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## The Influence of Confucianism on Identity Formation of a Multi-Skilled Migrant: An Autoethnography

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## The Influence of Confucianism on Identity Formation of a Multi-Skilled Migrant: An Autoethnography

### Abstract

In this autoethnographical study, I examine how my identities were influenced by Confucianism. Two main Confucian concepts were examined: “selfperfection,” and “filial piety and submissiveness.” As a migrant who left Macau for Australia at fifteen, I have been immersed in diverse cultural climates, experienced gender bias, identity crisis and racial discrimination. I consider all experiences as essential steps of my evolution with ethnographic, interpretative, phenomenological and narrative understandings. This paper introduces the term “seasonal fluctuations” as a way to describe the changing meanings of my lived experiences that were interrogated by my three distinctive personalities: The Writer, The Interpreter and The Observer. This triple hermeneutics is borrowed from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. For me, my gender, birth place and birth order had pre-determined my fate before learning took place. The Confucian values that my family and I adopted further shaped my identities. Issues of gender equity and social justice had been discussed in the interrogation of my story, my identities remain fluid. Finally, the challenges and benefits of conducting an autoethnography were discussed. I acknowledge that qualitative research can have a transformative influence on the individuals conducting the inquiry, as we reflect on our participation in the world around ourselves.

### Keywords

Confucianism, Autoethnography, GenderBias, Identity Crisis, Racial Discrimination, Lived Experiences, ExperientialLayering, Seasonal Fluctuations

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## The Influence of Confucianism on Identity Formation of a Multi-Skilled Migrant: An Autoethnography

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*In this autoethnographical study, I examine how my identities were influenced by Confucianism. Two main Confucian concepts were examined: “self-perfection,” and “filial piety and submissiveness.” As a migrant who left Macau for Australia at fifteen, I have been immersed in diverse cultural climates, experienced gender bias, identity crisis and racial discrimination. I consider all experiences as essential steps of my evolution with ethnographic, interpretative, phenomenological and narrative understandings. This paper introduces the term “seasonal fluctuations” as a way to describe the changing meanings of my lived experiences that were interrogated by my three distinctive personalities: The Writer, The Interpreter and The Observer. This triple hermeneutics is borrowed from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. For me, my gender, birth place and birth order had pre-determined my fate before learning took place. The Confucian values that my family and I adopted further shaped my identities. Issues of gender equity and social justice had been discussed in the interrogation of my story, my identities remain fluid. Finally, the challenges and benefits of conducting an autoethnography were discussed. I acknowledge that qualitative research can have a transformative influence on the individuals conducting the inquiry, as we reflect on our participation in the world around ourselves. Keywords: Confucianism, Autoethnography, Gender Bias, Identity Crisis, Racial Discrimination, Lived Experiences, Experiential Layering, Seasonal Fluctuations.*

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### Preamble

Recently, I was invited to be a panellist at the Monash Asia Institute International Symposium. Apart from asking intelligent questions, my job was to present a paper on how Asia Literacy was taught at Victorian secondary schools using my own experience as a migrant and my school as a case study. I left Macau for Australia when I was fifteen. I will be celebrating my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in September, the arrival of the half century— the year of Jubilee and liberty; so 2014 seems to be an appropriate year for me to write about my life. Tenni, Smythe and Boucher (2003) argued that the researcher is required to study himself/herself in order to discover the reasons underpinning personal experience and professional practice. The research questions that I attempt to answer are, “Who am I? Who and what have influenced me to become who I am?” Willingham (2009) asserted that “we teach who we are” (p. 59), so it is necessary to explore my roots in order to present an up-to-date picture of my life and work as an educator who has taught for thirty years in various disciplines including music, languages (Chinese & ESL) and psychology across a number of different settings both in Australia and overseas — ranging from pre-school to secondary colleges, from private studios to commercial music and language schools, from broadcasting booth to television screen, and from recording studios to concert halls.

## The Researcher and Her Research

I am a musician, psychotherapist, author, translator-interpreter, composer, researcher, studio and secondary school teacher. Over the course of my studies and work, I was fortunate to be granted with numerous scholarships, fellowships, community grants, academic awards, and sponsorships for overseas trainings, as well as being a cultural ambassador representing Australia. In 2013, I took a year off work to commence a PhD. I received the Australian Postgraduate Award, which continues to give me financial support for my research. Furthermore, I have been offered to become a co-author with my supervisor for a new book. As opportunity knocked, I resigned in April, 2014 from my well paid position as an expert teacher at the Department of Education after ten years of service, to join the Faculty of Education as a full time PhD candidate, a part time research assistant and teaching associate.

