



# DREAM BEYOND the PACIFIC

CANADIAN TEACHERS IN CHINA

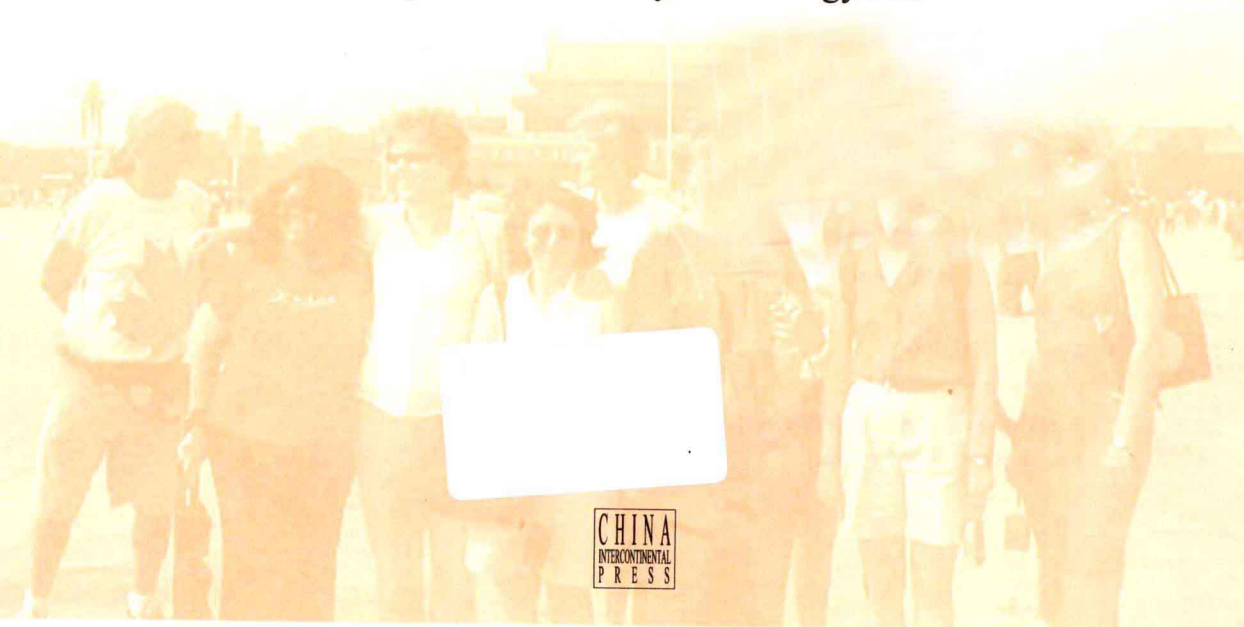
JULIA NINGYU LI

CHINA  
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PRESS

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CANADIAN TEACHERS IN CHINA

Compiled & edited by Julia Ningyu Li



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## PREFACE

As China determinedly opened her long-locked door to the outside world, people of other nations poured into this country, and more are coming. The relationship between China and the rest of the world enters a new phase of historical significance. The drastic changes in recent China have greatly affected the outsiders' traditional vision of this country and call for a much desired new vision. When reading the book *Dream Beyond the Pacific*, I was fascinated by the descriptions of the lecturing, teaching, living and traveling experience of the Canadian teachers and scholars, and much appreciate their contributions to the improvement of Chinese education and their efforts to achieve a better understanding of China and of themselves.

Most of the contributors of this book are teachers or specialists in education, and are or used to be invited by Bond International College, or recommended by Canada China Education Council, to work at colleges and universities, schools, teacher training centers, or institutes of education sciences in China. Among them are both young people fresh with their teaching career and experts on China with many years of working experience in China. Some are the pioneers of English teaching in China, and others, scholars and educators of world renown. Their traces can be found across China: Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province in the North, Sanya, Hainan Province in the South, Shanghai in the East, and Xi'an in the West. They enthusiastically give lectures and English teaching wherever they go, either in such metropolises as Beijing and Guangzhou, or in small towns like Longkou in Shandong

