

RED D DRAGON

MY COUNTRY MY STORY



YINGXIONG FENG

Copyright Declaration

Red Dragon

Introduction: This book outlines the author's life story in China and spiritual journey in Australia. It delivers a moral message that justice is necessary for humanity.

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Red Dragon

By Yingxiong Feng

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Part One My Country My Story

1 Early Childhood

A man was born to suffer.

Every part of his life was a bubble, easy to break and easy to be blown away. The philosophy was the same as my story.

I tried not to write with too much of my feelings and emotions but go down the lines with my mind and conscience. Feelings are the waves on the ocean, and emotions are splashes of the mountain streams when they hit the rocks. My mind and conscience are just flat water, still and calm without the push of outside forces.

But I may not be able to achieve this, as water and waves are one body, not two. They are inseparable. When we level and clear the waves, there is no more water.

Feelings and emotions hurt, but our minds and conscience do not. They give us courage and encouragement.

When our minds and conscience suffer, they become feelings and emotions. These feelings and emotions form an essential part of our memoirs.

I seemed to have started to understand things at three and left memories.

Earlier, I couldn't remember anymore, only that my mother had no milk for me, so I often felt hungry.

I was born in late autumn. I was like a dead baby without clear breaths when I was born. My neighbors and family friends said I would not live, and my

parents believed what they said about me and were preparing a funeral for me.

My grandfather's younger brother used the head of a match to feel my nose and insisted that I was still alive because the match head was somewhat wet, as he said it.

I was left alone on a straw bed for three more days and finally recovered.

I did not die, and there was no funeral.

My mother had no milk for me since birth as she had been sick for a long time. So I grew up a weak baby. I remember my mother eating a lot of ginger during my childhood; her body always carried the smell of ginger.

Summer and autumn were longer than spring and winter, so I remember more summer and autumn days. Between summer and autumn, it was often hot and humid. I liked to lie down in the doorway on summer and autumn afternoons. There was a stone bench on each side of the wooden door. I would lie on the stone wearing only shorts. My bare back made me feel more relaxed and more comfortable.

The small lane was from north to south, about two meters wide, with five to six houses on both sides. The north led to the mountains, the south to a pond, some paddy fields, and far away to the sea.

As a three-year-old kid, the only thing I could do was play with ants. I used a wooden stick to drive the ants. I would force them into the drainage or the wall cracks. I wished I had a magic weapon to form them into an army so that I did not need to use my fingers to punish them. My father promised me a wooden rifle, but it took a long time for him to make me one.

I am the second child in the family; I have an elder brother, only one year older than me. He did not like to play with me. He was always out and playing with other boys. I had no friends playing with me.

When I was three, my mother was pregnant again, and the new baby would be my sister. Still, my mother was busy working in the fields during the daytime while my father was working further away as an accountant. No one had the time to care for me or to play with me. I was most of the time left alone at the age of three.

My mother was a bit harsh with me. When she came home and saw me taking off my clothes and lying on the floor bareback, she would scold me and sometimes hit me with her fingertips. I truly felt the pain but seldom cried. Although she had no money to buy me new clothes, she always liked seeing me dressed. My father though a strong man was more tender; he's never beaten me. He only smiled and drove me away when I was not behaving well.

While lying on the stone bench and sleeping, some kids passing by would make fun of me with all kinds of tricks. For example, two might tighten my penis with a rope and try to hang me up. I would then wake up, chase them to the end of the lane and finally throw a stone to frighten them.

Some kids played in the muddy field. Others caught small fish in the brook. When leeches sucked their blood, they liked to dry them in the sun, together with the little fish. They had other games and fights. I did not want to join them.

Several villagers were blind or disabled. We, as kids, often made fun of them. They were inferior, and no one was taking care of them. One disabled man lost one leg and always carried a wooden stick when walking. People said he once tried to seduce a girl and thus had one of his legs slaughtered by a knife. I didn't make fun of him because he gave me little picture books to read. He told me he had been a fisherman that went far away into the seas beyond Hong Kong.

In the village, there were eight boys of my age. Most of them looked more muscular than me. I looked darker on my face, and they called me ox when I charged them. One was blind in one eye, but he was my best friend. He tried to defend me on those occasions.

I felt different from them. Those boys and girls were all childish in work and games. I was not silly, and I had more to consider.

I was often bored. I wanted to be away from the community and away from the village. On three sides of the farming village were hills and mountains. In the western mountains, there was a reservoir. Two roads crossed in front of the village, each leading into the mountains many miles away, where there were towns. It was the beginning of the sea and the end of a giant ocean to the south. We could see boats in the distance from the village whose land was a bit higher.

As little children, we often followed the adults into the mountains to pick up firewood and cut weeds for fire, especially on summer and autumn days. There were wild fruits for food and spring water for drinking in the mountains.

I only heard of the towns behind those mountains and hills. I did not know the whereabouts far in the direction of the sea. Before the age of five, I was never away from the village. But I was eager to learn what was behind those mountains and seas.

On summer afternoons, boys often followed the adults to the muddy beaches where shrubs grew in tidal coastal swamps. Fishermen could find crabs and other seafood there. We sometimes hear stories of villagers stuck in those mangroves and dying.

Typhoon was common every year. When a typhoon came, it was always wild and devastating. Once, a storm tore off the sea banks, and seawater covered all the coastal villages. Soldiers in uniforms came for rescue. That was the first time I saw an army truck with canned food.

It was common to see villagers quarreling or even fighting each other. People from different villages did not get along well with one another either. They would fight hard in groups with spades and shovels for irrigation water.

The west end of the village was of higher ground, and the barnyard was there. Surrounding the corrals were piles of dry weeds as firewood. While the adults

were working, children often ran around the stacks in fighting groups, one group acting as the Communist Liberation Red Army and another as the Kuomintang Army that always fell first to the ground.

Bamboos, banyan, and other tropical trees planted at the east end of the village formed a bush, where we often played hide and seek. One year during a pandemic, the commune ordered to cut down all the bamboo and trees so that the epidemic personnel could burn infected animals there. There was a virus smell, and we no longer played at the site.

Every year there were two to three funerals in the village, and we saw more from the neighboring towns. Funerals did not look sad as villagers would join for a free meal. I thought it funny to see most mourners have fake cries in the processions. Four people carried the coffin to the nearby mountains where the dead bodies found their resting place, and mourners would strike a dozen color flags on top of the tombs. I was scared of ghosts when we passed by those tombs at night.

Sometimes we saw wanderers in the village. These passersby were vagabonds from other provinces. These "aliens" spoke different dialects. However, when they tried hard to communicate, I seemed to understand a little bit more. They seemed to know more of the world. But they were mostly in tattered clothes and begging for food.

One afternoon while lying on my stone bench, I felt the mountain breezes blowing again, a little tender and a little sad, but with some sort of bliss, a delightful feeling from the abode of a Wonderland.

A vagabond passed by. With a smile, the man asked for water. I fetched him some. I saw him in rags, bareheaded, carrying a yellow bag. He asked if I had something to eat. I went back home and took a sweet potato for him.

I asked, "Where are you from?"

He said, "From Sichuan."

I asked, "Where is that?"

He said, "Far, far away, to the north. I've walked months here."

I asked, "What are you doing here? I mean, why are you wandering around?"

He said, "I am a monk."

I asked, "What is a monk?"

He said, "A monk wanders around."

I asked, "What if your family is looking for you?"

He said, "I don't have a family."

I had no more questions.

The monk said, "Good man! You are a shining mirror, brighter than any great man."

I did not understand what he said. I smiled at him.

He thanked me and left the village. I felt it happier to give than receive.

Later I learned that I was born on October 9, 1967, the second year after the communist dictator Mao Zedong started the Cultural Revolution.

My hometown was named Lotus Dragon Village of Huangbo commune in Enping County of Guangdong Province.

I did not know why our ancestors chose the name Lotus Dragon, or "Lianlong" in Chinese, only that Dragon symbolized the motherland of China. There was no lotus in the village. For some years, people changed the word "Lotus" to "Alliance", also meaning "Lian", making it sound more like "commune" or the "soviet Union Alliance." In those days, they wanted to relate everything to communism.

Several nearby villages also had similar names, like "Dragon Pond" or "Dragon Field"; the commune indeed sounded like an alliance of dragons. But this communist red dragon brought about disasters to the citizens of this motherland.

In January 1967, the party and government organs in Guangdong Province had their power seized by the revolutionary Red Guards. Paralyzed administration led to social chaos in both the cities and countryside areas. On March 15, Mao decided to impose military control in Guangdong, with Huang Yongsheng as director of the Military Control Commission.

The rebel alliance called Red Flag Faction and those supporting military management called the Dongfeng Faction had many armed struggles. Zhou Enlai, then Premier of the State Council, intervened several times between April and November. Mao said: "There is a party outside the party and factions within the party. That has always been the case. Except for the desert, wherever there are crowds, there are left, center, and right, which is still the case after ten thousand years."

In May 1968, with the support of Mao, the "clean up the bad class" campaign was launched nationwide, and tens of thousands of people in Guangzhou alone were persecuted or even tortured to death, especially returned overseas Chinese and their relatives.

Between July and October 1968, mass killings led by the Guangdong Provincial Revolutionary Committee peaked. Twenty-eight counties had mass killings, with an average of 278 deaths, resulting in at least 7,784 deaths.

In early August 1967, the Guangzhou Public Prosecutor's Office fell into chaos. The government kept more than five hundred labor prisoners in the Yagang Farm in Chatou, a suburb of Guangzhou. One day, four hundred ran away, and rumors told these prisoners in rioting planned to loot the city of Guangzhou. As a result, from August 11 to 12, bodies of unknown origin appeared on the streets of Guangzhou. In addition, people found a dozen dead bodies hanging on trees on both sides of the roads or telephone poles.

On September 23, 1967, in neighboring Yangchun county in the Province, "random beating and killing" occurred. In January 1968, Yangjiang County, close to our village, also began to have random killings.

By June 1, 1968, with the support of the Yangjiang County Military Administration, 17 of the 25 communes had begun to indiscriminately kill and shoot 178 people and their children from the "bad" class.

From June 1 to 15, Yangjiang County held a conference fighting the "anti-revolutionaries" by more than 2,800 attendees. The government organized the masses to carry out great exposés, great criticism, and great struggles, resulting in the formation of a climax of indiscriminate attacks and killings in the whole county.

By July 23, 573 people had been killed brutally in the county, 204 gun-shot, 274 killed by knives, and 95 forced to commit suicide. The methods of killing in the Yangjiang Massacre included beating people with sticks and poles, shooting, bundling and drowning, stabbing with daggers, stabbing to death with forks, stoned to death, blown to death by firecrackers, burned with kerosene, buried alive, and pierced through the nose with iron wire.

People were killed at will without approval in the Shangshuang, Longmen, and other production brigades of Hekou Commune in Yangchun County. The murderers used long hemp ropes to tie the "bad" class peasants and their children into a string, order them to stand by the river, shoot or beat them with sticks, and push the corpses or the heavily wounded into the river. As a result, mourners collected many floating corpses from the Moyang River. (1)

Chinese people cannot see these historical records because of strict censorship. And the government even doesn't allow the surviving elder people who experienced these tragedies to talk about them in China.

But these were lively facts that occurred in the villages and townships only twenty to thirty kilometers away from my hometown when I was born.

More cruelty and brutality were recorded in the neighboring Guangxi Province, where my grandmother was born.

Since March 1967, two opposing camps have gradually formed among the army and the masses in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region: the "Proletarian Revolutionary Rebels Alliance" led by Wei Guoqing, chairman of the autonomous region, and the "4.22" camp of the rebel masses supported by Premier Zhou Enlai.

In April 1968, Huang Yongsheng, the Guangzhou Military Commander who also had control over Guangxi, designated "4.22" as a reactionary organization and began suppressing "4.22".

In the unified operation in Lingshan County, more than 2,900 people were killed. In the spring and summer of 1968, most of the counties in Guangxi had set up revolutionary committees and organized systematic killings in the name of "defending the Red regime" and arresting the so-called "anti-communist national salvation group" supporters.

After they eliminated most leaders and backbone members of the "4.22" in rural areas, the Rebels Alliance in power and those who supported them immediately opened fire on the city opponents. From July to August, the Guangxi Military Region mobilized many troops to besiege Nanning, causing more than 10,000 deaths; More than 10,000 people in Guilin City and 12 counties in the Guilin area were shot, killed, or forced to commit suicide.

The methods of the massacre in Guangxi included beheading, stick beating, burial alive, stone smashing, drowning to death, boiled to death in boiling water, collective killing, abdomen cutting, heart opening, liver harvesting, genital mutilation, knife slashing, bombed to death with explosives, gang rape, and stabbing to death, tied to the railway tracks and crushed to death by train.

Cen Guorong, the leader of the Rebels Alliance of the Liuzhou Iron and Steel Works, tied explosives to the back of Huang Rigao, a member of the "4.22". As Cen pushed the electric button, the explosives exploded, and the flesh and

bones of Huang Rigao were everywhere in the air. They gave this a funny name, "The Heavenly Fairy Scattered Flowers."

Wu Shufang, a geography teacher at Wuxuan County Middle School, was tortured to death by the students. First, the students carried his body to the Qianjiang River. Then, the students took a rifle and forced another teacher to remove Wu Shufang's heart and liver, after which the students took the internal organs back to the school, where they grilled and ate them. (2)

I could not have made up these stories. These facts could be found in greater detail in the local historical records kept by the museums of related counties. They told me what my country was like during the Cultural Revolution.

The communists had tried to destroy these records, but historians brought them to the west and already had them published. (1)(2)

I did not know about these cruelty and tragic happenings until many years later. But I heard stories about "eating children" among the peasantry.

Several female peasants in our neighborhood came from Yangjiang County or Guangxi province. They had married our village men because life was a bit easier here. We often heard them talking about cruelty and brutal deaths in their motherland.

In my hometown village, I also saw students beating teachers in primary school. Finally, they formed into "army" groups, called themselves the Red Guards, and often paraded among the village lanes.

Many villagers experienced persecution and torture during the Cultural Revolution and other political movements. The village was made up of several clans hostile to each other. We occasionally hear of murders and suicides of some families. But people had a fear of talking about the past.

Teachers were of inferior social status and were looked down upon by the communists. However, two of my uncles, who only had primary and junior education, became teachers while still working in the field.

Three communist cadres formed the village management: the head or party secretary, the accountant, and the cashier. My father had the post of accountant. He performed the quickest calculation with the abacus, and many young men came to learn from him. Later he became an accountant in the commune for a short time but was removed. He was often denounced in public because his mother had come from a landlord family in Guangxi province.

Recalls made me sad. But those memories were so deep in my mind that I did not need my parents' help to bring back the past.

My father was persecuted at least two times during this period. But he never wanted to talk about the details of the spiritual torture that he went through except those physical ones I witnessed with my own eyes.

My mother told one time, when I was one and my elder brother two, my father was taken away by the communists for several months. She was left alone at home, taking care of us while working. Outside, she carried me on her back while my elder brother was eating the earth (mud) around her. No one was there in the fields to help her.

The heavens and earth were called to witness. The sky corresponded as we felt and smelt, cried, or laughed, and the world echoed.

Our ancestors lived on this land for hundreds of years, maybe thousands. But never before in history had they left so much thickness of scars and trauma on this land.

When we opened the earth's surface, the soil under our feet was mainly strip-like yellowish red, the color of a fierce dragon. Too much blood must have dayed the ground this horrible color as pugnacious living beings rested their lives underneath.

It was a bleeding color that many children would be afraid of.

But this sort of red soil was most suitable for the growth of wormwood, a popular herb for hemostatic and superstitious uses. My mother thus planted wormwood near our house and hung them over the lintel to ward off the evils.

2 Primary School

I started my schooling at the age of seven.

My primary school was also named Lotus Dragon at the end of the village, built in a small valley between two hills and two villages. This school was for kids from four villages, year one to year five. I only needed to walk five to six minutes from home to my classroom.

Besides sports and labor, we had only two subjects: maths and language. There was no drawing, painting, music, geography, or history. With language, the most important thing for us kids was to write the best essays.

Every Monday to Friday, we had one hour daily for maths and one hour for language. The rest of the hours were for labor and sports, with no difference from year one to year five.

Labor included cleaning classrooms, sweeping the school grounds, and helping with kitchen work for the teachers. It also included picking up dry cow dung in the fields, planting trees in the hills behind the school, cutting weeds in the mountains for firewood or green grass for pig feed, planting sugar cane, and caring for other plants and vegetables. Sometimes, we also needed to help the farmers in their paddy rice fields.

I learned to cook for my family at the age of seven.

Our daily food was mainly rice with mixed vegetables like cabbage and sweet potatoes. The meat was rare, and we only had pork on birthdays and festivals. However, chicken and goose meat was unique dishes during the Spring Festival. When there was a big day for celebration, my parents would not let me cook.

My family raised one pig. In one year, we had a mother pig and some piglets. That was the limit. More than that, it was regarded as the tail of capitalism and was not allowed. Every day after school, I had to feed the pigs before I cooked for the family.

At the end of autumn, the family started to raise some geese. Generally, there were six to seven geese. Every afternoon for about two months, I had to lead the geese to the grassland after school for an hour or so before I took care of the pigs and cooked dinner.

I needed to go to the private family farm to pick vegetable leaves, sweet potato seedlings, or leaves and make them into feed for the pigs. Sometimes when I was hungry, I just ate the same food as the pigs.

My elder brother was doing much better in school than I did. He was a big fan of Jin Yong's wuxia novels. He liked reading those martial arts and chivalry stories after school. I had not developed an interest in fiction until many years later.

My elder brother never did the same chores as I did. Every day after school, he just ran away and played with other boys, often as "gangsters" stealing things in the fields or fighting against other "gangsters" from neighboring villages. He was always back home at a good time when dinner was ready. During my primary school years, my younger sister was too young to give me any help. She was the one who cried out the most for help.

I wished my elder brother would help me with the cooking. But he never did. Sometimes I found things very hard, but he just ran away. How could he be so heartless? There must be causality, the law of cause and effect. In my past life, I set out those causes, and I must bear all the consequences in this life. No

one was to take my place, even though he was my brother, seeing me there enduring those hardships.

I first attended school in September 1975. Then, we saw images of Chairman Mao and his slogans everywhere in the school. He was like God that everyone worshiped.

We learned that China was the greatest socialist country in the world, and people lived the happiest life. Teachers taught that the United States was a paper tiger and that people there lived in darkness. Sailing the seas depended on the helmsman, and Chairman Mao was our helmsman.

On June 13, 1976, when Mao was seriously ill, he summoned Hua Guofeng and four other Politburo members who were guarding him about the aftermath. Mao said: "Seventy years old in life is rare, and I am eighty. An old saying is that the merits and demerits can only be judged with the coffin covered. Although I have not had my coffin covered, I am close. I can have those conclusive comments now. I have done two things in my life: fighting Chiang Kai-shek for decades and driving him to the island. After eight years of war, we had the Japanese back in their hometown islands. Few people would disagree with these things, only a few people chirping in my ears, urging me to take back the Taiwan islands as soon as possible. Another thing that you all know is the Launching of the Cultural Revolution. There are not many people who support this matter, and there are many people who oppose it. Nothing is yet over about these two things. This legacy has to be handed over to the next generation. How to hand it over? Peacefully or in turbulence? If these two things are not handled well, there will be bloody rain and winds. What do you do then? Only God knows."(3)

Our second-grade textbooks carried these words on the front page: "Socialism is good" and "Long Live Chairman Mao." That year in the autumn, Chairman Mao died, and the school held a grand memorial service. Most teachers and students cried during the service on the playground. However, I did not pretend to cry. Back home, I told my father that it was unreasonable to shed

tears for someone we did not know and had never met. My father said I had a cold-blooded heart.

After Mao's death, Hua Guofeng took over and brought down "the gang of four," Mao's wife being the leader. The whole country celebrated. Our teachers said that months before Mao's death, he left a personal note to his successor, "You take over; I have nothing to worry about." These words became a slogan posted on school walls together with the images of two leaders. At home, we had one also on our door.

We saw propaganda slogans everywhere, on places of social gatherings, on school walls, on public toilets; communists built separate propaganda walls on road intersections with slogans like "Long Live the Chinese Communist Party," "Never forget the class struggle," and "People's communes are good."

I gradually noticed that honesty was not regarded as merit. Honest people were often bullied. Crafty people lived a better life.

My grandfather was a quiet person and seldom talked much. One day I asked him about the village and his past. He said our village was at least two to three hundred years old. When he was young, there were thick forests in the mountains behind; once, people saw a tiger walking down to the village homes, and they were frightened. About 1949, communist troops fighting the Kuomintang burnt the forest. Later during the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962, the commune requested all peasants to set up steel furnaces, and families used their pots, pans, and other metal artifacts to supply the scrap for the furnaces. All trees in the mountains were cut for firewood.

My grandfather told me he and his brothers had a boat fishing in the seas when they were young. They went to the waters close to Hong Kong and often bought supplies on shore. Some fishermen stayed in Hong Kong and never came back.

I had never seen the ocean before nine, although it was only ten miles away on the other end of the mountains and seas. I was on a fishing trip with my father once at nine but saw the ocean during the nighttime. At that time,

private fishing was not allowed. I wished I could have gone for some adventure earlier to the ocean so my mind could become wider and my thoughts deeper. But a child was not supposed to be seen walking along the coast alone. And before 1978, people needed a permit to leave the village.

When I was in year three, my father started to teach my elder brother and me how to weave fishing nets. Sometimes we went out to the sea for seafood or went to nearby towns to sell our fishing nets. Since selling private goods in markets was not allowed, we had to get up early in the morning and walk about the hill roads for hours to evade confiscation. Our father did not let us go to town with him every time he went. But once he asked us to go with him, it was a great gift and a joyful adventure. We got up at 3 in the morning and walked along the hill roads in darkness like hiking, with the moon still shining over our heads.

Once I was lured by a big boy with a sharp knife. I wanted to buy his knife and thus stole money from my father's secret safe. I picked the largest banknote from the safe, which was ten dollars. I had never seen a ten-dollar note and had no idea how significant that amount was. My father was the accountant and shop assistant for the commune. It was the shop's money and that ten-dollar note worth two months of my father's salary.

I spent five dollars on the knife and kept the rest five dollars. My father found out the money was lost in the same afternoon and was searching for me the whole afternoon when he heard some big boy had brought me to the nearby town. When I met my father midway back from town, I saw the great sadness and horror on his face, which frightened me. The big boy had to admit the whole story and return the rest money. We spent one to two dollars. My father was speechless. I was even more frightened when I followed him home.

My father did not beat me. But my mother struck me. She used a stick to punish me, and it broke. Then she turned to use another thick pole to beat me. I raised my left hand to protect my head. The bar hit my hand and peeled off one layer of skin. My tears dropped, but I did not cry. It was harrowing inside me. It took me months for the wounds to recover.

Compared to my uncles and other villagers, my father was much taller and looked muscular. But he was a composed person. It must be the political movements, one after another by the tyrannic communists, that had frightened him and let him become timider and too careful. I wished he should have been more manly. If he dared to pick up a knife facing danger, I would like to be the "man" to cut the enemy. I felt sadder that my father did not beat me.

I liked to borrow little picture books from the disabled man. He kept other books with pictures of naked men and women in a secret place. My best companions were stories from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Outlaws of the Marsh always gave me fun and inspiration. I loved the revolts of heroes and heroines against social injustice.

Sometimes, fishermen might bring home brochures, advertisements, and singing star images from Hong Kong. From those pictures, we could see tall and beautiful buildings in the cities and pretty girls in colorful clothes. "How could the world have such wonderful places and beautiful girls?" I wondered while kissing those pictures and pretty faces.

In my memory, my parents never hugged me. People in those days were suppressed and reluctant to express their feelings. It could be a great embarrassment if they granted a hug to another person even though that person was their child. I wished they could have embraced me just once. One could be enough.

I once fell into the hands of a farmer in another village growing tobacco leaves. Another boy and I went to his field near the mountain and stole the leaves for smoking. The man took my neck as my mate had run away. He asked for my father's given name. I wouldn't tell him. Finally, as he threatened to beat me, my mate spoke the word loudly. Giving my father's name at this moment was a humiliating thing.

Before I attended school, there was a small temple at the end of the village where people worshiped the Lord of the Earth. Later some cadres from the town ordered the temple torn down and removed everything. But we were

taught to respect our ancestors. During primary school years, social events were rare. Still, we could watch villagers prepare for operas towards the end of the year, and my father was the one to beat the drums. He was good at several musical instruments but never taught us to learn. Adults also practiced martial arts in their spare time, close to the Spring Festival. Once, a family troupe from the north performed martial art on the school grounds. A boy fell from a pole that his father was holding. He was bleeding in the arms and head. Everyone was frightened.

At the end of a year, we sold the pig raised with care for an entire year to the commune and took back three to five kilos of meat. This was for a family of six to enjoy during the Spring Festival days, together with several chickens and geese. The money we received from selling the pig would be kept for school tuition fees, which cost 2.8 dollars for each child and books that were fifty cents each.

As I grew older, I began to admire my father. He seemed to know many things. Towards the end of the year, the village would have rehearsals of popular Cantonese Operas, like the Butterfly Lovers. Performances would go on for a week during the Spring Festival. My father went to Guangzhou or Canton to invite an artist as a director. When the artist was absent, my father would be the assistant director. My language and maths teacher was often the main character called the Literary and Martial Hero. He did all the singing, martial arts, acrobatics, and acting on stage. His excellent baritone always entertained a large audience. He was my father's best friend.

As boys, we often had cuts and wounds on our bodies. My father had mixed herbs to heal them. Local villagers knew how to treat minor sicknesses with traditional medicine or TCM drugs. We had a barefoot doctor in the commune who was always busy. During the Cultural Revolution, many TCM practitioners were persecuted, and TCM lost most of its inheritance. There was a small clinic in the commune that served a dozen villages.

When I was six, one day, my elder brother was holding my hand, walking along the brook after his school hours. Some kids tied a knot between the weeds

that blocked my elder brother's foot so he stumbled into the brook. He had limestone pieces in his pockets. The limestone automatically exploded in water and burnt his body all over. My father made a lot of effort to mend his burns. He carried many tiny scars on his body for the rest of his life. Luckily, I was not hurt.

Once I was in the back seat when my father was riding a bicycle. I had one of my feet crushed in the running wheel and suffered great pain. The doctor in the commune clinic could not treat my wounds. Luckily my mother had a cousin as a barefoot doctor in the nearby town. My father took me there for treatment, and my recovery lasted a long time.

I did not remember much of my school life except that there was more labor than study. Although we attended school daily, we had all kinds of duties outside the school, like digging aqueducts or growing castor oil plants.

I did not like my school life. I just hated the hard work and chores after school. When I was in the classroom, I often fell asleep on my desk with a watering mouth. Finally, the teacher beat me up, and the whole class laughed.

I would not say I like the village either. I wanted to leave this place.

3 A Little Blessing

At a symposium on science and education on August 3, 1977, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping announced that the college entrance examination would be held in the same year and China's institutions of higher learning would be able to re-admit new students through the unified exam.

In September, when Deng visited the Education Ministry, he stressed “rectifying the chaos” and said: “In short, the Ministry of Education should emancipate the mind and be proactive.” Deng urged officials of the Ministry to go down to the grass-root level as students to listen to teachers and implement plans and policies as soon as possible to reinstate the national examination system. He encouraged concrete measures while criticizing empty talks. (7)

Deng’s policies changed the lives of many for generations to come.

I finished primary school at the age of 12. After that was the long summer of 1979, the early days of August.

It was common to have a storm at this time of the year. The earth looked burnt, and the air tasted humid and hot—people working in the fields needed to find some tree shades from time to time.

One lazy afternoon, I had nothing to do but rest on the stone bench in the doorway. I quickly went into a dream.

It was up in the Heavenly Palace. There were colorful clouds here and there, a gentle breeze, and fairy girls dancing around. I could hear the sound of drums, the singing of birds, and the sound of running springs. I was about to see an army of Heavenly guards and generals when some restless noise around me caught me up.

A moment later, I could hear the noise and talks clearly.

“Congratulations! Congratulations! Good news! Great news!” It was the voice of my language and maths teacher. He walked and ran along the village lanes, calling out my father’s name. He told everyone in the village that his student had passed the national examination and would go to the city’s Number One Middle School. I was his student.

I was the first and only student in the Primary School in 30 years since its establishment who passed the national examination at the county level. And I

had the opportunity to study at the top school in the city in the coming month!

When asked how I had achieved such a high mark, I couldn't remember what I had written on the exam paper. My teacher said if I had praised the new government at the end of my essay, I would have won an even higher score. He seemed to be more proud of me than my father.

1979 was the second year the Central Government resumed its national examination system after its collapse ten years during the Cultural Revolution. The county had one to two hundred primary schools amongst its population of over four hundred thousand. One hundred students were selected yearly to study in the Number One Middle School. I was lucky to be one of them.

With the noisy words of "congratulations," dozens of villagers soon surrounded my family house and extended their most fantastic wishes.

Some superstitious villagers discovered that a large pine tree pointed directly toward my family's house on top of the mountain behind the village. And years ago, on Tomb Sweeping day, our uncles found a peak of a hill far away in the sea. The rise was behind clouds or fog and only appeared on special days. There was an implication that our clan would have someone of honor in the future.

My neighbors and uncles told people I was the most diligent and especially working hard on the Tomb Sweeping Day of the Clear and Bright Festival. It was the blessing of my ancestors that I won the national examination. The villagers had all their good talks expressed. Kids were running around and also having a good time. My younger brother, close to five, was the last family member; he was the happiest amongst the kids. He was very naughty and had a more muscular build than other kids. He rolled himself around and around on the floor, making faces at people around him.

My family was part of a more prominent clan. My father had four brothers, and he was in second place. His elder brother joined the Communist Liberation Army in the late 50s and served far away in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous

Region. I never saw his family. Three younger brothers lived in the same village, two of them temporary teachers in my primary school. My grandfather lived with the family of my fourth uncle, who married a woman from the same village.

My grandfather was still busy in his seventies. As he got older, he seldom talked to others, and his conversations with the family were no more than a hundred words for a whole year. In my memory, he never spoke to my grandmother. He took care of the pigs and chicken for my fourth uncle. He cleaned the floors many times a day. He just worked and worked during the daytime until my cousins told him time to eat. He took his rice bowl outside and sat alone on a stone bench. He seldom joined the family at the dining table. Before 70, when he was a fisherman with a boat, he went out fishing with my father most of the time, later with my fourth uncle. First, he lived with my fourth uncle in the smallest room. Later he moved to a separate cottage where he raised two pigs. He stayed with the pigs for the night, and there was a coffin for his death by his side.

My grandmother was an old woman of a bad temper; she lived alone in a separate room within my fourth uncle's quarters. She cooked her meals and shared them with nobody but her chicken. She came from a big family of wealth. Unfortunately, her family collapsed at the time of her marriage because the communist government confiscated all their wealth. She saw her marriage as a punishment from hell and became mad. She would quickly get angry and drive us around. We were afraid of her and defamed her as a ghost. And she laughed while kicking us away.

In the village, women did not have makeup. They would be made fun of, criticized, slandered, or even penalized if they did any makeup. But my grandmother had her makeup. Besides making herself facial powder, she would pick up a flower and give her hair some decoration. No one dared to anger her while she shouted, "I am the Goddess! I am the Goddess!" I seldom experienced her tense relationship with my grandfather, but they kept a distance. Occasionally, she scolded him, shouting again, "You are liars! You are all liars!"

My grandmother would throw a pair of shoes into the wok when my mother was doing her cooking. According to my mother, my grandmother occasionally dressed up as a ghost and appeared beside her bed when she married my father. And she would run about the village with dirty words defaming my father as a corrupt accountant. As she got older and became sicker, all my uncles' wives kept a distance. My mother was the only person to take care of her.

Before I attended school, my great-grandmother was still alive in her nineties. She lived with my grandfather's younger brother. Before her death, we all came to her bedside. She smiled at us; she felt no pain while peacefully passing away. My cousins and brothers-in-law sat at her house making wreaths for her funeral. We used banyan branches and leaves for the wreaths; we used colored paper, made them into flowers, and tied them into the garlands. This was the first time I saw a family member die. Death was not a terrible thing.

My great-grandmother was a Buddhist. She was the only woman in the village that had treated my mother well. My mother told me that her blessing gave me a fortune.

Although my father was the elder brother, my uncles did not respect him. My father should have given them more benefits as an accountant but did not. He was seldom home during the daytime. He seemed to have lots of meetings to attend as a communist member. Later, my father told me he must join the party and be transparent with his accounts to protect himself and the family.

Despite his difficulties, my father would dress up all his children on their birthdays and traditional festivals and prepare the best meals he could afford to encourage us and show us unity as a family. He would ensure we have mooncakes during the Moon Festival and new clothes for all Spring Festivals. He never skipped those complex formalities as a tradition.

On this day, when my father came home, the crowd dispersed. In an hour or two, a friendly man would come into our home and formally extend his

congratulations to my father. I could see the genuine pride and happiness on his face.

Not all villagers came to congratulate us. For two decades, the village was divided into two brigades of powerful clans, not supporting but competing with each other as adversaries in all aspects. Some families had been hostile to my father and always kept a distance, including the head of the village. I still saw contempt and envy in their eyes. But this was the first time I saw my father lift his head high when passing by these families.

The following day, I climbed to the top of the mountain to carefully examine the pine tree. It was so big that it needed at least three to four adults to stand hand in hand in a circle to hold the trunk. The pine tree truly stood in the middle overlooking our lane. But later, I heard rumors that someone was trying to cut the tree down.

Soon, I could read some sadness and worry in his mind. My father was no longer the accountant for the village and the commune shop. Three years ago, the government sent two communist cadres to our commune. They lived in our house for two days, eating our meals and sharing our beds. Then, they came to check my father's accounts. Two days later, they took my father away and put him on house arrest far away from home.

My father was an accountant for ten years, and those communists were sure he had corruption. But my father insisted he was water clean and never took public money. They took four huge cannabis bags of paper accounts from our home for checks. Two weeks later, my father was released. When my father came home, he lost a lot of weight. He looked calmer, cautious, and timider, with worries. He did not commit any sin, but he lost his job. From then on, he joined other villagers to work in the fields. He no longer had a regular wage.