For a mono-lingual evolving to become a tri-lingual speaker, growing up had been a linguistically challenging and culturally confusing journey for me. From experiencing culture shock in my early stage of adaptation, and identity crisis later during the process of assimilation to the Australian culture; I had struggled to integrate my original culture to the culture of the new host country. Occasionally, I still experience disorientation when main stream Australians are blinded by the colour of my skin that considered me as an ethnic minority. On the other hand, recent Chinese migrants nicknamed earlier Chinese settlers as *banana* (yellow outside, white inside). They do not acknowledge my ethnic roots, because of my Australian mannerisms and the ways I handle problems which primarily deal with business, instead of handling a complex web of inter-group/intra-group relationships (*Guanxi*) first, which is the stereo-typical *Chinese Way*.

My doctoral research investigates the influence of the fusion of Confucianism and Western culture including Christianity and Humanistic Psychology on family dynamics, learning and identity formation of Chinese-Australian musicians. This topic covers a vast domain of knowledge inquires including philosophy, religions, psychology, languages, and cultural studies. The complexities of my multi-dimensional research paradigm reflect the person I have evolved to become, and I am still evolving. In addition to writing an autoethnography, I conducted a series of case studies among Chinese-Australian musicians using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1995a, 1995b) as the method of data analysis. The theoretical axis of IPA consists of three broad domains: 1. Phenomenology is interested in the experiential aspects of a person which focuses on how he/she makes sense of his/her lived worlds; 2. Hermeneutics is an interpretative endeavour which is a crucial part of IPA because human beings are sense-making creatures who constantly reflect on their experiences; 3. Idiography refers to the detailed examination of a case study. Its extensive use in sociological studies is often because it allows a voice to the powerless and voiceless (Tellis, 1997). For the purpose of this autoethnographic study, I will only focus on the exploration of the influence of Confucianism on my ethnicity and cultural values. My family and I carry these influences and they impact on my construction of identities.

Chinese culture is founded on Confucianism for more than 2500 years. Confucian scholars concluded that the ultimate goal for every individual is to have a life-long striving to be the most genuine, sincere and virtuous human being through moral cultivation of the self (Ames & Rosemont, 1999; de Bary, 1991; Li, 2003a). It be said that *self-perfection* is the overarching thought of Confucius. Self-perfection emphasizes the desire to excel and constant betterment of oneself. The Confucian Analects (CA) argues that there are Three Hierarchies in a society: citizens submit to their political rulers, sons submit to their fathers, wives submit to their husbands. Extending from the Three Hierarchies, Confucius's humanism maintains that the Five Relationships: ruler-citizen, father-son, husband-wife, older-younger sibling, friend-

friend contribute to familial and societal harmony. In this paper, two important Confucian concepts would be examined: 1. *compelled to excel* which is expressed in self-perfection; 2. The Three Hierarchies/Five Relationships, which focus on filial piety and submissiveness.

### Methodology

In this study, autoethnography is employed. Autoethnography is a popular qualitative research method, it gives the subject a unique voice to his/her personal lived experiences (Heewon, 2008; Morse, 1994; van Mannen, 1997); and it has been successfully used by many researchers (de Vries, 2010; Mercer & Zhegin, 2011; Nethsinghe, 2011, 2012). Ellis and Bochner (2000) defined autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). Mallet (2011) regarded autoethnography as a form of autobiographical personal narrative that explores the author’s experience of life. By reflecting on one’s own experiences, autoethnography can offer understanding of self and others, (Chang, 2007; Karpiak, 2010); leading to a critical meta-awareness of the self (Souto-Manning, 2006).

Ellis (2009) maintained that effective autoethnographic stories are not victim tales, but survivor tales for both the writer and reader; whereby autoethnographers open up moral and ethical conversations with their readers about coping strategies for dealing with disappointment, trauma and loss (p. 16). She pointed out an important aspect of conducting autoethnographic research where we oscillate back and forth and within multiple variations of our current and former selves. Also, our experiences and the ways in which we make meaning of particular events are fluid across time and space. Ellis introduced the term ‘meta-autoethnography’ where she revisited her original story and asked questions she did not ask then. Taken into account of others’ responses to the original story, she included current experiences which affected the way she looked back at her story (2009, p. 13). Sutton-Brown (2010, p. 1307) termed it as *experiential layering* which refers to the practice of new experiences being juxtaposed upon, beneath, beside, and within former experiences, which then influence the ways in which we remember and re-tell our stories.

