

Chapter 3

Ten lives in mine: Creating portraits of influential Chinese educators

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Abstract

This is an essay about research methodology, particularly the use of narrative method, in a project which depicts portraits of 10 influential educators of China. The essay begins with reflections on the dialogue of civilizations and the potential future influence of Chinese civilization in the global community. It then goes on to consider the difficulties of interpreting this civilization through the lens of objectivist social science theories. Fundamental aspects of narrative method are then explored, and reasons why it is able to bridge profound differences of culture and epistemology between China and the Western world. Next the lessons that emerged in the process of creating portraits of the influential educators are presented, illustrating core values of the Chinese educational tradition in a dynamic and vivid way. The essay ends with a pencil sketch of the youngest of the influential educators.

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1. Introduction

This article describes efforts to depict the life-stories of 10 influential Chinese educators. It is thus an article about research methodology, particularly the demands

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of carrying out narrative research into the lives and ideas of educators in a culture very different from one's own. It is also an article about research purposes, in the sense that these life-stories are intended to give insight into a civilization, which is likely to have considerable importance for the global community in the coming years.

In order to give a context for the article and explain my reasons for writing it, I will begin with a depiction of the global environment in a period described by the United Nations as one of "dialogue among civilizations." This will frame the study and show why it has importance. Next, I will describe how my own research journey led me to narrative method, and reflect on its significance. Then I will introduce the subjects of my study, and share some of the lessons I have learned in the process of creating portraits of their lives. While it is not possible to present even one full portrait within the scope of this article, a pencil sketch of the youngest of the influential educators is offered in the conclusion.

Why the title "Ten Lives in Mine"? Here I must be honest and admit that I have borrowed this concept from one of my own influential teachers, Dr. Grace Irwin, who told the stories of her father, brother and beloved pastor in her book *Three Lives in Mine* (Irwin, 1986). I have been working on the life-stories of these influential educators for a number of years, interviewing each of them at some length, and collecting some of their writings, as well as the histories of their universities. Yet, when I finally came to the point of drafting a chapter about each of them for a book (Hayhoe, 2005), a sense of paralysis came over me. How could I tell the stories of lives lived with such richness, of educational theories and contributions which had changed the face of modern China? There was so much I did not know, even though I had gained glimpses of their lives on numerous occasions of personal interaction, in the interviews I had had with them and through reading their published work.

I realized that I was in no position to be their biographer, and simply did not have adequate information or knowledge for such a role. Yet I began to see myself as a portrait painter, seeking to sketch out the face and demeanor that I had come to know on the many occasions we had worked together over the years, also as I had listened to them during my interviews. I would try to fill in color, texture and poise from memory and from the perusal of their written work, then create a portrait that would convey to readers some of the deep values and beliefs that had given meaning and purpose to their lives. Thus it was not "their lives and their theories" as objects of scrutiny to be dispassionately presented, but "their lives in mine," as I had experienced interaction with them and as my life had been transformed by the examples they had given me.

2. The dialogue of civilizations

It is one of the wrenching ironies of early 21st century that the year 2001 should have been the year of the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York and the United Nations' Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The UN's stated purpose was to encourage a

“focus on human cultural, spiritual dimensions and on the interdependence of humankind and its rich diversity”(Hayhoe & Pan, 2001, p. 1).

We might locate the beginning of this dialogue among civilizations in the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1991 led to a reconsideration of the social sciences, which had been dominated by an approach to understanding modern development that was determinedly secular, and that tended to privilege political and economic parameters of modern society over spiritual or religious features. It was certainly the case in my field of comparative education that societies tended to be characterized as capitalist or socialist, economically developed or developing. Comparative research was geared towards understanding how education contributed to development within this framework, and educational practices from other civilizations were judged by the degree to which they supported modern development.

The end of the Cold War has brought in its train a new set of conflicts that have been summed up in Samuel Huntington’s haunting phrase “The Clash of Civilizations.” Huntington calls for “a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests”(Huntington, 1993, p. 49). He sees this as crucial for the West to maintain its leadership of the global community. Others have seen it as an opportunity to learn from non-Western civilizations and explore ways to move beyond the patterns of the Enlightenment heritage.

