I made friends with those people who shared similar political ideology, not only believing that they were my comrades, but also trusting that these people were morally sound with good conscience. On the other hand, I looked down upon those who were less critical to the communist regime, thinking they were unconscious and had no feeling or simply a bunch of cowards. I particularly hated those who spoke loudly in agreement with the government. I called them snobs and hypocrites. I believed that those people trade their conscience with official positions and power. I even saw some of them as potential enemies. My heroes were those who dare to stand up against them for justice and social progress.

Now, with the new paradigm of consciousness, I am becoming more and more aware of the complexity of the life of individuals. I came to see more of different shades of them, instead of dividing them into two black vs. white groups. With this new understanding of life and the world, I can see how people arrive at different conclusions for the same event.

Once I met an elderly Chinese professor who left China forty

years ago and had been teaching in an American university for years. He was very friendly to me. After exchanging a few sentences, I no longer thought he was a stranger. We found that we were both in the area of second language teaching. He suggested that we go to a restaurant to talk.

We did not discuss a lot about language teaching before we turned to the topic of politics. To my surprise, he stood firmly on the side of Chinese communist government on the issue of Tiananmen massacre. He was the first overseas Chinese individual I met who took that stand openly. Before I could get a chance to air my views, he sternly denounced 1989 Chinese Pro-democracy Movement, calling it an American conspiracy. He justified the army's killing of civilians, claiming that every government in the world had the right to do it and many countries, including the United States, did it to their own people. He also severely reprimanded the overseas Chinese students who supported the democratic movement. He believed that they had betrayed their own country for the exchange of getting a better life in western countries.

I was just stunned by his flow of tirade. What he said was not only nonsense to me, but also disgusting. I got some idea about his personal experiences in his talk. He had gone to Japan when he first left China almost fifty years ago. There he had a Japanese education as well as a lot of personal humiliation because China was conquered by Japan at the time. Then he moved to the United States and was teaching Japanese there. It seemed that he was very

negative to these two countries and the discrimination he suffered made him a very strong Chinese nationalist.

Our conversation had a very unhappy ending that day when I tried to reveal my point of view. At that moment I thought he might be the only person whom I could find in the world thinking that way. But later on, I had several opportunities to meet people like him. I came to understand more of how people think about their world according to how they are related to it.

Other Chinese who were from Malaysia, Indonesia, and other southeast Asian countries told me about the conflicts between Chinese and the native people in those countries. According to them, the Chinese were not only discriminated against their people, but even often murdered in riots in nineteen fifties and sixties. Though those people all knew some dark side of communist China, such as the violation of human rights, constant disastrous economic policies, etc., their concern focused upon a united and independent fatherland of China with powerful international influence. They especially appreciated Mao Tse-tong's time when China boldly stood up to both of the world super-powers, U.S.S.R and U.S.A. This posture made them feel dignified to be Chinese in those countries where they were not well respected and fairly treated. They said after China became a big power in Southeast Asia, they were treated better because these small countries had to think about their relationship with China. Human rights in China? They had heard something about it but never felt that concerned about it. What



they felt worst about every day was the inequality of being a member of an ethnic minority.

Now I can better understand that Chinese professor from the United States. Without a real life experience in China, it is so easy for him to say that any government in any country facing the situation of Tiananmen Event has to keep order and social stability, even if at the cost of hundreds, even thousands of peoples lives.

On the other hand, my judgement of the Tiananmen event is based on my belief in human rights and democracy, because of the totally different life experience I had. I would have thought he had ignored the facts, and was too subjective whereas I was objective. Therefore, he was wrong and I was right. But now, I would rather say that both of us were very subjective. Both of us ignored some facts and favoured some other facts. But the major difference between us was our beliefs. I believed in democracy and he believed in nationalism.

I still feel that my choice is the better choice based on better judgement. But I also acknowledge that hearing his point broadened my horizon and enriched my thinking. I no longer feel what he said was nonsense and disgusting. I am sure what I said to him would also make him think. Maybe he would like to adjust his stand as well.

With this new paradigm of thinking, I believe more and more in communication than in struggle. We tend to arrive at different

meanings from the same reality, because of our individual differences. If we all hold that our meanings are the only correct reflections of the reality, communication will immediately break down and struggles get started. This is just as what Stein (1983) says: "meaning is something we defend hotly and over which we wage wars. Provisionality, tolerance, and the spirit of play vanish when such systems of meanings, ideologies, values, beliefs, and attitudes meet and clash." (P. 394)

## **2) Cross-cultural Consciousness in Canadian Life**

I have emphasized much on how my Chinese cultural tradition and communist education created me to think in a black-white polarity. Actually, I have seen that this is not a unique way of thinking for people from China or the communist world. A lot of people in Canada also show more or less the same mentality.

Black-white polarity thinking is closely related to the traditional positivistic thinking in science and technology. This mode of thinking has been widely criticized in different areas of human sciences in North America. However, I found that in schools in Edmonton, and even in the universities, there are still a lot of people who hold that the textbook knowledge is absolute truth, and teachers and professors are the unchallenged authorities.

Once I worked in a university office which offered cultural orientations for the new coming Chinese students. Most of the Chinese students were sponsored by CIDA. They came to Edmonton for

two months of training in cultural adjustment and life preparation first, and then went to different cities for one or two years of learning in their professions. Being a Chinese myself, with certain cultural experience already, I was hired as one of the instructors for helping those newcomers, explaining to them Canadian customs, way of life, etc.

When I started working in the centre, I was told that cultural orientation program was not a very easy job. It could be very sensitive sometimes, and if things were not handled well, cultural conflicts could happen. In their previous years of work, there had been lots of good experiences, but there had also been bad experiences. I had not anticipated that a few weeks training program could be that complicated. I thought, perhaps, I could work as a bridge to fill in some gaps of cultural misunderstanding.

I taught with Canadian teachers in the class. Before very long I realized how different I saw the purpose of this orientation course from some of my colleagues. I knew it would take years and years for a newcomer to learn and understand the Canadian culture and life. I had been here for five years, but I still believed that I had just got to know a very small fraction of this world. I thought the purpose of that course was to raise the students' consciousness in seeing, appreciating and understanding Canadian way of life. The major goal of the program should have been to help the students to build up positive attitudes, and make them more open minded to see and learn different aspects of life in Canada.

However, some of my colleagues seemed to believe that they should teach everything they might need in their future of life in Canada. They also showed the belief that when the students left our centre, they should all be "mistakes" free in Canadian society. Some life skills they taught were very useful, such as how to shop in Safeway, how to make telephone calls, etc. A few of others created uncomfortable feelings, such as how to wash toilets, keep yourself clean, etc.

Once I was talking about the North Americans informality to the students in class. I explained that many people choose not to be as formal as most of us Chinese did. In the university, students were very relaxed in class. They sometimes drink or eat. They dress very informally too. Sometimes you can see students, even professors put their feet on the table. Such events, I believed, were good to tell the Chinese newcomer students, so as to make them understand the relationship of people here. Particularly, I wanted to stress the non-authoritarian image of the professors in Canadian universities, which I thought was a good example of a democratic society. However, my Canadian colleague felt I had done something terribly wrong. She immediately corrected me that these examples were not the typical Canadian way. Rather, they were bad habits and did not happen often.

This "good" or "bad" version of Canadian culture popped up several times. Gradually I feel that some people in that program saw the purpose of the cultural orientation as a correction centre.

They wanted to correct all the "bad" things of the trainees and make them "good" in Canadian culture before they went to other Canadian cities. This was where cultural conflict were created and it might be one reason why they had bad experiences before.

### **3) Cross-cultural Consciousness and Immigrants**

In my contact with the new immigrants from China and other countries, I feel strongly that cross-cultural consciousness and open-mindedness towards the new life environment is essential for a person with a different language and cultural background to survive and succeed in the changing life.

Living in a changed social and cultural condition, people need to have a very positive view of life change, including the change of themselves. However, the fact is that some people tend to be very negative to the changed life, and reject any change within themselves. As a result, they have a very hard time in coping with new life. They need professional help because they suffer from this.

Some immigrant women believe that the Western society is morally corrupted in terms of the "lose sexual relationship" between men and women. One of my friend's wife was very sensitive to her husband's social life for fear that the Western virus in this "dirty" world would infect him easily. Not only banning him from most socialization, she even do not allow him to look at TV and advertisements. Not only her husband suffered from this. She

herself also had a very stressful life because of her vigilance.

This kind of negative attitude also affects the relationship between generations of immigrant families. Many immigrant parents set very strict rules to their children in making friends, dating, and choosing their own life styles. In its extreme case, an Arabian father in the United States killed his daughter simply because of her newly acquired life style.

The lack of cross-cultural consciousness also set up barriers towards ethnic harmony in our multi-cultural society. With a different tradition and philosophy of life, some immigrants are very unsympathetic to the poor people in Canada. They observe that it is not easy to become rich in Canada, but it is not difficult to make a living for the poor, either. There are so many ways to lead a very economical life. So long as people work hard and do not become alcoholic or drug addicted, how can they say that you are poor? This is what I heard from many people who came from countries of similar economic condition and cultural tradition with me.

Because of language and cultural barriers, those people usually have very little social contacts with other people living in Canada. Therefore, their visions are very limited. They may see some people who are young and healthy, but choose to live on social welfare for some invented reasons, and so arrive at a conclusion that the over-generous Canadian welfare system creates lazy people. Those who are poor choose to be that way. They fail to see the very disastrous living conditions in which many people were born and

brought up, and thus were turned to alcoholic, drug addicted, prostitution, etc. They comment: "We work hard and take the simple life. But we pay taxes to support those people who choose not to work and get paid."

