Becoming an Intersubjective Self

Teacher knowing through Chinese women immigrants’ knotting of language, poetry, and culture

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This research work explores my narrative in the making by a self-reflective study of teacher knowing in my cross-cultural experiences. The inquiry originated in my teacher self and led to my students who upheld the strongest knots in my web of relationships. In conjunction with an autobiographical study, conversations and interviews with five women immigrants (including four former ESL students and my mother) and journals and life-writings from them, were collected in three years that overlapped four years of analyzing, interpreting, and writing. Thus, the work combined autobiographical and biographical research methods.

The women immigrants in my research were found to have experienced social and cultural vicissitudes in China and Canada from various perspectives. A value learned through such experiences is to persistently improvise a life worth living in the ever changing situations with whatever we were given. This threaded and gave ethical meaning to the thesis. One of my co-researchers, back in China, belonged
to a social group which at times oppressed my social group. Nevertheless, our equal teacher-student relationship evolved into a reciprocal friendship and a way of learning and knowing. I called it intersubjective knowing and simulated it in the metonymy of splicing Chinese knotwork. Such knowing was to understand oneself as a center of experience, at the same time to respect and validate other’s experience as one’s own. Connections were made in a pattern of symmetrical turn-taking of leading and following. Splicing happened when our story-telling touched commonly experienced historical moments and/or interested topics. I traced the cultural epistemological roots for such intersubjective knowing back to ancient Chinese ideograms, syntax, and the Taoist philosophy. And the roots found a rich soil in Deweyian democracy of valuing common life experiences.

Intersubjective knowing breached the horizons and enriched both parties. It is a Taoist interplay between teacher and student, researcher and participant, self and other, self and self, Western and Oriental, I and Thou, an inexhaustible multiplication of opposites and a transcending intersubjective WE.
Acknowledgments

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My gratitude to my supervisor, thesis committee members, and external examiner. I was guided into the world of narrative inquiry by my thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Connelly. During my one and a half years’ intensive writing, he read every draft of each chapter in process, and challenged, as well as encouraged me. Dr. Patrick Diamond, my committee member, helped me complete my structuring of thesis. Dr. Ardra Cole, my committee member, assisted me to articulate the strengths of my thesis. Dr. Jill Bell, my external examiner, gave her time freely to edit my thesis in detail.

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Chapter One: To Introduce

The Cricket Amidst the Leaves of Grass

..., the stranger is one who lives on the edge between her unique world and the world of others that she has just entered.

(Shabatay, 1991, p.136)

To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world’s sky.

... But poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of Being.

This topology tells Being the whereabouts of its actual presence.

(Heidegger, 1971, p.4;12)

This work is a stranger’s call,
    a stranger who is as strange as a cricket to a giant bird;
This work is a stranger’s answer,
    a stranger who has just entered the world of a giant bird,
    whose emerging selves are as strange as a giant bird to a cricket.
This work is a stranger’s journey to call and answer,
    --- an inquiry into her Being,
    the whereabouts of its actual presence.

In Carefree Wandering,
Chuang Tzu told us a tale about big and little:
In the darkness of the Northern Ocean,
There is a fish named K’un.
The K’un is so big that no one knows how many thousand of tricents\textsuperscript{1} its body extends.

\textsuperscript{1} A trcent is three hundred paces.
After it metamorphoses into a bird,
Its name becomes P’eng.
The P’eng is so huge that no one knows
        how many thousands of tricents its back stretches.
Rousing itself to flight,
Its wings are like clouds suspended in the sky.
        On its journey to the Southern Ocean,
The P’eng beats the water with its wings
        for three thousand tricents,

Then it rises up on a whirlwind
        to a height of ninety thousand tricents
        and travels on the jet streams of late summer.

A cicada, a dovelet, a marsh sparrow sees and says:
When the P’eng looks down at the sky from above,
It must appear just the same as when we look up.
The true color of the sky is azure.
The first emperor of the Shang dynasty asks:
Do up, down, and the four directions have a limit?
Chuang Tzu concludes:
Beyond their limitlessness
There is another limitlessness.
Therefore, the ultimate man has no self,
The spiritual person has no accomplishment,
And the sage has no name. ²

I have a name, so does this work — my currere³,
Which is to accomplish narrative in the making,

² Chaung Tzu, p. 3-5.
Which is to discover a self improvised\(^4\) 
with disparate elements and sequential diversity.

Therefore, I am not the ultimate man, 
or the spiritual person, 
nor the sage.

Therefore, I am limited.

I am a limited cricket who 

    experiences the world in her little hops, springs and flits; 
    tries to find the truths of her experience; 
    expresses her understanding of the experience 
in her little chirrs and chirrups 

    ----“voice”\(^5\) of a cricket.

The cricket has taken to heart the limit of her experience, 

    —the “experience of human finitude”\(^6\), 
situated amidst the grass 
that nurtures, shelters, grows the cricket;

Seeking for her authentic self, 
Writing her autobiography, 
The cricket soars beyond her experience, 

    —the “experience of one’s own historicity”\(^7\), 
    “and from the heights, 
discern(s) new landscapes, new configurations”\(^8\), 
the sky is not azure any more, 
from the wings of the P’eng 
ninety thousand tricents above.

\(^4\) Bateson, 1990, p. 3.  
\(^5\) Grumet, 1990a, p. 281-82.  
\(^6\) Gadamer, 1993, p. 357.  
\(^7\) Gadamer, 1993, p. 357.  
\(^8\) Pinar, 1994, p. 217.
The cricket recognizes the limit of her experience,
seeing herself amidst leaves of grass,
hearing herself chirring and chirruping.

"The eye, after all,
is not only a part of the brain,
it is a part of tradition."9

The ear, after all,
is not only a part of the mind,
it is a part of culture.

The color that colors the eye
is "the white out of the seven colors of a rainbow"10

The tune that tunes the ear
is the melody out of the seven tones of a piano.

The colored eye and the tuned ear
Are searching for truths of experience,
Are questing for meaningfulness
Of life in narrative form
—stories and reflections spliced together
"to suggest a style of learning from experience."11
to offer an alternative reality,
to extend our common experience
in an effort to grasp the self
— a stranger and an other
who "lives on the edge of her unique world
and the world of others she has just entered,"12
the worlds of her other selves she has just entered,

10 Buber, 1957, p.34.
11 Bateson, 1994, p. 11.
“as a human possibility”\(^{13}\)

in a rapidly changing and interdependent world,
which has been challenged by multiculturalism
---the philosophy of humanity and democracy
---the ethics of equality

for “possibilities inherent in ordinary experience”\(^{14}\),
---a hope to foster flexibility in education,
to increase a culture’s power to adapt to change
--- the norm in the contemporary world.

A cricket knows the limitlessness beyond the limit,
---beyond the leaves of grass,
---beyond the azure sky,
---beyond the wings of the giant P’eng,
---beyond the whirlwind of ninety thousand tricents high,
---beyond her horizon,
---beyond her vault of heaven.

Without metamorphosing,
The cricket reaches out to other crickets,

\begin{quote}
cicadas, dovelets, marsh sparrows,
swallows, dragons, K’uns and P’engs.
\end{quote}

“When all under heaven know beauty as beauty,
already there is ugliness;”\(^{15}\)

When all under heaven know limit,
already there is limitlessness;

When all under heaven know I,
already there is Thou,

\(^{13}\) Greene, 1995, p. 4.
\(^{14}\) Dewey, 1938/1963, p.89.
\(^{15}\) Lao Tzu, (Mair trans.). 1990, p. 60.
who are “historically unique
in the otherness of the past”\textsuperscript{16};

To be aware of both,
To be ready for both,
To interplay between the poles,
To understand in the process,
Brought her leaves of trees, as well as leaves of grass,
  skies of purple, as well as the sky of azure,
  stretches of clouds, as well as the stretch of cricket,
  heights of tornadoes, as well as the height of cricket’s hop,
  horizons out of horizons,
  heavens above heavens....
Brought her standpoints through sympathy and imagination
  ---the openness to new experience
  “that is made possible by experience itself.”\textsuperscript{17}

The cricket comes back experienced,
  re-assuring her finiteness,
  that supports, strengthens, and shapes the cricket;

The cricket comes back experienced,
  wandering through her small world of tradition,
  wondering about the big world of P’eng;

The cricket comes back experienced,
  seeing a big world of P’eng
  in her small horizon of cricket,
  hearing chirrs and chirrups of cricket
  from above the stretches of clouds,
  with her eye re-colored and ear re-tuned;

\textsuperscript{16} Gadamer, 1993, p.360.
\textsuperscript{17} Gadamer, 1993, p.355.
The cricket comes back experienced,

to teacher education which “is apt
to be advanced least by adherence
to the classic natural science modes of inquiry”, 18
with her teacher’s practical knowledge
which “is actively related to the world of practice”, 19
with her teacher’s personal knowledge
which cares about her students beyond
“pencil-and-paper tests”, 20
with her teacher’s personal practical knowledge
which reconstructs “the past and the intentions
for the future to deal with the exigencies
of a present situation.” 21

The cricket comes back experienced
to the telling and re-telling of women’s life stories
to “the resonance process” 22
in sharing narrative inquiries with her student
and co-researcher,
with her findings about the resonance
which happens either at a historical moment
experienced from various perspectives
or at a topic
of common interests,

Intersubjectively, stories go through a correspondence-creating process.

The cricket comes back experienced,
to the “Western pedagogical tradition

---
18 Lanier, Little (in Wittrock ed.), 1986, p.550
19 Elbaz, 1983
21 Connelly, Clandinin, 1988, p.25.
which hardly does justice to the importance of
intersubjectivity in transmitting culture", 23
with her brain and tradition pluralized,
with her mind and culture vitalized,
with her intersubjective self becoming better.

Better is a quality beyond good

---that forever on-going ethical quest.

“...storytelling is an ethical endeavor”, 24
The ethics are embedded in the aim of the narrative study, 25
aims “at a common good”
at making “explicit the view of the good life”. 26

It is an endeavor to ponder over the famous question of Charles Taylor:
What makes life worth living?
“To Live” is the theme,
threading all chapters;
It is the premise,
without which all the chapters would be of no value.
The aim, explicit and implicit,
in “To Splice”, “To Untie the Connection Knot”,
“To Untie the Friendship Knot”, “To Dialogue”
and “The Strength of Strangers: Vantage Point Beyond Opposites”
Is To Live a better life.

“To Splice” is to dig into the question of
How to live a life worth living.
It is the thesis of becoming an intersubjective self,

---

All in one are stories—content
dialogue—method
and knowing—philosophy.
It is a colloquy on knowing.
Knowing lies in telling stories,
Knowing lies in splicing stories,
Knowing is understanding intersubjectively.

"To Untie the Connection Knot" is to investigate the question of
Why to live a life splicing.
It is my teacher-self,
who is teaching to achieve a fuller sense of human possibilities,
in relation with my student,
a relationship that supports the knowing how,
"Knowledge evolves in human relationships."²⁷

"To Untie the Friendship Knot" is to inquire into the question of
Why to live a life of bonding and belonging.
It is to discover gender-selves in the relationship of my student and I,
 a community and a place
 that upholds the stories spliced.
 that "fit for women to live in".²⁸

"To Dialogue" is to search into the moral question in
How this work was done.
It is my moral-self in relation to my research subjects,
 to autobiographical and biographical writings,
 to my academic community,
 and my other multiple selves,

a dialogical and relational arena
that grounds the splicing work,
that claims “dialogue is ethics”. ²⁹

“Strength of Strangers” is to explore
The meaning making process of a life worth living.
It is my cultural-self in relation to my cross-cultural experiences,
a relationship of splicing and dialoguing,
a gain in polarizing
in translation
in transformation.

“There is no better way to study curriculum
than to study ourselves”, ³⁰
There is no better way to study the experience of P’eng
than to study the cricket,
the cricket amidst the leaves of grass
that nurtured and nurtures,
sheltered and shelters
grew and grows
the value of the ordinary experience in education
the gnome in Taoist tale of big and little.

“To be situated within a tradition
does not limit the freedom of knowledge
but makes it possible.” ³¹
The cricket is little, so is her tradition;
The P’eng is big, so is his historicity.
The little and the big are both finite;

³⁰ Connelly, Clandinin, 1988, p.31.
Infinite is the openness to endless new experiences.

To open to new experiences
Is to color your eyes and tune your ears
To the tradition and historicity
Of the limit of the new,

which is meant to catch and retain
the complexity of teacher’s knowledge;
which allows the forms of novel, prose and poetry
from my Being, not only the mind,
in order to approach more closely to experience of a truer self
and truer others, who are also subjects of their own right. 32

To understand this work requires you

to “habit yourself to the dazzle of the light
and every moment of your life”33,
to participate in the activities of narrative inquiry

---“a language of images, personal philosophy,
rules, practical principles, rhythms, metaphors,
and narrative unit.”34

You are exposing yourself to a series of Chinese knotwork

that connects selves of others and mine
within each chapter and between chapters,
with the last chapter as a summary cultural knot,
that closes up the series and makes it a circle.

You are exposing yourself to the series of Chinese knotwork

that metonymizes intersubjectivity and

33 Whitman, p.40.
34 Connelly, Clandinin, 1988, p.59.
the process of becoming an intersubjective self
to the series of Chinese knotwork
that has not knotted all the selves, some of which
are evolving and some are metamorphosing.
You are subjecting yourself to a spiral of
unfolding stories and versions of interpretations,
scenes, plots, and reflections are repeatedly lifted
and built up.
You may find yourself lost in the struggle of my multi language selves
--- the shoe of the cricket,
in several Chinese dialects,
in English learned
as a foreign language and second language,
literary, academic, metaphoric, philosophic, and poetic languages
--- my Chinglish.
You are expected to be walking in my moccasins
in my lost in translation\(^{35}\)
that has been transcended
to my gain in translation
my knot of Chinese philosophical self and English poetic self
--- my poetry.
You are to live my narrative — a stranger’s story.

This work is a stranger’s call,
a stranger who is as strange as a cricket to the giant bird P’eng;
This work is a stranger’s answer,
a stranger who has just entered the world of P’eng,
whose emerging selves are as strange as P’eng to a cricket.

Cricket and P’eng

\(^{35}\) Hoffman, 1989.
A pair of subjects,
Enters one another’s experiences,
Walks in one another’s moccasins,
Becomes an intersubjective Creng,

--- a knot spliced to introduce the framework

of the stranger’s Being,
in this thinking poetry

—the topology that tells Being

the whereabouts of its actual presence.
Chapter Two: To Live

To live is the theme threading all chapters and the premise of this research work. It is an ultimate pursuit for meanings of life by ethical humans, be they teachers, students, researchers, women, or immigrants. To live is to create meanings out of stories they live and tell.

This chapter is about how we six new immigrant women live our lives in interruption. How we create our meaningful lives out of the odds and ends we have at hand. It is a continuity of improvisation in my Master’s thesis. The continuity has two layers. The surface layer is that it overlaps and carries on where I had left off in my Master’s thesis. It is an extension of time. The second layer is that the theme of improvisation stands out of all my subjects’ stories. It is my responsibility to tell. This second layer is an expansion from myself to others and a multi-dialogue between inner-self and outer selves. Therefore, the continuity is on the theme in time and space.

My Master’s thesis was a narrative study of my life experience in China. The focus of my study was on the first major interruption in my life, that was the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. When I entered my teenage years, my life path brought me into chaos and confusion. I survived those ten years and grew into a mature woman. What I learned from the experience has provided me with a foundation to live a meaningful life in interruption. I believed the wisdom continuously contributed/would contribute to my life composing process in other major interruptions along my life path, such as immigration.
In rereading, stories remind me of familiarities in life’s continuity. In retelling, stories gather new meanings in life’s novelty and changes. The story that triggered the inquiry of my Master’s research work still keeps me wondering: How did I do that? In addition to the questioning of what I did in the story time, I am now asking questions about the story-telling time --- my third year in Canada when I was writing my master’s thesis and my learning in the immigration experience.

2.1 The Familiar Self and the Novel Self

I was on the train to Beijing, the capital of China. It was in May, 1988. China had been open to the world and the government had taken a relatively free economic policy for about ten years. On that two days and two nights trip, passengers were crowded in the hot, humid, and somewhat stinking train, gossiping. As people were from different corners of the country, they felt more comfortable talking, because they did not have to worry about being reported to officials in such settings. Besides there was nothing else to do. I happened to have an audience of people my age, who had the same experience on a farm during the Cultural Revolution, which had taken place about two decades earlier. When the train was traveling through all the tunnels in the mountains that surround and isolate my home province, my farm story flew out of my heart automatically to the rhythm of the rumbling train:

I was on the farm as an “educated youth” to get re-educated by the farmers for four and a half years. It was my last year on the farm. One day in autumn, I walked back home from work, exhausted. I went straight to the door and entered my room without looking around. A strong fragrance greeted me. Taking a deep breath of it, I was relaxed and intoxicated. It was getting dark. I could see nothing inside. But I knew it was the fragrant
There was a big beautiful osmanthus tree in the front yard and it was blooming. But the fragrance should not be that strong from inside. In the dark, I took a step forward and stumbled over some branches of osmanthus blossoms. There was a layer of it on the floor! “Who did it?” “We did!” A group of children burst into laughter from out of my window and ran away. I stayed in the dark for a while as those giggles and steps of the little bare feet died away. Now, high up in the sky, the golden moon smiled at me from out of the window. Those lovely and naughty children knew that osmanthus was my favorite blossom, white at the beginning, golden in full blossom, tiny but sweet. The fragrance stays long and travels a distance. They also knew that I loved it because of the story of ChangEr, which I learned from classical Chinese literature. It is about a lady confined in the moon, who had only one osmanthus tree and a pair of white rabbits to keep her company.

“You are lucky. You still have happy memories about those years. I don’t,” the passenger said. Then a long span of silence followed.

(Li, 1991, p.3-4)

The Fragrance of Osmanthus Blossoms is a celebration of the triumph of adaptation and growth on the interrupted path. It took time to gain a perspective to see beauty in a life in which everyone was struggling to survive on the minimum food, in primitive housing conditions, and under maximum control and oppression from a dictatorial government. It needed courage to acknowledge the beauty seen from the person who was deprived of a better and promising life. It required faith to recognize and remember the beauty printed on the life path which zigzagged through social, cultural, and personal vicissitudes.
To find a pattern, that underlying order in the ceaselessly changing flow of experience, I borrowed the notion of “improvisation” from Bateson and the “Tao” from Lao Tzu. The inventing of the authentic being at that time took me through stages of desperate improvisation, established improvisation and circles of Taoist nameless eternal Way, the irresistible soul and spirit of Water, and the dialectic and infinite ambiguity of the Opposites.

March 18th, 1969. Early morning. It was cloudy, windy and cold. On the harbour of my home city Chongqing, there were hundreds of thousands of people and a hill of luggage. They were teenagers, leaving for exile. Family members were to see them off. I was one of the teenagers. But my parents could not come. My father had to work at a labor camp and mother was in another labor camp, writing her confession letters everyday. Grandma was too old to come. I was to be sixteen years old in 6 days. It was time to board. I went straight on board, passing a lot of people who couldn’t tear themselves away from their families. While on board, I saw one boy who was short, slim, with a pair of glasses, about 18 years old, crying but trying to tell his mother to go back and not to worry about him. But he couldn’t speak because of his crying and tears. It was really a struggle for him and the struggle distorted his face. By then, I burst into laughter, pointing at his face: “Look, what a funny face!” He didn’t pay any attention to me nor did any other people. “What’s the use of crying? Ridiculous!”, I murmured. His struggle distorted his face only; my struggle distorted my behavior, and my heart.

(Li, 1991, p.17-18)

Emotions need to be educated. Education always has a goal to improve the present somewhere in the future. When the anticipated future is forever gone, emotions take their
own directions. Mine was to suppress the subject and to observe objectively and practically. When detachment was forced, sarcasm filled up the distance. Underneath there was confusion, horror, and helplessness. Confused with the unpredictable turbulence of values, horrified by the brutal violence of humans, helpless with the massive social madness for cultism, I hid myself in this desperate improvisation. Like pine trees sprouting out of rocks, creativity saved me from underneath the piles of rocks of oppression and inhumanity.

April 2, 1969. A Spring snow. I was excited, for I grew up in a city where there was no snow at all. Windy and snowing. No work. I went to Aunt Tian’s house for fire because I didn’t have enough firewood. She was not a good housekeeper. Her house was messy. But both the husband and the wife were very comfortable in it. (Actually, they had several rooms in the house where a dozen families lived, including us.) Neither of them had a temper. I was told later on that they were one of the two couples in the team, (there were about thirty-five families), who never fought. They had three sons, each one had a pair of big, beautiful eyes like their mother. She knew a lot about Chinese medicine and herbs. Her husband told me that her father used to own a Chinese pharmacy where she gained her knowledge of Chinese medicine. He was proud of her. I was surprised to see a party member being proud of an enemy’s daughter and mentioning her rich father’s pharmacy in a positive way. For years before that, I was told to feel guilty about my rich grandparents, for they “exploited” poor people. I had been told a lot of terrible stories about those rich people that I really thought it was a shame to be born into a rich family, although my grandmother told me her stories about how well those rich people treated her, a poor wet nurse. “Uncle Peng, come on in for a smoke” the husband called somebody. It was the former landlord, the only
rich person in that village before the communist government came. Because he was not very rich, not enough to be killed, he was allowed to survive, with all his money taken away; also his house and land, (the house which used to be his is now shared by a dozen families), and his political rights as a citizen. Once in a while, Aunt Tian’s husband, Chen, would gather some people like him together and give them orders not to talk at will, not to move at will, behave well, people would some day forgive them, etc. But Chen called him Uncle now, which was entirely different from what he told us when we just arrived. He told us to be alert about this landlord. Don’t talk to him. Don’t get influenced, don’t get poisoned. Then Uncle Peng came in. Chen and his wife greeted him as a decent guest, and asked him if there had been any snow at this time in the springs in the past, what would it do to the plants in the fields, how would this affect the harvest in the coming autumn, etc. Uncle Peng answered their questions amazingly. He mentioned several spring snows in the history, their influence on the harvest, what people did to decrease the bad influence, etc. He gave the exact dates and years and numbers of the weight of the grains for those years’ harvest. He was an expert in agriculture and people there respected him.

From how Aunt Tian and her husband responded to Uncle Peng, I started to realize their wise techniques toward people like Uncle Peng. This triggered my thinking about my own desperate improvisation moments before. And I started to improvise my experience with some consciousness about the balance among different factors in life. This led to more and more established improvisation moments since.

I began to be very interested in Uncle Peng. He did not talk much. He smoked a lot. When he smoked, he did not wrap his tobacco leaf with used newspapers as other farmers. He took pages from some old textbooks instead. Those textbooks belonged to his kids. He had two sons
and a daughter. All of them received good education, at least six years in elementary schools and six years in secondary schools. But, because of their black political birthmark, they did not escape the destiny of being farmers. Thus, their textbooks were abandoned. If other people could learn from him about agriculture, why not me from textbooks? I brought Uncle Peng some used newspapers and had a deal with him. From that time on, Uncle Peng wrapped his tobacco leaf with used newspapers that I gave him. And I read the old textbooks every day after supper by the kerosene lamp. Uncle Peng was glad to make the deal with me, although he recited a famous classical Chinese saying, “When Scholar Jiang went fishing, he waited only for those who were willing to be caught”, implying that he was not responsible for it. Actually I had a strong sense that he was pleased to see those books be picked up and read by people. And I was not surprised later on when I had questions about the textbooks, I went to seek help from him and he always gave me wise and interesting answers.

Those textbooks made up in part for my missed formal school education. I read all the literature, history and geography textbooks. I completed all the exercises after each lesson, and made piles of notes. More important were the teachers - the teacher for those textbooks and the teachers who led me on to the journey of life where my confusion started to disappear, where I learned the wise attitude toward disruption, toward distortion, and toward difficulties. Life on the farm was hard. I had to learn the ABCs of everyday life; I had to worry about how to make ends meet. Very often, when all the other families in the team had already finished their lunch and were off to work, I was still struggling by the stove; I could not get the fire on, I could not get our lunch ready. Tears and wood ash were all over my face: tears from both the smoke of the wood fire and from the tension. In the winter, there were many cuts on my
hands from the chilly wind and the heavy manual labour. In the summer, there were mosquito bites, fleas, leeches, and some other insects I could not name. In the spring, there was cold water in the rice fields freezing my legs until they turned completely red and purple. In the autumn, there was busy work on harvesting summer fields and planting winter fields: backbreaking work. I was often sick, I had a broken ankle, stomach problems, arthritis, anemia, etc. But I learned. I learned to understand the real life of the farmers, and the farmers as human beings. I obtained answers to questions which had haunted me for years, which were covered and twisted by the government propaganda.

I started to have my own philosophy of life, principle for being a Chinese, and skills to grow from the ever-changing situations forced upon me.

(Li, 1991, p.69-72)

Wisdom accumulates through time. Improvisation needs to be practiced. Continuity and interruption work side by side. Learning includes and builds upon unlearning and relearning. Inspiration and affirmation come to you only when you are ready to accept them from both inside yourself and others.

Practiced improvisation was learned in interrupted and discontinued life. The alacrity to learn was a continuity of making life worth living. At the ends of a pendulum, there was continuity and interruption. On a reed mat that paved the zigzag life path, there was continuity and interruption woven tightly. The dialectic and infinite ambiguity of opposites comes into vision while diverging from one end of the pendulum and the dark colored reeds of interruption in the mat.
My father was cooking for me on a tiny kerosene stove beside his bed in the corner. In this huge crowded labor camp, he occupied the bottom part of a double-deck bed under the stairs. It was 1972, my third year on the farm. Our five family members were scattered to five different places. I was working on the farm. Brother was training table tennis teams in the county town. Mother was confined to the university campus, working as a laborer in the rice fields at day time and writing letters of confession every night. (The university where mother used to teach is an agricultural university where they run some experimental rice fields). Father was in the labor camp opened by his university. Only my grandmother stayed home.

As the Spring Festival was approaching, the Chinese people all over the country were ready for their traditional annual family get-together. But my parents, as the “enemies of the people”, were not allowed to leave the labor camps, let alone travel back home for Spring Festival. My brother was not able to leave his table tennis teams because it was the season of table tennis games. My grandmother was too old to move around and she had to take care of our home. I was the only person in the family who was able to travel if I did not mind missing some “working points” for the absent days on the farm. So, I chose to go and see my father, for his labor camp was closer to my farm - two days’ travel - including one day on foot and one day by bus.

Because my father was living with more than one hundred professors in the huge, crowded, dim and stinky labor camp, I had to stay with a friend’s family at night and could only visit my father at day times. My father had more wrinkles and looked older. But he was in a good mood and had not lost his sense of humor. With his ever worsening eye disease and the harsh living conditions, he stumbled from time to time in his dark corner. But he was enjoying cooking the special chicken dish for me. I did not know what to say in such a situation. Looking around, I saw some familiar
faces (other professors); some were sitting on their beds, trying to mend their clothes, some were chopping vegetables on their self-made chopping board with their self-made chopping knives. The whole place smelled with cooking, dirt, sweat and urine. It was miserable.

“Do you remember Professor Deng? He is over there, just three beds beyond mine. He has lots of interesting stories. Go and say hello to him”, my father told me. “No, I don’t want to. I can’t stand the atmosphere. It is miserable.” He looked at me for a while and took me one step forward from where we could have a better view of the whole camp. “Don’t you see a beautiful oil painting of the Renaissance? Look at the mist, the brown background and the vivid figures of people. More important is that everybody is learning every day. Isn’t that wonderful?” I looked into his eyes and found honesty and sincerity. He had not changed and maybe he would never change in terms of his attitude toward the world.

My father is the person who can always have a dialectic viewpoint toward life. He always sees the multi-aspects of people and happenings. He has the eyes through which beauty is always alive.

When all under heaven know beauty as beauty,
   already there is ugliness;
When everyone knows goodness,
   this accounts for badness.
Being and nonbeing give birth to each other,
Difficult and easy complete each other,

Long and short form each other,
High and low fulfill each other,
Tone and voice harmonize with each other,
Front and back follow each other —
   it is ever thus.

For these reasons,
The Sage:

dwells in affairs of nonaction,
carries out a doctrine without words.

He lets the myriad creatures rise up,
but does not instigate them;
He acts,
but does presume;
He completes his work
but does not dwell on it.

Now,
Simply because he does not dwell on them,
his accomplishments never leave him.

(Lao tzu, p.46)

In my father's life, in his thoughts about the world, I see the dialectic of the relative opposites in Tao, the balance of the polarities and the infinite ambiguity of the opposites.

In my own interpretation, the Tao looks at life and the world as a seamless web of unbroken movement and change, filled with undulations, waves, patterns of ripples and temporary standing waves like a river. Every observer is him/herself an integral function of this web. This seamless web never stops, never turns back on itself, and none of its patterns of which we can take conceptual snapshots are real. Unreal in the sense of being permanent, even for the briefest moment of time we can imagine. Unreal in the sense of being complete, even for the most comprehensive aspects of space we can imagine; though these fixed concepts referring to things and states can be extracted by human thoughts from the ever-changing reality, can be useful. As people can extract beauty from things, human beings, and states, people can also extract ugliness - the opposite of beauty. At the time when beauty is concerned, its opposite partner - ugliness - arises. Nothing is a pure beauty nor a pure ugliness, in the senses of the multi-dimensions and the changing reality. As an integral function in this web, every individual is bound to, consciously or unconsciously, look constantly for the balance - a balance
between the individual and the whole web, a balance between the polarities in the web, a balance between the polarities inside the individual, a balance between the polarities in the web and that inside the individual.

The list of such balancing is endless, and this action of balancing is both everlasting and instant. Thus everything changes at every second; but the immense web does not change, for the changing components keep the balance of the whole web. In the face of such a world, what can man do? There is a story in the book Chuang Tzu, written by Chuang Tzu, who was a disciple of Lao Tzu and who interpreted and developed Tao Te Ching:

One day, Confucius and his pupils were walking by a turbulent river, which swept over rocks, rapids and waterfalls. They saw an old man swimming in the river, far upstream. He was playing in the raging water and went under. Confucius sent his pupils running downstream to try and save him. However, the old man beached safely on the bank, and stood up unharmed, the water streaming from his hair. The pupils brought him to Confucius, who asked him how on earth he had managed to survive in the torrent among the rocks. He answered, ‘Oh, I know how to go in with a descending vortex, and come out with an ascending one.’ He was, of course, a man of Tao.

The point of the story, according to Rawson and Legeza’s (1973) interpretation, is that in Taoist viewpoint, the world, that web of time and change, is a network of vortices like a moving and dangerous torrent of water; and the ideal Taoist is the person who has learned to use all her/his senses and faculties to improvise the shapes of the currents in the world, so as to harmonize her/himself with them completely. Meanwhile, the
person remains an individual, an unique individual, who owns her/his ever-increasing senses, faculties and ways of improvisation.

In order to improvise the shapes of the currents, it is important to be able to see the multi-dimensions and the changing aspects of them. And in order to see those aspects, the infinite dialectics of Tao arose. Thus came the relative opposites: “When all under heaven know beauty as beauty, already there is ugliness.” When I was unhappy to meet only my father while others met all their family members, my father was in a good mood and kept his sense of humor because he saw me - one of the family members. When I saw a miserable picture of the inhuman labor camp for professors in the 1970's, my father saw a beautiful Renaissance picture with vivid figures of human beings set against a brown background. “When everyone knows goodness, this accounts for badness.”

When I thought it was cruel to cut the professors away from their academic work, my father held that it was good for the professors to study the real world. Because of goodwill and expectations people usually have, it is difficult for them to see the “good” and “positive” aspects in the real world. After people extract concepts from the real world, they tend to forget that the origins of the concepts are the real world and label the real world with only those negative concepts. They also tend to forget that those concepts arise only relatively and they are interdependent. More important is that people tend to forget that they have an integral function in the real world. If she/he could be able to adjust the angles of her/himself, she/he might improvise the experience, which can be labeled as “positive”, “good”, “beautiful”, “healthy”. This seems like the key in my father’s viewpoint toward the world and life. This seems like the key in Taoist viewpoint about the relationship between people and the world. This seems like the decisive factor in water to make it irresistible.
My father is a gentle and intelligent person. He was always in his books, (now he has an eye disease). He taught me to love reading. He “preaches the doctrine without words”. My love of reading never weakens in my life. In the Cultural Revolution when culture was revolutionized, I read. In the years on the farm where I was supposed to get rid of my former “book knowledge”, I read. When I myself decided not to read any more in order to avoid the painful turmoil caused by the striking contrasts between books and reality, I still couldn’t keep from reading. Even my father tried to take away my books forbidden by government, I read. Books became my most devoted company; some authors became my best life-long friends. I feel comfortable wherever there are books. As it is said in the Chinese saying: “The force of example is force majeure”. My father’s example as a book lover laid a foundation for my life-long self education, particularly important in those chaotic years when culture, tradition, and thinking were censored.

(Li, 1991, p.7-11)

Times build people. People create times. The turning circle has no beginning or an end. Not like that haunting question since Darwin’s Evolution “eggs or chicken, which came first?”, there was no question of origin. Within the same times, some people swim freely; some people drown. They are both built by their times, and together they create their era. To find a cause for my learning to swim was to look for the answer of “eggs or chicken” question. But order helps. It makes the world more manageable for our comprehension. To my Eastern mind, the archer gets focus. The target stays in the background.

The fist closed at a conclusion that the transforming from desperate improvisation to established improvisation was an ascending from quantity to quality. The will to choose
and the way to select were learned from the recognition of the constant changing world — both inner and outer — in interaction with the ubiquitous "Tao" in my cultural upbringing. Vision came out of years' confusion.

2.2 The Writing Self and the Living Self

Writing gave an ending to the story, like a fist closing the life experience in order to explain, to grasp and to understand. But life is like an open hand. It oozes out. Fists and hands are totally different, but they are not mutually exclusive. Along the years of my writing and living, I have learned to have both simultaneously. Closing and opening up hands take shifts to come to the foreground. Five o'clock in the morning as the dawn opens up, I am closing my hand — writing explanations of life. In the background, there is a real life, the open hand of everyday routine of teaching, and mothering. Five o'clock in the afternoon as the day closes, I am opening my hand — dancing in the kitchen after two hours' travel in addition to five hours' teaching and pressed to be on time to take my son to his various after school programs. Meanwhile, in the back of my mind, an organization of Chapter Three is being formed among clusters of clutters of my preparation and cooking chores.

In order to explain my life and teach better, I asked four former adult ESL students of mine to help by letting me look into their life experiences. I chose them because I had established some trust in them through our classroom interactions and in our personal relationships. My initial inquiry was how and why I related to them the ways they were. How and why personal friendships had evolved from the professional teacher-student
relationships. They were not very much different from most other students of mine in terms of cultural and educational backgrounds. They were all from P.R.China where I am from. They were all women and two of them were my age and two others were about twenty years older. Mostly, they were not like the university students I favoured and established some friendship with when I was teaching in P.R.China. My assumption was that I must have changed in my immigration experience and the change must have some impact on my classroom teaching and in my relationships with students.

All my four women new immigrant friends went through turbulent vicissitudes in modern Chinese history. To take control of life without bowing before nor resisting the power of social changes over them on their interrupted life paths, this theme stands out in their stories. I asked each of them how they learned to play the game. They each had to learn it the hard way. They were all, at certain stages of their lives, thrown into desperation and had to struggle to survive.

2.3 My Improvisation Self and Others' Improvisation Selves

Doctor Liu is a retired pediatrician. Both her personal and career lives were interrupted several times before, during and after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In Mao’s Anti-Rightist Campaign in the late 1950’s, she was forced to divorce her husband who was accused of Rightist thoughts and speeches. As an ex-wife of a Rightist, she was sent by her hospital to work in a remote mountain area to have the influence from her husband reformed. Medicine is needed everywhere by everybody. On the reforming labour farm, she volunteered her expertise. Under the basic medical conditions there, she learned to
solve problems not only for children, but also for adults; not only in Western medicine, but also in Chinese medicine. Out of desperation, "there was no way out" to use her own words, she improvised her life there as a mixture of a labour being reformed, a mother of a daughter, a family doctor without pay, a specialist with many specialties, and a midwife who delivered babies at farmers’ homes.

"I was very vulnerable because of my political background. If anything had happened to any of my patients, I would have had to carry the black pot over my head as "a class enemy trying to harm or kill class brothers and sisters", she told me this in one of our after school conversations that happened along the way to the bus station. "In that case, why didn’t you stop doing that?" I asked her. "I don’t know. Well, that was my identity. I had no choice," she answered me.

Yaping took an early retirement from her engineer position in the Railroad Research Institute. Born in Indonesia, she came back to her home country in the late 1950’s. As a hot-blooded teenager, she was coming to make her contributions to her ideal socialism. Despite her culture shock and the big famine era in the early 1960’s when millions died of starvation, she did not give up her faith. She was among the first to leave her Railroad Research Institute, and her newborn son for camps set up deep in the mountains on the railroad construction sites. "Research should serve the construction; researchers should understand the real life of construction workers", she took this call from the government sincerely and practised it enthusiastically. She went into a deep depression at the sight of lives of people in the communes around the railroad construction area. Her faith was challenged and her naiveté was questioned. Out of desperation, she went out of the camps
in her spare time, visited more commune members, helped them clean up water, cook, take care of children, and collect firewood. She was unexpectedly and ironically honored as “Model of Re-education Receiver” for her outstanding willingness and efforts in accepting re-education from the commune members. She told me in our interview at her home: “I didn’t plan it. I just had to do it for a balance in myself.” Her husband added: “Well, she was lucky. The administrators were puzzled at the beginning. They did not know if they should condemn her for conducting anti-government investigations and propaganda among the commune members given her Indonesian background or they should reward her for her capability to be with them and learn from them. Nobody knew why they chose to do the latter.” (Her husband was also my ESL student. He used to work in the same institute, and went with her to the camps in those years. He was present at one of our two interviews).

Linda grew up in the country of northern China. To ask how many sisters she has embarrassed her, “Quite a few, teacher Li,” she said. And she was the last, another unwanted. Her parents did not send her to school until the Cultural Revolution when she was 13. To answer the call from Mao “It is right to rebel”, Red Guards entered school and taught themselves with Mao’s book. High school was the first school she went to and the last school she graduated from. Mao’s book was her school education. With the high school certificate, she found a job as a salesperson in a department store. But her schooling did not provide her with enough knowledge to balance her everyday sale’s records. Out of desperation, she grabbed a Grade One math book from her niece, and taught herself addition and subtraction. With her smile, patience, and sincerity, she won several awards for her service in the department store. For her, the Cultural Revolution
worked, “It opened school and opportunities for me and it taught me how to teach myself,” she told me this slowly and clearly as usual.

Jane spent two years in prison during the Cultural Revolution when she was 19-21, because of her father’s involvement in Lin Biao’s conspiracy to overturn Mao’s regime. September 17, 1971, four days after Lin Biao’s airplane crash, Jane was put into prison. During the first half year of her confinement, she was “accompained” 24 hours a day and “escorted” to toilet, washroom, cafeteria, and hospital. The only two people she was allowed to see were the female guards who took turn to watch her and force her to confess about her involvement with her father’s anti-Mao conspiracy. They each had a bed in Jane’s cell. They were both in army uniforms and read Mao’s teaching to Jane every day. Sometimes, Jane could hear Xiao Gong from next door singing Mao’s songs. Jane knew Xiao Gong before jail. She was older than Jane and was imprisoned also because of some personal connection. Once in a while, Jane would ask for permission to go to the toilet across from the hallway as soon as she heard Xiao Gong’s voice outside. When successful, she would be able to see the back of Xiao Gong. That’s her only comfort—to see another prisoner, a human being like her.

I asked her if suicide had ever occurred to her. She said: “Are you kidding? Every day and many times I thought of killing myself.” “Why?” I asked. “Because my past had been completely destroyed and my future was in darkness. Actually, there was no future for me at that time. My whole life was turned over,” she answered my question with tears. “I have never talked about this experience with other people. It is still painful.” “But you did not do it. Why?” I was being very cruel to dig more into her painful past. “Well, let me
see. It was the faith in my father that helped. Anyway, there was no way to kill myself when I had 24 hour company every day,” she did not elaborate her faith in her father.

The snow on Chinese New Year’s Eve made Jane miss her family desperately. There came Xiao Gong’s singing from next door. “North wind blowing, snowflakes drifting, the New Year is coming,” Jane joined the singing from this side of the wall. “I am expecting my father, to come and join me for a happy New Year’s celebration....”. Out of her eyes sprang inexhaustible supply of tears. Her glorious past, desperate present, and a dark future had been her unrecognized haunting companions. This desperate improvisation of the duet rinsed out her of suppressed despair.

When my journey to the labour camp was launched at the harbour, laughter came out of tears of my own and thousands of others’ from confusion, horror, and helplessness.

Dr. Liu was thrown into a situation of no choice but functioning as an all-round doctor — “a barefoot doctor” as it was termed. She was technically more than a barefoot doctor who would be sent for some basic medical training for only several months. But she was politically less than barefoot doctors who would be chosen from among the Red — those who were to educate people like Doctor Liu who was ranked as Black politically. And most of her patients were Red, too. If she made any mistakes, or anything bad happened to her patients, chances were that she would be condemned of murdering or poisoning out of her “class hatred”. Carrying the heavy psychological burden of “being vulnerable”, she did her best for her patients. At the same time, she took enough cautions. She improvised herself as an ironic Black Barefoot Doctor. An enemy of the people was curing the disease for the people.
When Yaping's ideal and reality were in collision, her despair drove her to go out of her way to help, and to experience more of the unexpected reality. This desperate improvisation was eventually narrowing the gap between her ideal and the real.

The Cultural Revolution seemed to favor Linda and the social class she belonged to. The damage was only seen years later. Her illiteracy brought her into desperation, but did not ruin her. On the contrary, out of desperation, she improvised a way to make it up.