One of these, Tu Weiming, has dedicated several decades to writing and teaching on what Confucian philosophy can offer to the Western world. In a thoughtful essay, Tu outlines the core values of the Enlightenment—liberty, equality, human rights, the dignity of the individual, respect for privacy, government by the people and due process of law (Tu, 1998). He then identifies a dark side to the enlightenment, as progress, reason and individualism were developed into self-interest, expansionism, domination, manipulation and control, and calls for a rethinking of the enlightenment heritage that may broaden its scope, deepen its moral sensitivity and creatively transform its genetic constraints. A new vision of human community may draw upon Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, but also bring in Eastern religions such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, as well as indigenous traditions, Tu suggests. Tu’s work complements a rich literature on Confucian thought in Western languages. Until recently, this literature was seen more as an academic exercise in preserving and ordering classical knowledge than as an important resource. One of the reasons for this lay in the fact that there was little readiness to listen to spiritual lessons that might come from other civilizations, or indeed even to the West’s own spiritual heritage. A second reason lies in the fate of Confucian thought in China itself over the 20th century.

After the May 4th Movement of 1919, which is often called the Chinese Enlightenment, Confucianism came to be regarded as a major obstacle to modernity by both Marxists and liberal modernizers. For decades it was criticized for its tendency to hierarchy, rigidity, conformism, and the suppression of creativity. Then in the 1960s and 1970s this judgment was suddenly overturned. The remarkable

success of East Asian societies such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong cast Confucianism in a new light. It was now credited with giving East Asian peoples the motivation, discipline and skills necessary for modernization (Vogel, 1991).

Pre-eminent sinologist William Theodore de Bary makes the point that both of these views of Confucianism misrepresent the character of Confucian education. He notes how the traditional Chinese state rarely intervened in education at the local level, limiting itself to control over the imperial examinations, used to select a scholar elite to rule. Education at the local level fitted into the neo-Confucian perception of a proper human order, grounded in values such as self-reliance, individual responsibility, family cooperation and local self-governance (de Bary, 1996).

Could it be, asks de Bary, that the lasting popularity of the Four Books of Confucius was a reflection of their intrinsic cultural merits? He goes on to comment on the marked eclecticism and diversity of research orientations among Chinese and Japanese scholars of the 19th century. Far from constraining openness to new ideas, this core curriculum provided individuals with a strong foundation in their own learning, from which to bring in the new scientific knowledge from the West that was so essential to modernization.

Confucian learning was a “learning for one’s self.” “*The Four Books* with Zhu Xi’s commentary gave the individual a sense of self-worth and self-respect not to be sacrificed for any short-term utilitarian purpose; a sense of place in the world not to be surrendered to any state or party; a sense of how one could cultivate one’s individual powers to meet the social responsibilities that the enjoyment of learning always brought with it—powers and responsibilities not to be defaulted on. Moreover it gave a sense of educational process through discursive learning in dialogue among teachers and students which allowed different understandings of traditional teachings to emerge” (de Bary, 1996, p. 33). These words provided a key for unlocking the secrets of inner power in the lives of the 10 educators I was studying.

Why then did it take me so long to grasp this? Why did I not see it 20 years ago, when I began my journey of research into Chinese education? Put simply, I had to do a great deal of “unlearning” of the research methods taught to me in my doctoral study, methods profoundly shaped by the pursuit of modernization that dominated the social sciences of the time. Only then could I begin to see.

3. A journey of learning and unlearning

My first degree was in Western classical studies and included the reading of much of traditional European philosophy, history and literature in Greek and Latin, including works such as Plato’s *Republic*, the *Apology* of Socrates, many Greek tragedies, Herodotus, Thucydides and Pindar, to name a few of the Greek classical writers, and such Latin works as the *Aeneid* of Virgil, the *Odes* of Catullus, the *Histories* of Tacitus, the prose writings of Cicero etc. I believe it was my familiarity with this rich classical tradition of Europe that drew me to the Chinese classics after

I moved to Hong Kong at the age of 21. Although my formal studies were mainly of modern Chinese, I learned some classical Chinese and read at least two of the Four Books of Confucius in the original.

In my graduate studies, however, I moved to the field of comparative education, and my approach to research was shaped by principles of objectivity and value neutrality, key elements in the “problem approach” to comparative education developed by Brian Holmes, my doctoral supervisor at the University of London. This approach was a novel effort to overcome some of the worst features of positivist social sciences, particularly the lack of attention to values. However, it remained true to a critical dualist philosophy which saw scholarship as a neutral endeavor that should critically assess the role of values in modernization, but could not contribute to judgment regarding the intrinsic worth of those values, nor set forth ideals for the future based on preferred values. Holmes’ problem approach melded well with the research literature on China at the time, which tended to measure China’s progress within the broad sociological categories of modernization or socialist construction and give greatest attention to the framework of political economy and the ways in which the policies of successive political factions shaped the nation.