They heard of children going to school without breakfast and lunch. In their perspective, food here is so cheap. There are also food banks and other kind of social services. How could those parents let their children go hungry? When they have money, they have pizza delivered to their doors. They buy whatever they want. If they had planned and were willing to work for even a little bit, they would not have their children go hungry.

Many immigrants are conscious of the discrimination they experience in their life in Canada. However, many of them are not that conscious of their own discrimination against other ethnic groups, especially other ethnic minorities. In Chinese communities, I heard bad comments on the natives, black people, Eastern Indians, Arabians, etc. Some people do not want to work, live nearby or do business with them. In comparison with those ethnic minorities, Caucasians are often said to be more friendly, honest and easy to get along with. However, when they compare Caucasians with Chinese, Caucasians are less appreciated. Chinese are superior. Furthermore, when they are talking about the problems of Chinese, they distinguish themselves from other groups of Chinese. The Chinese from mainland China may think those from Hongkong are too selfish and calculating, whereas the Chinese from Vietnam are often

regarded as uneducated and even criminal-related.

#### **4) Cross-cultural Consciousness and China**

The new consciousness I built from my cross-cultural experiences often makes me think about how I can help people in China. Today, many Chinese tried to draw lessons from the series of tragedies of the political movements since communist China in 1949. How could the whole nation be so easily dragged into that kind of disastrous turmoil such as the Anti-rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution? How come millions and millions of people, not only the young and uneducated, but also adults, including many intellectuals, so enthusiastically joined in that kind of mindless cult and "witch hunt" in the Cultural Revolution? These kinds of tragedies like a patterned epidemic occurred again and again in China.

I used to blame every thing on the social system. Now I realize another important factor. It was a certain mode of thinking in China that prepared the soil for that social system of dictatorship. This mode of thinking is the widely accepted belief in absolute truth, and the taken for granted black-white polarities in making judgements of their every day life and every person in their life.

Mao Tse-tuong once claimed that: "We should oppose everything that our enemies support, and support everything that our enemies oppose!" This black-white polarity of thinking has more or less



become some kind of Chinese mentality. Though many Chinese no longer believe in Mao now, they still act according to his philosophy.

In China, the political pendulum always switch from one side to another. After the communists took over China in 1949, they tried to wipe out all that left from the "old society". Nineteen sixty-six, Mao was not even satisfied with the past seventeen years of communist rule and hoped to create another completely new society. Suddenly, everything done in the past seventeen years was wrong. In 1976, when the Cultural Revolution ended, again people moved to the other extreme. Everything promoted by the Cultural Revolution were abandoned.

During the 1989 Pro-democracy movement in China, the students in the Beijing universities did not allow the opposition to air their views. Even those who did not show strong interest in the movement were pointed at and called cowards. It seemed that many of them did not understand fully that one basic element of democracy is the guaranteed freedom for the political differences and individual choices.

Totalitarian societies encourage no political differences and the power of creation of individuals. Ideological control make same pattern of thinking throughout the world. What happened in the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, South Africa, and other former non-democratic countries show that though people welcome freedom, they were not well prepared to move to democracy. They have not

learned of how to accept and appreciate differences, and solve their problems peacefully through democratic process. The dramatic social change of Eastern Europe will eventually come to China. It is very important that Chinese people get prepared for this dramatic social change.

#### G. The Next Paradigm, Where Shall I Go?

Whenever I came to a new paradigm in my past, it was always like that I had just conquered a new world. I had a feeling of great satisfaction in my accomplishments. I said to myself: "Finally, I got it! This is where I belong to." I believed that I had arrived at my goal or destiny. However, this latest paradigm I have just stepped into is very different. Instead of feeling certain and adequate in what I have achieved, I find myself filled with contradictions and paradoxes.

On the one hand, the crosscultural experience has given me a unique opportunity in my learning and personal growth. I feel what I have achieved is important and significant. If I benefit from this new way of thinking, I would also like to share my experience and insights with other people. Being conscientized, I see the lack of this consciousness in other people. To put it in the educational jargon, I feel it is my responsibility to conscientize them.

On the other hand, I find this role of being an educator and preacher contradicts the new consciousness I have achieved. In the new paradigm, I no longer hold that there are objective laws and

absolute truth in the world. Every thing can be seen from different perspectives. People with different views and ways of life should be understood, accepted, appreciated, and respected. If that, the way I went through may not be a good way for others.

I have been taking as if it as my commitment of life to make the world surrounding me better and better. I believed that the world and our life can be better and should be better. I think many other people have similar feeling of responsibility. However, breaking from the black and white polarity of thinking, I find the criteria of what is good and what is bad is becoming very ambiguous. "Good" can be "bad, and "bad" can be "good" with the change of situation, social context, and perspectives. If the distinctions between what is good and what is bad are relative and changeable, how can we know what to do is making the world and our life better?

Social justice, human rights, freedom, equality, democracy, racial harmony, these basic elements of human progress sound so self-evident. However, they are also the products of certain cultural values and human beliefs. We take them as our sacred missions. Many people struggle for them very delicately, and even sacrifice their lives for them. Are they just soap bubbles as the communism utopian in the past? So many Chinese revolutionary martyrs died heroically and selflessly in their struggles to overthrow the old regime and set up what they believed to be a better society, the communist system in China. How much better did

they make things?

Today, many Chinese are facing the same situation. They are struggling for democracy. But there is still a large population of Chinese who may not care much of democracy or any form of politics. We believe that they are not only badly oppressed and exploited, but also unconscious of their oppression and exploitation. However, can political change really make them happy? And do they feel comfortable being conscientized?

Not only on the important political issues, our daily life is full of personal choices based on our values and beliefs of life. A Chinese woman said that before she married her husband, they made an agreement that all the important decisions of the family be made by the husband, and she would handle the daily chores. She was apparently very happy with their family rules and her marriage as well. Do we have to conscientize her, and make her break their peaceful life and stage a rebellion in her family?

I discussed new immigrants' "narrow-mindedness" previously. It was often that I found that I could hardly keep quiet and tolerate their "biased" comments during a conversation with such kind of people. Though I was very polite and very cautious not to sound too critical, I always viewed my differences in opinions. My wife obviously noticed this, and asked me later: "Why do you always try to teach people?"

When I started teaching in the bilingual language program in a school, I immediately realized that many teachers there still

believed in the out-of-date structuralist methods of second language teaching. I felt sorry for the children at the age of six, seven, or eight repeatedly reading and writing the same words again and again. Soon, I found myself trying to influence others and to bring about change. Why do I always think that I am better than others?

In a Chinese language teaching conference held in Canada, I was invited to join in a panel discussion. I talked about how could Chinese language teaching in Canada fit into the Canadian educational system. Again, I distinguished myself by taking a very critical tone. I criticized that some Chinese parents emphasize too much on the competitiveness of their children's education and believe that education is a privilege, whereas the Canadian educators believe that education is a right and democracy is the essence of education. What I said was appreciated by many among the audience, but apparently some of them felt offended. I could sense it in some questions raised to me.

I celebrate my new paradigm of thinking. I believe that it is not only important to my own personal growth, but also, it is essential for the democratic future of China. I seem to believe that I have caught hold of something that billions of Chinese people may benefit from. I am very eager to introduce it to them. However, a question is kept in mind: "Do you think you stand high above billions of people? Are you too self-conceited?"

This might be from my years of being in the profession of

teaching. It may also originate in my belief that I am a social transformer, conscientizer and liberator, which, most probably, is from my communist education. Or I still operate in my old paradigm, i.e., seeking for absolute truth and believing that I have got some of it. I thought I had said "good bye" to these former way of thinking, but now I realize that I am still subconsciously controlled by them. I come to see something in me that I failed to see before.

This reflection on my personal growth for the first time makes me realize the severe limitation our individual thinking have. I thought breaking an old paradigm of thinking was the breaking of my tunnelled vision. Now I find that our human visions are always tunnelled by certain social conditions. Great thinkers may see better than others in certain ways under certain circumstances. However, their views are still confined by a tunnel that blocks away many other possibilities. No one can be God.

Then, what is more important in the development of our consciousness is to become conscious of the limits of our consciousness. What I have achieved in Canada in the past five years of development in my consciousness is a part of my acculturation. What I have accepted is basically the dominant ideology of the Western culture. This does not mean that I have learned nothing. However, I do need to be cautious not to simply give up something and take up something else.

**CHAPTER 8**  
**SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING**  
**AND**  
**CONSCIOUSNESS**

In this chapter, I will continue the journey of my autobiographic study to explore my own experience of being a learner, teacher and researcher. I will start with my past and present experiences in learning English, as well as reflecting on my teaching experiences.

Turning from general reflections on my life experience to this specific issue of second language learning, I am trying to apply the achievements of my consciousness development into the practice of education. I hope this process will help me understand better some specific issues in education, such as: what is the function of consciousness in learning? And what is the importance of raising students consciousness in learning?

This is also the part of my thesis in which I turn to more and more theoretical explorations in order to find some answers in improving teaching in this area. In this attempt, I find I have to confront research literature done by other scholars in this field in order to arrive at, clarify and justify my own solutions to the problems in this area. Therefore, I have to gradually leave my autobiographic voice and get more and more into theorizing. My readers will see the transition of my discourse style in this chapter with surging of references to other scholars' work, which

were not seen in the previous parts of my autobiography. Also, in the second half of this chapter, I will have a theoretical exploration of second language learning which bears little autobiographical nature.