My father's happy days were short as he started to worry about my school fees. My mother stood by his side, saying that the family would risk selling all the valuable stuff in the house to pay for my education and that she would sell the cooking utensils to the recycling vendors for some money.

Most families in the village were broke and lived a difficult life. As there was little room for my father to borrow money from them, he was thinking of a way out so I could have my higher education.

My mother begged her parents for help. Our grandpa and grandma lived in another town nearby. My mother told us they used to be a landlord with land and a shop. But they lost everything when the new government took office. My mother did not know the reason and provided no details. But they finally gave my father a bag of rice and a few dollars.

My grandpa and grandma were a talkative couple when they saw us. They would tell us to eat as much as we could. Finally, besides giving us pocket money, my grandpa murmured these words repeatedly: "Only the learned rank high, and all other trades are low."

I was finally ready to go to school on the morning of September 1. My father had given me five dollars in a sewn pocket within my jacket. I carried a cloth bag of fifteen kilos of rice on my back and walked out of the family house. My father had borrowed a bicycle from a friend, and he was ready to take me to the new school sixty miles away from home.

4 The Red Palace Academy

Enping was a county-level city in southwest Guangdong, at the western edge of the Pearl River Delta. It had a population of about 400 thousand.

Enping was an old town set up in the Tang Dynasty over one thousand years ago. Its history dates back to the early Qin Dynasty but with a different name.

The Jinjiang River ran eastwards, cutting through the center of the city. Jinjiang meant the beautiful river with magnificent views. The starting point was the Jinjiang Reservoir, with sub-tropical forests not far away in the west.

At the foot of the Turtle Peak Mountain and by the side of Jinjiang River, Enping Number One Middle School was the top school in the city. Formerly it was an academy built in 1480 in the Ming Dynasty and later burnt by fire. It was rebuilt about a hundred years ago in the late Qing Dynasty. It once served as a hospital during the Japanese invasion in the 1940s. We called it the Red Palace Academy, now our school's center.

This middle school was a boarding school.

The school had a large campus. At the front was a sports ground about three hundred meters long and 150 meters wide. The three-story main study building was in the middle, north of the sports ground. The building looked huge in my eyes.

At the back, we could see the tops of more houses built along the mountain slopes, one a bit higher than the other. Close to the center ground was the dormitory for the boys. On the right side was the dormitory for the girls. A swimming pool and some premises as the teachers' office stood in the middle to separate the boys from girls. On the left-hand side of the sports ground for running, there was another ground for basketball, volleyball, and other utilities. Next to these grounds and further up along the mountain slopes was the canteen and dining hall for students. There were two canteens and separate kitchens, one for the students and one for the teachers.

Amongst all these buildings, at the heart of the school ground and right behind the center of the main study building was a one-story mansion of red walls and green tiles. On its roof, two colorful dragons were playing with a pearl. The ceramic carvings looked vivid and historical. The mansion stood on a firm granite stone foundation, making a magnificent platform of solemnity and strength. Then, people called this hundred-year-old mansion the Red Palace. Now it housed the school library.

The government built the school to accommodate one or two thousand students. Yet, when I was enrolled here, there were only two hundred students,

junior grade one and grade two, each one hundred students, divided into two classes.

I had my seat in Class Two. My maths teacher was the head coach of the class. He was a middle-aged man of about forty, tall and a bit thin with a darker face like me. He was a strict but kind teacher who tried to care for most students. Later, classmates told me he had a family in the countryside and still had to help his wife work in the fields during school holidays.

My language teacher was a fat man with killing eyes. He taught us reading and writing, and I barely looked into his eyes in class. I only reluctantly raised my hands when attending his class, knowing he would never give me the favor of answering questions. He liked picking pretty girls and "handsome" boys with better-off backgrounds.

About half of the 50 students in my class came from wealthy families. Their parents were mainly from the city government or different organizations under the city government. They had leather shoes and changed clothes almost every day. I only had a pair of cloth shoes and a pair of slippers used only in the dormitory. I had only two sets of clothes for the whole year. Coupons were still used to buy cloth, though there were more choices.

The school served food in three grades in the canteen and dining hall. Only city students could afford first and second-grade food with meat, egg, vegetables, and other choices. Countryside students like me could only buy mixed vegetables.

For that reason, like me, many students from the countryside looked weak because of malnutrition. As a result, I never did well in sports.

Tuition was free for all students. All families had to pay for the rest. I carried 15 kilos of rice every month to the school canteen. The canteen management thought my rice was top quality and kept that for the teachers and chefs. So every meal, we ate rice at a much lower rate. My father came to see me once a month, giving me five dollars every time and another bag of rice or some rice coupons.

The school had discipline in all aspects. Every day we got up at 6:00 in the morning. Morning exercise included a 500-meter run and collective gymnastics for an hour starting from 6:30. Breakfast started at 7:30, and after that, we could have some rest. Classes began at 8:30, all the way to noon. Then one hour for lunch and a little leisure. After that, we had to rest in our dormitories for the next hour and keep quiet. In the afternoon, classes went from 2:00 to 4:00, with another hour for outdoor exercise. Dinner was from 5:30-6:30. After that, we had one hour for leisure. During this hour we could walk to the city streets for "sightseeing" because the city proper was only next door. We had to be back by 7:30 when the evening study began. That lasted for two hours till 9:30. By 10:00, everyone must be in bed, and we had to turn off all lights in the dormitories.

Political study was part of our curriculum and was strictly carried out. Deng Xiaoping stressed the importance of adhering to the Four Cardinal Principles of socialism, democratic dictatorship, Marxism, and Mao Zedong's Thought.

On October 25, 1981, Deng Xiaoping addressed the nation: "The evaluation of Comrade Mao Zedong and the exposition of Mao Zedong Thought is not only personal issues involving Comrade Mao Zedong, but are inseparable from the entire history of our Party and our country. Some comrades now attribute many problems to the personal qualities of Comrade Mao Zedong. Many problems cannot be explained by personal qualities. Even people with good qualities, in some cases, cannot avoid mistakes." (7)

In 1981, in an official document publicized in newspapers, the Communist Party completely negated the Cultural Revolution and characterized it as "a civil unrest that was mistakenly launched by the leaders, exploited by counter-revolutionary groups, and brought serious disasters to the Party, the state, and the people of all ethnic groups."

But Deng made a one-sided subjective judgment on the characterization of the Cultural Revolution and failed to reflect the true face of history. Deng failed to make a critical point: he did not dare to open up free speech and tell people

the truth. He should have let the Chinese fully understand the facts and participate in the judgment together.

At this point, Deng had his selfishness. Chairman Mao was the banner he needed to cling to. They were part of the communist dictatorship. But no one understood the reason in our school, and I wouldn't either.

School days were five and a half days, with Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. Like most classmates from the countryside, we only went home two times a year during the summer holiday and Spring Festival. For most people, Saturday afternoon was cleaning time when we washed clothes. Some students would go shopping in the city or climb up the mountain behind the school grounds.

On Sundays, many more students would stay in the Red Palace library. I was one of them.

On one occasion in summer, the school organized an excursion to the Jinjiang Reservoir, about 15 to 20 miles away. A dozen teachers and two hundred students walked along the Jinjiang River, carrying rice, ingredients, and cooking utensils as we needed to cook in the wilderness. By the Jinjiang River, there were hot springs everywhere. Later, with the support of the city government, developers started to build a massive holiday resort amongst the hot springs.

I was not doing well in my junior years. I felt most classmates were more knowledgeable than me and seemed to know more about anything in this world. Besides maths and language, we had history, geography, physics, chemistry, music, and one hour of English every week. So I was doing poorer in almost all lessons than most classmates.

In the library, I first read the world map and started to learn where America was. Books with pictures were mostly about communist achievements. I also found periodicals about Romania and the Soviet Union.

There were not many books in the library. There were no teachers there to lead us to the world of knowledge either. No one taught us how to think or live a better life.

In 1978, eighteen farmers in Xiaogang Village, Fengyang County, Anhui Province, took significant risks to make a life-and-death statement by signing a land contract to allocate farmland to households. Wan Li, secretary of the Anhui Provincial Party Committee, supported Xiaogang Village to package production to families and promoted it in the province. The 18 farmers became the pioneers of China's rural reform.

Deng Xiaoping designed a reform plan, starting from the rural areas to implement the "household responsibility system," distributing the land of the communes to peasant households by contracts. This agrarian reform began in Enping in late 1979.

During the summer holidays, I went back home and helped with farm work. Back in the village, people seemed busier with their chores. Instead of envy and admiration, I saw jealousy and reluctant smiles on most neighbors' faces. To pay for my education, my father must have walked into every house to borrow money, and the villagers were unwilling to see our appearances any longer. Rather than working collectively for the commune, the villagers now worked for themselves. That resulted from an agricultural reform in that every household had a divided piece of land to grow food.

To my surprise, my mentally ill grandmother was the first to ask me about life in the city. I told her that city people used electric cookers to cook rice, and firewood was not needed. My grandmother did not believe it until my father assured her.

In addition to farm work, my father started to have a seasonal job as a construction worker in nearby towns. Construction work was generally done in autumn and winter when people began building new houses for the coming year. If my father was lucky enough, he could work for 15 days a month during these three months and receive 30 dollars a month for the job.

My elder brother was then in another middle school near home, and my sister and younger brother were in the same primary school. The family had to pay

for their tuition and other fees as well. My parents found it very difficult to feed the whole family even though they worked day and night.

The county-town was getting busier and busier. More and more people opened shops and started their private shops, only as vendors but not businesses to hire. Some old buildings with large halls were redecorated as small cinemas, attracting many customers with erotic films from Hong Kong. Boys and girls were not supposed to walk together in or out of school; finding a boy or girlfriend in school was prohibited, and any student with a love affair would be dismissed. Poverty was another reason that real feelings were suppressed.

Memories were like wrinkles; they gradually grew on my forehead, climbed onto my eyebrows, and into my mind.

One day walking down the streets for leisure, I went into a public toilet and saw a five-cent coin lying in the urinary trough while doing poopoo and weewee. I had two fingers into the yellow liquid and picked up the cash. The following day, the school had a charity activity called "Follow the Examples of Comrade Lei Feng," a propaganda campaign popular across the country. I handed over the five-cent coin as my contribution.

I read Liao Fan's Four Lessons of transforming one's destiny. He said one should not be bound by fate but by one's actions. And to achieve that, one must have a sense of conscience and work hard.

Year after year and day after day, my schooling became the spiritual pillar of my father's hard work.

My success was an inspiration for the family. Two years later, my elder brother also passed the national examination and was enrolled in the senior grades of my school. That was exceptional in the whole county. The family was thrilled, but that also meant life became more difficult for the entire family.

5 Be Prepared and Ready

After the Cultural Revolution, there was a period of ideological emancipation in Chinese society. Loosening political and ideological restrictions has brought about relative freedom in the literary, artistic, journalistic, and theoretical circles. Reflection on the Cultural Revolution became a social trend of thought.

To some extent, we were free to talk about most things in school, including politics, although most people would not have an interest. But we could not get away with politics in our daily lives. Punishment was severe if we spoke anything terrible about the Communist Party.

Affected by the culture of Hong Kong and Taiwan, the mainland's cultural and entertainment undertakings flourished. Martial arts novelists such as Jin Yong were famous in China, and I became a wuxia fan. In 1982, the movie "Shaolin Temple" set off a new style of martial arts movie boom and made the young martial arts champion Jet Li an international film star. Under the guidance of Yuan Weimin, the Chinese women's volleyball team began to take off in the 1980s, and the three consecutive championships in 1981, 1982, and 1983 became the model and pride of the Chinese at that time.

But private businesses were not allowed. In 1980, The Communist Party Central Committee Document No. 75 stipulated that no workers were allowed to be hired. On May 29, 1981, the People's Daily published an article entitled "Controversy Over a Contracted Fish Pond," discussing whether hiring workers was considered exploitation of capitalism. Lin Zili, an economist in the Policy Research Office of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, believed that according to the definition of capitalism, the number of employed workers up to eight was a capitalist economy and that it belonged to capitalism. In January 1983, the Communist Party Central Committee put forward the principle for the occurrence of a large number of employees: "It is not appropriate to advocate the idea; do not publicize it, and do not rush to ban it." (7)

Deng was the first and only Communist Party leader to say "Sorry" to the Chinese people. He said during his visit to Japan in late 1978, "We are too poor, too backward, and honestly sorry for the people."

When I was in junior one, the school separated itself from the city proper with pieces of rice and vegetable fields in the middle. In three years, those fields disappeared, with houses built around the school sports ground. The trees we planted in the first year had grown tall as a natural separation dividing the school and the city streets. The principal building on the campus looked lower as taller buildings appeared around it. Every living thing seemed to win superiority over each other.

To be qualified for the senior grades after three years, all junior graduates must once again compete with candidates from other schools in the county. Unfortunately, one-fourth of my junior classmates failed to make their way to the next step. Nevertheless, I made a good advance.

My elder brother had two years only for his junior and was in senior grade one when I was in junior grade three. To cut our living expenses, the school allowed me to move to my elder brother's dormitory and share the same bed. Our story was also exceptional in the history of Enping Number One Middle School. Some years later, when our younger brother joined the school, the city newspaper had special coverage of our story called "the Three Brothers."

This year when I advanced to senior grade one, there were five hundred students in the school, three hundred in the junior grades, and two hundred in the senior stages.

In the dormitory of 18 people, not all my elder brother's classmates were happy to have my company there. Some looked down upon us because we were poor. But my elder brother was one of the top maths, physics, and chemistry students, so we gradually won the respect of most roommates.

But we often went hungry. Usually, our father would come once a month and bring us the rice and living expenses. However, there were times when he was late a few days, and thus we both went hungry. Sometimes my elder brother

would borrow meal coupons from his classmates, but that was not an easy thing. So many times, in order not to let me go hungry, my elder brother only had one meal a day. And for the rest of the day, he just drank water.

One day in the second half of the first year, our fourth uncle came to look for us after we had waited for three more days without seeing our father coming to the school. He brought us the bad news: our father fell from height to the ground while doing construction work and had his left arm broken. That was a thunderbolt from hell for the family.

My mother came to our school once when my father was sick. She said her heart tumbled, feeling that we must have encountered something bad. So she came. She had never come to the city alone.

Our family was under severe financial stress for the rest of the year. My elder brother and I could only have one meal or two a day for some months. Once my brother did not have any meals for two consecutive days and only drank water. After class, he just returned to the dormitory and lay in bed. He fell sick and rolled around in bed with severe abdominal pain. His classmates had to take him to the hospital for treatment. He was diagnosed with acute gastroenteritis.

To ease the family hardship, my younger sister, who was only 12, decided to quit her schooling and look for a job. With the parental agreement and the help of a relative, she got a job as a processing worker in an electric factory in the special economic zone of Shenzhen, 300 kilometers away from home. That was in 1983.

On March 2, 1983, Deng Xiaoping made an inspecting visit to the south of the country. When he returned to Beijing, Deng made these remarks publicized in newspapers: "This time, I went from Jiangsu to Zhejiang and then from Zhejiang to Shanghai, and along the way, I saw that the situation was excellent: people were full of joy, a lot of new houses built, the markets rich in supplies, and the cadres full of confidence. "

Deng talked about the achievements in six aspects: "First, the people's problem of food and clothing has been solved, and their basic life needs have been met; Second, the housing problem has been solved, now twenty square meters per capita. Because of land shortage, taller buildings were built, and I saw many two or three-story buildings in small towns and rural areas; Third, the employment problem has been solved, and basically, there are no unemployed workers in cities and towns; Fourth, rural people no longer leave their homes, and the situation in which rural people always want to run to big cities has changed; Fifth, primary and secondary education has been popularized, and education, culture, sports, and other public welfare undertakings have been arranged properly; Sixth, people's thinking has changed, and criminal behavior has been greatly reduced."

On January 24, 1984, Deng arrived in Guangzhou by special train during his winter holiday. He spent two weeks inspecting Guangdong and Fujian, including three special economic zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Xiamen, as well as Zhongshan and Shunde, two rapidly growing counties near Zhuhai. Deng also encouraged the construction of more special zones and proposed to increase the number of cities open to the outside world. (7)

Enping city was transforming itself at a rapid speed. The government started constructing a park at Turtle Peak Mountain behind our school. The Chinese name for Turtle Peak was "Aofeng," and the animal "Ao" had a head similar to the dragon head.

Soon, we saw a long corridor built, and from a distance, it looked like a yellow dragon descending from the top of the mountain, and the yellow glazed tiles resembled the dragon's scales. At the very top was a two-story pavilion called the Dragon Pavilion. The dragon corridor was 360 meters long, 2 meters wide with nine curves and seventy-seven bends, the eaves painted with 308 classical strokes of "Journey to the West," "Outlaws of the Marsh," "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," and "Dream of the Red Mansions." A sundial was built below, round like a yellow dragon playing a bead, imposing and graceful from a distance.

But some people argued that the man-made dragon was ugly and damaged the mountain's natural beauty and would impact the "fengshui" , the geomancy or fortune of the city.

Springs and winters came and left. Turtle Peak Mountain never changed its color until now. The Jinjiang River had run from west to east without stopping for a second, but now it made turns at lower land when dams were built. Cement and ceramics factories were established along the road from my hometown to Enping city.

Deng Xiaoping started the reforms and opening-up, allowing some people to become rich first. More and more families became richer while my family stayed poor.

I could do nothing but study harder myself. In my senior grades, I made my advance steadily, and by the end of the first year, I was already in third place in my class. I did even better the following two years. I was most of the time in the top three.

I showed more interest in English in senior year two, and my English teacher gave me a special favor. We formed an English Study Group, and I was elected the group leader. One day the teacher told us that she had a tape recorder for the group and let me go to her office after class.

I went to her office. My English teacher was a kind old lady of sixty. She told me she would retire in two years, and our class was her last one before retirement. After she gave me the tape recorder, she asked me questions about my family when she felt I was not very happy.

I was reluctant to tell the whole story. Instead, my teacher insisted on learning the reason for my little sadness. When she discovered my father had just had an accident and broken his arm, she looked sad and showed great mercy for my hardship. When I left, she gave me twenty dollars. That was the greatest gift in my whole life.

My English teacher once invited me to her home, where I learned more about her story. Before 1949, she studied English literature at Nanjing University, administered by the Kuomintang Party, and later worked in a foreign affairs office after the communist party took over. During the Cultural Revolution, she was classified as a right-wing reactionary, persecuted for her connections with Taiwan, and sent to a labor camp in Enping.

As students from rural areas, many schoolmates would choose to study politics, law, or economics in their higher education. Most people wanted to have power in government offices or make money in businesses. But in China, being in power or owning lots of money wouldn't keep us safe either, according to my teacher. The more important thing was to open our eyes to the world and see the truth.

She told me that studying English was a good way to learn about the world and encouraged me to attend a language university after graduation. Thus I worked harder with my English lessons and made good preparations for the national exams in the coming year.

Chinese people believed in fate. Life encounters were very important along the way to my growth, and I thought my encounter with this kindhearted old lady was one of the best in my life.

On January 9, 1958, the first law on household registration, the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Household Registration, was promulgated, which established a set of strict household registration systems and gave the government the power to fully control all people's permanent residence, temporary residence, birth, death, emigration, relocation, and their changes. All individuals were generally divided into two categories: agricultural hukou and non-agricultural hukou.

During this period, individuals attempting to migrate from rural to urban areas for non-agricultural work had to apply to the relevant authorities, and the approval limits for such applications were strictly controlled. People who left

the place of their household registration would not have food quotas, housing units, or publicly-funded medical care.

Urban residents needed tickets to purchase non-staple foods and household necessities. City residents' daily tickets include cloth tickets, coal tickets, soap tickets, bicycle tickets, etc. The four major pieces that ordinary families wanted to have – sewing machines, bicycles, watches, and radios – were purchased with a ticket.

In this rationing system, the peasants, who accounted for most of the population, were excluded from the supply system, except for grain and cloth. Families in need had to exchange cloth tickets for purchases, and at that time, the per capita annual quota was only enough to make a jacket and a pair of trousers.

The hukou system controlled and strengthened the flow of people, enabling the authoritarian government to allocate resources more effectively to various regions according to the population. It also laid the foundation for urban and rural inequalities and more corruption in the government.

The household registration system was the direct cause of creating social injustice and a corrupt system that trampled on the fundamental rights of citizens; it not only divided the Chinese into urban and rural populations but also divided the Chinese into classes, thus poisoning people's hearts and distorting human nature, which was the basis for creating class struggle and also one of the root causes of social decay.

To enter a university was the only workable way for me if I wanted to change my peasantry status and become an urban citizen.

6 University

My elder brother had two years of senior high school, while I was going to have three years of senior schooling due to national educational reform.

Malnutrition and mental weakness hurt the health of my elder brother, and he gradually lost self-confidence in his study. In the final months of high school, he was doing worse and worse in most subjects, and he even felt nervous about the coming national examination for universities.

He passed the exam but at a lower score line. Unable to attend good colleges or universities, he chose a three-year degree in Guangdong Provincial Shipping College, majoring in ship machinery and mechanics. We had a relative in Guangzhou who was a crew member onboard a container ship. This relative could travel overseas and see many countries. My elder brother hoped to become a shipman like him.

Two years later, it was my turn. Again, I scored excellent results and enrolled for four years in the English Department of Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute. As the country was having economic reform and opening up to the outside world, my major was in hot demand.

Most students came from the north, so I was not among the poorest in my grade. On the contrary, I looked more vigorous and healthier with regular meals guaranteed. My classmates chose me as their sports leader. Often I had volleyball or basketball in the afternoon and loved running into the mountains for fresher air.

I liked the university campus at the foot of White Cloud Mountain, except that it was too close to the airport. Teachers had to stop their speeches when an airplane flew over.

We had smaller classes of about twenty. In four years, I changed classes three times and had the chance to get along with about sixty students. We generally formed small groups for easier interaction and randomly made our changes. Many classes were more of a game than a formal lecture. Attending classes was an exciting thing, and I was seldom bored.

A little creek was running in the middle of the campus, separating the teachers' quarters from the students'. We called it the lovers' creek because many lovers would find it a perfect place there to express their hearts. I was often there in the evening reading books under the dim light or listening to the radio. BBC and VOA were allowed on campus.

University opened my eyes to a new world. As my career direction was foreign economic relations and trade, the English Department had courses covering all areas of international trade. And we were trained to be translators and interpreters as well.

These four years, I started to read about the west. Besides our daily courses in western literature, I read Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas, *The Thorn Birds* by Australian author Colleen McCullough and even William Shakespeare's novels. I also learned by heart important and beautiful English articles like Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

We also had foreign teachers from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. I had an American teacher who taught us Management and always gave me the highest scores in my class. He was a young man only several years older than me; we became good friends and often had an afternoon run together into the mountain roads behind the institute. One day his girlfriend from the U.S. came for a visit; she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

Guangzhou was the capital city of Guangdong province, with a population of over ten million. It was a bustling city of commerce and the chief hub of foreign trade. On weekends, we often went shopping or sightseeing in the city. As the country was opening up and having its economic reforms, we saw changes and new developments every year or month. When Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang were in charge as party secretaries, the country had more freedom in all aspects. We could find all kinds of publications in bookstores, including books on sensitive political issues.

Compared to middle school, life and study at university were easy and relaxed. Tuition was free, and the government gave all students extra financial help. I received 25 dollars per month which could cover most of my simple meals. I only needed money from my family for leisure and other expenses. And everybody knew employment was guaranteed and arranged by the government after graduation.

Once I enrolled in university, the government transferred my residency registration from the countryside to the city. As a result, official files would show that my household or hukou status was already independent of my parents. In addition, I started to have free medical services that residents in the country, like my parents, would not have.

This guarantee of benefits and stability allowed me to search for other things. With the implementation of the household responsibility system, my parents could make several thousand dollars annually in the countryside. My family's financial situation improved a bit when my elder brother and sister worked. In the second-year summer vacation, a roommate and I arranged to travel to the north for a month. He was from a county in Henan province in Central China. We took the train from Guangzhou to his hometown city, and I stayed in his family house for a week before going further north to Beijing, Tianjin, Beidaihe, and nearby places.

I loved the cultural part of Beijing. I thought I should have chosen a university next to Beijing University and Qinghua University. This was the first time I visited the Ruins of the Imperial Gardens, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heavens, the Tian'anmen Square, the Great Hall of the People, and the Great Wall. My partner also got us tickets to the Swimming Pool Quarters of former Chairman Mao. I was amazed to see Mao's bed covered with a white sheet with many books on one end.

It was in this room that U.S. President Richard Nixon met Chairman Mao on February 21, 1972. It was not until 1979 that the U.S. government betrayed Taiwan and established diplomatic ties with the communist regime.

I also visited Mao's Memorial Hall at Tian'anmen Square. I followed the line of visitors to pay their homage, but I did not have much respect for the wax figure in a crystal coffin. I started to think that it was Mao who had brought lots of sufferings to the Chinese people.

Instead, I showed some respect to Deng Xiaoping for his policies of opening up China to the world before he cracked down on the democratic movement in 1989.

In December 1985, ten graduate students from Tongji University wrote to Hu Yaobang, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, calling for political reform and the promotion of the democratic process. Hu Yaobang assigned two officials from the Central Propaganda Department to Shanghai to have a dialogue with the students. This arrangement was seen as one of the harbingers of the 1986 Shanghai student upheaval.

Several years after Mao's death, many facts about the Cultural Revolution's humanitarian crisis were revealed and publicized. People could publicly criticize him and discuss his policy mistakes over the past two decades.

When Hu Yaobang responded positively to the call for political reform, and the news was made known among intellectuals and students on university campuses, we very much welcomed that. We thought the country had real hopes for democracy as the Communist Party started to face the facts. I actively participated in related discussions and wanted to join the Communist Party with several other schoolmates and later asked my father for advice.

In May 1986, Deng Xiaoping asked Hu Yaobang to come to his home to discuss the personnel arrangement for the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party. Hu Yaobang suggested that Deng should step down from the central leadership.

On June 10, 1986, Deng discussed "political reform" during a meeting with Zhao Ziyang, Yu Qiuli, and Wanli. Deng said: "In 1980, the reform of the political system was proposed, but it was not concretized, and it should be put on the agenda now." (7)

When we knew political reform was on the agenda, we were overjoyed in group discussions. I submitted my application to join the party. I pledged to participate in a mission and help change China for the better.

Fang Lizhi, vice president of the University of Science and Technology of China, commented in a newspaper article: "The implementation of people's supervision is the key to the success or failure of political reform, and the people's representatives should at least have the right to question and impeach."

On August 18, Hu Yaobang mentioned in an interview that "the reform of the political system is not a denial of this system. Comrade Deng Xiaoping spoke about it as early as 1978, and I also talked about it later. Why did this issue come out this year? Because the reform of the economic structure involves the political system, without the reform of the political system, the reform of the economic structure will not be changed and unable to change."

On August 22, on his 81st birthday, Deng Xiaoping held a banquet in Beidaihe Resort, saying that he would retire from the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China two years later, and Hu Yaobang believed it to be true.

In October, Hu Yaobang made a public statement at a meeting of the Politburo of the CPC Central Committee: "Today I will be specific and frank, and I agree with Comrade Xiaoping taking the lead in retiring, which is a perfect lead. As long as Comrade Xiaoping retires, the work of other old comrades will be easy to do. When my term of office as General Secretary expires, I will come down to make way for the young comrades. "

As Hu Yaobang promoted the abolition of the lifelong system of cadre leadership positions, he was unaware that Deng and other leaders were planning to take him down from leadership the same year.

In the history of Communist China, 1985-1989 were the best years in terms of openness and free speech. Farmers had good harvests in the countryside; factories were busy; free speech and free press were allowed on university

campuses. People from all walks of life saw hopes and expected a brighter future.

In the foreign languages institute, we had more girls than boys in almost all classes. Schoolmates formed different interest groups, like singing, dancing, Chinese calligraphy, literature reading, and sports. I joined a calligraphy group, had gatherings almost every weekend, and arranged competitions. Every school term, we had excursions to White Cloud Mountain and other social events in the city and nearby tourist destinations. We witnessed many Phoenix stories and encounters of the Butterfly Lovers among these groups. Everyone welcomed a free country while enjoying themselves.

I composed a little verse, "These youths had forgotten the times when they tasted the bitterness while indulging in liquor and wine. They don't know those little happenings of excitement are just moments of watching the flowers in dreams. When tragedy falls, the flowers wither, and the dreams are in vain when you awake."

On the evening of December 4, 1986, Fang Lizhi said at a speech at the University of Science and Technology: "I believe that democracy is not given from top to bottom, but won by oneself. Democracy is only reliable if it is won by everyone's consciousness. Otherwise, it will be taken back." On December 5, more than 4,000 students from Anhui University and other universities took to the streets to march.

On New Year's Day 1987, the People's Daily published an editorial emphasizing the importance of the four cardinal principles and attacking bourgeois liberalization.

On January 6, Deng Xiaoping summoned Hu Yaobang to attend the "Party Life Meeting." Hu Yaobang first reviewed his party life, admitting that he had made some mistakes, but tried to make some excuses. After that, Hu Yaobang was criticized by many attendees.

On January 17, the Anhui Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection announced the expulsion of Fang Lizhi from his Communist Party leadership. Later, Hu Yaobang was forced to resign. (7)

Many schoolmates and I watched these developments closely. We thought our future and destiny were linked with that of the country.

I joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1987 after careful consideration and at my father's request. The following year, I was elected secretary of the Students' Union of the institute.

At the end of the 1980s, China started a national business boom. The military and government agencies set up their own companies and enterprises; officials were assigned managers positions in state-owned enterprises. Officials at all levels competed for private profits. The families of high-ranking officials dominated all profitable industries. Deng's family members were among the most corrupt.

During the Spring Festival of 1989, Hu Yaobang left Beijing for a vacation in Hunan and suffered a heart attack due to a cold. On April 15, Hu Yaobang died of heart failure resulting from a large-scale myocardial infarction.

After April 15, some mourners organized small gatherings near the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square. On the evening of April 17, more than 3,000 Beijing University students marched in Tiananmen Square, and soon nearly a thousand university students from Tsinghua University also participated. As the scale of the event increased, the gathering gradually evolved into a democratic movement.

The Democratic Movement occurred in the summer when we were graduating and ready to choose a job. Chaos, disturbances, confusion, and uncertainty continued for months. As the Student's Union secretary, I was responsible for writing and posting political slogans and posters.

To support the Beijing demonstrations, our Students' Union organized a march to the city center of Guangzhou. I stayed with other organizers in quiet

protests for a night at the Guangdong Provincial Government Headquarters entrance.

On May 23, over a million people in Beijing marched onto the streets, chanting slogans to oust Premier Li Peng. At 2 p.m. that day, three young men from Hunan Province used paint to destroy the massive portrait of Mao Zedong hanging on the Gate of Heavenly Peace at the Forbidden City.

I was thrilled to see for the first time people from all walks of life stood up to join the protests and demand a road for democracy.

On June 3, a Politburo meeting confirmed the events as "counter-revolutionary riots" and that resolute and uncompromising measures must be taken. The same night, the Liberation Army was ordered to open fire.

Deng Xiaoping spoke to the military after the crackdown, "As soon as things broke out, it was obvious. Their slogan is mainly two, one is to overthrow the Communist Party, and the other is to overthrow the socialist system. They aimed to establish a bourgeois republic that was completely western subordinate." (7)

When I heard these words from Deng, I felt cheated and deserted by the communist leader. We did not aim to take down the Party; instead, we wanted to stand firm by its side and be part of its pioneers for a great mission.

On June 30, the Eighth Session of the Standing Committee of the Seventh National People's Congress decided to remove Zhao Ziyang from his post as vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, with Jiang Zemin becoming general secretary of the Central Committee and Jiang Zemin, Song Ping, and Li Ruihuan members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee.

After the military crackdown, the hardliners in the Communist Party rose, and the reform and opening up policy stagnated, only to resume after Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992. The political reforms, including human rights discussions, were suspended.

The whole country looked silent again. And people returned to a life of fear. As graduate students, we had nothing to do but try to find a job.

Four years of university had come to an end. I had no desire to go any further for a Master's or higher degree.

I seldom talked about my love stories. I received a letter from a girl expressing her love in my first year. She didn't give her name, saying that she would make it open if she got a response letter to her address. I did not respond to that. My self-confidence suffered a bit in the final months when a girl rejected my courtship. I considered this karma.

I cut my love stories in this novella, so it wouldn't be too long for viewers. Modern readers won't have the time to read long novels. I don't want to catch their attention by putting in too much irrelevant stuff. Ancient scholars valued their writings as gold and would not add a single useless character. Modern writers like me thought hard to put in so many words but could not express themselves clearly.

The democratic revolt changed many things and the fate of many people. As a result, my life started another chapter in society.

7 Government Job

The government crackdown on the June 4th Movement did not negatively impact my career as my simple participation was not severe enough to cause any political persecution.

On October 31, 1989, when Deng Xiaoping met with former U.S. President Richard Nixon, he said: "We have taken a forgiving attitude toward the

students who participated in the demonstrations and signed the autographs, including those going overseas, and do not hold them accountable. Only a small number of those who have ambitions and attempt to subvert the Government of the People's Republic of China are punished to different degrees as necessary. We cannot tolerate unrest. In the future, when there is turmoil, we will still have to impose martial law. This will not harm others; it will not harm any country; this is China's internal affair. The purpose is to be stable, and only by stabilizing can we engage in construction. "

The newly selected leader Jiang Zemin became the core of the Communist Party leadership as general secretary of the Central Committee. But, then, Jiang Zemin faced a situation with the economic and political reforms stalling, the mixed-ownership economy disrupted, foreign investment nearly dried up, weakened exports and tourism, and a declining national economy.

After graduation, I worked in the Documentation Department of Guangdong Import and Export Commodities Inspection Bureau or CCIB.

On July 1, 1991, in his speech marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party, Jiang Zemin abandoned Deng Xiaoping's "taking economic construction as the center" and tightened ideological control. Again, I felt the tension in the new office.