When Jane was doing her duet with her next door prisoner, she was singing the Song that was part of Mao's wife's works. In those years, that was the only music allowed. By using the first few lines, Jane found an outlet of expression for herself.

Perseverance in adversity, and creativity in desperation saved us all in the times when the past had been cut off and the future had been wiped out of our curriculum and when we were deprived of our autonomy to choose. We all met here now as new immigrants to Canada. There had been no enforced political or social pressure on our decision making to leave. Instead, we all had to work hard and sometimes fight to get out of the country. We all took the autonomy to bring our life paths to another major interruption.

Our reasons were various. Our mottoes are the same: Since we survived the Cultural Revolution, what else are we afraid of? This time, we were going to make the best out of our chosen change of life. We were going to live.

2.4 The Cultural Revolution Selves and the Canadian Immigration Selves

Animals survive. They survive or perish in ecological changes. Their fates depend on their capabilities of adaptation. Passive adaptation does not allow them to live. Humans
live. We live our meaningful lives. We define what makes life worth living for ourselves. As individuals living in the particular time and country, we create our meanings as well as take hand-down values from the culture. We own our past and imagine our improved future.

Dr. Liu looked well fed and her husband came to my adult ESL class with her to keep her company. But her worrying face struck me. One day, I arrived early and had to wait in the reading room for the last class to finish. She was there without her husband for the first time as far as I noticed. Another student was doing fortune-telling to her for fun. But she took it so seriously that she turned to me and told me her story of coming to Canada.

Dr. Liu came to Canada to help fulfill her daughter’s dream. Since her profession was highly in demand, she opened her own clinic after retirement. She had been content with her life in China. Her daughter was a college student and was admiring the western world with freedom and democracy. One of her dreams was to go abroad. But the college she enrolled in was not offering any programs for its students to pursue an opportunity abroad. Like many single mothers, she was dreaming her daughter’s dreams. So the mother decided to help open a path to the western world for the daughter.

In those years, a Chinese had to either have some connection in a western country to invite and sponsor him/her to go out of the country or to be well-educated to be accepted by graduate programs in some western countries. Dr. Liu knew nobody from out of the country and she was too old for a graduate program anywhere in the world. Friends introduced her to a Chinese man in Canada. Through letter writing, she was impressed by his sincerity and accepted his invitation to come for a visit. The dream was that if she
would find good potential in this man during the visit, she would think about a relationship.

She and her husband had been forced by the government to divorce because he was condemned as a Rightist. A Rightist’s child would be deprived of proper schooling. For their daughter’s sake, they agreed to divorce although they had a beautiful relationship. Her husband was sent to the northwest province of XinJiang for exile and was never heard of since. For so many years, she had to raise her daughter by herself. She really deserved a good relationship for her retirement. So both her daughter and she thought. And if she could have a relationship in a western country, her daughter’s dream could also be fulfilled. Yi Jian Shuang Diao — to shoot two hawks with one arrow. They were both excited about her adventure.

Upon her arrival, the man introduced her to his friends and relatives as his wife, and forced her to marry him while she was still dizzy with a culture shock. His deal was to sponsor her and her daughter to immigrate to Canada. He did what he had promised.

He did not give her time to make her own decision for the marriage. But the Canadian immigration procedure provided her with enough time to know the man in real life. He was a widowed and retired Chinese Nationalist general. His expectation from a

36 The anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 was targeted at two groups of people. They were intellectuals and cadres who had criticized Mao’s socialism in 1956’s campaign of freer criticism under the slogan of “Let a hundred flowers bloom together, let the hundred schools of thought contend”. After repeated invitation from the government, many intellectuals and cadres, expressed their dissatisfaction toward Mao’s socialism in 1956 as their practice of loyal remonstrance to the government. As a consequence, in 1957’s anti-Rightist campaign, they were harshly attacked, obliged to recant publicly and condemn one another. The erstwhile critics including writers, artists, and professors were subjected to a big campaign for “downward transfer”. It moved a great number of teachers, students, and city cadres and functionaries into countryside and remote areas like Tibet, Xinjiang and Gansu. It was not unlike the exile Stalin had put on many political dissidents in Siberia. Dr. Liu’s husband was one of them.
relationship stayed in the 1930's. He needed a care-giver with good knowledge in medicine for his old age. He created a full-dependency of her on him. She had no friends, no family, no language, no legal status, and no money without him. She could not even go back to China without his permission because he held her air ticket. She was stuck.

A woman downstairs told her about our adult ESL program. But her husband did not want her to come. The reasons were that the weather was too cold, the road was too slippery, and TTC was too costly. She insisted. Her husband hung up phone calls from her very first woman acquaintance downstairs. She insisted. He forced her to wash his feet for him. She insisted. He started to yell and swear. She would not give up. He finally gave in under the condition that he came along with her in order to protect her. He was a real army man. So she realized.

His presence in class distracted her English study and his protection made her worrying face worse. She was tense and very slow in picking up English. But she persisted. That day, he could not come for health reasons and gave her two TTC tokens. "I have never been treated like this in my life. But I can do nothing now. ... He applied for my immigration and I have to wait for an answer. I don't know how long. You know, right now I am fighting for the right to sleep in another room. Because I am worried that he would kill me while I am asleep. ... So I have to put a pair of scissors under my pillow, just in case," she said.
She was happy that she had a chance to tell me all this. On our way to the bus station after class, she gave me her phone number and thought her husband would not hang up the teacher’s call. Now her worry became mine.

I would call her whenever she was absent from class. The husband tolerated it for a while. Then one day, he told me that she was busy and could not talk to me. The day after that, she came to class and whispered to me that they had a fight because she wanted to take a job as a live-in caregiver for an old lady. From then on, he cut off all phone calls for her.

She eventually took the job, and only came home to see him on weekends. She phoned me several times from work in the evenings. And we tried to see each other but only managed to meet once during that time. What did I see in her worrying face? Why? Why did she open up to me? With these questions in my mind, I asked her if I could include her in my Ph.D. research. She was happy to be included but doubted how much time she could commit herself to and how we could keep a regular communication.

Unfortunately, she was right. I lost contact from her when she left that job because the old lady died. I was not able to interview her at all for this research.

Three years later, I came across her in a store in Chinatown. She was still living with the man. Her daughter came to Canada just one month before. The man was too old and sick to control her like before. As a retired doctor, she began to feel compelled to take care of him. And she did. I asked her how she felt about me using her story in my research. "I signed the form. That is a promise. Go ahead and do it," she said. I gave her my phone number. But she did not give me hers.
Dr. Liu’s story is the most incomplete in my research. The incompleteness does not leave me in the darkness. The untold tells. The hidden reflects. The silence resonates. I felt lucky that in between the silences, I heard the news of her daughter’s success to come to Canada. Her dream has been realized.

It is hard to draw a line between a dream and a nightmare. To help fulfill her daughter’s dream, Dr. Liu lived a nightmare which made her daughter’s dream come true. And her daughter’s dream may have to include a nightmare too. I don’t know if Dr. Liu has experienced any despair in her nightmare. I only know that she had hope, imagination and practicality. I don’t know if she considered herself as a victim being taken advantage of. I only know that she persevered, and sacrificed her own dream for her daughter’s. I hope her daughter is deserving of her.

Dream symbolizes vitality and creativity. To make one’s dream come true is to learn, to grow, and to live a meaningful life. I don’t think Dr. Liu had realized, by the time she made the decision to come to Canada, what she had to give up. Her focus was on the dream --- the shared dream of her daughter’s and hers.

To leave one’s own country of origin is to give up familiarity. To live in a new country is to open to differences. Very often, we would forget that familiarities include unfavorable, taken-for-granted, as well as favorable elements. The same with the differences. In our dream, we tend to ignore taken-for-granted and favorable familiarities we have to give up along with the unfavorable. In reality, we incline to overreact to unfavorable differences we have to face along with the favorable ones. To realize our dream in a new country, we are forced by the situation to re-examine our value system. For Dr. Liu, her daughter’s dream seemed to weigh much more than her own.
circumstances did not allow her to make her own dream (to have a relationship she
deserves) come true, she protected her daughter’s dream and made it happen. She took
the losses that could never be overlooked while she was striving after the gains that could
never be known before owned.

She was worried. But she did not give up hope. “Who does he think I am! I have been
independent all my life. I survived the Anti-Rightist Movement in late 1950’s and the
Cultural Revolution. I know how to protect myself and how to fight for my rights and
independence,” she told me this when I warned her to take a good care of herself. I trusted
her. I knew her. The knowledge to survive and to live a life through social vicissitudes is
forever with her. She was not naïve to come to Canada to see a stranger and get herself
stuck. She had strong self-confidence to face difficulties — both expected and unexpected.

Her husband’s control over her had increased her isolation in the adjustment to life as
a immigrant. I can’t know how many hard times he had imposed on her in order to
practise his military control. I only knew that she broke through it and won for herself
some freedom, such as working outside. I don’t know how much pressure she had to take
from him for bringing her daughter over. I only knew that she survived it and brought her
daughter over. I don’t know if she has ever calculated the price for her dream. I only saw
a smile spreading her wrinkled face when she told me about her daughter’s arrival. I
could not see her value as a doctor in the Chinese society. But I found her value as a
person who was making her dream come true in the time of adjustment to this society
which is considered as the most open toward immigrants in the world.
For people who either haven’t been exposed to immigration themselves and/or have an unrealistic understanding about it, her story can be negative. For me, having myself experienced immigration and knowing many people who gave up and withdrew completely back to their past comfort of familiarity and social status, her story is telling. It tells people on the host side to value new immigrants like her, not to take advantage of, but to learn from and help them. It tells people who are on the new immigrants’ side that immigration is one of the greatest challenges in the modern world. To meet the challenge, one has to own courage and perseverance. One has to want and be capable of living, not just surviving.

Yaping’s immigration to Canada was a family reunification. She parted company from her family in the late 1950’s in Indonesia in order to come back to her roots --- China---to help build up a strong socialist motherland. She was disillusioned with her experience during the Anti-Rightist campaign, the Big Famine and the Cultural Revolution over the time. Since the economic reform that began in late 1970’s, things had been improved. Her life, like that for many other Chinese people, became better. Both her husband and herself were back working for the research institute and were paid well. Their son received university education and worked as an engineer. They were living a reasonably comfortable and stable life. But she was in her late fifties by then. Life now had different meanings. Political belief and career were not as valuable any more. They were like clouds in the sky that always drifted away with wind. Kinship was calling from inside herself for attention. As soon as the country was open to the outside world and allowed its people to leave, she took the opportunity to come to join her mother, brothers
and sisters who immigrated to Canada after Yaping left for China, when the anti-Chinese sentiments were getting high in Indonesia.

The second day after her arrival, she took a job in a restaurant as a kitchen helper. And since then, she never stopped working. Supported by her family members’ earlier immigration experience, she knew what she was giving up and never complained about her social status that had been degraded from an engineer to a restaurant helper through immigration. By the time I met her in my ESL class, her mother was turning 91, her husband was going through a by-pass operation, and her son was taking ESL courses to qualify for Canadian university entrance. She was the pillar of the family emotionally and financially.

She got up 5:00 am to start her day with English study. She went to ESL class from 9 to 11 and began to work from 11. She came to my class at break time from work in the afternoon. My classes ran from 3 to 5. Her break was 2 to 4. That left her only one hour in my class. She asked many questions and was active participating in class activities.

Once she asked me before class began: “Teacher, what is the English words to say when you don’t want somebody to interfere with your work?” I did not give her quick answer. “What happened?” I asked her. “My boss in the restaurant hired a young girl recently, who knows English, but wouldn’t work. She is always picking at me, complaining and reporting to the boss that I didn’t do this well, I didn’t do that well. And she cuts me off whenever I want to speak. You never teach us impolite words in class. Can you teach me out of class? I have to fight for my rights.” “Well, you can tell her to mind her own business,” I told her. Then she wrote down “Mind your own business” on a
slip of paper, and practised several times. As she put away that slip of paper, a big smile crawled on her face. "Now, I know how to fight back," she said.

The degradation of her social self during her early years of immigration to Canada did not look as if disturbed her. The possibility of staying in that position for the rest of her retirement in Canada did not look as if it disturbed her. When asked how she liked her life in Canada, she told me that there were advantages and disadvantages in both countries. But her focus now was to take good care of her family. She did not believe that she had done well in the past.

She abandoned her mother and siblings when she was devoted to socialism. She put her son in boarding school when she worked full-time in the research institute. During the Cultural Revolution, her family connection outside of China became a target for the Red Guards. Both she and her husband were condemned as traitors and spies. For that reason, they were sent to a labor camp for a year and a half to reform through labor. During the time, her husband began to have heart problems and never got any medical treatment. Now it was time for her to make up for the loss of a family life. Her price was to work as a restaurant helper or other similar cheap jobs for the rest of her life.

Her family of four lived in a small two story house in the west end of the city. The only two times I visited, her mother was praying in front of a Buddha statue. She did not understand me when I talked to her in the Standard Modern Chinese. I was told that she only spoke the Cantonese dialect. Her husband was also my student. He was present on my second visit. He was open and chatty. I was informed that he was going to have a bypass operation soon at the end of my visit. Her mother was not feeling well either. She was about 93 at the time. Their son was preparing for a TOEFL test. She not only had to
make money to support the family, but also take care of all three of them. Her time was
too tight for my research any more. But she and her husband convinced me to use the
materials I had collected so far. They left me their phone number and told me to call
whenever I need. I have had a call or two from either her or her husband at Chinese New
Year every year since then.

This was another incomplete story among my four subjects in this research. I was
discouraged. From my own immigration experience, I understood their situation. But the
unstable life of new immigrants made them impossible moving targets to follow\(^{37}\). I
doubted if I could ever have any complete stories from my new immigrant subjects.

Now more than three years after my last interview with her, what I could see in her
story was myself, like all the other subjects' stories I have in this research\(^{38}\). I have not
forgotten that by the time I was collecting data for this research, it was not long after my
master's thesis on "improvisation". What I was looking for and was able to see was
reflected in my teaching, my relationship with my students in particular.

Incompleteness perpetuates; completeness is transient. Vantage points are infinite;
objectivity is limited. To answer the call from the inner self is to be present to oneself. To
remain in touch with the world requires presence to oneself as well. Yaping's clouds of
political belief and career were dispersed by the wind. Kinship shifted to the center of her
life. The change involved both sides of the self presence. To listen to oneself and
simultaneously keep one's mind's eye wide open to the perceived world demand the art
of improvisation. Improvisation in both playing Jazz and living one's life calls out a

\(^{37}\) I will talk more about the moving targets of new immigrants as co-researchers in my methodology
chapter.

\(^{38}\) I will discuss this in my chapter on autobiographical and biographical research.
primordial spontaneity. Spontaneity needs to be developed and improvisation depends on accumulation of practice in lived experience.

Yaping hasn’t given me enough time to direct my research to a specific area in her lived experience. Projecting my understanding about desperate improvisation and that, as an established way, I assume that Yaping must have experienced numerous desperate improvisation moments like that in her story on the railroad construction site before she could reach the point to choose to leave China for Canada. The accumulation of her practised improvisation must have prepared her to take the losses in her immigration with peace and to strive for the potential gains with enthusiasm. When maturity and vitality become allied, wisdom smiles at her. A child in her eyes, experience on her face, she carried a strong will wherever she went. The will was to live and to make her life worth living at every stage of her life time. It is pleasant and encouraging to be around her.

For over forty years, Yaping worked and lived in the same province I am from. I could see her and imagine her life against the landscape where I grew up. Many times before I knew her, I took trains on the railroad she participated in constructing. The track winds through numerous precipitous mountains and deep valleys, leaving behind endless stories of the dead in tombs lined up on the sides of the railroad. I don’t know if she saw death there or not. But I know some people can gain wisdom after they face death.

Linda came to my class with her hair colored blonde. It looked funny against her skin color which was not as fair as most Chinese from the northern part of China. The bridge of her nose was unnaturally high for a Chinese and her eyebrows were tattooed deep dark. She spoke a lot in class. But in most of her speeches, she simply repeated whatever I was
trying to teach and other students were saying. She was a slow language learner compared with other students of her age in my class.

I did not like her at the beginning, but years of teaching experience had taught me not to make such a snap judgment about a student; years of immigration experience had taught me that people had to go through an identity crisis in the process of adjustment; years of experience as a woman had taught me that daughters, wives, and mothers carried heavier burdens of their cultural myth, and immigration to a new culture demanded from them more courage and effort to learn, relearn, and unlearn the myths of not only their own culture of origin but also of their host culture. They are like icebergs with a lot more stories underneath. I kept my mind and heart open to her.

About three months later, her hair started to show its virgin color at the root. One day, at break, I asked her if she was going to color it again soon. She gave me a negative answer. “Why not?” “I want to be more Chinese. I hate it here. I stay only for my daughter,” she said.

The phone rang again after 11:00 PM. I knew it must be from one of my ESL students, who were informed by me that they shouldn’t make phone calls after 11:00, but they never understood. “Teacher, I need your help.” “What is it?” “My husband agreed to divorce finally. He wrote down something. I have to have it translated into English. My lawyer needs it as soon as possible. Can you do that for me? If yes, I will bring it to your place tomorrow after supper, and we will pick it up the day after tomorrow at your teaching place between classes.” “No problem!” I answered with a somewhat exaggerated high-pitched voice. I had a term paper due on that same day. But I could not say no, nor could I let her sense any hesitation. That was Linda after she stopped coming to my class.
I could not refuse a woman like her who did not speak the language, had a daughter to care for and had to go through a divorce in a country where she had no family and friends to support her at all.

We became friends in adversity. And she agreed to help me with my research although she never believed she could really do anything. A Ph.D. was beyond her reach. And because of this, it was very difficult to interview her. She did not think anything about her was important enough for my research. When I asked her to tell me about herself, she would giggle and tell me I was a good teacher and helped her a lot. I had to change my plan for data collecting. I went to visit her place, talked to her daughter, participated in her social activities. I went to her temple and met all her Buddhist friends. I went with her to her lawyer as an interpreter. I would call, on her behalf, her daughter’s school principal about her daughter’s education. In doing such things with and for her, I became more and more involved in her life and knew more and more about her and myself.

She came to Canada because her husband and she made some money through their own real estate business in China and never felt safe to stay there with the money. In a capitalist country, individual property is protected by law. With this amount of knowledge about Canada, they came. Her husband arrived in 1990. Her daughter and she came in the following year to find out that the man was living with a younger woman who was three months pregnant with his child. Linda had no money under her name, spoke no English, had no friends or family around except their 12-year-old daughter. Her daughter and she had to live under the same roof with the man and his pregnant girlfriend. That’s why she

39 I will talk more about my researcher-subject relationship with her in my methodology chapter.
could not concentrate on studying English when she was in my class. She was repeating the words of myself and other students only to force herself to hear what we said once more so that she could register some sounds in her mind. On my side as her teacher, I was thinking of her as a slow learner who could only repeat when I and other people were expecting a question that would make some sense.

She was hurting and her wound could not be healed because she was also stuck in the same house with the cause of the hurt. Her daughter told her: “Mom, you are really good-for-nothing staying with them.” “Daughter, it’s not fair to say that. I’ve been a proud person. But at present, I have no choice. Do you want to go back to China with me?” “No, I like it here better. The sky is bluer, air cleaner, and flowers bigger. The school offers me more choices. Back there, they wouldn’t allow me to join the singing groups, but forced me to play basketball only because I am tall. Here I can sing and dance.” For her daughter, she had to stay. For her pride, she had to stay and fight.

In China, she was a successful salesperson and later a real estate developer. She had the self-confidence that she could succeed here, too. Being slow was her weakness. But through her experience in the past, she knew how to turn it into her advantage. She had patience and she was prudent. The tortoise was slow, but he got there before the fast hare.

It took her three years to get the financial settlement done. During the time, she had to deal with her husband’s threatening and abuse of their daughter and herself. She had to travel internationally to sort out hidden financial sources from her husband. She had to learn the differences in marriage laws between China and Canada. She had to take care of her daughter’s education and handle the trauma on both her daughter and herself caused by the divorce. She had to pay bills for the daughter and her own living expenses and
the legal fees. Without much English, she made it. Three years battle taught her a lot. To
discuss all what she learned (and what I learned) requires a separate dissertation. In this
chapter, I only want to focus on the theme of to Live.

Linda was slow but not fragile. She had not received much school education, but she
was very determined. She left a solid foot print on every single step of her life path slowly
and steadily. She fainted several times when she was living under the same roof with her
ex-husband, insulted constantly by the man and his girlfriend. And sometimes
misunderstood by her daughter. But she never lost hope. "Why suicide? He is wrong, not
me. I am still young enough to start a good relationship. Plus, I have a daughter. I'll get
justice back some day. It's just a matter of time," She was surprised at my question about
losing hope.

Linda was simple, like many women on the farm I met during the Cultural Revolution.
There was clear cut right and wrong, and a strong belief in justice in her mind like
children would have. She did not seem to be sophisticated enough to understand any gray
areas in between. But her simplicity did not hinder her from understanding life. On the
contrary, she had a more lucid view about life. And more important was that she was very
determined to implement her belief. She would not be discouraged by any setbacks. No
matter what happened, she would persist in and approach her justice.

Linda was slow, unlike many women friends I have had. Even in daily conversation,
she, very often, had to repeat what other people were saying. "Sorry, I am repeating
simply because I need to remember what you said," she sometimes felt that she had to
clarify this with people when she detected some annoyance from the others. She would
give people no more response than repeating on the spot. She would chew and digest
slowly and come back to you and seriously respond to you about what you had said a long time ago and could hardly recall. She may have misunderstood you. She may have remembered things wrongly. But she always came back to you to check it out. And she never pretended to know when she did not. Sometimes, her ignorance made people laugh; sometimes, her slowness made people annoyed and impatient. But she would never give up. Once she had a grasp of something, she would never forget. She made slow but steady moves in her life.

At first, I found her boring and frustrating to be with. But once I knew more about her, I took her as a very trustworthy friend. In her value system of morality, there should not be betrayal. And she would never do it in her understanding. In her belief, friends should share good things in life. She would never hide what’s good for her. She was simple but not gullible. She was slow but strong. She had a lucid purpose of life in her mind and she was working slowly and steadily toward her goal. For her, to live was to realize her value of life.

Once she told me: “Teacher Li, I gathered that we women should learn to take care of ourselves first. I learned it in a hard way. We should remind each other very often, and never forget it for a second.” She learned it in her life experience, and she did not want me to miss this important knowledge of life.

What I have learned from being with Linda is beyond the range of this dissertation. I am particularly grateful to her because she taught me with her own life experience that slowness does not equal stupidity. When she read my description about her first
impression on me, she, as usual, giggled, and added: "You knew I was going through a very tough time in my life then and was quite lost, didn’t you?" (Linter7, 1994).

Of course I did. But only later when I began to read the stories underneath the iceberg.

Jane came to Canada for a better future at a peak of her career life. Her design of a tie-dye dress successfully passed the evaluation by the Modern Fashion Research Institute of Beijing and was put to massive production. She was the owner and the manager of a thriving interior decoration business in Beijing. She decisively stopped all these and came to Canada for graduate study. But circumstances did not allow her the luxury to study. Instead, she experienced a big fall in her life. She had to work as a baby-sitter and a coffee shop girl. When her health was in critical condition and needed a major operation, she was shamed into applying for refugee status in order to have medical coverage. She had to endure the separation from her family, her teenage son, aging parents, brothers, friends, and her social connections that could provide her with passes to unapproachable power. She had to live in poverty and away from the main stream of society.

Falling from where she used to be in her own country of origin to the bottom of the society of her chosen new country, she took it calmly. It was a "piece of cake" to use her own words. Having experienced her first major fall when she was a teenager in China during the Cultural Revolution, she has gained both strength and wisdom to survive any other falls. And when the fall was an inevitable part of her chosen adventure instead of forced upon injustice, she found her strength and wisdom to be priceless knowledge.

Immediately after she recovered from her operation, she helped organize our Chinese cultural association. She progressed fast in her English study. She took courses to update herself with necessary computer skills. She took courses in fashion design. She
established her own business of the Chinese traditional art of tie-dye. She continued working in a coffee shop in order to make a living. She taught Modern Standard Chinese in public schools and, as well, tutored adult students. Along with all these, she had to go through one hearing after another for her refugee application.

She cried; she had lows. She worried; she had pains. She was bullied; she was taken advantage of. She was confused; she was frustrated. But she persevered. Her vision was never blurred; her imagined better future never yielded to her harsh reality. She toiled from the bottom of the society; she strove from the margin of the culture. She did not take a conventional path for most Chinese newcomers. That path would have led her by shortcut into certain well-paid computer-related professions and as a consequence, to a secure and peaceful middle-class life. She had her dream to fulfill. She wanted to develop and educate the artistic talent in herself. She missed many opportunities in the past in China. She did not want to lose any more in her chosen country where individuals are encouraged to take the freedom to realize their own goals in life. She had to take many losses in order to gain that freedom. It would be unwise to give it up. "I’m not here for money. It would be a lot easier to make money in China in my situation. I’m here for a better education and a quality life," she mentioned this several times in our interviews and telephone conversations.

For Jane, a quality life was to be able to be her true self. The oppressive regime under which she grew up did not allow her much choices. Her parents chose her a career as a meteorologist because that was considered hard science and could make a good living. Although she was successful, she always felt an urge of artistic expression that was missing. Ironically, her parents’ involvement in China’s political struggles interrupted
her promising career in meteorology completely and forever and left her in the bottom of the society: in prison.

On her way back from the first major fall on her life path, she improvised her second career in the area of interior decoration and chose to be an amateur fashion designer. She enjoyed the creative and artistic expression in her new career and hobby so much that she believed her true self was made to be more art oriented.

With the self-confidence of her priceless knowledge gained through her first major fall in life, she came into another fall — a deep pit — with her immigration to Canada. But the fall was only skin deep and temporary for her. A quality life had to be paid for.

To be a true self is a life long journey. The definition of a true self changes along the time. The quality of life is perceived subjectively by people with biased visions. Precious is the perseverance. Perseverance breaches horizons —— horizons of realities and of the imagined better futures. The breach creates enlarged horizons with different realities and newly imagined futures. And the spiral has a beginning but no end.

For Jane, to constantly make an effort to be her true self is to make her life worth living. To persevere in adversity, to keep a clear vision of her own value and goal in life, to improvise with the odds and ends at hand and take it to the direction she aims at, is to Live.

Jane turned out to be the most dedicated subject of the four Chinese women friends with whom I have done this research. I have the most comprehensive material about her. And our lives met on our paths and since intertwined so much that I need to contribute my major chapters for our dialogue and spliced stories.
I left China with two purposes. The first one was for an improved future in my career. I had been teaching English at post-secondary level for 11 years. Whenever there was an opportunity for promotion, I had to present more publications and more dedication to my teaching, because I did not have a graduate degree. And my undergraduate degree was obtained between 1973-77, before the Cultural Revolution officially ended. The quality of the education during the time was not considered high although I taught students in the years after that who supposedly had good quality education. I used to argue “if a teacher’s quality is not so good, how can her students obtain good quality education?” But the reality was nobody could do anything. The rule was the rule, whether it made sense or not. At the age of 35, I was too old for any graduate programs in China. For that reason, I decided to go to a western English speaking country for my graduate degree.

The second goal was for a better personal life. I had experienced a divorce and needed time and space to be away from the community where everybody’s affairs were everybody else’s business and where the blame of failed relationships was still put heavily onto women. I was too tired of explaining myself and fighting against the grain. I did not believe I could recover staying in the same place where I grew up, got married and gave birth to my son. I also assumed that divorce and relationship breakups were considered more normal in a western country, and that it would be easier for me to handle the hassles.
I came to Canada instead of other English speaking western countries by chance. I happened to have relatives in Canada. They went back to China for a visit after a 40 year separation from their home country because of China’s former self-isolation. Universities in all English speaking countries required financial sponsors for their foreign students. And my relatives were willing to sponsor me when told that I wanted and needed to get out of there.

So, two years later, after passing TOEFL with a high mark and gathering all the other documents needed, I came to Canada in summer 1988.

Unfortunately I realized only after my arrival at the university that I could not afford graduate study as a foreign student. Tuition fees for a foreign student were about $10,000 a year. All I had with me was $700 US. That was 4,900 Chinese Yuan which was the total of my four years’ salary teaching in the university in the 1980’s. Together with the culture shock, I had to make a living, which I was not allowed on a student visa.

$700 US would hardly last me two months if I stayed. $700 US could get me an air ticket back to China if I shopped around well and got some discount. But that was my last resort. I wouldn’t want to make that choice unless I gave up, unless I admitted to myself that I was a loser. Looking at other Chinese students around me and wondering how they had made it, I found out that many of them were working as baby-sitters and housekeepers. I was told those were the only jobs foreign students were allowed to take. So, through newspaper advertisements, I got a live-in job in a family of four in the Fall of 1988.

That Fall was a big fall in my life. The excitement of getting to know a Canadian family from within through daily life did not last too long. Adjusting to my new social
role was no easier than the adjustment I had to experience during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. To be professional in a family working environment instead of being friendly and helpful took me forever to learn. And without that knowledge, being taken advantage of, being used and abused were gradually becoming my everyday lessons.

Modesty would never win respect; kindness was the synonym of stupidity; money was the king in the jungle; bullying was the law. The facets of humanity in individualism were shown only on a political level; what was hidden was only felt in cruelty. Animal rights were true; human rights were false. One could only enjoy animal rights when one has learned to act smart and bully back.

And this never was/is or will be my dream.

As a new immigrant, I saw no blueprint for my life. I had to experience in order to know; I had to eliminate in order to embrace. The only hand-down I had from my past was the academic route which was impossible to follow. The only given I had at the present was the domestic job which turned out to be a nightmare for me.

To struggle in the nightmare in real life was like struggling to keep my head above the water in a deep well. There I could see no more than a small piece of sky where a bird may skim over once in a while. That bird would not give me hope, believe me or not. It only gave me self-pity.

The struggles in a nightmare stop when one reaches the limit of endurance. Usually one knows that the nightmare will end sooner or later. But not in the nightmare in real life. One had to plan to terminate it. Otherwise, it might never have an end.

To plan, I had to have a future to hope for. To plan, I had to see a hope in that bird. My original purposes of coming to Canada had been for better. My imagined future had been
on some improved academic track. The domestic job was not just to survive, but also to prepare myself to pick up my academic route and try it out someday. It took a special effort to breathe deeply without choking and drill these dreams back in my mind again and again. It was so easy, struggling in the deep well, to lose sight of that little bird.

To put together the odds and ends I had by hand, I persevered until I was ready to fly like the bird.

That was my first year in Canada, which I will discuss in more details in Chapter Four. I saw myself in all my four Chinese new immigrant women students' lives. They might have seen themselves in me as well. We connected in our shared experience of immigration. We related with each other in our shared value of making the best out of our chosen change on the path of life. We came from different social and educational backgrounds; we had various dreams in our lives. But we are the same in our pursuit to live.

To live, Dr. Liu helped her daughter's dream to come true; Yaping has been working industriously to fulfill her dream of making up for the lost years of family life; Linda has succeeded in the battles of her divorce case and stayed; Jane has been pursuing her artistic self; I am still living my Ph.D. dream.

The impassivity of us in desperate situations earlier in our lives in China saved us all from the danger of despair. Now, after years' accumulation of learning in various vicissitudes, we don't react any more. We take control.

We all seem old, because we are seldom surprised at or panic over anything that's within the realm of human conditions. We all look young, because we are curious and we dream and we live.
2.5 Summary

To live, I connected my familiar self with the novel self;
To live, I related my writing self to the living self;
To live, I linked my improviser self to others’ improviser selves;
To live, we tied our Cultural Revolution selves to our Canadian immigration selves.

To live, we hope;
To hope, we dream;
To dream, we imagine our improved future.
To imagine, we act;
We make constant effort to realize our dream.
To realize our dream, we improvise our realities.

We live, because we have been at the edge of life and death;
In desperation, we improvised to survive.
We improvise, because we survived;
We improvise, because we knocked the door of death;
In reflection of the door of death,
We saw that the world has no end;
We admitted that we are limited;
We realized that horizons can be breached;
And the breach happened in the midst of improvisation.

We learned that change is the law and the norm;
We struggled at the bottom of water;
We knew time would come when we could surface.
We swam against the stream;
We were sure time would come when we would swim with the stream.
Go in with a descending vortex;
Come out with an ascending one.
In the Taoist web of time and change,
We improvise the shapes of the currents.
Torrents among the rocks, rapids and waterfalls,
They all change in the moments of improvisation by the swimmers.

Improvisation is ancient and modern;
It is arts;
It is philosophy;
It is life.
To live, we improvise.
Chapter Three: To Splice

The real does not efface itself in favor of the imaginary; it effaces itself in favor of the more real than real: the hyperreal. The truer than true: this is simulation.

Jean Baudrillard, Fatal Strategies

In this chapter, I shall use “to splice in the Chinese knotwork 中國結” as “a metonymy” to simulate the story-telling process between Jane and myself. 41

In Autobiographies: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation, Gilmore compares metaphor and metonymy and defines metaphor as a male favoured trope for self-representation, while metonymy is a favoured trope for female self-representation for it recognizes “the continual production of identity as a kind of patterning sustained through time by the modes of production that create it”, and it aligns along “the horizontal” axis of meaning.” A metonymy has meaning in context, as when feminists contend that women autobiographers represent the self in relation to others”, (Gilmore, 1994, p.68-69, p.77-78). Borrowing the term of metonymy from Gilmore, I am looking for a kind of patterning of the real which “must be repeated by force of imposition and force of habit to become ‘real.’” (Gilmore, 1994, p.79).

Rope has played an important role in the life of mankind. In ancient Chinese mythology, the goddess Nu-wa 女娃 shaped mankind out of yellow earth. However, as this task was too fatiguing and time-consuming, she trailed a rope in the mud, removed it

41 The font of italics is used to highlight the analysis of structure and pattern of the main text and will be used throughout the whole thesis.
and created man. The god, Fu-hsi 背 爨 tied knots in rope to make nets in order to hunt and farm.

Several threads can be twisted to make a rope. Two independent ropes are needed to splice. As soon as the two ropes are spliced, they become strands in the knotted structure. In this chapter, I am anthropomorphizing “ropes” as Jane and I, the two independent story-tellers, who become “strands” as soon as our stories are spliced in a knotted structure. “Threads” will be used to indicate the different selves that compose each story-teller in carrying on internal conversations.

To splice, according to Griend in “History and science of knots”, is to make “(semi)-permanent ‘non-simple’ multi-stranded structures” with ropes (p.138). The Chinese knotwork is spliced mostly with two ropes. Lydia Chen pointed out the structural diversity of Chinese knotwork and its versatility in application, compared with the making of macramé. She summarized the characteristics as follow: “First, Chinese knots are very compact in structure....Second, Chinese knots are complex insofar as interlacement is concerned, ...Third, Chinese knots, for the most part, are symmetrical in form....Fourth, Chinese knots are three-dimensional: they consist of two layers of cord, with an empty space in between. This type of interlacement can strengthen the structure of the knot without having to alter its shape, rendering it tenacious enough for hanging.” (Chen, 1996, p.91).
Choosing to use the concept of "to splice in the Chinese knotwork" is meaningful in two ways for me.

First, its structuring resembles our story-telling process for its complexity in the interlacement, its interdependence and symmetry in the relationship as well as its autonomy in shaping, and the three dimensions with an empty space in between. Epistemologically, its structuring metonymizes a dialogue between us two.

According to Bakhtin, "Dialogue is at the heart of every form of thought." Hermans and Kempen define "the two characteristics of dialogue" as "dominance and
intersubjective exchange.” And they also claim that “The basic rhythm of dialogue is turn taking.” (1993, p.146). In the making of the Chinese knotwork, two ropes take turns to lead the splicing activities and they also take turns to interlace symmetrically.

(Figure Two: A dominating rope is leading in splicing)

(Figure Three: A dominated rope of following in splicing)
Secondly, "to splice in the Chinese knotwork" is a unique art form that belongs to the Chinese culture with which I identify. Moreover, like many other handicraft works, the Chinese knotwork has been assigned historically a secondary and supporting role to enhance the beauty of other dominant art pieces, such as Chinese painting and calligraphy (Chen, L. Turner & P.V.D. Griend ed. 1996, p.92). To adopt this art form, I am constructing a self-representation of a woman immigrant that has been historically marginalized within the North American mainstream academic culture. It is a representation of my lived life and of my relationship with Jane.

Of my five women immigrant participants with whom I proposed to conduct the research, Jane has provided me with the most extensive materials and grown to be the most interested in and dedicated to my research. When we, Jane and I, inquired into our experience of knowing one another, we realized that we have been splicing our life stories since we met. Joints and independent ropes take turns emerging from our story-telling process; interdependence and autonomy unite on our voyage of life; intersubjective exchange and dominance are our rhythm of dialogue. This chapter is an exploration of our dialogue. It presents how we told one another our lived stories in relation to events and meanings. It constructs how we initiated responses to events temporally and spatially. It exhibits how we understood meanings in each other's story-telling. We were developing a pattern of story-telling process.

3.1 A Connection Knot

It was September, 1991. I was just back to my bilingual adult ESL teaching from a one-month' visit to China after three years' absence.
It had been painful to say farewell to my aging mother, who had been caring for my father and my 6-year-old son. I was fully aware that this would be the last time I would see my father. The worry that I might never succeed in bringing my son to Canada overwhelmed me. The feeling of guilt toward my mother was eating my heart day by day. Upon arrival at my graduate institute, I found myself under a pressure of deadline again in order to qualify for my scholarship. I had been advised to go through my Master's thesis line by line with somebody for my English, finalize it, and submit it to the graduate studies office to have my Ph.D. scholarship released within the time of registration. At the same time I experienced a miscarriage, and the public transit system did not cooperate with me: another strike that year.

Trying to put behind all these facets of an immigrant woman's life, I showed my pleasant caregiver's side to my students. I smiled and listened. I was calm and peaceful as usual. In the crowd of my Chinese adult ESL students, another smiling face struck me. That was Jane. "Her smile resembles mine," I thought. "A smile that has many experiences behind it. A smile that has stood the test of hardship."

My projection of hardship behind my smile onto hers, my imagination and curiosity of her experience, my interpretation of her smile initiated the process of our first knot. I was the rope, ready to meet the other.

Jane came to my class two weeks after she arrived. Despite the fact that she was barely recovered from the twenty hours' flight across the Pacific Ocean and the time difference of twelve hours, she was very active and lively in class. "A natural good language learner, high energy level, ready to learn! And well motivated!" I wrote in my journal about this new student with question marks on her readiness and motivation. I was amazed that she
could be ready in such a short time after her arrival. It was the first time in her life that she had traveled outside China. I wondered where her motivation came from. Most adult newcomers would still be in culture shock, and would not be able to make any decision where to go, what to do. When I arrived for the first time in 1988, I could not understand how and why there were so many automobiles and so few people. When I needed to ask directions, nobody was around. I could not find a post office, because they were not in dark green, but red. Plus, how did she find out about our program? She piqued my curiosity.

The observed challenged the boundaries of the observer and pushed the ken of the observer. An internal dialogue was created by such challenge between the smiles of the two, between my observation of her and of other students of mine who had been through similar situations, between my observation of her and my own experience as a newcomer. This internal dialogue was leading the rope further to reach her. This outward activity was not linear. Within the outward trend to reach her, there were threads interweaving with one another and there was a thread turning inward to my deep self and opening up my past experience.

She looked to be my age. I started to observe her more in detail the second time she came to class. She appeared happy, with newly permed short hair and a long fashionable silk dress. She was tall, attractive, and spoke standard Beijing Mandarin. She carried a strong self-confidence with her, and began to socialize with the other students very soon. The topic for that day's ESL class was ordering food in a restaurant. In role-playing, she became a fussy customer ordering Peking Duck. That helped break the rigidity of other students who were so used to the traditional Chinese way of learning and teaching in
which they would only try to read or recite the materials in print. Her coping skills in language acquisition were very appealing, and at times amusing. She brought a fresh element into the classroom dynamic.

At the end of the second day, she walked up to me after everybody had left. “Teacher, could you help me with my banking?” “Sure!” I answered, assuming she would show me some document, and would want a translation. To my surprise, she told me the whole story of the transaction problem she was having with the bank, and took me there to help her communicate with the bank clerk. I stopped her on our way to the bank, asked her if she knew what she was doing. Before I finished, she told me that she trusted me. "Why?" I was puzzled. She said she practised meditation, and believed in Buddhism; she could tell by my appearance that I was a trustworthy person. I was flattered by her trust, and at the same time, became more curious about her.

We met and our first splice happened. Gathering her knowledge about people, Jane observed and interpreted me. And accordingly, she took a practical first step forward to reach me. Unexpectedly, but not surprisingly, she took the initiative and dominated in our splicing activities. To splice, two ropes are needed. To splice, a need to attach and to contact has to be acknowledged. To splice, both sides are required to bend over. One side can take the initiative to reach out and can dominate. But the splicing won’t happen until after both sides join forces.

We found each other because of a mutual recognition. We were attracted by each other for different reasons. Our mutual understanding was mostly projecting our own past onto the others’ present. We both autonomously observed and interpreted the other. In the action of observation and interpretation, there was a bend over. We were two
independent ropes reaching out to join. But she verbalized and communicated her need first. She was the rope that first reached out beyond herself, beyond her internal dialogue between her observation and interpretation of me. She initiated the splicing. She dominated our first splice. I, as the dominated strand, only reacted to her request, to her practical need to solve the problem of banking. I call this first splice Connection Knot.

(Figure Four: A Connection Knot)

3.2 A Double Coin Knot

Observation and interpretation are activities that depend on both continuity of knowledge from the past and applying the past in the process of being present. They are conversations between the past and the present. It is essential to be able to be present to now and, simultaneously to be present to the past. An important part of my past up until then was the completion of my Master’s degree study in teacher education.