and Shuyang in Jiangsu. They have experienced China's opening to the outside world and her reform especially in education, witnessing that "eclectic influences...have been not only absorbed but adapted to China's own unique society and polity" (Ruth Hayhoe: "Learning from Chinese Teachers and Educators"), and realizing China's striking economic success and social progress in recent decades rests on the strengths of its own educational heritage. They "...are multi-tasking in the extreme, preparing for and teaching classes, acquainting [themselves] with new colleagues, acclimatizing to a new part of the world, and adapting and accommodating to a strange culture. [They] are in overdrive!" (Nancy Sorensen: "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained") They lead the life of an ordinary Chinese: shopping in a grocery store, visiting a fabric market and a tailor, taking the challenge in crossing busy street and surviving the summer heat in Guangzhou... They prepare in *hanyupinyin* what they are going to order at their best loved Chinese restaurants, and learn Chinese through proverbs and allusions. They have found the "life saving" tricks, which guarantee their happy experience in China. They travel a lot in China, from those imperial mountains to the small towns with pure traditional custom. They do "experience the vast and complex historical underpinnings of China," and come to have a mental clarity they have never experienced. They have discovered "China's beauty lies not in its physical landscape, but in the hearts of the Chinese people." (Elissa McRae: "I Never Thought I'd Go to China") When the initial excitement gets over, they ponder with great seriousness on what they have experienced and try to get a new understanding of this country, her people and her education and culture traditions. The idea of China isn't new to most of them since they "grew up watching Kung Fu movies and eating at Chinese restaurants, and...even studied it briefly in history class. But studying and preparing are two very different things." (Jonathan McRae: "Once upon a Time in China") When confronted with differences, they appeal to mutual understanding and adaptation. When they "have found that understanding and a smile can often evaporate an embarrassing or a seemingly confrontational event," they come out of their stint in China with a greater sensitivity towards cultures. (Mark

Butcher: “Understanding Each Other”) They used to take for granted that China should learn from the west and had no idea what the west could learn from China. Their observation and interview in Chinese schools changed their mind. (Jim Sebastian: “Impressions of Education in China”)

*Dream Beyond the Pacific* showcases the unprecedented achievements and the recent development in education that China has got since the reform, the proud civilization of a long, long history and the hospitality of the common people. The English version of the same book will be distributed worldwide, so that the whole world will get a better knowledge of the great progress of China’s reform, and the positive changes in people’s life. It can be predicted that more foreign experts and teachers will come to China to pursue their career. As an agency for intellectual-resource introduction, China State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs promises to provide more favorable conditions for those who come to work in China.

China cannot separate herself from the world community in her development, nor can the world segregate China for its stability and prosperity. We do welcome teachers with “China dreams” come to us from all parts of the world, and, with joint efforts, we all can realize “One dream.” It took Leslie Jeanneret, a specialist in education, half a century to get her China dream realized; it was 11 years before Prof. Ruth Hayhoe, a well-known educator who began her teaching career in Hong Kong in 1967, set her foot on mainland China in 1978; And, Elissa McRae, who had never thought she would go to China, realized her dream to teach in a Chinese classroom within 6 months... Today, the way to the realization of dream is no more that long. We sincerely wish all the foreign teachers get dreams realized in a quicker, nicer and better way!

**Ji Yunshi**

General Director

State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs, PRC

## INTRODUCTION

**D**reams wing their ways across the Pacific towards the West. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, so many Chinese students and scholars dreamt of flying across the Pacific Ocean to study at North American universities. In this period of political tolerance, various schools of Western philosophy, ideological trends, education theories and approaches flooded Chinese universities and colleges. Yet, due to less developed mass media of the day, life, both material and spiritual, in western societies was only fondled and cherished in the imagination of Chinese people. With my PhD in Education conferred on in 1992, I had an opportunity to go to Toronto, Canada. What impressed me most upon my arrival in Toronto Pearson International Airport was the washroom! They were spacious and furnished with full-length mirrors, uniform closets, spanking new toilets and water basins, with lingering pleasant smell of air freshener. They were but real dressing rooms in my mind! It was unnecessary to follow one's nose to find a washroom? And how could it be possible to find a washroom without following one's nose! This, however, quite unexpectedly turned to be my first encounter with Toronto and of Canada as well. Then the panoramic Highway 401 and Don Valley Parkway registered themselves on my insatiable eyeballs. Those crisscross and even multi-layered freeways, with 8 lanes in the same direction at the widest part, was what I had never seen in my life. It looked as if they were capable of taking you to wherever you hoped to reach. During the days of my stay in Canada, I could not help exploring the society and culture of the nation in the manner of peeling an onion. Though eyes were much irritated, this tour of onion was non-stop with the intention to arrive at the truism. Time flies, and

sixteen years have gone without any realization. While I have been trying to get myself familiar with the Western society, China has been undergoing drastic changes that no time has seen before.