To me, using autobiography as a tool for research is a break away from the traditional concept of research methodology. However, I would like to venture a step further by not staying with the autobiographic format throughout this thesis. This inconsistency in styles is not simply for the convenience of writing. It is an attempt to distinguish my autobiography as research from autobiographies as literature, such as novels. I believe the former should be more oriented to theory making while the latter more entertaining. In fact, a good study of research can also be very entertaining and a good novel also makes theories. Sometimes, it is not easy to draw a clear line between the two.

In this thesis, I examined my own history through autobiographic writing. This process naturally leads me to think about our educational theories and classroom practice. In this sequence I figured out my own theory of second language teaching. I feel it might also be the better sequence for me to express and for my readers to understand my theoretical thinking in this thesis. Therefore, I am going to sacrifice the consistency in writing styles for a better presentation of my thinking.



## **A. The Development of My Consciousness in Learning English as a Second Language**

In the long journey of my learning English as a second language, I experienced many frustrations and setbacks as well as joys of success. What have I accomplished in this long journey? Is it the possession of an arsenal of language rules and thousands of words? Or perhaps, it is the fluency that can come out of my mouth at ease? Furthermore, probably it is the sharpened eyes and ears that can catch meaning between lines? What did I fail to achieve or is going to be achieved? Native-like pronunciation and intonation? Idiomatic use of propositions? Or those missed passing jokes? What has learning this language mean to me? Or what is learning English as a second language to me at all?

Probably, I can say, at this point, that my achievement is not simply the learned words and rules, or the fluency and comprehension of the language. What I have accomplished and what I am still accomplishing is the growing self-confidence and the ever-rising self-consciousness of learning. The change I went through is not a quantitative knowledge accumulation, but it is a change from a non-learner to a self-directed learner.

Like a man in the darkness seeking the light, when he is in the brightness at last, what he wants to do is not simply to hold a beam of sunshine, but to embrace the whole lighted world. What he feels is the control of the surroundings, and what he gains is the

freedom. When you have changed your relationship with your environment, are you still the same person as when you were at the starting point? In this sense, is learning simply to absorb from the outer world or to bring about change of the inner world? And if learning is to bring about change in the inner world of the learner, what kind of light do we need to give to our students, whose world is still dark and who are desperately seeking for the light?

Being in the darkness causes great suffering. When I started to learn English, I did not know where I was, what I was supposed to do, and what place I could arrive at last. There were oceans of words to learn and the rules were all in a dense haze. They were so vague to see. And those strange spoken sounds flowed as fast as meteors, impossible to catch. It was like being in a dream. I was in a state of half-consciousness and felt myself being totally paralysed, filled with uneasiness and anxiety. Sometimes it was also scary. What was always under challenge was the confidence of my own self. Though I knew I had done quite well in learning many different things ranging from most of my school subjects to playing basketball and repairing home fixtures, I was not confident that I had enough talent to succeed in this new area of mastering a foreign language. This test of self went on for years. When I got a full mark in an English examination, when I conducted a successful communicative act, when I passed the TOEFL test, or when

I heard some compliments about my English, I always got a feeling of relief. To me, it was a new light of hope. The darkness in me was fading gradually, and I was more and more confident of myself as a learner.

Yet, light is always accompanied by shadows. Often the feeling of fear and unsafety would come back instantly, and my self-confidence was still frequently under challenge. I lived in limbo for a long time. Even after I had taught English in a Chinese university for years, after I started my second graduate degree in Canada, and even after I became an English teacher in this English speaking country of Canada, there were always new challenges. I am still scared by those dark corners in me staring at me as their prey. I still need the new lights to burn out the fear. The new test I am facing is a demanding need to improve my English. Probably, it is a task which many people would think too ambitious for me to accomplish. I hate my accent, yet I have no idea how much I can do about it. I realized my ignorance being in a new culture. I am not sure how far I can stretch the limits of my potential to bridge the cultural gap. I am trying hard to prove that my increasing age is not contributing to the decline of my learning. Anyway, I am still shifting back and forth between darkness and light. The journey I have taken is the ebb and flow of the sea. Are these kinds of inner conflicts the nature of human learning and the dynamics of personal growth? Or perhaps they are just the poor

learner's common problem?

I can not say that my learning experience is typical of most other learners. But does it not sound reasonable to believe that most learners would have a much quieter inner world than mine. Nor does it make sense to assume that these inner conflicts have nothing to do with the result of learning. But how much has been done in studies to discover what is going on in the learner's inner world, and how importantly the change and the development of the inner world would be in affecting the learner's performance and achievement of language learning in the outer world?

Furthermore, if my learning development resembles the ebb and flow of the sea, what forms each of these tides and what pushes them up? Scientists tell us that almost all the energy on earth comes from the sun. Then what constitutes the light that gives me energy to form the power of my thinking? I propose that the power came from an ever rising consciousness.

To me, learning is a process in which the learner organizes the outer world in his or her inner world. No matter how the outer world is structured, it makes sense to the learner only when it is reorganized in his or her own way. In this sense, learning is not simple a matter of accumulating some existing body of knowledge, such as the lexical, syntactical and semantic knowledge of a language, but a process for finding out a new structure that can be connected to the existing system in the mind. When a new structure

is established, a new consciousness is built.

### **1) Phonetic Consciousness**

In my learning experience, together with the growing awareness of my English pronunciation, I was able to isolate smaller and smaller differences between my own pronunciation and that of the native speakers. It often happened in natural conversation, while watching TV, or overhearing people chattering on the bus. Having such an awareness in my mind of seeking an improvement of my pronunciation, such sounds often stuck out in the input and struck me. For example, first I caught the sound /l/ in "help" which I had not pronounced correctly before. It immediately caught my attention. I soon realized that I had the same problem with other words containing this sound /l/, such as in "hotel", "level", "problem" etc. After it was brought to my attention, I started an conscious effort to improve. I tried to correct my pronunciation and automatized the new learned sound in my speaking. At the beginning, the new learned knowledge as a monitor often came to my mind after I had already produced the sound in natural conversations. But gradually, I was able to think about it just at the moment I was going to say it. After a period of time, I could produce it correctly without thinking, that is, automatically.

I would say that adequate input is an very important condition to the acquisition of language. However, without my mind actively

attacking this target, the input may not become intake effectively. There were and are plenty of such examples in my learning. It seems I am in this process of conscious effort all the time in attempting to improve my pronunciation, like other aspects of my consciousness in language learning and personal growth, through step by step development. It was often that the coming of new consciousness brought about new improvement.

When I started learning English, I paid very much attention to pronunciation and intonation. However, we did not have any native speakers to talk to and there were not any English programs in radio or on TV at that time in China. The only thing available to me was a few albums of English texts produced by Lingophone company of England. At the time, I treated learning pronunciation as learning singing. I played the albums hundreds of times. Mostly, I imitated one sentence after another, paying attention to every tiny detail, such as the rising and falling tunes of each syllable. After I was completely confident that I could produce exactly the same as the speaker in the records did, I read loudly the same text again and again, to reinforce the memory and skills of pronouncing. Now after so many years, I can still read the same text in the same way.

However, the limit of my English language input stopped the further development of my pronunciation. For quite a long period of time, I was not aware of the serious problems existing in my

pronunciation. I thought if I had more vocabulary, I would speak perfect English. After I had more and more chances to get in touch with native speakers, I gradually realized some of the problems existing in my pronunciation. However, It was only after I came to Canada that I suddenly was surprised by the great discrepancy between my English and most Canadians.

I just could not believe that people could immediately recognize me as a non-native speaker on the phone, even after I simply said a "hello". I told a friend that I wanted to get rid of my accent completely. When he said that I was too ambitious, I did not know that he really meant that. It was only after long time of struggle, that I came to know how serious he was. Though I still have a strong will to improve and I am still ambitious, now I know that unless I have not any other life commitments, the effort to sound like a native speaker is a mission impossible.

I also found it interesting that people often have difficulty recognizing the typical accents that commonly occur within their own mother tongue language group. Since I came to Canada, I gradually learned to tell the differences between French-English, Spanish-English, Russian-English, Cantonese English, etc. however, I could not recognize what was the special common characteristics of Chinese-English. In a telephone conversation, I often recognized that the person on the other end of the line was from Hong Kong, Poland, or Eastern India. However, I often failed to detect by

accent that the person speaking to me was a Mainland Chinese. I heard some Chinese commented on the strong accents of East Indians, Filipinos, etc, but not the Chinese. Some of them concluded that most of the Chinese in Canada had had formal English training before in China, which emphasized pronunciation very much. They believed that is why most mainland Chinese had no special accents.

I thought this was right at the beginning. Now, with more exposure to English language, I came to know that there is a blind spot that prevents me from recognizing my own accent. I think it is important for the learners to find these blind spots and become conscious of the areas in which they need to improve.

However, in the field of applied linguistics, there are many people who exclude the function of consciousness in second language learning. Krashen (1982) elaborates a Language Acquisition Theory, in which he advocates subconscious learning, and argues against conscious learning. He distinguishes the terms of "acquisition" and "learning". The former is "a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language." "It is implicit learning, informal learning, and natural learning." (p.10) Acquisition is picking-up a language without consciously knowing the language rules. "Learning" in his term refers to "conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them." (P.10) He claims that "acquisition 'initiates' our utterances in a second language and is



responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor" which according to him "plays a limited role in second language performance." (p.16) Krashen argues that "if acquisition is central and learning more peripheral, then the goal of our pedagogy should be to encourage acquisition" (p.20)

In this theory, the key of acquisition is to receive the maximum amount of comprehensible input in natural language. Krashen downplays the role of output in acquisition. He notes that "we acquire spoken fluency not by practising talking but by understanding input, by listening and reading." (p.60)

I would accept that input plays a very important role in language acquisition. However, my own learning experiences told me that consciousness, including the awareness of rules and regulations can help. Krashen is only seeing one side of the coin. and ignores another important aspect in learning, i.e., the role of the active mind in learning. In my view, an active conscious mind used effectively will maximize language input, in many different ways. Some of my examples in my learning pronunciation support my claim here. In learning grammar, I found a similar case.