My narrative Master’s thesis had theorized my life experience in China in a Taoist conceptual framework. Bateson (1990), in Composing A Life, defines life, which is subject to repeated redirection, as an improvisatory art of ways to combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic. Using Bateson’s notion of improvisation, I had reconstructed my story within the context of various social vicissitudes in China, focusing on the
Chinese Cultural Revolution. The reconstruction had highlighted and empowered certain qualities in me in dealing with interruption and uncertainty.

These qualities, Jane pointed out to me, had resembled what a snake symbolized in the Chinese mythology. They are patience, perseverance, wisdom, flexibility, and the unconventional. I was born in the year of the snake according to the Chinese horoscope. Although the image of a snake is distasteful in Western literature and religion, beautiful stories of snakes are pervasive in the Chinese classical literature, with "Biography of White Snake" as the cream of the crop. With the recognition of those snake qualities in myself, I had found myself with the lenses through which I could see similarities from others. From my perspective at that time, I met Jane.

Jane was born in a year of the dragon. And she identified her temperaments with that of a dragon. Dragon is a symbol of China. Both Yellow River and Yangtze River, the two cradles of the Chinese civilization, are characteristic of dragons in the Chinese culture. Chinese people call themselves descendants of dragons. The body of a dragon is composed of parts of seven different animals - the essence of nature. It represents justice, wisdom, and perseverance. The strength of this combination is considered extremely powerful. Emperors in the Chinese history had dragons embroidered on their robes - dragon robes. Of course, dragons on their robes had two more legs to symbolize their superiority. For Jane, it was the dragon quality of perseverance and wisdom that gave her a foundation to stand on and to fly up when misfortunes befell her.

*For Jane and me, it was the shared symbolism of a snake and a dragon that connected us. It was our similar and different temperaments that spliced us. From the similarities,
we pulled the threads of empathy; from the differences, we picked up the threads of curiosity.

This was the second splice. Retrospectively, we were figuring out on a deeper level what made us connect. Again, she started this inquiry of our temperaments with the metaphors in the Chinese mythology. Between us two, she was the authority finding these metaphors. I fed her metaphors—a different context—with my self-knowledge in stories. She did not wait for me to take my turn to dominate this splicing. I responded with retelling my stories that had been told in my Master’s thesis. I suspended my perspective, which had had nothing to do with Chinese mythology up until then. Acknowledging her independent subjectivity, I was entering her world. To her world, I was contributing my lived stories. From her world I gained more self-knowledge. She dominated this splice; I welcomed it. Dominating this splice, she applied her theory to my practice. Applying her theory, she was accumulating confirmation. Accumulating confirmation, she revealed herself autobiographically. Fragments of her autobiography revealed in this splice was entering my subjectivity, which was wearing the lenses of improvising a life in adversity and interruption, in her case, “the foundation to stand on and fly up when misfortune befell her”. Intersubjective exchanges began to happen in this second splice.

This analysis of our temperaments connects us with the meanings made out of it. It is like a montage that is abstracted from our relating to and knowing about each other. We are identifying to each other; simultaneously, we are separating from one another. Interdependence and autonomy were also playing their roles in this splice. I call this splice Double Coin Knot 雙錢結 which intertwines tails of two dragons in Chinese knotwork.
Gradually, in that adult ESL class where I taught six hours a week, Jane and I knew each other more and more personally as well as professionally. We played our roles of a teacher and a student. But, our first personal splice had put colored lenses on us so that we could see one another in a more intimate way. We kept working autonomously on our internal conversations between observation and interpretation of the other.

In class, she mentioned several times that she liked Sichuan food. I heard her opening for an invitation from me because I am from Sichuan. I was also hearing that a personal situation was needed between us because of our developing friendship.

In November, about two months after we met, I invited her to come to my apartment for home-made Sichuan food. She was thrilled at my invitation and opened her treasure box, and took out four or five dresses to iron and to let me choose as her gift to bring to my dinner party.

Since Chinese currency in those years was very low against Canadian, many Chinese would bring with them things that they were told would be valuable in Canada. Things
like Chinese arts and crafts, silk and cotton, Chinese medicine and ointment, towels and toothpaste, shoes and soap, kitchen knives and cutting boards etc. were stuffed in the limited space of luggage bags to come over by air. Daily necessities were to be used to save their Canadian dollars that were harder to make for newcomers. Others were usually kept in their suitcases, which I call treasure boxes, to be given as gifts to people with whom they would make friends in their new environment.

I went to her small room on the second floor of a house in downtown Chinatown. The room was dark and so small that very little space was left after a double bed mattress was set up as her bed. The door could not be properly closed and the floor cracked under our feet. She apologized for bringing me to her "lousy" place and pointed at the wall on the other side of the mattress. My eyes were blinded by the splendid dresses that were hung there. They were traditional tie-dyed silk in a simple and comfortable style. She apologized again for not being able to hang them up at a more appropriate place than this wall and told me that she had just ironed them and wanted me to try them on and choose one. I tried them on one by one. They were all white silk with beautiful tie-dyed patterns in different colors. I liked all of them, but chose the red one. She said that she had known that was my color before I went to her place. She said she just wanted to see the effect of other colors on me. She was proud of her product, designed and hand-made by herself, which was also very successful on the market in summer 1990. Now it was my turn to be thrilled.

She reminded me of my own first years in Canada: poor with hope, struggling with dignity, smiling at hardship. "As long as there are no cockroaches, I am happy," she told me. I knew she was also convincing herself at the same time. Our conversation and try-on
happened in that bed without a frame. "Feel like I was back in my teens on the farm in Sichuan," I told her. "I did not go to the countryside," she answered. "I was told by my brothers that is the experience and knowledge I had missed. But I am making it up by experiencing this 'Yang Cha Dui' — going down to a people's commune overseas — now. They don't have the courage to come," she told me proudly.

Friday afternoon, I drove her to my apartment after class. Observing my driving, she told me that she learned driving from her father's chauffeur before the Cultural Revolution when she was a little girl. I also learned that she was the only daughter of three children so that she became her parents' favourite. She took advantage of that and did many things that boys were not allowed to. Later on, as an adult, she won the authority in the family and was given a nickname as "Chairman Mao" at the family dinner table. She was always proven right, which was the only difference between Chairman Mao and her.

She liked my apartment and commented on my decoration in her professional language. She said that the environment mirrored my personality. "What is my personality in your mind?" I asked her. "Well," she said, "You are intelligent like many of my friends with intellectual family backgrounds, including my husband. You are also artistic and flexible like me. You have some peace and gentleness in you that I don't have. And you also hold some mysterious detachment in you," she analyzed me like this. "What do you mean by 'detachment'?" I was curious. "You are easy-going but unconventional. You are in and out of the mountain simultaneously," she surprised me. That was the me understood by myself. I even used the same metaphor of mountain in my master's thesis. "But I could not do it. I am too much in the mountain and need to draw myself out
sometimes to have a better view," she continued. I was amazed by her way of knowing herself and me. At the same time, I was happy to be recognized as a distinctive individual by somebody in Canada where I had almost always felt being shrunk into a mere Chinese --- a piece of chess on the chessboard of the global economy, an object, and an other.

_This was our third splice._

_In my invitation, I was reaching out to her. Taking my turn, I initiated this third splice._

I was the dominating strand in this splicing. When she opened up her treasure box and told me bits and pieces of her upbringing, she was reciprocating. She was the dominated strand then. She reached out to meet my dominating bending-over.

We spliced again on a different level this time. She surprised me in her sophisticated way of articulation, which she had not been able to expose in our low level ESL class where only survival language skills were taught. From my own new immigrant experience, I had known that the depth of an iceberg under water should never be overlooked. But I could not know the accurate measurement underneath and the richness of its coloring unless I dived in. On her side, I, as a teacher, was under the spotlight. She, as an adult student, had the power to make meaning out of every word I said in English and Chinese in this bilingual class and every gesture and movement I made there. To her, I revealed more than I had thought in my profession.

From the fragments she shared about her family, I gathered that she was from a very different background than mine, but she had a connection to know people like me. From my visit to her place, I was exposed to her new immigrant’s reality. Putting two and two together, I realized that she was going through a big fall in her social and economic status by coming to Canada. From the fragments she gave about her relationship with
her family, I began to have a sense about where her self-confidence came from. From her sophisticated analysis of herself and me, I realized that she was well-educated, I suspected, by herself instead of from formal schooling.

I began to like her in our first encounter. She aroused my curiosity in our second splice. I, now, started to respect her in our third knot. On her side, she was attracted by my trustworthiness in our first splice. She was making an effort to frame me into her way of understanding in our second splice. And she, now in our third joint, qualified me as her good friend with whom she could have multi-dimensional communication and connection. This was a deeper and longer splice from where our friendship began to evolve.

This knot brought some symmetry into our splicing. Unlike in our first two splices, I took the turn to initiate and dominate it. And this turn taking brought more intersubjective exchanges into our relationship. I use a Cross Knot 十字结 from the Chinese Tang dynasty knotwork for this splice. (Figure Six: A Cross Knot)
3.4 A Friendship Knot

Jane’s English progressed quickly, she graduated from my class shortly after her visit to my place and went to another adult ESL school. She also moved from the small room I had visited for a cheaper place. She mentioned that to me during her visit. But she did not yet have the address and phone number yet at that time.

I understood fully the frustration and insecurity for a new immigrant to move. Such people are usually in a very unstable economic situation. They need to adjust their expense frequently. Rent in a big city becomes a major expense and they have to keep cutting it to the minimum. But because they are newcomers, they don’t have the language and they don’t know how the system functions; they don’t know where to find cheap places to rent. When they find a place that is affordable for their current income, they may lose the income very soon and find themselves in need of a cheaper place. When they find a new place, it usually takes a longer time for them to find out and to learn to pronounce and memorize the address which is in English. It is usually a big hassle for them to arrange their telephone. They don’t have credit with telephone companies. They are frequently asked to pay a deposit. Often, more money will have to go for telephone deposit than they can save from the rent. Because of their lack of English, they can hardly arrange an appointment for installment of a telephone line without the help of others who speak the language. Where do they, as strangers, find an English speaker to help for these daily trivia in a place where individualism and independence are highly valued? As their bilingual English teacher, I am always overwhelmed by such tasks. Survival English taught in class helps, but is never enough. When a person is overwhelmed with something, she has to find a way to protect herself. I decided only to help people who
asked. To offer help before I was asked was too Chinese for me and not practical any more in a Western society, even though I did not like this part of the Western culture.

Jane did not call me. Because, I thought, she was moving and changing school. I was sure we would resume contact soon. During the time of our separation, I was trying to understanding her world from her perspective with my own experience.

Almost two months later, she phoned me. Apologizing for her delay to give me Christmas greeting, she was relieved to have the time to make phone calls because she was in hospital.

It's not a joke to go through a major operation in a place where you have no family support and you don’t speak the language. I was startled by the way she looked at her hospitalization. “Another smile at hardship,” I thought. I saw that smile the first day she came to my school. I saw the same smile when she told me that she was happy as long as there were no cockroaches when I visited her small “lousy” room. I saw the smile again now when she found it a relief to have time to pay the debt of calling me from hospital after a major operation.

*That was the beginning of our fourth splice which triggered our inquiry into our lived experience.*

According to her doctor, she had to stop working and studying in order to recover from her operation. She did not want to let the time be wasted. With a group of friends, she began to organize a culture oriented Chinese association. She asked me to help and involved me deeply in its activities. And as a result, I became the vice-president of the organization. During the organizing period of time, we had more and more opportunities to work together as colleagues and to meet as friends. At some point in between those
organizers' meetings, I mentioned her smile and my interpretation of it. She nodded and told me that she had learned to improvise it during her most difficult times in life. Her use of the word "improvise" (Ji Xin Chuang Zuo in Chinese), surprised me and brought out my stories from Master's thesis.

When I told my stories and explained the notion of improvisation in my thesis, she responded with her life stories. During this fourth splicing, she initiated the activity by resuming contact with me and involving me in the Chinese community organization. She was the dominant strand at the beginning. I answered, so I was the dominated strand. Later in this long splice, I took turns to dominate in probing her smile. She responded, as the dominated, with her nodding and explanation from her life stories. And her explanation of what she learned from her difficult times in life, in turn, initiated my response with life stories of improvisation. Moreover, my stories in response started her on her life stories. We took turns in this fourth splicing to dominate and to be dominated. When we were dominating the dialogue, we were projecting our own subjective selves to the other. When we were dominated, we were receiving the other's subjectivity. When projecting and receiving, the boundaries blurred. Intersubjective exchange occurred.

In our relationship, there was more and more interdependence at this splice, particularly in our venture with the Chinese culture organization. We did not lose our independence. We held our separate viewpoints and lived our autonomous lives. Interdependence began to enter our independent worlds of selves. I borrow the Friendship Knot 友誼絆 from the Chinese knotwork for this fourth splice, in which some threads of me were connected with certain threads of her.
Together we found that we shared a similar understanding toward life although we had experienced the same historical events from different positions in the Chinese society. From this fourth splice in our relationship, we began to weave our past together.

3.5 A Button Knot

First, we found that, as contemporaries, we had very different experiences of Lin Biao’s airplane crash and his failure to overthrow Mao from remote social positions. Jane was imprisoned because her father was the colleague of Lin Biao and his son. The airplane crash was due to Lin family’s failure on the Chinese political stage. And that failure brought Jane into prison and changed her life path forever. But my life was hardly affected by the same historical event. I only began to be told by the cadres in the people’s commune about Lin Biao’s airplane crash and his conspiracy to overthrow Mao half a year after the event. Like a wisp of smoke, Lin Biao’s name swept over the mountains and disappeared very soon. No clue was left in the minds of local commune members. Life
followed its own pace. In response temporally to that important event in Jane’s life, I found the insignificance of the same history in my lived experience.

*This was our first splice weaving backward in time. She dominated this first backward splice by telling her life story about the Lin Biao incident. I responded with my life story that detected little difference from the same historical event. I was the dominated. By exchanging our stories, we were brought to a realization of the other’s independence. To name this splice, I borrow Button Knot 錦 扣 結 from the Chinese knotting.* (Figure Eight: A Button Knot)

3.6 A Child Knot

Second, we found that children had been important in our life experience. When I told Jane my story of osmanthus blossoms, she told me her story about children who gave her hope in her most difficult time. In response to the meaning I made out of the story about children, Jane agreed by responding with her children’s story.

Soon after the International Women’s Day, Jane gained some freedom. She was sent to work during the day in a kindergarten. Her responsibilities included cleaning the school and serving the meals for the children. People there who knew her before her imprisonment would point at her back when she was cleaning out garbage cans and laugh
at her situation. The humiliation was more painful because she was now a more public target. But with her experience of desperate improvisation and humanity before, she was able to look for her opportunities.

Like everywhere in the world, children there were humane, lovely and innocent. They did not look at her as a monster. They stood on her side and gave her the same sympathy they would give to small animals and vulnerable characters who were bullied by those in power. They found it fun to be with her, because she took them seriously. She did not let go this golden sparkle in her life. She offered to help the teachers with the kids’ activities. And her attachment to the kids increased along with her gradually increased hours with the children.

This improvisation of her life was telling her that if you have faith and look for hope, you will find it no matter how hopeless a situation you are in. Jane also believes that since then, she could always find hope and make her life meaningful.

In interruption, it takes courage to pick up the line of continuity from the past. It needs wisdom to see hope and future in one’s imaginative eyes. Improvisation is a creative art, an escape from our practicality, a lift from our mundane affairs, a reflection of our self-educated intuition, and a productive agent that brings vitality to dormancy and spring to winter.

On this topic about children, we spliced for the second time backward in history. It was my turn to initiate and push this topic along. I dominated. She responded with her life story on the same topic. She was the dominated. But, at the same time, we exchanged our stories and understandings about children in our lives. We confirmed each other’s
autonomy and blurred our separateness as well. Child Knot 兒童結 can be an expressive name for this splice. (Figure Nine: A Child Knot)

When Jane was experiencing children in the kindergarten, I was in my third year in the people's commune. Our story-telling now turns to follow the time.

3.7 A Round Brocade Knot

Three years' experience in the commune had changed me. As a 15-year-old-turning-16, I spent my first year in the commune struggling to survive. The culture shock was overwhelming; the reality was hostile. My second year was a year of desperation. While getting used to the new life, the hopeless boredom attacked me. From an intellectually privileged family background, I felt the impossibility of being brainwashed by commune
members, which was the purpose of Mao in sending us down to the countryside. I had an urge to learn, and to live; not simply survive.

Out of desperation, I fumbled along in the darkness, grabbed bits and pieces of sparks that came handily, and wove them into patterns of hope. Hope is very often just around the corner when people lose patience to see it. Hope is that little golden sparkle in the kaleidoscope of life. It needs a shift of angles to be seen. That shift could be initiated by the acknowledgment of a lack of hope and at the same time, by the recognition of a hope hidden somewhere out of sight for the moment. For me at that time, the shift was to look at the world from the commune members’ eyes.

In those commune members’ eyes, we young people from cities had been really privileged. We had lived a life in which we did not starve or freeze. We had had electricity bulbs at home for light, clean tap-water connected right into our houses, and rationed coal for cooking guaranteed every month. We had enjoyed a very convenient and insured health system although we actually did not need it. "If people have enough to eat and wear, what else will they worry about?" They could never understand crises that city people would have.

They were told by the government that they, the poor and lower-middle peasants, were the masters of the country together with their brother workers from factories in cities. After the Land Reform, they became pure proletarians, people who own nothing in Chinese translation. All land belonged to the state. All houses were owned by the state. All their bodies were property of the government. And their hearts and souls were given by Mao.
When I washed my hair with shampoo bought with money that my parents spared for me, I received admiring glances from women, who were very often trying to catch lice from their hair at break time in the fields. They had no time to wash or comb their hair; and they had no money to buy shampoo. My warm boots became their topic in snowy days out in the frozen fields. Their bare feet were red and swollen with dirt in the cracks. When I sat down to read newspapers and books at night, women would gather around my kerosene lamp to borrow light for their sewing work. Some would sit there to the last minute, staring at me adoring that I could read. Writing a letter for a family, I would receive a luxury treat of dinner - rice and pork which some families managed to save for special occasions. If I refused to go to the dinner, a pack of cooked rice and pork wrapped in a lotus leaf would be found in my room at the bottom of the window. My window could not be closed even in winter. Poverty did not take away their morality. The hearts and souls given by Mao did not replace their genuine ones. They gave back a whole ocean to me when I gave them only a drop of water.

They were not only surviving there. They were living their lives of value. What they materially owned could only reflect how they were surviving. What they hoped for, what they morally owned, and what they valued were what made their lives worth living. If they could live a meaningful life there, and they had lived there for many generations, why couldn’t I?

This third splice backward was overlapping the second. I picked up the time line from the second and wove it into the third. Jane responded with her story on the topic from my story instead of a time line. She was the dominated in terms of her response. But she was also dominating in making a shift in the direction of dialogue.
Jane learned from her experience, too, that in order to see hope, it is important to make a shift from one's own suffering to other people's perspective. She picked up this topic from my story that had followed the time line from hers.

Jane was imprisoned for two years. She spent her first half year in one room watched 24 hours a day by two guards. During this time, the presence of the other prisoner Xiao Gong next door and her singing on the Chinese New Year's Eve brought Jane some air to breathe. Jane's desperate improvisation to make up some excuses to have a glimpse of Xiao Gong, another person in a similar situation and to join Xiao Gong to sing the song helped Jane to make a shift from her own hopeless situation. By her own judgment, Xiao Gong was wrongly imprisoned. Jane was affirmed that imprisonment was also unfair to her. Her self-esteem was confirmed. When a person has some self-esteem, s/he is unlikely to abandon life even if s/he has the opportunity.

On March 8, 1972, International Women's Day, one of the guards, Xiao Han, was allowed to take Jane out for a tour around the city. It was Jane's very first time in half a year. Behind the bars in the truck, Jane saw the blue sky, people, the streets, and the traffic. People were crowded at the doors of buses, elbowing, squeezing, trying to get on. Jane was sitting lonely in the barred truck, watching. She had not belonged to the crowd in the past. She used to travel in her father's car. She was above. She did not belong to that crowd now either. She was below. What she dared not hope to belong to now was that crowd - people who had the freedom to travel in buses. Her tears ran down.

Xiao Han did not take Jane straight back to the prison. Instead, she took Jane to her home (Xiao Han's). Jane did not know whether Xiao Han did this because Xiao Han herself wanted to see her family at that moment or because she wanted to give Jane some
comfort by bringing her into a relaxed family environment. What Jane experienced there was humanity and the smell of home that Jane had been deprived of for half a year. No matter for what reasons Xiao Han had brought Jane there, Jane was grateful to her. Jane was able to see her guard in a very different environment. That person in uniform had always been pressing Jane to confess, reading Mao’s little red book to Jane, ordering Jane when to go to the washroom, when to take a shower and when to eat. Now at her home, Xiao Han was seen as a completely different human being. She had parents and sisters. She talked humanly and had ordinary concerns as normal people. She was not an obsessed Mao believer any more. That was soothing for Jane.

From there, Jane began to learn that people have various facets. Humanity is everywhere if one has faith in it and looks for it. From there Jane started to see hope. Not yet in changes of her imprisonment, but hope in life.

*This third splice backward was initiated by me along the time line and picked up by Jane’s story on a topic from my story. To name this splice, I use Round Brocade Knot 綢緞結 from the Chinese knotwork.*

(Figure Ten: A Round Brocade Knot)

The topic that was built up by Jane’s story led me into another splice — the fourth splice backward which was to develop the topic that Jane picked up from my story in the last splice. Our splicing here, began to overlap and pile upon one another.
3.8 A Sauvastika Knot

Once the shift was made, once hope was seen, a curiosity to know more and an urge to participate seized me. Among all the commune members around me, women and their lives attracted me the most. I did not have the luxury of many women friends in the commune, since they were always drowning in the ocean of traditional women's work, as well as liberated women's work. The women's liberation movement bragged about by the communist government allowed women to walk out of their home to work shoulder to shoulder with their husbands and to be credited for that. From outside, they were liberated. But back home, they were still solely responsible for housework as traditionally women had to be. They carried a double burden. In addition to that, I was not considered a woman yet since I was not married. Unmarried girls were excluded from women's gossiping. Girls were given lower social status. And I was one of them. Although my friendship with girls could not last because they had to be married out, I had unforgettable girl friends.

Peng Bi-Xiu took her mother's last name because her biological father died and her mother remarried. She was always making up excuses to be with me. In the fields, she would sneak in my group and work side by side with me to help me out of "the big sags" I made in the fields. Since we worked in teams, when I was slow, others would advance and leave me and my share of work in the field behind in the shape of a big sag. When we dug the land with our hoes in spring, the sag would be light green of weeds in contrast with other newly turned dark brown soil. When we reaped the wheat with our sickles in summer, my sag would be the yellow of wheat ears and awns in contrast with other
newly cut stubble. Water was ready to flood the wheat field into a rice field and water buffaloes were waiting to plough the land. I was new to the kind of job, slow and often frustrated at the bottom of the sags. Peng Bi-Xiu always came to my rescue. She was my savior.

After work, she would go with me to collect firewood in the forest. When nobody was around, we would talk about our different lives. She was illiterate, and dreamed of marrying a man who would allow her to go to school some day. "To have some taste of school," in her words. Sometimes, she would show me bruises and bumps her mother and step-father left on her arms, shoulders, and back. I always had first aid material with me those years. I could help her with the physical wounds; but felt despair to give comfort for her wounded heart.

Yuan De-Qing once saw her mother in bed with another man and was since ill-treated by her parents. She was always coughing out her laughter. She lived next door. Every night after she rushed through her house chores, she would come to my home. We would chat, and laugh while I was still eating my supper. She would sit down and watch me when I was quietly reading or washing my face and feet in different basins. Once in a while, we would hear her mother call her back to do more house work. She would whisper her complaints into my ears on her way out to do it, and come back very soon. She was the eldest daughter and had to take care of all five of her younger sisters and brothers. Under my influence, she demanded schooling from her parents. "No, you should work. Otherwise, you'll have nothing to eat. We can't afford to send you to school since you are going to marry out and become the property of another family. Once a daughter is
married out, she is like the water poured out of your door: it can never come back. To send you to school is a pure waste," she was told. She was eventually sent there one day for a taste, with her baby sister bundled on her back. She was the oldest in class, and could not help coughing. But she liked it. After her first school day, she had to make up the loss of missing one day's points of working in the field. She had to prepare food for their pigs till after midnight. I heard her chopping vegetables next door, coughing and swearing. I was helpless. That was her only day in school.

Both Peng Bi-Xiu and Yuan De-Qing were married at the age of 16 when they looked 14. Peng Bi-Xiu married out of the team, and I seldom saw her after. Once she ran into my room from behind the house, crying loudly. Before I found out what was happening, her step-father came in with a smile on his face. He was polite with me. But his face became long as soon as it turned to her," Go back to your husband. I would not allow you to enter my door." He took her out by her ear. I heard her screaming all the way out. "She did not have a sip of hot water yet after such a long run from her husband," that was the only line in my mind at that moment. I never saw her again. Marriage seemed like a tomb for her. Yuan De-Qing married into one of the poorest families within the team. She believed that was another punishment from her mother for her knowing too much. I saw her every day in the fields. But I missed her laughter and coughing at night. She had one child each year. I was wondering how her tiny immature body could bear those burdens of fetuses and the burdens of child raising work. She never visited me alone. Marriage seemed like a prison for her. As an unmarried girl, I was learning from observing my contemporaries in the commune. I treasured the knowledge my girlfriends passed on to me although I could not establish any strong and lasting friendship with any of them.
Friendship builds on trust, which is the foundation for being non-judgmental. And trust takes reciprocal attraction, understanding, mutual needs, circumstances, and time to establish. In good weather, friendship enriches life. In adversity, friendship shines - one little golden sparkle in life's kaleidoscope, the same hope I had when I was in the commune years ago. I would not resign life when I could see such hope.

_In this fourth splice backward, I picked up the topic of “making a shift to others” and led it into “friendship”. My leading was followed by Jane’s story about friendship:_

Jane had made friends in adversity, too, she told me, although she was in a worse situation.

The year of 1974 was a turning point for Jane. In January, Jane was out of prison. No more were guards sent to her room. No more were confessions demanded of her.

The death of Lin Biao - the appointed successor of Mao with power over eight hundred million Chinese people - left Jane to struggle in prison for over two years. The political situation in China was swinging slightly right between 1972 and 1974 as Zhou En-lai and Deng Xiao-ping gained some power. Up until then, Jane had been a prisoner in army uniform. She had belonged to the air force. In January 1974, her army uniform was replaced by plain civilian clothes. Jane was transferred to a machinery factory, which was to serve as a reformatory for her.

There she was allowed to work, and to be paid minimum wages. But she was singled out as a political criminal to be reformed and to discipline herself through the manual work. Her everyday activities were under surveillance. She had to report to the authorities about what she had done, where she had been, with whom she had been. She had to ask for permission about what she would want to do aside from work, where she would want
to go other than between work and dormitory, who she would want to see apart from the authorities. She had to take an active part in "the movement to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius" in order to prove that she was willing to take the side of Mao's revolution and that she had cut herself off from Lin Biao's counter-revolutionary clique.

She behaved herself well, learned all the skills that were needed for the job, and started to make friends. It was very difficult to make friends because she was under surveillance. It was also very risky for others to befriend her because she had a record of imprisonment, and her father was known nationwide as one of the major criminals connected with Lin Biao.

She made several friends, one of whom became her husband later on. Warnings came to him that he shouldn't mingle with a counter-revolutionary woman, that his opportunity to advance would be jeopardized if he did not keep away from her, and that he should be more considerate for his parents' positions in a research institute of architecture. The authorities had the fear that this counter-revolutionary woman would sneak in some tricks and destroy the architecture sooner or later in order to seek a revenge.

During Mao's years, numerous innocent people were killed, millions were brainwashed and killed spiritually, and the rest of the population lived in hell on earth day and night. In practice, there was no law, no justice other than Mao's will. There were many innocent cases that could never be disclosed or turned over.

Jane simply became a victim on the loser's side within the Communist power struggle. A little piece of dust. Stories were heard that people were beaten to death during the
Cultural Revolution because they accidentally broke the frames of posters of Mao's portrait, or used newspapers with Mao's photos in them to wrap groceries. In comparison, she was not innocent. At least, she believed that she was privileged and enjoyed some merit and glory from her father when he was in the power position. She thought she deserved some falls and lows in order to know the reality and herself. Life is not supposed to be smooth and flying up all the way, she rationalized.

The dictator was in deep insecurity. In his late years, he was so suspicious of everybody and everything that he lived a sickly lonely life. Therefore, he developed a government to serve his vicious desire to control. Despite the enormous propaganda institution covering up his stories and manipulating people, his government closely monitored every person's thoughts and deeds. As a result, everybody could become his enemy that he may someday need to get rid of. The fear of him he created in people's knowledge can go both ways for and against him. For him temporarily and against him in a long run. Sometimes, his controlling and threatening just turned people immediately into his enemies. Jane's boyfriend was one of them. He did not give up his right to love and he took the consequence. He too was placed under surveillance, labeled as a political "enemy of the people" and lost his opportunity for any promotion. Nevertheless, he protected his self-respect and love, and won freedom of spirit.

Jane's friendship in adversity turned into love. Love only belongs to people who have faith and hope in life. In turn, love nurtures life with hope and faith. In Jane's case, I don’t know which came first. She did not have an answer either. But we both agreed that it is valuable particularly in her situation. Now, in our forties, we can't recall many cases like this in which a man gives up his career for a relationship.
By responding to my stories of friendship, Jane told her story about friendship and love. In this way, she, the dominated strand of the fourth splice backward in time, completed this knot. For this splice, I call it by the name from the Chinese Knotwork as Sauvastika Knot (Figure 11: A Sauvastika Knot)

Jane, in my understanding, carries strong modern feminist's fragments in her pool of knowledge. But she rarely picked up topics from my story-telling that were about women relating to women except her relationship with her mother. And I seldom seemed to be affected by that. I responded to her without giving up women relationship stories.

3.9 A Tai Ji Knot

One of the only two women friends I had in the people's commune was married to a man who protected her from getting into trouble with the government because of her family background. He did not have to give up his career though, as Jane's husband had to for some time. She was Tian Qifeng - Aunt Tian. Her husband was the brigade leader in charge of re-education for us young people from the cities. She was the accountant for the brigade. She looked sloppy and had a masculine low and heavy voice. Because of her husband's role, she began to take care of us the second day after we arrived. As time went on, a friendship evolved.
She was from a rich family background. Her father and grandfather were both doctors and the family owned a pharmacy. She married Chen Kexun, who was from a poor family, had served in the army, and had the honorable experience of fighting the American imperialists in Korea. His political background protected her as a red umbrella. She survived various political crackdowns and remained in the important position of brigade accountant. She had a junior high school education, which was rare for a woman in the area. Her house was as messy as herself. But with a close look at her, I found her beautiful with exceptional fair skin and expressive big eyes. "Maybe being sloppy is her way of self-protection," I thought. She had a good sense of humor, and she was knowledgeable about health and medicine. She had many stories about the mountains and people in the mountains. I spent many freezing winter nights by her fire pit, listening to the stories told in her heavy low voice. She talked in a very slow rhythm, and her voice would, frequently, be overwhelmed by baby crying and noise from the huge wok where pig food was being cooked. She always picked up the story from where it was interrupted, and carried it on till there was a sense of ending.

She had a peaceful relationship with her husband. I never heard them raise their voices or saw them fight. She had a way to articulate her disagreement with her husband, and he listened. Talking about her messy rooms, she would laugh and say that housework was bottomless hole that would suck up all her time and energy. Maybe that's how she gained herself time to help her husband take care of us, and befriend us.

Aunt Tian and her husband Chen Kexun were both caring and considerate persons we found rarely in those years. They lived in the same house where a dozen other families and we lived. Their passion for caring found its way into the details of our daily life.
When we were struggling to set up a fire to cook in front of the stove, they would appear and help us out. When we ran out of kerosene for light, they would send their son to us with some they managed to put aside from the very stingy ration they received. When our farming tools needed repair, they would make time to either teach us to fix them or simply do it for us. In the freezing winter mornings, I would run to their fire pit immediately after I got up to warm before I could start any cooking and housework for myself. In the hot summer nights, the fragrance of their home-made mosquito repellent incense would be smelled in my room. Very often, they sent their youngest son to do the job. "Mom said, for Xin, mosquitoes here are as big as airplanes. I'd better do a good job for her," the 6-year-old boy would talk to himself like that when everybody else was busy carrying water from far away wells, cooking supper, cleaning up crying babies, counting chickens to make sure they were back in the nests, pushing goats into their shelters, and lining up for the use of the stone grinders to grind grains that were needed for supper.

In the fields, Chen Kexun would stop other male commune members making vulgar jokes when my cousin and I were present. He told them that we were unmarried girls from the cities who did not understand the men's humor in the commune and who should not be taken advantage of. When I was frustrated collecting firewood in the forest, Aunt Tian would very often come to my rescue. Beside her job for the whole brigade's bookkeeping and accounting, she was in charge of one of the water buffaloes for our team. In seasons when buffaloes were not needed to plough rice fields, she would herd the precious animal in the forest and collect grass for the animal's night snack and winter food. When we ran into one another in the forest, she would persuade me to sit down for a while to take a break. She would tell me stories in her heavy, low and calm voice while
filling my basket with firewood she collected. I don't recall the stories any more, but I never forget the caring and humor in her beautiful eyes with the soothing sound of pine trees in the wind.

I don't recall the details of her stories any more. But I do remember that I owe her a pound of dried mussels.

In the fall of 1973, I was admitted to a university back in my home city. Aunt Tian invited me for a farewell dinner. I promised her that I would write letters and send her a pound of dried mussels which she believed were very good for women's health and had missed since the communists took over. I did write letters for many years to her and other commune members, although I never heard a word from them. I understood that they cared about me but could not write or would not have time to write or have money to buy paper, envelopes, and stamps. But I never found the dried mussels she had longed for. If I go back to China after I finish this dissertation, I will take dried mussels to her. There are plenty here in Canada.

Like my friendship with other women later in my life, the friendship with Aunt Tian was supportive, comforting and caring. As the friendship evolved, learning and understanding grew. And the most important for that stage of my life was that it gave me hope and faith - hope to live and faith in humanity.

Here, I initiated the topic on friendship with women despite Jane's response in the last splice in which she took the topic to the direction of love. She did not respond at all this time. I continued my story chronologically.

The year of 1973 was a turning point for me. In October, I left the people's commune after four and a half years.
That year, the universities that had been closed since 1966 opened. I passed the first national university entrance exam since the Cultural Revolution and became a student in a teacher's university majoring in English. The smell of the Cultural Revolution was still lingering in the air. Major sections of English resources in the university library were not open yet to the public. Political studies were forced on both students and staff every afternoon. The Communist Party members in class were dominating and checking everybody's ideology. But I was happy and excited to come back to school which I had been deprived of for 7 years and which I would never want to miss again. More important was that I had learned to live a life in the labour camp, and now I could improvise a good student's life even in the smell of the Cultural Revolution.

The year of 1976 witnessed the deaths of three important Communist leaders: Zhou Enlai in January; Zhu De in May; Mao in September. It also saw a major earthquake in TangShan when millions died. Fierce power struggles within the Communist Party were felt by ordinary people through the frequent shuffles of the officials at all levels throughout the country. In the central government, Hua Guofeng was made party chairman in Mao's place, and almost immediately the four Cultural Revolution protagonists at the top, including Mao's widow Jiang Qing were arrested and lost their power. Their control over the media, Radio Peking and the People's Daily came to an end, and they were systematically denounced as anti-party renegades, while Deng Xiao-Ping reappeared in power. Subsequently this "Gang of Four" were denounced for having stressed ideological purity over production, sabotaged industry, and fermented anti-examination, anti-teacher, and anti-intellectual attitudes in education. They became the scapegoats for Mao's so-called mistakes during the Cultural Revolution.
In the middle of this chaos, I graduated from university and began teaching at Wanxian Teacher's Collage. My career life was inaugurated.

In the middle of this chaos, Jane and her family's case was neglected. The focus of the power struggle shifted away from Lin Biao and Confucius. So did the government's interest in Jane and her family. There had been no legal process, no court, no judge, no defense involved in Jane and her family's arrests, exiles, and surveillance. Neither were there any in staying their cases. They were simply forgotten, ignored, and left where they were. They all gradually gained more and more freedom. But they were not given back what they had had before - the position, the house, and the certificates that allowed them to reside in Beijing.

As the only daughter from a privileged family, she had been full of "Jiao Jiao Er Qi" - arrogance and squeamishness - before she had been imprisoned. Her years in the confinement and hardship took away her privilege which she had relied on to be Jiao Jiao. Being positioned at the opposite end from privilege, she came to learn, from being treated unfairly and unequally, that everybody should be equal; from being forced to live a materially basic life, to do manual labour and to suppress her individuality, she became a strong person both physically and psychologically. She was not the arrogant and squeamish princess any more. Self-confidence and perseverance had replaced "Jiao Jiao Er Qi". She was and still is proud of herself being able to survive the hardship and humiliation. She also learned that interruption could change her path of life, but could not end it. As long as there was a will, there was a way of improvising and making the best use of whatever she had on hand. And very often, opportunities did not come from the focus of her foreground, but from the peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994).
She did not let herself and her family's case be forgotten or left where they had been. She fought her way back slowly and persistently through the barbed wire entanglements of hypocrisy and bureaucracy.

First of all, she was determined to get more education. She did not dream of university education because of her so-called political connection with Lin Biao's case. She was looking for things in her environment that could provide her with opportunities of learning. In the factory, there was an art performance group that she believed she could make some contribution to, and which would add some color of creativity to her deprived dull life.

She could use and develop her talent in dancing and some early training in ballet that had been wasted for a long time. Jane believed that she was talented in dancing and acting. And she was chosen three times at the age of 12, 14 and 18 to go for professional training in a highly recognized and prestigious performing arts school in Beijing. But her parents did not want their princess to take it as her career and sent her, instead, to study meteorology.

She volunteered to work for the group in her spare time, while the rest of the group were salaried. She started to write programs for the performance group. She made some creative suggestions on the costumes and make-ups for the group. Her contributions were highly credited and she was then recognized as an important member of the group.

Maybe, she reflected, that was the origin of her success for fashion design years later.

She had became dedicated to the art performance group during those years. She not only composed the program. She also directed them. When a master of ceremonies was needed, she was viewed as the best candidate.
Unexpectedly, a Communist Party committee meeting had to be held to decide whether she should be allowed to appear on the stage. The decision was in her favor. But it was made only after heated debate, she was told. She only realized by then, after several years of her devotion to the group that she was intentionally kept behind the stage because of her past imprisonment.

From behind to the front was a political statement. Arts in Mao's regime were political tools for communist propaganda. People on stage had the power over the audience. The messages conveyed should be able to control and manipulate ideology of the audience. Every single gesture, an eye movement, and a smile was a political symbol. A revolutionary character should gallop across the stage with her\his back straight and head held high; a counter-revolutionary character should drag her\his steps through the stage with a hunch back and a sinister and ruthless smile. A performer was supposed to have high political awareness of those symbols. And of course, a person had to be qualified to have a faith in the revolution. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution before the Lin Biao Incident, like many other Red Guards, Jane had a faith and enthusiasm in it. After her experience of imprisonment, I don't think she genuinely believed in it any more. It was for the purposes of a political rehabilitation and an artistic recognition. It was the beginning of her political and social comeback. It was her triumph and recognition.

She was recognized despite her shameful past which worked to her disadvantage.

Jane considered this as a valuable learning experience. She was learning by doing, which became an important part of her learning style in the years to come. Formal school
education at that time, was not something she dared to imagine in her situation. But learning was longed for. Knowledge is power, she never forgot this motto of Marx she learned as a Red Guard.

Jane got married in 1978 and became a new mother in 1979. As the result of her years of battle, she was freed in 1980 from surveillance and was given back her official title as a cadre\textsuperscript{42} - a government officer. She gained the right to study. But she had missed the 1978's opportunity when universities opened all over the country and people who had missed formal schooling during the Cultural Revolution were encouraged to participate in the national university entrance exam. She enrolled herself in an accounting course.

In the summer of 1980, she launched her campaign to free her father from the prison hospital and her mother from the labor camp. At that time, her two younger brothers were working in two different people's communes. She was the only person in the family that was close to Beijing and could have some access to people who were related to resolving her parents' case. Circumstances lay the task on her, a young women of 28, who had lived a sheltered life under the father's wing earlier, and later behind the iron bars of prison. Now, she had to face the real outside world and her past through the bureaucratic system. For two years, she visited government offices, met important officials and their families and children. She reasoned with them, told them her experiences to win their sympathy, bribed them with whatever they liked that she could provide, except her own dignity. She learned that the system was corrupt. Reasoning only worked after bribery. It was sad to

\textsuperscript{42} She was a soldier serving in the air force before her imprisonment. Soldiers were considered cadre—a higher rank compared to workers in the hierarchical system.
see such degeneration of humanity. Now in retrospect, she feels sorry for that. But then, she was so upset and angry that at some time she was in despair.

Two years of fighting the system brought back thousands of memories that she had buried deep in her heart throughout those solitary years in prison and under surveillance in the factory. The memories and the emotions connected with them were more difficult for her to handle than the reality she had already faced and sealed behind in the past. She did not cry during the years of confinement. Yet, her eyes were always wet as she left government offices, especially so after she saw those officials who had been their close family friends before her family was drawn into the whirlpool of the Lin Biao conspiracy. They never wanted to recognize her and her family as friends any more.