In this government administration, my main task was translating inspection certificates and other official documents in foreign trade. About 500 people worked in the bureau when I joined the administration team. I needed to coordinate with colleagues from different departments, like the inspection departments of agricultural products, electronics, metals, chemicals, etc., for exports. Another important task of my department was the issuance of Certificates of Generalized System of Preferences, certificates issued to export companies to claim preferential tariffs, mainly from European countries.

We had only two people in our translation team when I started. My partner was an English teacher from South China Normal University. All the certificates were in standard formats, and it was an easy job for her and me. We had a

supporting team of about 20 people who were receptionists, typewriters, and proofreaders, primarily girls.

Work hours were 9:00 am- 4:30 pm with two hours lunch break from 12:00 - 2:00 pm. Regular work time was only five hours a day. As a result, I had lots of autonomy with my work. On most days, two hours was enough to do my work in the morning and another hour in the afternoon to finish the job. The rest of the time, I could do whatever I liked: reading a book or newspaper, chatting with colleagues in other departments, or even going out shopping or wandering for an hour or so.

CCIB provided official uniforms, including shoes and shirts, for public servants. Cadres with official identities like me had free accommodation with free gas, electricity, and even toilet paper. Seasonal foods and seasonal drinks were part of the benefits. The bureau also installed a TV set in every room for our entertainment. So everything seemed good and satisfactory in the beginning.

We had about 20 colleagues from different departments living together in the same apartment building, all unmarried graduates from various universities. As days went by, I noticed the differences. Most inspectors lived a better life than people like me who worked with internal affairs.

A typical day for an inspector would include free lunch offered by the applicants or the export businesses. After lunch, a gift like a pack of cigarettes was the norm; money under the table was an easy thing. Few would take it as a matter of corruption if an inspector from the agricultural department brought home several kilos of seafood for an export company or an electronic department inspector brought home some household appliances.

In the first few months, 10 to 15 colleagues would gather in the evening or on weekends for beers and playing cards. Half a year later, the number of people gathering dropped to 8, then to 5, then to 2. After one year, seeing such a gathering for open chats was very difficult. Fewer and fewer colleagues would speak their minds.

When it came to becoming a decent official, my idol was Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty, an intellectual with the combined cultural spirit of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

Although I was still poor, I felt superiority as a communist cadre in a government office. Like many other colleagues, I thought we looked down upon the ordinary laborers working in the streets. The gap in society between the rich and the poor was getting wider.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian economy also collapsed. After the June 4 Democratic Movement, the legitimacy of the CCP government's rule was challenged and appeared in crisis. The CCP regime believed that only economic prosperity could preserve its ruling position.

Since the 1980s, there has been a folk saying: "East, west, south, north, and south, get rich to Guangdong in the south." At the beginning of reform and opening up, most Hong Kong-funded, Taiwan-funded, and foreign-funded enterprises were labor-intensive companies that needed many young workers. The population of Guangdong was far from being able to meet such a huge labor demand, thus providing a precondition for young people from the inland provinces to go south to Guangdong. Millions or tens of millions of migrant workers from Hunan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Hubei, and other inland provinces came to Guangdong to seek their dreams.

In the early days of reform and opening-up, Hong Kong people could easily enter the mainland. Most Hong Kong residents would carry daily necessities, electrical appliances, and other items to relatives and friends on the mainland because the customs inspection was very lax then. It was also common for smuggling groups to evade taxes by bribery with customs clearances when they dealt with tobacco and alcohol. At the same time, the smuggling of stolen goods also increased, and many right-hand cars and projectors stolen in Hong Kong were sold to the mainland through smuggling channels.

In February 1983, the White Swan Hotel, China's first five-star hotel, opened for business in Guangzhou. At that time, the White Swan Hotel was not only of the

highest standard in Chinese terms but also the earliest hotel in China to implement western style management. Residents were happy to see that the hotel never refused their entrance as in the past, they needed a letter of introduction or government documents to enter a hotel. The opening of the White Swan caused a sensation, and on an opening day, several baskets of squeezed shoes were picked up in the lobby, 400 rolls of paper were used in the toilet, and several flush toilets were even broken. When I joined CCIB, another five-star hotel, the Garden Hotel, was just finished and ready to open for business.

The Garden Hotel was just next door. I often walked there for leisure during lunch breaks in the following two years. There was a fast food store inside the hotel where I sometimes had dinners if I didn't want to cook or eat in the canteen. A meal there cost eight to fifteen dollars.

Opposite the CCIB office building was the luxurious Guangzhou Friendship Store. The friendship store only accepted Foreign Exchange Currency for some imported items, about ten to twenty percent higher than the ordinary banknotes.

After Deng Xiaoping visited Guangdong in the spring of 1992 and made a series of speeches during his tour to Shenzhen, Jiang Zemin's reverse policies were corrected. The local economy started to boom again, and the CCIB office became busier. Soon our department chief announced a new service to charge the clients an extra "emergency fee." All clients were requested "voluntarily" to pay an additional amount to get their inspection certificates a little bit early on delivery. Most clients would pay that fee to evade bewilderment. This was systematic corruption, but nobody in the office was opposed to it, as everyone received some benefits. With a bit of some "extra" money, we could do more shopping outside.

Outside in nearby streets, we also saw night markets opening. Seafood restaurants were busy day and night. In addition, the city government set up more and more neon lights to make the city more robust and attractive.

On August 10, 1992, a riot broke out in the Shenzhen stock market. In the evening, hundreds of people gathered in front of the Shenzhen municipal government to express dissatisfaction with the sale of the Shenzhen IPO application forms and clashed with the police. Before the riots, the stock speculation heated up like fever rapidly across the country.

On October 12, the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party was held, and the party determined that "building socialism with Chinese characteristics" became its guiding ideology. The party congress formed a younger, reform-minded Politburo Standing Committee with the inclusion of Vice Premier Zhu Rongji and the secretariat secretary Hu Jintao, while Jiang Zemin acquired more power.

After Zhao Ziyang stepped down as the Party General Secretary, the living environment of Chinese intellectuals changed, resulting in China's intellectual elite beginning to develop in the direction of modern cynicism. Some intellectuals were either satisfied with the benefits brought by the industrialization of education and buried their heads in income generation or struggled to compete for the ranking of "public intellectuals" to attract the attention of the public media.

My department had only one computer, and the large-sized machine was hidden in a "secret" room for restricted use. I used a Stone typewriter. The office had air conditioning, but the engine made a lot of noise.

I got along well with all people in the office. We often went out together to shopping areas nearby in our spare time. However, older women often made fun of me when they wanted to introduce a girlfriend.

I started to pay attention to the work and life of my department chief. He was a thin, tall man of fifty. Like most of us, he rode a bicycle to work every day. He was often one of the earliest to come and latest to leave. He acted like an easygoing man and told everyone in the department that this was a big family and he was the parent. He walked into every room in the morning to say "hello" to everybody. He liked long chats, telling his old stories since the

administration's establishment. He signed his name on certificates and essential documents the rest of the morning. He seemed to have no tangible things to do besides these chores and more meetings. In the afternoon, he would read newspapers and summon us for more casual chats. He always said this was the best time in history, and young people would have a bright future in this office.

Every Friday afternoon was a particular study time for communist party members only. As one of the seven party members in the department, the chief often asked me to read out a newspaper editorial as part of the study. He was always generous in praising my "excellent" performance and telling everyone that I was among the best in the department. But there was something inside him I wanted to keep a distance from, something only a crafty man could carry. Unfortunately, I couldn't tell what that was.

My department chief was very kind but never talked to me about my work. The chief cadre knew almost nothing about my work in detail.

In the spring of my second year with CCIB, a delegation of five experts from the European Commission arrived for an official visit. They came to check the implementation of the Generalized System of Preferences in China and attended a forum during the China Export Commodities Trade Fair in Guangzhou.

In reception, the Chinese government formed a delegation of seven officials; I was one of them, acting primarily as a translator and interpreter.

In two weeks, besides the trade fair in Guangzhou, we traveled to factories and economic zones in different cities like Shenzhen and Zhuhai. This trip was the first time I stayed in four-star and five-star hotels, sat on a Mercedes Benz, drank Maotai almost every dinner, and had the best delicacies. Then, one evening I happened to see the bill at the cashier. That dinner cost over eleven thousand dollars, the amount equal to my salary of three years combined. I was shocked!

After 15 days of almost the best food in the world, I was back home in my dormitory and returned to my daily meals of rice and vegetable with a bit of meat. After that, I started to rethink the world ahead of me.

When I returned from this trip, I found a new colleague, a girl with the most delicate voice in my office. She first worked as a proofreader in the Typewriting Section, then as a receptionist at the front desk. Because there were many young girls in my department, young men from other departments flocked to our office like honey bees coming over the little flowers. She was the most glittering in the peony garden. And naturally, some applicants liked to invite her out for meals.

Whenever she had free time, she would come to my desk for any reason. I started to feel jealous when she was invited out for lunch. We fell in love and in three months gave ourselves to each other.

Now I had a girlfriend, someone to care for in the same department, and soon I met her father, a TCM pharmacist in a hospital. In the following year, weekends were no longer boring with her company. But when I dated a girl, I started to know money was never enough.

My girlfriend only worked in this government office for one year; Sharing the same office brought about some difficulties in our relationship. She later acquired a new job at the Concierge of the World Trade Center on the same street, only a ten-minute walk from my office. I didn't know how others experienced their first love. But I often dreamed of her being torn away from me. It was a bad omen.

I occasionally met with my former schoolmates to kill my dull days without her. Many worked in import and export companies or travel agencies. Some continued their studies for a master's degree or became English teachers, and others in other government organizations. The rest went overseas for immigration or further studies. I asked why most people had chosen export companies or travel agencies as English tour guides. I soon found out that they made the most money in those jobs.

After two years in the government office, the administration raised my monthly salary to about 350 dollars. In addition, I received a bonus of 500 dollars at the end of the year. If I was soon to marry this girlfriend, this could be enough if I had a small family of three like many of my colleagues. But I was facing a different situation. I had a family of six to support.

My elder brother had a job as a mechanic in the Waterways Bureau in a nearby city but received a low salary. My sister in a factory didn't earn much either. My younger brother, out of everyone's expectations, not only advanced to the same Number One Middle School but also did exceptionally well in the national examination. He was to enroll in the Law School of Zhongshan University later this year.

I took good care of my younger brother's education. I had regrets in my university because of poverty, so I did not want him to have regrets in his university due to financial stress. I would go to his campus occasionally and play badminton with him for an afternoon. I was glad to see him much taller and stronger than me.

To support my younger brother's university studies, I gave him 150 dollars every month, sometimes more. I gave my parents 50 dollars monthly. What I left for myself was 150 dollars. So every month, I was broke.

I tried to look carefully at my career in this government office. According to my department chief, our translation team would have five to six people in another three years and form an independent section. He hinted that I might be the section chief. I thought deeper that I might be promoted to the department chief in another ten to fifteen years. The image of that thin, tall man often appeared like movie slides in front of my eyes. "Could I be in his position 15 years from now? Do I want a job and life like my department chief?" I was very sure I talked to myself repeatedly, "No!"

Once I talked to a colleague in another department and asked about his ideal future in the administration. He told me his perfect future could be to sleep with 100 virgin girls. He was not joking. He was about to become deputy chief

of his department. His philosophy was standard and a shared ideal for many communist cadres. However, when I looked higher in the CCIB administration, all other leaders and directors were doubled-faced. They were decent gentlemen on the stage but had another face in real life. Their life was not the kind of future that I had hoped for or planned to live.

One of my classmates worked as a tour guide in the China Travel Service of Guangdong Province. He said his basic salary was about one thousand, but they could make five thousand to six thousand dollars a month, or sometimes more. That was lots of money compared to my salary. I could not resist the temptation. Soon he brought me the news that his General Manager wanted to hire me if I desired to make a change.

I needed money. I needed that money!

But my desire for money caused lots of harm.

He disagreed when I told my department chief my intention for a move. So then, I went to the HR department. They told me I must have approval from the deputy director in charge of my department. So I went to the deputy director. She disagreed too.

First, they told me I was the comrade with the best performance. Then, they suggested me a job change within the administration. Finally, my superiors told me I should listen to the authorities as a communist party member. I was like a ball kicked among the three parties.

One morning I knocked at the deputy director's office again when eight leaders were having a meeting. I did not expect that. But the following day, rumors spread within the organization that I disrupted a critical party meeting. When my resignation was made public, it was like a stone dropped into a pond in my department. In addition to rumors reactions, some colleagues started to keep a distance from me. I felt like an ant in a hot wok sitting in my office.

The HR department chief told me that I would receive a dismissal if I insisted on a resignation. I asked why. I did nothing wrong. He said I would be dismissed from the party membership if I had done something wrong, not just a dismissal from public office. When he said these words, his assistant, a hot-tempered woman, stood up to push me out of the office while showing her great impatience. "CCIB is not a place you can just easily come and go!" said she as she shut the door hard.

After one hundred years, Ah Q mentality was still popular among the Chinese. These HR officials thought they were the "Zhao family." But he or she was another Ah Q who was a bully to the less fortunate but fearful of those above him in rank or power. At this moment, I thought the HR department chief or his assistant was Ah Q, and their bully wouldn't work on me.

I said I insisted. I thought this kind of system was disgusting as it punished the good. Afterward, I thought I was an Ah Q too. I started a revolution, but I was the loser. I lost all my tactics. I was helpless. I felt like a naked person in my office amid the contemptuous and doubting eyes.

Later, some friends told me I was too young and naive. They said I couldn't do this kind of thing in the office. I would have to visit the family houses of the deputy director and the department chiefs separately. I had to give them gifts and money under the table. They were like the fortresses that I had to overcome one after another.

I said I would never do such kind of thing in my life. But I had experienced the harshness of the communist iron fists punching hard in my face. The ancestral Chinese said, "It is easy to worship the Lord of the Hell while difficult to serve the little ghosts around him." I underestimated the evils of these little ghosts. I did not expect the HR assistant would use her power to the extreme.

The HR department kept my official files and would not release them even though it was a dismissal. China Travel Service, also a government organization, would not give me formal employment without an approval letter

from CCIB, whether it was approved for regular resignation or penalized dismissal. I just hated the communist system.

Still, I had to come to work every day. I already had a tense relationship with the HR staff, the department chief, and the deputy director after they kicked me over and over like a ball. I felt to have mental problems that I could no longer focus my thoughts on anything. CCIB office became chilled hell to me.

I had to take one step backward to break the ice. One Friday afternoon after, I bought five kilos of the best quality imported apples and went to knock at the family house of our department chief. He was shocked to see me coming to his home without giving him notice beforehand. He asked me to sit in the sitting room, which was dim. He did not show me his rooms. But I could see it was a shabby house, at least 30 years old. The department chief dared not look directly into my eyes. He knew what I had come for. He had nothing to say about my resignation but repeated that I was the best worker in the office and that he valued my performance.

He stopped for a moment and continued with a prospect for me, "You see, in the department, we are expanding and will soon have a new translation section, and I will be retired soon, the bureau is building branches in the province. So as young men, you shall have lots of opportunities as you soon take up heavier responsibilities, I mean, to go higher up the ladder."

When he sensed I was listening, he was a bit higher in his spirits and wanted to sell his philosophy again. I stood up and said I did not want to bother him too much. He repeatedly said, "No bother! No bother!" and said goodbye as he stood up to open the door. I no longer had time for his ideological education. Instead of anger, I pitied him.

The following Monday, I walked to the office of the Deputy Director and knocked at the door. She was not busy and ready to talk about my affair. Again she praised my performance. I told her I already had a tense relationship in the office which made my job difficult. I asked for her home address to see her after work. She gave me her address.

Again, I bought five kilos of imported apples plus a box of ginseng tea and knocked at her door in the evening. She welcomed me in. While I sat down, she showed me a piece of paper with a red title from my Documentation Department. It was a letter from my department chief stating that the office would not agree with my department as it was challenging to find such a "good comrade" in the translation section. She said the management was considering a promotion for me and hoped I would reconsider my decision. She felt sorry about the tense relationship that had made my work difficult, adding, "Things could have been done better! Things could have been done better!"

Only at times of extraordinary happenings could we see the darker side of human nature and the evil part of the communist system.

As I had thought about the government organization over and over in the past months and whether I was fit for a work environment like this, I expressed my determination to leave. She did not stop me but told me to come to her office the following day for an approval letter.

Some years later, before CCIB of over 1000 employees moved to a new office complex in the Pearl River New City District, I was told that the HR assistant had a car accident and broke her legs. She sat in an armchair for the rest of her life. She must have done lots of evil to others. She was also a victim of the system. The former CCIB director and a dozen more officials were investigated for corruption by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. My department chief stepped down earlier, and the deputy director safely retired.

A Chinese saying goes, "God has put up the play settings, and the Heavens have all the arrangements in place."

8 A Tour Guide

Getting approval for the resignation from the government office took me over six months, and the result was a shameful dismissal. And sadly too, my work in the Foreigners' Reception Department of China Travel Service (Guangdong Province) did not have a good start.

To begin with, I was doing local tours in and around the city. I usually picked up tourists from the airport, the train station, or The Lotus Mountain Harbor, led them around sightseeing for a day or two in the province, and then saw them off to their next stop. My guests mostly came in from Hong Kong or back home through Hong Kong.

One day I received an old couple from the United States. A tour guide from Hong Kong CTS accompanied them on the train to Guangzhou in the morning and said goodbye after I took up the responsibility.

That was a one-day tour in the city. Afterward, I needed to take them back to the train station so that they could catch the last train back to Hong Kong. So that was a happy day in terms of sightseeing.

I took the old couple back to the train station when we finished the tour. The customs stopped them; the officials did not find valid visas in their passports. The old couple was nervous, worried, and frustrated and almost came to tears when I was desperately finding the solutions. It was evening, and offices in Guangzhou and Hong Kong were all closed. I could see nobody that could help. Finally, the last train left without carrying this poor couple.

I had to arrange five-star hotel accommodation for the couple and assured them that I must be able to get them onto the first train the following morning. When I settled everything, it was midnight, but I still hadn't figured out what had gone wrong.

Lying in bed, I searched my travel bag again and again. Finally, a small envelope dropped to the floor. I opened it. It was a paper with a stamp and the couple's names. It was their visas.

I had never learned that a visa could be a separate piece of paper with a stamp, and no one in the office had ever told me that either. When the Hong Kong tour guide met me at the train station, she handed me some papers and an envelope which I thought with a little tip. The documents were the itinerary and special requirements for us to take good care of the old couple. The Hong Kong tour guide did not tell me anything about the visas. And I thought that could be another piece of paper with their names and itineraries. It was a massive mistake on my side, but I could not tell anyone about this. I could not tell anyone in my office that I did not learn about visas on a simple piece of paper. And I could not tell the Hong Kong office that I had not received adequate training.

The following day, the old couple did take the first train back to Hong Kong, but I was personally responsible for their hotel accommodation and two more train tickets. I had to work at least a week to pay for the loss.

I took part in the national exam for English tour guides. Luckily, I passed the difficult exam with a 17% success rate that year and won the appraisal from my managers.

I continued with more local tours to build my professionalism. Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Memorial Hall and the Huanghuagang 72 Martyrs' Mausoleum were tourist-must-go places in Guangzhou.

Dr. Sun was the forefather of China's democratic revolution, like Washington of the United States. He overturned the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and became the first president of the Republic of China.

Sun Yat-sen was born in a farming village in Guangdong in 1866 and, at 13, went to Honolulu, Hawaii, where his elder brother had a farm.

In the United States, Sun liked to read the biographies of US Presidents Washington and Lincoln and hoped to build a new government in China "of the people, by the people and for the people." At a church school, he chose to study medicine and law and was baptized as a Christian.

Sun Yat-sen established the Huangpu Military Academy with support from the Soviet Union. Therefore, when he formed the new government, he invited many Communist Party members to important positions.

Sun Yat-sen criticized the bourgeoisie and capitalism, favored the public ownership of capital, and positively commented on Karl Marx. But during a public speech at Zhongshang University in Guangzhou, Sun denounced communism, saying it did not suit the Chinese nation. Instead, he wanted to have an American-style democracy in his country.

Sun Yat-sen spent his life pursuing freedom, equality, and fraternity. Inuyasha, the 29th Prime Minister of Japan who sheltered Sun Yat-sen Kai-shek during his uprisings, asked Sun Yat-sen: "What is your favorite thing?" Sun Yat-sen replied without hesitation, "Revolution." Inuyasha said: "You like revolution, everyone knows; other than that, what do you like the most?" Sun Yat-sen laughed while looking at Inuyasha's wife and did not answer. Inuyasha pushed him again, "Answer me, please." Sun replied, "Woman." (5)

During my local tours, I talked about Dr. Sun Yat-sen repeatedly. He was a true fighter. To take down the dictatorship, he led eleven times of uprisings and overcame countless failures until a final success.

Mao Zedong promised the Chinese a U.S.-style democracy when he fought the Kuomintang troops, but he brought us a dictatorship after "liberation".

After seventy years, ordinary Chinese still did not have the right to vote or to select their leaders at all levels. And there was no sign of any hope that this would change.

The Temple of Six Banyan Trees was another place that I often visited as a local guide. It related to Huineng, an even greater "revolutionary" figure in Chinese history who made his first appearance in the temple as the Sixth Patriarch of the Southern Chan school of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty.

Huineng also came from a rural peasantry in Guangdong province. His father was from Fanyang but was banished from his government position and passed

away at a young age. Huineng and his mother were left in poverty and moved to Nanhai, where Huineng sold firewood to support his family. One day, Huineng delivered firewood to a customer's shop, where he met a man reciting the Diamond Sutra. "On hearing the words of the scripture, my mind opened up, and I understood." He inquired about why the Diamond Sutra was chanted, and the person stated that he came from the Eastern Meditation Monastery in Huangmei District of the province of Qi, where the Fifth Patriarch of Chan delivered his teachings. Huineng's customer paid him ten silver taels and suggested that he meet the Fifth Patriarch of Chan.

The story of the Sixth Patriarch was always inspiring, and I hoped I would become enlightened one day.

In about three months, I began to lead national tours. My first group was eleven guests from America on a twelve-day vacation to Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guilin, and back to Guangzhou.

This trip was the first time in my life taking a flight, but neither my company nor my guests were to know the truth. I learned how to check in the luggage but did not collect the boarding passes. When the whole group stopped at the checking point, a service lady from the check-in counter called behind me loudly, "Boarding pass! Boarding pass! Your boarding passes!" I realized that we needed those tickets to go in and to find our seats on the plane later. I had no idea about that. Luckily, no one questioned my professionalism and took me as a newcomer.

In every city, we had a local guide. The Beijing guide was blowing up little gossip in politics; the Xi'an guide was good at telling erotic stories; the Guilin guide was good at selling landscape paintings. They were very experienced and doing much better than me, as I thought. Good tour guides made good money. When they made money, I made money too. These guests formed a VIP group, and we stayed in five-star hotels in all cities.

Most of my guests cried when we said goodbye on the final day. They gave me an envelope of appreciation with five hundred U.S. dollars. That was 3500

dollars in Chinese currency. Several months later, my office received a thank-you letter from this group, praising me as the best tour guide.

For most tour guides, our focus was not on the history of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Terra Cotta Warriors, the culture of the Summer Palace, or the beautiful scenery of the Huangpu River in Shanghai, the Lijiang River in Guilin and the West Lake in Hangzhou. Instead, we focused on how to make the guests happy and make money.

In the following months, I had the opportunity to lead other tours to the Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan, the Three Gorges along the Yangtze River, the Mountainous City of Chongqing and the Dujiangyan Irrigation Site in Chengdu, the Stone Forests in Yunnan, the Shaolin Temple in Luoyang, and other places.

When I visited Shaolin Temple, the abbot was famous nationally as he established a dozen companies promoting martial arts and the Shaolin culture. However, many disliked his adventures of turning a thousand-year-old Buddhist temple into a commercial place. Under the communist leadership, Shaolin was no longer a religious retreat for mediation and spiritual practice.

Touring China, we often visited Buddhist temples. Unfortunately, the Red Guards destroyed most temples during the Cultural Revolution. By the 1990s, most of them were restored or under redevelopment.

In the more than two thousand years since Buddhism was introduced to China, there had never been a practice of collecting entrance fees for famous mountain monasteries. However, after the establishment of the CCP government, atheist officials at all levels started the idea of profiting from these renowned monasteries.

Throughout history, the country's mountains have been shared by the public, and the Buddhist temples are sacred places for cultivators and treasure houses for inheriting culture. In the mind of religious Chinese, monasteries are not only places of spiritual practice but also function in educating sentient beings and purifying the minds of the practitioners.

In July 1979, Deng Xiaoping and his family were invited by Wan Li, then the first secretary of the Anhui Provincial Government, to the Yellow Mountain for a "recuperation tour." From his arrival on July 11 to his departure on July 16, Deng spent six days in the Yellow Mountain. During that time, Deng made the famous "Yellow Mountain Speech," which included vigorously developing tourism in Yellow Mountain to generate income by inviting more foreign tourists to the mountain.

Subsequently, in 1982, the State Council issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Tourism," pointing out that "tourism is a strategic industry, with low resource consumption, large driving efficiency, more employment opportunities, and good comprehensive benefits." As a result, all the country's mountains opened their gates wide as tourist attractions, and the local governments thus amassed massive wealth through high-priced tickets. Moreover, expensive entrance fees blocked the general public and religious believers from the mountain gates of monasteries, significantly weakening the primary function of these cultural sites.

Moreover, under the guise of reviving Buddhism, the CCP launched a large-scale construction campaign in the mountains and built highways leading directly to the monastery gates. Since then, Buddhist temples were no longer in peace, and the mysteries of religion disappeared. Monks became corrupt too. They cooperated with CCP officials at all levels to sell incense at sky-high prices and share the profits from expensive tickets and new developments of Buddhist statues.

There was a story that an old lady went to Putuo Mountain in Zhejiang Province to worship Guanyin Bodhisattva, but when she arrived at the mountain gate, she had no money to buy tickets, and in sorrow, she committed suicide by jumping into the sea.

While visiting the country's sacred mountains, I was most impressed with these inscriptions in all Buddhist temples: Do What is Good; Never Do Evil. But the communist regime has tried to ban religion, destroy our faith, and stop people from this fine education. This made many foreign tourists confused.

When westerners visited China for the first time, they were always very excited; they would find everything here fascinating, interesting, astonishing, lively, and so much different than what they had thought because China is so extensive, large, diverse, and inclusive. And the Chinese are so friendly. Their first impression must not be poverty. But they would feel differently when they stayed a little longer. The change in their opinions could be anything, depending on the provinces and cities they had visited. One thing for sure that visitors would have in common is that the Chinese love money and making money, never thinking enough of it. And if they could go deeper, they would tell that all Chinese bear some nature of a caged slave. They don't care much about their human rights, and they don't respect the rights of others either. They won't mind their privacy being intimidated by the authorities.

On March 31, 1994, twenty-four Taiwan tourists, eight crew members, and two tour guides were robbed and burned to death on board the ship in the Qiandao Lake when their sightseeing boat "Hairui" registered in Chun'an County, Hangzhou City, was taken by criminals. After looting US\$5,000, more than NT\$150,000, and more than 3,000 yuan, in addition to jewelry and cameras, the robbers drove the "Hairui" to the deep water, then to the predetermined wreck waters at Huangniling. Before the robbers left the cruise ship, they dumped entire barrels of gasoline inside the boat and set fire. This Qiandao Lake incident significantly impacted cross-strait relations between Taiwan and the mainland.

There was an old saying that reading ten thousand books was not better than traveling ten thousand miles. Only those who did it expressed a resonance.

With these tours, I could better understand the customs and cultural differences of various cities and countryside areas. Traveling as a tour guide allowed me to eye-witness the country's developments in many provinces, in addition to difficulties and bitterness.

On the one hand, China still followed its traditions, but on the other, the Chinese tended to easily hurt each other. They worshiped money and power

and disrespected women. Marriage as a commodity was widespread. I saw great inequality in the country.

The well-known writer Lin Yutang talked about the personalities of the Chinese in his bestseller *My Country My People*. But situations changed after one hundred years of too many mixed marriages and more accessible transportation. People in the south and southeast work harder than those in the west, northwest, and northeast. Contentment was the merit of the Chinese described in Lin's literature, but this character no longer existed with the communist experiments.

Colleagues seldom met to become close friends. All tour guides were taking tours across the country and always on the go, ready for another group to different destinations. There was no time for us to share experiences or talk about how to become better tour guides or how to make money. I had to search around in the darkness, learn from mistakes and keep a watching eye. "If you were treated badly, grab a beer, spend some money to make you happy, and then get on with your next journey!" one of my colleagues said.

There were significant differences among tour groups in terms of money-making as tour guides. First-time comers were happy to shop and bought lots of useless stuff when tour guides pushed. Second-time comers usually would not buy anything but be glad to give a handsome tip. Third-time comers would not listen to tour guides when it came to shopping. Instead, they would go down to free markets in their free time to buy exciting and valuable things.

Excellent tour guides all had their unique skills. You could either be knowledgeable about Chinese history and culture, or good at singing or telling funny stories, giving lectures that purify people's minds while bringing them comfort in life, or showing great compassion or care for the elderly. It was easy to make friends with guests but hard to win their trust. You sang different songs to different people.

Because China is such a big country with great differences, with different customs in minority areas, with changes of weather in different cities, with

outdoor activities in the mountains and on rivers, we as tour guides must always ensure the safety of our guests, especially the elderly. We could not be too high on making fun or making money and forget about the safety issues.

There were many ways we could make money as tour guides. The above 500 US dollars as tips from my first national group was only a tiny proportion. As a local guide, we collected commissions or kickbacks when our guests shopped in local stores, the rate being 10%-35% of the total sales amount, depending on the goods or services. We could sell souvenirs like local coins and stamps. We could make money exchanging foreign currencies. We could sell tickets for a night show.

Specialty shops for foreign tourists also did their best in promotions. I had groups visiting Chengdu and Kunming stores that sold burn cream. In the promotion show, several girls aged 18 to 20 were requested to demonstrate the magic power of the cream. The girls used their slim jade palms to touch an iron bar over the burning firewood. When their hands touched the reddish iron, we instantly saw tears coming out of their eyes. We almost screamed with a broken heart. The girls wiped their hands with the cream within three seconds, so we didn't see any burns on their palms. It was a tragic and heart-touching scene but a truly remarkable performance.

Then the sales managers started to say that these girls came from the countryside and were poor. For their safety, each of them could only demonstrate the task three times a day, which was really hard work. All my guests bought the burn cream showing great mercy for the young girls. I felt really sorry for the girls and bought the cream at a discount.

Honesty was not the merit of the Chinese. But I gradually realized that honesty was the best policy for a tour guide who stood between the guests and the market. For instance, if I had a foreign exchange with the guests, I would show them the official rate that could be checked by everyone and told that I must make two points more as a profit. Because the exchange market fluctuates daily, we must leave room for a possible loss. And most guests would agree to that because if they went to a bank in China, the bank also charged extra fees.

There was an underground market for foreign currencies in China, and all tour guides had connections. Some visitors knew about that, but we must tell them about the risks of dealing with a street vendor.

When in shops, the driver was usually the person to pick up the kickbacks. The shop owner would list all the items bought by the guests with the prices and the total number of kickbacks.

There were also customary rules as to which part of the money be made by a local guide, which part by a national guide, and how much we might give the driver.

On another tour as a national guide, I led a Malaysian group of 35 guests for 18 days. The group spent half a million dollars shopping in 7-8 cities, their major items being paintings, jade stones, cloisonne, and emergency drugs. Again, my harvest was one of the best. Some guests said they were almost broke, and two jokingly said they wanted to borrow money from me.

But good times wouldn't last long.

That I was working too hard caused health problems.

9 Venture Failure

In the eyes of many Cantonese, people from my hometown of Enping seemed more venturesome. I might be one of them.

In 1992, "four fevers" (the development of industrial zones, real estate, stock market, and fund-raising) appeared nationwide. People were seeking high returns from fixed asset investment, borrowing by credit, overflowing currency issuance, and higher inflation. The governments at lower levels encouraged

random fund-raising, random borrowing, and random establishment of financial institutions.

In Shenzhen, at a site where Deng Xiaoping once visited, people put up a huge sign: "Time means money, and efficiency means life."

In my hometown, in 1987, the Enping county government began formulating policies that violated China's financial management laws and regulations in the name of "financial system reform" without authorization. In December 1990, the Enping County Government put forward unrealistic policy goals such as "the establishment of financial companies in various economic fronts and towns" and "the average loan balance will increase by more than 13% annually in the next 20 years", and formulated the "Enping County 1992 Incentive Measures for Encouraging the Development of the Economy" to encourage violations such as high-interest savings.

From 1987 to November 1993, Zheng Rongfang, general manager of China Construction Bank Enping Branch, evaded supervision and issued loans that amounted to 1.51 billion RMB, resulting in the inability to recover the interest on the loans and an operating loss of 20.21 million RMB. In the city as a whole, most loans could not be retrieved, resulting in economic losses of more than 3.6 billion RMB.

Enping citizens witnessed two serious bank runs and more mass protests during that period, which once triggered financial paralysis in Guangdong Province.

Enping City was then listed by financial institutions as a "high-risk financial area" for ten years, and the financial institutions with branches in Enping City rapidly withdrew from the lending market, so the number of local bank service outlets dropped from 266 to less than 50.

As a result, dozens of cement, textile, and aluminum factories were closed, and numerous factories became dilapidated. The city government was reshuffled. And the new mayor said publicly that "the financial turmoil has set back the

city's economic level by at least ten years. The debts owed by Enping can only be repaid after 100 years. "

My hometown's financial scandal was known among all Enping residents in Guangzhou even before the news was publicized in local newspapers. In two years, I saw former schoolmates busy traveling to and from Enping engaged in all kinds of "profitable" businesses. That was when I had some health problems after working too hard on national tours.

After attending an annual health check, I diagnosed to have hepatitis B, which was infectious. The causes could be my life irregularities traveling a lot as a tour guide, and I had been worrying too much about everything. As a result, the travel agency stopped assigning me tours and gave me a three-month sick leave with a basic salary.