## **2) Grammatical Consciousness**

Krashen (1982) argued that error correction can become a monitor which would benefit writing, but has nothing to do with language fluency and proficiency (p.15-16). Furthermore many studies do show that correcting students' errors is ineffective.

However, we cannot simply conclude that a second language can only be learned subconsciously. My own experience tells me that error correction will not work if the learner has not built up his or her self-consciousness of correcting these errors himself. In other words this learner is not yet ready to correct these errors. But self-correction does work when the learner is consciously involved in the correction.

The function of consciousness in learning is a complicated issue. Some of the English grammatical items, such as English tenses, the distinction of he and she, the third person regular "s" etc., need much longer time to acquire than many other items in spoken English. Though I knew the rules about them well, I often could not use them correctly in speaking. This might support Krashen's claim of the limit of monitor use. Yet, I did find that consciousness still played some role in the acquisition of them.

At first, I made grammatical errors frequently for a long period of time, during which the conscious attempt of using them correctly was always in vain. Furthermore it was impossible for me to keep these rules in focused attention when I was engaged in conversation. This went on until one day I suddenly found that I was able to keep attention on the problem though I still could not use the form correctly. Then I began to over use past tense, i.e. using past tense for other tenses which should be employed. Through an endless conscious attempt, gradually I found I could use this

tense correctly most of the time. What is strange is that I never could keep two grammatical items in mind at the same time. Attention could only be given to one. After I automatized the correct form, the next item came to my consciousness and was kept there until it was acquired. There seems to be a "readiness" in gaining a new consciousness. But consciousness did function effectively in this process. On the other hand, the lack of this consciousness may result in fossilization of these errors.

There have been numbers of studies about the role of conscious learning. Many have challenged Krashen's acquisition theory. Schmidt (1984) conducted a longitudinal study of a 35-year-old ESL learner for six years, during which time the subject acquired English in an English speaking country. Learning was a typical subconscious acquisition as Krashen described. As a result, the learner did achieve relatively high levels of fluency, but there was almost no improvement of his language structure observed throughout the six years of the study. His English sentences remained very poorly organized. The other studies, Cazden, Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann (1975) Schumann (1977, 1978a, 1978b) Shapira (1978) Kessler and Idar (1979) Stauble (1978) gave evidence of other unsuccessful adult learning in a natural acquisition setting.

There are many different explanations for the causes of the successful second language learning. Schumann's acculturation model for second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978b) is one with wide

influence. This model claims two groups of variables, social and affective, cluster into a single variable of acculturation, which is the "major causal variable" in second language acquisition. To put it in another way, the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group controls the degree to which he or she acquires a second language. Schumann notes that adults often don't acquire the second language because they don't get involved in real communication because of problems of attitude, motivation, language and culture shock and so on, and that if affective factors are favourable, the adult's cognitive processes will automatically function to produce language acquisition.

However, some adults may acquire a second language successfully through natural interaction without any formal instruction. Those people may be what Schmidt (1984) called "self-studiers", using conscious learning strategies such as those identified by Rubin (1981). Such strategies include asking questions of native speakers, consulting available sources, and actively using deductive and inductive reasoning to look for general rules and exceptions. What function their conscious mind plays still needs more investigation. Besides, the acculturation motivation defined by Schumann might also be the development of certain consciousness. As I observed at the beginning, one needs a cross-cultural consciousness to appreciate a different culture and to have a critical self-consciousness to overcome one's own

ethnocentrism.

Probably there are some adults who have a language aptitude that could enable them to acquire a second language without much conscious effort just like children. Forcing those people to learn consciously is either a waste of time or even a destruction of their talent. However, these people need a self-consciousness to find out their individual strengths and to make their own decisions for the best way of learning. We may call this a strategic consciousness. In this sense, the subconscious learning still needs conscious decision. From a pedagogical perspective, consciousness is always the central issue as we can do little to change people's aptitude for learning just like we cannot change an adult to a child. However, there is always potential for the employment of people's power of consciousness in learning.

### **3) Semantic Consciousness**

How did I learn the English words? How did my consciousness of vocabulary develop? Being an English teacher, I was often asked by the students how I got to know so many English words, and what is the best way to learn new words. To reflect, I had to admit that I tried dozens of different methods, and I do not feel any one of them was especially good to me. Does that mean that I failed in this learning task? Maybe not. By trying each of these methods, what I learned is not simply some more words, but I came to know

what learning vocabulary is. My understanding of the nature of words and their usage is deepening and my consciousness of learning is rising.

As a beginner, I tried to read each word loudly and as correctly as possible, in order to gain the control of its pronunciation. After becoming tired of repeated reading and writing the same words, I tried to figure out the rules of letter-formations to find a better way for the pronunciation and spelling. No long after, I found there are so many irregularities in English words and these spelling rules often became very vague. Then I tried to put the words with similar sounds together to compare and remember them. I tried to link the sound of the word with some strange things and ideas for a sharper and deeper memory. I used cards with the new word on one side and Chinese translation on the other, carried them everywhere and played them in my hands even if I had only one minute to spare. I tried to remember as many words in a day as possible. As a record, I swallowed two hundreds in one single day only to find that I forgot most of them the week later! In this way, I realized that words cannot be crammed into the mind once and for all.

Two other different approaches were tried out separately. One used the principle of "little strokes fell great oaks." Only three words were learned everyday with long periods of time for persistent and frequent review. The other approach was to persist

in remembering as large a number of words as possible in a few days, followed by large quantity of reading for reinforcement. I also posted those words onto the walls, the stove, the table, the bed and the ceiling of my rooms, so as to meet them more frequently. I even tried to talk about these words to anybody who would be patient enough to listen and would not kill me! Not satisfied with any of these methods, I gave up remembering new words as a serious effort. Instead, I tried to meet new words in context of listening and reading, hoping that I could gradually acquire more words and their usage subconsciously.

I explored an inductive method, trying not to bother knowing a word's meaning until I had seen it often enough. At that point, I opened the dictionary and found it was much easier to remember, just like it is much easier to remember a person's name if you are already familiar with his face. I also experimented with the deductive method by learning the roots, prefixes and suffixes of words, and then remembering the words with these rules. Other methods included crossword puzzles, scrambling, etc. Though I cannot tell which of these methods was particularly effective, none of them was totally useless either. Regardless, by trying these different methods, my vocabulary was increasing.

I suppose many second language learners have responded similarly as beginners. By doing this, what was more important to me was that my consciousness about the nature of English words was

growing. I built up a consciousness of English phonetics to recognize the correct sounds from incorrect ones, to distinguish minimal-pairs, to find the rules of spelling, etc. In this period of time, I basically dealt with English in a "scientific way". That is to say that I believed that language is a natural phenomena. To learn it well is to find and grasp the natural law that governs it, i.e. the rules of pronunciation, spelling and grammar.

The further development of my consciousness in the nature of learning English is to understand that language is more a social phenomena rather than a natural phenomena. In learning English words, I gradually built up semantic consciousness of words. I realized that the meaning of words depended on the context of language, which was not always identified in the dictionary. The same word could mean very different things in different contexts. We can say something, but do not mean it. On the other hand, we can also mean something, but do not even say it. In this aspect, there is very little can be found to use as rules. To learn the subtle meanings of words is to constantly encounter the words in different contexts and gradually grasp their usage.

#### **4) Social Cultural Consciousness**

In my study of English words, I also realized that the meaning of a word is culturally embedded. It is quite often that I could not find an exact counterpart of an English word in Chinese. Some



times, I even felt that language could not be translated at all. Words can carry specific cultural connotations which are only meaningful within certain specific cultural thinking. Therefore, to understand a new language, one has to form a new way of thinking. Communication fails not always because of the lack of linguistic knowledge, but the lack of cultural understanding.

My further studies of language made me understand even deeper the nature of language. I came to see the power of language in forming our thinking. In the process of an individual's effort to control a language, he or she also gradually falls into the control of that language. This happens especially in the process in which one acquires his or her mother tongue. I realized this only after I came to Canada, and got into my latest paradigm of thinking.

In the constant encounter and comparison of different cultures and different ways of thinking in a new world, I was forced to examine how I was historically created by my past life, in which the language I learned as my mother tongue played an important role in forming my thinking. There are certain unique expressions in my native language which might have made me more conscious of certain aspects of life that are not emphasized or even realized in English speaking countries. The lack of some other terms in my language indicates the lack of certain consciousness that are well accepted in other countries.

It might not be a coincidence that I found the similarities

between the paradigmatic changes of my social consciousness and linguistic consciousness. When I started dealing with the pronunciation and spelling of the English words as a beginner, my understanding of second language learning was just like my understanding of the world at that time, i.e., there was an absolute reality of the world which was governed by rules. While the social-economic development of human society is governed by the natural laws according to Marxism, language is governed by linguistic rules such as word-formations, phonetic regulations and grammar. Learning a second language is to conform to these rules and regulations.