Autoethnography is different from a biography, because it is a research method that selected lived experiences are the focus, which connect the person to the cultural, social and political, placing the self within a social context (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997). These selected experiences would be examined vigorously which lead to a greater understanding about the development of the researcher as a critical-reflexive practitioner (Cunningham & Jones, 2005; de F. Afonso, & Taylor, 2009; Quicke, 2010). Roberts (2004) defined the process of writing an autoethnography as “researching identity construction” (p. 3). Eakin (2008) confirmed that self-identity can be created by one’s narrative and autoethnography can help to illuminate the ongoing development of one’s identities. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the formation of my identities as a migrant, having experienced various cultural diversities before and after my immigration to Australia. This is a reflectional process that enabled me to learn about myself while sharing my stories with others.

Autoethnographic writing depends on what can be remembered by the subject; in my case, I am sure selective memories would have occurred. Since some of my stories (in Chinese) had been published during my youth, I find myself revisioning the original work when I am writing this current account. Dancing between the lines, I will be playing three distinctive roles with split personalities as in the triple hermeneutics of IPA: 1. The Writer documents her history as she makes sense of her experiences back then; 2. The Interpreter simultaneously interrogates the meanings of the writing with an altered frame because the related experiences

that happened since she first experienced modify the way she sees herself and her stories now. The Interpreter tries to make sense of The Writer trying to make sense of what is happening to her; 3. The Observer pretends to be the potential reader, and comments on the style, language, symbols and voice of the writing. It is valid to have different windows to examine the data with contrasting perspectives, assumptions and expectations. Since my interpretations and sense making of the 'I' are fluid, I would coin it as 'seasonal fluctuations' where I look at my story with new insights as I *wised-up* over time, having had the opportunities of additional learning since then.

It is precisely the juxtapositions of former and current experiences (existential layering) that make autoethnographic research challenging and easier said than done. This script is the product of endless discarded drafts, because writing an autoethnography has aroused internal conflicts in my value system, Confucianism advocates that 'modesty' is a virtue of a junzi (noble man); making oneself look good on the outside without hiding one's achievements can be perceived as self-worship and arrogance. Traditionally, theoretical ethnographers are quick to dismiss autoethnography as a narcissistic diary disease (Geertz, 1988), or excessively subjective, shallow textual reflexivity (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). On the other hand, it is encouraged in Western culture that life-time achievements are celebrated in significant events. Constantly suppressing one's emotions and presenting a low profile to others are seen as cowardly behaviours; the external-internal incongruence can also be considered as the source of mental illness in psychology. So, I have decided to write things that I would prefer not to write about as suggested by Tenni et al. (2003) in order to create good data, and to be genuine to my true self. Other data, apart from my recollections, included my published literary work and compositions, cassettes/CD recordings, journals, performance memorabilia, photo albums, video clips of TV footage, certificates of academic/professional/community service awards, and conversations spoken or remarks written by family members, friends, colleagues and students.

### **Cultural Context—The Moon Princess**

I was born in Macau on the late hours of the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival in the Chinese lunar calendar. According to traditional beliefs, there was a princess who lived on the moon. She originally was in human form who later took a magic pill to become an immortal. I was blessed to be like a Moon Princess due to my birth day/hours according to Chinese astronomy. The implication is that I am destined to have an extraordinarily prosperous life. I used to believe in these good wishes just like all children believe in the Santa Claus story. This became a self-fulfilling prophesy— that I have endeavoured to excel in all I do, in order to live a meaningful life that a royal princess deserves to have.

At the same time, I am also a Chinese-Australian who had experienced ambiguities of personal, national and cultural identities. I was born in a Portuguese colony without an affirmative national identity as a child. The official languages in Macau were Cantonese and Portuguese at that time. Upon arrival in Australia, I suffered identity crisis on an elevated level, having to cope with the cultural in-group who were Chinese from Mainland China fluent in Mandarin. I also tried to shed off my *Chinese-ness* to the out group in order to quickly integrate into the main stream society. My understanding of such experience is described pictorially by a Chinese idiom: A person with two legs spreading across a river bank, he/she can never reach either side and remains paralysed. Mainland Chinese denied my Chinese roots because I had not begun to learn to speak Mandarin yet. Therefore, I was not able to communicate with Chinese people I met in Australia. I did attempt to speak English with them, but it only caused further rejection and disgust. They said that I insulted my ancestors— I was boastful because I

spoke English with my fellow Chinese. I was cursed to become dumbfounded before white people who were native English speakers.

These unpleasant incidences confirmed my own vulnerability as a post-colonial migrant struggling to find a peaceful land to settle in. However, they were the motivational factors that drove me to become a fluent speaker of Mandarin and an expert teacher of Chinese languages later. As I attempt to interrogate the way I describe my past experiences, I notice that I am inclined to use cultural symbols to create visual representations of my inner bruises. This is congruent with my prior understanding of myself who is a visual and introspective learner.