But I was eager to work harder. Those days I only thought of making more money.

I didn't rest in my rental unit, though I took medication regularly. Then, randomly, I checked the local newspaper and found an American company Kellogg's Corn Flakes, looking for an HR assistant. Naturally, I wanted to try that and thus applied. In a week, I had an interview. They hired me immediately, and I started work the following day.

Kellogg's was building a factory in Huangpu Special Economic Zone, and they had the office in the World Trade Center, then the tallest and most expensive office building in the city. My salary was 2300 dollars to start and would raise to 3000 after two months of probation.

It was 8 hours a day of office work. I was the first and only staff member in the Human Resources Department, directly working under the General Manager. I never worked continuously for 8 hours a day. I had a free and wild mind. Eight hours staying only in the office made me bored. I quit after only one month.

I found another job in two days as an office executive in China Real Estate Development Group Guangzhou Office. In addition to taking care of document

writing for the company, which was not much workload, my main task was to accompany people from all circles for lunches, dinners, social events, and karaokes almost every night.

My office was in a three-star hotel, and we were regular customers at a restaurant on the fifth floor. I saw daily gatherings of "happy" people having meetings and parties in the restaurant for a week or two. It was Japan Life pyramid selling healing mattresses. I saw a countrymate there, and he was eager to invite me to join his pyramid scams. I joined and gave him five thousand dollars. But a week later, I no longer saw their gatherings, and my countrymate disappeared. I lost five thousand dollars.

Again I worked in the real estate company for a month and quit. I thought I would rather go back to the travel agency since my three months of sick leave was ending. The agency assigned me only small groups for local tours and told me to "take care of my health" first. I worked only three to four days a week and had plenty of free time.

In those days, Napoleon Hill and Andrew Carnegie gained popularity in China. Their books were promoted as expounding principles to achieve "success" and influenced many youngsters like me.

I mentioned before that I had an uncle working in the government of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. He joined the Communist Liberation Army in the 50s and has stayed there ever since. We had two cousins a bit younger than me. They came to see their uncles and visit the ancestral family for the first time.

This elder uncle was then a government official at a prefecture-level in Xinjiang and a department chief. Their holiday home was paid for by the government. That was also the first time our clan had a group photo as one big family. We had ninety-four members in a total of four generations.

My cousins told me about the Uyghurs and their businesses. They said that honey melons were everywhere in their prefecture, and the wholesale price was only thirty cents a kilo. In my city, the price was ten times higher.

Without hesitation, I decided to do the melon business. The main cost was train transportation of over five thousand kilometers. According to our estimates, one container of 60 tonnes would cause about 50 thousand in total, including fees.

Since my elder brother had a poorly paid job in the shipping industry, I asked him to quit the job and start a business. I gave him more than 50 thousand dollars, and soon he was on a trip to the Uyghur minority towns.

Everything seemed to work out well as we soon had an entire container of honey melons dispatched from Urumqi railway station. According to the schedule, the goods would arrive in my city in seven to ten days.

But things went wrong accidentally. It was late August, and heavy rain in North-western China caused severe floods in Qinghai and Gansu provinces. The train went out of the rail and overturned when it passed the Gansu valley near Lanzhou. It was hot summer, and the temperature would go up to fifty to sixty degrees in the desert during the daytime. The train stopped there for a week when the local government sent an army for the rescue. When it continued its journey to the destination, it was already 23 days late. Our container was not refrigerated, and we did not have full insurance coverage. When our goods arrived in Guangzhou, over 70% of the melons were rotten and smelt bad.

Adding pain to the misfortune, local mafia gangsters controlled the northern city freight station and the fruits wholesale market, and we had to hire their employees as laborers to clear the goods.

I lost my appetite for any of the melons. After that, I could do nothing but give more money to my elder brother to take care of the mess.

In total, I lost nearly 100 thousand dollars. I was broke again.

Since I had requested my elder brother to quit his job, it was my responsibility to take care of his life. He visited several college mates in the city and formed a community. They planned to do some business together but never registered

a formal company. For a year or two, I often heard my brother talking about their coal, timber, or smuggling vehicles trade. Every time he came to me, he asked for more money. I could only give what enough for meals was.

Desire was a burning fire. I seemed to climb toward the top of the ladder but suddenly fell. I seemed to have planted a tree, and it grew well; shortly, somebody cut it off. That was what I felt when I became broke again.

My relationship with my girlfriend also experienced some turbulence during this period, although I left a significant amount of poetry for her.

My days of tours with the travel agency must go on.

10 Macau

HR people from Macau China Travel Service came to our office to interview tour guides. I was selected after only a meeting of two minutes and won a contract to work in Macau. The process was easy, and everything settled in a matter of days. When I recalled it today, it was like a little blessing from God.

Macau was a tiny peninsula with two small islands, a Portuguese colony in the south of Guangdong, bordering the city of Zhuhai. Macau is a gambling city, often referred to as the Las Vegas of the East. When I joined the CTS office, Macau had become a major resort city with a gambling industry larger than Las Vegas.

CTS Macau shared a modernized office building with Xinhua News Agency, and I received lots of smiles. Strangely, many of my colleagues were not from Portugal but of Malaysian background. Nevertheless, I could sense their heartfelt welcome, different from the "fake" ones in my former jobs.

Most tourists come to Macau for gambling games. However, they were from everywhere across the world. Half of my guests came from Hong Kong and came for parties, big meals, and the annual Formula Three Grand Prix.

A typical day for me could be getting up at 8 a.m. and strolling for twenty minutes from my residential apartment in the west to the office in the east. I would pass the Ruins of Saint Paul, the Government House square, and most casinos. I usually had breakfast at the canteen in the office building at 9 o'clock and started work at 10 for guests' pick-up at the ferry harbor.

After about one hour of sightseeing on the peninsula, telling tourists the simple history of the colony, it would be lunchtime. After that, a short trip would be arranged to the two small islands and let the guests have some outdoor exercises. After an hour or two, I sent all the guests to the leading casino, and they would take care of themselves there. At about 6 o'clock, I would come to pick them up again for dinner. After dinner, I sent them back to the ferry. And I would then finish my day job. For guests who were going to stay for the night, we only took them to the hotel. There was no extra service. We said no to all guests who wanted to invite us for night-time leisure.

We also had guests coming in from across the border with the mainland. Chinese guests would not require touring service as they would go straight into the casinos. Some people might want to watch table dances in the evening, and we just sold them tickets for a profit.

Occasionally I also led national tours. But, again, the rules were the same as we did in mainland China.

Tour groups were of different sizes, came for various purposes, and had different needs and requirements. It could be small as one or two people. Or it could be as big as 200 hundred people. We would expect one to two hundred people if it was a student's summer camp vacation or church service.

Once, we received a group of 400 guests. We needed ten buses and ten tour guides. When there was a large group, I was always the team leader of tour guides and was on the first bus.

I made easy money in Macau. In addition to a monthly salary of 4700 dollars, I received shopping kickbacks, tips, ticket sales, and currency exchanges. Hong Kong groups were the easiest. Everyone knew before departure that they needed to pay 20 dollars each as tips to the tour guide. At lunchtime, I would receive an envelope for the total amount. A group of 20 people was standard, and I could earn an extra 400 dollars that day.

My best harvest a day was a small group that purchased 200 thousand dollars of stuff in an antique shop. That day alone, I made over 20 thousand. And the good part was that in Macau, we never shared the tips and kickbacks with the drivers, while on the mainland, drivers took half of the earnings.

I could solve most of my family's problems with the money made. My elder brother was arrested by police and put into custody because he was involved in suspected illegal energy sales with his mates. It cost me over 20 thousand dollars to get him out of prison. I had to give him more money to survive. I did not want to see him give up and become dispirited. Later he opened a grocery store and made a simple living. My parents thought he needed to get married and settle down with a family. I spent another 20 thousand so that he could have a wife.

Our old house in the countryside was close to collapse, and the family proposed building a new one. I paid for the main structure, and my younger brother contributed the rest. He was then a judge at Foshan City People's Court after graduation. Later he was married to the daughter of a well-known millionaire entrepreneur who had a joint venture with German's Bosch. But my parents did not like their marriage.

I seldom gambled in casinos, although I went to those places every day. I set a limit of 500 dollars if I truly wanted to test my luck. In four years, my total loss was less than 10 thousand dollars. But luckily, at one time, my 500 dollars won me back 25 thousand dollars. I took 22 thousand and left 3 thousand for tips.

Some friends from China would ask me about prostitution in Macau and try the service. Besides Chinese girls, there were mostly girls from Russia, Brazil,

and Thailand. Very few Portuguese girls joined the industry. I never paid for prostitution in Macau though I talked to many sex girls there. I had girls in the neighboring city of Zhuhai.

Smuggling activities along the eastern coast from Zhanjiang to Zhuhai and Xiamen had a long history, especially near Hong Kong waters, and became more severe under Jiang Zemin's leadership.

During Jiang Zemin's regime, there was also unprecedented corruption in the army, and smuggling by the military along the southeast coast and the South China Sea was more rampant than pirates.

After Chen Tongqing became secretary of the municipal party committee at the end of 1992, smuggling activities in Zhanjiang became increasingly rampant. According to the investigation, the smuggling gang headed by Li Shen, Lin Chunhua, Chen Lisheng, and others, from the beginning of 1996 to September 1998, wantonly smuggled automobiles, steel products, refined oil, and other goods with a value of 11 billion RMB and evading 6.2 billion RMB of taxes. While handling the case, the working group seized about 4.7 billion RMB of stolen money and real estate from the people involved. In particular, Chen Lisheng, relying on the power and influence of his father Chen Tongqing as secretary of the Zhanjiang Municipal Party Committee, returned to Zhanjiang to set up a joint venture to carry out smuggling activities after becoming a Hong Kong resident through a relationship.

The main party and government leaders of Zhanjiang City and personnel of law enforcement and supervision departments such as customs, port affairs, commodity inspection, shipping agency, public security border defense, and coast guard all acted as shelters for smugglers or colluded with them. Under pressure, 163 officials from the Customs, port affairs, commodity inspection, and other government agencies surrendered themselves to the investigation. Some officials under investigation came from my former CCIB Guangdong office.

Later, a more substantial smuggling case by Xiamen businessman Lai Changxing was investigated, with over 600 corrupt officials involved.

Premier Zhu Rongji said in response to the smuggling cases; "We have prepared 100 coffins, one of which is mine and 99 are theirs, and the big deal is that I may die together with them in exchange for the long-term peace and stability of the country and the happiness of the people."

But most ironically, this Premier later became one of China's most prominent corrupt officials. Macau casinos became the main hubs where the Communist Party officials had their dirty money laundering out of the country.

1997 was the year of Hong Kong's return to the mainland. On June 30, the Governor's Office held a flag-lowering ceremony. At 4:39 p.m., the courtesy car of Governor Chris Patten was officially bid farewell to the Governor's Mansion under the escort of the police motorcycle. At sunset, the flags of Britain and Hong Kong were slowly lowered.

At 12:00 midnight, the flag of the People's Republic of China and the flag of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region were raised. Sovereignty over Hong Kong was officially transferred from Britain to China. As the Chinese flag and the new Hong Kong flag were raised to the sound of the "Volunteer March," large-scale celebrations and fireworks displays began in Tiananmen Square.

The development of Guangdong was inseparable from the strong support of Hong Kong and Macau, and it was inseparable from Hong Kong and Macao-funded enterprises taking the lead in entering Guangdong investment and development. Hong Kong and Macau people not only brought funds, technology, and talents but also advanced management experience to the mainland and updated the management culture in commerce.

The Chinese Communist Party promised no change in the political system of Hong Kong for fifty years. Few would expect the communists under Xi Jinping to break their promise in less than twenty years and turn this Pearl of the Orient into a dead harbor.

On February 21, 1997, Deng Xiaoping died at 93. After retiring, Deng said: "My greatest wish is to live until 1997, because then Hong Kong will be taken back, and I still want to go there to see." Unfortunately, however, Deng did not live long enough to see the day of Hong Kong's return.

On October 26, 1997, at the invitation of U.S. President Bill Clinton, Jiang Zemin began an eight-day state visit to the United States. This trip secured China's entrance into the World Trade Organization.

After nearly four years of service here, I experienced another part of the world. As I grew older and had some pocket money, I no longer desired to serve others. The United Kingdom just handed over Hong Kong to China. In two years, Portugal would do the same. We began to see more violence and chaos in the colony's streets.

I passed the Customs very week. The Chinese and Macau Customs were only 200 meters apart. On the Macau side, passengers were treated fairly with equality and professionalism. On the other side, communist officials played people around with bewilderment. Chinese Customs officials took ordinary Chinese people as dogs or refugees while they honored foreigners as gods. They disliked people like me who carried a Chinese passport of public affairs and accompanied foreigners in and out. They never wanted to hide their bad feelings of envy, jealousy, and hatred, at least most of them. In two years, these people would take over Macau. I did not have confidence in the future of Macau.

In Macau, I made more money and had fun. But these days would not last long as I decided to make another change.

Men are blind in their muse. The onlooker sees more of the game. When I looked back at things with CCIB. I could climb up the ladder and gain an official post, but I might also end up in prison as the system was a meat-grinding machine.

If I was to continue working in the government administration of imports and exports, my salary could be about 2000 dollars, according to my former colleagues. So the change had paid off.

But these days, I was sad as I had just separated from my first love. Walking down the paved roads at the Macau City Hall, I saw girls stepping on those marble and granite blocks barefoot, carrying their sandals as if they were walking on the beach. Some elders sat on chairs and chatted. More visitors crossed by, stopped for moments, relaxed, and moved on with their journeys.

The Romans used gravel paving to connect imperial palaces with streets. The Portuguese was good at that as well. These stones were transported from Portugal many years ago. They gave a romantic touch to the streets of the colony.

At sunset, I could feel the peace and solemnity on these pavements around the City Hall, as they matched the magnificence of European-style architecture in a foreign country.

I often had leisure walks along the narrow winding streets in Macau. I remember when I chatted with a priest in a cathedral who gave me this advice, "Live life easy, live life simple."

I still loved traveling. I hoped I would open some specialty tours only for small groups of people with similar backgrounds or needs in the future. We just talk about health, cultural subjects, and the meaning of life, or just go climbing the mountains to see the sunrise.

But for now, it was time for me to go back, I thought.

11 Real Estate Agent

After I changed my first job, contacts with my girlfriend became fewer and fewer, and finally, we separated. It was a true romance of over six years, but I did not want to go into the details.

Back in my home city, I wanted to buy a property. So I visited some real estate agents and checked some apartments.

One day, I was walking down the streets again when I met an acquaintance. I did not expect that he had just started a real estate agency. Before this, he was a demobilized cadre from the Air Force with a military rank equal to a brigade commander. He showed me around his company, and we had a long chat in his office.

He was developing a small project of about five thousand square meters of street shops. It was a piece of land leased from the military, close to the local Air Force Headquarters. Construction was near completion, and the shops were ready for lease. He had 15 people in the business. He invited me to join his company to lead the sales department and gave me 2% shares of the business. I accepted his offer and started work for this new boss the following day.

Several days later, my boss asked me to the construction site to settle a dispute with one of the clients. Months before, Kathleen's Cafe and Restaurant signed a contract to lease the top floor of the building to open a new restaurant. Kathleen was an American with a Chinese background, and her restaurant mainly served foreigners working in the city. Kathleen had already started some fancy decorations on the roof of the building. But the military later found out that Kathleen's customers would include officials from the foreign consulates in Guangzhou, who would have parties on Saturdays on the roof overlooking the military quarters. There was a security concern about foreign interference that these officials might take pictures of the Air Force base when having a party. So the company had to cancel the lease, and Kathleen asked for compensation. That was the reason for the dispute.

A month later, my boss asked me for help again. He told me the business was running out of cash, and he could not pay the employees this month. So he

asked to borrow 50 thousand dollars, and I gave him the money. For that reason, he promoted me to deputy general manager of the company.

We rented some shops the following month, and his conditions improved slightly. We restructured the sales team and hired four more girls. But soon, my boss and I disagreed on how to lease the shops. He insisted on renting them to "high-class" clients while I suggested the "lower class" for quicker returns.

The sales team had to listen to his orders. He was from the military and did things like a soldier. But months later, the results turned out to be unsatisfactory. He had to rely on other rental income to cover the expenses.

I never quarreled with my boss, but I turned my back on him when we disagreed. He was quickly in a bad temper, and everyone in the company was afraid of him except me. My boss insisted that he liked to see me every day in the office even though I did nothing. But I didn't particularly appreciate sitting there and doing nothing. So I thought about things in my way.

My boss tried to maintain a good relationship with me. He drove me out for some free talks, took me to his home, and showed me pictures of his military life. He was only three years older than me but had a son of five years old. His wife was a teacher at a university. But they were going to have a divorce.

He took me to places of Massage and Sauna operated by businesses with military connections.

Under Jiang Zemin's leadership, the army engaged in a pornographic industry on an unprecedented; pornography was rampant among the military and government staff. They indulged in "pet dogs and horses," another name for the sex industry. The army had clubs, guest houses, nursing homes, and resorts of different grades, all so-called "advancing with the times" and scrambling to provide high-ranking officials with places for sexual pleasure.

According to the Biography of Jiang Zemin by the Epoch Times (2005), these places of red wine and fun were divided into three grades: exceptional, advanced, and sub-high. There were about 30 high-level ones in the country,

providing services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year round. These clubs, guest houses, and resorts issued different certificates or memberships to army officials of different ranks, so they received graded hospitality treatments.

The unique premises were also equipped with medical clinics, highly qualified military medical services, emergency medical equipment, and ambulances. The Grand Club was equipped with a "Straight Nine" helicopter for first aid. The "waiters," "attendants," "nurses," and other staff members were unmarried young women selected from the military or police cultural corps, military and police health schools, and party and government organs in small and medium-sized cities through "political interrogation," and trained in culture, literature, art, etiquette, and social networking.

Some years later, on November 2, 2001, the Ministry of National Defense and the General Staff issued a "Notice on Rectifying Clubs, Guest Houses, Resorts and Others." Most of the clubs, guest houses, and resorts suspended and rectified by the authorities were built in the early 1990s after Jiang Zemin became chairman of the Central Military Commission and reached its peak in 1997. (6)

China's urbanization accelerated, and many moved from rural areas to cities. In 1997, nearly 50% of the population lived in cities. In this context, housing has become a hot issue of concern in Chinese society.

Housing prices rose quickly with the support of real estate hoards and the covert support of local governments. As a result, the real estate industry has become an essential pillar of the national economy.

Chinese have a particular interest in real estate. When the Chinese buy a house, they only buy the right to use it for seventy years, and the ownership still belongs to the Communist regime. What will happen seventy years later? No one cares too much. The Communist Party uses the land rights to "cut leeks," and the people are happy to be the leeks. This phenomenon is unique in the world.

My boss told me about his plans. He wanted to start a paint company for construction and was already having some experiments with some scientists at university. He showed me his house in a vast estate under construction by a reservoir and said I would easily have a similar one for me in a few years if I continued to be his partner. I shook my head.

By this time, my brothers had considered opening a real estate company and started to plan for their first residential project. But I did not want to join their plan, either.

I thought money was no longer the most important thing in my life. And I didn't think a big house was essential for me either. I had more important things to think about: why I have come to live on earth? what am I going to be after wealth? why have I come through so many sufferings but still not understood why? Although these questions passed by like flashing lights, they came back again and again in my mind.

My past philosophy from books had told me that internal factors determined external ones. Shall I blame myself for my suffering instead of for outside reasons? Shall I give up "my opinion, myself, my interests" and be submissive to "collective will, public interests, and others' opinions"? I was confused and needed an answer.

I worked here for six months. Finally, I told my boss I wanted to leave for fresh air. I assured him that it was not because of him. I had worked continuously for ten years and truly needed some rest. He said he would have the seat of deputy general manager forever waiting for my return. But I never came back.

I thought about a home to settle down with a family. I thought of finding a girlfriend and living everyday life. But such thoughts just went by like flashes of lightning, too. Instead, I thought of freedom as more important than anything else in my life, although it also meant a bubble.

I wanted to rest for a year or two. I no longer wanted to buy a property. I wanted to travel across the country again, not as a tour guide but as a general guest, alone and by myself.

I wanted to say goodbye to the past and be a free man.

12 Journalism

I carried a backpack and traveled to the north.

I only took slow trains and buses that made many stops along the way. I visited cities and towns, leisurely walking down the streets like a wanderer. I visited natural parks and climbed the mountains, learning to live like a monk.

I stayed in small and cheap hotels most of the time. However, I stayed in star hotels for one night or two to give myself a big breakfast and a comfortable shower.

I carried two books with me: the Dream of Red Mansions and Zizhitongjian, one of the most important history books like the Book of the Grand Historian. Sometimes I visited a Buddhist temple and picked up a free book of sutras. I could not understand what those books were talking about, but I was curious.

I did not have a plan. However, I had a rough idea to visit the central provinces first, then the northeastern regions, and finally the western areas like Guizhou, Sichuan, and Tibet. Thus I moved slowly from Changsha in Hunan province to Jiangxi, Hubei, Anhui, Henan, Hebei, and soon on my way to Beijing.

I had been to the capital many times and was quite familiar with the city. One afternoon, I walked down the streets and into Beijing Exhibition Center. There was a Human Resources market there, and it looked crowded. I walked in to have a look.

I walked to a counter set up by the People's Daily. It said the editorial committee of the "Earth," a supplement of the People's Daily, was looking for

editors and journalists to join a propaganda project called Splendid China Fifty Years in celebration of the coming 50th anniversary of the People's Republic.

I sat down and had a chat with the HR staff. According to the introduction, the journalists would travel to all provinces across the country and interview government officials, celebrities, and successful entrepreneurs before writing articles about their achievements. These articles would finally form a "historical" book called Splendid China 50 Years as an essential gift to the anniversary of Socialist China in the coming year.

I thought about this. The idea matched my plan of traveling across the country. This way, I could continue with my travel while someone was going to pay for it. Writing articles or news reports could be an easy job for me. Still, I could have the opportunity to meet with influential and successful people in the country. This job sounded like a good idea, and I wanted to have a try. Thus the HR people arranged an interview for me to meet the project general manager in his office at the People's Daily Headquarters the next day.

After a short meeting, I registered into their files of journalists. Within a week of some informal training and preparation, I received a work certificate and a press card with the official People's Daily stamp stating I was a certified journalist of the government organization.

I was assigned to work in Jiangxi province, the second poorest province in the country in the Yangtze River area.

In the summer of 1998, major rivers such as the Yangtze River experienced exceptionally heavy floods. Days of heavy rains exacerbated the floods, causing the most extensive flooding since 1954. Twenty-nine provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions suffered from the disaster, affecting hundreds of millions of people, 4,150 deaths, nearly 5 million houses collapsing, more than 20 million hectares of land flooded, and economic losses amounting to billions. When Premier Zhu Rongji inspected Jiujiang City in Jiangxi Province, where the worst floods occurred, he criticized local governments who built "tofu slag projects" along the river banks.

Since the Great Leap Forward, China has built thousands of dams and reservoirs along the Yellow River and the Yangtze River for power generation and irrigation. But these constructions caused more floods and droughts than at any other time in history, in addition to ecological damages. Despite criticisms, construction of the world's largest dam - the Three Gorges Dam - started construction in 1994 and was expected to be fully operational in 2009, a gift to the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic.

Three people took the train southwards together, my team leader and another young fellow. Two more young men waited at Nanchang Train Station when we arrived. So we were a team of five journalists.

Our office was a tea house in the center of the city. The owner of the tea house was a disabled man of around forty. This tea house was convenient for social gatherings with simple accommodation, and we could easily have tea and a simple meal every day.

My team leader was a fat man, a native of Beijing. He appeared like an experienced communist cadre, but if you stayed for five minutes with him, he looked more like a rude farmer. He seemed to have an excellent relationship with the disabled boss. He told us that this disabled man was a famous woodcarving artist in the city, and he had strong social connections with top leaders in the local government. He could easily walk into the family house of the Party's General Secretary of the Province without making an appointment. In addition, he had connections with top leaders in the Central Government in Beijing. That sounded interesting, but I was suspicious.

With my work certificate and press card, I could quickly get a train ticket or even a free ticket for public transportation when I traveled. I could also go to local parks, cultural events, and the famous Tenghuang Pagoda without buying a ticket. Because we had come from the top State Media, some local officials looked afraid of us when we questioned them during an interview. Of the five people in our group, only me and the team leader carried an official certificate for journalism.

Jiangxi province was a poor place, at least 20 years less developed than my home province of Guangdong. We saw beggars and low-income families everywhere. We had come at a time when there were severe floods along the Yangtze River. The General Secretary of the CCP's Central Committee also visited Jiujiang city and directed the rescue efforts along the riverbank.

When I saw beggars around us, I would give them some dollars. Sometimes I would give a poor little girl or boy more money. My teammates thought I must be a rich person and asked why I joined a subpar team of casual journalists like this. One time a teammate saw me give away a 100-dollar note and said, "Those beggars may not be poor, and they may have a boss behind them. Be careful that they may be fake beggars." I told him that I did my part as a giver, and I wouldn't care what they would do with the money. He could not understand my philosophy.

My team leader told me we had come here mainly for money, not to report the facts. He suggested we interview more successful entrepreneurs willing to pay and make some money first.

One day, two teammates went out for an appointment with a famous private school and asked for money during the interview. The principal called the police, complaining that they must be fake journalists. They did not have official work certificates. My team leader and I had to go and explain that they were trainees and asked for their release. We got our men back, but the local police called our headquarters in Beijing with the complaint.

The following day the project general manager called our team back to Beijing, and the project general manager "criticized" my team leader. As a result, he canceled our mission to Jiangxi province and assigned the team leader to another region.

I joined another team, the biggest and most profitable team in Shanghai. The team leader was a middle-aged fair lady whose literature was outstanding. We had dinner when I met her on the first day in the People's Daily Headquarters. After that, we needed to look for accommodation to spend the night. There

was a small hotel at the Headquarters entrance but only one room with two beds for the night. Nevertheless, we had the last room and spent the night together.

On our train to Shanghai the next day, she asked me with a smile, "Did anything happen last night?" "What do you think?" I responded. We both laughed: nothing had happened last night. When we arrived in Shanghai, we spent the first night together again in a Karaoke bar, drinking and singing all evening. After that, nothing else happened between us, but I changed to calling her "elder sister."

This "elder sister" came from Taiyuan in Shanxi province near Beijing. She was formerly a reporter with the Shanxi Daily and went to Beijing for a better fortune. She left her ten-year-old daughter home to live with her parents while her husband worked in the military.

We had a group of about 15 journalists in Shanghai and were going to hire more. With the help of the Party's General Secretary of Changning District, my team leader found a beautiful villa as our office, with a big garden inside the fences. We had separate apartments for accommodation.

In our team, we had a couple in their early fifties. They were retired editors from Xinhua News Agency and now mainly assisted with the editing job. We had casual journalists from nearby Zhejiang province. Like our team leader, people from Shanxi seemed more proactive in politics and making money; Girls from Zhejiang and Shanghai were attentive to details. I was the only person from Guangdong who took a more practical approach.

We often played cards together during our spare time and sometimes met in a karaoke bar for drinks or singing. Like the elder sister, the couple liked soprano singers such as Peng Liyuan and Song Zuying. The Chinese valued personal relationships a lot. My teammates told me that Peng Liyuan had Jiang Zemin's wife as her godmother and maintained intimacy with Jiang, which was one of the main reasons Xi Jinping was promoted.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, publishing institutions have been nationalized, the distribution channels of books and periodicals have been uniformly controlled, and writers have been monitored by the Writers' Union. A strict censorship system came into effect, while literary works were guided by Mao Zedong's "Speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" and emphasized the ideological nature of the works.

Since childhood, I have had no desire to become a writer. Only after I found my first love and was not getting along well with the love affair did I have the impulse to write some literary words. I started to read the Dream of Red Mansions more closely, although I had roughly read the novel several times. I began to study Lu Xu's essays more closely and found lots of interest in this literary critic. But sadly, I discovered that if Cao Xueqin or Lu Xun had lived under the communist dictatorship, they would never have become great writers.

Writers under the communist regime were brutally oppressed, and there were few high-quality works. After the Cultural Revolution, some cynical "scar literature" emerged. The spirit of literary experimentation flourished in the second half of the 1980s, trying to touch on sensitive topics. After the June Fourth Movement, contemporary Chinese literature and culture began to favor commercialization and escapism. For sixty years, free thought has been stifled, and the literary world has nothing to achieve.

Historically, literature has been a vehicle for delivering a moral message to transform and enlighten the minds. Now it has become an ideological tool used by the dictatorship.

My team leader told me her dream was to become a writer, not a singer or businesswoman. But now, her career was to make money in journalism. That was not the life of her choice.

Shanghai in 1998 was a robust and modernized city. It has become one of the world's most advanced financial and trade centers. Moreover, the lively metropolis city was still building more highways and skyscrapers. And the

proud residents of Shanghai were confident that the government would create the best city in the country with the cleanest government of high efficiency.

We checked the local newspapers daily, trying to find the latest news, feature reports, and "Toutiao figures" that might fit our project.

Large-scale privatization campaigns were launched in 1997 and 1998. Except for a few large monopolies, all state-owned enterprises were liquidated. Assets owned initially by state-owned enterprises were sold to private investors, and workers were laid off in large numbers. Layoffs were essentially unemployment in disguise, and although workers lost their jobs, they still belonged to their original units in files but received no wages. As a result, the lives of most laid-off workers were very difficult. In 1997, more than 21 million people were laid off nationwide.

On March 16, 1998, a reporter from Guangdong Southern Metropolis Daily tracked down and investigated some underground shops in Guangdong and Hunan and found a chaotic use of gutter oil in many districts. Gutter oil is waste collected from restaurant fryers, grease traps, slaughterhouse waste, and fatbergs for repeated use in food preparation.

Since the 1980s, the government gradually reduced subsidies to public hospitals, and the country's 13,500 public hospitals had to bear their responsibilities while making profits. Most hospitals relied on drug sales, high-priced drugs, and expensive examinations to maintain regular operations rather than providing professional services.

By 1997, the publicly-funded medical system was paralyzed; Some enterprises and institutions could not pay for the basic medical expenses for their employees, and medical security existed in name only.

Even in the modernized metropolis of Shanghai with the best hospitals and social security system, ordinary workers' lives experienced difficulties in 1997 and 1998. But we were not supposed to report on these things.

Everybody on our team knew that our primary purpose for this mission to Shanghai was to make money. I was not willing to raise the issue of money during interviews. The team leader agreed that my job was only for interviews and article writing, and she would handle the money matters.

I was pretty good at money matters which required different skills and effort. But my primary purpose in joining the propaganda project was not to make money. Some companies would not want a formal interview when we sat down, just give us an envelope with several hundred dollars and some promotional articles already prepared by themselves, hoping we might publish them in our newspapers. To tell the truth, we did not have the right to have their articles published in the People's Daily.

We traveled around Zhangjiang and Waigaoqiao Development Zones and Pudong areas to attend appointments and visited organizations that played an important role in Shanghai's development. Sometimes, the interviewee arranged a car for us; sometimes, we took a taxi, the subway, or the bus. We did a lot of walking and often came back late for dinner. Occasionally, we just had simple snacks on the way.

I did want to make some money. But for this trip, I thought the right to use money was more practical than owning it. Collective accommodation and public spending were examples of using public resources as money.

There were too many celebrities and successful entrepreneurs in Shanghai that might fit our mission for journalism. But when it came to making money from them, it was another story. Shanghai males were primarily stingy and would skimp around money matters. As a result, I soon gave up the hope of making more money here.

But I did not want to lose the opportunity to meet celebrities and influential people in the city. As I put aside the idea of making money, I started to arrange meetings with scientists like Qian Weichang, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Science and then President of Shanghai University, and celebrities like Yue-Sai Kan, a television host and successful entrepreneur

known as "Queen of the Middle Kingdom," in addition to managers and directors of major sino-foreign joint ventures.

Qian Weichang gave me a complete picture of the country's blueprint but highly praised the achievements of the Communist government. I disagreed with him in some areas. I thought a country that granted the highest state honor to a "scientist" that produced atomic bombs was against humanity as his thoughts and daily work were how to kill humans on a massive scale as soon as possible.

I could imagine if I brought the physicist to the same stage for an interview with the glamorous beauty Yue-Sai Kan, they must have had a much-heated debate on the subject of humanity.

Again, I did not want to lose the opportunity to see more places around Shanghai and Zhejiang province, this time not as a tour guide but as a "journalist."

On an October vacation, five teammates who had become good friends wanted to climb the Yellow Mountains for leisure, and thus we arranged an interview with the Yellow Mountain Tourism Management. We told them our purpose being reporting on the remarkable achievements the Yellow Mountain Management Authorities had made in 50 years as we had official documents introducing our Splendid China 50 years project. We just wanted a few days off and did not have to pay while we went sightseeing.

We spent four days and three nights in Yellow Mountain. Climbing to the top of the mountain was tiring work. However, a girl on our team took good care of me during the trip. When we reached the peak, there was a place for concentric locks as a memory of love.

We sat resting, so close to each other that we could feel our breaths warming together. Above us was the misty sky; the white clouds were running around lower mountain tops. Heaven and Earth witnessed our amity turning into affection when our eyes met, and our hearts felt. On this peak, other tourists were celebrating with joy and care. The air was clean, fresh and pure. This was

a loving atmosphere that no girl would reject a courtship. I asked the girl if she was willing to tie a lock together with me. She nodded her head and became my girlfriend.

In Yellow Mountain, we met a fortune teller. He said that my life was "a hen flies high while breaking all her eggs with her feet," implying that many parts of my life were like bubbles, easy to break and easy to blow apart in the air. My new girlfriend looked sad with these words.

Back in Shanghai, work continued as usual for months, only that I had a partner in caring for daily. Happy days were always short, and freedom was hard to earn. My travel plan seemed to come to an end.