When I came to the conclusion that the natural laws of Marxism did not work well in my society, I also started to realize that lots of linguistic rules learnt from textbooks did not help me much in language learning. In the communications I had with the native English speakers, I found I could be understood often even when I pronounced words very poorly. Sometimes I just spoke a few separate words without any grammatical connections. Still, my meaning was caught immediately. On the other hand, sometimes I was not understood even after I gave a perfect utterance learned from books or tapes. That was also the period that I started reading more and more English novels and magazine articles. The reading opened up my mind to understand the complexity of both human societies and our language. I became critical to the doctrines I was taught in these

two seemingly very different areas. It was much later, when I read Paulo Freire, that I made the connection between the words and the world.

In my teaching experience, I found it is very important for the students to have the contextual consciousness of word meaning as early as possible. Some students suffered from assuming that words are simply the building blocks with a constant definition to form the meaning of the sentence together with other words. Those students often had a hard time understanding the complexity and subtlety of language meaning. I also found the students needed much more help to build up this cross-cultural consciousness of word meaning. Mostly, they blamed their communicative problems on their insufficient English, nothing else, but English. They came to school to improve their English. However the lack of cultural understanding aroused irritability and hostility in them. Therefore, a shift of teaching orientation from linguistic knowledge to cultural knowledge, I realized, has to be well designed and carefully implemented, otherwise it would not only create confusion but also resentment. However, most of our curriculum was centred upon grammatical syllabus, situational syllabus, or functional syllabus. We seldom saw a well designed syllabus which put cultural information as an important part of the curriculum and which could be taught in a systematic way. As a teacher, I did make the effort to bridge the cultural gap in my

classes. But I felt painfully that without the support of research findings, necessary teaching resources, and a well designed syllabus, the effort of a teacher alone was very inefficient. What we need is a systematic effort to build up our students' cross-cultural consciousness.

Furthermore, I realized that to establish cultural consciousness, one needs one more consciousness, i.e., a critical self-consciousness. One needs to see one's own history critically to find out one's own ethnocentrism and egocentrism.

In a ESL class I taught, I gave the students a questionnaire about their personal inventory named "knowing yourself". One of the questions asked: "Do you want to change yourself?" It was interesting to see that among the 15 students, only one of them said "Yes." I thought that was because my question was decontextualized. I asked further: "Living in a new country and new culture, don't you think you need to change yourself more or less to adjust to the new way of life?" Still, many of them said "No". I then gave the class a short passage written as a comment about American life, and asked the students to write about their opinions of this passage. The passage is as following:

TEACHER: Oh, Mr. Sittipunt, welcome back. How was your trip to the United States?

Mr. Sittipunt: Well, I'm glad to be home. In the U.S.A. I saw old people trying to look young, and young people trying to look old. I found you Americans say "yes" when we would sometimes say "no." People said, "How are you?" and then they

didn't even wait for an answer--they just continued on their way. I met unmarried couples living together, and married couples who were not living together. American women are just as aggressive as the men. I'm really glad to be home. I just don't understand your American way of life. I had heard about the American dream, but take my word for it--it's no dream, it's a nightmare. (Johnson, 1986, p.43)

I thought this passage was clear enough to show a typical ethnocentrism and cultural stereotype, and I expected that the students would respond critically. But to my surprise, still the majority of the students wrote critiques of the United States--American way of life, its moral crisis, its deteriorating education, etc. Probably, if I had changed America to Canada in that passage, the students would have responded very differently.

One might argue that it is not the task of ESL teachers to change the students' world outlook. Although I am no longer focusing upon the consciousness of learning English at the vocabulary level, which is what I have been discussing so far, the word "AMERICA" does have different connotations among different people. And these precepts of this word do influence language communication. It is my task as ESL teacher to bring about this critical consciousness to the students, to make them see how each of us (no matter where are we from) is socialized and culturally created in one way or another. The question is how should we liberate our subconsciously controlled self and regain the freedom of our own? Paulo Freire talks about the relationship between

"word" and the "world". Learning the world through the word is an important path for people to become conscientized.

I think the past years of my struggle to learn English as a second language in summary is the history of my growing understanding of the nature of learning. At different stages of my learning, English language always had new meanings for me. My understanding of the learning task is growing. It is the growing consciousness in learning that lights my way out of the darkness of ignorance and incompetence, and brings me from non-learner to better learner, from naive learner to mature learner. The history of my learning is a history of gaining more and more of the consciousness of learning. The more I understand the nature of my task, the more confident I am, and the more I am moved out of the darkness.

## **B. Theoretical Exploration**

In this part, I will leave my autobiographic voice and venture into some theoretical exploration of the second language learning and teaching. I will first examine the history of the theoretical development in second language teaching and then propose a new vision of second language learning and teaching. Though this is not part of my autobiography, it is certainly one of the outcomes of this autobiographic journey.

# **1) An Examination of Paradigmatic Changes in the Development of Second Language Teaching Theories.**

Using Garfinkle's theory of paradigmatic changes in human consciousness to examine the history of second language teaching and theorizing, I found that our human understanding of the nature of second language learning and teaching also went through several paradigmatic changes. In each of these different paradigms, people see the nature of language and language teaching from a very different perspective. The whole process of this development seems to me the breaking through of the narrowness of our previous consciousness of learning and the creation of new consciousness.

The attempt for seeking the better ways of teaching a second language has a long history. A brief review of that history will yield a long list of methods and approaches, the Grammar-translation Method, the Direct method, the Reading Method, the Audiolingual Approach--the Audio-visual Approach, the Situational Approach, the Cognitive Approach, the Communicative Approach, the Natural Approach, to count only a few. Many of these methods and approaches are based on the development of different theories of linguistics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and other fields of studies. Using Garfinkle's theory of paradigmatic changes in human consciousness, I found the paradigmatic changes in second language theorizing is parallel to the paradigmatic changes in the development of human consciousness. Certainly this is only one

possible way of viewing the history of second language education, and it is certainly not the only way to view it. However, I feel it is very useful way for second language researchers, teachers and learners to have a better understanding of the nature of second language learning. In the following part, I will use some of Garfinkle's terminology and time grills in this theoretical examination.

#### **a. Methods Based on Common Sense (1425 level of thinking)**

One of the oldest method of second language teaching is the Grammar-translation method. This method has a long history. Moving into the medieval period in Europe, with the declining of Greek and the emerging of Latin for instruction, grammatical analysis became prominent. The publication of Roman grammars at the period was of far-reaching effect. The fourth-century Latin primer *De Octo Partibus Orationis* by Aelius Donatus and the sixth-century grammar by Priscian were believed to have established the pattern for Latin grammars throughout the Middle Ages. Much later, Alexander de Villa Dei's grammar *Doctrinale Puerorum*, added principles of syntax and even drew upon linguistic usage. These developments were part of the human effort to seek a rational, formal, logical knowledge like mathematics, logic, harmony of music, which was typical of the 1425 level of thinking based on common sense. While the roots of Grammar-Translation are evident in these early ages, its approach



for teaching did not emerge full-blown until the early decades of the nineteenth century. From that time this method dominated second language teaching for many years and even today Grammar-Translation method is still widely used in many parts of the world.

The appeals of Grammar-Translation approach included the cognitive, systematic use of grammar rules as a basis for instruction, the directness of translation and the utilization of students' native-language proficiency. Grammar-Translation was an easy method for the teacher to use. Classes could be taught in the students' native language with little teaching skill or foreign-language speaking skill needed by the instructor. Objectives were limited and attainable. Vocabulary lists, printed grammar rules, and sample sentences to translate followed by reading selections, provided maximum control for teachers and students. This method also conforms to the basic characteristics of Garfinkle's the 1425 level of thinking, which primarily focuses upon deductive, rule following, memorizing and imitating procedures.

Grammar-translation method has many disadvantages. The effective way of learning a second language through Grammar-Translation demands that the students not only know the language rules, but also know how to use the rules. This is found to be difficult in practice. Taught in the students' native language with great emphasis on language rules instead of meaning

and communicative skills, students usually develop very limited oral proficiency. In many Grammar-Translation classes, the purpose of learning a second language is no longer the effective use of the language but the memory of the established grammar system. Language becomes a knowledge which is deductive and measurable quantitatively. In this way, the students' role in learning is passive and inactive, and the learning does not demand much of the students' self reflection and initiative thinking.

#### **b. Methods Reflecting Descriptive Consciousness**

The dissatisfaction of Grammar-translation method led to changes in different directions--the emergence of the Natural method, the Direct Method, the Phonetic method, the Audiolingual method, and the Audiovisual Method. While some of these methods may involve other level of consciousness, a common characteristics of these methods is their inductive nature and the focus on spoken language. By shifting to studying spoken language inductively, the learning demands careful examination of what is going on in daily conversation which demands observation and measurement of objective facts of language habits and usage with sensory and hands-on experiences of listening and speaking. These methods were developed much later than the actual period of 1500 to 1575. Most of them were the inventions of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **The Phonetic Method:**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, descriptive phonetics was pursued by a number of scholars who believed that all languages should be represented phonetically. The systematic observation and measurement of the human sound system yielded the Phonetic Method, which utilized oral expression as the basis of instruction, stressing pronunciation, and avoided grammatical rule giving.

### **The Direct Method**

Another teaching method in the same direction was the Direct Method, which developed from the Natural Method. It was seen as far back as the first appearance of the Direct Method in 1878 when the first Berlitz School opened in Providence, Rhode Island.