The humiliation that she had learned to suppress came back to hit her again in the eyes of people from her confined world. She thought of giving up every day after one of those encounters. It was more manageable and comfortable to be sheltered even though it was not the home, but a prison. Home was the warmest, supporting, caring and nurturing place where she could be her real self. Prison was the coldest, destructive, and cruel place where she could be a complete other, a distant self. The hurt became unbearable when she was in between the two and when she had to be reminded of her unfair shame in comparison with others' unbelievable comfort and glory. The pain became unendurable when she had to smile while her heart was crying and bleeding.

Jane's fall from glory to shame had been unexpected and beyond her control. The way from shame back to glory was full of thorns with poisonous heads of insults. She had to pull them out herself. She had to swallow the bitterness in order to win the sweet home back. She believed that it was the smell of that sweet, sweet home that gave her courage
in those years. When you are lonely and confined in a cold, damp and dark room, what you want most is a home with your dearest parents and siblings. But when you have one, you can take it for granted and ruin it carelessly. For a person like Jane, who had lived on the edges of life and death in confinement, home was the most important dream and reality she wanted to own, to create, and to fight for if she had to. She was determined to do her best to own her home this time since she did not contribute to the previous home. The feeling of her own desire, the dreaming of her own dream, and the wanting to make her dream true provided her with courage, vitality, and confidence. She survived this aftermath of her nightmare, kept dreaming, hoping, and taking actions.

This was our fifth splice backward. In this splice, I initiated a topic on women friendship and received no response from her on the topic. I, then, continued along the time line. I was dominating this splicing. But at the same, I had no control of her response. She responded to me with her stories around the historical events. She was the dominated in this splicing. But she maintained her autonomy of when to respond and what to respond with. Like the Taoist concept of Yang and Yin, the dominating and the dominated were interpenetrated into one another. I name this splice as Tai Ji Knot 太極結 Tai Ji represents the Taoist concept of Yang in Yin and Yin in Yang. (Figure 12: A Tai Ji Knot)
3.10 A Cloverleaf Knot

From those years’ experience, the most important knowledge Jane had obtained was never to give up hope, and always to understand other people from their point of view. In order to carry on, she had to understand the world - the self and others, in their respective positions. She felt better when she could step into others' shoes and look at the world from others’ perspectives. She realized that everybody must have had his or her own reasons for his or her deeds. She did not believe that people were doomed to betray or to be vicious to others. Circumstances could bring the best or the worst parts out of everybody. To step into others' shoes, to understand others from their point of view could bring the others closer to you, sometime into your shoes. A situation created in this way could bring out the best of each other. Many people told her that she was diplomatic. She did not agree. She believed that she was genuinely understanding. She needed faith in people in order to make life worth living. She had/has that faith. This part of her later developed into her belief in Buddhism.

Here, Jane came back to our previous shared topic on “making a shift toward the other”. Her story along the time line took her back to the topic. This became the beginning of our sixth splice backward. But this time, the topic gains more power by reinforcement. And we, both the story teller and the listener, have been moving spirally up to a more thorough understanding of the topic. As a listener, I did not respond at this point.

As a result of her two years of effort, Jane brought her father out of prison on medical parole. She also obtained a certificate for her mother to come back and reside in Beijing, and her mother’s retirement was officially authorized. As a retired government official,
she was given back her entitlement to free medical service and government provided housing. During her ten years of imprisonment and exile (1971-1981), Jane's mother's health had been deteriorating. She had anemia, a tumor in her womb, and later a cerebral tumor that constricted her nerve center. With the medical service Jane newly gained back for her mother, they could finally afford hospital and surgery.

Ten years separation from her parents had changed their relationship. In the past, Jane was under her father's wing, well protected. Now she became the supporter and protector of her parents. Her father had been in mental disorder since he was arrested and her mother needed a major operation. Neither of them was able to take care of their home - that sweet sweet home Jane had been dreaming about for so many years. By bringing back her parents, Jane had just started her work to rebuild that home. She spent more of her time after work in the reconstruction of this dream. And eventually, she moved her own nuclear family to her parents' place in order to bring her parents some sense of family.

I have never been a supporter or a protector for my parents. I have been through humiliations and displacement with my parents. Our home was ransacked and our family members were scattered to different labour camps. I had been forced to leave my parents when I was 15. I had missed a home that Jane had been dreaming of for so many years. But my parents gained back their positions when the power struggles up at the central government level swung to the right side more in favor of intellectuals. We were within

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43 In communist China, the left wing has been the inhumane extremists. They act upon hatred against their class enemies. They worship Mao and take an extreme approach against democracy, individual freedom and economic development. If somebody is identified as a Rightist, s/he could be imprisoned, exiled, fired, persecuted, humiliated, deprived of any opportunity for advancement, or even killed. Intellectuals in China were, at times, considered right wing because they have their own minds and ideas. The regime was
a dominated social group even when we were in favor. Individual efforts would not make much difference in our positions in the society.

This was our sixth splice backward. Jane started this with the topic of “understanding other people from their point of view”. I picked up the topic of being a family supporter from her story. She took her turn to dominate the splice. I followed. Like what happened in our fifth splice, the dominating and the dominated were interpenetrated. As the dominated, I chose my time and topic to respond to. She, as the dominating partner, was not in control of my response. In these two splices, neither of us stopped to push the dominated for a response as the dominating partner. In this dialogue, we exchanged our subjectivity. We respected each other’s autonomy; we upheld our own independence. At the same time, we were reaching out identify with, to attach to, and to belong to the other in the activities of splicing. I name this splice after Cloverleaf Knot 酢漿草結 from the Chinese Knotwork. (Figure 13: A Cloverleaf Knot)

威胁了并从不想失去对知识分子的控制。它会利用知识分子的知识力量，当经济发展成为焦点时。但一旦知识分子开始“摇尾巴”——对当局来说，是威胁，左派政府就会把尾巴压回去或把它们砍掉。大规模压制发生在反右运动在1950年代末期，文化大革命在1966年至1976年期间，以及1989年的天安门广场事件。
3.11 A Zhe Teng Knot

Jane’s family used to belong to the dominant social class. They lost out in the ruthless power struggle within the class. They did not belong to any group any more. Unless some practical reasons occurred, people in power would not have the need to bother with families like Jane’s. People like Deng Xiaoping who had made three come backs were rare. In addition to that, Jane’s parents were physically and mentally disabled by prison and exile. It was worse to be dominating than to be dominated.

The courage and determination to fight individually against a highly collectivized society is beyond my reach. I had never before opened my feelings to a person like Jane from the dominating social class. I understood, I suppose, theoretically what it meant to be dominating. But not experientially. These story listening and responding activities brought me to a situation in which I was allowed to hear, to see in my mind’s eye, to feel what she had experienced. I suspended my bias and opened my mind to her perspective.

With a home as her responsibility and comfort, Jane became more involved in her career. In 1985, the economic reform began to reach the grassroots of urban industry. Jane worked for a year as a research officer for the Second National General Survey of Industry sponsored by the State Council of China. To reward her full commitment and excellence of work, the Beijing Municipal government honoured her as an "Excellent Researcher". This success prepared her to take a new job in a trading company. Later in 1985, she passed the national university entrance exam and was enrolled by the Beijing Radio and Television University in a three year program majoring in statistics. While studying, she became the department manager of the trading company, the very first
female manager within the Municipal Bureau of Water Resources and Conservation. One year later, she was promoted to work as the manager in a newly registered joint venture of interior decoration.

Both her study and job needed full-time involvement. She put her job first, working day time and her study second, attending classes in the evenings. Embarking on the undertakings with her previous experience of learning in and from life, she surprised her boss as a fast learner\textsuperscript{44}, and in about 3 to 4 months, she was appointed to a position in charge of the marketing and supply department. Within a year, she became the manager of the sales department. In the evening classes, she very often entered courses that were beyond her levels and came out with the best marks. Her trick was, she told me, that she was never shy to expose her ignorance by asking the most basic questions.

Compared with Jane, I have had more certainty in life. I admire her spirit of ZheTeng, which means, in Beijing local dialect, to make constant efforts to improve. Her ZheTeng spirit has been giving me strength in my good times and bad times as a new immigrant trying to establish myself in a strange country. Her story of ZheTeng is particularly encouraging when I was thinking about quitting this dissertation.

\textit{This was our seventh splice backward. In this splicing activity, Jane took the dominating position to start with her story on the time line about her family situation and her battles against the system. I responded with my change in understanding of the social class she had belonged to and my admiration toward her courage. In this splicing, time and topic were blurred. Temporality and meanings interplayed. For this splice, I call it a Zhe Teng Knot 折腾结.}

\textsuperscript{44} I was not surprised to hear that given her active participation in my ESL class.
3.12 A Good Luck Knot

By the year of 1989 when student movement was sweeping across Beijing and China, Jane was going through one exam after another for her graduation from the Central China TV University. Meanwhile, she threw herself right into the movement and visited TianAnMen Square every day with a group of friends. Since she was the boss of her own company, she opened her business late and closed it early in order to take the time to bike to the heart of China and listen to the voice of Chinese people. She rushed her exam papers at night and got into heated debate with her husband, her brothers and her friends over the student movement. She was curious about how the government was going to react, she was trying to take a stand in the event, she was excited at hearing the ordinary students’ public voice that had been suppressed for long.

In 1919 in the May 4th Movement, students had walked out of classrooms and voiced their opinions against corruption and incompetence of the government at the crucial time before the Japanese invasion of China. Their peaceful protest was suppressed by power and guns from the government. Now 70 years later, those who survived the gunfire from the previous government, took over the corrupted and incompetent government and made May 4th a national youth day in memory of the students' spirit. How were they going to deal with a similar students movement against their own regime? The whole nation was watching. The whole world was watching.
Jane and her gang went to the center of the focus of the world every day. There she joined the students' debate on the streets and in TianAnMen Square. She was excited at experiencing the freedom of speech. She marveled at others' opinions, struggled to voice herself, and was inspired to think about issues ignored and suppressed and reflect on her long buried past.

Jane received her degree in 1989. With what she learned there, she could do bookkeeping and tax return for her own company. Her husband was working in the Municipal Bureau of Water Resources and Conservation. During the TianAnMen Square student movement, he was less involved than Jane.

The short-lived awakening of democracy was brutally eliminated by machine guns and tanks. The government filled the vacuum with money-chasing urge. More and more capitalist aspects of economy were imported in spite of the temporary blockade from some democratic countries for human rights reasons. Fashion shows became popular in Beijing and Jane became a fashion model in her spare time. With her talent and early training in dance, she found modeling an excellent form for her artistic pursuit. She performed in one show after another and decided to design fashion for herself. Incorporating the ancient Chinese arts of tie-dye with the modern western style of simple and comfortable dress, she won the 1990 Beijing annual fashion award for one of her designs which became popular that summer in Beijing.

Now Jane's career life was well organized. Both the full-time job of managing her interior decoration company and the part-time job of designing and modeling were thriving. Her personal life was in good order, too. Both her parents were back in Beijing. Both her brothers were married. Although her husband did not understand the frustration
and difficulties in her career life, he did offer support in his way which was to take care of their home and the cooking. She could not expect sympathy from him with her complaints from work, but she felt warmed at the dinner table by her husband's fine food. She would share her thoughts and emotions with her mother. Her mother always felt guilty that she and Jane's father had brought Jane and her brothers too many troubles. It was not fair to her and Jane knew that. But she could not change her mother. She was not well-educated but she was wise and understanding. She listened to Jane. It was the process of talking to her that helped Jane sort out her thoughts. Talking to me, Jane indicated that she missed her mother and needed one person like her in Canada. I wondered if I was that person like her mother in her life now.

Jane had climbed to another peak on her life path now. "After you reach the peak, then what, you go down," (Int.J1, 11/23,93). She told me this when she was talking about her experience of imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution. But this time, she was in control. She chose to go down, to adventure and to prove herself in a western world. Her dragon temperament of ZheTeng had/has always been pushing her from inside. With the self-confidence she had accumulated during her years of hardship and success, she launched another campaign — going abroad.

The 1989 June 4th tragedy was the trigger for her leave. She was completely disillusioned. The thriving economics and the freedom people could enjoy before the incident gave a false impression to her, and to many others, too. She believed that there was still some hope in the government. In a way, the blood and death of the students
awoke the Chinese people to different degrees. On the whole, they were reminded of the dictatorship before and during the Cultural Revolution. Jane gave me her reasons to leave China this way.

Jane with a group of friends, assistants and employees in her interior decoration company, were bicycling in and out of TienAnMen Square and ChangAn Street during the student uprising. She considered herself as an outsider and a bystander with sympathy toward the students. She witnessed the students' peaceful protest, and the murderous appearance of machine guns on the rolling tanks. When they were being chased around by the tanks, she did not think the machine guns that were pointing at them would be loaded with real bullets. The army men were innocent kids like herself during the Cultural Revolution. Jane, with her friends, tried to tell them what was happening and joke with them. Sometimes the soldiers would stop to listen briefly and would resume their chasing game soon. She thought that the army was sent only to intimidate. She herself had served in the air force during the Cultural Revolution and had been told that they were the army from the people, of the people and for the people.

In Jane’s understanding, she did not participate in the students' protest. She only went there and watched. But the act of being present is very important in the Chinese context. First of all, it is a political statement against the government, because, at that time, the complete media network in China was telling stories about how students were violently killing PLA soldiers, and threatening that good citizens should stay out of the conflict and let the government solve the problem. Second, between risking her life in order to exercise her own independent judgment and to take the consequences that independent
knowledge may cause, and staying out safely as told and accepting the official stories, she chose the former. She paid for her independence and she is still paying for that.

The price she paid is the disbelief in a future in China and a separation from her family, friends, the language and environment in which she grew up. Knowing is not always pleasant.

She decided to come to Canada to see with her own eyes a democratic socialist society. The freedom of thoughts and speech that inspired her at the students' movement gave her hope. While trying to cover up her marginal involvement during the countrywide comb-out, she began to plan another ZheTeng --- coming to Canada --- immediately after the June 4th students' tragedy. It took her 2 years to realize her dream. She was accepted as a graduate student in economics at Concordia University. A professor in US known by her friend sponsored her. "I did not and will not spend his money," said Jane when I asked her how she managed to come. She planned to come to Toronto first to improve her English until she acquired enough proficiency to carry out her graduate program, and then she would go to Montreal.

When I asked her about her English study in China and TOEFL points for Canadian university entrance, she became shy and embarrassed that she did not speak good English. In her undergraduate program, she did not attend her English courses properly because she did not have enough time apart from running her interior decoration business and taking many other more practical courses. Concordia university did not request her TOEFL marks because, she guessed, of the sympathy Canadians had toward Chinese

45 It took me 3 years to go through TOEFL, admission to a graduate program in Canada, obtaining a Chinese passport and a Canadian visa.
students after TianAnMen Square tragedy and also because of the award for her outstanding performance in the Second General Survey of Industry in 1985.

My application to be a Canadian immigrant also resulted from the TianAnMen Square tragedy, although I was at a remote position from the historical site and experienced it only through Western TV and radio news reports. By contrast, the Lin Biao incident had turned Jane’s life upside down but affected my life on the people’s commune hardly at all. A history is merely one version of public stories of people. Generalization contextualizes particularity. In return, history needs to be contextualized by particular stories. What does history mean for a person in her meaning making process of life?

This was our eighth splice backward in time. Jane initiated this splice around the historical event of the TianAnMen Square tragedy. I listened and responded at the point of her reason to leave China. Jane dominated this splice again. I was the dominated. We joined at the topic of a reason to come to Canada. And splice is our Good Luck Knot 吉祥結 from the Chinese Knotwork. (Figure 15: A Good Luck Knot)
3.13 Summary

Our stories of meaning making sprang out of our encounters of smiles — smiles that stood the test of hardship. We knotted at the smile, the improvisation of life, the humanity from children, the friendship in adversity, the Chinese mythology of Snake and Dragon, meaning of family, and understanding other people from their point of view. Our stories anchored on historical events — events that stirred up the life paths of many people, such as the Cultural Revolution, the Lin Biao Incident, the TianAnMen Square Tragedy. Taking turns, we spliced at our learning moments from the events. In between the knots and the splices, we separated, we floated away, we nurtured ourselves independently from one another. Our individual vantage points were enhanced; our acceptance of the other who has an independent subjectivity on her own was recognized; an intersubjective reality was mutually created.

Intersubjectivity was formulated in deliberate contrast to the logic of subject and object, which predominates in Western philosophy and science. It refers to that zone of experience or theory in which the other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of self. (Benjamin, 1995, p. 30)

Recognizing the other and asserting the self simultaneously, we were going back to our cultural tradition — Taoism — to embrace two dimensions and to interplay between opposites and go beyond opposites (Capra, 1991, p.145). A dynamic unification of the opposites is reflected in a dialogical self. That is a self which is always in motion. The
motion to “cease to be opposites is the very essence of Tao. Only the essence, an axis as it
were, is the centre of the circle responding to the endless changes.” (Capra, 1991, p.147).

Jane and I
We spliced with our openness
Of our present and past;
We created interdependent exchange
In our narratives.
We untied with our closeness
of our present and past;
We developed independent centers.
We led when we talked;
We followed when we listened.
We talked when we closed;
We listened when we opened.
We controlled when we were seeking autonomy;
We risked when we were striving for attachment.
We separated to obtain that privileged centralized position;
We united to decentralize those singular units of mastery and control.
We wove backward into the past
With our lived experience;
We live forward into the future
With our spliced stories;
And we continuously splice
In our chapters to come.

We spliced into our Connection Knot, and connected it with Double Coin Knot with two
dragons intertwined in it. From there, we led our knot to a Cross Knot which looped our
Friendship Knot. In turn, our Friendship Knot hitched the Button Knot which corded the
Child Knot. The Child Knot, with its one end corded the Button Knot, looped the Round Brocade Knot at the other end. And the Round Brocade Knot hitched the Sauvastika Knot, which corded the Tai Ji Knot. The Tai Ji Knot looped the Cloverleaf Knot that connected with the Zhe Teng Knot. The Zhe Teng Knot hitched our Good Luck Knot at the end of this chapter.

“Compared to the making of macrame, each of the knots in a Chinese knotwork is in itself a delicate piece of art, with its own cosmos of looping, weaving, hitching, and cording. When a group of these knots are assembled, countless combinations of decorative patterns emerge.” (Chen, 1996, p.91)
(Figure 16: The spliced Chinese knotwork from this chapter)
Chapter Four: To Untie the Connection Knot
To Untwist the Teacher Rope

In the last chapter, I spliced the Chinese Knotwork to simulate the patterning of the story-telling process between Jane and me. The simulation was not the real. The real was more fragmented. Nevertheless, the simulation was as open-ended, non-judgmental, turn-taking, receptive, and reciprocal as, if not more than, the real. The simulation was aimed at a hyperreal and the truer as Jean Baudrillard put it so well in Fatal Strategies (see quote on p.60). The aim of this chapter is to untie the Chinese Knotwork and untwist the teacher rope in order to study the relationship that made such splicing possible. It is to explore my teacher self and our immigrant selves. I am inquiring into my "web of interlocution" underneath the patterning.

A self exists only within what I call 'web of interlocution'.

(Taylor, 1989, p.36)

In our first splice, the Connection Knot, Jane and I met as a student and a teacher in class. I caught her smile and interpreted it as a smile that had stood the test of hardship; she detected trustworthiness in my appearance and gave her full trust to me in asking me to help with her banking. To untie the Connection Knot, I was projecting, on her smile, my own smile at the hardship of my three years' immigration experience; she was looking for, in my face, a faith in the trustworthiness of herself who had been betrayed by a friend and taken advantage of by a stranger on the first day in Canada.
4.1 The Splicing of My Smiling Self and Jane’s Smiling Self Began

I had learned to smile at hardship through my life experience in China. I had learned to improvise and to live a meaningful life in social vicissitudes such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Such learning gave me courage and self-confidence to seek adventure in Canada. When I met Jane, I had been in Canada for three years. That had taught me that living in a country other than my own was no less a challenge than living through the Cultural Revolution. The smile was the same; the hardship different.

4.1.1 Splicing My Successful Self and My Failed Self

I felt a chill coming through me and suddenly my heart sank the moment I left my relatives and friends behind the yellow line at Beijing International Airport, on August 28, 1988. I had expected feelings of relief, pride, excitement, and happiness after so many years’ striving to obtain a passport to leave China and a visa to enter Canada. It was a liberation. While stepping into the future, I realized that those feelings only belonged to the past, behind the yellow line with my glory in relation to my Chinese context. The present was overwhelming me with, instead, a complete loneliness and a thorough confusion.

School opened. I went through the registration week and realized that I was supposed to do five undergraduate courses to qualify for the graduate program. During that time, I was not allowed to work as a teaching assistant and I was supposed to pay a tuition fee that was five times higher than Canadians. In 1988, that was about ten thousand Canadian dollars a year. By then, I had taught in a teachers' college and a university for 11 years in China. For the first three years, I made about five hundred Chinese yuan a year which was
The Connection Knot: The Teacher Rope 121
equivalent to one hundred Canadian dollars. For the next eight years, I made about one thousand Chinese yuan a year which was two hundred Canadian. For 11 years all together teaching at post-secondary institutions in China, I had made 1900 Canadian dollars. If I had not spent a penny during those eleven years, I could only pay one-fifth of the tuition fees for a year. I realized that I had been economically crippled by my heritage. I had not made a well-informed decision to come to Canada. I was shocked.

Eleven years' undergraduate teaching, many publications and various exams had qualified me as an associate professor in China. The system did not require a Ph.D. to teach at university as long as one received a good evaluation from students, and had appropriate professional development and academic publications. Since China was changing rapidly, a Ph.D. was going to qualify me as a full professor. I was too old for the Chinese system to pursue a graduate program. There was no age limit in the Canadian system, but it did not give credit for any of my post-graduate qualifications from China and did not accept me as in their Ph.D. but Master’s program with five undergraduate qualifying courses. My undergraduate records were very extensive, but China was practising the Russian system. One undergraduate course in China would cover three or six or nine courses' work in the Canadian system. As a result, from a Canadian perspective, I had not taken enough courses even for my BA degree. It was a favor given by them to let me do my graduate study with five undergraduate qualifying courses. I learned this through the hassle of that registration week. By telling people what I had just learned, I was given another favor to reduce two undergraduate courses provided I maintained a minimum mark of B plus for each course.
I was not yet allowed to be a teaching assistant to make Canadian money to pay Canadian tuition fees. I was not allowed to work outside of the university campus according to the regulations of Immigration Canada for a visa student like me. I was told that it is fair for Canadian universities to charge foreign students high tuition fees, because we had not made any tax contribution to the Canadian education system. I also learned that a foreign student was supposed to be a student in Canada not a competitor with Canadians for jobs. And there was only one exception - domestic help. Why, I wondered, do they accept foreign students? What kind of foreign students do they expect? I was certainly not what they needed.

I was not rich. I had with me seven hundred US dollars. It was about three years salary. When I proudly told people about that, pity came into their eyes - "That's all? Poor little Chinese girl!" although they would say with exaggerated facial expression "Really? That's great! You are rich. Even I don't have that much money in my bank account." Then, silence would follow. I was confused by the different messages I got from their eyes and mouths. But I knew that they were not inviting a dialogue with me. "Age and money are the two taboo topics in Western culture." I used to teach this to my students in China. And I forgot this rule in my Western reality. I felt like a failure.

In this splicing, glory and confusion, excitement and shock, academic accomplishment and academic handicapped, financial establishment and economic deprivation—my successful self and failed self took turns in leading and following.

Success and failure are the opposites of a person's social value. To be able to see oneself as a success can play as a blessing for more success in a virtuous spiral. To consider oneself as a failure can play as a curse for more failure in a vicious circle. To
be able to interplay between the two makes a Taoist, who knows when to descend and when to transcend in the rapids of changing water. Both are equally challenging. Splicing the successful self and the failed self is to provide opposite perspectives and to prepare a person to take the challenges from both. Success in China does not guarantee the same in another society of one’s choice. A descent is a risk of plunging into a vicious circle. It is also a test of the blessing from the success in the past.

4.1.2 Splicing My Chinese Intellectual Self and Canadian Nanny Self

I quit university in order to survive. I found a job as a live-in nanny taking care of two boys — a one-year-old and a two and a half-year-old. "In order to survive, I had to go through this." I needed to convince myself of this every day. "It's nothing in comparison with my experience in the people's commune during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," I told myself. On October 22nd, 1988, there was snow and I made my first snowman in front of the house where I was going to work and had a picture taken in front of it.

I worked 7 months in that house and it felt like seven years. I was underpaid and overloaded with the child care for two infants, housekeeping, and cooking for the whole family. I was confined in the house by the babies and the severe winter and by my own ideas of being helpful to people who needed it, being grateful to people who helped me, and by my need of a work permit.

In the first 3 months, I worked 14 hours every day, but was paid for 10 hours. My labor was only worth around 2.50 dollars per hour. My typical day was like this:

At 7:00 am, my alarm o'clock woke me up. By 7:30, I was in the kitchen, and work began. If lucky, before the kids woke up, I could put away clean utensils from the
dishwasher and the counter back to the cupboards according to the colors: yellow dishes to dairy cupboards left of the stove, maroon dishes to meat cupboards on the right side of the stove. I was told that it was a sin to mix them up. And I should also clean up the mess left over from last night's ritual of coffee, tea, beer, dessert, popcorn, various tools for making fruit shakes. Usually, the parents of the children would carry on the ritual after 9:30 when I put the kids to bed and finished my work for the day. Very often, the two energetic kids would not wait until I finished. The two-year-old would appear in the kitchen in his pajamas with a big wet diaper, asking for milk and the 1-year-old would scream in his crib upstairs.

It was a battle to handle two at those ages with the expectation of attending them all the time. Sometimes, when I was struggling with the diaper of one child, the other child would suddenly punch up the miserable guy on the changing bed and make him scream hilariously and kick off and mix up everything, clean and dirty. Usually, at that moment, the mother would run into the room and tell me that those things should not be mixed up. When I put the child in his highchair and the other one at the breakfast table, I could sit down and feed both of them at the same time. The younger one would paint his face with baby food in his highchair and the older one would throw his food or plate at my face for fun. I remember once when this happened I lowered my voice, told him to stop, and put the plastic plate back to his side of the table, then the mother yelled at me and told me it was not right for me to do this to her child.

I had never done this to my nanny nor ever allowed my son to do this to my baby sitter in China. I assumed that, in Canada, since children were more important than adults, they were, of course, allowed to do anything they like. Since Canada is a capitalist
country, money was, of course more important than people and their dignity. I was educated by Mao that a capitalist society was a hell where capitalists were using their workers as machines and communists were creating a paradise where everybody was equally respected with dignity. With my experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the years in the people's commune in particular, I unlearned their brainwashing about the paradise and was ready to unlearn their story about the hell. I was confused.

Sometimes, while playing with their toys in the family room, the older one would suddenly take a stool, hold it up high, and throw it down onto the younger one's head. And I was not supposed to raise or lower my voice in order to stop him. What I could do was to put off whatever at hand, even if it was a burning pan on the stove, and run at my highest speed to save the little one from the disaster. Very often, when I came back from my weekend break, under the care of both their father and mother for only two days, the older one would have a serious rash caused by wet diaper, and the little one would have several big bumps on his head. Once in a while, both kids would have diarrhea, which would make both the kids and me suffer for the week.

After breakfast, if weather permitted, I would bundle up the kids and take them out to the nearby park. After lunch, I would put them in their separate bedrooms for a nap. Holding the big one in my arms with his bottle and books, I would attend the little one first, and put him to sleep. Then, I would lie down with the big one and read and read and read until he fell asleep. Now I got my quiet moment for the first time during the day. I would use this time to do laundry every day, to make the bed for the parents who never did that themselves. This was new to me because Chinese parents I knew always taught their children to make their beds as soon as they get up. From kindergarten Chinese
children make their beds themselves. Adults depending on their housekeeper to make their bed would be a big scandal in China. I would also use this time to clean up their washrooms twice a week. My mother and I never let our housekeepers do our washrooms for their dignity and for our own privacy as well. The washroom of my Canadian boss was always a mess covered by dirty towels and hair. I used to wonder how could they use so many towels in two or three days and where that hair came from. I felt embarrassed intruding into their very private life and a loss of my own dignity kneeling on the floor to face the hair. But they didn't seem to be bothered by that and never lifted a finger to protect their privacy. I learned that they did not consider it a waste to dirty up so many towels in such a short time. Instead, it was their display of wealth and a higher living standard. This napping time for the children was also my time to tidy up all the rooms everyday, and vacuum and wash the floor once a week.

Sometimes, if the nap was long enough for me to finish up all the required work, I would sit down in the kitchen and prepare myself a bowl of Chinese instant noodle soup that the mother bought for me when it was on sale: one dollar for three. The mother would suddenly appear in the kitchen and ask to share half of my lunch. She was on a diet and made me hungry all the afternoon. Afternoon was always a big hassle. The mother taught private piano lessons after 4:00. While preparing supper for the whole family, and caring the two babies, I had to attend to all her students who kept coming in and out of the kitchen for drinks. For the baby's safety, I had to keep the younger one close to me, very often in my arms, and the older one in the family room where I could see him from the kitchen and could run to him any time when it was needed. With one child in one arm and one child in my eyes, I prepared dinner and made juice and served many of her
students with the other hand. According to the contract, my work finished by 5:30. But the parents were never there to take over the job of caring for their two children. She was still teaching. He was either shopping after work, or came home to tell me that as far as work was concerned, my day was finished, but went upstairs to work on his computer and left the kids for me to take care of. Actually, my day would never finish until after I put the two kids to bed.

Then, I had the rest of the evening for myself if both kids were well. Sometimes, after midnight, the older kid would run into my room in the basement crying as if he had a nightmare. His parents were only two doors away from him on the second floor. I did not understand why he did not run to his parents and wondered why Western parents were so cruel and selfish to put their kids to separate rooms when they were still infants. A remote monitor could never replace the presence of parents. But I was not in a position to discourage the two-and-a-half-year-old to from being “independent” when that was what his parents wanted. I would have to get up and talk to him and send him back upstairs to his room on the second floor. Sometimes, one kid was sick and needed to see a doctor at night, the mother would ask me for a favor to care for the other one left at home. To do her a favor, I understood from the dictionary was to help her, not to work for her. So I never asked any money for my midnight help. Sometimes, the parents needed to go out for the evening, I would get ten dollars' extra money for that day. The mother was not happy to let me baby sit for her friends at night. She told me that I wouldn't have enough energy to work for her in the day. Once, when a couple of her friends insisted, she let me go. Sitting down with two children in their teens and watching TV and reading for a evening, I made 40 dollars. She never allowed me to do it again.
In the first three months, the relationship between my boss and me, I thought, was reciprocal. They claimed they took me as their friend and I related to them as friends, too. They showed their appreciation of my help. They were both my age, decent professionals, who loved music and the arts. We formed a small music group and performed at a Chinese fundraising event. I sang Chinese folk songs, they accompanied on keyboard and flute. Once they took me out for dinner in a restaurant. But the next day, her parents and sister told her, over long distance phone call, that they should not do that to a "nanny". I loved Chinese painting and calligraphy. I would do some every night after work. They showed their interest by giving me paper and a sketch book. I was grateful for their caring. At Christmas, I gave them a Chinese painting for a gift. I worked 4 more hours every day. They paid my air ticket to New York city for a domestic work permit and let me stay in her sister's place over night in New York.

I was not offered a domestic work permit because I honestly told the immigration officer that I would continue my studies on a part-time basis after I would be granted a permit. My reasons were: first of all, that was what I came to Canada for. Second, it would help solve my financial problem. Working for Canadians and paying taxes to Canadian government would qualify myself to pay Canadian tuition fees. The immigration officer understood me completely and showed his sympathy. He talked to me two or three times on the same day trying very hard to make me say that I am not going to study any more and that I am going to work as a domestic forever. The immigration regulation for the domestic program did not allow anybody to be on "a double status" in Canada. That means if they grant you a work permit for the program, they would not grant you a student authorization. I had been told that I should not be bothered to hold a
student authorization to be a part time student as long as I have a work permit and that I should not tell any immigration officer that I was going to study in the future. Well, I could keep quiet on that issue but I could not lie when they asked me directly. I knew many people did that. But I just had not learned that soon enough. I told my truth and the honesty was acknowledged by the sympathy of the immigration officer but not by the law.

Later, I learned that my Chinese morality of "giving a whole fountain of spring water to appreciate other's drop of water help" and my failure to lie in front of an immigration officer meant that I was stupid. Giving them an expensive Chinese painting for a sketch book was idiotic. To work 4 more hours every day for their air ticket and one night stay over in New York was being cheap. I learned that people were not very good calculating in math in Canadian schools but very good in daily life. And I learned these from that family --- my first boss in Canada.

Back in Canada, she talked to the immigration officers within the country again. And they thought that it was ridiculous for their New York office not to grant me a permit. Of course, she did not say that I was going to continue my studies. Another appointment was made because of her efforts. But we all had to wait for another 5 months. They kept hammering in my head that I would lie with my eyes looking right into the immigration officer's eyes at the next appointment.

The relationship between my boss and me went sour when I requested less working hours after three months' efforts. Fourteen hours was too much for me over the long term and I was willing to try 10 hours: from 7:30 am to 5:30 PM. That would bring my labour up to about three dollars per hour. "She was disgusted", her husband told me. She gave me a disgusted face while responding to my request. At the same time, she pleaded for me
to work 12 hours: from 7:30 to 7:30 but not putting it down in the contract because that was against the law. I agreed. Since then, she became bossier and bossier and kept bragging of her skills in manipulating the immigration officer for my second appointment every day in order to remind me of my failure to lie in New York and my dependency on her.

She would not allow me to bring in cooked pork anymore in order to respect her religion. But in the past, she would be thrilled to share my Chinese pork as long as I didn't cook in her kitchen. She would tell me that I was good with kids but not good with housekeeping because her washroom was a mess and her husband was mad although she did not mind. She would spit some saliva on her fingertip and wipe out some marks on the wall telling me it was in my contract to keep the walls clean. She would pick up a Chinese Jiao Tzu I made (a kind of dumplings that Chinese people eat at the traditional Chinese New Year’s Eve dinner), bite off half of it, and stuff the rest into my mouth when I was too busy to push it away and too confused about the meaning in her behavior. Cultural? Personal? Flattering? Or insulting?46 She used to admire my skill at putting two kids to bed in separate rooms at the same time all by myself. After the change of my working hours, they had to do that and their kids could never go to bed on time anymore. Once I agreed to baby sit for one evening, and put the kids to bed 9:30pm before they

46 A friend of mine told me that when she was working as a live-in nanny for a rich Canadian family before she received her landing paper, her boss once broke a corn cob and handed half to her while saying: “Do you know how lucky you are. In Canada, only the rich can eat sweet corn.” She replied: “Do you know, in my home country, corn is very common. To tell you the truth, only the poor eat corn. The rich eat rice.” Then the Canadian rich was offended: “Are you insulting me?” “No, I am just telling you the facts,” my friend replied. She knew that the rich Canadian woman was demeaning her and had a good and prompt answer to bring the rich into terms with her insult and evil. I did not know that at the time.
were back. She came home to tell me that she was disappointed not to be able to say good night to her kids. She always had a good reason to express her nastiness. I was disgusted.

I came to Canada to escape from bureaucracy and hypocrisy, which I had thought was forced upon many Chinese people by the dictatorship. I was very naive to expect a democratic society free of bureaucracy and hypocrisy. I realized, since money was the dictator in a capitalist society, people were ranked by the amounts of money they possess. Canadians who have been here for generations and able to accumulate wealth were of course at the top and a person like me who was still struggling for a Canadian work permit was certainly at the very bottom.

My stratification ladder would have to be: first step work permit; second, domestic work for three years; third, apply for immigration; fourth, wait one year for approval of immigration; fifth, apply for my son’s immigration; sixth, wait one or two years for approval of my son’s immigration; seventh, a Canadian degree; eighth, a real Canadian job; ninth, retire without enough pension for a decent life in Canada; 10th, a fallen leaf going back to its root - China. For the ninth and 10th steps, I could not see the top at that time. I was overwhelmed by my reality at the bottom of the ladder. And that bottom was not a comfortable position for me. In some sense, it was worse than my experience in the people’s commune during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

I was confined in the mountains. But the mountains were hundreds of square kilometers big. The house I worked in here was only two or three thousand square feet. I lived with my brother and cousin in the commune. I had a family to share my life with. And there were thousands of other like me who were in the similar situation. In comparison, I did not feel worse. In Canada, I was in complete isolation, thousands of
miles away from my son and my parents in China. My mother told me a story in her letter about my 4-year-old son: When friends came to visit and asked about his mother, he would take out a globe and point at Canada: "My mother is far away on the other side of the globe. It is night time at my mother's place when it is daytime here." He was proudly showing off his knowledge of geography. I was crying here missing him and feeling sorry for him and carrying a mother's guilt. My mother also told me in a letter that for over a month after I left, my son would look for me over the house as soon as he came back from kindergarten assuming I was playing hide-and-seek with him. That would bring out my parents' tears. They were hurt to see their grandson experiencing this and they missed me, too. My father had suffered a chronic pulmonary emphysema and needed constant care in winter. My mother shouldered the responsibilities of caring for both my father and my son and the emotional turmoil of my absence. Their comfort was that they were contributing and sacrificing to help with my graduate study. I did not have the heart to tell them that I quit school and worked as a nanny for economic reasons. Had I told them that, first, they would give me all their savings. But two university professors life-long savings in China would not do much to help with my graduate studies in Canada. Second, they would tell me to go back home to continue my faculty job in the university. But I was not yet ready to give up my dream at that time. If I stayed, they would be worried even more and that worry would jeopardize my father's life and my mother's health. As a result of all these considerations, I decided not to tell them my reality. Instead, I swallowed my bitterness and did not take away their only comfort and emotional support for the sacrifice.
In addition to that, I was in a worse situation than most friends of mine who were graduate students. I would phone up my friends in the university, get all the information about the rhythm of universities in Canada and lie in my letters to them about my studies, the libraries, the computers, the badminton games, my term papers and exams, and my progress. It was painful to write such letters. I was hurting them by deceiving them and hurting myself by putting down my own unrealized dream on paper. It was frustrating to write such letters. I had to keep track of my lies and make them coherent. I felt very sad and helpless about the situation. Meanwhile, I became more and more determined that I would make my lie and my dream come true. I had to live the life I described in the letters to China, because that was a life I had always longed for and a life my parents sacrificed for me to have. I had to make my separation from the son worth the suffering. I had to give my parents and son something to be proud of. Before I began to work there, I had known that it was an emergency arrangement and that I would continue my study in one way or another after I obtained my work permit. As the relationship with my boss became worse and worse, and as all these lies, dreams and reflections went on in my mind all the time, I started to question if I could stay there long enough. If not, what would be my options?

I contacted two universities other than the one I quit: one in the middle of Canada geographically where foreign students were not required to pay high tuition fees and life was cheaper; another in the commercial center of Canada where foreign students were required to pay high fees and life was expensive but the graduate study was considered one of the best in North America. Before I got in touch with the universities, I told my boss that I was planning to go and gave them two months' time to find another employee.
Two months passed very fast. I told my relatives in Toronto about my decision and was offered accommodation there for a transition period. But I did not hear anything from the universities. My boss had not found anybody to replace me, either. I had to give them one more month. One month later, they had not found one yet. And I found it harder and harder to work there. She became worse and kept abusing my goodwill of parting on good terms. Now three months had gone by, I was still working there and had a relapse of arthritis. Utensils from their evening rituals doubled and most of them needed to be hand washed. For about two weeks, their younger son had a diarrhea and became very demanding. I had to hold him in my arm(s) more often and that made my arthritis worse.

I realized finally that they would never find a replacement as long as I stayed. In early April, I told them that I was leaving in early May. She was irritated as if I had never given her three months' notice before that to look for a replacement. I had not learned how to argue with her in my second language yet. But I had learned to convey my determination by staying silent. Now I began to see people coming in for interview and try to play with the boys half a day or couple of hours.

On Friday, May 5 1989, she told me that, since her new nanny was moving in soon, I could leave on that weekend, and she was not going to write me the last paycheck. I was happy that they found a replacement and that I was free. But I was puzzled about her decision of not giving me the last payment. I went back upstairs to ask her for a reason. She said things were done like this in Canada: if an employee does not pay his/her phone bill, Bell will charge the employer. I did not understand where this rule came from and why. I had always had my own telephone number, faithfully paid my bills every month, filled out change of address form and transferred my last bill to my new residence in
Toronto. My bill had never had anything to do with my employer. In the evening, I called my friends to check the information. They were all puzzled. Since my friends were all Chinese students, some had been in Canada longer some shorter, nobody felt sure enough about that rule of Canada.

On Saturday morning, I decided to call Bell Canada. I talked to an operator, explained to her about the situation and inquired about the rule. She had never heard about that rule either. But to be sure, she offered to ask her supervisor. A few minutes later, she called me back and told me that her supervisor confirmed that there had not been such a rule and her supervisor was willing to tell my employer about it.

I went upstairs to tell her that the supervisor was waiting for her call to explain the rule to her. "I am not going to talk to anybody. I have company here. I'll write you the check and you should leave today," she yelled. "According to our contract, my room and board for this weekend should be covered. I will leave today if you include that in my last payment," I told her. "I will," was her answer.

I called the operator back, told her the story, and asked her what else might happen and what should I do. She told me to make sure that I should get my luggage out before my employer locked the door. If that happened, I should call police for help. She gave me the number of the nearest police station and convinced me that my English was enough to tell the police about what happened. I thanked her many times, arranged my weekend accommodation with a couple of friends, packed up my luggage quickly, and carried them to the hallway but forgot to ask for the name of the Bell operator.

I called a couple of friends to arrange my transportation. My friends came in about an hour. We sat down in my room talking about what had happened. My boss walked in
suddenly. Her face changed completely now. She looked so pleasant, gave me a huge hug while I was still puzzled, and said: "Xin, Thank you for taking care of my kids. I meant to part on good terms although it did not happen that way. We will all miss you. You may not understand it now. But I am sure you will in the future."