We had to consider more things if we were to form a family. She was a little girl from Zhejiang province, seven years younger than me. Once, we went to the Slim West Lake of Yangzhou and continued to Huzhou city, her hometown. It was a prefecture by Taihu Lake with a long history and rich cultural heritage. If we were to choose a city for a family settlement, Guangzhou could still be the best choice as I had a permanent residency in the city where we could have subsidized medical care and other benefits. I no longer had free medical services after my dismissal from CCIB. So, to think of the future, we needed a stable job and a place with more security.

She was very much willing to follow me back to Guangzhou.

13 Restaurant Manager

I was back in Guangzhou with a girlfriend. We rented a new apartment in the city south and started looking for jobs.

She was a hardworking girl, intelligent and a bit sensitive. She should work with art or literature. But unfortunately, she had a bachelor's degree in chemistry that did not fit her personality. In history, Zhejiang was a place for slim beauties; she could fit in that category when I carefully looked at her body.

I was not providing her Chinese name, but it could be translated into English as "Louts Red," which I thought coincided with our life encounters. The portrait of Lin Daiyu in her affection after reading the Romance of the West Chambers matched this. And I left this verse for her, "Flowers withered and petals fell, her sadness all over the air. The red faded, and the fragrance disappeared, without the mercy of her pair. Her hairs soft like silk, and her skin tender as stone jade, but lacking a man's care. The lotus pinkish red, the seed-pickers no longer there."

Love was lazy without much romance as we were both eager to seek employment.

More intelligent than me, she was the first to find a job in Huangpu Special Economic Zone. It was in the east of the city, far away from where we lived. She got up early every day, took a bus to the city center, and then changed to another bus to the east. It took her at least one hour and a half. I suggested moving closer to the east, but she wanted to wait for a few more months until the contract ended as she had just spent lots of effort furnishing the new rooms. We liked the garden, and she did not want to waste the deposit either.

I got a phone call from Kathleen's Cafe and Restaurant. I did not expect that. Kathleen said she was impressed with how I handled the dispute and wanted me to manage her restaurant. She asked me for a meeting in her restaurant.

Kathleen was an outstanding business lady who did things the American way. Chinese bosses wouldn't be so straightforward in hiring someone who used to stand on her opposite side of a dispute. She was opening a new restaurant in Shanghai and couldn't find a suitable manager for her Guangzhou restaurant.

She thought I was the perfect candidate who could work with foreigners and deal with the local governments simultaneously. I accepted the offer.

Kathleen's Cafe and Restaurant was famous among the expatriate community in Guangzhou. The business was busy almost every day. Customers from foreign-invested businesses filled the dining room on Saturdays. There were often groups with bicycles, basketballs, hiking shoes, and other sports equipment. There were always hugs and laughter among the guests, our waiters, and waitresses. Kathleen was also clever in marketing. She built a weekly magazine/newspaper for Expatriates in Guangzhou telling about foreigners' lives in Guangdong. Many customers subscribed to her newspaper, and foreign-invested businesses were happy to place ads in the newspaper. Everybody knew Kathleen made the best pizzas in town.

As a restaurant manager, my primary duty was to look after the accounts. Kathleen might have known it was challenging to find an honest manager to do the job. I thought she trusted me on that, and I worthed her trust. Every day I checked the inventory, coordinated the delivery of raw materials, and ensured the bills and invoices were all accurate. In addition, I checked the kitchen to see if the chefs and boys were doing well.

Other times I chatted with the guests and listened to their complaints. Then, when it was a busy time for lunch or dinner, I helped the waiters and waitresses. But I did not want to learn cooking or how to make a cappuccino.

Sometimes I felt much annoyed with myself. I was a quick learner but stupid on a lot of things. I was a jack of all but master of none. I remembered I had once read, "Success comes because of patience," but I just could not hold on to that patience.

I wanted to go deep inside something but suddenly stopped for other reasons. When I looked at the "naive" smiling faces of young boys and girls in the restaurant, I just wanted to be one of them. I felt that knowing too much was also a kind of suffering.

Time passed fast in the restaurant, but I seemed to forget my girlfriend. She came home late every day and looked tired. We just slept together, and the following day she would get up early without waking me up. We did move to another unit closer to the east several months later, but the new home looked ugly. I had very little time to care for her.

One day she said she was homesick and wanted to leave. Instead of comforting her, I grew a bit angry. She cried and said again that she wanted to go. I didn't beg her to stay. Instead, I sent her to the train station, where she left quietly in sadness.

When I came back to the busy restaurant, I felt lonely. Back to the place where we lived, everything had changed. I threw everything away.

The following week in the restaurant, I often sat outside for an hour or so doing nothing. Everything seemed to be in emptiness. The boys and girls were afraid to disturb me.

A month later, she called to tell me that she still missed me, explaining why her departure was so quickly that she got a job offer in her hometown with a better salary. If I had stopped her, comforted her, and asked for a reason, she would not have left. I was speechless but wished her well. I never took the time to understand women.

With that, I thought about my carelessness and selfishness. I seldom asked whether my girlfriend had a good time with the new job. We did not even have time to discuss a plan for our future. Then, I remembered that my first girlfriend said I was too manly, a "compliment" that I did not try to understand what girls thought behind their beautiful smiling faces. Only at this moment did I realize it was all my fault. But, what was past has passed.

If you gave love too much freedom, it slipped away. If you held it too tight, it slipped away too.

Two girls stayed with me during a memorable part of my life and left like angels. They had come to accompany me at some extraordinary times and rise

me up. I was very grateful for their affection and care. I valued their friendship, and the memoirs would remain for the rest of my life.

At this moment, my parents started to be a little pushy with my love affair. All my brothers and sister had their own families, but I was still in the air.

My brother's real estate business just had a good start building a government project in Foshan. But it would still be years to see the profits. I had no interest in being part of their ventures.

I wanted to be a free wanderer again in this world.

I called Kathleen that I wanted to quit.

14 The Media

To continue my travel as a wanderer, I started my journey from Beijing as I took a direct flight there.

But life was a game, and it played tricks on me. Just as I had checked into an underground shelter next to the Forbidden City, I received a phone call from an old friend in Guangzhou Television Station.

She came from an honorable family, and her husband was a school friend of mine who also graduated from Enping Number One Middle School. He was now a political secretary working for the Governor of Guangdong province.

She was the deputy chief of the News Department of the government media. They needed an editor and presenter of international news. Since she knew me well, there was no need for an interview if I just accepted her offer over the phone.

I returned to Guangzhou the following day and soon had my employment in the TV station.

At thirty-three, I looked an older man in the office. Most were young men and girls in their twenties. They called me "elder brother."

News editing was not difficult for me as the source materials were already there from the Reuters and Xinhua News Agency. There was no need for creative writing. However, my manager asked me to pay special attention to sensitive topics like religious affairs for political security. A makeup artist helped me the first time I appeared on TV as a news presenter.

About a week later, I was all on my own with the editing and makeup. I appeared on TV only once or twice a week, late evening or early morning. And my program lasted for only five minutes. Yet, two hundred kilometers away in the countryside, my parents were happy to see my face on television and proud to tell their friends and relatives.

I must settle down and live everyday life. So I bought a two-bedroom apartment in Clifford Estates with a mortgage of 25 years. I needed to pay about one-third of my salary on a monthly mortgage. I had my parents living together with me.

I bought a desktop computer and often went to the computer market in my spare time. I started to learn how to disassemble and install a computer. I needed to figure out different parts of the hardware, the CPU, the sound card, the graphics card, the data storage, etc. I thought the internet could be essential in the coming years and I must learn the basics as soon as possible. I was a quick learner in terms of self-study.

In the beginning, I could search for all kinds of information on the internet. Later, the government began to build the Firewall that blocked internet searches. We played around with VPNs. Still, as international news editors in the office, we were allowed full access to the internet.

I didn't think I would have the fortune to find a girlfriend in the TV Station, although there were many young and beautiful ladies, and my old friend also encouraged me to. I seemed to learn that my scarred heart had lost the ability to embrace another love. I was a lonely canoe in the middle of a lake. I even thought that one day I might become a monk.

The department had a broadcast accident one evening at a golden time. Because of a technical error of three seconds, the wording of the subtitles did not match the pictures on the screen when the most crucial piece of news about Falun Gong was live on air. As a result, the name under President Jiang Zemin was entitled "Falun Gong practitioner." It was only a three-second error, but it turned out to be a serious political event. The Chinese Communist Party deposed a deputy director of the TV station, with a dozen people penalized, including the department chief. The monitoring technician lost his job.

By 1999, it was estimated that 70 million to one hundred million people across the country were practicing Falun Gong. The Communist Party could not tolerate any non-communist group growing so strongly. Beginning in 1996, Falun Gong was increasingly criticized and monitored by the government's state security agencies.

On April 25, 1999, more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners suddenly gathered on Fuyou Street and Xi'anmen Avenue outside Zhongnanhai to petition and demand an end to the growing harassment of Falun Gong practitioners by Chinese public security organs and the release of those arrested in Tianjin. This angered Jiang Zemin, who suspected that external forces were secretly exerting influence. Although the matter quickly eased, Falun Gong was banned rapidly.

Soon after the broadcast incident in our office, the city mayor and the chief official in charge of propaganda paid a study visit to the TV station. Dozens of subordinates followed quickly, and journalists tried to find their best positions for filming from all angles. Nearly all my colleagues went down the stairs to welcome the party leaders. I watched from the window. To me, that was the most disgusting scene. I turned back and rested on a sofa seat.

The communist regime's crackdown and demonization of Falun Gong were driven by massive propaganda, including through television, newspapers, radio, and the internet. The turning point in the propaganda war was Chinese New Year's Eve on January 23, 2001, when Xinhua News Agency and CCTV reported that five people had attempted to set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square. The government-directed self-immolation was ironclad evidence of the CCP government's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners as an act of state terrorism. Washington Post reporter Philip Pan reported that the two self-immolation deaths were not Falun Gong practitioners.

Almost everyone in the News Department knew that was political persecution of the Falun Gong practitioners and that the suicide attempt at Tian'anmen Square was a scheme fabricated by the Chinese Communist Party. But no one dared to speak the truth or seemed to care about the cover-up.

Gao Zhisheng, a lawyer known as "China's conscience" since 1996, has defended the rights of Falun Gong practitioners and other vulnerable groups; as a pioneer of China's rights defense movement, he also suffered the harshest persecution by the authorities.

Gao Zhisheng said: "China is different from other countries in terms of the legal system, and every small case can ultimately reflect a serious system problem. It's real and hard, but you never know where to change it. When you desire to change it, you are already in danger. "

In 2001, Jiang Zemin expounded on the regime's religious policy at the National Religious Congress. He said: "We Communists are materialists, do not believe in religion, and at the same time insist on treating religion from a scientific point of view and method, and strive to understand and grasp the laws of religion itself."

Gao Zhisheng challenged the communist regime saying, "If I lose today, no one will believe in justice anymore! So he who holds the power of heaven will not stand idly by! We know God is fighting alongside us! "

But most Chinese were not fighting alongside Mr. Gao. They indulged in music and a variety of entertaining shows. The Communist Party wanted to see ordinary people paralyze their minds in decadent songs and dances.

Two other vital departments in the TV station were the Entertainment Department which organized regular art shows and entertaining performances, and the Ads Department. Although we had more chances to watch their shows, I regarded singers and dancers in another class of feelings and emotions, which did not fit my taste. I naturally paid more attention to their programs on my night shifts as we worked in the same building.

In the second half of 2001, I took up the task of a new program introducing western movies to Chinese viewers. For this reason, I also needed to edit films during night shifts.

China's strict censorship of films has been criticized by many filmmakers, and even many local directors had to distribute two different versions of their movies at home and abroad to avoid censorship.

On December 25, 2001, the State Council promulgated the Regulations on the Administration of Film. The Chinese government implemented a public screening license system, imported films needed to obtain a license to be released in theaters, and domestic movies were not allowed to be distributed or exported without the review of the state council's review department.

Still, my task focused on news headlines from international sources.

On April 1, 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft performed a reconnaissance mission over the exclusive economic zone of the South China Sea, and the Chinese People's Liberation Army Naval Aviation dispatched two J-8II fighter jets for surveillance and interception. U.S. military planes landed at Lingshui Airport on Hainan Island without the permission of the Chinese government.

China accused the US reconnaissance plane of deliberately crashing into the J-8 fighter jet and landing on the territory of the People's Republic of China

without notice and permission and severely condemned the US side in this regard. The United States believed that the EP-3 was hit by an out-of-control J-8 fighter jet, and the Chinese side should bear the primary responsibility. (7)

The plane collision incident caused public indignation, and the FBI released a message on April 17 local time that they had confirmed that some US websites had been attacked by Chinese hackers in the past ten days and said that similar attacks might occur again.

The stalemate between China and the United States on responsibility for the incident turned into a diplomatic crisis. After negotiations, the incident ended with the United States expressing regret, China releasing personnel and returning the aircraft.

It was strange to see that the Chinese Communist Party took the U.S. as its biggest enemy, which has treated the ordinary Chinese fair and well in history while embracing the terrorists like the Taliban and the Soviet Union that had brought disasters to the common Chinese.

The 112th IOC Plenary Session was held in Moscow, Russia, from 12 to 16 July 2001. IOC members decided by secret ballot to host the Olympic Games, and the vote counting work ended at 18:08, and Beijing finally won the right to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. Samaranch's announcement of Beijing's successful Bid for the Olympic Games was sensational news in China at the time.

In the middle of The two-time points of China's "WTO accession" and "Olympic bid," an even more influential event occurred — the "911 Incident."

On the morning of 11 September 2001, 19 Al-Qaida terrorists hijacked four civil aviation airliners, two of which crashed into the North and South Towers of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, both of which collapsed progressively within two hours and resulted in the destruction or damage of other adjacent buildings. The hijackers also forced the third plane to crash into the Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia, near Washington, D.C. After the hijackers took control of the fourth plane and flew to Washington,

D.C., some of the passengers and crew tried to regain control of the plane, and the fourth plane crashed near Shanksville, a rural area in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

The 911 terrorist attacks in New York were the most important news of that year. That was the most tragic thing. But most colleagues in the News Department saw this as the happiest thing, and many were celebrating. I felt sorry for those families with grief-stricken souls. How could any civilized people gloat like this and celebrate the deaths of so many innocent lives? What kind of system had made the Chinese so heartless and evil-minded?

As an international news editor, I did my best to report the facts while intentionally disregarding much of the government's propaganda in my selection of subjects. I must follow my conscience. These days I was the busiest. But many of my reports were cut short.

After a year or so working here, I knew how the news was fabricated and produced, how the government was telling lies and trying to cover up the truth. I did not want to be part of their propaganda machine.

Often on night shifts, when standing on the roof of the tallest building overlooking the busy streets of shining traffic and neon lights, I strongly felt that China needed a political change for the general public's good.

When we edited the news, facts and the truth were important. But more important was how we looked at the facts and truth and responded to them. When I went deeper into my history studies, I came to the root of the evils of this communist regime.

All the ups and downs finally came to this fundamental question: Will I challenge the communist government? Even tiny thinking of this would lead to a significant danger!

From then on, I was not too fond of this working environment and wanted to get out.

Some friends asked why I acquired government jobs one after another but finally quit them all. Not yet enlightened, I had greed, selfishness, anger, worries, pride, and doubts. I only followed my mind and conscience. Confucius said, "I suffer greatly because of this physical body." I wished to have a mentor.

I recalled my life in the countryside and all the happenings in my former employment. I was an individual of little importance, a drop in the ocean, but also, I had been at the center of special attention in all the "play settings" of my life in this country, as I had taken my fate always in my hands.

But now, this country no longer needed me, and I did not belong here.

Then, I suddenly thought China was no longer a place for me. I must leave this country.

We went to the last chapter in China.

15 Migration

I omitted all the names of my heroes or heroines in this novella as they are all real-life individuals still holding government positions or living simple life. And what I have talked about here are real stories. I don't want to disturb them because this book is banned by the communist regime.

This memoir is not just a memory of the past of rejoicing and suffering that we as a nation share and endure, but a reminder of how we should look into the future and respond to the dictatorship that is still enslaving our generations.

I had an old friend and schoolmate who came from similar family background. His major was German, and he worked in a state-owned import and export company of chemicals. He never changed jobs.

We lived close. When I bought the apartment with a mortgage in Clifford, he purchased one nearby, bigger with three bedrooms. We often met after work and on weekends.

He was a music lover, and he played piano and violin. I tried to learn from him, but I never could. I was a good listener.

He was a Catholic and attended church services every week. Several times I followed his service at Dongshan Catholic Church and learned to read the Bible. But as a communist party member working in a government organization, I was not allowed to attend any church services.

In November-December 1999, local CCP authorities destroyed or confiscated hundreds of churches or places of worship in the vicinity of the coastal city of Wenzhou, Zhejiang. On August 19, 2000, personnel from the Fujian Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau and the Public Security Bureau went to Shangchen Hall in Jinfeng Town, Changle County, Fujian Province, to arrest Father Gao Yihua and the parishioners who were holding a religious ceremony. In the winter of 2001, the Intermediate People's Court of Jingmen City, Hubei Province, sentenced 17 responsible persons of the "South China Church" on charges of "cult" and other charges. In August 2002, the host family of the Yongcheng Local Church in Shunhe Town, Henan Province, was arrested by local police. (7)

When my friend told me about these incidents of persecution, he not only felt sorry for those "brothers and sisters" suffering, he was afraid that one day it could be his turn.

His church service and home gathering with his "brothers and sisters" were often disrupted by the communists. As a result, people lived in fear in his communities.

We talked about everything from politics to religion and our early days of life. We agreed that no matter how hard life was, we must guarantee a stable life for our parents.

We shared similar viewpoints. Enslaved by the CCP cult, the Chinese people have no customary beliefs. Because of moral degeneration, educational and medical care corruption forms an extremely evil political ecology. Although the communist government has repeatedly emphasized ruling the country according to law, it is ruling according to evil laws.

Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates that citizens of the People's Republic of China have freedom of religious belief. However, after the founding of the People's Republic, the government required that all religious sites must be registered with the government and that Protestantism and Catholicism must join the officially controlled "Three-Self Patriotic Churches" and must operate under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and accept the control and interference of the State Administration for Religious Affairs.

In our hometown, we used to have some religious sites. They were all torn down during the Cultural Revolution. Some fishermen along the coastal line believed in Catholics during the Kuomintang era. Their family churches were forced to close when the communists took over.

My friend was born in another village not far away from mine. He had one brother and several sisters, all living in the countryside as farmers. He needed to take care of their lives and even helped educate their children. He married three years ago, but divorce was inevitable. He said peasants and aristocrats could not live together.

One of his elder sisters was married to a farmer in the neighboring Guangxi province over 20 years ago. Then, it was a poor village, and many villagers died of hunger during the Cultural Revolution. And today, his younger brother was considering buying a wife from Guangxi province.

Although my friend was married, he was afraid of raising a child. He said he would not have children when he thought deeply about the country's primary education.

Violence ran rampant in primary and secondary schools across China, and schools were the most basic soil polluted by the CCP's evils. Privileged

students entered elite schools such as “red kindergartens” or “international schools.” Students in ordinary schools were divided into categories by their parent’s social status, and there was no sense of equality. The children of CCP officials enjoyed privileges and arbitrarily oppressed the children of ordinary people. The CCP propaganda deceived and brainwashed teachers and students. It cultivated generations of devils and slaves. The corrupt education system has plagued the entire nation.

I had not seen the blue sky with white clouds in Guangzhou for a long time. The polluted air was the leading cause of my allergic rhinitis. All across China, the land was polluted, the water was contaminated, and more severely, people’s minds were poisoned. I loved the country but now had to leave it behind.

I questioned whether I had lived like a leaf following the tides or a wanderer against the currents.

I recalled my old days in primary and now had a clearer idea of why ordinary families suffered that much in those days.

When I was in primary school, my grandfather had swelling legs and couldn’t walk right. My father told me that because of hunger, my grandfather ate tree bark at challenging times during the great famine in the early sixties. Later there was the Four Cleanups Movement when hundreds of people lost their lives. That was when my father suffered persecution for the first time. Then, as I said earlier, I witnessed a brutal scene when they took my father away from home. That was the second time of persecution.

I did not learn about my mother’s family until we lived together in the new apartment. My mother thought she was an orphan but later found out that she was a foundling raised by an old couple in the same county. She was born in 1945 into a wealthy landlord’s family destroyed by the communists that took over China in 1949. Her parents had to throw her away when they fled to Hong Kong. She was picked up and raised by a childless old couple who became my grandpa and grandma. I remember days in primary school when

they often gave me pocket money. Later my parents often received their financial help to pay for our education.

I didn't know that my mother finished high school when she was young, until now. In those days, girls seldom went to high school. Now I could remember why my grandpa always murmured these words, "Only the learned rank high, and all other trades are low."

We reside in Clifford, a massive estate with gardens, a large market, and a famous food street. There were also playgrounds for the kids. My parents now help care for my sister's child here. Many Hong Kong people bought houses here and made this a holiday resort. My mother's relatives from Hong Kong also came to visit her.

To cure my hepatitis and other problems, I studied Traditional Chinese Medicine in my spare time. I could feel the pulse and tell the reason for most common illnesses. I prescribed quite complex formulas for myself and my mother. I had my parents' trust, and their health was in good hands. I believe that when you were devoted to caring for yourself and your family, there was always a good way to learn.

On weekends, we sometimes went for a walk in the gardens and climbed the mountains. I thought this could be a good place for my parents to retire.

My parents won their respect and honor in our hometown because of me. My story inspired many in the local villages. "You don't have to make a lot of money or be a high-ranking official to bring changes to society," my first beloved English teacher once told me.

I told my mother that she hit me too many times as a child. My mother cried, and I had to comfort her, adding, "I wish my father had beaten me, not you." My mother was sad in her words, "In our family, everything is upside down." "But you have never let us down." She smiled again. I agreed with my mother. The world we live in is upside down. In our country today, men have become too weak; they can no longer protect our mothers and children. When Chinese

men became too weak, Chinese women had to stand up to protect their families.

We often went hungry in primary and middle school days because of the policy failure of the communist government. The country's social economy was at the edge of collapse at the end of the Cultural Revolution. After Mao died and Deng took over, there was the so-called rectification when I had the opportunity to study at Enping Number One Middle School and later in university. People were getting better in their lives when they witnessed another cruelty of the communist regime during the democratic crackdown of the June 4th Movement in 1989.

When I joined the government office in the import and export administration, we had a political study every week to centralize our minds of thinking into the communist ideology. As a result, people wore a mask in their work and life. Things were not different now with the Guangzhou TV station.

The communist leaders said openly that the ordinary Chinese could not be too well-off and only a certain level of hunger made the country easier to govern so that the country's rivers and mountains were forever red. They pledged China must have class struggles for the Communist Party to reign on.

The Chinese Communist Party owes the Chinese the truth about the history of its one hundred years. If the Chinese majority were to understand this truth, they would eat the flesh and crush the bones of the communist demon. Yang Jia, a young man tortured and executed by the regime, once said, "If you don't give me an explanation, I will give you my explanation." He attacked a police station in Shanghai when he was brutally abused by the evil police only for the reason of riding an unregistered bicycle.

Today, ordinary Chinese live like slaves, but they seem to be the "happy" pigs in the pigsty. Few realize that they will soon be slaughtered by the communist regime. But the Chinese already gave themselves the name "leeks."

In Chinese tradition, people cared about their "faces" and liked to show off whenever there was an occasion. My family was no exception. When my

younger brother bought his villa in Foshan, and my father had his sixtieth birthday, we hired a bus to invite over fifty Lotus Dragon villagers to the city for meals and sightseeing. They visited my apartment in Clifford Estate as well.

While my parents and brothers were happy showing their "faces", I kept a distance from such "extravagances." Most Chinese people had two faces, the same as the Communist Party, which had two faces. Sometimes they went high, sometimes, they went low. It was the Chinese people who had fed the Communist regime into a monstrous Red Dragon.

Courage was necessary when the little child spoke out, "The new emperor was without clothes!" I thought I would soon publicly announce I had quit the Chinese Communist Party.

Jung Chang, the author of *Wild Swans*, said in an interview in London, "the government regime does not encourage people to think about the past. Most people are not in the process of turning their past experience into memory. I'm very lucky — I wrote *Wild Swans* and I can think about the past now without trauma. But I have often met people in China, at dinner parties for example, who seem very calm and cheerful on the surface but have trauma deeply etched on their mind." (4)

I did not suffer as much as many fellow citizens did. I did not think I was a brave fighter. I did not want to see our children and grandchildren would repeat the sufferings that we went through.

My friend was happy that I dared to make those changes. He hated the communist system and had more profound thoughts about its roots. He said the communist had ruled with lies and violence. The communists called the regime a socialist democratic dictatorship. But, he said, "when you have a democracy, you will not have a dictatorship. And when you have a dictatorship, you are not a democracy." He was the first person to encourage me to make the change. He even thought working with the government media was dangerous for a man like me with independent thinking. Luckily I was still single and without the burden of a family.

Stepping into the new century, more and more Chinese went overseas to study or immigrate. Some of my former schoolmates from Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute brought home information about the western world. Since China joined the WTO, more joint ventures have been set up in China, including immigration agencies.

I first thought of studying in the United States and gave up the idea because of my age. I no longer wanted to go back to school. I wanted a migration. England was expensive, and Canada was too cold. New Zealand and Australia were my final consideration. After consulting an immigration agent, I decided on Australia.

After applying with a 25 thousand dollar payment, I took the IELTS exams and later a health check. I waited for a year and a half.

China moved on as a dictatorship. On November 15, 2002, Hu Jintao became general secretary of the Communist Party of China at the First Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, nominally the country's supreme leader.

In 2003, for the first time since 1949, the two sides of the Taiwan strait opened a direct charter flight for Taiwan business people to celebrate the Spring Festival. Hu Jintao's new policy seemed to make a good start.

Starting this year, communist China planned for a Grand Diplomatic Campaign to exert its influence overseas full-scale politically, economically, culturally, and ideologically, with evil schemes that western countries were unaware of.

I lost confidence in the communist regime but was powerless to change it. So I must get out of the country when I was still allowed to.

People of my generation were not strong enough to challenge the Communist Party. But I was sure there must soon be a new generation with wisdom and strength outplaying the dictatorship.

In May 2003, I received a residency visa from the Australian government. I handed over my resignation to the HR department of the Guangzhou TV station. On the morning of October 15, besides my parents, my friend accompanied me to Lotus Flower Mountain or Lianhuashan Harbour and said goodbye. Afterward, I took the ferry to Hong Kong and was on a flight to Sydney in the afternoon.

The past was gone with the wind. Let bygones be bygones.

I was going to the free world.

... ..

The mountains have ups and heights; the ocean width and depth.

We see the same moon in a foreign land.

The concept of nation is narrow-minded; we are all earth citizens.

When China is no longer my country, Australia is.

There is no ending.

Part Two My Spiritual Journey

Chapter 1 Christianity

When my Cathay Pacific flight from Hong Kong touched ground at Sydney airport on October 16, 2003, it was misty and a bit cool.

Even after a nine-hour flight, I was not tired. I came with a Permanent Residency visa, so I felt relaxed, free-minded, and blissful. I stretched my legs and hands and inhaled at the arrival terminal. So this is my country now.

It must have rained last night as part of the ground looked wet while I was dragging my suitcase to the taxi lounge. It was early morning, and Chinatown shops wouldn't open. So I took a minibus to Kings Cross.

That was the first place I considered my accommodation for the first few nights as I checked out the travel guides to find out about bars, restaurants, music, nightclubs, and erotic shops. I loved the cultural and sexy part of any new city on my travel routes.

Because my suitcase was a bit heavy, I needed to check into a hotel before going out for leisure. I chose a budget inn on William Street and bought a week-stay for 350 dollars. I felt totally at home when I put down my luggage and walked out of the streets again free-handed.

I still wanted to look at Chinatown first. I often heard of Chinese towns in the western world, and that cultural heritage was like a thread that took my mind there. So, with a handy map, I strolled in that direction.

I did not expect the “town” to be so small, just one street about 100 meters long with bilingual shops on both sides. An arch of traditional Chinese style with these four characters, “Si Hai Yi Jia,” meaning “Four Seas are one family,” stood at the front and a small pavilion at the end. I walked into some shops and finally sat at the pavilion for an hour, watching visitors pass by. Then, after a simple lunch at a Cantonese restaurant, I walked backward to the railway station, then back to Kings Cross.

I needed to open a bank account and apply for some IDs as an Australian resident. So I spent the whole afternoon checking things down near the hotel. Only then I knew that suburb was called Darlinghurst, such a romantic name. I walked a different route to Hyde Park, Town Hall, and Darling Harbor the following day. Woo! This darling was not just a romantic harbor but a food world. It’s such a paradise here! I thought Australia was indeed a country of abundance. I did not expect some words from the Australian National Anthem, “Our land abounds in nature’s gifts, of beauty rich and rare,” would come to my mind at this moment.

For three days, I did not see a policeman. When I finally saw two officers standing at the street corner, I was curious and looked at them for a moment. They smiled at me and looked friendly. This was Kings Cross! If it were in China, the police would have come to question and lock me up if I looked at them that way. These familiar words came to my mind: “We serve the people.” I could only find the answer here. China was indeed a police state.

October 18 was a Saturday. There was an Anglican Church nearby, so I attended a morning service there. When in China, I went to the Catholic Church a few times but only acted as a visitor; as a Communist Party member working in government offices, I was not allowed to attend any religious services. Only now could I openly join such gatherings and express my mind freely. It was a different

feeling in all aspects. I thought of my best friend in China. "Go to God when you need him, in happiness or suffering."

If you have read my last book "Red Dragon: My Country My Story", you learned that I attended church services secretly in Guangzhou and read the Bible in Macau.

The Bible Read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." I thought this the most beautiful words in the world.

I still remembered the words that my best friend in Guangzhou told me, "Go to God when you have the need, in happiness or suffering." I thought I should become a Christian someday.

In the following days, I followed my mind and continued my walks to Rushcutters Bay, Double Bay, Rose Bay, then the Botanic Garden, the Opera House, the Circular Quay, and finally Bondi Beach. I just walked continuously for six days, every day from morning till night, until I got tired. On the seventh day, I took the ferry to Manly. When I sang "Our home is girt by sea," I felt that the harbor city was a gift from God and was more beautiful than any harbor or beach I had been to in China.

I had chosen to come at the end of spring and the beginning of summer because I hoped to see more and more sunshine when I started a new journey in life. Some might think I was superstitious, but I thought it better to believe in anything that might bring me good fortune.

After a week, I moved to another hotel, also at Darlinghurst. For seven days, I ate outside, something not home-like; this new hotel was equipped with a kitchen so

that I could cook, and it was 50 dollars per week cheaper if I stayed for a whole month. So I paid for a month.

I did not come to Australia with a strong desire to make money. I had thought of settling down in a quiet country so that I could live a simple life. After many years of hard work, my dream was a simple and easy life.

Still, I needed to find work. So I went to Chinatown. I checked the local Chinese newspaper but mostly found jobs as waiters or kitchen help nearby. I did not want to work in a restaurant. While wandering around Chinatown, I thought of moving closer to this suburb. So I called and met a Chinese landlord who had rooms for lease near the university -UTS. She was a lady of about fifty. She just bought a terraced house near the Stadium-Museum area. A young man of my age was doing the renovation and decoration of the old house. He needed an assistant and asked if I could join his construction team. He paid 100 dollars daily, so I started work as a construction worker. The landlord said when the decoration was finished, I could choose the best room for 200 dollars a week.

In about two weeks, the landlord's boyfriend came for a visit. He showed us a newspaper advertisement that he was selling his 15-year-old Mitsubishi Wagon for 3,800 dollars. I asked him to bring in the car so that I could have a drive. He brought the car to the construction site two days later, and I gave it a trial. I did not ask for a bargain. I wanted to treat all people well in a new country. Finally, I bought the car for a discount of 100 dollars with the help of my teammates.

For a month, working with cement, paints, and ceiling boards made me feel so much different from a country of sunshine. I could only use the word "different." It was not a difficult or tedious job or something I did not like. It was just different. Outside, there was clear air and a blue sky. Nearby there were busy markets and Darling Harbor events and activities. Christmas was coming, and people were

setting up decorations at the harbor. But inside this old-fashioned and somewhat historical terraced house, I worked with dust and dirty mud. I used an old newspaper as a cap and wore a heavy boot. That did not seem like me.

Since I had a car, I thought I should travel across the country and see new things and events daily with my own eyes. I had not come to work for money, let alone a job like this.

It was another weekend, and the next day, my rent for the month should end. When I attended the regular church service, I told myself, "tomorrow, I shall move on; it's going to be a new journey again."

The following week, I traveled over the bridge to North Sydney, Parramatta, Penrith, and the Blue Mountains; then, I traveled to the northern beaches and the Hunter Valley. I moved southward to Ashfield, Liverpool, Fairfield, Sutherland, Cronulla Beaches, and Wollongong.

Concerts on the Domain, Sydney Harbor fireworks, Cross the New Year City Walks, Darling Harbor boat shows, and the Australian Idols and football all added to the festive atmosphere.

In a month, I was on my way to Melbourne along the coast and back along the Hume Highway. Then, I continued my journey to Gold Coast and Brisbane to the north. Australians love beaches and barbeques. It was the Christmas holiday and people were celebrating. The highways were getting busy; small beach towns were also filled with the sunshine of celebrations.

While I traveled in China's wilderness, the words "bleak and desolate" would quickly come to my mind; but in Australia's wilderness, I saw only "vast and immense."The diligent Chinese children rode a bicycle as a tool while the adventurous Australian children rode a bicycle as a game.

Most nights, I stayed in my car or occasionally checked into a motel for one night or two for a comfortable shower. I followed my mind to rest in a town or move on to another one. I did not take photos along the way. I did not want to leave memories with photos. If I thought of a place worth returning to, I might just come back in the future. If I thought a place was not worth a second visit, I would not need to keep any photos.

My Australia tour was plain and too easy compared to traveling across China. The most significant difference was everywhere I went, I saw nature, new and clean, fresh and quiet, with white clouds and blue sky, with similarities. On the other hand, we saw substantial differences from city to city in China, even from village to village. We saw events, accidents, different stories, the decay, and the highly developed, all carrying a historical or cultural sense.