In a split second, where I used to call home was no longer home, the new home in Australia did not seem too welcoming. I suddenly realised my equilibrium had collapsed. I doubted myself and continued to question about my roots. I felt being born in Macau was a mistake because I just received a death sentence without any parole and appeal. Blaming my parents who took me away from my familiar surroundings and friends in Macau gave my negative emotions a temporal outlet. I switched back and forth from barking at my mother verbally and hurting myself physically, such as standing outside in pouring rain, coming home late from school by walking on narrow alleys to invite danger. I needed something thrilling such as an electric shock from a thunder storm to make me feel that I was still *alive*. Perhaps walking around as a living ghost was worse than being dead literally. To visualise my inner pain, I began to mourn for the death of a vibrant teenage life and dressed gloomily in outfits of mainly pure black for three years from the age of sixteen to eighteen. Again, it is observed that The Writer had the need to externalise her internal injuries.

I had also encountered some forms of racial discrimination at my early settlement due to my inability to speak English fluently, my limitations of colloquial and colourful expressions. Working as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant on the weekends exposed me to endless verbal abuse with a racial overtone. For example, one customer called me *chop suey* (stir fry combo) instead of addressing me respectfully by my name. The worst form of mental manipulation I recall was that a customer tried to impersonate Chinese people speaking English with an Asian accent (i.e. Chinglish). Such derogatory and seemingly funny acts were quite hurtful to me; my self-esteem was diminished and I decided to turn into an ostrich. I buried my head in the sand and pretended I saw no evil, and heard no evil; so no harm was done and life went on. This was the only way I could cope at that time. By using the metaphor of an *ostrich* that reduced herself from human form to animal, The Observer finds The Writer depicting her traumatic mental state, the threats and intimidation appropriately — the animalistic behaviours exhibited in the offenders activated the victim's non-retaliating behaviour because she was not strong enough to defend for herself. Symbolically, The Interpreter views the psychological abuse associated with racial discrimination as cannibalistic acts where people eat people in civilised society. Similarly, in the animal kingdom, only the strong species survive, and the weak falls prey to the strong.

White Australians in the 80s never accepted that I was truly one of them because of my obvious Asian face. I used to have this fantasy that I could scrub/bleach off my skin colour so I could camouflage into the *holy white cloud*. Psychologically, The Interpreter now understands this is called the *imposter syndrome* where she feels overwhelmed by a lurking feeling. The manifestation of such anxiety led me to holding a tight grip on my internal script— I was only one step away from being discovered as a *complete fraud*; I was never good enough or undeserved to become an Australian citizen. The one positive thing came out from these negative experiences was when I decided I must become *more than good enough* for this new country. This new internal script served to be a powerful motivator for me to later become *not only a fluent English speaker*, but a TESOL teacher (teaching English to speakers of other languages). Since my identities are directly shaped by the cultural and political climate in my

domestic environment during my early years; it is therefore crucial to first examine what it means to me to be born and raised in a Portuguese colony.

### **Macau-The Window to the West**

Macau Peninsula was the earliest port that China opened to Western merchants since the fifteen century. It was colonised by the Portuguese for almost 500 years until its return of sovereignty to Mainland China in 1999 (Cohn, 2012). Italian missionary Mateo Ricci first set foot in this city in the 1550s to spread Christianity among the local Chinese in Macau. In collaboration with his pupil who was a French missionary, Ricci translated the Confucian Canon (i.e. Four Books and Five Classics) into Latin; hence Confucianism was spread to Europe quickly at the turn of the sixteenth century, later to other Asian countries including Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Not only was Macau historically the window to the West, it has a diverse mix of cultural practices due to the Portuguese occupation. The Portuguese soldier headquarters were located on the same street as our house. I believe I am the beneficiary of this rich cultural environment.

During my childhood before my family's migration to Australia in 1980, Macau's main population was made up of native Cantonese speaking Chinese, Portuguese and Portuguese-Chinese. There were very few Mandarin speaking Chinese living in Macau because the Chinese Communist Government restricted migration and visitation of its people to colonised regions like Hong Kong and Macau at that time. Chairman Mao, being an atheist himself who headed the ten year long Cultural Revolution (1966-76), believed that all religions contaminated people's minds, and Western decadence negatively influenced its colonised subjects. With reciprocal feelings, local Macau people at my time generally discriminated against mainlanders living in China for their uncivilised mannerisms, close-mindedness, and lack of colour and visual appeal in their dress codes. Growing up in this cultural-political climate enabled me to witness conflicts within the same race and I had a taste of multiculturalism living next door to the Portuguese soldiers before my immigration to Australia. Nevertheless, The Interpreter did not anticipate that she later became the subject of intra-racial discrimination during her early settlement in Australia. In hindsight, she believes life will come full circle, what goes around comes around. What she did to the mainlanders, they did the same to her.