Perhaps due to my early Western classical education and to a deepening attraction to Chinese classical philosophy, I found myself more and more dissatisfied with this approach. Thus in my postdoctoral studies I adopted a value explicit approach developed by a stimulating group of scholars in different parts of the world who committed themselves to the World Order Models Project. They insisted on the direct moral responsibility of scholarship and set themselves to the task of visioning preferred futures for the global community. Their work made possible a framework characterized by openness to multiple civilizations and cultural heritages as sources of value, in contrast to the closed framework of Enlightenment social science. This approach helped me to sketch out a picture of mutually respectful relations between universities in China and various western countries and to evaluate projects of educational development on substantive rather than mainly technical criteria (Hayhoe, 1989).

A second important change that came about in my research work was an increasing emphasis on inter-subjectivity in collecting data about China’s educational development. As China opened up to Western researchers, it became possible to carry out interviews and gain insight into the ways in which Chinese university administrators and scholars understood the change processes in their institutions and society, rather than interpreting them through an external theoretical lens. Every year I traveled around the country visiting universities and listening to university leaders and professors talk about the ways in which their institutions were responding to the nation’s modernization project. Each university seemed to have a personality of its own, and to be capable of acting in ways quite different from what might be expected by the national policy framework.

The writing of institutional histories after the end of the Cultural Revolution was an exercise in identity formation, also a healing from the straightjacket imposed by the Soviet model in the 1950s, and the destructive attacks launched on them during the Cultural Revolution. Within a national reform framework that gave increasing

autonomy to universities, institutions developed their own distinctive approach to reform, based in their unique historical experience, the specificities of their geographical region and the opportunities they identified in their environment (Hayhoe, 1999, pp. 149–244).

Nevertheless, it was some time before one felt comfortable as a foreign researcher to interview individuals by name. Only in the late 1990s did it become possible to focus on the personal views and life experiences of 10 influential educators whom I had worked with in projects of joint doctoral student training and collaborative research.

It was then I made the surprising discovery that the Confucian heritage, repudiated as an obstacle to modernization ever since the May 4th movement of 1919 and viciously attacked during the Cultural Revolution, had been an essential foundation of their lives and thought over the century. It took me some time to recognize, since I too had been strongly influenced by the prevailing tendency in China's educational literature to dismiss Confucian thought as an obstacle to progressive change.

How then was I to interpret their life-stories in relation to this heritage? What method would enable me to handle, in an interactive way, their evolution as inheritors of a civilization of great richness, and my own changing understanding of China? I was fortunate, at this point, to stumble upon the literature of narrative method. What a pleasant surprise to find the lessons I had learnt through my practical exposure to the Chinese environment resonated with a newly emerging approach to the social sciences in North America.

4. Narrative method in social science research

Alasdair MacIntyre's influential book *After Virtue* explores the dilemma of modern life in terms of the emergence of morality as a category separate from scientific knowledge, set against lives that had been lived within an integrated understanding of knowledge and virtue before Immanuel Kant's introduction of a dualism between facts and values. "In a world of secular rationality, religion could no longer provide a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action: and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal, narrowly academic subject" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 50). This in turn led to the social sciences becoming dominated by objectivist studies of human society that focused on what could be observed, measured and patterned, rather than the inner meaning of human lives.

MacIntyre proposed narrative as a means of escape from the limitations of post-Enlightenment social science, and way of exploring inter-subjective understanding. "Conversations in particular... and human actions in general" might be viewed as "enacted narratives," he suggests. "It is because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the action of others. Stories are lived before they are told"

(MacIntyre, 1984, p. 211). He goes on to make the point that “the other aspect of narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 218).

Donald Polkinghorne provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarly challenges to value neutrality in the social sciences. He notes how “Weber defended a dualism of understanding in which the personal decision pertaining to private world-orientations was separated from a scientism or instrumentalism in the sphere of rational, intersubjectively valid information” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 41). He demonstrates how narrative has come to be used in the fields of history, literature and psychology to bring values and scientific understanding back together. Most interesting is his discussion of the healing character of narrative within psychology—the importance to human well being of the ability to “create a narrative that is coherent and satisfying and that will serve as a justification for one’s present condition and situation” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 106).