"My goodness, what an actress! See, this is what we should learn from Canadians. They know how to cover up their ass and make themselves politically correct when there is witness," one of my friends commented in Chinese while my boss was giving her show. But none of us could learn it that fast to say the same thing to her.

I stayed inside while my friends were taking my luggage out to their car in case she would lock me out. When everything was out, I searched for my key in the pocket of my coat hanging the closet. It was gone. I had to go back to the kitchen to tell her that I lost her key. "I have it," she said, She took it from my coat without my permission. "I want my paycheck," I required. She gave me a paycheck without the amount for the weekend's room and board, and told me to leave right away. Otherwise she was going to call police to arrest me for disturbing her company. I told her not to worry, and I'll take care of that before she would do and persisted for my payment she had promised. My friends stopped me, "We'll take care of your room and board for the weekend," they did not think it worth my fight.

I was angry. At the door, I told her directly that she was a typical North American who cared for nothing but money. I got out of that door safely without involving the police. If the police had come, she may have won the case because she was a Canadian and had known the game better. I was not even a second-class citizen yet. That was my fear and my Chinese friends' worry, too.
Now, eight years after that, I can’t forget this first Canadian boss of mine, who was a public school music teacher, and who was, according to herself, being considered for promotion to a vice-principal position. Also unforgettable was the Bell operator, who kindly and generously helped me out. She was also a typical North American.

This knot spliced my Chinese intellectual self and Canadian nanny self. To be intellectual means to think and decide independently. To work as a nanny means to follow orders and to depend on the mercy of your boss. To be an intellectual, you treat your nanny as your equal: to order your nanny around and to play the charity game is to degrade yourself to bully others in the darkness of insecurity. During the interplay between my learned Chinese intellectual self and involuntary Canadian nanny self, I made an effort to be a respectful equal nanny, transcended the involuntary self, and won my dignity.

4.1.3 Splicing My Chinese Exile Self and Canadian Exile Self

What I had learned from this experience is more than I intend to handle in this chapter. The importance is that, now eight years later, this story is still fresh in my memory. It is fresh because I have been reminded of it by many other new immigrants’ similar stories. It is fresh because I have seldom read a story like this. It is fresh because it is important for my learning and for other people, I believe, be they new immigrants or second, third generation immigrants or older settlers. As a teacher, I believe it is particularly important for other teachers who have new immigrant students. The challenges new immigrant students and their families have to take during immigration should never be
underestimated, including a challenge from a teacher like my first boss or other similar people in the country of the new immigrants’ choice.

The challenge I had to take to smile at the hardship of coming to live in a country other than my own was no less than living through the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The smile was the same; the hardship different.

The Cultural Revolution was forced on me. Immigration was chosen by myself. To be forced, I could not withdraw, for better or for worse. To be forced, I could blame others for the worse. To choose, I had to take the sole responsibility, for better or for worse. To be responsible for my choice, I had to constantly compare, to weigh, and to live between the two worlds. I had to take all the blame on myself for the worse. I was learning to be autonomous.

The Cultural Revolution threw me into a group of youths who were at the very bottom of the society. I threw myself, in immigration, into the very bottom of the society where I had nobody to relate to. I was more isolated. During the Cultural Revolution, I was a teenager full of life and youth and had not yet started on my life path. I had not had much to lose. During my immigration, I was in my mid-thirties, had family responsibilities left behind, and had already established an academic life. The loss was not easy to overcome.

The Chinese government propaganda had told me that the people’s communes were like paradise created by the communists, and that I and other youths like me were to be ‘re-educated’ by the commune members. Judging from my experience about the government propaganda during the Cultural Revolution before I went to the commune, I created a myth of a hell-like commune with its beast-like commune members, who would be worse political animals than the Red Guards in the cities. The commune turned out to
be more hellish but the commune members were more humane. The communist propaganda had told me that a Western country was like a hell where capitalists exploited the poor and racism was rampant. Judging from my experience about the government propaganda and my limited exposure to Western culture through studying and teaching English, I invented a myth of a paradise-like Canada with angel-like people. On the contrary, Canada turned out more paradise-like but not all people were humane, some exploited, some were racists, and some were abusive.

My educational background which was not much before the Cultural Revolution had eventually advantaged me to end the deprived life in the people’s commune. But, my Chinese educational background allowed me fewer opportunities in the competition of the Canadian academic community, and degraded me as far as to be a nanny.

In addition to all these, the Cultural Revolution finished over twenty years ago. I had survived it and lived it. That was certain. But I was/am still a new immigrant. My future was/is unknown and I was/am emotionally closer to the hardship. When one is in the mountain, more vivid details can be seen. These details of my own immigration experience enabled me to feel vividly how Jane would have felt. They had brought me closer to her and to her smile.

This first 10 months’ immigration experience of mine had brought me right into the center of the whirlpool of cultural, ethnic, class, racial, power, and women issues in Canada. This whirlpool was as difficult as, if not more, all the other Chinese rapids which a wise Taoist could go in with a descending vortex, and come out with an ascending one. I was not able to find an ascending vortex earlier because of my culture shock. I was accepting everything as cultural difference, which had blinded me from...
seeing other important issues at stake and had encouraged evil. Whenever I see a newcomer, I wonder what kind of a myth she has about living as a new immigrant in Canada. How big is the gap, if any, between the myth and her reality? Will she blind herself, as I did, with cultural difference from recognizing other universal good and evil? I wish whole-heartedly she could come out of the whirlpool safely with a big smile. I marvel at such a smile one could wear because I know intimately the details of the currents.

*Spliced here were the two involuntary descending movements in my life experience. One was in the notorious Chinese Cultural Revolution, the other was in the well-known Canadian immigration. The interplay was between the forced exile to the commune and the chosen exile to Canada, between the different perspectives that colored my expectations, between the different music of time and degrees of urgency that tuned my imaginations. The interplay has given recognition to both that challenged my limit and became my resource of learning in adversity.*

4.1.4 Splicing My Smiling Self and Jane's Smiling Self Completed

I have met numerous Chinese immigrants and heard their stories. Hardship has been the major theme. But not all of them were able to smile at their hardship. Some whined; some were silent; some obeyed; some quit. Some wore a worrying face; some looked numb; some carried the humblest body gesture as if she had wanted to shrink to the minimum; some held a head up high to compensate for her insecurity with arrogance. I felt for them all, but personally I identify myself with a smile. A smile tells me a wise attitude towards life as well as an ability to learn and grow in adversity. My personal
preference led me to the imagined story of hardship behind Jane’s smile. And the imagination was later proven not to be beyond her reality. When a mad person met another insane, their eyes sparkled; empathy, understanding, and connection are seized.

Jane’s smile attracted me because it resembled mine. I was completing my own experience of smiling at hardship in such an imagination of hers. Hardship is a subjective concept of universal human experience. It is subjective to the attitude of the individual who experienced it in the specific context. Some people lack courage, they avoid hardship; some are scared, they withdraw from it; some are full of self-pity, they whine about it; some are fragile, they cry over it; some enjoy sufferings, they laugh at it. And I smile at it.

I smiled at hardship because I understood that I could learn from it. This smile was not the smile of courtesy, nor of pretense. It did not express happiness, nor satisfaction. It was a smile that revealed self-confidence and internal peace. Smiling at hardship was not to erase it. Having an internal peace with hardship was not to deny the sufferings. To learn from hardship was the key.

To smile at hardship is to grow and to live through catastrophes. To smile at hardship was to acknowledge the privilege of experience in hardship. Such an experience equipped me with an open heart to another’s hardship. It invited new immigrant’s stories that nobody wanted to or was able to hear; it gave people like Jane some hope — a hope to end the hardship as I had done and a hope to have some future as I had in a society which seemed so opaque and inaccessible for them.

Here I was splicing my smile at hardship and Jane’s. From my own experience of hardship, I imagined hers.. From my learning to smile at hardship and improvising
difficult situations, I saw hers. Jane's smile was leading my interpretation, and my imagination was, in turn, leading the splicing. Jane followed with her appealing smile.

This knot was initiated earlier, and was completed after three other knots were made. Behind the smiling selves, there were the splicing of successful self and failed self, Chinese intellectual self and Canadian nanny self, and Chinese exile self and Canadian exile self. Behind my smile, there had been these three pairs of intersubjective selves. Behind her smile, I was expecting more selves from Jane.

4.2 Splicing Jane's Trusting Self and My Trustworthy Self

Jane read a story of trustworthiness in my face when she first saw me. At that time, she had been in Canada only a few weeks. However, during the first 24 hours of her life in Canada, she had experienced a trauma of being betrayed by a friend and taken advantage of by a stranger.

The reason for Jane to come to Toronto to improve her English, not Montreal or other cities in Canada, was that she had a friend in Toronto, and that the friend promised to help with her settlement. Jane had known this friend for a long time in China. Time and circumstances had tested the trustworthiness of the friend. Their shared experience in the specific historic event of the TianAnMen Square students demonstration bonded them as loyal friends. They had stood up to life and death situations during the time and in the aftermath when the government was searching for "counter-revolutionaries"—those who participated in "TianAnMen Square Incident", forcing and blackmailing people to report one another. She wrote: "During the June 4, 1989 period, we went to TianAnMen Square
every day, and underwent danger. I thought he would be my loyal friend, so I helped him."

"Many times I accompanied him to the Canadian consulate. I gave him money to buy lots of things to prepare to go abroad, and to get a plane ticket\textsuperscript{47}.

A trust born in such circumstances is precious among Chinese people. 患難之交 (Huan Nan Zhi Qiao)—friends in adversity—are friends who would support one another under social pressure, in interest conflicts and life-threatening situations. There had been many such government manipulated life-threatening situations in China. Many friends failed the tests of adversity and became 酒肉朋友 (Jou Rou Peng You)—friends of meat and alcohol for a direct translation and “fair-weather friends” in English. In adversity, they disappear and betray. Nevertheless, many people withstood hardships together and established life-long friendship which bonds them beyond the limit of time and space.

My parents began to teach me when I was very young that I should not run away from friends in difficulties. I was told that was a very unethical thing to do. It was 投井下石 (Tou Jing Xia Shi)—to throw a rock into the well where somebody fell. I was also told that I should not trust anybody who behaves as such. I asked Jane if her parents taught her this. She did not remember. But she learned it through her imprisonment—the well she fell into.

\textsuperscript{47} To buy an air ticket from Beijing to Canada cost me 3,000 Chinese Yuan, which was about my three years' salary teaching in the university put together.
But this value about trust was challenged as soon as she arrived on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. At the airport, her friend did not show up. She called and was told that he was busy at work.

Jane, certainly, expected help from this friend in her adversity, although she did not count on him. Without the language and the basic knowledge of how the system functions here in Canada, she did not make an accommodation arrangement before she left China. In China, when we travel, we don't reserve hotel rooms ahead of time. Maybe it is because of lack of modern communication and management skills. We function in a web of connections. If there are relatives or friends in the designated place, we would write to them to notify of our arrival. It is their obligation to provide accommodation. If there are no such connections in one's destiny, we would simply knock on the doors of hotels after we arrive. I remember, at 14, knocking on the doors of one hotel after another with my father along the street in a city where we had no relatives. Jane was practising according to her Chinese norms.

She arrived, but nobody was there to greet her. One acquaintance she got to know on the flight arranged a taxi for her, and gave her information about the Chinese Students Association at the University of Toronto and its temporary cheap accommodation for newcomers. Now, she was completely on her own with somebody who did not understand her language. She took out her electronic English-Chinese dictionary, and tried to communicate with the taxi driver. At least, she thought she could tell him where to take her. But her English did not seem to work. Every time she mentioned "Downtown", "University of Toronto", "Chinese Students Association", he replied with something that did not sound the same. "'My English pronunciation was really bad', I told
him and myself too," she said. Then she opened her dictionary and asked him to spell what he was saying. "M-Y H-O-M-E" was the answer. She was scared. "No, no, no. No 'my home',' she began to yell in English first, then in Chinese. "Take me to the University of Toronto. If you don't, I am going to sue you, I am going to report to police," The taxi driver was not supposed to understand her Chinese. But he got the message, maybe from her yelling and tapping at the window. He dropped her somewhere on the university campus, and left her with a pile of luggage. She had to find her way to the destination.

The passenger, who helped her at the airport with the taxi told her that people here in Canada were all very nice, including taxi drivers. They wouldn't charge her more than they were supposed to, unlike those in China. There was law and rules for them to follow. You can sue them if they don't do it. What happened to her in the taxi puzzled her. What if that taxi driver really took her to his home? What if he drove her far away from the city? What if he simply dropped her on a highway? She did not have English. She did not have family or friends. She did not know about 911 emergency to call for help. If she disappeared, nobody would know, nobody would care, the globe would still turn as usual. Maybe several days, or months later, there would be a piece of news in a local newspapers :"A Female Body Found Beside 401 Near Oshawa, No ID, Face Non-recognizable."

"Not a big deal. A piece of cake!" This was how Jane looked at her experience. It was part of the human condition. She had had much worse experience of that before. She had learned to smile at them. Now she was trying to come to terms with this piece of cake. She was striving to establish a faith of trustworthiness in herself through me. She was
expecting me to help her with not just English. More important was that as a student, she was requiring her teacher to help with her faith; she was pushing her teacher to be a whole human being.

Who would have the heart to reject such a call for a faith in humanity? Who would not try to live up to such a faith in life? I was not just flattered by her trust. I was hearing a deep yearning for a value that was crucial for humankind but not commonly practised. I was responding to the given task of a trustworthy model, and of caring for my student’s well being.

In this knot, Jane’s yearning for trustworthiness was spliced with my trustworthy self. Being betrayed and bullied in her new country of choice, she was reaching out and growing out of her nightmare by interplay between her trusting self and my trustworthy self. She was leading in the splicing, I followed. I took my turn, later, to lead the splicing by re-telling her stories in my biographical writing to help her come to terms with it and to make it into a valuable learning experience—a knot in our series of Chinese knotwork.

4.3 Splicing Jane’s Person Self and My Caring Self

Pushing her teacher to be a whole human being was to recognize the teacher as another subjectivity; projecting my story of hardship onto my student’s smile was to accept my student as a separate and equivalent center of self. In the mutual recognition of the other as a subjectivity, we were imagining about the other. Imagination did not resolve, nor did it point the way or improve, it only disclosed “the ordinary unseen, unheard, and unexpected.” (Greene, 1995, p.28). In return, we were seeking for a full experience of our
own subjectivity in the disclosure of the ordinary unseen, unheard, and unexpected. Our stories spliced, and our subjectivity exchanged.

To recognize the other—the student—as a subjectivity and to seek for a full experience of our own subjectivity in the other was to relate to one another as a whole human being. To relate to one another as a whole human being was to be completely receptive and to give full attention to the other. It was an open-ended genuine quest, and a common search for understanding, empathy and appreciation.

To relate to the student as a subjective self was to create knowledge together. To create knowledge together was to acknowledge the other and to assert the self simultaneously. To embrace two dimensions at the same time was to interplay between opposites, and to dynamically transcend the opposites. It is to splice her person self and my caring self, caring for my student's well being.

4.4 Splicing My Teacher Self in 1991 and the Teacher Self in 1977 Begins

Why, as a teacher, did I take the task of a trustworthy model and of caring for my student's well being given by her, a student of mine? To abstract the Connection Knot further, I need to look at how I had become the kind of teacher I was when I met Jane, what my curriculum was and what kind of relationship I had expected to have with my students. I need to untwist the rope of myself and to study the component threads of my teacher self.

I started teaching 20 years ago in a teachers' college in China immediately after I graduated from a teachers' university, in which I was trained, during four years' education, to teach English to Chinese students. It was also the very first year after the end of the Cultural Revolution. The college had just restarted for one year. The
curriculum was still in recovery. As soon as I was assigned to teach English to two
classes in different departments, I went to the storage room of the library, dug out an old
typewriter, typed the text from the only one textbook I had, and had it mimeographed.
That was the curriculum I was supposed to work with as I understood it at that time. And
the textbook was given by the administrators from the curriculum department of that
college. I did not consider factors of learner, teacher, the particular time, and the context
that I later found were important in the curriculum.

Before practical teaching in classroom, my knowledge about curriculum was simple
and in good order, formed in the interaction of me and the situations, in which
"curriculum in schools . . . is formulated and prescribed" and "the official ideology is . . .
so pervasive that the absence of competing views may leave its citizens unable to think
about alternatives. The ability of a single ideological view renders them insensitive to the
ways in which their own beliefs have been shaped "(Eisner, 1992, p.303). I did not know
either "the chaotic state of curriculum terminology" (Kliebard, 1975/1992, p.3); or "that
the field of curriculum is moribund, unable by its present methods and principles to
continue its work and desperately in search of new and more effective principles and
methods" (Schwab, 1969, p.1). This was the context and the time in which I started my
professional journey.

Half a year later, I invited one of my colleagues, an experienced teacher, to visit my
class. After the class, he commented :"Your teaching is very heuristic. And I can see that
students love to be in your class. But you may get out of control easily if you don't pay
more attention to the curriculum and the discipline." I appreciated his insights about my
teaching. And I knew that many other people, including the director and some students,
held the same opinion. But I enjoyed teaching my way, offering students enough space and time to shape and share their learning process, being a person instead of a knowledge container and giver, and enjoyed taking the risk of losing control.

For years, I took this experience as a positive learning process. When I closed my eyes, and concentrated on my positive professional experience (Hunt, 1984), this particular class, the colleague and his comments, and my response all came to my mind. It seemed that from only half a years' teaching, I had experienced good practice. What was my implicit theory in terms of curriculum and my relationship with the students?

"There is legitimate variation from teacher to teacher and from classroom to classroom as ideas are worked out in practice" (Connelly, Clandinin, 1992, p.5). How were my ideas worked out? As in the practice of reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983), I brought in an observer to help me learn by doing (Schon, 1987, p.12). Now, I can see that my ideas about curriculum had changed from the one I held before my practical classroom teaching activities. They were not just about the text book and the curriculum authority any more.

What were they? How did they come into being? Why did I give my students "enough space and time to shape and share their learning process?" Why did I "want to be a person instead of a knowledge container and giver"? Why, still a new teacher, did I have so much confidence in teaching "my way"? Why did I enjoy "taking the risk of losing control"? Why did I include teacher and learner now, ignoring my previous understanding of "the curriculum with only subject matter and milieu"? What was my curriculum by that time? How did I relate to my students? It seemed that my practical classroom teaching tapped into my personal knowledge. I was expressing my values, beliefs, conceptions through my practical teaching activities in classroom.
4.4.1 Splicing My Teacher Self and My Student Self

In reflection, I found myself drawing on my personal experience of being a learner in teaching. "We gain personal knowledge throughout our lives. Experiences prior to teaching shape what Pinar (1986) calls the architecture of self" (Butt, Raymond, and Yamagist, 1986, p.98).

Grade one. Russian class. The teacher was fresh and still in her "practice teaching" program from the university to which my elementary school was attached. She tried hard to force us to pronounce and to remember the Russian alphabet. In the second half of the class, I raised up my hand, got a nod from her to allow me to question: "You are wrong. Letter 'A' should be pronounced as 'a'. We learned it long ago in the kindergarten." The whole class agreed and refused to "swallow" any more stuff from her. With more than forty kids talking in the class, I couldn't hear anybody, only saw that the teacher's mouth was shivering, and then tears came out. I knew what we learned in the kindergarten were Chinese alphabets. I said that in order to "screw things up", because I hated to be stuffed. This was my first rebellion against Peking Duck Stuffers.

My parents used to tell me this story of Peking Duck Stuff Teaching Method:

Peking Duck is a famous delicacy in Mandarin cuisine. It attracts many gourmets, professional and amateur. But if you know how people feed the ducks, you might not want to eat it any more. When people feed the Peking ducks, they give the ducks more than they can handle. Meanwhile they confine the ducks in the least possible space to limit their movement so that the ducks grow very fat in the shortest possible time. The meat of a duck thus fed would be very tender and delicate. But the poor duck in his short life could not have any time to swim in the pond, duck into water to catch fish, or even have the right to refuse being stuffed. A traditional teacher in China is called a Peking Duck Stuffer, implementing "Stuffing Duck Stuff Teaching Method". And her/his students are like Peking Ducks.
I rebelled because I did not want to be taken as a stupid and empty container, ready to be stuffed. I enjoyed seeing teachers making mistakes as everybody else would. If she didn't, I would make up one for her. As the consequence of this rebellion, I was taken to the principal's office and had to stay there late after school to "think", which was a way to say confess at that time in that school, and which was considered progressive compared with physical punishment that still prevailed in the Chinese school disciplinary measures in the early 1960's. I did not plead guilty at the principal's office and insisted that the teacher was a Peking Duck Stuffer. But I was made to admit that I should have been more cooperative and considerate with a new teacher.

Back home, my parents already had known, from my brother, that I was at the principal's office. After I told them the reasons, they made no comments, only laughed.

But that teacher's child-like chubby face, her dark skin, the pair of her braided pigtails, her shivering mouth, and her tears stayed with me. Now I could see this memory of the story in my "giving enough space and time to the students to shape and share their learning process" — the sense I made from the experience. I was creating my teacher knowledge from my learning experience. Knowledge is subjectively created. It is a process of learning, not a depersonalized world out there, waiting for us to discover. Eisner has studied it profoundly in several of his works, such as The Enlightened Eye, Objectivity in Educational Research, and others. For me, as an "inheritor" (Dewey, 1964, p.425) of the Chinese civilization, Lao Tzu's view of the world, through the Chinese culture and my father, had strongly influenced me in the formation of my concepts of knowledge. "The Tao that can be talked about is not the unchanging Tao", this first line in Tao Te Ching, was/is my motto. In terms of the concept of knowledge, it denies the
objectivity and the absolute Truth. It believes in subjectivity, and the creation of knowledge by the individual human being.

*Here a knot of my teacher self and student self was spliced. In the process of interplay between my teacher knowledge and learner knowledge of teaching from how I was taught, I was reconstructing my teacher’s personal practical knowledge.*

### 4.4.2 Splicing My Teacher Self and My Person Self

From my experience of being a person in a society where individuals were suppressed, at a time when the dictatorship was carried out, I longed to be treated as an equal person with dignity.

In 1964, when I was eleven, in the so-called Movement of Socialist Education, the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, my father was deprived of his right to teach. As the result, I was deprived of my right to study in an academically oriented secondary school, a so-called key school. I was forced to go to a secondary school where I did not belong when I was twelve. From that time on, I became silent, confused, and reluctant to talk, (I did not “screw up” teachers any more). I did not feel that I was treated equally and humanely as a person, but only as a social element in the hierarchical system. From then on, I began to notice more of such inhumanity and inequality in the society. The Cultural Revolution and the people’s commune that I had lived were the extreme phenomena in such evils — cultural and moral evils in Noddings’ terms (1989:120). With the official ending of the Cultural Revolution at the time I was teaching at the teachers’ college, the whole nation was reflecting on this unprecedented evil. I was not an exception. In reflection, I was recovering what had missed, and I was longing to be an equal person.
Now, I could see my learning from this experience in my relating to the students during my first year teaching. In class, a teacher as a person only existed in relation to students. In this teacher-student relationship, I tried to take every student as an equal person, and expected to be treated as a person, too. I didn't play the power game as a condescending "knowledge container and giver"; nor did I want to degrade myself from a person to an adjudicator, adjuster, and adapter of knowledge (Connelly, Elbaz, 1980). I recall starting my teaching with a famous saying of Confucius written on the board: "Among three fellow travelers, there must be my teachers". We were all fellow travelers on the path of life, and all of us were potential teachers. "A teacher is a person" (Hunt, 1987; Rogers, 1983) was included in my understanding of curriculum, of being a teacher, and of teacher-student relationship.

I also trace my self-confidence in teaching "my own way" to my educational experience in the people's commune. When I was fifteen, I was confused by the Cultural Revolution, and plunged into the deepest confusion when Mao forced us to leave our home and go to the country to "be re-educated" by the peasants. Ironically, from the peasants, I learned how to fool with the authorities, how to filter their control in the situations when trust and understanding were built between the "educators" — the peasants — and the "one to be re-educated" — me at that time. From my relationship with Aunt Tian, I learned how to survive and to live. More specifically, from how she related to Uncle Peng, the enemy of the people, I learned how to filter the tight control of the official curriculum in order to improvise my own curriculum and my own life. My own way of being a person, my philosophy and principles in life were established during
the years in the people's commune. And this was where my self-confidence of "teaching my way" rooted.

In my enjoyment of "taking the risk of losing control", I see my caring for my students, and the influence of Taoist philosophy. "As a teacher, I am first caring" (Noddings, 1984, p.176). I took all my students as persons with their own ethical ideals. As I mentioned before, I took them as my fellow travelers on the path of learning. In addition, more than half of my students were older and had experienced the Cultural Revolution as I did. We had common life stories and insights. I did not take them as "It" (Buber, 1975) as I was taught to by my own schooling. Noddings expressed my position precisely by saying: "When a teacher asks a question in class and a student responds, she receives not just the 'response' but the student. What he says matters, whether it is right or wrong, and she probes gently for clarification, interpretation, contribution. She is not seeking the answer but the involvement of the cared-for" (Noddings, 1982, p.176). For me the students' involvement was the first and foremost. I was excited and encouraged by their involvement. And I felt my ethical ideal fulfilled, and cared for.

In the enjoyment of risking loss of control, I saw Taoism again. "A good teacher does not teach", this famous saying from Lao Tzu became part of my teacher's knowledge, and it "meets" Buber when he says "For if the educator of our day has to act consciously he must nevertheless do it 'as though he did not'.... But a hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force" (Buber, in Noddings, 1984, p.177).

From that very class I taught and my colleague visited 20 years ago, I established a strong teacher-student relationship net; and I have gained several life long friends, two of whom I am still in contact with regularly despite the time and the space between us. Both
of them are living and teaching in the same area where my people’s commune was/is. Both are expecting me to go and visit them after my Ph.D. dissertation is defended.

*Spliced here were my teacher self and my person self. It was an interplay between my classroom teaching and life experiences. Principles and beliefs learned from life experiences were spliced with those practised in classroom teaching.*

### 4.4.3 Splicing My Teacher Self in 1977 and My Teacher Self in 1991 Completed

When I started my first teaching job in Canada, my supervisor, dutifully, advised me that I should establish a professional relationship with my students. By professional relationship, she meant to maintain a role of expert and keep a proper distance between myself and learners and to retain objectivity, preserving the right to act as a fair judge and the evaluator. Otherwise, according to her experience, I would make myself very vulnerable and would be drowned into the ocean of the adult ESL students’ daily emergencies because of their lack of language and knowledge about how the system functioned in Canada. In other words, she was suggesting that I should protect myself well against my students, and take a distant stand from them.

Having taught one year’s adult ESL program by the time Jane came to my class, I had learned that what my supervisor had told me was true. Adult ESL students can appear very demanding once you step over the border of “being professional”. On the other hand, I had also realized that I should and had to break through the role for the professional teacher advised by my supervisor. Because I was a new immigrant myself. I understood new immigrants’ hardship and concerns. As a new immigrant teacher, I was in the best position to help them. It was my duty to make my best effort to meet their needs. Because
I believed, as I mentioned in the inquiry into my first year teaching in China, in an equal relationship with students. As a teacher, I was also a person with feelings, like all my students including Jane. I had sympathy and I favored a smile-at-hardship attitude. As a teacher, I was in the same boat with my students.

同舟共濟 (Tong Zhou Gong Ji) — in the same ship, people should help one another in order to cross the river. In the same boat, we shared common interest; and we had a common goal. In the same boat, we should unite to form some solidarity among ourselves. Our common interest was to co-create our curriculum from which the learners could most efficiently learn. Our common goal was to help one another on our journey of becoming better selves. If we did not take it as our common interest to co-create our curriculum, the boat would fall apart. If we did not take it as our common goal to help one another on our journey of becoming better selves, we would never reach the destination. In that case, the teacher, by stuffing her students with official teaching materials in the authority approved method, and protecting her own separate interest, would row in her own boat up towards somewhere on her professional ladder. The students would row in her/their boat(s) towards somewhere or nowhere, stuffed.

We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need.

(Noddings, 1992, p.23)

To stay on the same boat with the other gives the carer the privilege of a better understanding of what the other needs and the history of this need.

Staying on the same boat with my immigrant students, bringing my own experience of immigration into my teacher-student relationship with Jane, as a carer, I was able to see
the ordinarily unseen, to hear the ordinarily unheard and to expect the ordinarily unexpected. It was to pursue an equal relationship. Being equal needed strong self-confidence in the expertise of teaching; it required solid self-respect in the decency of my well-being; it demanded constant improvement in the ability of my learning from the students; it compelled a life-long self-education in reflection, as well as in teaching practice. Being equal with my students was to care, and to be the carer (Noddings, 1992, p.15).

After the knotting of my teacher self and student self, and my teacher self and person self, I have completed here my knot of teacher selves in 1977 and in 1991. This has evolved into an interplay between my teacher self and my immigrant self, a new emerging self who “has to place in question nearly everything that seems unquestionable to the members of the approached group”(Shabatay, 1991, p.140).

4.5 Summary

To untie our first splice—the Connection Knot,
I spliced my smiling self and Jane’s smiling self,
  ---my successful self and my failed self,
  --- my Chinese intellectual self and Canadian nanny self,
  --- my Chinese exile self and Canadian exile self,
  ---Jane’s trusting self and my trustworthy self,
  ---my teacher self and Jane’s person self,
  ---my teacher self in 1991 and teacher self in 1977,
  ---my teacher self and my student self,
  ---my teacher self and person self,
—my teacher self and my immigrant self.

I abstracted “her smile that had stood the test of hardship”,
And “the trustworthiness in my appearance”.
In her smile,
I was completing my immigrant story of learning from hardship.
In my trustworthiness,
She was yearning for a faith that was threatened
By betrayal from a friend and bully from a stranger.
In responding to her need,
I untwisted threads of myself as a teacher,
Who valued an equal relationship with her student.
Bringing my childhood and life experience into my becoming of a teacher,
I was being a person as a teacher in relationship to my student,
I was taking a stand on my student’s boat,
I was caring.
Caring for my student’s well being,
Caring for my own well being.
Chapter Five: To Untie the Friendship Knot

To Untwist the Friend Ropes

The Heart is the Capital of the Mind—
The Mind is a single State—
The Heart and the Mind together make
A single Continent—

(Emily Dickinson)

Female friendship is a thoughtful passion. It manifests a thinking heart.
(Raymond, 1986, p.225)

In this chapter, I shall untie the Friendship Knot and untwist the friend ropes. To untie is to free in order to win autonomy for future splicing; to untwist is to separate in order to gain power for further integrity. According to the Greek philosophical perspective, female friendships are shallow because women do not “appear to be endued [endowed] with firmness of mind to endure the constraint of so hard and durable a ‘knot’” (Montaigne, in Raymond, 1986, p.224). Nevertheless, Jane and I were involved in organizing a Chinese cultural association. During the time, we found out that we shared the wisdom of improvisation accumulated from our life experiences. This commonality was the beginning of our Friendship Knot.

5.1 Splicing My Immigrant Self and Jane’s Immigrant Self

To splice the Friendship Knot, our story-telling was interweaving backward in time in which we began to understand each other backward, at the same time we were living forward together in the Canadian society as Chinese women immigrants. Living forward together, we were permeating each other’s everyday life. We were establishing an
interdependent bond, without which, as Heilbrun (1989) believes, we as women who had moved out the home, would have entered the limbo world of the ‘honorary male’ (p. 89). Without our woman bonding, we would have gone through a more severe identity crisis in our cross-cultural immigration experiences. In our “web of interlocution”, to use Taylor’s (1989) term, the friendship is a crucial interlock of our woman self, as well as a milestone in the development of our relationship.

Our friendship was like a ship that was carrying us through the oceans of immigration. We were both the ship builders and voyagers. We built the ship with our women’s way of relating—caring, sharing, supporting, reciprocating, non-judgmental and open-ended dialoguing; we co-operated the ship with our Chinese immigrants’ solidarity and loyalty—a cooperation of horizontal sisterhood in actual every day life emergency.

This friendship was also like a cradle. It provided us with a safe base to grow, a reliable space to be ourselves in each other’s care, and a home to return to. Only that we created the cradle for ourselves; we took turns to be the carer and the cared-for; nurtured by it, we grew together in it. We were mothers, babies, and sisters simultaneously. We were “friends equal to the task of building a creative and responsible friendship; to the task of two sights-seeing; the task of building a woman-centered existence” (Raymond, 1986, p. 229). During the process, our individual centers of Self were empowered with a heightened awareness of and attachment to one another. As the ship builders and voyagers, as the carers and cared-fors, we upheld an integrity of mind and heart, thought and passion.

As Chinese immigrants, we came together to claim our heritage and to form our solidarity through organizing the Chinese cultural association. The organizing process
took us about a year’s time, during which we began to understand the history of the Chinese immigrants in Canada. We sought advice and help from older Chinese-immigrants, clan leaders and business elite. We invited them to be our directors. We attracted members from outside the circle of Chinese students in universities and Chinese professionals who were better accepted by the Canadian mainstream culture. We organized Chinese immigrants who did not belong to or were not included by any other Canadian institutes or cultural communities. Most of them were isolated and struggling at the very bottom of the society.

In these activities, we learned about our position in the large Canadian mosaic, vertical and horizontal, as well as the politics in the practical registration procedure and government paperwork to legitimize our organization and activities. More important was that Jane and I, in the process of our female friendship, learned about ourselves and each other in the world of men and women.

The world, as Raymond (1986) defines it, is the sphere of public activity where thought becomes concretized and action meaningful. Our friendship provided us a location for existing in the ordinary world with our women’s worldly integrity. At the same time, our friendship offered us a vantage point for seeing beyond the ordinary world to something different —something interwoven with our women’s wisdom. We were inside outsiders who “live in the world with worldly integrity, weaving the strands of feminist wisdom into the texture of the world and paving the way for the entrance of women as women, that is, women on our own terms, into the world.” (Raymond, 1986, p.232)
Working together for our association, as the vice-president, and the public relationship officer and treasurer respectively, I realized that she had very strong people skills. Like me, she was understanding of people and their perspectives. Unlike me, she was very diplomatic with people of various social and educational backgrounds and in a variety of social occasions. I could be diplomatic only with people for whom I cared. She was very assertive and she articulated herself better in speech than in writing. That was, I told her, a skill of debate she had acquired as a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. I didn’t think I was a good speaker although I had been a teacher for many years. I was not persuasive either, since or as a result of that, I believed people had to be ready to understand others and I saw no point in pushing others to accept my ideas. That was, she told me, the Taoist philosophy of achieving by non-efforts. We differentiated ourselves from and identified with one another. Our friendship was like the vehicle for our self-definition in Judith Kegan Gardiner’s (1989) theory of commonality/complementary. Besides providing love and support, we are a sounding board to bounce off and a mirror to step into.

Working together for the association, we found in each other a counselor for ourselves. We had long conversations either on the phone or in person about everything. When we were in difficulties, we would not hesitate to seek each other’s consultation. We analyzed each other’s dreams, as well as realities in an effort to understand for the other and for the self. When we were low, we shed tears on each other’s shoulders. When we were high, we threw laughter at each other’s face. When we discovered goodness, we shared; when we saw evil, we warned each other; when we were confused, we talked and sorted things out in each other’s attention; when we were hurt, we listened to and soothed
one another; when we were lost, we gave each other honest, sometimes unpleasant advice. We admired and respected, and at times, we were jealous. We knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses. We encouraged the strengths, protected the weaknesses, and we learned from them. With caring, supporting, sharing, non-judgmental and open-ended dialoguing, we were building our common ship of friends that would carry us through both good weather and tornadoes in the ocean of immigration. “Men fix things, but women fix each other” (Block and Greenburg, 1985, p.4).

As Chinese immigrants on our ship of women friends, we cooperated as sisters. We came to help each other in our daily life. We became each other’s confidantes with whom we shared stories about our boyfriends, husbands, and children, which nourished us emotionally. And we understood each other’s desires and needs and allowed one another to come into each other’s actual daily life.

In daily life, we were like mothers, babies and sisters. When my father passed away in China, Jane became my listener to share my grief over my father’s death; after my son received his immigration paper and came to Canada, Jane came to care for my son when he was sick and I had to work. When my mother joined us later to help me with the caring of my son, Jane spent hours talking to my mother, who was in culture shock. During those months, I helped her with her immigration application, which is still now not completed even five years later. I went with her to see her social worker for social assistance that she needed after her major operation. I helped her check out arts and crafts stores she was thinking of buying. In emergency, we supported each other like diehards. We permeated each other’s daily life so much that our new immigrants’ lives would have been more difficult had we not met and related to one another in such a way.
We were also two individual human beings with boundaries but no fence between them. We did not defend nor offend; we only respected. We took pleasure to see and treat each other. She claimed it was her happiest day since she came to the Canada when I visited her place with my mother and son. She cooked a banquet with fresh fish for us, and invited other friends to play Majang with my mother. I took her out for a bicycle ride in the park around my residence when she came to visit me and it was comforting for me to see her happy out of Chinatown, in a better residential area, and near nature.

We were both gourmets, but she would not eat Western salad, which was considered "rabbit food" by her (now, toward the end of my thesis writing, she has become worse than a "rabbit": she eats raw vegetables!). We liked good clothes, but I would not wear a miniskirt, which was taken as "too easy" by me. We were both fun-loving, but she would never go on a roller coaster ride, which, for her, was looking for a heart attack. We took interest in Chinese Taoism, but I would not accept it a religion, which was "a fall into blindness" in my understanding. We both took risks, but she would not make prompt decisions before consulting me. We were caring, but I had a more gentle and subtle approach. We were both diplomatic, but she applied her tact universally. We were hard-working, but I was seldom obsessed with anything, which she read in my palm as multi-talented but never perfect in anything. We were both determined, but she had more ethical dilemmas to deal with. And we persevered, but I accepted my limitation more easily, which she also saw in my palm with a weaker career line in it. We were both emotional, except she cried more and I laughed more. We knew how to stand up from where we fell down. We both smiled.
We were amazed at our similarities. For our differences, we admired those we liked in the other; we laughed at those we disliked in the other; we respected those we did not understand in the other, and hoped sooner or later we would understand. We felt safe to be ourselves in each other's presence, and safe to give and take.

We felt safe with one another, because we were women. As women, we shared our way of thinking. We did not criticize, we did not attack; we did not judge, we did not question to trap the other, like in many male games, with the Right Answer in mind. As women, we opened our subjectivity, and shared our realities. We were mothers, daughters, wives, and professionals. We both had taken almost the sole responsibility to raise our children. We both had taken the most obligations to take care of our parents. We both had been wives of men from whom we had learned about gender differences. We were both professionals, although in difference fields, who were very often under the pressure to do the dirty work in man's world, and who had to contribute more to be recognized under the gaze, sometimes, of our male bosses and competitors. We had a lot to share.

We felt safe to be ourselves because we were both Chinese-immigrants. We did not have to say sorry when we were not apologizing; we did not have to say thanks when we were not grateful; we did not have to take any insult for enjoying our best Chinese food---fresh fish with head and eyes; we did not have to feel strange hearing ourselves speaking another language. We did not have to worry about being viewed as abnormal when we were physically close to each other according to the norm of the Chinese culture. We were not invading each other's privacy when talking about money and age. We did not have to give a reason for coming to Canada when we found faults in this society; we did
not have to be ashamed for our ignorance about the Canadian common knowledge. We did not have to be judged or degraded for our Chinese way of behavior by the dominating cultural norms. We did not have to work hard to twist our Chinese way of thinking, which was more holistic oriented, into the English frame which categorized and analyzed more into details. We did not have to be a representative of our own culture; underneath the culture, we recognized each other’s individuality. We felt normal and genuine in each other’s presence; we were off guard and at ease; we were safe and free. We were created into each other’s base and home, as mother and sister, ship and cradle.

We trusted each other because we were both women. As women, we did not have to worry about being looked at as a sex object by the other. We both learned, sometimes the hard way, that it was impossible to be friends with men in Canada. There was always a hint or reminder of us women as objects of desire when a relationship involved a male, which would never lead to friendship. We both had learned to block Canadian men of all cultural origins out of our friendship circle. For us, we were first persons. We needed to be liked as equals, subjects with our own centers of selves. We hated to be “loved” or belittled as “Chinese girls” to serve men for their exotic fantasy. But there was an exception in Jane’s experience of a Chinese male who helped Jane as a noble friend, although a continuing friendship did not find its way to be built.

*Here we were living a spliced story in our shared Chinese women immigrants’ reality.*

*We were living our friendship—an intersubjective relationship.*

5.2 Splicing Our Chinese Trusting Selves and Our Canadian Trusting Selves

When the taxi driver was taking Jane around in town upon her arrival, she did not know if he was lost as he claimed or he did it on purpose to confuse her. In desperation,
she ordered the taxi driver to pull over when she saw a passer-by. He looked Chinese, but offered his help in English. Jane said to him: "Shut up your English. Can't you speak Chinese?" The stranger gave her information, then in Chinese, about the hotel address that had been given by the University's Chinese Student Association. Although the taxi driver dropped her nowhere on campus, the stranger helped her find the hotel. The stranger helped her carry the luggage to the hotel, gave her a tour around Chinatown, and treated her to dinner at a Chinese restaurant. With his help, Jane found a room in an apartment to share with a Chinese family at the University's married students' residence.

