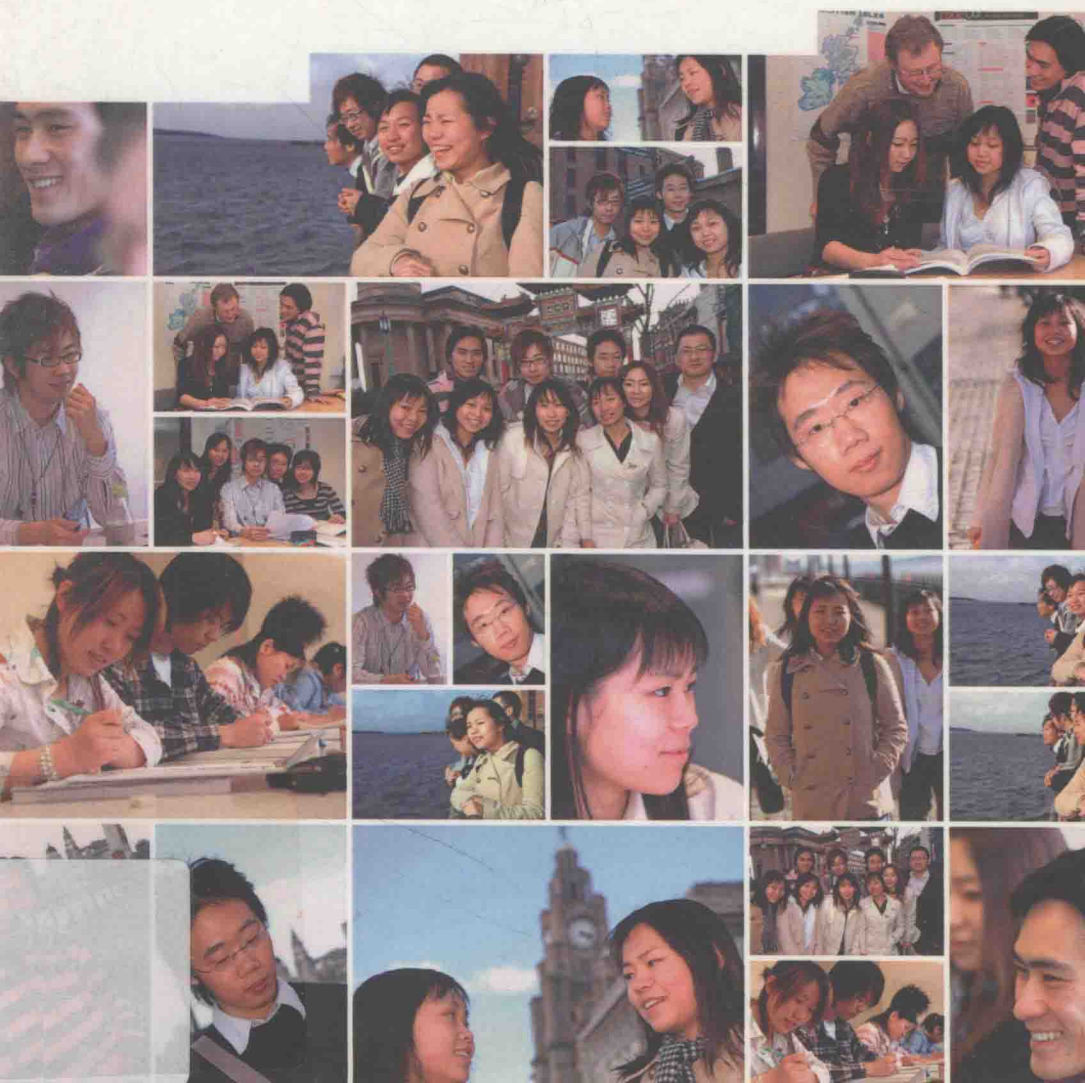


chinese

LEARNING JOURNEYS

chasing the dream

Edited by Feng Su



Chinese Learning Journeys:
Chasing the Dream

Edited by Feng Su



Trentham Books

Stoke on Trent, UK and Sterling, USA

Trentham Books Limited
Westview House 22883 Quicksilver Drive
734 London Road Sterling
Oakhill VA 20166-2012
Stoke on Trent USA
Staffordshire
England ST4 5NP

© 2011 Feng Su

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

First published 2011

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978 1 85856 477 7

Photo credit: *Many thanks to Liverpool Hope University's Marketing Department for permission to use the copyright protected images for the cover.*

Designed and typeset by Trentham Books Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by 4edge Limited, Hockley.