Polkinghorne goes on to say that “in the understanding of human existence—both human lives and organizational “lives”—narrative has a central role” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 123). “According to a narrative theory of human existence, a study needs to focus its attention on existence as it is lived, experienced, and interpreted by the human person” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125). This in turn leads to a different conception of time than that which has dominated the social sciences. “In the objective view of reality constructed by the formal science of the Enlightenment, the world was pictured as space filled with meaningless objects that moved through a time plane which made up the present moment” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 126). In narrative understanding, however, one is dealing with multiple layers of time—time past, in memory, time present, in attention, and time future, in expectation. Thus the person or institution in a narrative study is seen as an unfolding story, rather than a fixed entity in time and space; the person is also seen in relationship with his or her family, colleagues, institution, and also with the researcher.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly note that “temporality” is a key term in their narrative work. “We are ...not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people’s lives, institutional lives, lives of things. Just as we found our own lives embedded within a larger narrative of social science inquiry, the people, schools, and educational landscapes we study undergo day-by-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Clandinin and Connelly end their first chapter with what they called a ‘working concept’ of narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus.... Simply stated, ...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Two core points from this literature have shaped my thinking as I have worked to create portraits of influential Chinese educators. The first is that people’s lives are lived in inter-relation with others; they cannot be seen as isolated entities but as

members of a family, of one or several institutions, of a community, of a nation. The second is the importance of a fluid sense of time in understanding evolving lives.

A particular characteristic of the lives of scholars in modern China has been the fact that many have been associated with one university throughout their lifetime. Thus their personal narrative has been intertwined with the narrative of their institution. For Chinese scholars, the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, constituted an important turning point. For the first time since 1949 they were given space and time to reflect on their own life stories. Likewise, institutions finally had the opportunity to reconstruct their stories, and almost every university in China produced an institutional history.

5. Creating portraits of the educators

It will not be possible in the span of this paper to present a portrait of each of “my” educators. Rather I will describe the process of creating the portraits, and the lessons that have been learned along the way. Over a period of several years I carried out two or three interviews with each of the scholars. I asked them to reflect on their own lives, their experience of family and schooling, and their educational contributions over a lifetime. I also asked them to comment on the main phases of China’s educational development from the early 1950s up to the period of reform and opening up after 1978. In addition I collected articles and books that they had written, as well as institutional histories of the universities where they had studied and taught.

When I sat down to craft a portrait of each of them out of these materials, it became clear that the nature of this portrait—how up-close it was, the degree to which the inner person was revealed and the character of the discourse in relation to China’s “official” story—was a factor of my relationship to the scholar in question. Several of the scholars were individuals I had cooperated with over a lengthy period of time. Others I knew less well. They were naturally more guarded in sharing their life experiences and their educational views.

In the case of Xie Xide, distinguished scientist and first woman president of a major university, I had met her in 1980 when she was vice-president in charge of international affairs at Fudan University, Shanghai, and I was a foreign expert at Fudan. Our paths crossed on many occasions over subsequent years, as she took up leadership of a major World Bank project in Chinese higher education, traveled abroad often and graciously came to Canada as keynote speaker for a conference I organized. Thus when I spent two afternoons with her in a Shanghai hospital in the autumn of 1998 she talked in an unrestrained way. I had the sense she welcomed this opportunity to reflect on the meaning of her life as a woman leader in science and higher education. The memory of those meetings is now bittersweet as she passed away a little over a year later, the only one of the 10 educators who has not been able to read and comment on the portrait I have created.

In the case of Wang Chengxu, China’s leading scholar of comparative education, our first meeting had taken place in London in 1983, while I was a doctoral student

at the University of London Institute of Education, and he was returning to visit the country where he had done graduate work several decades earlier in the 1930s and 1940s. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to meet one of the luminaries in the field from China, just as I was starting my research on Chinese education. I invited him and a colleague for dinner in the dining room of the William Goodenough House, our pleasant graduate residence, and made the most of that opportunity to learn. While I was aware of Professor Wang's work over the subsequent years, it was to be 18 years later, in the spring of 2001, before I met him again at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, when I visited to fulfill my duties as a recently appointed advisory professor. What a delight to learn in some detail about his major program of translating western educational classics and the contemporary comparative education literature into Chinese, as well as the three-volume global history of education he edited, which was organized around China's remarkable history of education.