Based on a particular psychological interpretation of the learning process, (second language learning was analogous to first language acquisition), the Direct Method created a standardized set of teaching and practice routines. The avoidance of both translation and formal grammatical training, the exclusive use of the target language for all aspects of the teaching/learning agenda, the use of a text as the basis of instruction, the utilization of visual aids, and the focus on non-literary language uses characterize this method. Opposite to the deductive approach of the Grammar-translation method, the Direct Method involves inductive teaching.

### **The Audiolingual Approach**

The Audiolingual Method had much more influence in second language teaching than the phonetic method and the direct method. It evolved as a result of growth of behaviourist psychology and of descriptive linguistics in the forties, and fifties of this century. Based on behaviourist psychology which holds that learning is to change behaviour through conditioning and mechanical stimulus-response, descriptive Linguistics believes that language is a habit, and learning a second language is to build up a new set of habits. Like the Direct Method, Audiolingualism shifted the emphasis of teaching from controlling language system to language use. Language rules were no longer the centre of study. Therefore the students were not taught the knowledge about language, but the language per se.

However, the goals of this approach were not met in practice. In Audiolingual classes, the study was full of mind-jarring strings of unrelated sentences for pattern practice, decontextualized minimal-pair drills, anemic dialogues with thinly disguised doses of structure. In their worst form, Audiolingual classes ignored meaning, denied creative responses from students, and concentrated on linguistic form rather than on communication. Of course, taught by capable teachers, Audiolingual classes could also be exciting, action-filled experiences, but on the whole, meaning was absent in this methodology. "Mindless" drill was the only means and end of

Audiolingualism. While the psychological and linguistic platform gave away in the sixties and seventies to cognitivism in psychology and generativism in linguistics, the audiolingual approach was also replaced by some new methods.

### **c. Theoretical Consciousness and Chomsky's Theory**

The publication in 1957 of Noam Chomsky's work on transformational-generative grammar was a powerful challenge to structural linguistics. The generative linguist is interested not only in describing language or achieving the level of descriptive adequacy but also in arriving at an explanatory level of adequacy in the study of language--that is, a "principled basis, independent of any particular language, for the selection of the descriptively adequate grammar of each language" (Chomsky 1964, p.63). This attempt to formulate a universal grammar for all languages is the reflection of the 1650 level of human thinking, theoretical consciousness, i.e., the consciousness of synthesizing, generalizing and theorizing in seeking for universal laws. Under the new theory, language as a set of habits was apparently unfounded. The new view saw language as rule-governed, with language acquisition a creative process requiring considerable learner initiative rather than learner manipulation through mimicry, memorization, and overlearning.

The impact of Generative-transformational linguistics to

language teaching is manifold and far-reaching. Many approaches and methods developed after 1960s share its insight. Perhaps the most immediate and direct outcome of this trend was the cognitive teaching method.

The cognitive teaching method also drew from cognitive psychology. Instead of focusing rather mechanistically on stimulus-response connections, cognitivists tried to discover psychological principles of organization and functioning. Of the two ways of learning, rote learning and meaningful learning, the cognitive method stressed the latter. It was designed to rule learning, concept-formation, problem-solving, meaningful practice. It concentrated on the learner's processes of knowing rather than on mechanistic procedures imposed upon him or her by the teacher. Though the cognitive method looked like an attempt to restore deductive methods, it was different from the Grammar-translation method in a fundamental way. While learning through the Grammar-translation method is totally rule following learning, the cognitive method is a student centred rule deliberating and discovering. This is the typical 1575 level of thinking--reflective consciousness of initiating, planning and rule-making, as well as the 1650 level of theoretical consciousness of generalizing, synthesizing and theorizing.

Interest in this method did not last very long, because the theorists began to examine and question the very notion of method.

They broke away from the method notion and focused on the concept of teaching per se. In language theorizing and teaching, a new paradigm, sociolinguistics, became dominant. However, there was a renewed emphasis on the major goals of cognitive psychology in the current years. In psychology of learning and teaching, more and more attention were given to metacognition and cognitive strategies (Gagne and Dick, 1983, Gagne, 1985, Sternberg 1983, etc.). A number of concerted attempts have been made to develop programs designed specifically to teach cognitive strategies (Lefrancois, 1988). In teaching English as a second language, attempts have been made to categorize the good second language learner's learning strategies which result in a long list of various kinds of strategies employed by successful learners in their learning. For example, Oxford (1989) developed a list of six broad strategy categories: metacognitive, affective, social, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Each of these categories is composed of two to four sub-categories, each of which has a number of different specific strategies or behaviours. In total, there are sixty-two different strategies Oxford found from the successful learners. Other researchers have different categories and formulated different strategies (O'Malley et al., 1984, 1985; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Naiman, Frohlich, Todesco, 1978; Politzer, 1983). Some important implications from the studies above which addressed learning strategies are:

1. Learning a second language is the combination of a variety of different types of learning.
2. Higher levels of human consciousness play a very important role in learning a second language.

The other implication of these studies is that we may not be able to handle such a complex system of the discovered learning strategies in our classroom teaching as we expected when we were looking for them. The teachers and the students feel lost in front of such a numerous army of strategies. They might have expected to find a key for opening the lock, but are frustrated when confronted with hundreds of them. Yet none of these keys could work single handedly. Furthermore, some strategies which work well with one person may be quite useless to another.

The problem is that when we teach the students those tips one by one, we still lose sight of one most important dimension of good learning strategies, i.e. the initiative of the students in learning. The learners themselves consciously search for good strategies of learning, hypothesizing, testing, and making their own choices as to which strategy to use is more important than attempting to employ a whole list of preplanned strategies. A good learner knows how to choose the ways of learning most appropriate to him or her and the task at hand. This might be the real only key of successful learning.



#### **d. Historical/social-critical Consciousness and Sociolinguistics**

The next paradigm in language research and teaching was that of Sociolinguistics. This perspective came to dominate linguistic theory in the seventies. In this new view of language, both inductive and deductive methods focused on the development of linguistic competence, i.e. the control of the language itself. However, the ability to use language in various ways was a separate ability from simply controlling the language. In addition, this ability referred to the ability to use the structural and lexical modalities of the target language in appropriate ways to express various social functions.

The term "communicative competence" was coined by Dell Hymes (1967, 1972). Hymes was convinced that Chomsky's notion of competence was too limited. Chomsky's "rule-governed creativity" that was so aptly described as a child's mushrooming grammar at the age of 3 or 4 did not account sufficiently for the social and functional rules of language. Communicative competence then, is that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts (Brown, 1987, p.199).

Canale and Swain (1980) distinguished four different components or subcategories of Communicative competence. First, grammatical competence is the competence that encompasses

"knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology" (Canale and Swain 1980, p.29). The second subcategory is discourse competence, the complement of grammatical competence. It is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. The third one, sociolinguistic competence, is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and of discourse. It requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used, the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. "Only in a full context of this kind can judgments be made on the appropriateness of a particular utterance" (Savignon 1983, p.37) The fourth subcategory is strategic competence, which Canale and Swain (1980) described as "the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence." (p.30)

From these categories we can see that Sociolinguists no longer view language learning simply as learning the linguistic code, but put it in a much broader social-cultural context. This reflects the 1725 level of historical consciousness (which see things in a historical perspective) and 1800 level of social-critical consciousness (a crosscultural comparative perspective).

The role of background knowledge in language comprehension

is formalized as schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980). Schema theory claims that text, either spoken or written, does not by itself carry meaning. A text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. The previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Adams and Collins, 1979, Rumelhart, 1980). According to scheme theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text.

Carrrell and Eisterhold (1987) point out that we must be particularly sensitive to comprehension problems that result from the implicit cultural knowledge presupposed by a text. Rivers (1986) recommends that the strong bond between culture and language must be maintained for the student to have a complete understanding of the meaning of language. She believes that differences in values and attitudes are one of the main sources of problems in foreign language learning. Rivers and Tempeley (1987) have emphasized the importance of providing background information, explaining high-frequency but culturally loaded terms, and using illustrations with reading passages to provide additional meaning to texts.

The relationship between language meaning and its social-cultural context can be testified in many different ways. Michel

Foucault and Jacques Derrida have their special insights. They focused their research on how the discourses of texts are materially produced by specific social, political, and economic arrangements. They found that discursive practices cannot be extricated from their historical setting. As Foucault (1972) observes the existence of a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space the meaning of any statement. Cherryholmes (1987) explains this idea as: "The rules of a discourse govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid. Its rules identify who can speak with authority and who must listen." (p.301) He goes on: "Dominant discourses determine what counts as true, important, relevant, and what gets spoken. Discourses are generated and governed by rules and power. The possibility of separating the meaning of a sign system from the conditions that produced it is rejected. It may be that the relationship of a word to a definition or a concept is arbitrary, as structuralist posit, but these arbitrary configurations are produced by historical, cultural, political, economic, and linguistic factors." (p.301)

Cherryholmes (1987) concludes Derrida as following:

Derrida argues that meaning of language is not centred or fixed because it is caught in a play of references between words and definitions. This can be seen in written texts which give the appearance of stability but have no centre, no transcendental signified, no transcendental semantic meaning. Meanings are dispersed from word to definition to definitions of words in the definition and so on. This dispersion of

meanings destroys Saussure's structural concept of the sign. Reading, in part, is a pursuit, tracking traces of meaning in a text. A consequence of the dispersal of meanings in a text is that proposed categories of inclusion and exclusion deconstruct, they break down (p.302).

and he went on:

Text refers not just to what is written and on the printed page. It also includes other words and definitions, other traces in the language that make it possible to assign value and meaning to what is written. To understand a text one must go back and forth between what is present and what is absent, what is written and what is not written. One must read the silences of a text as well as what is written. The ideological commitments of a proposed transcendental signified can be illuminated by surveying the boundary of the text and determining what is in and what is out. Because a text is a cultural, historical product, it will not be surprising if it reflects dominant political and social ideologies (p.303)

From the above statements, it is not difficult to see that breaking from the narrow view of seeing language simply as the linguistic codes and bringing it to the much broader social-cultural context is moving from 1650 level of theoretical consciousness to the 1725 level of historical consciousness and 1800 level of social-critical consciousness. Successful communication does not depend as much on people using the same signs as on their thinking in the same ways. Possessing these kinds of consciousnesses students can understand and accept the differences of values and belief held by the other people, and come to the point of seeing things through the others' eyes. These kinds of consciousness are essential in forming one's

communicative competence.