For Caroline and Ella, with love

The life stories recounted in Feng Su's book are epic journeys into the unknown. This inspiring volume shows the tenacity of these outstanding individuals, as they dig deep into their reserves of cultural and linguistic courage to pursue their dreams in the face of daunting challenges. – **Professor Bob Adamson, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong**

This is a fascinating collection of narratives telling us of a widely varying range of personal 'learning journeys'. It is an important reminder that the academy must provide a context or a 'habitat' that can nurture a wide range of learning journeys and a new diversity of educational dreams. – **Professor Jerry Wellington, University of Sheffield, UK**

Our bookshelves groan under the weight of explanations for the juggernaut of globalisation and China's multidimensional entanglement with it. This modest book, with more heart than pages, lightens the load a bit through first-person accounts of eight Chinese sojourners chasing their dreams across a diaspora of learning and living. Reflecting the universal human condition that life's transformative lessons are unpredictable and always unfinished, these intimate accounts of wrenching homesickness, indomitable will to achieve, and sheer delight in the wonder of the world are interwoven with epochal changes that have moved China from famine in the late 1950s to the glaring disparities of 2010's post-socialism. Central to each story is the development of what Catherine Bateson has called peripheral vision, a rooted yet empathetic ability to scan one's horizon for life-enabling serendipity. While these tales of persistence, hard work, and self doubt and cultivation are quintessentially Chinese, travellers of all origins will recognise in each story the leap of faith that translates confusion, persistence, and hard-won knowledge into hope, humanity, and future. Yes, 'everything can disappear overnight,' formal schooling is not always a pretty affair, foreign languages befuddle the tongue and numb the mind, and doctoral training can feel like a battle fought on three continents. But along the way education can help us know ourselves and others; can cultivate the dispositions of patience, careful listening, and humility necessary for appreciating difference; can mobilise resilience and resoluteness of purpose in the face of setback. Jon Nixon captures these lessons in a proverb-inspired epilogue worthy of each seeker's frailties and courage: 'the wind got up in the night and took our plans away'. Feng Su has produced a little gem of a book that quietly celebrates the choices we are capable of making when hard winds blow. – **Professor Heidi Ross at Indiana University, USA**

Feng Su's study provides a fascinating insight into the learning journeys of Chinese students. We follow richly diverse narratives of schooldays in China, the huge challenges of studying in English in British universities, the making of new friends, and the taking of community jobs, all of which transform the learner and engage the reader. – **Associate Professor Anne Hickling-Hudson at Queensland University of Technology, Australia**

Foreword

Since this is a narrative volume, or more precisely a volume of the narratives of Chinese learners reflecting upon their experiences in a wider world, I will begin this foreword with a small piece of my own narrative. When Mao Zedong died in the summer of 1976, followed shortly by the arrest of his closest collaborators, the so-called 'Gang of Four,' I was a young Canadian teacher in Hong Kong. I had been observing China from this vantage point since 1967, but had been unable to get a visa to visit. When Deng Xiaoping came forward at this important juncture to declare that China would now open up to 'modernisation, the world and the future,' I caught a vision that has stayed with me ever since. Education would be the first priority in this opening up, and education would transform China from an isolated and inward turned society to a dynamic outreaching society, that would be in a position to share its rich cultural heritage and civilisation with the world. I committed myself to contributing to this process of transformation, first through teaching in Shanghai in the early 1980s and secondly through researching both the internal and external consequences of the opening up. It has been quite a journey!