Dreams wing their ways across the Pacific toward to the East. The 1990s witnessed a large number of Westerners arrive to work in China through the arrangement of the State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs of PRC. In 2002, exactly 10 years after I first set foot in Canada, I took a group of Canadian principals and teachers to Nanshan International Conference Centre, a village-owned hotel over one hundred kilometers away from Yantai City in Shandong Province. The facilities in the hotel, its washrooms in particular, are much more luxurious than what I saw in Canada ten years ago. The 100-plus-hole golf court lies in the beautiful country scenery with a ramification of freeway networks accessible to traveling villagers. Such are the changes to villages, let alone metropolises like Beijing and Shanghai. No wonder one Canadian teacher commented: "Beijing's central financial district, barely ten years in the making, makes Toronto's Bay street look like hick town." (Shirley Turchet: "The Crouching Dragon Is Ready to Leap") Now it is this Canadian's turn to peel a Chinese onion. The Pacific Ocean has been seeing an increasing number of Canadian principals and teachers fly over to China, a land teeming with bustling changes of modernizations in a fascinating mysterious culture of thousands of years, where they give lectures, go sightseeing, enjoy their lives and get dreams realized.

One World, One Dream. In the era of modern information technology, people have been brought closer so that the sharing of resources is facilitated. As a result of world convergence, countries become much alike in all prevailing high-rising buildings and Central Business Districts with similar pattern and layout. All these make it difficult for visitors to tell where they are. "Western fast food chains, supermarkets, the idolized Western images and modern living facilities are nowhere to be avoided" in China, which "...is definitely

being affected by the west, but it's absorbing the influence into its spirit; the spirit itself remains its own. In talking with people, working with them, just watching them walk down the street, I get the sense that each person is six thousand years old. Each carries within himself or herself the accumulated wisdom, humour and art of the entire country... it is old enough, secure enough in its national identity, not to fight them, but to embrace them." (Jonathan McRae: "Once upon a Time in China") When the initial excitement gets over, and a down-to-earth life gets into gear on an exotic land, these Canadians come across their first bombardment of clashes in culture and education.

Primary disagreements present themselves in education: In school management, it is routine at Canadian schools that school calendars and timetables are well-arranged early before a new term begins, and everybody, either a principal or a teacher, should follow them rigidly unless there are emergencies. This, however, is different to Chinese schools, where modifications to them can be made for such reasons as entrance examinations arranged at different levels. With regard to the classroom teaching, Canadian teachers always believe that students' motivations, home-assignments and examination achievements are of equal importance in evaluating students' performance. As for teaching resources, Chinese teachers tend to be textbook-based, whereas their Canadian counterparts love to use supplementary materials. Nancy has taught in China for quite a few times. "I have yet to meet a Chinese teacher, though, who fully understands why Canadian teachers use the photocopier so much. Resources!" (Nancy Sorensen: "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained") Canadian teachers are sometimes so baffled with a roomful of students of 50 more that they have no idea to manage their teaching activities for effective language-skill training.

Cultural adaptation, however, is never secondary. Many Canadian teachers had no experience of living abroad. Their nervousness of changing their ways of life is illustrated in the comment: "I was afraid to leave behind the culture and lifestyle that I had become so

familiar with.” (Elizabeth Wreford: “Get on Your Way”) They take for granted that quality life is valued over work. Hence, language barriers in daily communication, different climate and dietary habits, inconveniences in living facilities could be issues big enough to have the Canucks pack up for homeward journey, whereas they mean little or even nothing to the Chinese, who always favor work more than life. That is why Canadian teachers feel it important to address these issues in such articles as “Surviving Summer Heat in Guangzhou” and “Five ‘Live Saving’ Tricks.” (by Jane Young) In addition, Chinese hospitality, typical of Chinese culture, to honor guests with banquets and companion to tours, and ask “personal questions” often make Canadian teachers feel uncomfortable since they have been brought up to show respect for privacy and keep distance.

All the disagreements, both in education and cultural adaptation, can be easily detected between the lines of the book. While there should be no either-right-or-wrong judgment of the differences, to co-live with them is sure a transcending experience. Since Bond International College set up its first joint schools with China in 1997, and Canada-China Education Council started recruiting Canadian teachers to work in China in 2000, hundreds of Canadian principals and teachers have been to China. Among them, some withdrew themselves to Canada only after a 3-day stay in China, and some have stayed there for eight years. “China is not for everyone. However, if we are flexible, open to cultural differences, able to appreciate the special qualities of a country with thousands of years of history, it could be the opportunity of a lifetime.” (Nancy Sorensen: “Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained”)

Down below the dreams is the Pacific, on one side with a profound 5000-year-old civilization desiring to get integrated with global culture; on the other side the new vast continent of multiple chances to achieve prosperity. Crossing the Pacific, whatever direction we go, is a challenge and an adventure. Once we make the successful crossing, what we have realized is not only a dream, but also self transcendence.