When traveling alone, I witnessed many beautiful sunsets on country roads. In spite of repeated fatigue warning signs, I sometimes did not know I was going to sleep after long hours of driving. I almost drove into the forest twice. I often saw animals crushed by cars on the highways. "Take a break. Revive! Survive!"

I had worked too hard in the past and forgot time to be amiable with nature. It had been a long time since I last stopped to smell the grass in a park, to hear the chirps of bugs and birds singing. My nose had been blocked for a long time due to air pollution in China. I was overjoyed when I finally smelt the fragrance of flowers in the Australian wilderness.

I had the wish to find some settings in my memory of the Australian novel "The Thorn Births" in the countryside here. But everything seemed to have changed.

I finally felt tired, so I returned to Sydney. Many newcomers would choose Chatwood or other towns with better schools and modernized supermarkets. I

decided on Campsie because it was small, it was Asian, it was poor, it was "ugly," and it was close to the city.

I chose a two-bedroom unit near the shops. The rent was 170 dollars a week, and I remember a monthly gas and electricity bill of about 30 dollars. There was a church nearby, and I attended regular weekend services.

I was not baptized as a Christian. I just liked the environment, I wanted to listen to religious lectures, and I loved to chat with others from time to time. I did not have a family here. The ambiance gave me a sense of belonging.

Campsie had an open market on Saturday. Vendors paid five dollars to rent a spot and set up a stall to sell their stuff, new and old. When I traveled across New South Wales, I visited many weekend markets; the atmosphere gave people a lot of fun and memories. I liked this atmosphere with vendors shouting, kids running around, and people making friends. And in particular, I loved the atmosphere of freedom.

I wanted to become a free vendor. I thought of what kinds of things to sell. Farmers sold their agricultural products like flowers or honey. Painters and tattoo artists sold their craftsmanship. Recycling vendors sold their used furniture or electronics. I did not want to sell second-hand stuff. I thought of bringing in new furniture and electronics from China which was then "the world factory." Although they might have a better profit margin, those things could be too heavy for me to handle.

I decided to sell towels and socks. With towels and socks, I did not require extra storage as I had two bedrooms. I could carry them in my car when I traveled to different markets, so I did not need to buy a van or change to another vehicle. I didn't even need to set up a stall in the market. Some vendors needed frames to

hang their clothes, hats, or sunglasses. There was no need for me to buy extra equipment. I thought this could be a safe and handy business; if I couldn't sell well, towels and socks were easy to handle or give away.

I did not expect buying a car or opening a business could be such an easy thing in Australia. It was only a matter of minutes. In China, any of these things could take many days and many stamps. And it costs "dirty" money to go through those formalities. No wonder Communist China has such a corrupt government.

I phoned my elder brother in China about this, and in two months, a container filled with towels and socks arrived in Sydney by ship. They filled two bedrooms and half of the sitting room. I had to sleep on the towels.

In the following months, I drove to Balmain for paintings and antiques, Paddington for jewelry, The Rocks for grocery, Manly for drawings and underwear, Bankstown for second-hands, and Camden Valley for agricultural products. I sold my socks and towels.

I worked two days weekly, got up early in the morning, traveling to all markets across Sydney to sell towels and socks. As Flemington was the best market for my stuff and was close to home, I spent half of my weekends at Flemington Market.

My neighbor was a family of two brothers and their mother of Middle-east background. They both got casual jobs but still relied on Centrelink's payment. I gave them towels and socks that could be enough for years. Later, they came to borrow money. I gave them twice, 100 dollars each, but they never returned. I did not want others to do anything terrible to my towels and socks.

Because of these towels and socks, I did not have time to attend church services for several months. But I had lots of free time. So I joined some brothers and

sisters in their Bible Study sessions during the weekdays or evenings. Sometimes I also helped with their labor. Because I was a quick learner, those brothers and sisters soon prepared a baptism for me.

Some Christian friends were Falun Gong practitioners who actively participated in taking down the Chinese Communist Party. The Epoch Times became popular and was distributed to many suburbs across Sydney. I took it as an opportunity to publicly announce my cancellation of Communist Party membership in the newspaper. I thought of myself as free from communism when I had the freedom to choose a religion. That was also a moment of excitement.

I admitted I was a man of sins and needed to be saved. The pastor said, "If you believe in God, you shall be saved." But the more I studied the Bible, the more I became confused. I did not know what the Bible said about birth and death and what was the truth of life. There was a fact that fewer and fewer youth came to the church and the pastor said that too.

When it was a time for self-reflection, I looked to the dirty corner of my heart and I confessed to God that I used to lie, to have greed, to steal, and to have sexual misconduct. I was not a man of self-discipline.

In the end, I did not join Christianity. The night before the planned baptism, I knelt on my bedroom floor, tears running down my face, and asked myself and God these questions: "Where do I come from? Why have I suffered so much in the past 36 years? Where shall I go after death? " I could not find the answers. No one was there to provide the solutions. I decided to cancel the rituals for the following day.

Ah! Poor God! My heart had no place for you!

Chapter 2 Lost Freedom

Many years ago, I told myself I would sacrifice anything for freedom. But in a material world, I gradually found my liberty lost.

I must admit that I was influenced by the Taoist writings of Zhuangzi who valued his personal freedom more than anything else.

Some people might have heard of this short dialogue between Zhuangzi and his friend Hui Tzu. "Do you see how the fish are coming to the surface and swimming around as they please? That's what fish really enjoy." "You're not a fish," replied Hui Tzu, "so how can you say you know what fish really enjoy?" Zhuangzi said: "You are not me, so how can you know I don't know what fish enjoy."

After experiencing years of ideological suppression in China, I thought of coming to Australia to become a person like Zhuangzi. But these thoughts faded when I was doing my business as a market vendor and my financial concerns had overshadowed my pursuit of personal freedom.

In half a year, half of my towels and socks were sold. Still, the remaining half filled one bedroom. But I became tired of going to markets. I wanted to find a job.

I did not think an office job with a shirt and tie would fit me. I wanted to try something different. I went to an agent in Chinatown who introduced me to a factory job in Revesby, half an hour's drive from Campsie.

The company was called Thermo-Tech Australia which produced foam insulation products for swimming pools. I worked five days a week as a machine operator. My colleagues were mainly immigrants from India and Indonesia. The factory paid us 17 dollars per hour. I worked here for about nine months.

I still went to Flemington Market on Saturday, but not every week during this period. But every day I came home and saw those towels and socks in the bedroom, I felt depressed.

I met a vendor Danny in the markets and became friends. Danny was about ten years older than me; he was hard-working and always ready to help others. His wife was also kind and open-minded. I called her Sister Lan. They opened a stall selling sunglasses and handbags imported from China.

The couple lived in Maroubra, close to the beach. They wanted me to move close, so I did not have to cook daily for myself. Soon they found me a unit next door, but it cost 270 dollars. I pondered: "what have I come to Australia for?" Money? No! Big house? No! Nice car? No! Sunshine and freedom? Yes!

Thinking it might be time for me to make some changes, I decided to move. And I thought working in a noisy factory was not my lifestyle choice in this country. So I quit the job without hesitation and proceeded to Maroubra.

Danny not only helped me transport my towels and socks to my new home but soon found a vendor to buy all my stock at a wholesale price. I did not lose money on this shipment.

Danny and Sister Lan started to have a regular stall at Bondi Beach. And being a free man myself, I accompanied them to the beach every weekend, sometimes during the weekdays. Their handbags and sunglasses sold better at the beach. They were happy to have my company as I could help them from time to time. The best part was that I no longer cooked dinner for myself.

It was easy for any free man to become a philosopher of some kind. When I did my business, I thought of the tactics of Sun Tzu, his art of war like "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of

defeat." So I needed to know the market in Australia as I was doing business while still maintaining a high level of "personal freedom".

I also read some inspirational books like "How to establish good habits daily", "The Secret to Wealth", "The Law of Attraction", and how to gain financial freedom before thirty-five. But I was already thirty-five. It was a strange thing that I had not come to Australia to make money but my thoughts were often carried away by the idea of making some fortune. I was kind of betraying my philosophy and this was self-cheating.

I had lots of time for myself and thus started a home business. I checked out the market, wrote five books in three months, and made them into a marketing package. These books about 100 pages each were entitled Millionaire Mindset, How to Market Your Goods, How to Start an Import Business, How to Profit in Sydney Markets, and Australian Success Stories. I targeted the local Australian Chinese. This was a mailing business, and I sold each package for 299 dollars.

When I started my promotion, my advertisements covered nearly all local Chinese newspapers and magazines. The response was excellent. In the first three months, I acquired about 500 customers. And this financial year, over 1000 people bought my package. But my advertising cost made up fifty percent of the income. And the printing cost was about 100 dollars per package. I did not make much, but it was a successful start.

I was close to forty but did not have a girlfriend. Sister Lan was warm-hearted and often talked to me about girlfriends. I told her about the girls I met in China and my romantic stories. I said that most Chinese girls in Australia found their partners either for money or permanent residency, and true love was hard to find.

When Sister Lan married Danny, it was also a fake marriage. Sister Lan used to be a millionaire in Hong Kong. But she fled to Australia five years ago when her family business went bankrupt. According to their agreement, Sister Lan was to pay Danny 200 thousand dollars after she gained permanent residency. But their fake marriage turned into true love. Sister Lan only made her first payment of 10 thousand dollars, and for the rest of her time, she only collected money from Danny. They were now husband and wife for four years in a happy family.

A few months before I migrated to Australia, I met a girl in Guangzhou. She wanted a marriage to me, but I never loved her. She attempted suicide two times in my apartment cutting her wrist pulse. To calm her down, I agreed to a marriage registration but soon regretted the decision. I thought I would go to Australia soon and our relationship would gradually fade and disappear. We did not live together. I only went for courtesy meals with her and kept a distance. And I did not let her see me off and say goodbye when I left Guangzhou by ferry. But I was morally wrong in this relationship.

After one or two years in Sydney, I almost forgot about this girl. I never gave her a phone call. These several months, when I made phone calls to my parents back home, my mother told me that this girl often invited her out for meals and took good care of her. I was a bit surprised.

I told Sister Lan about her, and she asked me for her phone number. Soon they exchanged phone calls frequently and seemed to have become soul friends. Sister Lan suggested I should let her come to Australia. I asked my mother, and she agreed too.

In less than three months, this girl arrived in Australia, and we lived together as husband and wife. I applied for her temporary residency, but my nightmare began, and my freedom was no more.

When I first met her, she worked as a hotel manager in Guangzhou. She told me she was from Shaoguan City, but later I found out she came from the countryside in Hunan province. I never looked down upon people because of their family background. But she was not honest. I never thought of loving her. But she became my wife in legal terms. Sister Lan made fun of us, saying I could take it as a similar case of her "fake marriage."

Sister Lan took "my wife" around when she first came, showing her places in the city. She spoke no English and dared not go outside herself. Sometimes, she followed the couple to their stall at Bondi Beach. Danny worked part-time at a souvenir shop next to the Star Casino. So Sister Lan and my wife often went together to the casino and played the slot machines. My wife brought some money from China to spend a year without work. But she never let me check her wallet.

My wife stayed home when she was not out with Sister Lan. Soon she got bored. She wanted to study English but gave up in a week. She did not like to learn. She never read. She applied for a waitress job at a Chinese restaurant but was rejected. She wanted me to spend more time with her, but I did not want to. When she first came, we had sex regularly, and I needed that. But she wanted it every day. That made me feel horrible. I tried to keep a distance from her.

When she had nothing to do, she went to Star Casino every day. That was the only place she knew how to get around and the only bus route she felt familiar with and comfortable with. Sometimes, she went out alone after lunch and stayed in the casino until late in the evening or just spent the whole night there, coming back at daybreak. She often told me that she had made some money. But I knew she was losing it most of the time, and the money she brought in from China would not last long. How did I know? She began to check my wallet and took money from it.

I went to Danny's home not so often. Although we still had meals together sometimes, our relationship was not close anymore. My wife could not find a job in Maroubra but often told Sister Lan that my family in China had lots of money. When I migrated to Australia, my brothers had just finished their first real-estate project, a government office complex, and made about 60 million RMB or about 10 million Australian dollars. They invested the money into their second project, a residential estate of about one thousand apartments. This project was not yet completed, but all the flats had been sold, and the profit was also in the millions. And they were planning for the third project. I told my wife repeatedly that it was my brothers' business and their money had nothing to do with me. She was not happy that I did not love her. I told her always be honest and tell the truth. But we started to quarrel from time to time. I thought our marriage was fake, and we were in a relationship of "wait-and-see." I was about to tell her this genuine feeling of mine when she found herself pregnant. I swallowed all my prepared speeches into my stomach.

When I settled in Australia, I had full access to the internet and learned more about China and the world from another perspective. Unfortunately, I had poor computer skills and did not know how to move my business onto the internet. I started my self-study of how to build a website.

After I sold 1000 packages of my marketing books, I saw a peak in my potential market. I started to make a loss on every dollar I spent on advertising. I thought of selling to my existing customers a second time by offering face-to-face marketing courses and consultations. As most of my clients were from Hurstville, Chatswood, and the inner west, I considered moving westward to Hurstville.

I rented a house in Hurstville, fifteen minutes walk from the shopping center. The place looked old but had a lovely garden at the back. I thought when the baby was born, this garden could be a happy playground.

I had sixteen customers attending my first marketing session in Hurstville library. But this was the only course I offered to my clients. Whenever I talked to another female in my class, young or middle-aged, my wife would get so jealous that I might just go to bed with any woman I met. She was angry one day when she saw me receiving a female customer at home. When my client left, she straightly threw a book into my face. This barbaric act shocked me and made me furious. I walked out of the house. I strolled around and went for a beer in a bar. I did not return until late at night.

But we had more quarrels, and she became more violent, complaining that she should not have come to Australia, this damned place. I tried to control myself, not irritating her as she was having a baby. Although I no longer organized training sessions, I still responded to my former clients, and my little advertisements brought in some income.

One day I talked to a female client for about ten minutes on the phone. My wife was listening next door. Suddenly she came in to tear off my telephone line and threw the phone at me. I thought she was unreasonably crazy, but I tried to calm myself down. I did not quarrel but walked out to the parks. I regretted bringing her into the country. It was a mess. I wanted a separation or divorce, and I did not want a baby. But the baby was coming.

I stopped all the advertisements, and my marketing business was finished. I walked down to Hurstville shopping center and the library daily to kill time.

She was alone at home. Our neighbor was a middle-aged woman in a large and modernized house. She was from Malaysia and mostly alone too as her husband worked with a timber business in Papua New Guinea and her son was in college. This woman would sometimes bring some food to my wife who also spent some hours in the neighbor's house. I had pity for her, but I did not love her; nor did I want to understand her.

I stayed long hours in the library and walked home late with a shopping bag when the library was about to close. Sometimes I also spent an hour or two in a club with slot machines and bought a beer there. I was a free man again, but I had lost my freedom.

Chaper 3 Fatherhood

I was almost broke after two months without work. I had been looking for a job, but it was not easy. The birth of my daughter saved me as the Australian government granted a five-thousand-dollars New Baby Bonus. Besides, we started to receive regular payments from Centrelink. She is a beautiful girl and has come as my savior.

My wife found a waitress job at a Chinese restaurant a month later. She knew nothing about babysitting, only that she had enough milk. I picked up the position of taking care of the child, changing nappies, cooking, washing, and cleaning. Every day, I took her to the library, the shopping center, and the parks. I carried her to the GP and the parenting classes.

My wife was lazy to walk the fifteen to twenty minutes to work. For my convenience, too, we moved to an apartment next to the library. We lived on the seventh floor.

After work, my wife seldom came home directly. She went to Star Casino again and usually spent a whole night with slot machines. We maintained a tense relationship, so I managed with a tight budget.

I had overeaten junk food in the past two years, like fried chicken and potato chips at Macdonald's, KFC, and Apportos. One morning I noticed blood in my stool; the following day, it became more severe. I went to St. George's hospital and was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. I was hospitalized for a week. After that, I took medication for a month but did not see much improvement.

I told my parents, who suggested I return to China for another check. In addition, I needed some money for the new baby. So I returned to China and stayed for a month when I had another bowel screening and received TCM treatment. My family business did well in China, and we ate outside almost daily. My younger brother was no longer a judge at Foshan City People's Court but focused on property development. My parents and I were not happy that he quit his job as a government official.

In China, my condition improved slightly, but the problem was still there. Back in Australia, I started to prepare my own TCM formulas as I had studied traditional Chinese Medicine before. I tried all kinds of herbs and took the disease as my medical experiment. I had my bowel problem cured in three months.

Still, I spent most of my time with my kid in the library. She just played around with toys and other kids while I read books.

There were not many books in the library, and few caught my attention. I checked the shelves one by one closely and randomly picked up some videos by Dharma Master Chin Kung. I borrowed a tape and took it home with me, together with

other movies. Chin Kung explained Buddhism in a new way that interested me. I returned and borrowed all his videos and books.

Humans are born to suffer. There is no exception. Everyone has come to this world to endure hardships through birth, aging, sickness, and death. No one could escape this karma.

When I looked back into my past year and further back to my childhood, I was deeply touched by the master's words. Birth, aging, sickness, and death. Yes! How could we be on top of these and gain absolute freedom? "Come to Amitabha Buddha," said the master.

I had not been to the church for over a year; I had walked away from God and the truth for too long. I must have gone in the wrong direction until this baby brought me back to the starting point.

I found great comfort in the words of the Buddha. I began understanding the Five Precepts of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and alcohol addiction. I reflected on my greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubts. When I realized that "everyone is a shining mirror, his brightness not a bit less than the Buddha," I was overjoyed.

I read some Buddhist sutras as a tour guide in China, but I could not understand their meaning. After reading all the Buddhist books in the Hurstville library, I began understanding what the Buddha was telling the beings. I thought of the suffering that my wife had brought me and the joy that my child had gifted me. I felt that the Buddha had sent them to test and raise me. I asked my kid if I was right when we were alone, although she could not understand but smiled.

The Master said, "If I were to learn the path to the truth in the morning, I would be happy to die in the evening without regrets." I was blessed to hear the Buddha said, "You never die." I thought I was close to the Dao.

One year passed, and the child started picking up some words besides calling "daddy and mamma." Another year passed, and the child could stand up and walk alone. Spring came and left. Summer and Christmas were coming. But we did not have much to celebrate.

By raising the child and witnessing her growth day after day, I started to realize the simple reasons in the universe that affect our daily life. These simple reasons could be found in traditional Chinese medicine or TCM which has been used for thousands of years.

Life experience has told me that good health is directly related to the balance between yin and yang qualities within oneself. If yin and yang become unbalanced, one of the qualities is considered deficient.

In the study of herbology, I learned in greater depth which herb has a warm/heat nature and which has a cold/cool nature. In diagnosis and treatment, understanding how to apply warm herbs to cure cold-related diseases is very important for all practitioners.

For example, when you catch a cold in winter, you shall know how to warm it. When your body feels too hot, you shall know how to cool it down. These are the primary reasons to keep your body balanced and stay healthy. There is nothing like a mystery there. This yin and yang theory is one of the basics of TCM.

If my ulcerative colitis got worse, it might develop into bowel cancer. Every year, about six thousand Australians had the disease. I was lucky to learn TCM and had the confidence to make up effective herbal formulas for myself.

In our body, the fire goes up, and water flows down. When we feel the heat in our hearts, the fire goes up towards the head, we shall have a sleep problem. Instead of finding trouble with the heart, we might look into the kidney for a solution. The heart problem can be solved when the kidney (water) is balanced. This way, we treat the problem of fire with water. The same reason applies to my bowel problem that causes the bleeding. So, my herbal formulas were made to balance the fire and the water in my bowel and intestines.

After I cured my ulcerative colitis, I gave up junk food and became a vegetarian as a Buddhist practitioner. I remembered the days in Macau when a priest at a Cathedral said to me, "Make life easy, make life simple."

I tried to make changes myself. In words, it was one thing; in practice, it was another. At home, there was still no harmony. My wife went to the casino and came home late every day. I used the Five Precepts as a mirror of reflection on her, but not me. I mistreated her when she returned from the casino and sometimes intentionally ignored her existence.

One day as I was playing with the kid in the bedroom while ignoring her, my wife got hysteric and lit a fire in the middle of the sitting room, burning a pile of old clothes. I smelt the burns and came out to see a fire. I was greatly astonished and grabbed a basin and got water to put off the fire. The whole room was in smoke, and everything was a mess with water. My wife was so mad that she grabbed the child and walked to the balcony on the seventh floor. She threatened to drop the child onto the streets, and I dared to say she meant that. I tried to calm myself first, then calmed her down a little and took back the child. She lay on the floor like a dead body and then cried loudly. The child was scared, and so was I.

I observed her movements the following days but never dared to anger her anymore. I would not have forgiven her if it were not for the Buddha. I did not want

a life relationship with her, but I did not want to see the baby without a father at a young age. I did not like to share the same roof with her, so I considered a solution.

The city of Hurstville changed fast with its urban development as more Chinese moved to the suburb. The greedy City Council marked all possible places for paid parking that were once free. Real estate was booming, and there were seminars in major clubs every week for property promotion. Rental prices also went up fast. Overseas Chinese were busy investing in property. But I had no desire to make lots of money and no interest in owning property either.

When I looked at the greed on many people's faces, I felt sorry for those less fortunate. Medium price for houses in Sydney went over half a million, double the price in a matter of years. Rental prices also doubled. Even those market stalls we paid for 10 to 30 dollars went up to one to two hundred dollars. People were competing for resources and were ambitious to own more stuff. I suddenly thought that those on Centrelink payments contributed significantly to society as they not only consumed the least social resources but helped rectify the evils of greed, thus conducive to social stability.

One day I told my wife that finding a job in Sydney was difficult, so I wanted to look for employment in Melbourne. I said housing was too expensive in Sydney, and Melbourne might be a better choice. She said she wouldn't mind giving up her job so long as she had the child and Centrelink payment.

I badly needed to keep a distance. I left most of my cash to her and went on my journey to Melbourne.

Chapter 4 Amitabha Budha

I arrived in Melbourne by plane and then at Box Hill by train. I checked in a budget motel first for a week and started to look for a unit for a longer lease.

The rental property was hard to find as there was severe competition in the rental market. We often heard the news that thirty to forty tenants would come for a rental property on an open date for inspection. Melbourne was catching up with Sydney when it was listed as the most suitable city to reside in on the globe.

I paid extra money to the girl agent individually to secure a unit close to Box Hill train station on the first day she showed me the property, and she declined all other applications.

It sounded like a stupid idea that I had to pay for two properties as one family. But as I said before, I would sacrifice all material things for spiritual freedom. I told myself not to worry about tomorrow.

For the first two weeks, my child would not sleep without hearing my voice. And my wife would call me daily in the evening so that she could talk to me and say goodnight. Gradually she seemed to become accustomed to reality without me, and we exchanged calls only once or twice a week.

I did not look for a job. Instead, I enrolled in a three-month course in Economics at Box Hill TAFE. I attended a two-hour session every morning during the weekdays. In doing maths, all my classmates used a calculator. I never used a calculator; I only used my brain. I used some sort of "secret formulas" in my calculations taught by my father during my childhood. Most of the time, I was the fastest to provide the correct results. My classmates were curious but could never learn.

In Box Hill, Master Chin Kung's followers opened a branch of The Pure Land Buddhist Academy, and I attended the services every weekend. Sometimes I did some volunteer work there. I stayed home chanting "Amitabha Buddha" and practiced meditation for the rest of my time.

One weekend, Master Chin Kung came for service. After that, I was ordained as a lay Buddhist by the master, together with other fellows. The master had his base at Toowoomba in Queensland; his Buddhist Academy there was formerly a Catholic church. The Box Hill branch once organized a tour to Sunny Banks in Brisbane, and I joined the party for seven days to the north by plane. Hundreds of Chin Kung's followers worldwide took part in the events.

Back in Box Hill from Brisbane, I experienced the hottest days in Melbourne's history when many suburbs were on fire. For about a week, people went into the shopping center and Box Hill library for air-conditioning. Hundreds of houses were burnt to ashes, and dozens of people died in mountainous fires. Like the Salvation Army and other charity organizations, our Buddhist Academy also organized an event for donations. In my wallet, I had eleven hundred dollars. My mind seemed to have a push by an outside power, and I donated one thousand dollars. Magically in two days, the government announced a cash payout to all residents in the area. The exact amount of one thousand dollars was returned to my bank account. This was the first time I felt the magic power of the Buddha.

I had given my old car away to Danny before I came to Melbourne. I did not see much change in Danny's life after fifteen years in Australia. Danny came from Malaysia and his parents fled Communist China to look for better fortune in Malaysia when the CCP took over China. Danny was sure the coming of more Chinese state-owned companies in Australia would make the country worse and the lives of ordinary Australians would become more difficult. In Melbourne, I

bought another second-hand Toyota Camry for seven thousand dollars to travel across Melbourne. Although I had been here twice, I did not have the chance to look into different suburbs. Traveling by car saved me a lot of time when visiting a university or going into the western mountains and attending religious services.

These days in Melbourne, as I looked at the surrounding world around me, I thought of basic life issues. Every day, we work hard for material wealth and happy life. What is a happy life? Traditionally, a happy life meant a life of good health, financial freedom, good morality and virtues, and natural death in peace. Nowadays, most people are busy making a living or only making lots of money. Some better-off people pursue fame and good health. Few people would aim to develop good moral qualities or think about preparing for a natural death in peace. For Buddhist believers, this is an essential thing in life. And it should also be the most critical issue for every human being.

I remembered Confucius said, "Benevolence means 'to love others'". Learning to become a "good human being" is the central philosophy of Confucianism. I thought this was the same with Buddhism and Christianity. To develop good morality is to learn how to become a good person, behave, and do good for oneself and others. Only good people with kind hearts and good behaviors can die a naturally good death. This is a simple reason. It's the rule of law of the universe. And it's the true meaning of life. Everyone should be educated to become a good person, by their parents, by our schools, and by society. People with great virtues shall be honored. People who die a natural death shall be honored.

In Buddhist practice, I strove for something more important: to free my soul from the karma of birth and death. To die a natural death is not an easy thing. Every year, millions of lives die of abortion; millions of kids die of hunger; millions of people die of cancer and other illnesses; millions of people die of traffic accidents

and natural disasters like floods and earthquakes; millions more die in prisons, wars, and all kinds of conflicts. How many people can die a natural death? Very few; one out of ten thousand maybe, or even less; who knows? And whoever cares?

What is natural death? According to Buddhism, every person has a natural lifespan; a person shall end his life in peace without suffering from illnesses; we should be able to predict the coming of our death, weeks, months, or even years before that; we shall have rebirths into good realms. But look at this world around us; who can achieve these? or how many? Similar questions filled my mind when I did my Buddhist practice in Victoria.

After two months without seeing me, my daughter seemed to have forgotten me. But in the third month, she suddenly came to her sense and remember me. She cried whenever we exchanged phone calls and asked me to return home. I had to go back to see her. It was a feeling of lightning when she saw me again.

My wife looked in a good mood when I was back. She behaved more like a woman and a housewife when we met again. After four to five days, I decided to bring them to Melbourne. When we moved, we threw away lots of stuff; still, my Toyota Camry was packed in every corner when we traveled along the Hume Highway. I drove for ten hours, but that was the best journey ever for the mother and child.

My wife soon found a waitress job in a Chinese restaurant in Melbourne. It was time to send the child to ABC Kindergarten in Box Hill, and it was always the most difficult for a child to take that step for the first time.

The Buddha had the power to solve all problems. Although my wife still had some moments of bad temper, I witnessed her efforts to change, and improvement was

evident. In our communications, I avoided mentioning past experiences but looked into the future. This was hard for me, and I thought for her too. Whenever she had an occurrence of bad temperament, I found the secret weapon being sex.

Still, she wanted to go to Star Casino. I thought it was a severe problem. Instead of stopping her, I accompanied her to the city and the Casino Hotel. I gave her a time limit of two to four hours, during which I would stay with the child shopping around or playing by the riverside. After some months, she went there less and less.

We lived in a two-story flat. Living alone downstairs was an old man of about seventy, born in Australia with a European background. He had a wife, but she lived separately, far away in the western city of Geelong. He had three sons and several grandchildren. But I never saw them come to see him. Sometimes when he sat outside in the backyard for sunshine, I would have a chat with him. One Saturday, he said he was going to Geelong to see her wife on Sunday and asked if we would like to come along. We were very much happy to be in his company. We drove past the city center into the western grassland. My child was excited to see many Kangaroos running in the wilderness. We did not have a big meal in Geelong. We saw the old man dropping some food and clothes to an old lady in a shabby house in a remote village, and we left. There was no welcoming "ceremony" of any kind. We bought a Macdonald's on our way home.

In Box Hill library, we met a couple with a daughter one year older than our child. The kids became friends, and the adults were too. We often joined for meals and went out sightseeing together. Their names were Kevin and Jane.

We attended several auctions in the neighborhood. I thought the auction was the main reason to push the Aussie property prices sky-high. When housing was not taken as a shelter but a commodity, human greed would create huge social

problems. I was shocked to learn that over 100 thousand Australians were homeless. There was a solution to the housing affordability crisis: limit the government's power in policy making; give the power back to the people.

In local bookstores, I saw many books on real estate investment, with bold titles like "Invest With No Money." Australia is a vast country with enough land for a small population of just over 20 million. It was a complete joke that this great nation had a housing crisis. Auctions should be limited; the land tax was too high; property should not be a tool from which to make money. There were too many unreasonable factors in the housing market. There should be a public debate on the issue annually so that anyone could submit his or her suggestions and opinions. If a government could solve this housing crisis, it would be the greatest government in Australian history and the Australian people should be the happiest on earth.

When these two women meet, the hottest topic must be real estate and how "luxurious" they used to be in China. Everyone seemed to take property as the most crucial thing in life. But I had no money to buy any property. My wife suggested I go back to China and asked for some money. I thought I also needed to go back to see my parents, not for property money.

Another real estate project was finished when I returned to China. It was a residential complex of ten buildings of 22 stories each. My parents and elder brother had just moved into a large apartment of about 400 square meters. This apartment had the best view of the complex. My younger brother and sister lived nearby in a separate house, all newly decorated.

While my brothers were busy, six family members organized a tour to Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan province. My parents were happy to see those beautiful lakes as natural reserves and to give dancing girls in minority villages tips. When we

passed those dangerous mountain roads, we saw rocks running down from the bare slopes as the bus driver drove carefully ahead.

Only two days after we returned home, there was international news that a massive earthquake had occurred at Wenchuan and Jiuzhaigou. Over two hundred thousand people died, millions more were injured, and their houses collapsed. Our whole family prayed that the Buddha had saved our lives.

When I returned to the city of Melbourne, many overseas Chinese groups organized events at the Convention Center Square for donations. The Wenchuan earthquake and rescue work was on top of all headlines for a month in the international media. I prayed again that I was steps away from the disaster scene.

Still, I attended Buddhist service at the Pure Land Academy every Saturday. Most fellow Buddhists might just come for social gatherings and meet friends besides the regular service of paying respect to the Buddha. After the masses, what most people think could still be big houses, new cars, better food, traveling, and enjoying life. I was a bit different. I wanted to have a deep and complete understanding of Buddhism and free my soul from the karma of life and death.

There were Chin Kung's books for free pick-up there. But the Tripitaka or Buddhist Cannon had over seven thousand books or sutras, and I wanted to read all of them. I had noticed the links between Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and I hoped to find the relationship between the world's religions. I needed to get into the truth of the universe. Moreover, I needed to take my study notes and write down my thoughts along this journey.

I needed a comfortable place to read and write. Box Hill had a small library with fewer books. It had few study rooms and spaces for the kids. Compared to Hurstville, Box Hill library was a noisy place that did not fit my study needs. I thought I should go back to Hurstville.

In addition, Summer was too hot in Melbourne and winter too cold. After a year of living here, I still thought Sydney was my better choice. I decided to move back again.

Chapter 5 Enlightenment

Back in Sydney, I rented an apartment right on top of Hurstville Library. While my wife returned to the same restaurant to work as a waitress, I took care of our four-year-old child and devoted two years to writing about Buddhism.

I did not read many books and then focused on writing; I decided on a subject or theme, started to write about it, and looked for related books and material along the way. This served two purposes: reading a book or Buddhist sutra and immediately applying the ideology to my daily practice, including health and meditation.

My first writing was a small book of 88 pages, "Inspirations of Sakyamuni's Life." Sakyamuni was a sage from the ancient Shakya republic in India on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. His life is a story of how a normal human being can become an "awakened one" by sacrificing himself for the benefit of all. As Buddhists, what we can learn from the eight stages of the Buddha's life is very inspiring when we follow his teachings in our daily practices. This book helps the readers to form good values in life and have comfort in this faith.

The most powerful idea I got from Sakyamuni's life was his teaching, "All beings were born with the wisdom and virtuous look as the Buddha. The only difference is that they have not awakened to reality because of delusion and attachment to materialism."

I learned that the way to enlightenment was not to read more books or gain more knowledge but to cut my desires for material or spiritual things. It was not a method with "plus" but "minus." This way, we can gradually eliminate our greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubts.

So I must start from just one book, one sutra, and reflect on what the Buddha said and behaved in his practice. And I needed to put my thoughts into practice daily.

As I saw some similarities between Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, which I had been familiar with for three decades, I thought it a good idea to return to my former learning of Dao De Jing and the Analects.

Dao De Jing is simply referred to as the Laozi, an ancient Chinese Classic known worldwide. There could be different interpretations of its passages that are quite ambiguous without in-depth Taoist practice.

The Analects are sayings and ideas that form the basics of Chinese Confucianism. My understanding was that the philosophies of Confucianism could be better understood when combined with those of Taoism and Buddhism. This understanding did not come from reading but from putting the perspectives into daily activities. I thought the growth of a person with Confucius's beliefs was like that of a tree: we needed to provide water and sunshine to the young for a good harvest of flowers and fruits.