It thus gives me great pleasure to say a few words about the stories of Chinese learners collected in this fascinating volume. With typical modesty many of them have focused on unique aspects of their experiences of learning and professional development in England and elsewhere, and said less about the contributions they have made and are making. Almost all of the authors have begun their narratives from early childhood, depicting difficult and impoverished environments in rural China and the ways in which the sudden opening up of the educational system gave them the opportunity to 'chase their dreams'. All

are part of the huge number of Chinese students and scholars who have found their way to different learning environments around the world and often stayed to make unique professional contributions. As of 2009, the tally of Chinese students going abroad since 1978 is 1.62 million, with 497,000 having returned to China. With the acceleration of reform and openness the annual return rate has risen dramatically in recent years, from 10,000 in 2000 to about 42,000 in 2006, 69,300 in 2008, and 108,300 in 2009 (Pan, 2011).

The other piece of this story relates to the nature of the contribution being made by those million plus Chinese learners who have opted not to return for the time being at least. This book gives us fascinating insights into the professional career developments of some of these people, and the ways in which they are enriching the increasingly diverse environments of universities and other professional organisations in England and Wales, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Many have stayed in contact with colleagues and family members in China and some are making extraordinary efforts to contribute from afar to the remarkable transformations coming about in Chinese education and society. In this sense they are a part of the other side of the story of openness in China's recent development – the fact that China has become the sixth destination of choice for students from around the world, after the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Australia, with over 200,000 international students enrolled in Chinese universities in 2009 (CSC, 2009), up from 10,000 in 1991, 52,000 in 2000, 85,000 in 2002, 141,087 in 2005 and 195,503 in 2007 (Hayhoe and Liu, 2010).

This volume contributes in significant ways to a rich and growing literature on the Chinese learner complementing other recent titles such as *Revisiting the Chinese Learner: changing contexts, changing Education* (Chan and Rao, 2009) and *International Education and the Chinese Learner* (Ryan and Sleuthaug, 2010).

Ruth Hayhoe

*Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto*

President emerita, The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Editorial preface

This book charts the learning journeys undertaken by eight Chinese learners across national and continental boundaries and socio-cultural contexts. All eight contributors are originally from mainland China and each chapter takes the form of a reflective autobiographical account of their experiences of studying both in China and overseas. Their reflections are structured around the turning points and life changing choices they have had to make in chasing their dreams.

The book has its origins in my doctoral study of the Chinese international student experience of UK higher education: *Transformations through Learning* (Su, 2010). Although the analysis I developed in that study informs the focus of this book, I feel it is important that the contributions speak for themselves without any prior editorial interpretation. All I would want to say by way of guidance to the reader is that the narrative form – the idea of the learning journey as a passage across time and space – is a central feature of each of the chapters and reflects my own concern as editor with learning as both holistic and multi-layered. The significance lies in the story.

Other than that I simply want to express two hopes for this book. I hope, first, that it will contribute to our understanding of the Chinese learner's overseas experience and how that experience is shaping the aspirations of a future generation of Chinese citizens. Their dreams of the future will shape not only their own individual fates, but also the future of Chinese society. It is this generation – informed by international travel and overseas study – that will play a leading role in the creation of the emergent China.

Second, I hope that the book will contribute to our understanding of what it means to be a learner in the 21st Century regardless of our particular origins and destinations. All the contributions to this volume relate in their different ways to the complex and turbulent history of China over the last fifty years. However, the major themes of border-crossing and inter-connectivity impinge on us all. In a world shaped by forces of globalisation, the experience of transition and displacement is one we all share.

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me while I was editing this book. In particular, I thank Jon Nixon for his generosity in sharing his thoughts on many aspects of the writing and, more importantly, for the warmth of his friendship. I owe special thanks to Bob Adamson for his detailed and thoughtful comments on an early draft of this book. Thanks also to Pauline Nixon for her final read-through. I thank my publisher, Gillian Klein, for having trust in me and providing advice and encouragement which I desperately needed during the process of editing this book. Thanks also to Liverpool Hope University for grants which enabled me to attend conferences to meet with the contributors of various chapters. I thank Bart McGettrick and Wendy Bignold, at the Faculty of Education of Liverpool Hope University, for their support. Finally, I thank my family who have always been there for me. Without their love and support, I could not possibly have completed this book.