In the case of Li Bingde, an outstanding scholar of learning theory and educational experimentation, our relationship goes back to the late 1980s. I had begun a joint doctoral training project with China in 1989, and his university, Northwest Normal, was one of our partners. Over a twelve-year period, Professor Li staunchly supported the project, sending several doctoral students to Canada, attending conferences associated with the project in both Canada and China and welcoming me on many occasions to his university. Two of his doctoral students became backbone members of the project and we collaborated in many areas. Given this network of close ties, it was not surprising to find Li open and forthcoming in telling his life story and giving his thoughts on China's education development experience.

The case of Zhu Jiushi, former president of the Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, and a leading higher education authority, was different. It had not been a slowly evolving relationship, rather a dramatic experience of meeting in the spring of 1993. I had been doing research with a younger scholar at his institute, and asked for permission to interview him in order to learn how he had transformed his university, making it a nationally emulated model, immediately after the Cultural Revolution. A planned meeting of 1 or 2 h unaccountably turned into three afternoon sessions of 3 h each, as Professor Zhu poured out his heart to me and a group of graduate students who had asked to sit in on the interview. He expounded the ideas which had guided his work with vivid detail, while also sharing aspects of his own political background. The only one of the 10 educators who had joined the revolution as a university student, he had spent years in Yan'an working for the anti-Japanese Resistance University. This moving encounter was the beginning of a lasting intellectual friendship, which has drawn me back to Wuhan over and over again to lecture in the university's higher education institute, collaborate in research and learn more from Professor Zhu's remarkable "scholarship of practice."

In the case of Pan Maoyuan, a leading theorist of higher education, who founded this field as a discipline in China, I had met him at a number of conferences, and heard his presentations, but these were always in rather formal settings. When I visited him at Xiamen University in the autumn of 1997, in order to interview him,

he asked me if I would like to attend the salon he hosted for graduate students in his home every Saturday evening. I accepted with alacrity, and found myself spellbound as I observed hours of passionate and lively argumentation, with different students taking one or other side of a position put forward by one of them, and exploring aspects of the sociological function of higher education in great depth. Professor Pan occasionally injected a few brief comments, if the argument began to lose focus, but largely left it up to the students to carry it forward. I watched the evening's proceedings with fascination, seeing aspects of Professor Pan's teaching style and rapport with students that I had not seen in the more formal settings. That evening's experience had been as valuable as the interviews in allowing me to see the inner power of this teacher's life.

In the case of Lu Jie, China's first woman doctoral supervisor in education, and a leading figure in moral education in China, we got to know each other rather well through our collaborative doctoral program. I was nevertheless touched and surprised by her candor in sharing her life experiences and passion for teaching during the two interviews I had with her in Hong Kong and Nanjing. A handwritten manuscript, which she gave me at the end of the second interview, provided further insights into her understanding of the teacher's role and responsibility. It was entitled "A choice that I do not regret," and elaborated her vision of the teacher, based on her own life within her family and her 43 years of teaching.

The meetings I had with each of the educators were distinctive, with different settings, emphases and insights, but all were extremely valuable. In the case of three of the educators who have not yet been mentioned, Wang Fengxian of Northeast Normal University, Wang Yongquan of Peking University and Gu Mingyuan of Beijing Normal University, there were also particular circumstances in which we met, which enabled me to gain insights into their lives and educational contributions. More will be said below about the third woman educator who was included among the ten, Ye Lan of East China Normal University.

One of the decisions which had to be made was the order in which the portraits should appear in the book. Should I organize them by educational field, by geographical region, or by the degree of importance or influence of their work? As I reflected on this question, it became increasingly clear to me that the acceptable way to present them would be according to a status order based on age. Chinese courtesy would demand that I begin with the oldest and proceed to the youngest, grouping them in cohorts that reflected the time of their birth. This has turned out to be quite helpful for readers, since their educational and family backgrounds reflect the period in which they experienced their early education, and the ways in which the phases of their careers have unfolded related to wider political changes in China. This also shows how important it was to insert myself into the Chinese social context as the project developed.

From the beginning I had hoped to have several woman educators among the 10. Yet I knew only two women, Xie Xide and Lu Jie, who could be characterized as "influential educators" and grouped together with the seven male educators I had selected. After much reflection, I decided to add a dynamic younger woman whom I had met on several occasions and felt to be an educator of growing influence in

China. When I arranged to interview Ye Lan, while on a trip to East China to meet one of the oldest of my group, a trusted Chinese colleague let me know that Chinese readers might be taken aback to see her grouped together with the older generation of renowned scholars. He also intimated that the older educators might view the inclusion of her portrait in the volume with some reserve.