This man, from Jane's observation, was a new immigrant himself. He did not speak much English. His family was not in Canada yet. He was learning English and working in Chinese restaurants and factories where English was not required. Jane learned that he was from Shanghai and had studied medicine before he came to Canada. She believed that this man still kept the traditional Chinese morality in two ways. First, when he helped, he did it in the modest Chinese way, trying not to make you feel obligated to him. His help was not the kind of cheap gift wrapped in expensive looking paper with the giver's big name on it that you often get in the Western culture; but a precious present wrapped in a piece of used newspaper, hidden in the corner of your living room chair, left anonymously that people often find in the Chinese custom. Second, he did not help a woman with a hidden agenda for a return from the opposite sex. Jane emphasized the second and told me that from her experience with many males in Canada, this man was really an exception.
She had a few telephone contacts with him after that. As life went on, they lost contact. Two years later, they came across each other in a Chinese restaurant. He was the same, nice, gentle, and generous. He never mentioned, or even hinted at his help to Jane. "Unlike most men, when they help women, they are thinking of what they can get from the women. This man is a real decent person. I am looking for some way to express my gratitude to him. Maybe, next summer, I will invite him for dinner." (Int. J1, 11/23, 93). I don’t know if Jane has ever found an opportunity to resume contact with this man. Or if her head has been high enough above the water of her new immigrant’s life to pursue it. Or she would rather keep the beauty of the story as it is and has tried, on purpose, not to disappoint and hurt herself again.

My understanding of the impossibility, in Canada, for a friendship between opposite sexes was due to our female newcomers’ vulnerable position in the dominant culture, which “remains divided and confused about opposite-sex friendship” (Block and Greenberg. 1985, p.98). And this facet of the culture, somehow, suits something, somewhere, in human conditions universally. And it seemed so easy to be picked up by people with different cultural origins. Even well-established male-female friendship in another cultural context would change as soon as it stepped on the land of Canada. Jane’s male friend, who betrayed her might be a case. One of our guesses about his betrayal was that he was in Canada now. The culture here would interpret his contact with Jane, a female friend, as sexual. In order to fit in the culture and/or to meet the expectation of his family here in the Canadian context, he had to abort the friendship. How many people from this culture would not have, in one or two flashes at least, a suspicion of their
relation in China as sexual since she “invested” in him so much money and they were, “anyway”, opposite sexes?

The trustworthiness between Jane and me had been tested by both Chinese and Canadian social realities. We both had understood the meaning of trustworthiness grown out of life-threatening situations in China; we also shared challenges of different aspects on trust in the Canadian immigrants’ situations.

Jane’s friend, who proved himself trustworthy in the severe Chinese situation betrayed her in Canada, one of those ideal societies in her mind. The democracy, freedom, and human rights in such a society were, supposedly, what those TianAnMen Square hunger-strikers were fighting for and died for. People here were believed to be free to become their best selves. No political suppression, no ideological control, high level of human rights, these all should help bring out the best sides of humanity. Her understanding at that time of what a Western society could do to an individual, and her friend’s inconsistent behavior, crashed. He was inconsistent with himself - that self Jane had known of in the Chinese context. He was in contradiction with what Jane expected him to be in a better society. The crash was beyond Jane’s comprehension.

"A good friend did something wrong to me. But, some people are two faced. Also this friend had\(^{49}\) his reason to do anything\(^{50}\). Hegel said: ‘All things are reasonable.'\(^{51}\) It is the truth. I should go on my way myself." Jane wrote this after two years' immigration experience. She had not found an answer yet. But with her trust and loyalty established in

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\(^{49}\)“must have had” is what Jane means here.

\(^{50}\)Should be read as “whatever he would choose to”.

\(^{51}\)This is a direct translation from the Chinese version of Hegel. An English translation can be “Every existence is logic”.
the Chinese context, she kept her mind open to understanding her friend's behavior and reasons. Her trust and loyalty were learned in the catastrophic years in China when many people had betrayed, and later were found forced and threatened with death to do so. Her trust and loyalty were also enhanced in her two years' Canadian immigration experience when many new immigrants changed, for better or for worse, for shorter or longer periods of time, when their value system was challenged from different angles and their identities were in crisis.

Loyalty and betrayal are opposites. From childhood, we are taught to identify friends with good --- loyalty; enemies with bad --- betrayal. And everybody believes that s/he is always on the good side. A simple world with people under two categories: white and black, good and bad. Loyalty and betrayal were well-defined concepts.

Both Jane and I had lived over thirty years in China when we learned that these fixed concepts were subjective. They were subjective to the vantage point where a person stood, to the change of the political climate and of Mao's mood. When the political climate was manipulated for people to open up themselves and criticize the Party in power, it was loyal to do so. When the political climate changed and the new rules were enforced to enshrine the Party and the government as the supreme good, the criticism

52 Such as what happened in 1956's "Let a hundred flowers bloom together, let the hundred schools of thought contend campaign". Mao launched this campaign and defined it as "A campaign for freer criticism of the cadres and bureaucracy." Intellectuals who owned the form to criticize took it as Western idea of a 'loyal opposition', and did their best to be loyal. See more in footnote 26.

53 Such as the 1957 Anti-rightist Campaign which was targeted at both groups [intellectuals and cadres]. The neat trick of 1956's 'let a hundred flowers bloom together, let the hundred schools of thought contend campaign' trapped many naive people into the Western idea of 'a loyal opposition', which could attack a regime's politics while remaining loyal to the state. Mao estimated in March [1957] that among five millions or so higher and ordinary intellectuals perhaps 1 to 3 percent were hostile to Marxism, while most simply needed education in it. As a result of his 'estimation', the rest of the 1957 Anti-rightist Campaign forced many ex-liberals and minor party members out of public life and purged many thousands of cadres. The erstwhile critics including many writers were harshly attacked, obliged to recant publicly and condemn one
that had been invited and had been considered loyal became the most obvious evidence of betrayal to the Supreme. You would be punished when the sets of rules contradicted one another if you were only loyal to one set. If you were loyal to both sides, you would be punished by your own sense of morality. You betrayed yourself if you had a sense of morality. You never won. Loyalty and betrayal were never white and black, good and bad any more.

Through experience, many people learned the lesson to trust those who were loyal to their own sense of morality even if they had to be punished. And sometimes they had to pay a high price to be loyal to themselves. Some paid with their lives. Jane defined her friend as loyal and trustworthy in that context. She had not been prepared for his change in a different context --- a free, humane, and democratic society, which had been her ideal world. She had believed that people should be better human beings without life-threatening pressures. Her friend should not betray without any social pressure, like that in China, to force him into it. It was her openness to the unknown in the new context that was holding Jane together. Maybe there was some life-threatening social pressure that had forced her friend to do so. Maybe to fit into the culture was one of the life-threatening social pressures. Maybe his wife, who came earlier and was better established, had the economic power over him as one of the life-threatening social pressures. Maybe more.

Her most recent understanding of her friend was that he was confused by himself and ashamed of himself in the new environment. Otherwise, he could have at least informed another. Finally great numbers of people were subjected to a big campaign for 'downward transfer' (xia-fang) to move teachers, students, and city cadres and functionaries into the countryside so that by manual labor among the villagers they would avoid 'separation from the masses' and could also help agricultural production and reduce urban unemployment. (Fairbank, 1983, p.402-404).
Jane of any reason for being absent. "He must have felt terrible and out of character about his betrayal to me that he did not think he could face me." Jane analyzed his behavior in this way. "Did you feel hurt because his words contradicted his deeds?" I asked her. "No, not really. I felt hurt and sad because he contradicted himself as the person I knew in China."(Int. J2, 12/23,93).

Life in China taught us about the dynamic relationship between the opposites of loyalty and betrayal; life in Canada had continued to teach us the same principle but complicated by immigrants’ reality—challenges from cultural difference in gender issues, and from economic difference in class issues.

Chodorow (1978) has said that women need a “network” of female kin to develop their sense of self (p.198). As immigrant women, we were challenged with a re-creation of a sense of self by our new immigrants’ environment of radical changes in culture, gender, economy, class, and power. We needed to seek, more urgently, a salvation of female bond that nurtures a realization and recognition of our strengths. These were the strengths of strangers, who were no longer full members of any culture. These were the strengths that relied solely on strangers -- ourselves -- to realize and recognize in order to improvise a life worth living in our new environment. The ship and cradle that we co-created as our salvation of female bond were our real life -- the life underneath the Friendship Knot, the life that was going forward while the Friendship Knot was splicing backward. Our female bond added happiness to our lives. The “happiness,” as Raymond defines, "is striving for the full use of one’s powers that make one ‘life-glad’” (1986, p.238).
Our Friendship Knot was spliced in the particular way that the Chinese knots are spliced. Such splicing “can strengthen the structure of the knot without having to alter its shape, rendering it tenacious enough for hanging” (Chen, 1996, p.91), for “the constraint of so hard and durable a ‘knot’” (Montaigne). Our Friendship Knot was spliced while a real life was empowering it from underneath with its thoughtful passion, worldly integrity and happiness. That real life was our women friendship.

*During this knotting, our understanding of loyalty and betrayal learned in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and knowledge of trust newly gained from immigration were intersubjectively spliced.*

5.3 Splicing My Gender Self and Jane’s Gender Self

To untie the Friendship Knot, a Chinese woman-immigrant friendship was identified. To untwist the friend ropes, the two Chinese woman-immigrants were too complicated, too ambiguous, and too individualist to be included in this compound noun. As Chinese, we lived in different social groups in the same historical time of China; as women-immigrants, we could not represent any of the opposing poles of masculinity and femininity. To untwist the friend ropes, I shall contextualize the Chinese culture in which we grew up; and identify the ambiguous gender(s) we learned to belong to.

5.3.1 Splicing My Chinese Social Self and Jane’s Chinese Social Self

Jane and I are Chinese contemporaries. We grew up in two different, at times, warring social groups. She politically privileged; I intellectually privileged. We would not have become close friends had we not met many years after the “war” between the two social
classes during the Cultural Revolution, had we not recognized one another at a depth of humanity as new immigrants independent from our former social belongings.

Privileged as we were, neither of us were exempted by our social groups from the modern Chinese social vicissitudes. But both social groups and our families have honored us with women models of ambiguous gender(s).

Jane was born in a Year of Dragon that witnessed the end of "The Elimination of Counter revolutionaries Movement" and "The Land Reform". "The Elimination of Counter revolutionaries Movement" ran from late February 1951 and into 1952. It was a movement of mass arrests and mass executions. I never heard about it from anybody except my grandmother. She used to call it "the Movement of Knocking Clay Pots". "I did not know that a person could be finished that easily. Just like that: a peanut in his clay pot," she named her horror of the sight of those mass executions this way. People's heads were as fragile as clay pots. Shooting people to death was as easy as knocking any abandoned clay pots. Bullets were as cheap as peanuts.

During that reign of terror in the cities, reports could sometimes be seen in the press, such as 293 people shot to death in Shanghai April 30, 32 on May 26, 206 on May 31 (Fairbank, 1983, p.369). I only read about this after I came to Canada in the late 1980's. "The Land Reform" was not to reform land: it was to reform people into different social classes. It happened from 1949 to the end of 1952 in the rural areas. The government sent work teams of communist cadres to the countryside to identify out-and-out enemies. "Class struggle" and "struggle meeting" were everywhere at that time. Hatred was fanned into mob violence in such public trials. Local "rich" people chosen for public denunciation were either killed, expelled, or brought to confess and reform. Urban people
tried to hide themselves far away in rural areas from their "rich" families. This was particularly so when people assumed, judging by the published government category for class enemies, that somebody within the family may have their "clay pots knocked".

My parents were from "rich" and "well-educated" families, who had owned some property before the communist took over, and had had a family history of some academic titles honored through national Imperial Examinations before the nationalists replaced the last feudal dynasty, which ended in 1911. In order to keep themselves away from potential troubles, my parents never went back to their parents who might have been identified as "class enemies". I have never heard my grandparents' names mentioned in the family, never saw them in person.

Jane’s parents came from an opposite social background. The same social events were interpreted very differently from her upbringing. What Fairbank (1983) called “the reign of terror” and my grandmother called “the Movement of Knocking Clay Pots” were understood and lived as opportunities by Jane’s parents. She told me that her parents “took the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the communist revolution, and changed their fate of poverty and ignorance.” (Int. J1, 11/23/93).

Jane’s parents became communists when they were very young. They did not receive much school education before they joined the Communist Revolution during the Anti-Japanese War and later transferred to the army in the internal war against the nationalists. After their victory over the nationalists, the Communists had never stopped launching various social movements. Although, Jane’s father was given a powerful position over many people who had been in a higher position over them in the social hierarchy before,
they needed to settle down to have a life, too. Jane's parents felt this strong need, and hoped that the little baby girl could bring a sense of settlement to them as the swallows brought spring and life to people. They named Jane after a settled swallow.

Jane preferred her Chinese name interpreted as a peaceful swallow because she had been longing for some peace in her life, but she could seldom have it, not in the sense of a physical environment nor "a psychological balanced self", in her words. She always had to fly up and down, in the beautiful sunny spring days and dangerous summer thunderstorms as well. She had her wings broken several times, dropped to the ground. But she always managed to stand up, heal her wounds, and fly back up again. In those ups and downs, she learned that she could never become a peaceful swallow although she had been yearning for peace. Instead, she believed, she was born a dragon, and has been conditioned as a dragon who never gives up when she comes across turbulence unexpectedly, and who constantly looks for challenges. "Looking for troubles" was the word she used. She said: "Look, it's written in my palm - past and future - always ZheTeng, never peace, never smooth" (Int. J1, 11/23/93). She identifies herself with dragon. She sees this character both in her traveled path and in her evolving future.

For me, a swallow connotes life cycle, peace, and home. Every spring, they come back, as long as there is peace. They renovate their nests, and breed new lives.

Little swallow,
Dressed new,
Comes here every spring.
"Where are you from,
Little swallow?"
"Spring here is the most beautiful"
She says.
My brother and I used to sing this lullaby every spring when we saw swallows dashing in and out, when we heard swallows chirping to one another, busying themselves renovating their nests under the eaves of our house. Father would stand in the room, looking out through the window, counting the newly born baby swallows, and identifying the returnees. Grandmother would take out a big bowl of grain, put it under the nests, talking to them, "You are back. It is better here at home. Right? You brought back luck to us. Be peaceful! There is plenty of food here." Mom would announce, "Spring is here earlier this year. I'll have to get ready to study possibly more species of insects." She never forgot her profession - a professor of entomology. In 1967, the spring after the Cultural Revolution began, those swallows did not come back. I did not know if it was a coincidence or a consequence. In my understanding, swallows love peace.

In this knot, we spliced our warring social classes. The splice opened us to each other's worlds and prepared us to step into the other's shoes.

5.3.2 Splicing My Multi Gender Selves

I was born one year after Jane -- the Year of the Snake. That was the only year since the Communist took power when there was no political movement. My parents named me after the word Xin which means pleasant. I was happily growing up on the university campus in the suburbs of a big industrial city in China.

I was brought up in a family where gender was ambiguous. My father was a very gentle person; and my mother straightforward. My mother grew up in boarding school and did not know how to cook. My father had tried to teach her in the early years of their marriage. But he gave up eventually because my mother was not learning anything (I had
learned in my two years’ experience living with my mother in Canada that she was a hopeless cook). My father took care of our psychological and emotional needs and mother took care of our physical health and clothing. Economically, they both contributed to our family, with my father’s salary slightly higher because he was four years senior.

My brother is three years older than I am, and he received full attention from my parents only up until one-and-a-half-years old when my “grandmother” came to live with us. My parents had learned from that one-and-a-half years’ child rearing of my brother what they had done wrong and were trying to correct themselves in bringing me up.

Our grandmother was my father’s childhood wet-nurse, who later had became a sworn sister of my father’s mother. She had always been loyal to my father’s mother, even many years after my father’s mother passed away. She had a poor family background and a mysterious motherhood as all her five sons died. She depended on herself all her life by bringing up my father’s children of other families, my brother and myself.

When I said that my mother took care of our physical health, I did not include cooking or regular housework. My grandmother did the job, and she was paid for that. My mother stayed in her university for week days and only came home for weekends. Our home was on the university campus where my father was teaching. Father was with us physically on a daily basis and our grandmother took care of our everyday needs.

Mother told me, after I became a mother, that she did not like that life. She missed her family too much during the week. She did not encourage me to teach in university either because the competition was endless which gave a woman no break to put her mind into family life. I did not listen to her. I chose to teach in a university and thought I could do

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54 See my Master Thesis.
better with my family life. I thought I had more femininity which would make me a better wife and mother. On the contrary, the femininity did not work to my advantage, it burdened me more. Mother’s wisdom was only appreciated after bad experience.

My separation from my mother was very early—seven days after I was born. From then on, I was in my grandmother’s care. I shared one bed with her till age fifteen when I left for the people’s commune. My mother always encouraged independence and sometimes, naively, to use my father’s word, threw me into danger. I recall one Chinese New Year’s Eve when I was in grade two. She dressed me up and put a pink ribbon on my pony tail, gave me some money, and let me go by myself to the New Year’s Party that was held on the university campus in the evening. I was wandering around in the crowd of the university students, staff, and other children with their parents. I tried some games and spent all my money. I came home with that pink ribbon loose and hanging down. My parents were having an argument: “See, she is back safe and sound,” my mother said. “That’s only luck. It was more dangerous than you could imagine,” my father answered.

They had the same argument over my decision to come to Canada years later. “Did you read the story in the newspaper about Chinese students’ life in foreign countries? They had to work as cheap labour in order to make a living while studying. In Japan, the only job that paid them high was to carry corpses in funeral homes. Are you sure you are going abroad?” This, of course, was from my father. “If you listen to him, you will end up like him, never travel, never move, die in his birthplace. Don’t worry, you will make it. I’m retired and I’ll take care of your son here,” she said. (Unfortunately, she was right.)
My father spent all his life in one city). "Old lady, you are too old to be naive," my father accused my mother of being naive. I am as naive, adventurous, and enthusiastic as my mother, and sometimes while I was/am maturing, I could be cautious like my father.

When I said that my mother took care of our clothing, I only meant that she kept us warm. She never wore make-up and had very little sense of color coordination and she always made fast decisions about clothing. I recall that once she bought a hat for my father and it did not fit. My father thanked her but wanted to exchange it. She became very upset and swore (she swore literally, and she still does) that she would never buy anything for him. But she always did. When I became an adult, I bought, knitted, and sewed clothes for mother which fitted her better, I believed. "Well, I guess that's me. I am a scientist. I don't understand aesthetics," she laughed at this, and told us that one of her best high school friends used to laugh at her choice of colors and clothes like this "My goodness! Look at you, can you ever coordinate your shirt and skirt?" "I am sorry, that's me. Nobody can change that," she replied. My mother never seemed to be bothered by stereotype about women's appearance.

This might come from her own upbringing. She left her home at age of 14 (in the mid 1920's), traveled to my home province on foot with a group of friends and went to a boarding school in the city where the teacher's college I later taught was located. She had no money and the only way for her to stay in school was to pass exams in one of the first three places so that, as a reward, her tuition, room and board would be covered. And she made it this way all the way up to university. Her world was male-dominated and she was educated to be competitive. She was also very beautiful although she did not know how
to dress. She was the “School Flower”, which meant the Beauty Queen of the School. She had both beauty and intelligence that could have made her very powerful. But she never bothered to exercise her power. What she got out of her intelligence and beauty was self-confidence. She could be happy with herself for not being able to cook, to dress nicely, nor to wear make-up. I believe I have mother’s self-confidence and intelligence, although not her beauty.

In our family, my grandmother made decisions and carried them out about what we should eat and wear everyday and what time we should go to school and come home, who we should be friends with and how. My father gave his opinions and suggestions only, and seldom interfered with my grandmother. My father talked to us at dinner table about school, people, and other family issues. He detected our moods easily and was always supportive and considerate. I felt safe and comfortable to talk to my father, especially after I became an adult woman. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, we spent hours and hours chatting about our different and shared experiences during the Cultural Revolution. He was a good listener, rarely judgmental, at times philosophical. I shared more of my personal happiness and frustration with father than with mother. She was too quick with an answer, or a question or a generalization. That left me no room to think and sometimes shut me up. I understood that as her way of thinking gained from her intellectual pursuit of science. I learned from father to be a good listener and to give gentle and open-minded response to others.

Mother usually finished her work before she came home for weekends and spent time with her family. Sometimes, my father had to finish his work on a weekend, and mother would be upset. When she was upset, she would pout and she would say it loud. “That’s
my personality.” She was honest to others and with herself as well. I wish I had learned to be like her earlier. To be in touch with her authentic self and not to bend in front of any gender stereotypes made mother a strong person.

Saturday evenings, we would go out to see movies. On Sundays, we would go shopping together. We would go to department stores, bookstores, toy stores, and candy stores. My brother, very often, would be crying on our way home because he was not satisfied. On those occasions, my parents would say it was their fault to have induced too much desire in my brother for material happiness. They would not do that to me. They believed that desire for material happiness creates greediness and pain. I did not know how they induced desire in my brother for material happiness, I did not know how they corrected themselves in bringing me up, either. I only know that it worked on me.

Indeed, I was always happy with what I had. I only had two dolls in my childhood. One of them could close her eyes. The other one needed me to make clothes. I also had a set of toy tea pot and mugs. That was all my childhood girl toys that I could remember. I played with my brother and neighbors and liked both girl games and boy games. Sometimes, mother dressed me like a boy with hand-downs from brother so that I would not run after good clothes, appearance and vanity in my life. One thing I remember was that when I played games with my brother, he had to win even though I was in boy’s clothes. If I won, he would punch me. When that happened, my grandmother would protect me and give him a good lesson, and sometimes beat him in order to teach him how it felt to be punched. That was in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s in China, where physical punishment was/is widely applied as “physical education”, for a direct translation, instead of “physical abuse” in the Canadian interpretation.
Both mother and grandmother believed in physical punishment. And they practised this several times, as I could recall, on my brother. When my brother was too big for them to handle, they did it together. Once they even broke a ruler that they used to spank my brother. I have not been spanked by them. Later in my adulthood, when mother was not happy with me, she would admit that she did not educate me well because she never beat me. I did/do not know why I was not educated in that way. Maybe I could get their message only by observation. Maybe, I confessed soon enough. Maybe, I was more obedient, behaved more properly, or I was more sneaky. Maybe they were more protective of me because I was younger and I was a female.

Both my brother and I were good students academically. My parents were proud of us. But they never got involved directly. They never came to our shows, art performances, sports games, math competitions, English competitions, etc. But I never felt discouraged. They always told us it was our fault if we got into trouble with other children. That, I identified later, is Confucius’ philosophy, and I hated it. I decided never to bring this kind of problem home and I would solve them by myself, either by compromising or by force. I did many mischievous and daring tricks in my childhood that I never told my parents. When I happened to mention them to my son in my mother’s presence, she would raise her eyebrows and say: “You were not as good as you pretended to be.”

In my childhood, I could not see much gender difference between my father, mother, and grandmother. All three of them had femininity, masculinity, and something in between. All three of them were polymorphous individuals whom I respected and liked and loved. I could do whatever my brother could and I never felt inferior or oppressed
because of my sex. I was a pleasant child as my parents wished. I only began to see injustice and inequality between genders after I went to the commune.

In this knotting, I spliced my gender self and the gender models in my upbringing. The interplay between my gender self and each of my family members has brought me to an understanding of my polymorphous self.

5.3.3 Splicing Jane’s Multi Gender Selves

In Jane’s family, her father used to be the boss. He did not talk much, but what he said counted. As the only daughter, Jane was her father’s favorite and was spoiled, to use her own words, since childhood. Her father’s prestige in the air force allowed the family to have a government paid detached two story house, body guards, a chief, and a driver. She did not have to walk in line as I did to and from school. She could have a ride in her father’s car. The driver let her play with the steering wheel when she was being taken to elementary school; the chef needed to ask her opinion for their menu. Her three brothers did not receive much attention from her parents. She was under the spotlight all the time. She had several health problems when she was a child and that obtained for her more power from the parents.

Unlike most Chinese in our time, Jane’s life path was not changed when the Cultural Revolution hit the nation. Because of her father’s powerful position in the communist air force, she became a Red Guard, looted others’ homes, put up Big Character Posters criticizing “enemies of the people”, learned to win all oral debates against others, using Mao’s quotations accurately and wittily. Later, when thousands of young people were dumped in the countryside and left toiling in the fields, she was sent up to continue her
education in the Air Force College of China, studying aeronautical meteorology. She was trained to be an outstanding airport meteorologist. On July 9, 1971, she was chosen to be the airport meteorologist for Henry Kissinger, the then Secretary General of the United States on his secret visit to Beijing. During this visit, President Nixon's first visit to China was announced.

"It was very secret and exciting," she said. "I was told that an important and glorious task was given to me. I was going to provide statistics for the airport weather to direct an important airplane into the military airport where I was working. I was not allowed to look at the airplane though. But when the time came, I simply could not control myself. I peeked. The first striking thing I noticed was that the airplane had no sign of our army on it. Second, a strange human being came out of it. Not in our army uniform, tall, in western suit that I saw in some class enemies' house when we went to erase the Four Evils. I also saw that my father and other important officials from the air force went to greet him, and walked him away. That night, I asked my father about that strange person. 'Did you already see everything? Well, this is Mr. Kissinger. His visit to Beijing was known to only twenty people in China. Now, you are the twenty-first. Keep it a secret. This is the secret of the nation." (Int. 8,6/22,95)

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55Four Evils were translated as Four Olds by Western historians such as John King Fairbank (1983). It referred to old ideology, thought, habits, and customs, according to Fairbank's brief explanation. In Jane's and my personal experiences, Four Olds meant everything that did not have a signature of Maoism. For example, as a Red Guard, Jane destroyed people's college diploma when she went to ransack a class enemy's house as "old ideology" that was obtained before the communist regime, because no portrait of Chairman Mao was in it. As a Black Bastard, I witnessed Red Guards taking away my mother's only two pairs of western high heel shoes, traditional Chinese costume Qi Pao, a piece of embroidered silk that my mother had bought for my birthday, a pack of coins my mother had kept as a memory from her first month salary after university graduation found at the corner of one of our chests, piles of books, magazines, academic journals, and photographs of my parents taken before the communist government. Four Olds meant Four Evils that were being erased from our lives.
About the same time, Jane’s family became known as good friends of Lin Biao - the vice-chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, who was Mao's appointed successor. And it was believed among the family friends that Jane would be the fiancee of Lin’s son - Lin LiGuo.

"After you reach a peak, then what, you have to go down," she laughed and became philosophical when she started to tell me her story of the first major interruption in her life.

The airplane crash incident which happened on September 13, 1971 was considered a failure of the conspiracy of Lin Biao to usurp the supreme Party leadership and state power. It was said that the successor of Mao became desperate for Mao’s death. He used the power he was given to organize a coup d’etat. The air force was the base for it. Whether or not this was true, Jane was arrested too, because she was the daughter of someone who had been a colleague of Lin Biao and his son. That year, she was nineteen. Life was not smiling at her any more.

She had seen Lin’s son on one of the family social occasions his mother used to organize. Jane started to tell me that part of the story later in our relationship. That became her major “involvement” in Lin’s coup d’etat. Her journal entry on that day was used as an evidence against her, and she was forced to confess her “crime”.

Meanwhile, Mao’s document on Lin Biao’s counter-revolutionary incident was condemning that Lin’s wife used her power position to launch a nationwide search for concubines and fiancee for the son. Although Jane was not officially on the list of their selected concubines and a fiancee, she was considered the real fiancee of Lin’s son within her social circle because of the known close relationship between the two families. This
rumor put Jane in an awkward situation which was doubly shameful for her dignity as a woman. "What I want to tell the world is that I am not a seductive woman." (Int. J2. 12/12,93).

He was a handsome young man, Jane told me. Jane saw the sparks in his eyes when he saw her. She had taken the initiative to walk across the huge room to get some fruit for herself where every other young person was scared and stayed stiff. That's all she could remember of how she was "chosen". And the story stopped because there was no more personal contact between the two. And obviously, the fiance did not take Jane too seriously. Otherwise he would have taken Jane with him when he took off. Jane would have died in the same airplane crash, and the story would have ended there. Jane, in her confinement in later years, even imagined an ending like that. "That would have made life much easier for me," she commented. (Int. J2, 12/13,93).

The story was picked up by the government as her involvement with Lin’s conspiracy, and caused her more hardship in prison. She never mentioned what she meant by hardship. And I did not ask her until very late in our research when she told me about Xiao Gong, the prisoner next door, and her singing on New Years’ Eve.

Many Chinese emperors in history were notorious womanizers. The story of the imperial concubine Yang Yu Huan has been told in numerous versions over a thousand years. The major plots remain the same. The emperor chose Yang Yu Huan - a beautiful concubine out of three thousand concubines confined in the palace for his service and made her very important. Because of her, the emperor ignored his work of governing the

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56 In China, the public is more willing to believe rumors of scandal and gossip than what it is told by the official government sanctioned press and media.
57 See Chapter Two.
country properly. Uprisings exploded and drove the emperor and his troops out of the
palace and their capital city Chang An, now Xi An. While fleeing, the whole army
stopped and threatened the emperor with rebellion if he did not kill Yang Yu Huan. The
woman was the evil that caused the fall of the kingdom. She was ordered by the emperor -
her lover - honorably, the story says, to hang herself.

Jane did not receive the honor to hang herself; Lin Li Guo did not become an emperor,
either. Jane became the victim of a loser in a power struggle within the government.

If Jane were a male, she would never have been in such troubles. Men in her social
class in China would have become either extremely powerful or a complete failure
depending on the political climate and the family’s political power. A man in that social
class, had the power to choose a fiancee and many concubines, as the official document
and the public opinion said. As a woman, her family’s political power, had attached her to
another potential political giant. If Lin Biao and the family had overthrown Mao, Jane
would have become an important political pawn for the two political allies. She would
never have had a chance to make her own decision. But Lin Biao and the family failed.
Their failure did not liberate Jane from that political bondage. On the contrary, she was
forced into a deeper trouble. She had to carry this “shame” all her life of being a seductive
woman, a failure, and a laughing stock. Her woman’s fate was worse than that of the
classic Yang Yu Huan, who at least enjoyed some luxury and power in the palace. Jane
did not even see her fiance for a second time. Yang Yu Huan did not have to face her
“shame” too long, she was honored by death. Jane had to live with the shame for the rest
of her life. The worst was that as in all brutal political power battles, the loser was
considered wrong. Jane was chosen by the wrong side. She was logically wrong too. Who
would bother to speak for a little girl who was on the wrong side? Who would not take her as a dead chess piece that belonged to the past? As a women in her social class, she was lesser, somebody who belonged to the second sex, although not in her family.

_Spliced here were Jane's gender self and the gender models in her upbringing; knotted were her gender self created at home and her gender self molded by the social class to which she belonged._

5.3.4 Splicing My Home-made Gender Self and Commune-made Gender Self

When Jane was having her time of glory directing the landing Mr. Kissinger's airplane, I was living a deprived life in the people's commune. And my gender education started there by observing the inequality and unfairness that female commune members had to endure. Their lives were like those I had read or heard of, through the Communists' propaganda, in the bad old days before the Communist government came to power. The only difference was that women were working out of home, side by side with men in the fields. Back home, the stories were not changed, and they were paid 20 percent less from the work they shared outside with men.

As an unmarried girl, I was not considered a woman yet in the commune although I was an adult in my later years there. The unmarried female members in the commune were not allowed any autonomy. They had to slave to qualify for their womanhood with a
hope of some independence and power on marriage. My friendship with unmarried girls in the commune launched my journey on gender education.

A wedding was the watershed for females between their girlhood and womanhood. Good families married their daughters out late. Within the production team, 22 years old was the oldest to be married during the years I was there. Peng ErJie was married at the age of 22. Her father was a tailor who could bring some cash into the family. She was the only daughter and had received seven or eight years’ school education. She invited my cousin and me to be her bridesmaids. With a whole gang of people from her own family and baskets of her dowry carried on a pole by a team of over a dozen, I walked her to the bridegroom's family. She was weeping the whole day. And right the next day, instead of in three days according to the custom there, she came back with us to her "Niang Ja" - "mom’s home" --- the local term for woman's natal family.

I remember seeing another girl friend of mine getting married. Zhao Hong-ju was considered well-educated since she had graduated from an elementary school. She had expected a happy marriage and a luxurious wedding with a man in our team who was handsome and had served in the army, which would have given him lifelong honor, a big amount of money, and the privilege to have access to life outside of the mountains. At the dinner party of her wedding, she was happy and excited.

The next day, after the first night with the man, she changed. "You girls are so lucky and precious," she told me when I dropped by at break time the next day. "Come on, what do you mean?" I was puzzled. "You don't know how lucky to be a girl like you. I am

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58 See Chapter Three.
a woman now overnight. I wish I am a girl again. You girls smell fragrant and worthy. Stay in your girlhood as long as you can."

The mysterious womanhood did not look too rosy for me, although I thought my mother was happy with her womanhood. Once unmarried girls crossed the threshold of wedding, their lives became as opaque as cocoons for me. Weddings had changed most of my girlfriends from butterflies into caterpillars. Now when they looked back, girlhood was “fragrant” and “precious”. Yes, they did win some freedom by crossing that threshold, such as swearing. It was acceptable for them to swear. And some of them would not miss any chance to swear.

I understood their swearing as the only outlet for the oppression. And this outlet became an entertainment center for the commune members in their boring life. In the fields, people would bet on newly married women to compete for the boldest swearing. The winner would get good applause from the audience. Wang Cong-Yu, a newly married woman, once took the challenge and tore off all her clothes in the middle of the field, swearing. The next day, she came to the field with a huge bump on her forehead and bruises on her neck and arms. Her husband beat her for swearing and being naked in the field.

The mysterious women’s lives aroused my sympathy. Their lives were not what I had expected. And my expectation was built on both my family and school curriculum and the various media controlled by the government. I had a couple of women friends in the commune, as I mentioned in Chapter Three. From them, I unlearned more elements of my previous gender curriculum.
The Communist government had promoted, by the highly centralized and censored media, their policy of achieving a liberation for the Chinese women. I had been made to believe that the Communists liberated women from their home and provided women, such as my mother, with an equal opportunity for schooling and employment. The reality for the commune members, who were 80 percent of the population, was that it was not true. It was true that women were allowed or forced to work side by side with men in the fields. They had to work the same amount of time, but they were paid 20% less. And that was legitimized as "Equal Pay for Equal Work", because women were considered "weaker labour". The Communist propaganda encouraged women to go to school. But few would be willing to give up the contribution a daughter could make to the housework and baby sitting. Few could afford not to make the best use of a daughter's cheap labour before she was married out as the water poured out of the door never to be claimed back. The social system did not encourage women to go to school. The liberation of women from housework was a lie. Women in the people's commune still had to take the full responsibility of housework on top of their “liberated work” outside of household. They were doubly exploited.

But these un/learning experiences were not complete. Since I had not seen such exploitation in my family, I assumed it to be a class issue. I never imagined that I would allow such exploitation to happen to myself. I was determined that I would never marry anybody from that social class if I had to stay there all my life. I made sure to establish myself well before even thinking of a marriage. Unfortunately, my experience had proven that I had been wrong. I did not escape motherhood as a cross-class, cross-culture social institution (Rich, 1986).
My gender self learned from my upbringing and women's position in the commune were spliced in this knotting. My home-made gender self provided me a perspective to see the unfairness and cruelty of women's position in the commune, which in turn, has enhanced my home-made polymorphous self.

5.3.5 Splicing My Gender Self and My Mothering Self

Motherhood trapped me as soon as I was pregnant. Like Adrienne Rich (1986), I was also allergic to pregnancy. Two days before the baby was born, I broke out in a rash. Because of a fear of the horrible hospital staff's attitude toward patients, I stayed home. A friend of mine who was a medical student happened to visit me and told me it looked like my body was allergic to some chemicals that a maturing fetus was producing. I was not diagnosed but only tried to endure and wait. I walked from the sixth floor down (there was no elevator) in the intervals of my contraction pains, which were happening every two minutes, in order to get to a vehicle. It was about 7:30 in the morning when I was lying on the bed in the delivery room ready to let the baby come. Suddenly the room became empty and quiet. I was left there alone with all kinds of tubes, pains, blood, and horror. By 8 o'clock when the obstetrician came, I figured out that they were changing the shifts. As soon as she walked in, she started to ask me about how big my baby was supposed to be so that she would know how much she should cut. I was blamed as an ignorant mother when I told her I did not know. She accused me of not being able to push the fetus out. Eventually, she found out that I had already passed the time of the contraction and the fetus was in danger unless she induced it. On hearing that, I closed my eyes, pushed desperately, and my baby came out. The nurses were
screaming at a birthmark on my baby. I asked where the birthmark was. The obstetrician yelled at me “It’s none of your business! Your job now is to push out the placenta!”

This happened in mid-1980’s in an internationally recognized hospital in China. The inhumane medical laboratory of the masculine intellectual system (Rich, 1986, p.81) was inadequate to include the mother as a whole person with feelings, emotions, and subjectivity. Thanks to my mother who had prepared me for the inhumanity in hospitals by her stories of how my brother and I were born, I minimized my hospitalization before and after my son was born. And thanks to China’s one-child-one-family policy, I have only one son.

I began to really understand the feelings of being suppressed and exploited at home on a daily base after the baby was born. Mother told me the first day when my son was born that "You are a mother now, and you will be a mother all your life". I realized that mothering was a life time commitment, but I did not know that fathers had choices.

I went back to teach about three months after the baby was born. Teaching English in a university, I was at the same time mothering and researching. I had a full-time live-in baby-sitter to help while I was away in the university. But that was only one shift. My second shift was for academic development - researching and translating in conjunction with listening to my baby-sitter’s complaints, playing with the child, taking him to doctor appointments, shopping for groceries, caring for the "ignored" husband, etc., in order to keep the household going. My third shift was to take care of the baby overnight.

We were not allowed to install a heating system in our residence since the government was controlling electricity for industrial use. In winter, the temperatures inside and outside were the same. We did not have the modern diapers that Canadians have now.
The cloth we used for diapers could not keep the baby dry for a whole night. What I had to do was to sleep beside the baby and discipline myself to wake up before the baby wet the bed. If the baby wet the layers of blankets, both of us would be freezing cold and a doctor would be needed the next day. I learned to sleep with my hand underneath the baby's blanket. As soon as the baby moved a little, which was a signal, usually of discharging his urine, I would jump up, turn on the light, and carry him to pass into a toilet pan that was left beside the bed. Very often the diapers would be wet and my job was to take out dry clean diapers that had been warmed up by my body heat within my blanket and change the baby before his startled cries in the small hours led to complaints from neighbors the next day. After all these hassles, it was hard for me to go back to sleep although that was not the case for the baby. Working around the clock was no exaggeration. It was my experience. And many other working mothers in China lived/live similar experiences, too.

The reward for that work was my academic achievement as the assistant director of the department in the university, several research publications and a healthy baby son. The by-product was betrayal from the father of my son. This added some spice to my sleepless nights. After the hassle of bed wetting I had to make a decision that should benefit both my son and myself.

As a Chinese woman of my time, I had the rosy title of a liberated women. I was supposed to be politically and financially equal with men. But I had to make double efforts and work three shifts in order to be "equally" respected. Does that reflect the deep roots of the Confucius classification of 男尊女卑 (Nan Zun Nu Bei) - men superior to women? My equal salary did not gain me an equal share of family responsibility. My
successful career shone on my husband's face as if he had good enough taste to choose the Chinese vase like me for display. He also took all the credit for my baby's healthy growth as if the seed he planted would automatically grow into a boy who was an extension of his pride. I concluded that a respectful and equal position would never be given by them. We had to fight for it if we did not want to give up.

It took me 3 years of pain on top of all the three-shift work to made the decision, torn between the past and a future, the tradition and an independent person with some dignity, and between the reality and my idealist understanding about relationship with my parents' as a model.

Motherhood had taught me, as I discussed in my Master's thesis, that it was a social institution built historically by and for the fathers. In addition to that, mothering taught/teaches me to appreciate more both my mother and father, my grandmother and my exceptional upbringing. Mothering had told me that a woman had to learn to fight for equality. Very few men would be like my father who did not enforce his patriarchal position in our family. Very few women would be like my mother who did not take an inferior position in our family dynamic. Very few women would be like my grandmother who accepted regular payment for her child-caring and house work and at the same time was emotionally devoted and loyal to our family. All three of them had/have balanced female and male in them. With this exceptional family relationship in my education, I found myself stubbornly seeking a balancing of such ambiguous genders in myself as well as a similar family dynamic. Thank you Mom, Dad, and Grandma for giving me the model and hope!
This knotting spliced my mothering self and my polymorphous self. My home-made polymorphous self did not save me from the motherhood institution. But the interplay between the two has empowered me and made me a stronger person with multi genders.

5.3.6 Splicing Jane’s Mother Self and Daughter Self

Jane has had a stronger bond with her mother since she came to Canada, even though the formality of the relationship changed because her reality in Canada was foreign to her mother and was difficult for the mother to understand. The physical communication was not there any more, and the verbal communication was becoming less and less. However, her mother’s physical absence from her immigrant’s life and her reflective thinking about the mother-daughter relationship had brought her into a more profound understanding and relationship with her mother.

She missed her mother most when she experienced her most difficult times in Canada. Every evening at home, she would pour out her day’s happiness, frustration, and problems to her mother. Her mother was a supportive and sympathetic listener. It was the process of her talking and her mother’s listening that helped Jane sort things out in her mind. It was her mother’s patient ears that provided her with the comfort of home. It was the feeling of having a home that supported her in the years when she was fighting the Chinese system to re-establish her home, to get her father out of prison and her mother back to Beijing officially, and when she was establishing her own career from a disadvantageous re-starting point.

She described her mother as "one of the most tenacious women" although she looked
frail, and "takes tiny, shuffling steps as she holds onto her cane." "When she smiles, her mouth is a little crooked because her face nerve was damaged. And her voice is feeble. However, her spirit is very strong, and she never gives up" (Jauto3, 1994). Jane's mother was only twelve when she joined the army to fight against the Japanese invasion during World War II. She became a Communist Party member, and later was well-known in the province as a young woman leader in the Women's Anti-Japanese and Save China Federation. After the Communist Party took over the country in 1949, her mother was demobilized from the army, and worked as a government official. In 1971, she was arrested and sent to jail. After Mao's death in 1976, she was forced to a labour farm. Her health had been deteriorating due to the physical and psychological hardships during those years. She had anemia, and later a cerebral tumor that constricted her nerve system.