Feng Su

November 2010

A note on terminology

There are two approaches to presenting Chinese names in English. One is to follow the Chinese convention and present the family name followed by the given name. An alternative approach is to follow the Anglo-American convention in presenting the given name followed by the family name. The second approach has been adopted in this book, since some contributors have previously used this form in their published work and most use it routinely for their professional work.

The term 'China' used in this book refers to The People's Republic of China (PRC), which governs mainland China and two special administrative regions – Hong Kong and Macau. It should not be confused with The Republic of China (ROC), which is the 'official' name for Taiwan.

Notes on contributors

Anwei Feng, PhD, is a Reader in Education and Director of the Graduate School in the College of Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) at Bangor University, UK. He has had teaching and research experience in tertiary institutions in a number of countries including China, Qatar, Hong Kong, Singapore as well as the UK. His recent publications include *English Language across Greater China* (2011); *Becoming Interculturally Competent through Education and Training* (2009, with M. Byram and M. Fleming) and *Bilingual Education in China: practices, policies and concepts* (2007), all published by Multilingual Matters.

Xiang Li, BA, is a Graduate Trainee in an oil corporation in Hong Kong. She has studied in Sun Yat-Sen University in China and Liverpool Hope University in the UK. She has a combined degree in Linguistics and Business Studies. Her research interest is in the area of second language acquisition. In her spare time, she enjoys playing basketball, listening to BBC radio and volunteering for charities.

Jue Jun Lu, LL.M., is a solicitor at an international law firm in London. She completed her secondary education in Shanghai, China. During her seven years in the UK, she has studied and worked in Chester, Liverpool and London. She speaks Mandarin, Shanghainese, Cantonese and Spanish. She holds a first class law degree, a Distinction in vocational legal training (Legal Practice Course) and an LL.M. in Professional Legal Practice. Her interests include swimming, karate, trekking and travelling.

Jon Nixon, PhD, has held chairs at four UK universities and currently holds an honorary chair at the University of Sheffield, UK. His publications include, *Interpretive Pedagogies for Higher Education: Arendt, Berger, Said, Nussbaum and their legacies* (Continuum, 2011), *Higher Education and the Public Good: imagining the university* (Continuum, 2010), *Towards the Virtuous University: the moral bases of academic practice* (Routledge, 2008), and (edited with B. Adamson and F. Su) *The Reorientation of Higher Education: compliance and defiance* (Springer and CERC of The University of Hong Kong, 2011).

Feng Su, PhD, is a Research Fellow at Liverpool Hope University, UK. He has studied and worked in China and the UK. His primary research interest is in cross-cultural learning contexts and the development of the learner within higher education settings with particular reference to overseas students. He is the co-editor (with B. Adamson and J. Nixon) of *The Reorientation of Higher Education: compliance and defiance*. He is currently working (with B. McGettrick) on an edited book *Professional Ethics: education for a humane society*.

Mamtimyn Sunuodula, MA, is a specialist in Asian and Middle Eastern languages and information resources at Durham University, UK. He studied and lectured in educational psychology in China before coming to the UK. He was a lecturer in psychology and conducted research on Uyghur education in Xinjiang. He has worked for the BBC World Service and the British Library. He currently teaches research skills to postgraduate students and conducts research in the field of second language learning and identity.

Wenli Wu, PhD, is a Post Doctoral Researcher in a university in Hong Kong. She gained her doctoral degree from the University of Warwick, UK. Her doctoral research explores international East Asian postgraduate students' experience of cross-cultural adjustment in UK higher education. During her seven years' study in the UK, she worked as a Chinese language tutor, international officer and interpreter at the same university. Previously, she was a qualified English language teacher in China. Her current research interest lies in second language acquisition.