How was I to find a diplomatic solution to this delicate question, which reflected deep differences between a China that still adhered to respect for age and a West that tended to value youth and to emphasize gender equality? After some discussion with my colleague, a solution was found that made it possible to include this younger educator without offending any Chinese sensibilities. Here is how it happened.

There had been one older influential educator, Liu Fonian, who was known to me by reputation, though not personally. I would have liked to include him in the book, but he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease and it was not possible to interview him. With the help of my Shanghai colleague, however, I was able to interview his closest disciple and read his autobiography. In doing this, I came to realize what an important mentor he had been to Ye Lan. The 11th chapter of the book has thus become a portrait of "his life in hers." It gives the story of the university where he had been president and where she both studied and taught, also elements of his life-story and educational contribution. This constitutes vital contextual information for the story of how she became an influential educator, and the approach she has taken to building a research program that has had a transformative impact on basic education in China. The concluding section of this article offers a sketch of Ye Lan's life-story and educational contributions. I hope it will interest readers in the full portrait of this remarkable educator, which appears as chapter 11 in the book (Hayhoe, 2005), as well as the portraits of each of the others, whose stories have been touched upon above.

6. A pencil sketch of Ye Lan, leading theorist of basic education in China

Ye Lan was born in 1941, the fourth of nine children, six of whom survived. Her father was a teacher and an artist, who was caught up in the progressive currents of the time, having rebelled against his conservative father and joined the Communist Party at an early age. She has very happy memories of her childhood in the two-room apartment in Shanghai where the family lived. From the age of four she went with her father to the primary school where he taught every day, and became a lover of books and reading. She also remembers the lively ambience of the home, with her father having constant visitors, both from artist friends and leftwing activists. From time to time he would sell some of his paintings to help maintain the family. Though it was a painful period of Shanghai history, under Japanese occupation, Ye Lan's memories are largely positive ones.

After the revolution of 1949, Ye Lan began her secondary education in an academically excellent school led by a principal who was a friend of her father. Her father had not helped to get her a place, simply suggested she approach the principal herself. After gaining entrance, she soon found herself rebelling against teachers who

used a repressive teaching style that did not allow students to express their views. She lost interest in study, and fell behind academically until her third year, when an angry outburst against the teacher gave her a sense of release. She then made the decision to prepare for rigorous selective examinations for entry into the attached school of the East China Normal University for her upper secondary years. She was successful in gaining entry, and the three years that followed laid a foundation for her later academic career in terms of the rich cultural and literary environment she found there.

In 1958 she began her university studies in the department of education at ECNU, and in 1962 graduated with high honors, being one of only two students in the program who were kept on as young lecturers at the university after graduation. During her four years of undergraduate study she had experienced both the rebellious enthusiasm of the Great Leap Forward of 1958, when students were expected to do research and re-write the textbooks and the re-instatement of highly academic patterns in 1960, when some of the follies of the revolutionary movement had been recognized.

After graduation Ye Lan was required to spend 2 years in a local school, gaining teaching experience before taking up her lectureship at the university. It was a sobering time, as she had many difficulties in managing her students and became aware of how demanding was a teaching career. Between 1964 and 1966 she began teaching in the university's department of education, and also took on an assignment to teach Putonghua to Vietnamese students sent to China for study. This was interrupted by the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and she found herself deeply distressed by the sufferings of her father, whose early party membership record had been lost, and who was therefore treated as a traitor and subjected to debilitating struggle sessions. For the first time, she began to have doubts about the country's political leadership. She also had her own experience of labor in the countryside in a May 7th cadre school in a poor and remote part of northern Jiangsu province.

In 1974, Ye Lan made a life-changing decision. She volunteered to go to the remote region of Tibet for 2 years to pioneer in the establishment of a teachers college for Tibetan teachers. Her motivations were two-fold—the desire to do something significant for others, and a curiosity about a people, culture and language so different from her own. This decision meant leaving behind her six-year-old son, in the care of her husband's mother in Shanghai. Her husband had been sent to work in the Northeast, and was uneasy about her plan to go so far away, yet finally agreed. The 2 years in Tibet were exhilarating, allowing her to learn a great deal about the needs of poor and remote schools, while also taking in the beauty of the mountain terrain she had to traverse in visiting the schools. Up till the present Ye Lan has maintained close ties with the Tibetan teachers she nurtured during those years.