We will never look at the world in the same way again! No matter which direction to go, being beyond is nothing but a challenge, an experience, and an adventure! With this enjoyment of being beyond, we realize a dream, and have a new self and a brand-new life as well!

**Julia Ningyu Li, PhD**

President, Bond International College  
President, Canada China Education Council

# Learning from Chinese Teachers and Educators

## ● Ruth Hayhoe

Professor, Department of Theory and Policy Studies, OISE, University of Toronto, and President emerita, Hong Kong Institute of Education.



**I**n 1967 I moved to Hong Kong shortly after graduating from University of Toronto, and taught for eleven years in a girls secondary school in Kowloon. Those were the years when the “cultural revolution” was raging in China, and it was difficult for Canadians to have the opportunity to visit. I was able to make my first visit only eleven years later in 1978, as China began opening up to modernization, the world and the future, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. As I traveled by train from Hong Kong to Guangzhou, then on to Beijing, from Beijing to Shanghai, and then back to Guangzhou, I drank in my first views of the Mainland—the neat green paddyfields and the rural villages one could see from the train windows, the great rivers and bridges, cities that were clean and orderly, but with few new buildings and bicycle traffic as the dominant mode of transport. Here were people who had been isolated from the outside world for more than a decade, and caught up in intense political upheavals. Yet they appeared to me also as people deeply rooted in their own communities, with a strong sense of identity and an awareness of the continuity and rich cultural heritage that came with being Chinese.

As China opened up, I caught a vision of how rewarding it would be to contribute to China’s modernization project as an educator, both through teaching in a Chinese university and researching Chinese



On the New Year's day of 1993 Professor Ruth Hayheo hosted Chinese scholars at her home in Toronto. The compiler sits first on the left.

higher education and its relations with the Western world. My vision also included a sense of how much China could contribute to the global community, based on its rich civilization and its dramatic struggles with modernization efforts over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I hoped that I could be a bridge between China and Canada, and stimulate dialogue that would lead to mutual learning and mutual respect on both sides.

In the thirty years from 1978 to 2008, China has changed in ways that few of us could have anticipated. For me, it has been a privilege to observe and participate in many of these changes, as my teaching career evolved. From 1980 to 1982 I taught at Fudan University in Shanghai, working with the first two cohorts of university students recruited after the end of the “cultural revolution”—the classes of 1977 and 1978. From 1982 to 1984, I completed a doctoral thesis at the University of London, researching the evolution of China’s higher education policy as it related to Japan, Europe, North America and

the Soviet Union over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When I returned to Canada in 1984, I was delighted to discover that the Canadian International Development Agency had signed a memorandum of cooperation with China one year earlier, with higher education as one of the main areas of focus. As I began my own academic career as a university teacher at OISE, I was able also to develop a major project for joint doctoral training with seven teacher education universities in all regions of China. Under this project, 22 Chinese doctoral students and visiting scholars came to Canada, while 11 Canadian doctoral students studied and did research in China.

From 1989 to 1991, I got a different perspective on Canada-China relations in education, when I found myself on loan to the Canadian Embassy in Beijing, with the task of coordinating exchanges and cooperation in education, science and culture. It was a difficult period, but a period of deeply meaningful exchange and understanding, with Canadian studies centres established in many Chinese universities and large numbers of Chinese and Canadian students and faculty members taking up opportunities for study and research in each others' countries. When I returned to Canada in 1991, the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a period of dialogue among civilizations meant that Canada, along with most of the Western world, was more open than ever before to learning from Asia, and my sense of the importance of mutual learning and mutual respect between Canada and China found more resonance than ever before.

1997 was another turning point in China's opening up to the world. It was the year Hong Kong returned to China, after 152 years as a British colony. It was also the year I returned to Hong Kong, thirty years after starting my career there as a young teacher—this time as Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, a newly established tertiary institution responsible for upgrading teachers for all Hong Kong schools to degree level and above. Over a period of four and a half years I was able to participate in the creation of a new Hong Kong identity as a special administrative region of China and the nurturing of many fruitful ties between HKIE and teachers universities in



In June 2008 Professor Ruth Hayheo (second right) and Jane Gaskell (first left), President of Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, visited Nanjing-Bond International College.

different parts of China. There were also new opportunities for cooperation with Canada, including the development of a three way relationship among HKIE, OISE's Institute of Child Development and Nanjing Normal University that resulted in Hong Kong's first Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Now that I have been back in Canada again for six years, there has been time to reflect on these encounters with a changing China, and to publish a memoir which celebrates them: *Full Circle: A Life with Hong Kong and China* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004). Three lessons stand out as part of the treasure of my many experiences with China and Chinese people.