Thus I finished two books afterward: Master's view of Dao De Jing with 106 pages and A Buddhist View of the Analects with 158 pages.

My book on Dao De Jing presents a Buddhist Master's view on the fundamental reasons within the main concepts of Laozi. In my book, I opened up another way to understand Laozi's ideas through Buddhist ways of practice. I also aimed to help my readers to build the correct values of life by benefiting all human beings.

Laozi said, "The way of the Dao gives benefits and does no harm. The way of the sage works hard and does not compete."

With my thoughts on Confucianism, I looked at Confucius' life and his ideology in ten aspects: respect for our parents, becoming a scholar, learning our fate, how to become a good human being, worldly practice, benevolence, righteousness, rituals, royalty, and trust, on history and politics, and the truth of wealth.

Confucius said, "You must work hard first, then you shall harvest. This is how we grow as a human."

To raise my soul from human to sage, I needed to practice my mind, as the Buddha told me. So my next book was called *The Power of Mind*, a little longer with 276 pages. I put in the book the reflection on my daily meditation.

People say: that seeing is believing; when they don't see it with their own eyes, they won't believe. Although Buddhism also talks about supernatural powers, Buddhism is not a superstition. To practice, Buddhism means to gain enlightenment. Buddhism is an education. Buddhism teaches us facts about the earth, the universe, our world, and our human life. It tells us the truth about everything to get rid of the bad and keep the good. Buddhism is a science and philosophy, and more than that. It teaches us how to live a better life, the true meaning of life, what we should live for, and how to avoid suffering and hardships. The truth of life might be out of our comprehension; the facts of the world might not be the same as what we see with our eyes or what we think might be like. But still, they are the facts, the truth. And we cannot deny that whether we believe it or not.

Buddha tells us that when we look at a thing and try to find its actual existence, we shall at least look at eight aspects: causes, conditions, and effects; intrinsic

nature, appearance, and usages; images and reasons. For example, this is a flower vase. Is it truly a vase? No, it is made of ceramics. And ceramics are made from the earth of different elements. When we break a vase, it's no longer a vase. So when we talk about a thing, it might not be that thing in its actual existence.

So when we cannot see other realms of existence with our human eyes or other senses, we cannot say they do not exist. When Buddha says there is an incarnation, there is life after life, we believe that there is. When we do our practice, one day, we might come to realize that there are genuinely other forms of existence in this world. This is like a scientific analysis. In Buddhist writings, we read words like, "a cup of water is a cup of worms." When the microscope was not invented, the Buddha could see thousands of little worms in a cup of water. Buddhist sutras also say, "there are tens of thousands of suns and moons" in the universe. With technological advancement, we genuinely believe that there are many suns, moons, and stars in the universe. But people a thousand years ago might not think that was true.

The Power of Mind was my understanding of The holy Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, a sutra with only 262 Chinese Characters that tells all about Buddhism, a faith of the mind. Every character contains significant ideas, and only a Buddhist Master can fully comprehend their arguments through long-time practice, the main form of which is meditation. With in-depth meditation, the practitioner can obtain great power in many aspects of life, including gaining better health, turning knowledge into wisdom, and living lives of abundance.

When I finished these books, half a year had passed. One day, I met a former colleague from CCIB, China Commodity Inspection Bureau, on the street close to the library. He was on a mission to start a government office in Hurstville called

CCIC, and he asked me if I was interested in joining his business. I rejected his offer.

I continued with my tedious project. I came to study two important books in Chinese Buddhism: Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra and the Surangama Sutra.

According to Huineng's autobiography in the Platform Sutra, Huineng's father was from Fanyang but was banished from his government position and passed away at a young age. Huineng and his mother were left in poverty and moved to Nanhai, where Huineng sold firewood to support his family. One day, Huineng delivered firewood to a customer's shop, where he met a man reciting the Diamond Sutra. "On hearing the words of the scripture, my mind opened up, and I understood." He inquired about why the Diamond Sutra was chanted, and the person stated that he came from the Eastern Meditation Monastery in Huangmei District of the province of Qi, where the Fifth Patriarch of Chan lived and delivered his teachings.

Huineng went to the monastery and worked in its kitchen. Eight months later, the Fifth Patriarch summoned all his followers and proposed a poem contest for his followers to demonstrate the stage of their understanding of the essence of the mind. He decided to pass down his robe and teachings to the contest winner, who would become the Sixth Patriarch.

Huineng wrote a stanza, "Bodhi initially has no tree. The bright mirror also has no stand. Fundamentally there is not a single thing. Where could dust arise?"

On the next day, the Fifth Patriarch secretly went to Huineng's room and asked, "Should not a seeker after the Dharma risk his life this way?" Then he asked, "is the rice ready?" Huineng responded that the rice was ready and only waiting to be sieved.

The Dharma was passed to Huineng at night when the Patriarch transmitted "the doctrine of sudden enlightenment" and his robe and bowl to Huineng. He told Huineng, "You are now the Sixth Patriarch. Take care of yourself, save as many sentient beings as possible, and spread the teachings so they will not be lost in the future.

The life story of the Sixth Patriarch touched my soul. I suddenly realized what the monk had told me when I was a kid, "You are a shining mirror, bright as any great man." I understood that every human being has the power to become a Buddha.

With this understanding, I added my notes and Commentary to the Platform Sutra and composed a new book of 294 pages.

In my introduction, I wrote: The Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra is the only sutra by a master of Chinese background, the Chan School's sixth patriarch, Huineng. Among many explanations of this sutra for over a thousand years in Chinese history, the notes by the second patriarch of Buddha-in-mind are one of the best to explain the profound in simple terms and serve as absolute guidelines for Chan practitioners. To supplement, the author's commentary further explains the texts for practitioners to get an overall idea of the Chan School and historical events related to the platform sutra. It tells more simply about the philosophies hidden in some ambiguous texts.

There have been questions regarding the translation of the Surangama Sutra as the Imperial Chinese Court did not sponsor it, and the records regarding its translation in the Tang Dynasty were not carefully preserved. This Surangama Sutra, however, has a unique position in Mahayana Buddhism and has been incredibly influential in Chan Buddhism.

Life is not without suffering; to live is to suffer. At birth, we suffer; growing old, we suffer; in sickness, we suffer; in death, we suffer. We all forget how we suffer at birth, the moment when we were pushed hard out of our mothers' wombs. It is warm inside, but the outside is cold. When a baby is squeezed out, he cries loudly because he feels the pain. The mother also feels the pain. When we grow old, our eyes become blurred, we cannot see things clearly; our ears become deaf and cannot hear clearly; most of our teeth have fallen apart or are not strong enough to eat. Our body is deteriorating; we need other people to support us. We may have sicknesses and cancers of many kinds. We are not free from pain and suffering. You see how people suffer when you visit a hospital or a scene of natural disasters like earthquakes. We all live to suffer. Death is also another great suffering, although we do not have the experience yet. According to Buddhism, our human body is made up of four key elements: the soil, the water, the fire, and the wind. Flesh and bones are the soil; our body is 70-90% water; our body temperature of 36-37 degrees is the fire, and our breath circulation, is the wind. When a patient dies, the soil collapses, and we feel the weight. The body is getting dry, then, with water lost, the dying body feels cold. Then the fire element leaves and the dying body loses its temperature. Finally, the wind element fails to function; the dying person is having difficulty breathing, with only air out but no more air in. After holding the last breath, a patient dies. So life is suffering.

In Buddhism, sutras reveal the truth of death and ways to rebirth. There are answers to life questions and ways to gain longevity and be free from the reincarnation of the six realms of existence. Life is but a dream. Why are some people born rich while others are poor? Why have we such different appearances? Why do some people have long lives while some people's lives are short? How can we know about our own fortune, live a healthy life, and die naturally? Buddhism provides all the answers.

In Surangama Sutra, the Buddha tells this story. Once, Buddha asked the King of Persia, “Is your body deteriorating, and you will die one day?” The Persian King answered yes, sadly. And the Buddha asked again, “Do you know there is something inside you, which I call the real you, that never deteriorates and never dies?” The king was very much delighted when he learned he should never die. He was pleased to know that his death and rebirth were like changing another piece of clothes.

Buddha says all physical existence has a life span. It has birth and death. Even the earth we live on has its birth and death. People feel happiness at birth but sadness at the time of death. But birth and death are only our illusions. There is, in truth, no such thing as birth and death. When we realize that the real me will not die, we should never be afraid of death. How delightful could that be?

Ordinary people are scared of death; they are scared of the pain and of the unknown ahead. They are scared of going to hell. People may hear ghost stories and think ghosts would be coming to haunt them, as debt collectors, or even to kill them, tear them off, or cut them into pieces. Will this happen? Yes, they will. If you do bad things, bad things follow. But if you never do any evil, these miserable things would not happen. And if you have achieved enlightenment, all those bad things will not follow you.

Through my insights into this Mahayana sutra, I talked about some of the key themes of the Surangama Sutra that form the foundation for Buddhist practice, mainly by samadhi power. The moral precepts in this Sutra are so crucial that they are often used to combat delusions that may arise during meditation.

This was the heaviest work I wrote, about 12,00 pages into two books. This book serves as a guide for all Buddhist practitioners to understand the basic ideas of

Buddhism and lead their hands through the way of factual practice toward the ten stages of Mahayana achievements.

This book took me an entire year to complete. But it helped me immensely with my process of enlightenment. I felt my mind filled with magic power after finishing the work.

According to Buddhism, we have a bardo that wanders around after death. This bardo is our transitional state of life existence, the soul or supernatural consciousness of our spirit after death and before rebirth. After this bardo leaves our physical dead body, it wanders about, looking for attachments. It would see three cliffs: one red, one white, and one black. These are illusions of greed, hatred, and ignorance. Our greed is like fire, red; hatred is white, and ignorance is black. Ordinary humans all carry greed, hatred, and ignorance in their lives; that's why most people would encounter these cliffs of different colors. It's like a horror movie we would watch after death. An enlightened Buddhist practitioner would know they are just illusions and won't be afraid of them.

After death, our spirit shall be illuminated, and our bardo will see lights of different colors. Our human body has five kinds of light: water light (our eyes are watery with tears), vibration light (movements of arteries), heart or mind light, the light of intrinsic nature, and universal light (Our whole body is a small universe). These are lights within our inner existence. Outside our body, there are five kinds of light: sunlight, moonlight, electrical light, water light, and darkness. Darkness is also a kind of light. Our inner lights interact with outer lights. A monk or Buddhist practitioner of outstanding achievement might turn into a torchlight and disappear into the universe at the time of time. A monk with lesser achievement might have a very small and shortened body after death. The remains of a monk can be many

numbers of shining relics like gems. After death, only our physical body is rotten; our soul or spirit is immortal.

What about rebirth? According to Buddhism, a human body can be formed and born to earth only when these three factors are complete: the father, the mother, and the bardo. When the father and mother have intercourse, a bardo enters and finds its abode. That bardo or intermediate form of existence is the real “you”. If you are a boy, you show love for the mother and hatred for the father; if you are a girl, the opposite.

Within the 9 to 10 months in your mother’s womb, you would suffer a lot, as countless living beings would beat you, fight against you or try to eat you. If you were a good person, you would make yourself and your mother suffer less; if you were a bad guy, you would make you and your mother suffer a lot. If you are a Buddhist practitioner with a pure mind, you would have the blessing from all beings that you will have a blessed rebirth.

Naturally, to find out the bliss of rebirth after enlightenment, my work came to another two important sutras of the Mahayana School: the Diamond Sutra and The Lankavatara Sutra.

The Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita Sutra, simply known as the Diamond Sutra, has been very popular among the Chinese Buddhist communities for more than a thousand years. It is considered the ultimate source of wisdom by which Buddhist practitioners gain enlightenment. The philosophies within the lines can be the most ambiguous, especially to philosophers of a Marxist background. Through his teachings and guidance, the Buddha leads us to the final stage of the complete emptiness of materialism and the diamond-shining existence of the mind.

The Lankavatara Sutra is an essential classic for the Chan School of Buddhism, and it is considered to be the most challenging sutra to understand. For a thousand years in Chinese history, very few people ever had a close study into the five factors towards ultimate freedom of mind, the three elements of human nature qualities that form the reasons for existence, the eight senses of the ego consciousness that influence our reactions to the living environment, the truth of non-selfishness, and the always-changing status of materialized existence. I told about my experience in comprehending these progressive elements through an adaptation of a Buddhist master's way of life.

Another half year passed when I finished my Argumentation on these two sutras. Translation of these sutras from the Sanskrit language into Ancient Chinese mainly occurred during the Tang Dynasty 1000 years ago. As I checked into the history of this magnificent dynasty, I left enough materials to write a history book called the Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty.

The Tang Dynasty is one of the most prosperous periods in ancient Chinese history. This prosperity in culture and economy has much to do with the spreading of Buddhism in the country. This book is a brief history of this great dynasty. Still, more than that, it is a deeper look into the cause of human nature and the importance of human nature quality development which can help change the course of history and shape a better world. For ten years, this book of mine was listed as Number One on the same subject on China's most popular search engine- Baidu.

All these ten books were published with Trafford Publishing in the United States of America. Unfortunately, when I contacted publishers in China, none of them dared to publish them because of the censorship of the Chinese Communist Party. My younger brother helped to print five thousand books and distribute them to friends

and Buddhist organizations in the country. Readers can find all these books on Amazon.

I was the painter of my own life. I arranged the paints and colors and thus made my life colorful and beautiful. That was what the Buddha told me. I was the creator of my fortune.

I was happy to experience my spiritual advancement as I did the writing, and I had the same happiness to see my child growing up day after day, year after year. When I finished a day's writing, I often saw my child sleeping in one corner of the library or fighting with other kids in the children's books corner.

My friend from the Chinese government office CCIB sometimes came to me for a drink, or we had a walk together along the beaches at Brighton-La-sands.

“How to become a Buddha?” asked my friend one day. “The Buddha says, love your parents.” My friend agreed and added. “And extend the same love.” I thought he had done much better than me in this regard.

As you sow, so you reap; Buddhism tells the same reason. When you do good, good things follow; when you do bad, bad things follow. This is the truth of the universe.

Most people are ignorant of the truth of life and death. But this issue is so important that it relates to everyone, not just for one life but for many lives.

Every day, there are many deaths in our world, and there are many new births. Man's life, some fifty or sixty years, some eighty or eighty years, is long but also short. Where are we going after death? And where do new lives come from? Few people know. Birth or death is a fundamental issue. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to reveal the fact of this.

Two and a half years had passed when I finished all these and wanted a rest. So what was next in my spiritual journey?

Chapter 6 Study Tour

After I finished ten books, I thought I owed my gratitude to Master Chin Kung. So, I considered paying a visit to the Master, who then lived in Hong Kong.

Before departure, I wrote a small book of about one hundred thousand words, "Stories of Master Chin Kung," as a gift of gratitude to the Master. However, when the Master met me in his Hong Kong office, he seemed to have a misunderstanding that I wanted to make myself popular by utilizing his fame. Instead of having this book published, I deleted the files from my computer.

Later, Master Chin Kung was under pressure from the Chinese Communist government and criticism from the Buddhist community in China. His followers thought of my book and asked for the manual script. I told them, unfortunately, that I had deleted all the files.

After Hong Kong, I visited Taiwan. I did not go to Chin Kung's base in Taipei or Master Hsing Yun's Fo Guang Shan Temples. I paid my respect to the late Chan Master Sheng-yen's Dharma Drum Mount on the outskirts of Taipei.

On this trip, I also went to Vietnam and Thailand, where Buddhism was popular among overseas Chinese communities. But I watched about other religions as well.

Christianity teaches us to love the world and the people. Islam tells us to share. Buddhism gives us compassion and loving-kindness. Taoism tells us not to

compete with each other but to tranquility with a simple life. All religions honor doing good for others and harmony for the whole world.

It was always a comfortable feeling to be among people of religious beliefs. But it was a pity that most Buddhist believers sought Buddhism as a temporary spiritual retreat rather than the ultimate goal of becoming enlightened from karma.

My plan for the day started in the morning. "What should I do today?" Zengzi said: "I have my reflections three times a day." A monk should touch his bald head three times a day to remind himself to practice diligently.

When I walked into the public to begin a "study tour", the word "respect" first came to mind.

The character of respect has two sides, in and out. We have a lot to do to build our dignity and good quality so that others would respect us. Outside, we need to respect others, regardless of their rates. A life of peace comes from a mind of respect; it is without pride, greed, or going into extremity in any aspect. It's the middle way.

When I see an elder, I show my respect because he has come a long way to grow this old age and must have an experience I can learn from.

When I see a younger one, I show my respect because his youth means strength and opportunities that I shall not look down upon.

When I see a rich person, I show my respect because he might be the person who gives me support when I need it.

When I see a poor person, I show my respect when I give my donation because he might be the force of peace in the environment where I live.

As a son, I shall tell my parents where I am going when I leave home and inform them when I am back. I shall not sit in the middle place when we have dinner together. I shall not make any decision without consulting my parents when friends and relatives have come for a visit. I shall not climb high or stand in front of the water so that my parent would worry about my falling.

Respect is mutual. Respect means balance. Let him take the handle when you give another person a knife, not the sharp edge. When holding something of an honor, take your steps carefully, and behave cautiously as if you are having something quite heavy.

A mountain on a plain usually is low. When a peak is tall enough, people would arrange sacrifices there and pay their respect. Supported by high mountains and deep forests, tigers and lions maintain their authority. Winds and rains are hard to follow because they have no definite directions. Monkeys can jump in the forests, but humans cannot. People won't blame the wood when a wooden house built with new timber collapses. When a father does not behave like a father, his son will not behave like a son.

My favorite thing about visiting China was with my best friend on tours to the Buddhist mountains across the country. It was good that he could put down his import and export business and spend a week or two with me in those mountains. Although he was a Christian, we had a lot to talk about in common.

One time, we climbed three mountains in one week: the Hengshan Mountain in Hunan province, the Jiuhua Mountain in Anhui province, and Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi Province. These are mostly Buddhist mountains, but my friend was happy to accompany me into all those temples and pay homage. I thought he was more open-minded than me. On top of Lushan Mountain, we visited a Christian church that Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong May-ling often went for service when

they ruled China. When the communist Mao took over, this church and its surrounding area looked desolate and deserted.

Returning from those tours, my idea was to build a Buddhist retreat in Guangdong so that I could meet some like-minded friends and live a Buddhist lifestyle. My younger brother gave me a five-thousand-square-meter property so that I could build an academy. I also considered making that into a teahouse for leisure.

Book reading was also a form of practice. A Taoist said, "It is not difficult to master the Dao; don't be choosy." A practitioner said, "I am a vegetarian; I don't eat meat." A monk said, "Don't be choosy. Evil can be found in those vegetarians." "Every day is a good day, everyone is a good person, and everything is a good thing." The monk added.

"Everything in the world: the sun, the moon, the stars, the grass, and the jungle are all my embodiment." "One is many; many is one."

"Where did man come from?" Christianity says, "God created man." Islam says, "Allah created man." Who created God or Allah? The Buddha says the mind creates everything.

Few people would study the Great Way of Life, which the ancient Chinese called "Dao." Dao is the law of the universe and the truth of human life. Dao is about relations: the relation between human beings, the relation between humans and their environment, and the relationship between human beings and other living beings, including ghosts and spirits. The study of these relations forms the basis of the world's religions and philosophies, which answer life's questions.

A common saying is that reading ten thousand books is no better than traveling ten thousand miles. It tells us that we should learn about this world by walking into the mountains and rivers and seeing things with our own eyes. This way, we can

better understand the truth of the earth. And we shall always open our minds to new ideas.

Summer was a bit hot in my hometown. On August 24, 2011, at the invitation of China Buddhism Online and Shaolin Temple, I attended a national Buddhist Sutras Contest at Shaolin Temple. I was to meet in debate and compete with 18 monks selected from Buddhist Temples and academies across the country. The contest was broadcast live on TV in Henan province and on major online Buddhist platforms.

Shaolin Temple arranged my accommodation in the Monks' Village, about one mile northeast of the temple.

After breakfast on the second day, more than 600 abbots, monks, and laymen from across China gathered at the Shaolin Zen Hall when the contest was convened. Among the eighteen debaters, I was one of the two laymen un-ordained.

The first debate topic was the meaning of "emptiness or voidness" in Buddhist terms. The setting was, "Interesting things occur in our dreams while sleeping, but awakened, they disappear. Why is that?" This was a simple question that arouses not much debate.

On the first night, Shaolin Temple hosted a large-scale martial arts performance, with more than 1,000 monk dancers, the mountains filled with neo-lights and spectacular scene flashes.

The following day, just after nine o'clock, another debate began. The title of the debate was: "Before birth, how can I be what I am?" Although it is superficial, the title points directly to the purpose of Buddhist practice. I faced four monks as my opponents. Completing ten Buddhist books gave me the power of one hundred

thousand warriors in my mind as I looked down upon my opponents. Attendees might have felt my arrogance, although my debate had won countless applause.

That night, in the Shaolin Inner Courtyard, some Shaolin martial monks with profound strength performed Kung Fu for us contestants.

After that, an elder monk and a layman invited me to a secret room. They said they greatly appreciated my performance during that day and intended to invite me to their monastery after the event so that I could give lectures to their donors.

At night, it rained a little. Early in the morning, there was thick fog in the valley of Songshan Mountain.

After breakfast, the temple hall was busy again with five to six hundred people. The masters and abbots like Shi Yongxin sat in the chairmen's seats, and there were teachers and students of the Shaolin Cultural Research Institute of Zhengzhou University in the crowd.

The title of the new debate was "Snow Seals the Mindful Beads; What are mindful beads?" That was a very good topic, and those who were enlightened by these words must be able to embrace the Buddha's wisdom. It was a pity that none of the debaters had a deep understanding of the Buddha's ideas. I did not take part in this debate.

I joined another debate. The question was, "If you see the Soul Mountain with a leaf obstructing your eyes, do you still see the Soul Mountain?"

The atmosphere was very dull when all my opponents expressed their humbleness, "I don't understand."

Although humility was also a strategy, we had come for "debates". If the Sixth Patriarch also responded with humbleness, he should not have won the approval

of his master. Intentionally, I shot out my "arrows" at my opponents so that none of them was able to defend. There were applauses repeatedly amid the five to six hundred spectators.

The Buddha's idea is that everyone has the same wisdom and virtue, but he cannot attain it by clinging to delusions. Each of us is a shining mirror; our lights are no different, but because of our greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, we have blinded the five aggregates of self-nature. It was like "a leaf" that blocked our sight so that we could not see our soul mountain.

The debaters were powerless to defend themselves when I shot out my arrows, and there was greater applause among the crowd.

At that time, I felt my body like Sumikaya's sitting under the statue of the Bodhi Tree. I felt my figure was no longer me but only a spirit proclaiming the Dharma on behalf of the Buddha.

A guest monk challenged me, "Since you see the Buddha in your mind, how about the Buddha's path for you and so on?"

I spoke to the crowd. "As a practitioner, like climbing the Soul Mountain, when you start, it is the road up the mountain, until you see the best scenery at the top. But along the way, there are leaves blocking your sight, so that the soul mountain is not seen in full. When you reach the peak, which I call mindfulness or enlightenment, you will see your self-nature. That is the Buddha's path."

The guest asked modestly, "Please tell us about the experience of becoming a Buddha?"

I did not say, "I am the Buddha", and I did not say, "I am not a Buddha." I was not going into his traps.

I spoke to the crowd: "Buddha's words: Everyone is a Buddha."

Still, I needed to say something about my experience, so I said: "When I ascended the Soul Mountain, I saw that the mountain was not a mountain; When I descended the Soul Mountain, I saw that the mountain was still a mountain. In this process, only those who had climbed the mountain can taste the experience, and this is enlightenment. "

At that time, an elder monk stood up from the crowd, angrily rebuking: "I have been practicing in the Shaolin Temple for decades, and I still cannot become enlightened. How can you, as a layman, talk about enlightenment? "

I laughed. I wanted no more debates.

The following day, I did not come to the temple hall. I hired a taxi and got out of Shaolin Temple without saying "Goodbye!" to the organizers.

Chapter 7 Secret Mantra

I did not follow up with the elder monk and layman who invited me to lecture in their monastery as I left Shaolin Temple without completing the contest.

When I returned to Guangdong, I continued with the construction and decoration of a Buddhist property. But my development was stopped only after I installed two Buddhist statues at the lecture hall because of disruption by the local police. They ordered my construction to be closed down and asked for my identity. Their tune came down a little when they saw my Australian passport and only gave me an oral warning.

We now live in a world of strong governments and chained citizens. These innocent policemen knew nothing about the immorality of their actions; few of them would realize that the moment they were holding guns against people walking down the streets, their parents, brothers, and sisters were treated the same way somewhere on the other end of the roads.

Lao Tsu had been a government official for years before he gave everything up and wandered toward the west. He knew he could do nothing against the world's declining morality and corrupt government, and his give-up attitude showed his disappointment. We did not know if he wanted to become a hermit or was just going west looking for a way to save this world of declining morality. He just disappeared from this world after leaving behind five thousand words of Deo De Jing about life and nature, the Great Way, and ideal human moralities.

Reflecting on my Buddhist studies, I could only see my strength in theory. I was powerless in practice and still had doubts about the fundamental cause of life and death. A man of enlightenment should be free from fear and the threats of life and death. When facing the threat of death, I reckoned, my mind was still not at peace. I must have the practice that would equip me with the power to overcome these fears and threats.

The Taoist master of Lu Cunyang was said to be a practitioner of outstanding accomplishments. He could turn his body into a bardo, a baby-like spirit that can live for a long time. He traveled about and one day came to the Yellow Dragon Mountain. There was a Buddhist temple there, and the abbot was teaching the Dharma to his disciples. He turned himself into a bardo and sat in a corner of the temple hall, listening to the lecture while the audience could not see his appearance. The abbot realized his existence and shouted, "you corpse-guarded ghost!" What the abbot meant was that no matter how long you could live with

your bardo, you would be destined to die. You could never be immortal with a physical body. When the Taoist master realized this, he humbled himself and became a Buddhist practitioner under the abbot at the Yellow Dragon Mountain.

During my Buddhist studies, the late Venerable Master Yuan Yin of the Vajrayana School helped me immensely. The Master's Xinzhongxin, or Mindful Mantra, was at the top of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism, a sect of Hanmi developed in the Tang Dynasty. Unfortunately, the Master passed away a few years before I discovered his teaching; he had left without my coming to pay homage. Therefore, I traveled to a Yuan-yin Temple newly built by his disciples in Luofu Mountain and had myself ordained in his school of mantra study so that I could practice the secret tantra.

After the formalities of ordination, I came back to Australia. In the following three years or one thousand days, I shut myself from television, newspapers, books, and basically from this material world to practice the secret mantra, mainly through strict meditation processes. Whether it was a holiday, Christmas, the Spring Festival, or a birthday, I skipped all the social gatherings and celebrations. Whether on a rainy day or a cold winter, I shut myself in a secret room to practice meditation. Whether sick or with other problems, I put everything down and did not let anything else distract my meditation.

According to the Master, the worst blockage in our mantra practice is sex, love, and affection. With love, there comes worries, sadness, and attachment. These are obstacles in the way of our enlightenment. These feelings all come with conditions. The greatest love from the Buddha is without conditions; it is the compassion we develop during our practice. Only by cutting our minds away from "humane" love could we obtain Buddhahood.

My daily meditation was strict, at least two hours sitting with mudras of different requirements. If I was disrupted in any way during this period, I must start all over again for another two hours. In the first three months, I experienced significant pain with my fingers twisting into mudras, sometimes, the pain was like many knives cutting through my flesh, but this pain was gradually reduced as time went on.

The Master said that meditation was only the assisting practice. The main practice is in our daily life: sitting, walking, eating, and sleeping. We test our strength in our daily activities so that our minds will not be tempted and moved by material things. Whenever we sit, sleep, eat, and walk, we must reflect in our minds and not be distracted by our physical movements.

Practicing meditation is a way of recovery. We are not advancing to attain Buddhahood. Instead, Buddhahood is our born nature, and our practice is to return to this nature which is always there. It is like a lost child returning home.

After a year of meditation, I felt my stomach very painful one morning and wanted to vomit. I went to the toilet and vomited a mixture of blood stains, the amount a full bowl. I was terrified, but soon I felt no pain but light and comfortable. I felt refreshed in the whole body.

When doing my meditation, I must put down everything, forget all kinds of thoughts, and just sit like a dead person. I must concentrate on my murmuring of the secret mantra in the name of the Buddha. I got up every morning at three o'clock and started my meditation in half an hour. After at least two hours of meditation, I must always be mindful of my daily activities. I must be open-minded, thinking my mind is broader than the sky and more profound than the ocean. Every day, I had one meal or two; I must get rid of other material desires.

Whether I made progress or not, it was like drinking water. Warm or cold, only the drinker knew. The Sixth Patriarch said, "Your self-nature is pure in origin, no birth, no death, full of abundance, self-sufficient, and always productive." This is the force of enlightenment. As Buddhist practitioners, we don't seek magic powers, but magical powers come naturally in our minds. We do not take away our worries, anger, and frustrations; they are just like waves on top of the ocean. When there is no wind, the ocean calms down, and the waves become nothing but water.

The Master told us we should not always hold tight with our practice, we must at a proper time learn how to relax.

As I was close to the finish of my mantra retreat, I took some notes about the process of my practice that later became three more books: Commentary Notes on Avatamamsaka Sutra, The Land of Ultimate Bliss, and a selection of my speeches on Buddhist Practice.

The Commentary Notes on Avatamamsaka Sutra came from my Weibo tweets that gave a vivid description of the Buddha's world. The sutra reveals different causes of ways of cultivation and how some of the greatest Bodhisattvas gained their absolute enlightenment. Here I talk about the importance of equality and harmony among all living beings and how important it is for us humans to follow these rules.

Introducing The Land of Ultimate Bliss, I spent four chapters talking about the basic philosophies of the Amitabha Sutra: the nature of the Pure Land, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the effect of Amitabha, and the cause of being mindful of the name of Amitabha. I moved on to tell how the attainment of the ultimate bliss came from an awakened mind through the guidance of the Buddha's holy teachings.

As a Buddhist, in the third book, I shared my experience in the faith of Buddhism and how we could make this world a more peaceful and harmonious one. Now I learned all religions share the same source and serve the same purpose. As I read the Bible again, I could understand the message delivered by God's messengers. I finally came back to God's side.

Three years did not seem long or short. When I finished this period of meditation and practice, the world around me changed considerably.

Some friend introduced me to see a property in Goulburn, a small city midway from Sydney to Canberra. The property was 100 thousand square meters with over fifty decaying houses. The place was a hospital during World War Two and was deserted afterward. The new owner wanted me to turn her property into a Buddhist Temple so that she could make some profit from her investment. I visited the mountainous town several times. Unfortunately, I was not influential enough in the Buddhist communities to turn the dream into reality.

But something terrible happened with my family in China. It was a hurricane. I had to go back to Guangdong.

Chapter 8 Bankruptcy

In late 2013, Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, was under disciplinary investigation due to CCP leader Xi Jinping's Anti-corruption Campaign.

A year before the media announcement, investigations had been carried out throughout the country into the corruption of his family connections, including

Guangdong. A member of Zhou's family was a shareholder in my brother's real estate business. I warned my brother of the risks, but he would not listen.

At the beginning of 2013, several officials in the Foshan City government were arrested for corruption. These officials helped my brother in his business. As my younger brother worked as a judge in Foshan People's Court for some years, his connections from the legal sectors informed him that his property development company was among the entities under investigation. Before the police came, my brothers traveled to Hong Kong and fled the country.

Property development was risky in China as the Communist government owned the land. Acquiring land and loans in China always involves corruption, regardless of private or state-owned companies. The ruling CCP leaders used the so-called anti-corruption campaign to eliminate their political opponents. During Xi Jinping's first term, over five million officials were penalized or persecuted for corruption. My brother's case was just one of them.

When I returned to Guangdong, my brothers and their families were already overseas, leaving my parents and younger sister at home. I inquired about the details and found that all the houses, apartments, offices, and shops under my brothers' names, were either sealed or confiscated by the local government without going through any legalized procedures. These properties amounted to 200 million dollars. All their bank accounts were frozen, and cash was seized.

This robbery by the government was a heavy blow to my parents and sister, who were left alone and helpless. I comforted them and encouraged them to be strong again. I told them that the family had gone through so much suffering during the Cultural Revolution and when we were young in school, and we must be able to overcome the difficulties we faced this time.

My younger sister still had one property management company under her name that was not closed by the government. She had been a housewife for a decade doing only the cooking and washing for the family. But now she had to pick up the job as a manager of the business. This could be the only income source for her family and my parents for many years.

I did not feel too sad or miserable about my family's misfortune. It was part of human life. These misfortunes teach us the lesson that all material things are empty in nature; they follow the rules of birth, growth, and decay. The practice of Buddhism gave me the strength and courage to deal with any difficulties while keeping my mind at peace.

I thought of what my Master Elder Yuanyin had told me in his teachings. He says nothing is good or bad in this world by telling a story. Once, a Buddhist traveler came for shelter under the roof of a butcher's shop. A customer came and said to the butcher, "give me a kilo of lean meat, no fat"; the butcher cut a loaf of lean meat, and the customer was happy with that. Minutes later, another customer said to the butcher, "I want to buy a kilo of fat meat, not lean." The butcher cut a loaf of fatty meat, and the customer was happy. Again minutes later, a third customer came and said to the butcher, "I want to buy a kilo with both lean and fat meat." The butcher did that, and the buyer was happy. The butcher said, "see here, all my meats are good." When the Buddhist traveler heard of this, he suddenly realized the world's truth and attained awakening.

I went to my best friend, who believed in Christianity. Although we practiced different religions, we shared the same faith and the same values, and we thought that through God and Buddha, we could gain our comfort and be revived.

Coming back to Australia, I needed a job.

I came to my friend in CCIC or the Australia office of China Commodities Inspection & Certification Group. In name, this was a company assisting Australian exports to China with services in commodity inspection and certification. It was part of the Chinese government's strategy to exert its influence in the developed world; it was a state-owned organization directly under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

I joined the business as the General Manager Assistant and Marketing Manager. I thought of it as an arrangement of God. Twenty years ago, I resigned from CCIB; twenty years later, I came back to work for its sister organization CCIC. I am sure that, in our lives, God has all the play settings arranged for us. So when we are in God's waiting room, don't hurry. To believe in God is the same as to have faith in the Buddha.