Jesse Chiu Lai Yi, MA, is a teacher of Japanese Language in Hong Kong. She has studied and worked in Hong Kong, Japan, UK and Korea. She speaks fluent Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, English and Korean. She holds a combined degree in Business and Multimedia technology awarded by University of Liverpool, UK and a MA degree in Japanese Language and Teaching awarded by the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Xiaowei Zhou, PhD, has recently completed her doctoral study at the University of Manchester, UK. She also has a BA in English Language and Literature and an MA in Linguistics from Peking University, China. Her doctoral research explores the narrativised academic experiences of six Chinese students studying an Economics related master programme in the UK with a focus on the phenomenon of academic acculturation, the complexities of culture and the culturality of individuals.

Contents

Foreword by *Ruth Hayhoe* • ix

Editorial preface • xi

Acknowledgements and a note on terminology • xii

Notes on contributors • xiii

Chapter 1

**A Chinese lecturer in an English university:
an unfinished journey • 1**

Feng Su

Chapter 2

**A Shanghainese solicitor in London:
'By endurance we conquer' • 15**

Jue Jun Lu

Chapter 3

**A Chinese academic in a Welsh university:
luck, reality, dream • 31**

Anwei Feng

Chapter 4

**An undergraduate student in Liverpool:
a woman's struggle • 51**

Xiang Li

Chapter 5

**An Uyghur linguist at an English university:
intercultural encounters • 69**

Mamtimyn Sunuodula

Chapter 6

**A doctoral student in Manchester:
becoming an independent learner • 89**

Xiaowei Zhou

Chapter 7

**A post-doctoral researcher in Hong Kong:
'I am not who I used to be' • 105**

Wenli Wu

Chapter 8

**A teacher of foreign language in Hong Kong:
the centrality of language • 119**

Jesse Chiu Lai Yi

Chapter 9

Epilogue – realising the dream • 135

Jon Nixon

References • 147

Index • 153

1

A Chinese lecturer in an English university: an unfinished journey

Feng Su

I was born in 1978. The province in which my hometown is located is mainly agriculture based. My parents were working in a small factory at the time – my father was a technician and my mother was a factory worker on the production line. My grandparents were living in a small village near the town. One year later, my younger brother was born. Due to the start of one of the most controversial social policies of all time (Greenhalgh, 2008) – the one-child policy in China in 1979 – my parents were penalised for having two boys. Their salaries were frozen for a year, which made life extremely hard for the family. We barely survived. Among my earliest recollections, the most memorable moment was my birthday each year because my mum would give me a boiled egg as a birthday present. My dream at the time was to be able to have a proper birthday celebration although I did not know what would have counted as a proper one. Since then, I have not been keen on celebrating birthdays. They remind me of the tough living conditions in the past.

School years in the Chinese countryside

I started primary school at the age of 8. There were no kindergartens or nurseries available in the town. Even if they had been available, my family probably would not have been able to afford them. There were five compulsory years of primary school education at that time – now

there are six. When I was in the second year, my parents left the factory and started their own small manufacturing business. In 1988, it was still rare to see private businesses in inland China as the government had, until very recently, viewed them as a form of evil capitalism. The factory employed about ten workers. It was very challenging for my parents to make a profit because there was not much support for private business in the form of credit from banks and networks for selling the products across regions. They were too busy with the business to look after two young boys at home. As a result, they decided to send the older one – me – to stay with a distant relative in a remote village named Xuezhuan about fifteen kilometres from my home town.

Being a child, I was not very happy to leave home to study in the remote countryside. It meant that I had to leave my friends, family and familiar environment, and venture into the unknown. The living conditions and harshness of the life in the village were much worse than I had expected. There was no electricity and the nearest town was five kilometres away; drinking water was taken from a community well. It took about 30 minutes to walk to the village primary school in a field, and when it rained or snowed, it took much longer. However, the family I stayed with treated me like one of their own and I started to get to know some of the neighbours' children. In the following two years, I was fully engaged with life in the village. Like many other children, I had to work in the fields after school, particularly in harvest seasons. I remember looking after a horse, two cattle and a number of sheep.