Ye Lan returned to Shanghai in 1976, to face dramatic changes in the country, with the death of Mao Zedong, the arrest of the Gang of Four and the establishment of a whole new direction for the country under Deng Xiaoping's modernization program. It was a time of profound reflection, and she credits the President of

ECNU, Liu Fonian, for enabling her to develop a critical understanding of the works of the Soviet educator, Ivan Kairov which had dominated educational theory during the fifties and early 1960s, then had been attacked and repudiated during the Cultural Revolution. The thoughtful and discriminating re-assessment of Kairov's work laid a foundation for new theoretical developments in the field of education, and Ye Lan was to take up an active role in these developments. Before that, however, she had another life-changing experience—a two-year study period in Yugoslavia under a leading Serbian educator at the University of Zagreb. This opportunity was given to her with China's opening up to the world, and she felt her two years of exposure to forms of socialism quite different from those of the former Soviet Union were extremely stimulating. She also developed a new awareness of her own identity as a Chinese while living abroad.

After her return to China in 1982, Ye Lan benefited greatly from the mentorship of Professor Liu Fonian, who brought together a group of those returning from various Western countries and led them in comparative discussion and analysis, as they debated the relevance of what they had learned to China's own educational needs and circumstances. Ye Lan took up an assignment to teach a foundation course in educational concepts over these years, and the textbook she developed for the course has become widely used throughout China.

Her starting point was the recognition of education as a complex system that must be understood in a dynamic and interactive way. She feels her approach was a response to Kairov's pedagogy, which had dominated Chinese educational theory since the revolution. Kairov had identified three main factors in education—the genetic heritage, which is given, the environment, which has a determining effect, and education, which can be no more than a “helping” factor in relation to the other two. By contrast Ye Lan gave great importance to human potential, the human ability to know the self, and the human desire to develop the self. Her interactive model stresses the fact that the genetic heritage offers many possibilities and it depends on each individual how they will be used. It also suggests that the environment has a less and less determining influence over time, as the child comes to understand it and transform it.

After writing and refining this text (Ye, 1990), Ye Lan threw herself into experimental school-based research, beginning with an assignment to analyze an instance of successful reform in one of Shanghai's poorest districts. From this research she developed the concept of “a system of breakthrough points” which had made the success possible. She came to see educational theory as a kind of “X-ray process” which makes it possible to see and understand the “wisdom of practice.” Subsequent research projects have embraced a wider and wider range of schools throughout China in an ever-expanding network, which includes some of the poorest and most remote rural schools. These projects have demonstrated her basic theory of the potential of each child for self-knowledge and self-development, when given the opportunity to be pro-active in their own learning process. (Ye, 1999) They have also involved the education of parents who are often opposed to pedagogical experimentation as they have so much invested in the examination success of their children.

This pencil sketch gives some insight into the interconnection between the life experiences and educational contributions of one of the influential educators. The family environment in which she grew up, her formal education and each of her later professional experiences served to shape her vision for the transformation of basic education in China. In her life and work we do not see either of the stereotypes of Confucian education which have dominated the literature—a stifling conformism, on the one hand, or a focus on the kinds of personal effort and social cohesion directly related to national economic needs, on the other. Rather we see an individual whose life profile reflects de Bary's thoughtful assessment of the tradition—"a sense of self-worth and self-respect not to be sacrificed for any short-term utilitarian purpose, a sense of place in the world not to be surrendered to any state or party; a sense of how one could cultivate one's individual powers to meet the social responsibilities that the enjoyment of learning always brought" (de Bary, 1996, p. 33).

In Ye Lan, we see a person deeply connected to her family—parents, husband and son—yet shaping these relationships in such a way that she was free to pursue the fulfillment of her own passionate educational mission. We see a person profoundly influenced by her intellectual mentor, yet striking out in a new and innovative direction in her theoretical contributions and her experimental research agenda. We see a person deeply committed to her country, yet critical and reflective in face of the mistakes made by its leaders. Definitely influenced by a culture that emphasizes the collective over the individual good, her life has nevertheless demonstrated a remarkable degree of freedom and initiative within the Chinese social context. It can perhaps be best summed up in Tu Weiming's depiction of the Confucian person: "never an isolated individual (an island), but a center of relationships (a flowing stream)." (Tu, 1998, p. 14)

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