As a marketing manager, I made marketing plans and organized events and seminars to meet with business people and government officials. I attended annual conferences held by different industry associations. As the business expanded annually, I assisted with related developments like building a new laboratory in Melbourne for food testing.

I also assisted our inspectors in the capital cities of Australia. I traveled to Port Kembla in Wollongong and Port Lincoln to supervise the loading of grains for export. I traveled to Mildura to overlook the inspection of grapes and other fruits. We were also in South Australia and Victoria for wine exports. I traveled to Perth to meet our surveyors ready for iron ore inspection. We issued certificates to over 20 thousand containers of recycled materials exported to China annually. As this was one of our primary incomes, we jokingly called ourselves a "rubbish" company.

CCIC Group was a government entity under the administration of AQSIQ or formerly CCIB. It employed over 20 thousand people with branches in 30 countries. We had official delegations from China every month for visits or official errands. Our office was a key meeting point for these officials whether or not they came from the inspection and certification circles. Our General Manager was busy every month or week meeting these delegations. As a vegetarian, I avoided joining their meals and parties because they always drank lots of wine and other liquor besides Australian beef. But to get along with my colleagues, I had to give up as a vegetarian.

We also attended meetings held by the Chinese Embassy in Australia and the Consulate General in Sydney every year. As CCIC was a standing member of the Chinese (Australia) Chamber of Commerce, I not only attended its meetings but drafted annual work reports for the organization. About 250 Chinese-invested companies were in the organization, many being state-owned businesses under the CCP leadership. Many of these companies set up Communist Party Units within their management and received regular instructions from the Party, and CCIC was no exception. I did not think the Australian government was fully aware of the existence of these communist insertions.

China's influence was everywhere in Australia, socially, politically, and economically. Australia's prosperity relied too much on exports to China, which accounted for 70% of the total. Chinese businessmen came in to buy Australian land, property, farms, vineyards, and businesses. China leased Darwin Port for 99 years. China even built a "military" airport in Western Australia. Star Casino was investigated for helping Chinese companies in money laundering.

As more Chinese moved in, Hurstville became a genuine Chinatown. Residents with a Chinese background made up 50-60% of Hurstville's population, and the

Chinese did not need to speak English to survive in Hurstville. We saw more police presence in all suburbs. Grace Bros changed to Myer and then moved out of town. Australian lifestyle was no more in Hurstville and some other cities like Liverpool, Chatswood, and Burwood.

Several churches in Hurstville were closed down in the past fifteen years, and I guess conditions might be more or less the same in other towns. Corruption and sexual scandals topped the headline news of the Vatican in recent years. When we saw the Pope under heavy security on his official visits, we understood that religion seemed to have lost hope as the messenger of God regarded his people as enemies. The noted populist Steve Bannon strongly criticized the Vatican for signing a secret deal with the CCP regime in Beijing.

ABC TV's Q & A program held a thematic discussion, "Is God still here", during which the bishop of Sydney was harshly challenged. David from Victoria asked: "Do you believe intelligent design should be part of the science curriculum, caught alongside evolution? Or do you believe it is non-scientific and should be relegated to the rubbish bin?" Andrew Kollington asked: " You are courageously open about your religious and moral beliefs. As a believer in God, do you accept the Bible as the word of God and that those who participate in homosexual behavior should be shunned or put to death as the Bible demands? Or do so-called 'moderate Christians' choose to ignore the word of God in this case, picking what passages they feel best suit our social trends?"

Changes gradually occurred; they did not happen overnight.

Chen Yonglin, a former diplomat at the Chinese Consulate General in Sydney, exposed confidential documents inside the Consulate as early as 2005, showing that the CCP used Chinese student organizations to act as agents to gather intelligence. These documents show that the CCP has used overseas special

agents to support international student unions and pro-Communist societies to spread hatred among the Chinese community and denounce the Falun Gong practitioners in Australia.

In an Epoch Times report, Chen said, "There are two main points of infiltration into Western governments: the first is to give benefits to high-ranking officials, such as free travel to China. Second, use cultural exchange programs to grant scholarships to international students who favored the CCP regime." Chen pointed out that the CCP used pressure against Australian officials. For Australian officials who helped Chinese dissidents, the CCP would refuse a visa for their China travels.

Chinese businessman Huang Xiangmo moved to Australia in 2011 and began making large-scale political donations. In 2019, the Australian government issued an investigation order against him; On December 5, Huang Xiangmo's Australian permanent residence visa was canceled, and he withdrew his Australian citizenship application two weeks later.

Between 2014 and 2021, several Hurstville city councilors accepted bribes from Chinese developers in exchange for support for two real estate development projects in the city. One of them received \$170,000. Australia ICAC opened an investigation against three councilors, Constantine Hindi, Vincenzo Badalati, and Philip Sansom. Mr. Badalati was first elected to the Hurstville City Council in 1999 and served as Mayor from 2001 to 2004, 2005 to 2008, and from 2015 to 2016; Hindi was first elected to the City Council in 2004 and served as mayor and deputy mayor; Sansom served as Mayor from 1999 to 2000 and from 2009 to 2011.

At the hearings, evidence was presented that Badalati and Sansom had regularly met with Philip Wong in China or Hong Kong since at least 2007. On weekends,

they had "eaten, drunk, and sang karaoke" together. The Chinese developers also arranged prostitutes in Tangshan, Hebei Province, China.

The Belt and Road Initiative was at the core of Xi Jinping's "Great Power Diplomacy" strategy, which aimed to challenge the United States and its Allies in all spheres. China signed a secret deal with Daniel Andrews' Victoria Government.

In two decades, the overall mortality in Australian society deteriorated largely due to the influence of the communist ideology and loss of confidence in the church. Today, the CCP's infiltration and corrosion in the West are all-encompassing. Besides Australia, political circles, judicial circles, academia, media circles, and financial circles in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have all been extensively and deeply infiltrated and corrupted by the forces of the CCP and its BGY scheme.

Although I was busy with my work and had my eyes open to what was happening around me, I never forgot to meditate daily and chant Amitabha Buddha. Chanting Amitofo with the Pure Land School has been my daily bliss, the most simple way of Buddhist practice. I thought this meditation by chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha was the best way to calm myself down, make my mind at peace, and keep my thoughts away from illusions. By keeping my mind in profound peace, I came to feel the connection of my body with the universe, to feel the loss or existence of material things around me; time after time, my meditations helped to clear the illusions of my mind; I think this concentration of mind has led to awakening and enlightenment.

Life was like a dream. This bankruptcy was the fate of my brothers and family. The fate philosophy would calm us down when facing this extraordinary misfortune.

Everyone has his fate. But we shall not think we have a destiny that can never be changed. Let us tell the true story of Yuan Liaofan in the Ming Dynasty. When Liaofan was young, he met a fortune teller who predicted his future. The predictions were so accurate for over ten years that Liaofan started to believe fate had decided his life course. At about 30, Liaofan went to a Buddhist monastery and met with Abbot Yungu. The abbot admitted, “there is fate, but fate can be changed.” He told Liaofan that to change his fate, he must make changes to his life and always do what is good. He gave Liaofan a book of merit and demerit grids and told him that he should mark the merit grid with red if he did a good thing and mark the demerit grid with black if he did a wrong thing. And when the grid was marked with only red dots, his fate would be changed. Liaofan made up his mind to do 3 thousand good things. And after three years, he started to see his life change. The fortune teller had predicted that he would not have children, but at the age of 50, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. The fortune teller had indicated that he would die young at 50, but he lived up to 79. The fortune teller had predicted that his education would not bring him any honorable achievement in life, but he finally became a high-ranking official and built a good reputation. He had changed his destiny so typically that he recorded his life courses of remarkable changes for future generations.

Chapter 9 Whistleblower

I worked for five years as a marketing manager. I did not want a busy life or travel too much with my work. So I stepped down from marketing chief and in the following two years retained only the position of General Manager Assistant, helping with office work, documentation, and Human resources.

Without the awareness of the Australian government, the CCP gradually controlled all Chinese media in the country, except the Epoch Times. CCP-controlled companies either invested in these Chinese newspapers and online news platforms and became shareholders or bought the press directly. The CCP's influence and power forced the BBC, VOA, New York Times, Bloomberg, ABC, and Washington Post into its captives. Twitter, Facebook, and Google followed the CCP along as running dogs. In less than a decade, the CCP successfully controlled the mainstream media in the western world. It was difficult to find public media trustworthy about china issues.

For financial gains, Twitter and Facebook would share the privacy of Chinese dissidents with the CCP from their databases; the CCP proclaimed that it could block anyone's Youtube account if it wished to do so.

Amazon also kowtowed to the CCP regime as it prohibited books about a specific political party in its policy guidelines on Lockscreen Ads and Sponsored Display.

When I worked at Guangzhou TV Station as a news anchor, I was regarded as “an old man” at thirty-five. Communist China only needs the “youth’s blood” in its media front and there must be a reason for that. In Australia, I saw many anchors over fifty or even sixty. I thought this reasonable as the “elders’ blood” were more experienced. When I saw Angie Asimus presenting news while pregnant, I thought it was amazingly amiable as it was more humane. This was and is impossible under the Chinese Communist government.

Ancient Chinese philosophers commented that the stress of morality was the source of all evil. When human beings lack morality, we must stress the importance of morality. From the stress of moral conduct came laws and regulations and government administration. Government administration produces fear and challenges human dignity, without which freedom loses its grounds. The

first communists of China were overseas students studying in France and Germany during the last days of the Qing Dynasty. Their primary aim in bringing Marxism into China was to create a country of freedom for the people. When these young men heard the word “freedom” from their European teachers, they had such a lofty ambition that they could bring this ideology back to their mother country and build a republic based on that. But they were too young to be able to understand the core nature of the Communist Manifesto. They did not expect this to cause more destruction to the human dignity of their fellow countrymen.

For thirty-five years, I experienced the CCP's brutality and cruelty in China. Now the CCP came to the western world to plant seeds of its ideology and change the lifestyles of our children and grandchildren. No matter how weak I was, I must stand up and do something to stop this from happening.

In January 2017, I created an online platform in English called Followcn. In addition to introducing Buddhism and Chinese culture, my focus was to report on Sino-foreign relations and expose the true history of China under the CCP since its establishment in 1921.

In the spring of 2017, Miles Guo started his Whistleblowers Movement in the United States, proclaiming to take down the CCP. I reported on the development of Miles Guo's revolutionary activities as well.

I reported on the CCP's genocide of the Xinjiang Uyghurs, persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and organ-harvesting, the rise of the CCP's flag at the Shaolin Temple and destruction of family churches, and other human rights issues. I reported on the CCP's Grand Diplomatic Campaign, how the CCP used the Confucius Institute as a tool to bring communist ideology to the west, and the vicious plans of the CCP with its Belt and Road Initiative. I repeatedly warned the western world of the risks of the Communist dictatorship.

On September 28, 2015, Xi Jinping delivered a speech entitled "Working Together to Build a New Partnership for Win-win Cooperation and Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" at the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and the concept of "community with a shared future for mankind" received widespread attention. On 10 February 2017, the 55th session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development unanimously adopted the resolution "The Social Dimension of the New Partnership for Africa's Development," and "Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" was written into the United Nations resolution for the first time. The United Nations and the world communities all went into the traps of the CCP regime while I wrote articles against its ideas.

The BBC soon published an article with this analysis: Although China has shown that it advocates a "community with a shared future for mankind" and actively opposes trade protectionism, it is one of the countries that practice trade protectionism and only accepts free trade and open markets that are beneficial to itself. China says one thing and does another.

Over the years, Australia became a backyard for corrupt CCP officials to hide stolen money and raise mistresses. The Xi Jinping family, the Zeng Qinghong family, Sun Lijun, and Liu Zhenya of Shandong Luneng had substantial economic interests in Australia. The CCP often threatened both the Australian political and business sectors on the grounds of economic interests.

My platform attracted thousands of visitors daily, and in a year, it gained momentum in China. My Weibo account won seven thousand followers in two months and was blocked and deleted by the communist government. I had to close my WeChat account because of regular harassment. From May to August

2018, my outlet was blocked by the Great Firewall in China, and the CCP's censorship monitored my website closely. My website was hacked many times in the following two years, especially when I reported on the CCP's crackdown on Hong Kong's democratic movement.

The CCP is an atheistic ruling party, and its religious administration is often accused of brutality, with controversies and scandals of suppressing religions in the country. The international organization Freedom House published a report on religious freedom in February 2017 titled "The Battle for Souls in China: Religious Revival, Repression and Resistance under Xi Jinping." The report pointed out that under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the problem of religious governance and suppression in China had worsened in recent years.

In April 2018, the CCP ordered religion to be "sinicized" and "the media, religion, and enterprises should all be surnamed by the party." On July 31, the sixth meeting of the National Joint Conference of Religious Groups was held in Beijing, and the "Initiative on Raising the National Flag at Religious Activity Sites" was issued.

At 7:00 a.m. on August 27, 2018, the Shaolin Temple solemnly held a flag-raising ceremony in front of the mountain gate. The temple was built in 495 during the Northern Wei Dynasty, 1,500 years ago. When I saw the CCP's flag rise in the monastery that I was familiar with, I felt extremely "frustrated" over the event.

In July 2018, the Five Eyes Alliance's intelligence agencies held a meeting and unanimously regarded Huawei as a "security threat" and believed it necessary to boycott it. On August 23, Australia announced a ban on Huawei and ZTE from participating in the country's 5G mobile network construction. As a retaliation, China often found troubles with Australia's wine and meat exports.

The International Network Policy Centre of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) had a concentration camp database containing information on the number of people, locations, photographs, and prisoners in Xinjiang "re-education camps." Researchers at the institute used satellite imaging to discover about 380 suspicious camps in Xinjiang, at least 61 of which had been expanded since July 2019. In my editorial reports, I closely followed up on these developments in Sino-Australian relations.

The CCP government sent the police to harass my parents and my sister's family. They went to my hometown to investigate my history but had to stop their denouncement after discovering I had a widespread reputation in my hometown.

I had no fear. After so many years of living with fear under the CCp's rule, It was time to challenge this dictatorship. Not just to challenge it but to fight and awaken more fellow Chinese to stand up with me against the tyranny and finally take down the Chinese Communist Party. Countless Chinese have stood up to fight.

Thirty years of opening up to the outside world has given the Chinese the opportunity to see the truth of the world and the CCP dictatorship. The economic reform in the past forty years has told the Chinese not to go back to the chaotic time of the Cultural Revolution.

When my younger brother's father-in-law started his Divine Land company in 1979, it was a business producing gas water heaters in Foshan city. As a thirty-year-old veteran, he traveled to Japan in 1978 and brought back a heater. He disassembled the Japanese heater and made his brand. In less than five years, he produced 100 million gas water heaters annually that dominated the national market. Trucks from across the country often lined up for two kilometers waiting for loading and discharge in front of his factory warehouses. He made torches for the 1985 Asia Sports Games and won a worldwide reputation. But an ownership

struggle with the local government brought him to bankruptcy. Later in the 1990s, his joint venture with German Bosch brought him to close down the business. Many more private businesses followed in his footsteps. Now Chinese businesses abroad were another landscape.

Over the past two decades, millions of Chinese talents emigrated overseas, most believing that life in China under CCP rule would not have a promising future. More and more people were aware of the CCP as threatening their democratic pursuits overseas.

By the end of 2019, my friend and colleague finished his term leading CCIC Australia and moved on to his new post in another country. The headquarters in Beijing sent in a new General Manager who wanted me removed from the office as the CCP government was not happy with what I did in Australia. I was the first to leave the company; in less than a year, 90% of the employees also lost their jobs. CCIC Australia was registered as an Australian company, but it followed instructions from Beijing and did things in the CCP way.

Chapter 10 Coronavirus

While my family members were safe in Australia after they fled China, my younger brother went alone to Mexico as he had a business there. He stayed in Mexico City for five years but was set up in traps by local overseas Chinese. He wanted to go to the United States but was under house arrest by human traffickers. He managed to run away and finally made his way to the State of Arizona. At times of difficulties, God was our refuge.

In May 2019, I went to the United States and stayed for a week without seeing my brother as he was kept in the detention center. He had the church and a lawyer help him out of detention for several months. In mid-February 2020, I went to New York again after he moved there with a work permit.

His suffering was another long story that he had to go through without a clear understanding of the human nature of greed and the evil nature of the Chinese Communist Party.

Warnings were often powerless and he had to suffer to learn and grow.

I was happy that my brother was not beaten down although he had lost millions. I was happy that he wanted to stand up and started things all over again in a new land.

I was happy to see my brother become a Christian and attended church services every week. I helped him settle down in the city while continuing my writing on my internet platform. I watched the Sin-US relations closely in the past year as Donald Trump fought a trade war with Communist China.

The CCP had a plan to develop biochemical weapons against the western powers, ridiculously with the U.S financial aid and European technology. When cracking down on the Hong Kong democratic movement in the second half of 2019, the CCP leadership under Xi Jinping was about to use the newly-developed coronavirus on Hongkongers but it went out of control in a Wuhan lab, according to Miles Guo.

By February 21-25, when the Chinese government imposed a total lockdown on the city of Wuhan, coronavirus or covid-19 had spread worldwide. Cases in South Korea have risen; Italy has imposed a lockdown. The U.S. government set up a task force to respond to the pandemic.

On the first of March, President Donald Trump ordered to shut off all flights departing from china. Unfortunately, he didn't do the same with flights from Iran, Italy, and other European countries simultaneously. The virus quickly spread to many parts of New York.

I had a temporary share office at 26 Broadway Avenue in the heart of Manhattan. I moved around Jersey City, Upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Flushing for two and a half months. Due to the pandemic, I was forced to retreat from my Manhattan office on March 10.

During this period, I paid attention to reports on how to treat this disease, besides conducting some research with my TCM experience. At this moment, the Buddha in my mind equipped me with enough strength to deal with the uncertainties ahead.

I booked a return flight with American Airlines on April 5th. A week before departure, I confirmed with AA that the departure time had changed slightly, but the flight had not been canceled.

At 12:00 am on April 5, I left for JFK International Airport. It was hard to find a taxi or Uber, so I took the subway from Manhattan for transit to the airport.

When I arrived at Times Square Subway Station, it was around 1:15 pm. I wanted to go to the bathroom, so I got off the train and went to find a public toilet, but the toilets in the station were all closed. I tried to take the elevator to the public restroom on the third floor, but the elevator was also closed. I immediately felt of I was stupid, as the whole city was locked down in a widespread epidemic.

I looked around the subway. It was hellish. The plague had turned the once lively and most active city into hell.

I got back on the train and continued my way to the airport. I felt much uneasy without going to the toilet. When I sat down and looked around, I mainly found homeless people and beggars. I gave my last one-dollar note to a beggar sitting next to me. Although I had a mask on most of the time, I had an ominous feeling: I might be infected here.

Because the number of trains had been drastically reduced, I needed to wait longer on the train. When I arrived at the airport, it was almost 3:00 pm.

To my surprise, I barely saw a single passenger in the entire corridor from the train platform to the terminal, except for a cleaner.

I checked in from an automatic machine. There was only one boarding pass printed. I checked with the counter staff and was told I would be given another boarding pass for Australia when I arrived in Dallas. I was relaxed and sat back in the lounge to watch TV.

My flight departed on time at 6:00 pm. The Boeing 787 with more than 300 seats appeared empty, with 8 flight attendants but only five passengers.

I arrived at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport at 9:07 pm local time. I did not waste any time but quickly contacted AA customer service. I was told my flight to Sydney was 10:15 at Gate D14. But when I walked to D14, I saw no passenger waiting, and there were no signs of anyone working there. The shops were all closed, and people were leaving.

I asked the airport staff around and was told that all international flights had been canceled. I returned to the AA counter, where two ladies were still on duty. They checked again and said to me that my AA-Qantas flight had been canceled, and there was no possibility of any further flights tomorrow or the next day.

It was about 10:30 pm, and I was tired. I had nowhere to go and planned to spend the night at the airport. The two ladies were so kind that AA was happy to provide me with a suite at the nearby Hilton Grand Hotel and a taxi transfer ticket. I was very grateful for that.

After checking in at the hotel, I didn't go to bed immediately. It was midnight, but Australian time was Monday morning. I checked the Australian government website and contacted the relevant authorities. Although I waited a long time to get on the hotline, I was able to talk to an official and discuss my situation. She was unable to provide any feasible advice.

Lying in bed, I was thinking about how to find my way out: What should I do if I was to be trapped in Dallas? During the national lockdown, it would be challenging for me to find a place to live here. If the pandemic continued, I couldn't afford an extended stay in Dallas.

I decided to return to the airport the following day and stay there until the airport was open so I could fly to Australia on the same ticket. I thought I could work on my computer just waiting there.

The following day when I woke up, I changed my mind.

After breakfast, I returned to my room and stared at the clock. I waited until 9:00 am and called the Australian Consulate General in Los Angeles. The office was closed. I called the covid-19 helpline again, and a gentleman answered the phone. I asked if there was a flight back to Australia. He told me to check the Qantas website, but I always got an error message. He told me to check Google and look for any possible commercial flights. I did as suggested, and I was lucky: United Airlines had a flight from Dallas to Sydney at 5:45 p.m on the same day, stopping

in Denver and San Francisco. There was still a vacancy! I booked the flight immediately.

I sat in the hotel room until 12:00 and took the shuttle bus back to the airport in the rain. The driver was friendly and talkative, saying the weather in Dallas had been going on this bad for five or six days, which was rare. The city already had more than 3,000 confirmed covid cases. Everywhere looked quiet, and very few cars were on the way to the airport.

I waited five hours at the airport, and the terminal was almost empty due to restrictions.

I was the only passenger waiting at the lounge for the first two hours. I retreated to a corner and sat on the floor, meditating for half an hour or so.

Two hours later, three more passengers joined the waiting.

Suddenly, I felt like needing to go to the toilet. I had a bit of diarrhea, the stool a little faint and dark. It seemed abnormal, exceptional.

After going to the toilet, I felt weak and quickly sat back in a chair. When I massaged my hand and leg, I felt pain in the muscles of my legs, which was also abnormal. I quickly took the herbal pills I had carried with me.

I wanted to find something to eat to boost my energy. Only one grocery store was open in the lounge, and all other shops were closed. I bought two chocolate bars, a bottle of orange juice and a bottle of water.

A total of six passengers were waiting to board before departure. I stood up and walked around the lounge wearing a mask.

As I walked, I felt some pain in my throat and a little dryness; then I felt my chest tense, my breathing a little short, but no cough. I drank some orange juice, and the symptoms eased a little.

Suddenly, my tongue and mouth felt numb. I was a little shocked, and my heart was beating faster. To my knowledge, something was coming: I must be infected with the coronavirus!

I bought another bottle of orange juice and two chocolate bars because, during the pandemic, no meals were served during the flight.

During the last hour of waiting, I was a bit nervous. I even thought of abandoning the flight and immediately reporting to the airport authorities: "I am infected, please give me a test!" but I tried to restrain myself. At the same time, I kept a distance from everyone and always kept my mask on.

I thought: If I were hospitalized in the United States, it would take a long time, and unexpected things might happen; to get back to Sydney, I would have at least 30 hours to go, and everything could happen during this long flight.

I finally decided to move on with the journey. After boarding the plane, I prayed to Amitabha Buddha. During the next few hours of the flight, I felt no discomfort. The herbal pills I took had already worked.

I made transfers in Denver and San Francisco and was finally boarding my flight to Sydney on time. I felt much released.

I arrived in Sydney the next morning, April 8. Security was tight at Sydney airport, and every passenger needed to be checked before transfer to quarantine hotels.

I was fatigued when I arrived at the Travelodge Hotel in the city center, and after checking in, I had diarrhea again, and my stools smelled bad.

I still had herbal pills in my suitcase and quickly took some to fight the disease. At the same time, I told my family to prepare some herbal formulas for urgent needs. My wife brought the herbal soup to the hotel register together with meals. I prescribed the formulas myself and was confident they would work on the virus.

I felt my situation worsening in the evening and early morning of April 9. I felt strongly that something was attacking my upper body. In addition to fatigue, I felt a fever, occasional numbness in my tongue, and more diarrhea. In the middle of the night, I took the herbal soup my family had sent to the hotel in good time.

At noon on April 10, in addition to other symptoms, I felt my heart beat faster and thought the virus was attacking me again. It lasted for half an hour. This happened again later in the evening, and I took more herbs to fight the disease. For three or four days, my tongue had turned white and greasy.

On the fourth day of the quarantine, at about 5:00 am, I began to experience more symptoms, and my condition was no better. I was a little short of breath around 8:00-9:00 am, but I was running out of my herbal formulas. I called reception and told them about my situation. A doctor came to check my temperature, and it was ok. But I was not tested for covid-19.

The virus hit me twice a day for the next three days, attacking my heart and lungs. Every time I took herbs for defense, the confrontation lasted from half an hour to an hour. I felt tired and weak after every fight with the virus.

Although I felt dizzy several times during the confrontation, I did not lose consciousness. As a specialist, I felt the fighting was there. If I failed in a confrontation, the virus would enter my lungs and finally crush me.

On the night of April 14, I saw my tongue bleeding and purple-black. I was shocked and called the doctor. The doctor had no idea of the virus and thus gave

no meaningful feedback. After a few hours, my condition improved a lot. My tongue coating changed from white to reddish, with some dark areas.

I started to have a little phlegm and a cough. My urine had turned yellowish instead of white and transparent. I knew I had overcome the virus.

After the final battle on the night of the 14th, I felt exhausted. I had never had a good night's sleep for seven days, but now I had seven consecutive hours of sleep for the first time. I knew I had overcome the disease.

After eight days of hotel quarantine, the government arranged for testing. The next day, the doctor called me and said my test was negative: I did not have covid-19. I firmly believed that the Buddha in my mind had saved me from the virus.

Back home in Hurstville, I continued my reports on the coronavirus and vaccine developments. Citing the source of Miles Guo's whistleblows, I wrote several articles affirming that covid-19 was a biochemical weapon developed by the CCP and released to the world with malicious intentions. Miles Guo repeatedly warned the world of the risks of the vaccines, but few countries seemed to listen.

The vaccines were bio-weapons that killed more people than any physical war, but no governments were serious about this.

Australia is a lucky country. But with the coronavirus hit, millions of Aussies say they have no savings. After the covid-19 pandemic, what follows is a recession that will change a generation and many people will lose everything.

Chapter 11 Retreat

Because of Covid-19, the world was locked down. The plague changed the world and the lives of many.

After the covid outbreak, President Trump repeatedly criticized the World Health Organization, which had become the CCP's running dog. On April 14, 2020, Trump announced a freeze on financial aid to the WHO, claiming that the WHO was controlled by China and sent a letter to its Secretary General, Adhanom Tedros, asking for complete reform. On May 29, Trump announced that the United States had terminated its relationship with the WHO.

On November 3, 2020, the United States ushered in a new round of general elections. White House National Security Adviser O'Brien confirmed on August 9 that hackers directed by the CCP continued to launch cyberattacks to disrupt the infrastructure of the presidential election.

On December 2, Donald Trump claimed "a lot of bad things happening" during the election. He accused the presidential election of being rigged with fraud. Many believed Joe Biden stole the election in public eyes. The world was still ruled by evils and war was inevitable.

Donald Trump called the coronavirus "China virus," while Miles Guo provided a proper name, "CCP virus." In the CCP's virus epidemic and vaccine crisis, scandals in the world's scientific, medical, and media circles were exposed to unprecedented corruption. The world's population lost confidence in the scientists, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals they had trusted for a century.

The CCP officially announced the death toll in Wuhan at more than 2,000, but the real number exceeded 200 thousand. According to Miles Guo, the virus resulted from the CCP's inadvertent leakage of biological and chemical weapons.

However, to cover up its crimes and create global chaos, the CCP deliberately unleashed the virus on foreign countries and the Chinese people.

CCP data showed that by 2022, China had 70 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and 13.7 million "coronavirus-related deaths." Globally there were over 500 million infected cases and 6 million deaths. Xi Jinping's family made a fortune in this human catastrophe through viruses, vaccines, and covid tests.

The CCP does not represent China or the Chinese people. The CCP is the enemy of the Chinese people and traditional Chinese culture and civilization.

China faces many problems along with its economic advancement, either politically, socially, environmentally, or ethically. The Chinese government is highly bureaucratic with a rigid centralization of authority. The advantage of centralization of authority can be evident in that governments at all levels can mobilize national or regional resources on a mass scale for construction, and there is high efficiency. But the centralized regime dictated by a small group of elite who monopolizes political power holds the authority that penetrates the deepest reaches of societal structure. Under the communist regime, officials sought to completely control the thoughts and actions of ordinary people; many human and environmental disasters had been covered up.

Don't ever say that what happened in China has nothing to do with Australia here. Today communism has its toe on our doorstep.

The Chinese Communist Party feared the truth being exposed and did its utmost to cover things up. That was the reason why the CCP had to control the media and build the Great Firewall.

The "conscience of China" Gao Zhisheng said, "If I lose today, no one will believe in justice anymore!" This great lawyer still under CCP persecution said this evil dictatorship must be overthrown!

A foreigner said to me, "the Chinese are inhuman." When I heard this, it sounded like a joke; but it was deafening when I thought about it in greater depth. I had to admit it to be true. The Chinese lacked humanity and lived only with animal nature. But this is not unique to the Chinese; in today's world, both East and West, evil is everywhere. Evil forces are always doing the work of destroying humanity.

While Germany, France, Canada, Italy, and the United Kingdom were all submissive to the CCP regime, Australia was the only country to call for an independent inquiry into the origin of the coronavirus.

I could see the world population finally waking up to the risks of the Chinese dictatorship and being ready to fight back. I thought the mission of my news platform was finished, and thus I shut down my website Followcn entirely under the CCP's consistent hacks.

Good people are powerless to deal with such evil gangs as the Chinese Communist Party. But the power of God and the Buddha always prevail. God and the Buddha are always watching; I believe the heavenly power has appeared.

Oh! God and Amitabha Buddha! You are the saviors and refuge. Why we have suffered so much? Not only from Covid-19. I was born to suffer because my parents lacked the protection of God; The Chinese suffered because Communist China has no place for God; The world suffered because people have walked away from God.

During the lockdown retreat, I decided to write about the history of China for 100 years and reveal the truth about the Chinese Communist Party in a more significant task of one million characters.

I shut my door again and worked on my computer the following year.

I would not care what would happen in tomorrow's society. Those madmen may continue to govern; governments may be more shameless, and those in power may try to reduce the population with more plagues. Social polarization may be even more significant; a minimal number of interest groups may continue to owe the vast majority of the world's resources and wealth; AI machines may replace much manual labor, and the high-tech development of deformity may make more people with complex brains, simple limbs, and human faces may become more like aliens. Knowledge may be disrespected, art may become nonsense, poetry may have no aspirations, and music may become noise. Women may never want to marry, more families may be ruined, merchants and prostitutes may gain more honor, and human life expectancy may be reduced. I had no interest in learning about them. I focused my mind on the past.

I still lived in a world of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubts. All the same, I work, eat, entertain, and sleep, but in my mind, greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubts, and even pride gradually faded.

In the Dream of Red Mansions, the bareheaded monk told a maxim, "When you have accumulated enough, it is time for you to die."

The Buddha said if you could move materialism and not be moved by it, you were no different than the enlightened one.

"Do not envy those with title, honor, rank; the Buddha looks at all beings as equals; do good and never do evil and always keep your mind in peace." These were the Buddha's words and my words too.

I saw on TV every year summer fires destroying Blue Mountains houses, autumn floods destroying Queensland houses, car accidents destroying families on the roads, countless family businesses going bankrupt during the pandemic, and more man-made disasters putting families into desperation.

Most people thought of building wealth and accumulating precious things daily. Material wealth took years to build but seconds to be destroyed in fires, floods, theft, robbery, war, plagues, or the hands of immoral children. I thought I should never live for material wealth. I should be content with a budget shelter and a simple living.

Spring and winter came and left; autumn and summer went and came. The breeze blew, and the sun shined.

With gratitude, I said "hello" to the Buddha every morning I stepped out of the bed edge.

I was finally out for some fresh air when the restrictions were eased.

... ..

I did my meditation daily.

Yesterday, when I got up at four o'clock in the morning, I saw that the sky outside was dark and hazy, and the moon and the sun had long since disappeared. Suddenly there was a gust of wind; the road was rustling, with the sound of leaves falling. Soon, there was light rain in the mist, it was falling, and no shadow was seen as it fell to the ground.

I left the balcony and returned to my room.

As usual, I sat down cross-legged; In a moment, the inner body, the mind, and the outer world were quiet. A spiritual sense was clear... ..

Was it dark? Or was my mind bleak... ..

Was the wind blowing? Or was my mind stirring... ..

was the rain falling? Or was my mind tranquil... ..

The Buddha says, "Like the sun and the moon, traveling around space, illuminating the earth, benefiting all sentient beings, with no pride."

Confucius said, "The four seasons rotate, and all plants grow. Heaven is speechless." Oh my God! Spring and summer come and go; autumn and winter come and go; the breeze blows, and the sun shines. Does Heaven say anything?

After breakfast, I walked out of Hurstville.

A man of benevolence favors the mountains; a man of wisdom favors the ocean.

On sunny days, I often took a twenty-minute train to Cronulla Beach. As I walked along the coastal path leisurely, I saw peace in the children's laughter and harmony in the company of friendly visitors. I felt lucky and grateful for living in this blessed country.

Australia is a country of immigrants, still an inclusive society that respects choices and different opinions and lifestyles.

I liked to sit on the rocks with my feet in the sand under the water. When I closed my eyes, I heard the echoes of waves coming and leaving, hitting the stones with splashes on my face.

I looked into the distance. The sky was high and wide; the ocean was deep and boundless. I seemed to see God in the white clouds; I seemed to see the Buddha in the blue sky.

There was no end.

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