School life was not as challenging as in my home town. The main subjects included Chinese literature, Mathematics, History and Physical Education-my favourite subject because I would get the opportunity to play in the fields next to the school. English was not yet offered as a subject. I did not start learning English until a few years later when I went to a city high school. However, in primary schools in China today, many students are learning English from year three. At present, English is compulsory throughout primary and secondary schooling, and in higher education, and is learned even in kindergartens in some coastal cities. In retrospect, government attitudes and policies towards English have been shaped by China's relationship with the outside world and by the political, social and economical development of China. Historically English, as a foreign language, can be regarded as a barometer of

modernisation (Ross, 1992). My father's generation would have taken Russian as a compulsory school subject in the 1950s given China's close relationship with the former Soviet Union.

There was some fun living in the countryside. For instance, there was no big pressure to excel at school as long as you could pass the class tests. I would treasure all the opportunities for entertainment, like going to a movie, even if this meant walking miles to another village in the evening. This was often a treat for me and other kids because it only happened on special occasions like weddings and the birth of baby boys. The movies were shown in an open field with the help of a petrol-powered electricity generator. While you were enjoying the movie, you would pray for good weather so it would not be interrupted. The love of movies stays with me today. The conditions for watching movies have improved beyond my wildest imagination, from an open field to a 3D IMAX cinema in the UK many years later.

My mother visited me from time to time, but I rarely went home due to the distance. It was both the happiest and the saddest time when my mother visited me; it was very sad to say goodbye to her at the end of each visit. I did not like village life most of the time and I found it difficult. I always dreamt of leaving the village and being reunited with my family in the town. However, those two years provided me with an opportunity to witness how harsh life could be in rural China. Many years later, whenever I have a difficult time, I always tell myself there could not be anything worse than coping with life in that village. If you really dislike or fear such conditions, you will work harder to make a difference. Now I believe my experiences in those two years have motivated me to strive against the odds in my later life. Every time I recollect life in the village, I feel appreciative even though I did not see it that way at the time.

Becoming a Communist in China

After a two-year stay in the countryside, I was reunited with my family. Not long afterwards, we moved to a small city and my parents gave up their private business and joined a state-owned factory as engineers. The main reason for the move was that my father wanted my brother and me to get a better education.

Along with the one-child policy, there is an equally infamous and controversial family registration policy in China. The *hukou* is a household registration record and a residence permit which identifies a Chinese person as a resident of one area and holds personal information on all members in the family, such as name, date of birth, name of parents and name of spouse if married. There are two kinds of *hukou*, one for rural residents and one for city dwellers. It has been used by the authorities to control the flow of residents from rural areas to cities. The *hukou* makes a huge difference to a Chinese person's life. An urban *hukou* brings with it a number of benefits, such as education, employment, housing and health care which are not available to a rural *hukou* holder. If a person wants to live in a city, permission has to be obtained from the authorities. It has effectively and unfairly created two tiers of social class, based on where a person is born. In recent years, the *hukou* system has been relaxed a little, due to the mass migration of workers from rural areas to cities to seek a better life and drive the growth of the Chinese economy. However, in the 1980s it was very difficult to change the *hukou* from one category to another. My parents did so by giving up their small private business in exchange for the right to move to a small city and work in a state-run factory. Only children of urban *hukou* holders could attend city schools.

The high school years in the city were a struggle for me. I attributed this to the fact that I had received a disadvantaged primary school education in the small town and the countryside. I sometimes even found it difficult to make myself understood because of my strong regional accent. I had to learn standard Mandarin Chinese along with a number of challenging subjects. English was the most difficult subject for me and I did not enjoy it. English classes focused on grammar rules and vocabulary. There was little speaking practice. I could not see the point of studying it apart from the fact that it was a compulsory subject for the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE). At the time, I longed for the day when I would no longer have to learn English. Ironically, many years later English became my second language and I use it daily.

Confucius says: 'to be fond of something is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it' (Confucius, *The Analects*, Book VI, 20). This is a true reflection on my experience of learning. I did not find much enjoyment in studying during high school