The attempt to bring sociolinguistic principles to teaching practice has been made. The communicative approach is commonly accepted as the outcome of it and is widely used in today's ESL classes. Brown (1987, p.213) identified four interconnected characteristics as a definition of the communicative approach.

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.

2. Form is not the primary framework for organizing and sequencing lessons. Function is the framework through which forms are taught.

3. Accuracy is secondary to conveying a message. Fluency may take on more importance than accuracy. The ultimate criterion for communicative success is the actual transmission and receiving of intended meaning.

4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

The communicative approach suggested that grammatical structure might better be subsumed under various functional categories. Much less attention was given to the overt presentation and discussion of grammatical rules. A great deal of use of authentic language was implied, and the attempt was to

build fluency. In the classrooms of the communicative approach, the students are encouraged to deal with unrehearsed situations under the guidance, but not control, of the teacher.

The communicative approach is an advance from the previous paradigms of second language teaching. However, though this approach was the outcome of the development of the sociolinguistic theories of this century, it is not adequate to represent this theoretical paradigm. The communicative approach with its notional-functional syllabus tried to meet the students' needs by applying the language teaching in the sequence of the notions and functions that might be most frequently used in their daily communication. Though teachers design the lessons in certain social-cultural contexts and introduce the concept of cultural appropriateness, raising the learner's social-critical consciousness is not the aim of teaching. As argued previously there is not a well designed syllabus that puts cultural information in an important part of that syllabus which can be taught in a systematic way. The notional-functional syllabus put those social functions such as greeting, inquiring, complaining, excusing, as the main organization of textbook and teaching. The result is a series of dialogues around these functions for the students to practice. In this way, these practices of dialogues are just as boring and meaningless as the pattern drills of the audiolingual approach.

## 2) Summary

To summarize the previous paradigms reviewed, we can see that the concept of learning has gone through several changes. The Grammar-translation method treated the target language as an established entity of grammar system. Thus, teaching is to give students this well defined body of knowledge. The relationship between the learner and the language can be illustrated as in Figure 1 in next page.

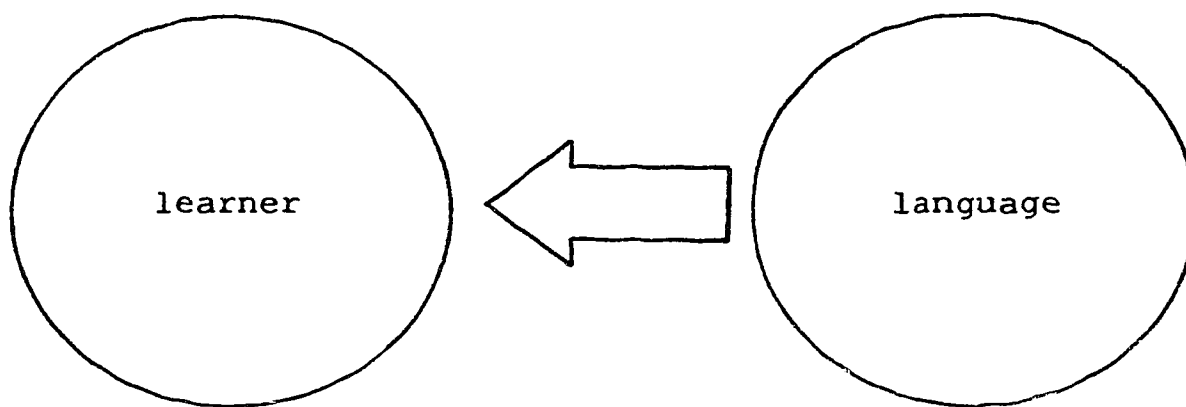


Fig. 1  
The Grammar Translation Method

Though the focus of learning in the Direct method, the audiolingual approach and others, was shifted to oral English and learning became habit formation, these methods did not differ greatly from the above learner-language relationship (Fig 1). Language was still regarded as a well established system for



learners to absorb. Therefore for both of these two paradigms, the centre of learning was the language, not the learner. No matter what differences existed among the learners, they had to face the same task and go through the same route of learning.

As opposed to the above methods, the Cognitive Approach recognized the learner as the centre of learning.. By concentrating on the learner's processes of knowing rather than on mechanic procedures imposed upon him by the teacher, learning became learner initiated. This changed the relationship between the learner and the language learning task as noted in Figure 2.

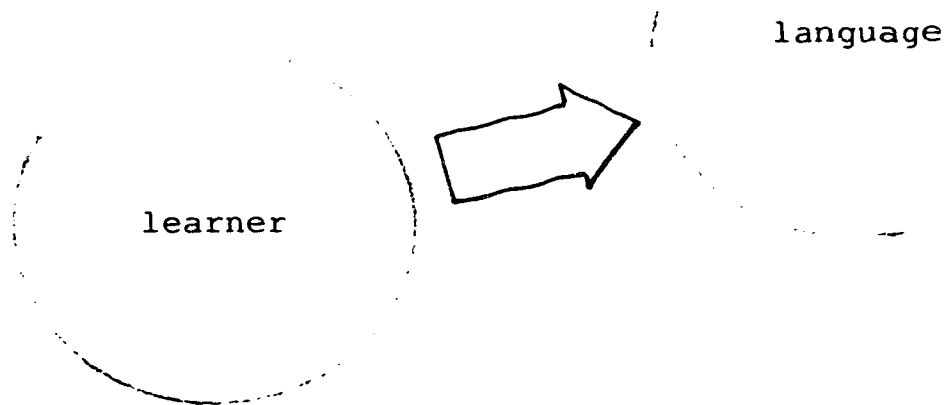


Fig. 2  
The Cognitive Approach

In the Communicative Approach, the relationship between learner and the learning task was changed further. This approach

recognized learners' needs and tried to define the learning task according to those needs. Therefore, the target of learning was no longer a well established system of language rules or patterns. The content of learning and the process of learning were all designed according to different learners' different needs in the context of their lives. By using authentic materials and organizing relevant and meaningful communication, the Communicative Approach tried to offer an ideal surrounding for learners. This approach can be illustrated as in Figure 3 next page.

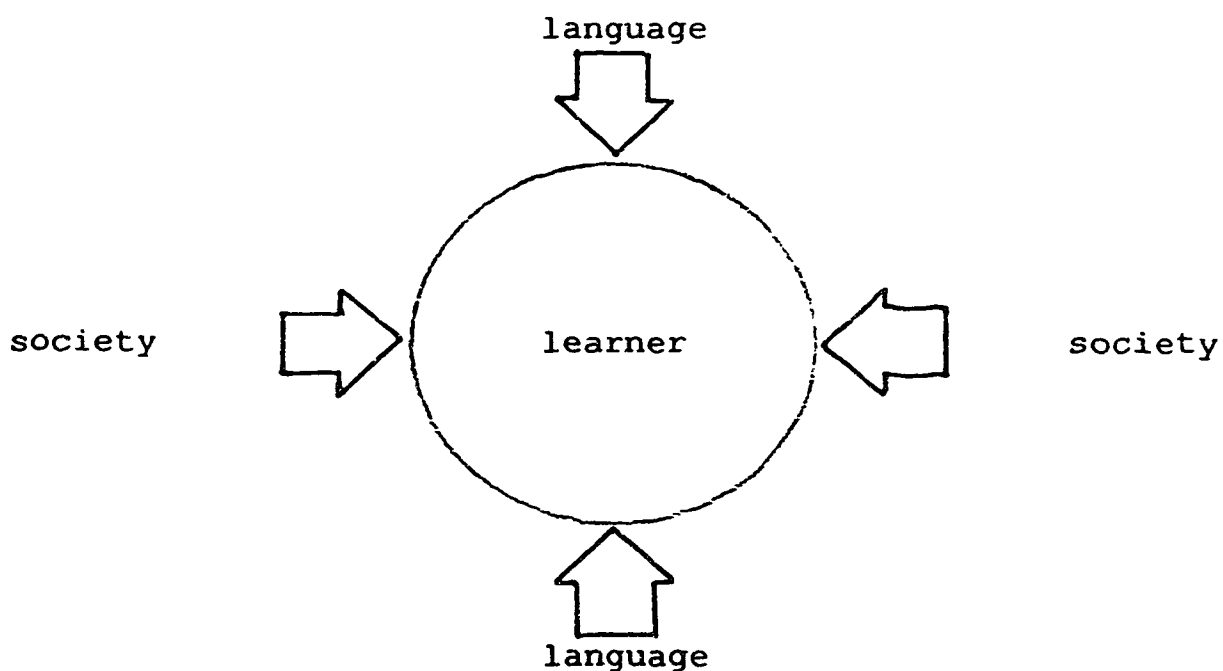


Fig. 3  
The Communicative Approach

Although the Communicative Approach moved to the learner as the centre of teaching, what it did was to define and facilitate the best learning environment outside the learner instead of fostering learning from inside the learner. In this paradigm, not enough attention is given to the inner world of the learner, how he/she experience learning a second language along with coping the life in a new culture. In this sense, communicative approach still only circles around the edges of learner and has not yet really reacted into the centre of the learner. In other words it did not foster learner initiated learning; nor did it develop learner's mental powers of self-control which are essential if we accept the important functions which human consciousness play in learning.