Jane's mother, now in her 70's and in limited health, remained a care-giver. She took good care of herself so that she would not need others to care for her. She exercised every morning, and enjoyed knitting work. Jane pointed out to me a green-and-white dress she wore, and told me it was designed by herself and knitted by her mother. "She never stops knitting. She believes it is a good exercise for her nerve system and it produces good things for us children and other family members. For me, it means more. I am wearing my mother's love" (Jint8, 1993). She had tears in her eyes when she said this.

Her mother was also taking care of Jane's son. It was not an easy job. The generation gap was a major obstacle. In addition to that, Jane brought up her son in a very liberated way. She always encouraged creativity in her son's education. And she believed that her own "creative talent was thwarted", in her words, by the Chinese educational system and her parents' philosophy in raising her.
In this knotting, Jane and her mother were spliced. An independent and caring mother has brought up a daughter with strengths that represent both male and female values.

5.3.7 Splicing Jane’s Daughter Self and Mothering Self

Jane’s parents had turned down three offers for her to study performance arts before the Cultural Revolution, and believed their daughter should pursue a career in science and technology so that she could be useful to society. As a result, she studied aeronautical meteorology. Although she did a very good job in the field, she resented missing opportunities in more creative careers like performance arts. And she did not want her son to miss such opportunities.

From a very early age, her son was encouraged in various creative activities by Jane. "He was only one and a half years old when I found him drawing circles. He drew four circles with the biggest one on top of the rest, and he told me that he was drawing a car. I was surprised by his imaginative power, and encouraged him to carry on," (Int. J8). Jane started to enroll her son in Chinese painting classes when he was only five. Every weekend, she took him by bus to study Chinese painting even if it was snowing. Later, she found her son interested and talented in music and performing arts. She encouraged him, helped him, familiarized herself with the information and knowledge needed, and even used her connections to involve him in the performing arts. He was doing very well
before she left China. He was a lead singer in a rock-and-roll band and his paintings were highly appreciated by some Chinese, Japanese, and German artists.

Jane's husband was less adventurous than Jane. She had felt for a long time before she left China that she had to push her husband for any meaningful fulfillment. She found herself taking up the traditional man's role in the relationship. She was proud of herself, and needed to feel proud of her husband. But after so many years' encouragement, and practical help, she felt exhausted by the heavy burden, and was disappointed at her husband's "contentment with the present", to use her words. And she believed this aspect of her husband wouldn't make him a good model for the son. Jane was brought up as a male, and her expectation for her husband was more than sharing house work. She wanted him to shine like a man. She wanted him to be successful in the fierce competition of the male-dominated social hierarchy. Maybe she had her father as a male model for her husband. And she needed her husband to be a good male model for her son. She was trapped by her own myth of a male, and by the institution of motherhood as well.

After she left China, she had nobody to count on for her son's education. Her mother did take care of the boy. But the boy could not communicate with the grandmother. Her husband was very happy with what his son was like, and would not make any effort to encourage or help the boy in his adventure of creativity. And Jane was worried that the Chinese educational system would kill her son's creativity. So the task fell on her again, but this time by remote control. International phone calls were too expensive. Exchanges of letters and tape recordings were more practical. But as time went on, such exchanges became less and less frequent, and the emotional disturbance every time she received a letter or a tape from her son became worse and worse. He was still with his rock band,
and was composing now. But he was sent to a boarding school and was moving further and further away from the family influence, including Jane. "There was something in his letter and tape that bothered me," Jane said. "It seemed that he was becoming more and more like his father. He seemed content with himself. He did not seem to be willing to do his best to explore his creativity. He was only fifteen now," (Jint12, 1996) Jane sighed.

Jane had been trying her very best to bring her son over. But she had not obtained a landing paper for herself after six years' struggle in Canada.

Jane was brought up as a male and her father sounded like a traditional father. If there was cross-sex identification, her masculinity must be from him. But her mother was not a traditional housewife, not a pure object to love (Benjamin, 1995). She worked outside the house, too. She could also be a subject who could bring the excitement of the outside world to Jane's development as traditional fathers did. The unfair imprisonment had brought her to the very bottom of a woman's position after the family's from their political prestige. But she did not take her woman's fate passively. She had a masculine propensity in her pursuit of career, relationship, and in seeking an ideal male model for her son. But she acknowledged her feminine propensity in her choice of creative arts, in her encouragement to develop her son's talent in arts, in her deeper bond toward her mother, and in her caring, sharing, reciprocating relationship with me.

In addition to the entrapment motherhood had brought us, it gave us a sense of mission. Calls from the baby seemed like calls from the mother's deep self — the one that was blurred away in the dusts of facts, rules, roles, and reality. The physical and biological endurance that mothers gain from pregnancy is transformed into energy to take care of the babies, and themselves as well. We both learned that it was the mother that
needed the most care psychologically and physically. The baby still had a whole life to live. The mother had only half left. Out of the half, parts belonged to the children, parts to the father, parts to the family. Only the last small piece was left for herself. Maybe none at all. A mother’s feeling of urgency was my motivation to strive after a new self. Jane was also making the best use of her motherhood motivation. She was re-creating herself as a successful career woman in arts, she was setting a model for her son — a model of polymorphous genders.

*Here Jane’s daughter self was spliced with her mothering self. The interplay was between what she learned about mothering from being a daughter and how she mothered her son. The interplay brought forth a mother who transcended the Confucian rules for sons and daughters and was creating a polymorphous son.*

5.3.8 Splicing Our *Yin* Selves and *Yang* Selves

In the Confucian metaphysical worldview, women were identified with all that was *yin*: dark, negative, empty, ill-omened, etc. The cosmic inferiority of women was materialized in the social world by the notoriously widespread practice of female infanticide, footbinding, the marrying off of daughters at an early age to the point of selling them into other families at infancy, the drudge housework that was a woman’s burden, woman’s lack of education, and the high rate of suicide among Chinese women. This Confucian worldview was so deep in the Chinese culture that, even during my years in the people’s commune when women were encouraged to work out of the home to gain some independence, women’s inferiority was seen in the very fabric of their daily lives;
exploitation of women in motherhood was rampant not only in the commune but also in my life and Jane’s.

But Confucianism is not the only worldview in the Chinese culture. In the Taoist metaphysical worldview, yang does not exist without yin, and vice versa. The best stays in the balancing movement. The cosmic equality between women and men was concretized in the Chinese tradition of the warrior women, such as Hua Mu Lan, who took her father’s place in battles, and fought gloriously and returned alive from war; Yang’s Women Generals in Song Dynasty; women armies during the peasant revolt of 1851-64 known as the Taiping Revolution; Women’s National Army, the Women’s Murder Squad fighting for the Republican cause in the early 1900s; Women’s Anti-Japanese and Save China Federation, for which Jane’s mother was a leader; and Women’s Red Army fighting for the Communist against Japanese invasion during the Second World War.

The Taoist cosmic worldview could be also seen in the Chinese marriage resisters in Guang Dong region between early 1800s to early 1900s; in Qiu Jin, the great female poet, who placed herself at the end of the long line of women warriors in the tradition. Qiu Jin was arrested and beheaded, in 1907, by the Manchu government, the puppet government of Japanese invaders. But her poetry became a source of inspiration to many women came after her. The Taoist cosmic worldview is also reflected in Guan Yin — the Taoist Goddess of Mercy and Wisdom, who is a nun and whose value is independent from all other gods in the Taoist religion.

Jane and I, our mothers and my grandmother are all inheritors of the Chinese culture with both Confucianism and Taoism as its philosophical foundations. But our era is one
of women liberation and equality. We were privileged to have mothers and grandmother of ambiguous gender(s). My grandmother was married and had children. But like those marriage resisters in Guang Dong, she worked all her life to be independent and supported herself and her family when needed. Jane’s mother was one of those women warriors during the Second World War. My mother was one of the pioneer women intellectuals who rebelled against the fate of dependence on marriage and men. Our ambiguous gender selves grew out of our particular families and social cultural environment. Taoist Yin in Yang and Yang in Yin are reflected in our polymorphous genders.

If sex and gender as we know them are oriented to the pull of opposing poles, then these poles are not masculinity and femininity. Rather, gender dimorphism itself represents only one pole — its other pole is the polymorphism of all individuals.

Benjamin, 1995, p.79)

As polymorphous individuals, Jane and I connected at our shared facets of femininity.

As Chinese immigrants in a new culture, we related to one another in a horizontal sisterhood, which added, instead of replaced or excluded, to our multi-faceted gender selves.

Spliced here were our Yin selves and Yang selves. Created during the knotting were our inclusive multi-faceted gender selves.

5.4 Summary

For future splicing,
I untied the Friendship Knot.
To untie the Friendship Knot,
I spliced my immigrant self and Jane’s immigrant self,

---our Chinese trusting selves and our Canadian trusting selves,

---my gender self and Jane’s gender self,
—my Chinese social self and Jane’s Chinese social self,
—my multi gender selves,
—Jane’s multi gender selves,
—my home-made gender self and commune-made gender self,
—my gender self and my mother self,
—Jane’s mother self and daughter self,
—Jane’s daughter self and mothering self,
—our Yin selves and Yang selves

To untie the Friendship Knot

— an important milestone in our relationship and identities,

Our life living forward was traced
While our stories were splicing backward.

Our friendship was recognized

as a Chinese women immigrant friendship
—A ship that we co-built, co-operated,
—A cradle in which we cared for and were cared for,
—A relation whose trustworthiness has met
the challenge of our cross-cultural moral experiences
—A women friendship characterized with
thoughtful passion, worldly integrity and happiness.

For further integrity,
I untwisted the friend ropes.
To untwist the friends
— the two Chinese women,

Our upbringings were contextualized
from different social classes and families
in the particular historical time of China;

Our genders were identified
as ambiguous and polymorphous,
learned from our individual families and their dynamics;

Our genders were identified "with a mother
who is outside as well as inside,
who can represent subjectivity just as well as the father";\(^{59}\)

Our genders were identified
in our respective social experiences,
—my observation of inequality between genders in the commune,
—her life of injustice as a female in the prison;
in motherhood as social institution,
—my three shift work as a career mother,
—her remote control mothering
    in addition to her struggles during immigration;

Our genders were identified with
the traditional Chinese women warriors, marriage resisters, poet,
and the Taoist goddess,
the Taoist *Yin in Yang* and *Yang in Yin*.

Relating to one another as women,
We connected and enhanced
our shared feminine facets,
And enriched our plural gender identifications.

Our Friendship was endowed with firmness
of mind and heart
of worldly integrity and happiness
to endure the constraint of so hard and durable a knot.

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\(^{59}\) Benjamin, 1995, p.126.
Chapter Six: To Dialogue

...ethics is dialogue.

(Gadamer, in Miller, 1996, p.131)

This chapter is a reflection on the ethics of how my stories evolved to be what they are. My ethics in the methodology of this work lies in the notion of dialogue—dialogue between experience and storytelling; between gathering stories and using stories; between my storytelling and others'; between my autobiographical writing and biographical writing; between my interpretation of my storytelling and of others'; between my interpretation and others'; and between my solitude in writing and interaction with other people around me, including authors of books I read.

To trace the notion of dialogue could lead us, as far back as Plato in the Western culture and to Lao Tzu in the Chinese culture. I am connected more deeply with Lao Tzu because I was born and grew up in the Chinese culture. My understanding has been formed, during the first 35 years of my life, in the interaction with the community where Taoism and its descendents grew. Taoism has seeped deeply into my blood and into every fabric of my growth. By saying so, I am not discrediting, nor excluding my more recent interaction, in a Western culture, with my curriculum on ethics in the research of narrative and auto/biographical methods. I am simply structuring this chapter with the highly inclusive or benign Taoist philosophy of ethics.
To dialogue, in Taoism, is to interplay between opposites. It is to look at the world as a
dynamic universe with change at its center. The pattern of the change is the symmetrical
movement between opposites—concepts of extremes, such as experience and storytelling,
storytelling and interpretation, my storytelling and others’, etc. as I listed for reflection in
this chapter. The ethics of this world view is in the inclusion of opposite concepts and the
goodness of it is in the symmetrical movement. It is a morality of equality.

A morality of equality is the ethics of what MacIntyre (1984) calls internal goodness.
It is in conflict with external goodness in the social institution in the Chinese feudalistic
history. It is not the ethics for people who are after power. That’s why all the powerful
Chinese feudalistic dictators have done their best to suppress it. None of them was able or
willing to take the challenge of the morality of equality. A morality of equality is the
ethics for suppressed people who are not after the external good of power but the internal
good of strength. That’s why Taoism prevails throughout the Chinese history. The
suppressed masses need, promote, and hope for a realization of equality.

The Taoist moral equality is imbedded in taking the opposite concepts as equally
important. The goodness lies in the balancing movement—the interplay—between the
two. To interplay is to gain strength along the way between the opposites. It is to unite
and harmonize the opposites.

6.1 Splicing My Teacher Self and My Ethical Self

In teaching, student and teacher are in opposite positions. One is teaching; the other
is being taught. To frame this relation into Taoist view, they should be equally important.
An interplay between the two is the morality. Teaching students should start with teaching the teacher self.

.....we teachers, .... must become students, students of currere, which is to say students of ourselves, before we can truthfully say we understand teaching....

(Pinar, 1975, p.412)

I began, in my Master’s program, with a narrative inquiry (Connelly, Clandinin) of my personal curriculum. In the interaction with the outside world of varieties of curriculum theories and a narrative community, the inquiry led me deep into the reservoir of my memory. In the process of the study, I reconstructed stories of the past, learned my personal philosophy, and recovered the meaning of curriculum. The program was finished in two years with the completion of my Master’s thesis: “Moments of Improvisation in My Life Experience”.

Immediately, I started my Ph.D. program with an intention to extend and expand my Master’s thesis. I wanted to make my “pool of memory deeper, larger, and more complete”, to borrow Pinar’s words. By going deeper into my autobiographical research, I found myself in an inevitable net of relationships. Many of these relationships were more current than I had written about in my Master’s thesis. Circumstances did not allow me to write a collaborative autobiographical master’s thesis because I was too new in a foreign environment to have any long-term relationships yet with which to collaborate.

As time went on, I established some meaningful relationships in my new environment. That, I thought, would provide me with a long enough duration in order to take into account my strongly felt complex constraints on my women immigrant participants and myself. I also thought that by including biographical research, I could learn from what Butt and Raymond (1987) claimed as a potentially tremendous
integrative, synergistic, and emancipating mode of curriculum research which permits research conducted in the middle of qualitative and quantitative methods (p.68).

6.2 Splicing My Ethical Self and My Student Selves

In order to teach students, the teacher was teaching herself by autobiographical study. The understanding of the teacher self through autobiographical research evolved to include understanding of students through biographical researches. It takes courage to study the teacher self; it is honest to study the students. Self-study needs to be vitalized and enriched by reaching out to the students. The focus was coming back, from the teacher self, to the students. The ethics are in the interplay between the two: teacher and students—a pair of opposites in teaching. Both sides are given equal attention to and are of the same importance.

Then, I picked some of my students and succeeded in negotiation with four of them to participate in my research. They are Dr. Liu, the retired pediatrician; Yaping, the retired engineer; Linda, the devoted Buddhist, and Jane, the artistic fashion designer. I chose them, because I had related to them more personally than most other adult ESL (English as a Second Language) students of mine at the time. We had, in different ways, established some bond, some ship on which we were traveling toward our respective futures. I wanted to learn from them how to find the wellsprings of my own being, and how to sustain myself. I chose them because they have value for myself and, I hope, for my readers. I chose them as participants in my research. I hoped that they all could become subjects some day in my research. I started with subjectivity; and hoped that I could reach intersubjectivity.
6.3 Splicing My Subjective Self and Other Subjective Selves

To claim subjectivity is being responsible for my own intellectual pursuit; to pursue an intersubjectivity is to be fair to others — others as individuals with equal rights of their own. and to value a dialogue between the subjective self and the subjective others.

My mother also agreed to participate in my research. When I was preparing my proposal and later collecting data for the research, my mother was living with me. I had not been able to share my Master’s thesis writing process with her and other significant others in my life. Now that I had her with me, I thought, I’d better not to miss that opportunity again. So I talked about it with her and asked her if I could have her in my research. Her answer was also a question: “Why not?” When I asked her if she would sign an ethical consent form to participate, she did not think it was necessary. “I am your mother anyway. I cannot escape,” she said. She had been an entomologist for over 40 years. I did not think she ever needed to sign any forms with her “participants”. But she eventually signed her ethical consent form when I insisted.

To understand mother—our unconditional kin of blood and flesh—also requires to see her independent subjectivity colored by her experience. The justice is in the choice of explanation of her understanding about participants, in seeing the world from her point of view, in validating her reasoning.

6.4 Splicing My Ethical Self and Dr. Liu’s Silenced Self

My proposal was approved in 1993. Soon after that, I lost contact with Dr. Liu. The materials I had about her were from the case study I had done for the proposal. Without
her permission, I could not use materials I had but not used for the proposal. About three years later, I came across her in a Chinese craft store. We briefly updated each other, and I gave her my new telephone number. She did not give me hers, although she convinced me to use what I had had from her for my dissertation⁶⁰.

I had informed her before she agreed to participate in my research that we would need a minimum six to seven sections of conversation with one hour for each. I had also mentioned to her my concern about the controlling man with whom she lived. We had worked out a tentative strategy to bypass his control in order for us to meet. Despite that, we lost contact and could not do anything more. She remained my participant only in the sense that I was allowed to use the materials. There was no collaboratively understood lived experience, although she was/is right here living in the same city where I live. Modern technology of communication could have made it very convenient for us to communicate and to share, given that we both were willing to. My initial assumption about our relationship-to-be was a mistake. What we had had did not guarantee what we would like to have. Now I can still feel the bond to her; she may feel it, too. But there has been no regular maintenance to allow this practical and time-consuming collaborative research to happen.

The bond, that ship we were sharing on our journey of life, is the experience of immigration. We connected with our mutual empathy and understanding in our immigrants’ situation. We both had been professional women in our country of origin. She was a pediatrician; I an associate professor. We both had to meet the challenge of beginning from the very bottom of the society where our professional knowledge was of

⁶⁰ I will analyze, in details, new immigrants as fast moving targets for research later in this chapter.
no value. We both had dreams to realize in our new chosen country of immigration. We are both single mothers, and had to leave our children behind in uncertainty.

It is also our new immigrants’ situation that made it impossible for us to carry on a collaborative research. I needed to work with new immigrants because I am a new immigrant myself. But the uncertainties in her new immigrant’s life disconnected us from a regular contact. And in her particular case, the oppression from the man with whom she was living and who took advantage of her new immigrant’s situation isolated her from the rest of the world. Had she been able to function in English, had she known something about what was available in this society that could protect her, had she had some family she could go to in times of difficulties, had she been able to work as a pediatrician as she did in China and to be independent financially, had her retirement pension been worth the same or not so much less than it is in Canada, she would not have had to stop our contact. Her new immigrant experience made her important for me and my research. Her new immigrant experience also made her a moving target, impossible for me to follow. I have to read the disconnection and interpret the silence from my side only.

I like her and deeply respect her. I had wanted to understand the world from her point of view. As a writer of her life, I was allowed the imagination of form not the facts. But I did not have enough facts from her in order to get to know her well enough to make the shift from my projection to her subjective vantage point. I collected the information for my purpose, wrote stories from my understanding, and interpreted the stories solely. She did me a favor, because of the bond we had/have, to offer me complete authority to write and interpret her stories. At the same time, my responsibilities were not shared. I don’t
know how she will feel some day, if she comes up to me, and asks for a copy of the stories, and reads them.

To write somebody’s biography requires a tremendous amount of information, an ongoing exchange of ideas, and a deep involvement intellectually and emotionally with the life one is writing about. One should only interpret and criticize after one learns to see things from one’s protagonist’s point of view. In putting together the fragments of Dr. Liu’s stories, I could not do so accordingly. I had to work with very minimum information in the light I had learned about her.

*My truthfulness is in the symmetrical interplay—the dialogue—between her storytelling and my interpretation; between her silence and my imagination; between my understanding of her experience and of my experience; between her storytelling followed by silence and my loyalty to tell her stories of silence—a splice between my ethical self and her silenced self.*

6.5 Splicing My Ethical Self and Yaping’s Ethical Self

With my second participant Yaping, I had only two interviews which were held at her home. And her husband was with us in one of them. Because of her family responsibilities, she decided to stop working with me and allowed me to use the information I collected during those two interviews.

We have kept a friendly relationship since then. Every year around the Chinese New Year, either she or her husband would call me to wish me a happy new year.

No written autobiography was done by herself. The information I gathered was far from enough to write her biography. Based on the materials, I wrote stories about her.
And those stories have little sense of completion. No collaboration had happened during my writing. She has not yet seen my writing. On several of those new year’s quick updating-greeting telephone conversations, I told her about the progress of my writing and offered her a copy. She expressed her complete trust in me and no interest in reading it or having a copy. Yaping, too, remains my participant only in the sense that I was allowed to use the materials from the two interviews and from my case study done before the proposal.

We are still in a bond with one another. We met at one point on our lives’ paths. And that meeting place was/is a haven as well as a springboard. As immigrant women, mothers, daughters, wives (ex-wife in my case), we comforted, supported, and encouraged one another with what we did and what we said. As immigrant women, our stories of family responsibilities connected us in resonance (Conle, 1996).

Had she not been a new immigrant, she would not have to take one of the lowest paying jobs in Canada in her retirement after a life long career as an engineer. She would not have to take care of her 90 year-old mother on a daily basis in a country where the cultural norm is to send seniors to homes. She would not have to support a son in his late 20’s to learn a new language and start a new career. She would not have to come to my class and ask me to teach her how to say “Mind your own business” in order to protect herself at work. She would not have to stop collaborating with me in my research due to the overwhelming daily emergencies of her family responsibilities.

I understand her, I feel for her from my immigration experience. But I could not have my research done to my satisfaction. I had to accept my reality as she had to accept hers. I am a new immigrant woman. I connect with immigrant women and I need to do research
with them. But the new immigrant's world is full of uncertainties and unpredictability, as much as the untold.

Compared with Dr. Liu, Yaping was in a much better situation. She was less isolated; she had her family with her. She had her immediate family who came soon after she did and her extended family who came before she did and whose knowledge of immigration was a great help for her. Dr. Liu came as a visitor and the long battle of application for her immigration made her depend completely on her sponsor. Yaping came as an immigrant which provided her with the right to work and to sponsor her husband and son independently. And she had a job, no matter how low her pay was. She had it as a connection with the outside world.

_The goodness is to let her go when her reality demanded that of her. To understand her reality is to respect her and to value what she values. That was the movement from my external goodness to her internal goodness, from my external goodness to my internal goodness. In return, she valued my internal morality by giving me complete trust to use the material. The interplay—a reciprocal understanding—was the morality of equality—equal ethical selves._

### 6.6 Splicing My Ethical Self and Mother's Immigrant Self

The research with my mother was not done as planned, either. My mother lived with me over two years. During that time, I had kept a journal which recorded and reflected on my observation of my mother and my conversation with her. She had also kept a journal about her immigration experience and the changes she saw in me after a four years' gap. I had not done any interviews with her. My work with other participants was always more
difficult to coordinate. I thought the work with her could be done anytime. And this anytime never came when she decided to go back to China. That was not planned.

She had planned to come to Canada to help me take care of my son while I was working on my Ph.D. But she had no life here for herself. As a new immigrant woman in her retirement, she was in complete isolation from the outside world. Her two years’ immigration experience had gone beyond her endurance. She suddenly decided to go back and for good.

I was/am happy for her choice. Actually I helped her to reach that decision for the sake of her health. But my research with her would be interrupted. So I asked her if she could leave a copy of her journal with me. She refused. Because she had written something about me that she didn’t think I would like. I told her that was exactly what I needed. She would not give in no matter what I said, even though I used the weapon of her ethical consent form.

She left and wrote me about the happiness of her life in China. I was/am happy for her decision. But what about my Ph.D.? I insisted, in my letters to her, that she give me a copy of her journal and also write an autobiography. She kept silent. One year later, she did send back a copy of her journal with two pages of explanation. She had been through very difficult times here in Canada she said in the explanation. And I was the only person who could understand her and share her experience. But I had changed and became part of her pain. With the distance between us, she thought she could handle my possible reaction upon reading her journal. And she also gave me authority to use it. “I don’t care what you think of me. I am telling the truth,” she said that in her letter. (MI 95, my translation). She did not write her autobiography. Her reason was that she had not had
much happiness in her life to write about. But she sent me a 12-page memoir she wrote about her two years’ experience in Canada.

With the material I have from her, I could not write a biography of her. But I could add her perspectives into my autobiographical writing. And I did.

If I had not been an immigrant, my mother would not have been one. And I would not have lost her in such an unpredictable way, both in our mother-daughter relationship and researcher-participant relationship.

*When my mother’s good will, which benefited me, and reality, which harmed my reality, needed a balancing movement, I put aside my interest and thought for her reality.* The suspension of my subjectivity and the respect for her subjective world was my loyalty and honesty. *I lost her in the very action of giving my respect to her reality, which she could not, or did not want to identify with at the time. I am gaining her back by the interplay of her reflection on the reality then and her reality now back in China. She has recently come to agree with me that the meaning of her life is over there in her Chinese academic community. Spliced are my ethical self and her immigrant self.*

**6.7 Splicing My Truthful Self and Others’ Untold Selves**

Nevertheless, my expected collaboration with Dr. Liu, Yaping and mother stopped. I doubted, as a new immigrant, who was uprooted from the old land and not-yet-grounded in the new soil, could I ever do a collaborative autobiographical research with someone who was in the same boat as I. Should I switch to some more quantitative oriented research, conduct surveys with questionnaires, count the numbers, yes and no from acquaintance and strangers, and write a more objective report?
Now I knew why so many of my new immigrant friends had to quit their research work or Ph.D. programs. Our own uncertain new immigrant’s life and our unpredictable new immigrant social contacts made it more difficult to commit to a long term research. Many people had to stay within the ivory tower for research, or go back to their countries of origin to collect data.

Like those of us who are still in the ivory tower, I consider myself privileged over most new immigrants who could not continue with their careers. My reality is what is happening around me, including the interrupted research and the disappeared participants.

*To describe them and to interpret them to the best of my knowledge is my understanding of fairness. To meet the challenge of writing incomplete stories is my courage. The justice is to strive to tell the untold.*

It was a real challenge to write their stories based on very limited information I have about them. The incompleteness was too much, I was worried, that my readers would get frustrated by the fragmentation and could hardly make any sense out of it. And my imagination could not fill the gaps, either, because I don’t know them enough.

It was a struggle to interpret their stories because of the incompleteness both in their stories and in our relationships. I had no way to get any response from them about the stories. I did not know how they would have interpreted their stories or how they would like me to interpret their stories. They could not have their voices in my text.

Ethically, it was no better than writing about somebody in my autobiographical research without their consent. In case of autobiographical research, I claim all the credit and also, I am solely responsible for the blame. In the biographical studies with these particular participants, they consented; and they are responsible for my use of the
materials. I am protected. They fell into the traditional role of objects being observed. I was thrown into a powerful position over them.

Epistemologically, my text on them is subjective. There was no dialogue and interaction with them personally during my writing. I did not know how they would look at and think of what I wrote about their worlds, including me. I could not share my vantage point with them, neither could I see theirs.

As a researcher, I believe that if our researchers want to understand the thoughts of others, may they be one individual or a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based upon their concept, not ours. With Dr. Liu and Yaping, I failed to follow my own belief.

*The truthfulness in my writing of their stories and my interpretation was the awareness and acknowledgment of my incapacity to share the writing process with them. This restrained me from losing balance between my self interest and theirs’ and it involved my writing into a constant dialogue with the stories I had collected from them. Interplay between my writing and their stories was my morality of equality between researcher and participants and between interpretation and stories. To admit my failure is to protect them from possible distortion and unwanted interpretation from their point of view. Spliced are my truthful self and others’ untold selves.*

I have been able to follow Linda and Jane on their zigzagged paths of immigrants’ life. Along the way, we have established a friendship that was becoming deeper and deeper and a bond that was turning stronger and stronger.
6.8 Splicing My Ethical Self and Linda’s Friend Self

To be able to connect with Linda in a long term relationship was unexpected. When I was explaining everything about our research to her, she repeatedly said: “Yes, Teacher Li.” I interpreted it as her respect and courtesy to me, as her teacher and a friend who had helped her so that she needed to give something back to me. I was not sure how deep she would be involved and how long would that last.

To know Linda took time. She is very shy, modest, and never believed that her story would be of any significance for my academic work. Questions very often would be answered with a smile, meaning “not a big deal” or with a long sigh, meaning “it’s a long story”, never wanting to mention it again.

Her way of thinking and the language she uses to express it are very different from mine. When I asked her something like “How is everything with you?” A typical response would be: “How is everything with you? Oh, OK.” “What did you do for a living in China?” Her response was: “What did you do for a living in China? Oh, me? No, no, no. Never mind. I did not do anything, not like you. My life was plain and dull,” “Why plain and dull?” “Mmm, because,... nothing worth mentioning,” (L2, 1993).

“Teacher Li, come to our temple. Do you know that the world will be ended by the year 2,000? I did not know this before. I tell you this because you have been nice to me and we are good friends. Bring your son and your mother so that you will have a place to go and will be protected when the time comes,” (L4, 1994). The simplicity, the seriousness and the sincerity in her tone stopped me from being sarcastic as I usually was. Instead, I worked out a time to go to her temple.
With her, I visited her two temples, went to her lawyer’s office, met her potential boyfriends. Upon her request, I talked to the principal of her daughter’s school, introduced her to a financial management consultant, talked to her landlord. I visited three apartments where she lived over a three year period. She visited me several times, brought me Buddhist books and told me the books were more convincing than she was. I did things with her and experienced life with her in an attempt to know her, to understand her concept, and to see her vantage point.

She is not an articulate person. She is not like most of my students both back in China and here in Canada who have received high education so that we could share, to a certain degree, a language. In her articulation, the difference on both semantic and discourse level was as profound as in her learning style, which I had noticed when she was in my ESL class. There came the conflict of whether I should go with her style or she should get to know mine. In a classroom setting, we both had to make some effort to meet the other’s. In my research, I did not think it was fair for her to change since my purpose of research was to know her and to learn from her. She should be my teacher. She seemed more a doer than a talker. In order for me to learn, the best way was to do things with her.

Based on the field notes and my reflective journals over one year’s time (Nov. 93-Dec. 94), I wrote the first account of her biography of 62 pages and presented to her. It took us three meetings of 15 hours (Feb. 95) in total to go through it. Interpretation, translation, explanation, debates, defense, arguments, clarifications, and compromises were going on and on from both of us. At the end of our last session, she started to giggle and could not stop. “Look, (laugh) your face is so serious. I guess it is a serious business
for you, right? (laugh) I’m flattered. I never knew my life could be so important and meaningful,” (L15, 1995). It was rewarding for me, too.

Linda did not write her autobiography as I suggested. We had to work on her biography I had written. She did not write any memoir or keep any journal to share with me. I had to share mine with her. She did not articulate much. We did things together. And we both learned a lot about ourselves and one another in the process of doing things together, and sharing my writings with her.

I wrote another version of her biography, and presented it to her for the second time. This time, more focus was on taking certain points deeper. I had not known I could reach some depth with her. And she had not known she could be philosophical either (L16, May 95).

I have not done any interpretation and analysis work yet with Linda’s biography except the fragments in Chapter Two: To Live. Among the four participants of mine, Linda is the most different from me. And she is also the one from whom I have learned the most. One of the major issues that came out of our sharing her biography was the difference in our use of the language. To investigate such difference philosophically and linguistically and the relations with our cultures—our ways of thinking—will need a separate dissertation. When I realized that, I arranged a meeting with her. I told her the limit of my Ph.D. dissertation and wanted to know how she would feel if I, after so much commitment from both of us, could not include it in my paper. She paused for half a minute, and, with a smile, said: “Are we still friends?” (L17, Sep.95).

I did not answer her with a yes or a no. She was not asking a question. She was making a conclusion. For her, friends are more important than anything else. I will
complete a biography of her and make it public after my Ph.D. dissertation. I made a promise to myself and to her.

Yes, we are still friends. I have less regular contact with her since I began writing other chapters of my dissertation. But we call and see one another when something important happens to us and when we need to share our ideas and emotions.

With Linda, my research is more complete and has more elements of collaboration in it. I felt confident to write about her and enjoyed sharing with her my writings about her. At times when we were doing things together and sharing my writings with her, I could suspend my own concept and moved into hers. I could see the necessity for her to believe sincerely in Buddhism; I could feel the craving in her for a peaceful relationship she deserves; I could hear her inner call for fairness for women. She won my deep respect and I like her. I could write her biography with both her and my voices in it. Intersubjectivity was happening between us.

The entrance to Linda's world was her temple. To suspend my non-religious mind was to respect her belief—a balancing movement from my world to hers. From there, I began to understand her unarticulated world. From there, I started to express my ethical self. Writing her biography was another moral action on my side. Respecting her dignity of not writing, taking the responsibility for her, and involving her in reading, commenting and criticizing what I wrote about her is a series of interplay between opposites of I and Linda. The fairness is to make both subjects—she and I—seen and heard, learn and grow.
6.9 Splicing My Ethical Self of Choosing Jane’s and of Postponing Linda’s Work

Jane is the participant I focus on in my dissertation. She is the one of the five participants I have had in this research who has provided me with the most comprehensive materials, and who is the most dedicated and involved. Her life stories are the most dramatic of the five, reflecting various vicissitudes in the modern Chinese history, and revealing one of the most difficult categories of immigrants to Canada: conventional refugee. I chose her over Linda to focus on in this dissertation not because her story is more important. Linda’s stories are equally important if not more. With the materials I have from two of them, my dissertation could only cover one in terms of scale and theme. The theme in Jane’s story is more manageable in this dissertation and there has been fewer language issues between Jane and me.

*In this knotting, I was splicing my ethical selves in handling Jane’s and Linda’s work. The interplay between the two was to be ethical to both of them.*

6.10 Splicing My Interrupted Self and Others’ Interrupted Selves

Timing, I learned through this dissertation development, is important and self-discipline accordingly is of more value. While living an interrupted life and improvising fragments from life’s given, I worked with five participants including my mother, whose lives were equally, if not more, unpredictable in addition to making a living for my son, my mother for a period of time, and myself. The dynamic of moving from one to another is frustrating and challenging. Dates and months in the list of an account as follows may appear distinct. But there is always preparing before a start, and cleaning up after an end.
My proposal was approved September 93. I started research in October 93. In about one year’s time till September 94, I had 31 journal entries with reflective records on my own cultural transformation experiences. The journals were basically done biweekly, and when special events happened. I had collected my theoretical memoirs with notes from and thoughts triggered by readings. I had done two interviews with Yaping, seven with Jane and nine with Linda. I began to write a biography of Linda from Sept.94 and did three more interviews in September, October, and December respectively. By February 95, I had the first draft of Linda’s biography and met her three times during the month to share it with her. I had the second draft ready to present to her in May 95.

From June, 95, I began to work on Jane’s biography based on autobiographical materials she wrote and recorded interviews I had collected. I was able to have a draft to present to her in July. During July and the first week of August, we met five times to work on the first draft together. During these intensive five sessions, we shared, we clarified, we translated back and forth between the two languages we were working with, we argued, we cooked, we ate, we laughed and we cried. More interviews had to be done and were recorded in each section; more exchanges of our life stories happened and field notes were made after each section which lasted six to seven hours.

By September 95, I had the second draft of Jane’s biography ready. I had also had a draft of my autobiography which I had been writing all along the time simultaneously when I was working on Linda’s and Jane’s. I began to think of a table of contents for the dissertation in an effort to find my thesis. Going through all materials from myself and my participants, I realized that Jane and I had connected the most facets of our multiple selves. Since we met in 1991 as a teacher and a student, we had dialogued and grown,
especially during the time of our research, in a way that had made our ways of thinking and ways of living different. They were different than before and they were different without our involvement in each other’s life. So, I decided to try to mingle our stories, which I called A Spliced Story: A Dialogical Self. I was going to splice all the stories from us two and make it my whole thesis.

Before I put a focus on this spliced story, I had to negotiate with Linda to postpone any further work on her biography and make another plan after my Ph.D. dissertation to finish the work with her. That happened in September 1995.

From September 95 to June 96, I worked on the spliced story and wrote about 120 pages. The story was not finished. There was more to come about our mothering and being daughters in our situations as new immigrants. And I was becoming less happy than at the beginning of this spliced story writing. I needed to find a device to help me bring out insights for me, for Jane and for my readers.

In July and August 96, I re-read everything I had written in the past few years, including research data from participants, journal entries, my theoretic journals, story writings, biographical and autobiographical writings. I pulled out several topics and cut everything into pieces and put the pieces under different topics. That, later, became my most working table of contents with seven chapters. The stories are no longer chronological. The topic in each chapter, I thought, would help me reach some depth.

From September 96, I began to write chapter two: To Live. It is a chapter about continuity. It continues on my master’s thesis of improvisation and extends it to my life later during immigration to Canada and expands it to my four participants. It took me five
months to complete this chapter. I enjoyed the process of writing and I was/am satisfied with the device of focus on a topic which could help me bring out some insights.

I was excited to have this found out after the first 20 pages of chapter two. With a topic, I could weave in my interpretation and theorizing. It elucidates the stories, sharpens the points and gives the text some depth which had been lost for a long time in the translation from Chinese to English and in immigration from China to Canada. It digs more deeply into certain aspects of the stories.

My ethics lie in the movements between the stories and the device of topic, between the storytelling and the interpretation. The good is to equally include both sides and to work for a unity in Taoism, and a fusion in Gadamer between the two. It is to honestly present the process of understanding the stories in dialogue. "Understanding in dialogue" as Gadamer says, "is not holding on to one's own point of view, but being transformed into a common position, in which one no longer is the same as one was before" (in Widdershoven & Smits, 1996, p.281). The experience with the common position, or unity of opposites in Taoism has set me on a different level of morality. It tells me that to tell the stories is moral and to carry on a dialogue between the stories and the interpreter is also an ethical endeavor—ethical in the choices of what to interpret and what not to; of how to interpret and for whose good the interpretation is meant.

To maintain a balance between my participants' and my chaotic every day life and a time schedule for my academic research expressed my morality. It is my decency to respect both sides—their life and my academic life, my everyday emergency including my family responsibilities and my academic life.
6.11 Splicing My Biographer Self and My Autobiographer Self

Writing Dr. Liu and Yaping’s fragments of biographies tells me, that biographical research can be an aide to autobiographical research. And it can sometimes tell more than autobiography can. Biography does not stand in the middle of objectivity and subjectivity. Although I did not imagine the facts about my participants, I chose the form, I decided on the topics and my voice is omnipresent. Themes, interpretations, and organizations are all mine. Therefore, the biographer is the biography. As Virginia Woolf said: “Yes, … Writing lives is the devil!” (in Edel, 1984, p.17).

In the claim of the subjectivity and of the autobiographical nature in the biographical writing is my courage to risk harm or danger on myself. I was taking the responsibility off my participants who only told fragments of stories to me but did not have the opportunity to bring their subjectivity into the process of interpretation, although their subjectivity was right in the very action of telling stories. Bringing the stories, that I put together with the fragments they provided, to public, I should protect my participants although they signed ethical consent forms and authorized me to use the materials as I like. As I like, I return their trust and faith in my moral self. My moral self is expressed in the courageous announcement that I am the devil, if any, not my participants.

Writing Linda and Jane’s biographies tells me that it is possible to approach some degree of intersubjectivity in biographical writing. If circumstances allow the writer and the protagonist to have a long-lasting relationship, if the relationship is reciprocal, if the writer could be open minded, if the protagonist is equally able to learn and gain from her
telling, writing, and sharing. To possess all these ifs in one relationship requires both luck and knowledge.

I did not have much luck with Dr. Liu and Yaping to have long-lasting relationships. Our new immigrants' situations bonded us but not in a practical way to carry on a research which demanded regular commitment of time. They were overwhelmed by their basic every day living, with which I was not in a position to help, except understanding and sympathy. We could not share "a sense of family, or community" (Heilbrun, in Martin, 94, p.134).

I was not lucky even with my own mother. She had said that because we were in a mother-daughter ship, she could not escape. But she did. At least one foot of hers is not on my ship any more. That foot is called immigration. She had left her footprints on her two years' adventure in Canada and her marks of immigration in my life. But I haven't been able to connect with her more deeply into our shared and different past in order to create a better present and future for both of us. We are in a life long relationship and we had lived under the same roof for two years, which was the longest since I turned fifteen when I was forced by the government to leave home for a re-education by the peasants on a commune during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. But the daily emergencies in our new immigrant lives did not allow us to reach the depth of one another.

I am lucky with Linda and Jane. Their basic everyday living was also overwhelming. But I was of some practical help and use to them. A mutual need has kept the relationship on a more regular basis. We have developed an interdependence between one another. My interviews and observations were very often carried out while I was helping them. I was giving Jane a complete course in English pronunciation during the summer when we
were working on the draft of her biography. Linda came to my residence to pick up translations I had done for her divorce case when we had our seventh interview. We were like orphan sisters, depending on our joint forces to fulfill our respective tasks and to dream our harmonious dream.

*Interdependence between us orphan sisters, our respective tasks and harmonious dream unite us into oneness—an I-Thou-We friendship. In oneness, every single decision and action from any component affects the wholeness, be it a moral decision or an unethical one. The balancing movement between components has to be constant and the morality has to be held high—high beyond each individual, high to benefit every individual. My ethics is in positioning myself together with them, equating my interest with theirs' and reciprocating their contribution to my work with sincere appreciation—practical help in their everyday emergency. By such acting on my morality, every single component in the oneness is benefited and the oneness is strengthened.*

I had some knowledge, both theoretical and practical, about relationships. I learned more during the research. The first and the foremost is to be open minded equally to similarities and differences of Other. In relating to Other, we need to acknowledge the similarity in Other: every individual is the same as a subject of her own right with a center of being equivalent to my own from where perspectives of a world is drawn. In relating to Other, we should recognize the differences in Other: each person is different as a world of her own with her eyes colored by her continuity from where her experience is lived and her style of knowing is accumulated.

This knowing is particularly important in relating to new immigrants. New immigrants have carried with them their cultural, social, and ethical knowing from their country of
origin. They have been looking for their new cultural, social and ethical selves in their country of immigration. Their taken-for-granted and hand-downs are being challenged constantly by their new reality; their newly learned values are being tested from all different angles cross-culturally; their multiple selves are very often in turmoil between the old and the new; their learning styles vary on an international scale; their understandings and expectations in relationships are diverse.

The first time I realized that people learn in different ways and people learn different points from the same story was in my first year teaching. The first time I realized that people as a group learn in different ways and learn different points from the same story was in my first year immigration. The first time I realized that people learn in a mixed way and learn mixed points from the same story was in my first year research work with my new immigrant participants.

The immigration process gives mixed cultural and social messages to new immigrants about themselves. In the case of my participants and myself, we are from a homogenous nation compared with Canada and our country of origin had had one of the most ancient histories of totalitarianism in the world. We had been accustomed to oppression and forced changes. We needed to unlearn totalitarianism in the practice of our freedom to choose, and to be responsible for our choices. We had to place into perspective the subtleties in a multicultural and democratic society. To share our mixed cultural and social aspects of learning during the research was/is comforting, affirming, and supporting in our experiences lived.

We are united in the commonality of being women and new immigrants. We have "sympathetic understanding" (Gadamer, 1993, p.323) for one other.
During both the research (data collecting) time and the writing time, I was struggling with clear definitions of autobiographical and biographical researches. Connelly and Clandinin made it very clear by saying that “Autobiography is the telling of our own history, while biography is someone else reconstructing an individual’s past.” (1988, p.37). But how much of Other is there in telling of my own history? And how much of myself is there in reconstructing other individuals’ past? If biographical study, as Butt and Raymond (1987) stated, permits research conducted “in the middle” of the qualitative and quantitative methods, does that mean in the middle of the objective and subjective? Or does it mean in the middle where two ways of world views merge, and become intersubjective?

I have not found the answers yet. But by staying with the questions during the research, my questions became the answers: It all depends on your relationship with yourself and with Other in the research.

Autobiographical and biographical researches in my work with new immigrant women are similar because both involved writing lives that are still being lived. Interactions and dialogues are allowed with the protagonists in the process of such researches. Therefore, endless variations and interpretations can be available. Changes and unpredictability need to be taken as the norm. The meanings from the “facts”, which the auto/biographers are not supposed to change, do change. “There is no original meaning,” as Gadamer put it so accurately. “Each interpretation not only sharpens, but also changes the meaning of the phenomenon that is interpreted.”(1993, p.12).

Both needed to find a unique structure, the ideal shape, texture, and pace for the auto/biography. Our new immigrant women’s lives are “a tightly woven mesh of public
and private events” (Wagner-Martin, 1994, p.6) across over more than one culture and country. Any single workable formula for such a life does not work. We need to create different structures to write these interconnected parts of new immigrant women’s lives, including the phenomenon that is lack of a story form with a beginning and an end.

Both could be only done on a trustworthy researcher-participant relationship, that between the different “I”s in case of autobiography. Mutual respect, understanding, and like are essential for walking in the Other’s shoes and seeing in the Other’s vantage points so that a text that was formed in such relationship could reach a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1993, p.20).

They are different because autobiographical writing is mostly a solitary study of the inner world. It is the construction of what Pinar called “authentic humanity” (1994, p.219). And “autobiography which makes self’s architecture more complex moves below the surface of memory”. By pushing back edges of memory, “the water and air of experience seep in, making the pool of memory larger, deeper, more complete.” (Pinar, 1994, p.218). This task of self formation, deformation, learning, and unlearning requires the dismantling of self-defenses. Solitude is very often needed in this kind of dismantlement. In solitude, there is freedom. In freedom, there is creation. In creation, there is beauty.

Biographies are more focused outward, and the important "facts" of the protagonists' existence are more external. The biographer has her own points of view from outside of her protagonists, although, the biographer can try to write the interior world of her protagonists. “Indeed the subject’s inwardness can be recreated only in a limited way and only if sufficient self-communion has been bequeathed in diaries, letters, meditations,
dreams”, (Edel, 1984, p.16) With my live participants, Jane was the only one who worked
a lot on her dreams, meditations, diaries and letters; and with whom I could recreate some
inwardness. The limitation of writing the interior self of one’s protagonist creates a
dissatisfaction of incompleteness, imperfection, and a lack of vividness and emotion.
Sympathetic understanding from Other cannot replace the architecture of self. The
reconstruction of an authentic humanity can benefit from the external interpretation.

“The poet is the poem; the novelist the novel; the playwright the play. Is
the biographer the biography?”

(Leon, 1984 p.17)

Underneath the similarities (of change and unpredictability as norm and of a need for
unique structure), there is a difference (of outward and inward). Underneath the
difference, there is a similarity (of autobiographical writing). They intertwine and
interplay.

To interplay between similarity and difference is to be fair. It is to include both as
equally important instead of positioning difference over similarity or vice versa. The
good is to claim the similarity of autobiographical nature of both. It is to correct the
historical extreme of masculinity that overvalues difference and depreciates commonality
(Chodorow,1979, in Benjamin, 1995, p.50).

This knotting compared the sameness of and the difference between biographical and
autobiographical writings, and spliced my biographer self and autobiographer self.
6.12 Splicing My Solitary Self and Social Self

The awareness of the intertwining and interplay of the sameness and the difference between autobiographical and biographical writings brought forth my Chapter Three: To Splice. By telling and writing my life story and Jane’s, I realized an interdependence between our telling and living of our life stories. And this was pointed out by several friends with whom I shared my writing process. One of them suggested that I wrote a mingled story; another one even found out the word “splice” for me by observing her friend boating. So I wrote a mingled life story, using the idea of to splice. At that time, to splice, for me, meant to join force from two ropes. The splice would make the two into one and would strengthen both. The mingled story did not splice all the way but parted as individual autobiography and biography in interval.

I presented my second version of this spliced chapter to my thesis supervisor. He approved it with a suggestion that I gave a definition to “splice” by checking with some kind of reference on boating. His suggestion led me to the notion of “to splice in the Chinese knotwork”, which made the best sense for my work. Thus came Chapter Three: To Splice in the Chinese knotwork.

To splice in the Chinese knotwork not only expresses myself epistemologically as I will discuss in the next chapter. It also expresses myself morally. My morality is to show the equal roles of Jane, as a participant, with her story-telling and of myself, as the researcher, with my story-telling in my research which became our common meaning making endeavor. It is to state that symmetrical turn-taking of leading and following in a dialogue is my justice of research methodology.
The interplay between my solitary writing process and interaction with friends, the thesis supervisor, and authors of books is my decent moral action. It is the morality of dialoguing between solitude and communication; between inwardness and outwardness, between self and others. It is to acknowledge both sides in the process. It is to be truthful to the research as a process, and to claim ownership for myself without excluding my multidimensional reality in which meaning making process was happening.

6.13 Splicing My Cultural Self and All the Other Selves

When I decided to use the definition of to splice in the Chinese knotwork, I only knew that it would make sense in terms of the structure. The structure just fitted what I was trying to do.

After the excitement of finding this structure and framing the chapter, I began to ask myself for some reason. This inquiry took me to explore the characteristics of our relationship that lay underneath the spliced Chinese knotwork and the researcher-participant relationship. The exploration resulted in Chapter Four: To Untie the Connection Knot, To Untwist the Teacher Rope and Chapter Five: To Untie the Friendship, To Untwist the Friend Ropes.

In the process of untying and untwisting, I spliced more and more selves and made the story of "To Splice" into my thesis—an intersubjective self.

The inquiry into why I chose the structure of "to splice in the Chinese knotwork" also led me to look into the philosophical implications in the Chinese knotwork, which resulted in chapter seven—a philosophical analysis of this dissertation. I called this chapter "Strength of Strangers, Vantage Point beyond Opposites".
The goodness is to be loyal to the process of my research instead of fixating on any predetermined hypothesis. It is to suspend the researcher's subjectivity and to let the research take the turn to lead—an interplay between the researcher's subjectivity and the evolvement of the research process.

A curiosity and desire to know the process, epistemologically, of how this dissertation has come to what it is like has stayed with me all the time of my writing. While pulling together materials that I had put under the category of cultural self, I realized that, by culture, I meant what Bruner (1996) defines as a way of thinking and a way of life. Reading what I had already written in the prior chapters, I detected, here and there, a thread of this cultural self as a self who identifies with a certain way of thinking, relating, and living. Rereading my theoretical memoir on philosophical readings, I found a connection of it with that cultural self in both the materials I had put under the category of cultural self and the thread I found in the prior chapters. This brought me to a decision of writing a philosophical chapter as a chapter on cultural self.

My cultural self was spliced with all the other selves. This made the cultural self into the final knot to unite all the other knotwork throughout the thesis.

6.14 Splicing My English Poetic Self and My Chinese Philosophical Self

While trying to write several pages in order to find a format for this chapter, I felt most comfortable with poetry as the lines I put at the end of each prior chapter. Poetry writing gave me a sense of going home. The lines at the end of each prior chapter came to me as the easiest for summarizing. The lines in the chapter of the cultural self brought me closer to my way of understanding. The lines in Chapter Seven bridges my academic
Ph.D. dissertation in the English language with my Chinese way of meaning making, that is rooted in the symbolic system of the graphemes in the Chinese language and the poetical and simplistic expression of philosophical ideas with images whose meanings are multidimensional and inexhaustible (Poggeler, in Parkes, 1990, p.68-69).

My justice is in the choice of the philosophical meeting place of Taoism and Deweyianism, and in the choice of the format of poetry writing in English. In the pairing of opposites of Western and Oriental philosophies and of Western and Chinese written languages, I chose to move and interplay between the two. It is to acknowledge the contributions from both sides in my experience, and my meaning making process, for particular. It is a morality of equality of pluralism and multiculturalism. It is a gain in cultural transformation.

6.15 Summary

To reflect on the ethics in this research work,
I used my Taoist framework of the Chinese Knotwork
To splice my teacher self and my ethical self,
   —my ethical self and my student selves,
   —my subjective self and other subjective selves,
   —my ethical self and Dr. Liu’s silenced self,
   —my ethical self and Yaping’s ethical self,
   —my ethical self and mother’s immigrant self,
   —my truthful self and others’ untold selves,
   —my ethical self and Linda’s friend self,
   —my ethical self in choosing Jane’s and that in postponing Linda’s work,
   —my interrupted self and others’ interrupted selves,
my biographer self and my autobiographer self,
my solitary self and social self,
my cultural self and all the other selves,
my English poetic self and my Chinese philosophical self.

Tracing the study back to the autobiographical research in Master's thesis,
My moral reflection was led to a series of dialogues between opposites.
Opposites are extreme concepts—tools to aid the work of human mind,
Working with the extremes does not mean
to exclude the non-extremes and the non-pure.

The map is not the territory.
Experience is story laden;
Storytelling is experience laden.
Using stories is not possible without gathering stories;
Gathering stories is of little significance without interpretation.
My storytelling includes other's;
other's mine.
My autobiographical writing never excludes biographical writing;
neither does biographical writing.
My interpretation can never happen in isolation from other's interpretation;
nor can other's interpretation.
My solitary writing work always interacts with others;
so do others.

One in the other;
the other in one.

Two ends on the continuum are always in motion,
Interplay describes the motion.
In a practice of qualitative research with participants,
I am compelled to decide spontaneously and constantly.
In a reflection on action with the help of the acquired human quality of virtue,
—values of equality, goods, right, responsibility, choice, respect, reciprocation,
trust, loyalty, truthfulness, courage, dignity, honesty, decency, justice,
intersubjectivity, symmetrical turn-taking of leading and following in dialogue
Elucidates, enhances and concretizes morality.
Ethics are in action,
Ethics are in reflection,
Ethics are dialogue between action and reflection.
Chapter Seven: To Conclude

Strength of Strangers

Vantage Point Beyond Opposites

...mind could not exist save for culture. For the evolution of the hominid mind is linked to the development of a way of life where “reality” is represented by a symbolism shared by members of a cultural community in which a technical-social way of life is both organized and construed in terms of that symbolism. The symbolic mode is not only shared by a community, but construed, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations who, by virtue of this transmission, continue to maintain the culture’s identity and way of life.

(Bruner, 1996, p.3)

TO YOU

Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, Why should you not speak to me? And why should I not speak to you?

(Walt Whitman)

As strangers to Western culture, All my subjects in this research, as well as myself, Brought with us our personal herstories — our curricula — that had been developed In a way of life ———the Chinese culture Which carries unique features, As all cultures tend to claim, That were shared, construed, elaborated, and passed on to us In our way of thinking,
In our way of being
Being as a process,
Which "has no contour", 61
Which is "the natural course of events", 62
Which "is a process of integration of particulars", 63

Being strangers to Western culture
Is to live on the edge of the world of others;
Is to live on the edge of the world of our own origin.
Disturbed with a desire of to speak,

to speak to ourselves and others
ourselves who have experienced differences,
others who had been others and were newly becoming others,

We were living in the worlds of unspeakable,
unspeakable for a lack of tools
"tools for organizing and understanding our worlds
in communicable ways." 64
unspeakable for a lack of an audience
an audience whose genuine interest lies in listening to strangers,
whose inferiority was imposed by others’ failure to hear.

"Yes," to answer Walt Whitman’s question
"We should."

We are strangers who have brought cultural treasures from our worlds of origin;
who have to “place in question
nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable
to the members of the approached group", 65

64 Bruner, 1996, p.3.
who have to place in question
nearly everything that seemed to be unquestionable
to ourselves before we became strangers to our culture of origin.

Stories—the narrative inquiry
Which is the study,
"(O)f how humans make meaning of experience
(B)y endless telling and retelling stories
(A)bout themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose
(I)n the future."^66

"(A)llow us to break through barriers and to share in another’s experience;"^67
The process of telling strangers’ life stories
Found values in what we have brought with us from our culture of origin,
— the intersubjective meaning making symbolic system,
— the Tao.

"What is firmly established cannot be uprooted"^68
The convergent point of the meaning making
in narrative inquiry and in the Chinese symbolic system
Provided us with strength to make the unspeakable "world speakable and heard;
Put us in a vantage point beyond the two worlds,
that we had not belonged to,
but belong in a deeper sense
during this study.

In our country of origin,
The graphemes of the language are pictographic,
And the "images of those meanings

Are multidimensional and inexhaustible”, 69
Where “there is no kind of ‘logical progression’;
Rather, everything comes out of one center.
Across the various dimensions of meaning
(E)very word is connected with every other;
(The) breakthrough to the deeper dimensions
(T)ransforms thinking and brings it on to a path.” 70

Being strangers to Western culture,
We can never answer questions,
That follow a lineage of cause and effect,
First, second and third.
The concept of China,
中 國 in Chinese graphemes,
Is composed of 中,
Which means “middle”, and “center”;
And 国, which means country.
“(T)he is not the forms of language
that generate meaning, but….the use of such forms
to think about something”. 71
From 中, --- middle and center,
We learned concepts as micro as “心 中”— inside one’s heart,
“滴 水 之 中” --- inside a drop of water;
As macro as “ 宇 宙 中” --- in the universe;

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71 Geertz,1995, p.46.
From 国 — country,
We learned stories about “印度国” (Yin Du Guo) — the country of India,
Where Buddha was born;
“希臘” (Xi La Guo) — the country of Greece,
Where a culture called Western was originated;
“英國” (Ying Guo) — the country of English,
Where numerous “英”(Ying) — heroes of Knights were nurtured;
“美國” (Mei Guo) — the country of America,
A beautiful (Mei) country,

The experience of learning the concept of 中國
Opens for us
Inexhaustible compositions,
And endless possibilities.
With our own country standing in the middle,
We look out for other countries, other 国;
Others as Ying Du, Xi La,
Heroes and the Beautiful.
“Observe other states through your own state.” 72

Meaning of such a system of symbols
Taught us that
With oneself at the center,
There are infinite 国 around,
Infinite worlds that are like the 中國,
For they are all 国;
Infinite worlds that are unlike 中國,
For they are not 中.

72 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.17
We suspend 中
to understand others.
We don’t give up 中,
to understand others,
For others should also have their 中,
their center of a world.

The meaning in the use of such a system
Is about sympathy and intersubjectivity
—“the human ability to understand the minds of others”.

The meaning in the use of such a system
Nurtures Taoist story of the Happiness of the Fishes:
Chuang Tzu was walking by the stream
Accompanied by his friend.
On seeing fish leap out of the water,
He commented that the fish were in joy.
His companion asked:
“How can you know the joy of the fish
Since you are not the fish?”
“How could you know that
I don’t know the joy of fish
Since you are not ‘I’?”
The conclusion says
That we know the joy of the fish
By our joy at walking by the steam.
The conclusion tells us
That Chuang Tzu was able,
Through his joy in wandering,

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74 Poggeler, (in Parkes ed.) 1987, p.52
To share the joy of the fish in the stream;
That meaning making starts with sharing and sympathy,
With that forever puzzle of
Putting oneself into the other's position,
"In such a way as not to distinguish
(B)etween you and me.”
It begins with learning the symbol and concept of China, — 中 国，
中 — the center, 国 — the country.
We are aware of many centers of others
At the time we learn about the centers of ourselves
We know many other 國,
At the time when we learn about 中 国.
We learn about others as subjects of their own right
By learning about ourselves as such.

A self is a center,
Not a thing.
It is an event,
Like everything in the world.
A rock is not a thing,
It is an event of a process
Of geological transformation,
It is “a set of surfaces,
(E)ach of which represents changes and transformations
(A)s they go on”.\(^{75}\)
Only the geologist has the tool
To approach a rock's scope of time
To interpret the changes and the transformations

To reconstruct a story of a rock.
Every rock lives a story of life.
Nothing is a thing.
Everything lives.

Life is the essence,
Multiple polarizing is at the center
Of every single event.
To Live is an event,
It is a process to improvise.
To improvise is to pull together
The multidimensional world around;
Like a Taoist swimmer,
To improvise is to go in with a descending vortex;
And to come out with an ascending one,
In the rapid torrents
Of danger,
Of uncontrollable and capricious violence,
Of invasion and rebellions,
Of massacres, famine, flood, and starvation,
Of the powerful oppressing powerless,
Of feuds resulting in entire families being murdered or destroyed,
Wives and children seized and enslaved,
Of hideous legal punishment,
Of vicious injustice surrounding the Imperial throne,
Of Ssu-ma Chien’s (145 - 90 BC) castration,
For writing an accurate but unwelcome memorandum.
“Such was the turbulent sea
(I)n which the Chinese had to swim." 76
Such is the turbulent sea
In which the Chinese philosophy of Tao
Has been “shared, construed, elaborated,
(A)nd passed on to succeeding generations who,
(B)y virtue of this transmission,
(C)ontinue to maintain the culture’s identity
(A)nd way of life.”

The fittest survives;
The improviser lives.
The fittest practices jungle law;
The improviser acts by human law, the law of Tao.
The fittest has an instinct to survive;
The improviser has a will to live.
Jungle law and human law,
Instinct and will,
To survive and To Live,
Three pairs of opposites,
Polarize, interplay, and interweave
Into multiple polarization
At the center of To Live.

At the center of To live,
“I” survived the early years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution
Out of instinct,
Like any fit animal,

Silently and stubbornly;
"I" lived the later years of that catastrophe
By will,
Like any human being,
Who, with alacrity, is constantly learning
To make her/his life worth living;
Always ready to enjoy To Live,
Ready to enjoy the process, the changing, the multi polarizing,
The improvisation.
Also by will,
"I" invited myself to another interruption
Of ten years', maybe more, setback
Of the progression on a career line
During immigration.
The career line is crisscrossed
By numerous other lines,
The line of coming to know Western culture,
— another way of thinking and living
The refinement of myth and imagination;
The line of becoming aware of my Chinese identity,
— additional facets and extra depths
The reconstruction of the taken-for-granted;
The line of understanding and knowing myself through others
— former students of mine, my Chinese women immigrants subjects.
Crossing my career line,
All these lines progressed,
Expanded, deepened, and enriched
My authentic self;
Crossing my career line,
All these lines confirmed
For myself and others
That loss and gain interplay;
That setbacks enrich as well as breakthrough;
That the will To Live
Is the human law;
That an improviser lives.

Knowing the joy of the fish
By the joy at walking by the stream;
Knowing other centers of selves
By the knowledge of the center of myself;
Sympathy initiated learning and understanding
The joy of the fish, the centers of others.
Sympathy led me to put myself in others’ position,
— positions of Dr. Liu, the retired pediatrician,
Yaping, the retired engineer, Linda, the former department store salesperson,
And Jane, the fashion designer and the interior decoration company owner.
Sympathy led me to put myself in the way of other,
Who bodies forth and enmeshes me.
“We know ‘Self’ from our inner experience,
(A)nd we recognize others as selves.”77

Dr. Liu’s new immigrant world rotated around her daughter’s dream;
Yaping her family, both the nuclear family and the extended one;
Linda her daughter and herself,
Jane herself and her son.
During their pre-immigration time,
They all had survived the jungle law,

———
77 Brum, 1996, p.35.
To Conclude

--- the turbulent sea of the Chinese culture.
They were the fittest.
From their respective centers,
They all had learned To Live the human law
--- Going in with a descending vortex
--- Coming out with an ascending one
In the multidimensional vortexes of the rapid torrents of the Chinese sea.
They were all improvisers.
Only that the time and the context
The meaning of a life worth living
Was unique for each of them.
Only that the angle from which
Each of them had experienced the culture
Varied.
Varied were their vantage points;
Converged was the way
--- the Tao that has no contour
--- the course of events
--- the process of integration of particulars
--- the water and the air wherever life is
The improvisation.

Aren’t we “all the same, that is, human,
(In such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else
(W)ho ever lived, lives or will live”78?
There is “nothing which happens,
(N)o event or process,
(E)ver repeats itself exactly.”79

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To Splice the Chinese Knotwork
Is to simulate, not to repeat, a process
—the process of story-telling between Jane and myself.
It is to let the real efface itself
In favor of the more real,
The truer than the true,
The more telling and poignant than the real,

The hyperreal.
Hyperreal lies in the "metonymy"\(^{80}\).
--- the patterning,

Which "recognize(s) the continual production of identity
(A)s a kind of patterning sustained through time
(B)y the modes of production that create it."

Metonymy repeats the patterning
By force of imposition and the force of habit,
But the process can never be repeated exactly
For the particulars, the time, and the context
The angles of them towards the patterning
Are non-repeatable.

The Connection Knot was being made
At the particular time and place,
With the particular ropes of a teacher and a student
Who had brought their particular stories.
All these particulars are non-repeatable,
Not to be generalized, nor abstracted,
Nor was the Connection Knot,

\(^{80}\) Gilmore, 1994, p.69.
Nor was any other knot.

Only the rhythm of turn-taking in a dialogue,
Only the characteristics of dominance and intersubjective exchange,
Only the metaphysics of non-contour — the Tao.
That is the Taoist pattern of change,
—— the interplay between opposites.
—— the unity beyond the world of opposites.
"Opposites are abstract concepts
(B)elonging to the realm of thought,
(A)nd as such they are relative.
By the very act of focusing our attention on any one concept
(W)e create its opposite.
As Lao Tzu says,
‘When all in the world understand beauty to be beautiful,
(T)hen ugliness exists;
(W)hen all understand goodness to be good,
(T)hen evil exists."
The dynamic unity, or interplay, or balance
Between the opposites
—— the intellectual extremes
Has been emphasized in the Taoist archetypal poles
Of yin and yang.
“(T)hey called the unity lying between yin and yang the Tao
(A)nd saw it as a process
(W)hich brings about their interplay:
‘That which lets now the dark,
(N)ow the light appear is Tao.’”

That which lets now dominance,
Now the intersubjective exchange appear is Tao.

The historically secondary and supporting role
Of the Chinese knotwork
Embodies and points to the Tao
Which takes the position of water,
--- The lowest.
It seeps low and flows towards lower.
It is weak and soft.
"Nothing under heaven is softer and weaker than water.
But those who can attack the hard and strong cannot defeat it." 83
"The highest good is like water;
Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures
but also struggles
to occupy the place loathed by the masses."
Therefore,
It is near to the Tao." 84

The historically marginalized position,
In the North American mainstream academic culture,
Of the representation of woman immigrants
Is embodied in its supporting role
Of the Chinese knotwork,
— the pointer to the Tao.
Like a drop of water,
Like the Chinese knotwork,
The self-representation of woman immigrants

83 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.54.
84 Lao, Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.67.
Takes a low position,
--- a secondary and supporting role,
For it has the flexibility --- the vitality
To bend.
"If it
is bent,
  it will be preserved intact;
is crooked,
  it will be straightened;
is sunken,
  it will be filled;
is worn-out,
  it will be renewed;
has little,
  it will gain;
has much,
  it will be confused.

For these reasons,
The sage holds on to unity
  and serves as the shepherd for all under heaven.
He is not self-absorbed,
  therefore he shines forth;
He is not self-revealing,
  therefore he is distinguished;
He is not self-assertive,
  therefore he has merit;
He does not praise himself,
Long-lasting is an art work
Which embodies and points to the Tao.

"Most Western collectors content themselves with admiring
(I)n a general way
(T)he technical finesse and atmosphere of Chinese pictures,
(Or) the qualities of shape, glaze and the texture of ceramics;
(A)nd arranging them in chronological order.
They never realize that each object they so much admire
(S)poke a language for its Chinese makers
(W)hich conveyed a clear, non-verbal meaning;
(A)nd that the object was meant to make people
(W)ho used it aware of their own environment in a special, ... way.
It was supposed, quite literally, to work a transformation on the world
(A)nd open the user's mind to their own intimate relationship with their universe.
A good work of art should be an embodiment of — and a pointer to — the Tao."86

An embodiment and a pointer to the Tao
Is the symmetrical in form and the empty space in between the layers
Of the Chinese knotwork.
Symmetry acknowledges opposites — dominance and intersubjective exchange,
Symmetry represents balance between the opposites,
Symmetry transcends the opposites,
Symmetry unites.

An embodiment and a pointer to the Tao
Is the empty space,

85 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.87.
Which strengthens the structure of the knot
Without having to alter its shape;
Empty space renders tenacity to the knotwork
And provides flexibility for its usefulness.
“Thirty spokes converge on a single hub,
but it is the space where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the cart lies.
Clay is molded to make a pot,
but it is the space where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the clay pot lies.
Cut out doors and windows to make a room,
but it is in the spaces where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the room lies.
Therefore,
Benefit may be derived from something,
but it is in nothing that we find usefulness.”

Chinese “works of art provides some of the means
(F)or bringing people into communion with currents and vortices,
(G)iving them a deep sense of their presence,
(A)nd of the ways in which the tangled skeins evolve.”

Embodiment and a pointer to the Tao
Are the tangled skeins—the Chinese knotwork
That simulates the Taoist web of the world of relations,
In its splicing
In its rhythm of turn taking—dominance and intersubjective exchange;
In its historically secondary and supporting role;
In its symmetrical form and empty space in between the layers.

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87 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.70.
To Splice in the Chinese knotwork

"Was illuminating another aspect of the infinite multiplicity of the Tao." 89

To ground To Splice in the Chinese Knotwork,
I untied the Connection Knot
And untwisted the Teacher Rope.
To Untie the Connection Knot
I abstracted "her smile that had stood the test of hardship",
And "the trustworthiness in my appearance".
In her smile,
I was completing my immigrant story of learning from hardship.
In my trustworthy appearance,
She was yearning for a faith that was threatened
By betrayal from a friend and bullying from a stranger.
Completing my immigrant story of learning from hardship in her smile,
I was putting myself into her position,
I was opening to her center of the world
From my center of the world.
Like Chaung Tzu,
Who is able
Through his joy in wandering
To share the joy of fish in the stream,
I understood her smile
By my smile at learning from hardship.
Putting oneself into the other's position,
"In such a way as not to distinguish between you and me." 90
"Observe other persons through your own person," 91

Who was, through intersubjective exchange,
Making meaning of life — mine and my student’s.

In my imagined smile of hers
Which stood the test of hardship,
There is polarizing movement toward
My own smile of hardship.
In my own smile of hardship,
There is interplay
Between the Chinese Cultural Revolution
That was forced upon me,
And the immigration
That was chosen autonomously by myself;
Between a life in the commune
And a life in isolation;
Between the anti-commune members’ myth in the pre-commune time
And the pro-commune members experience
In the commune and the post-commune time;
Between the pro-Western myth in the pre-immigration time
Owing sole goodness to a Western world
And a reconstruction and refinement during the immigration time
Of a lived Western world
Which was conceptualized as a polarizing movement of opposites,
Of good and evil, light and dark;
Between my imagined upward career movement
And the lived downward career movement;
Between the certainty of my successfully survived and lived Cultural Revolution
And the uncertainty of my unknown future and the on-going struggles
During the immigration;
Between accepting everything as cultural difference
And locating individual differences underneath the cultural,
Seeing the particulars behind the general.
In the reconstruction of my own smile of hardship,
There is sympathy and understanding
Toward hers,
To complete mine and to fulfill hers;
There is hope and reality
Of mine
To give birth to, to form, to follow, and to harmonize with,
One another.

In my trustworthy appearance,
She was moving towards her intellectual opposites
Of betrayal from a friend and of bullying from a stranger.
Like the interplay between Taoist opposite extremes,
Her inner yearning for the opposite
Was a balancing movement between the concepts of good and evil.
At the moment the balancing stop,
Evil would have been generalized as of the new culture she just entered;
At the moment the balancing stop,
She would have become rigid and stiff.
Her balancing movement was a symbol of vitality
Of her humanness in the Taoist frame of thinking:
"Human beings are
soft and supple when alive,
stiff and straight when dead.
The myriad creatures, the grasses and trees are
soft and fragile when alive,
dry and withered when dead."
Therefore, it is said:

The rigid person is a disciple of death;
the soft, supple, and delicate are lovers of life.”

A lover of life,
She yearned for trustworthiness;
A lover of life,
She acted towards the opposite.
That keeps her away from becoming a disciple of death;
That keeps her soft, supple and delicate;
That represents her intellectual pursuit of a life worth living;
That is to Live and to improvise.

To Untwist the Teacher Rope,
I looked into the threads of my teacher self,
Which valued an equal relationship with a student.
To bring my childhood and life experience into my becoming of a teacher,
I found myself taking a stand on my student’s boat.

Equalizing with a student
Is to lower a teacher’s position in the traditional sense,
It is to lower the position of human,
Like Chuang Tzu in the Fish Story,
To the position of fish in the stream,
It is to let sympathy lead
To an understanding of the ways of thinking of others --- the fish, the students,
---the student “she”, the students “they”
And the student “I” --- the “I” as a student in childhood
And the “I” as a student through becoming a teacher.
The “I” student was learning about self,

92 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.52
In order to sympathize with others.
The understanding of others led by sympathy
Shed light on learning about self.
"To understand others is knowledge,
Understanding oneself is enlightenment;"^93
Others and oneself,
Knowledge and enlightenment,
Pairs of opposites,
"(G)ive birth to each other,"
"(C)omplete each other,"
"(F)orm each other,"
"(F)ulfill each other,"
"(H)armonize with each other,"
"(F)ollow each other—
it is ever thus."^94

The endless multiplication of the verbs
Is the intersubjective exchange,
— exchange as movement
Between centers,
Between subjects,
The center of self, the subject of self
The center of other, the subject of other.
Moving toward one center
With the subject of the other.
One center does not replace the other,
But rather adds to the existing center.
It is "assimilating difference without repudiating likeness

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^93 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.100.
^94 Lao Tzu, (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.60.
— that is, .... straddling the space between the opposites.”

For a Western mind,

“It is easy enough to give up one side of a polarity
(1)n order to oscillate toward the other side.

What is difficult”, for a Western mind,

“(1)s to attain a notion of difference, being unlike,
Without giving up a sense of commonality,
(0)f being a ‘like’ human being.”

To take a stand on my student’s boat,
Is to move toward another center — another boat,
From where I could see a world from the vantage of the other boat
In addition to the world I see from the vantage of the center of myself.
It is to acknowledge and value the other as a center of its own right,
As a — a country in addition to 中 国 — China,
As a fish who through the leaping in the stream
Expresses its joy,
Who through its own joy of leaping in the stream,
Understands the joy of Chuang Tzu,
Who enjoys walking by the stream.
In Taoism, everything is an event,
Everything has a story,
Including a rock.
A rock is equal to a human being,
A fish, a grass, a drop of water, and air.
A student is equal to a teacher.
Caring for the student,
Is, for the teacher, to understand the student.

95 Benjamin, 1995, p.50.
And to teach the student
To understand the teacher,
The other from the student’s point,
Is to let the student enlighten herself
Without being taught.

To ground To Splice in the Chinese Knotwork,
I untied the Friendship Knot
and untwisted the friend ropes.
To untie is to free in order to win autonomy
for future splicing;
To untwist is to separate to gain power
for further integrating.

To Untie the Friendship Knot,
A Chinese-woman-immigrant friendship was identified;
To Untwist the Friend Ropes,
Two polymorphous individuals were reconstructed.
The friendship was a ship
— co-built, and co-operated by us two Chinese woman-immigrants;
The friendship was a cradle
— in which we cared for and were cared for.
The two Chinese woman-immigrants are women,
Who “(k)now masculinity,
Maintain femininity,
and be a ravine for all under heaven.”

With masculinity,
We built and operated our ship,

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96 Lao Tzu , (in Mair trans.) 1990, p.93.
On our journey of immigration;
With femininity,
We shared our experience of building and operating the ship;
We cared for one another in our cradle of immigration
— a home we made for each other to return to.
With masculinity,
One of us took the lead
Initiating a relationship;
With femininity,
One of us followed
Accepting the relationship.
With masculinity,
We stayed different;
With femininity,
We remained same.
With masculinity,
We were piloting our own independent lives;
With femininity,
We let our life paths cross and be changed by each other’s.
With masculinity,
We were strong persons,
We stood steadfast, persevering;
With femininity,
We were vulnerable,
We remained flexible, improvising.
For, in Taoist way of thinking,
"There exists no yang without yin in it
Nor yin without yang.
They are impalpable polarities which provide that oscillation
(With)out which there can be no movement."
Their endless dialectic in vibration and wave-pattern
(is what weaves the web of Tao.

_Yang_ is bright, red, male, penetrating, high, celestial,
_Yin_ is dark, black, female, receptive, abyssal, deep.\footnote{Rawson, Legeza, 1973/1995, p.12.}

Thus these two mutual opposites are infinitely ambiguous.
Ambiguous were the gender influence in our respective up-bringing:
By financially independent mothers and my grandmother,
By her powerful and my gentle father,
By similar expectations with our brothers from our parents,
By our inescapable motherhood as a social institution,
By our constant improvisation of odds and ends available in life
By our persistent striving for a life worth living.
We were bright, dark, and gray,
We were red, black, and brown,
We were penetrating, receptive, and we stay in the golden mean,
We were high, abyssal, and we were content with middling state,
We were celestial and deep, and we were grounded,
We were male, female, and we were ambiguous.
Ambiguous as we were,
We were polymorphous.
Polymorphous as we were,
We were polarizing between the two intellectual extremes,
We were moving on the continuum,
We were circling around the center of Tao,
That _yang_ in _yin_,
And _yin_ in _yang_.
The concepts are mere tools,
Important was the person’s being,
--- The becoming of an intersubjective self
--- Exchange between the center of yin and the center of yang
--- Harmony beyond the opposites.

"That which lets
now the dark,
now the light appear
is Tao."

"The world as we know it
(1) is inseparable from how we know it."

Narrative inquiry with its tools of autobiographical and biographical studies
Is the soil in which the world as we know grew.
The shift from self to others,
From autobiographical study to biographical study,
Is another interplay between opposites,
Another sympathetic understanding of fish in Chuang Tzu,
Of putting oneself into other's position,
Of intersubjective self.
The move from self to the others
Depends on "a deep sense of trust
in the quality of the experience of other persons and cultures."

"Respect for experience is respect for
its possibilities in thought and knowledge as well as an enforced attention
to its joys and sorrows.

Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction
of life and of tolerant and generous cooperation among men.
Respect for things of experience alone brings with it such a respect

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100 McDermott, 1986, p.121.
for others, the centers of experience,
as is free from patronage, domination, and the will to impose.” 101

The sameness of and the difference between
Writing the stories of self and the others
Is a story of “reciprocal understanding” 102
intersubjectivity, of the way how meaning was being made.
The writing of the process of the inquiry
Is a story of
“habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and every moment of your life”, 103
a description of how the described was described.
Is a story of how the world is viewed.
With the respect to experience
Whose criteria of continuity and interaction
“Intercept and unite”104,
I reconstructed stories of the ever passing past,
With a future in the back of mind.
The method allowed me to start with subjectivity,
And hoped, through interaction with my students’ stories,
That I could reach intersubjectivity.
—intersubjectivity between
A teacher and her students
I and others,
My way of meaning making in the Chinese culture
And my way of meaning making in a Western culture,
—Lao Tzu and Dewey.
The method
That was originated in the North American academic culture in Deweyian tradition

103 Whitman, p.40.
104 Dewey, 1938, p.44.
Became like the soil
For the growth of my Taoist intersubjective meaning making of experience,
---experience from my perspective at different times
   in both Chinese and Canadian contexts,
---experience from my subjects’ vantage points at different times
   in various places of China and Canada.
“The history of America is an accurate cameo version,
(B)oth actually and symbolically,
(O)f the forthcoming makeup of global culture.”
“(T)he history of American thought ha(s) frequently displayed
(A)n awareness of the cultural and political characteristics
(M)ost congenial to the development of a creatively human future,
(G)lobally experienced.”
Globally experienced is the present,
In my narrative inquiry and auto/biographical research
When my personal and cultural way of thinking finds its soil.
--- a rich soil of Dewey’s ideal “society of free individuals in which all,
(T)hrough their own work,
(C)ontribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others,
(T)he only environment
(I)n which any individual can really grow normally to his own stature.”
“What is firmly established cannot be uprooted;”
My way of thinking was firmly established
In my experience on the soil of the Chinese culture;
My way of thinking is ripening into my own stature
Only in my experience on the soil of Dewey’s society,
On the soil that grew the narrative mode of thinking in educational research

---

---the reflective and meditative meaning making process

Created by the story-telling animal of humans;
On the soil that has nourished the spirits of Emerson,
For whom the making of words is the making of the world of meaning, 108
Like the making of the Chinese words 中國.
The relation between the two words
And the endless relations between the words and the rest of the world
Make and remake the very fabric of our world as experienced.
“The world is emblematic.
Parts of speech are metaphors,
(B)ecause the whole nature is a metaphor of the human mind.”109
On the soil grew William James,
Who believes in a dialectical relation between nature and mind
—“the inmost nature of the reality is congenial to powers
which you possess”, 110
Like the dialectic polarizing opposites in the Chinese Taoism,
Interdependently mind and nature evolve,
Unity and harmony lies in the interplay.
On the soil grew Dewey
Whose passion for democracy led him to uphold ordinary everyday experience
Which, with the increase of a demand on pluralism and multiculturalism,
Has been cultivating ordinary everyday experience
Of the new comers like my subjects and myself
With an aged culture
Whose strength is in both continuity and adaptation
—-improvisation.
The advantage of this newest civilization of the world

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108 McDermott, 1986, p.34.
109 Emerson, (in McDermott) 1986, p.34.
110 James, (in McDermott) 1986, p.106.
Is the freedom from being burdened by many centuries of encrusted tradition, 
Is the very freedom to improvise, 
To choose and to act upon well-educated choice out of 
Continuity brought by people from aged cultures 
And adaptation to the ever changing composites of the young soil, 
— the Taoist rapid currents. 
The soil is a concept at the other end on the pole 
Of my meaning making continuum. 
My understanding of Dewey and Lao Tzu 
Develop interdependently. 
None would be like what it is 
Without the other. 
My becoming an intersubjective self 
Has been enriching myself to grow to my own stature, 
Becoming an intersubjective self, 
Interplay between my subjective world and my students’ 
My personal way of thinking and theirs’, 
My cultural way of thinking and the Deweyian way of thinking. 
My becoming an intersubjective self, 
Is also intended to contribute to 
—“the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others” 
Of Dewey’s ideal. 
My becoming an intersubjective self 
Has accumulated for me — a stranger for either cultures 
Strength to understand both ends on the pole; 
Has grounded me — an improviser 
On a vantage point to transcend the opposites 
— a unity and harmony beyond.
Spliced, in this chapter,
were my cultural self and all the other selves,
were my Chinese philosophical self and English poetic self.
Spliced was the knot of my intersubjective self in the making.

Like the symbol in Figure 17,
A Taoist Tai-chi Tu of a symmetric arrangement of dark yin and bright yang
is my Chinese philosophical self,
The colors on Tai-chi Tu characterize Dewey's ideal society of democracy
of the North American tradition,
that nurtures my English poetic self,
Seven chapters are the seven knots spliced through the colored Tai-chi Tu,
All together, it illustrates my cultural self,
that completes my circle of becoming an intersubjective self (Figure 18).

(Figure 17: A Cultural Knot)
(Figure 18: An Intersubjective Knotwork)
References