The Cognitive Approach did tried to develop the learner's self regulated thinking, initiate learning from inside of the learner and put the learner as the centre of learning. But it had a narrow vision of what language learning was. It regarded the target of language learning as an existing system which is basically the linguistic code of grammar rules and vocabulary. In this perspective, learning is acquiring the new strategies as the instruments to solve old problems.

The limits of these previous paradigms indicate that we need

a new vision of the second language learning and teaching, a vision which not only takes learner's initiatives at the centre of learning and develops the learner's self control of his or her own learning, but also takes the task of language learning in a much broader social-cultural context than the linguistic code itself. I think this vision should also go much beyond the study of learning strategies and metacognition and come to the height of learner's personal growth and conscientization.

If we are no longer thinking learning a second language is simple learning the linguistic code and consider it in a broad social-cultural context, learning a second language is nothing less than the process of personal growth as a whole.

If our ESL teaching is aimed at raising the learner's consciousness, and this consciousness does not only include the grammatical consciousness and discourse consciousness of how to learn the linguistic code, but also the other consciousness necessary to gain communicative competence such as sociolinguistic consciousness and strategic consciousness, the nature of learning is changed and the relationship between the learner and the learning task is changed from the previous ESL methods.

In the previous paradigms of ESL teaching, learner's self was always represented in a circle which has a clear boundary with the outside world. (see Fig 1, 2, and 3) The proposed new vision of learning can not accept this boundary of learner with the outside

world, because his or her self is ever increasing in the process of self growth. The new relationship between the learner and the language environment should be as following:

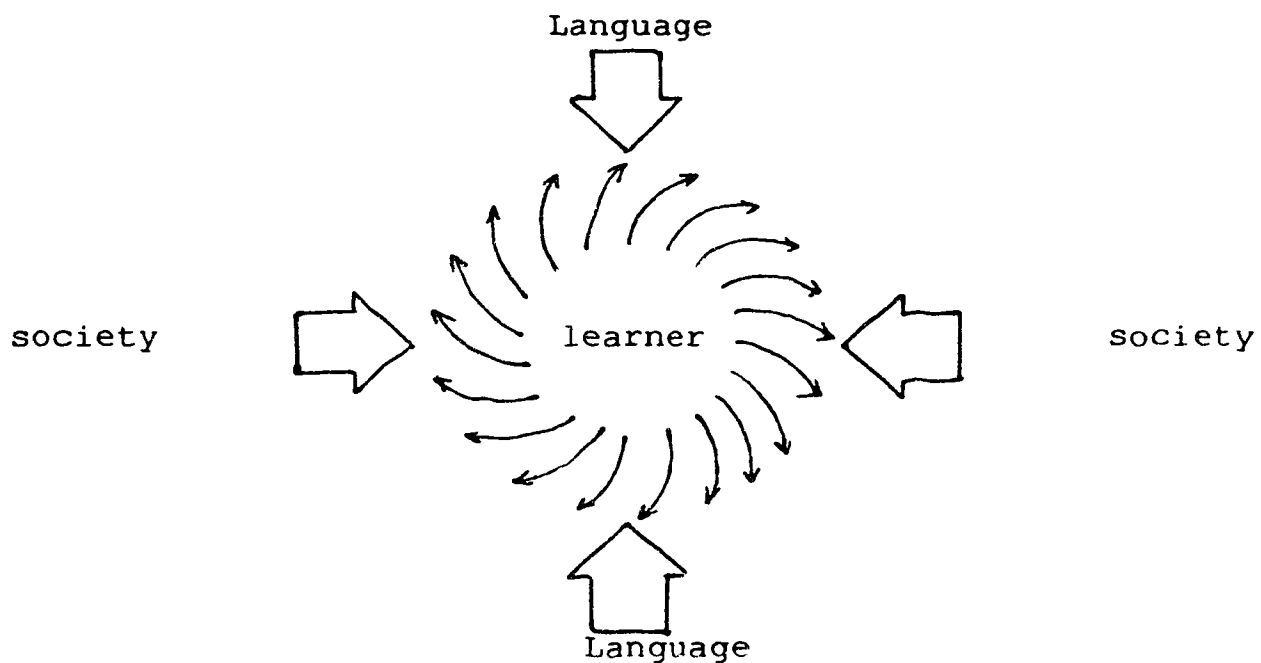


Fig. 4  
The Proposed model

These spiral arrows represent the developing consciousness and competence in many different areas of learning in the process of self-growth and conscientization. They are directed to language and society which are regarded as an inseparable whole. While these

arrows are going out, the body of learner's self is ever increasing. This increase of the learner is not to shift from one cultural thinking to an another. It is not to give up one's own value, tradition and identity. It is a process of self enrichment and self development.

At the same time, this new model of second language teaching should not exclude other paradigms of educational thinking. It is the combination of all the previous achievements and views language teaching from multi-perspectives.

### **3) The End Without an End**

My autobiographic study and theoretical reflections in this thesis lead me to arrive at this proposed model of second language teaching. Then it is very likely that I would be asked "Does every learner needs these kinds of consciousness to learn a second language and to survive in a new culture?" My answer is "NO".

Each individual is different. Everybody is unique in his or her own way of learning. In democratic societies, people also have their right to choose their own way of learning and living. Some people welcome personal changes and see it as self growth. Some others might want to keep their own way. Therefore, there is no one single way of learning and living for everybody. The proposed model of second language teaching is not a generalization based on my own personal learning experiences. It is an suggestion for the further studies on the role of human consciousness in second language learning.

The terms I used to describe different kinds of consciousness

in second language learning such as phonetic consciousness, grammatical consciousness, semantic consciousness, social-cultural consciousness, self-critical consciousness etc., are not descriptions of reality, but interpretations of reality. As the same reality can be interpreted in many different ways, by no means I hold mine as objective truth.

Furthermore, those names I gave are too broad to describe the very complicated phenomenon of human thinking. For example, within the category of grammatical consciousness, there can be very different things happening. Some people might be too conscious of language rules, and very quick in generating or memorizing rules. However, that might not help the development of their communicative competence. Just as Krashen argues, learned rules do not add to language proficiency and fluency. To some others, they do manipulate their knowledge of language rules and improve their language through doing it. What language rule may help, and how it may help is another consciousness good learners may possess. We probably can also find something that cannot be called consciousness. It might just be awareness, or intuitive judgement. But still, it is the learner's active mind that acts on it and makes learning happen.

As to social-cultural consciousness, it is more of an ethical issue. As we are judging if a person is a good learner or bad learner according to his or her attitudes towards another culture and ways of life, we are already making decisions according to our own values and way of thinking. Every one has the right to be oneself. Why should we tell them how to think about others, and how

to treat others?

The above comments are based on the paradigm of thinking I gained several years after I came to Canada. It is obviously contradicted to the proposed model of second language learning I raised in Chapter VII. Then how do I make myself consistent?

The contradiction here is the contradiction that characterizes the whole new paradigm of my consciousness. If there is not definite criteria of what is good and what is bad, what are we supposed to do to improve our life? What is the guidance of our human actions? When someone seeks for a new and better understanding of a phenomena, one probably looks for definite solutions and concrete answers. The whole process of searching and researching is to seek for stability and safety. However contrary to what is expected, now coming to this new paradigm, I am totally confused. I have a strong feeling of being unsafe and unstable.

On the one hand, I told myself that like it or not, I have to accept it. On the other hand, I am still desperately seeking for new truth. Will this lead to a new paradigm of my thinking? I do not know. As I believe in change, there should be no end to changes. I may still work out something better.

Presently, I came to a temporary "solution". Though there is not objective truth and natural law to distinguish what is right and what is wrong, we all have our own personal judgements of right and wrong. These judgements are indeed subjective, relative, and subject to change on conditions. What I believe as right might be totally wrong to others. However, we have to rely on these judgements to make decisions of our actions. As we have come to



this world, we have to find some way to let life continue. My life experience, my relation to others, and my understanding of my life situation can tell me what is positive, promising, and worth doing. I will still have certain criteria to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. I will still do what I thinking is right. On the other hand, I will also remember the limit of my life and my thinking. To constantly adjust my thinking and actions, I need to constantly increase the scope of my vision, the circle of my life and the horizon of my thinking. That is to continue the paradigmatic changes of my consciousness.

This explains why I proposed this model of second language learning and teaching based on my understanding of consciousness in learning. Being a teacher, I still believe that it is my responsibility to influence my students, to foster positive thinking in them and to bring about constructive changes to them. I can not realize it in an authoritarian way. It is because I believe that the positive thinking is their self-directed thinking. The constructive changes are changes based on the development of consciousness.

To propose a model of learning and teaching at the end of this thesis does not mean that the whole journey of my autobiographic study is just for the arrival at this conclusion. The most valuable thing in this thesis to me is a deep self examination and reflection which has helped me to reorganize the tangled thoughts and therefore redirected my life. To my readers, I think they all look for different things. Therefore, I just revealed my own self and my own way I see myself. Is it interesting or boring? Is it

rich or poor? Is it productive or counterproductive? Is it educational or disastrous? I do want to hear the answers.

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