In the colonised cities—Macau/Hong Kong, Christian schooling formed the educational system. Most middle class families would send their children to fee-paying or Christian schools where they learnt English/Portuguese as second language. In contrast, the economically less advantageous people would attend Chinese government schools for free where they learn Mandarin as a second language. The main religions in Macau were and still are Christianity/Catholicism and Buddhism. I went through Christian schooling in Macau and benefited from the moral education I received, in addition to learning English although my conversational skills were very rusty.

### **My Paternal Family**

I had never met my paternal grandfather because he lived in Vietnam, and his ancestry was originally from Mainland China a few generations back. He ran a garment factory in Vietnam. During the Sino-Japanese War that invaded China, my grandfather took orders from the Japanese troops and made uniforms and caps for the army. My father, being the eldest son and a useful helper in the factory, lost his opportunity to proceed with formal education. My Chinese paternal grandmother migrated to Macau from Vietnam with her three young adult children in the 1950s due to her accumulated anger toward the concubine, leaving behind her husband, a married daughter and a young son from the concubine. Under French occupation,

it was illegal to be married twice in Vietnam. However, the government was powerless in restricting the number of unofficial wives within people's private walls. My grandmother was considered by me as an oppressed female because of her inability to stop the unwelcomed change to her marriage. She also refused to receive financial support from her husband back in Vietnam after her arrival in Macau. My grandmother showed me that she only carried one canvas sack of personal belongings when she walked out from my grandfather's house. As a child, I admired my grandmother's courage and resistance to a powerful husband, and wondered if I would have the same strength like this lioness.

As fate struck, I found out all the males in my family were unfaithful to their wives/girlfriends, including my two grandfathers, my father, three uncles and my brother. The Interpreter thinks her mental toughness was forced to develop being surrounded by males who appear to be untrustworthy. It is said that "there is no cat that does not eat fish." Specifically in Chinese culture, it refers to the second nature of male being unfaithful to their female partners (sexually/emotionally/both). My ex-husband was no exception; he engaged in extra-marital affairs with his secretary. I became a divorcee and a single mother with two children more than ten years ago. At that time, they were only eight and four years old, I did not want any maintenance from him because I had too much pride like my grandmother. The Interpreter looks back today with the experiences of counselling divorced women, she now comes to the conclusion that "money is neutral— it can't add further misery to the brokenness. So demanding maintenance is not only legally rightful; but is absolutely essential for survival and recovery."

According to the Confucian teachings which stress on "the wife's submission to the husband who is the boss of the family," combined with the underlying assumption that the male is the ruler of a kingdom in ancient China; being a divorcee in Chinese culture implied I was guilty of "not being a good wife." I failed to keep "familial and societal harmony" in Confucian terms. My own father told me 'it was my fault that I could not keep an eye on him'. At the time I most needed support from my maiden family, I received criticisms and abandonment instead. Consequently, I became an outcast who not only lost a husband, but the entire clan of relatives and most of my trusted friends. To me, it was like a double divorce, one of which could have been avoided if the significant people in my life did not uphold the traditional cultural values and acted as God/Goddess who judged and sentenced me to a second death. The Chinese saying of 'rubbing salt into a wound' rightfully described my mental state at that time. It felt like they were stabbing my back and guarding my dead body to make sure I was certified. Today, The Interpreter sees the whole thing in a new light. Instead of being angry at them which will demand a lot of energy from her, she thinks they might have lacked education, experience and skills to handle family breakdowns. In a way, her tragedy triggered many undesirable emotions in the hearts of her friends; she might have rocked the boats for some unfulfilling marriages around her immediate surroundings as well. The Observer also notices the *seasonal fluctuations* of the current self because of the effect of experiential layering has taken place here.

Zooming back to my childhood, though my grandmother experienced female oppression as a wife and mother, she did not seem to learn from it. I remember she treated me quite differently from my older brother. For example, she always prepared breakfast for my brother before walking us to school, but I could never find my serve on the table although we left home at the same time for the same school. On the way back, my grandmother would sometimes buy us a snack when stopping by a local dairy. Whatever my brother wanted, I got the same, but I was never invited to choose. To me, it was as if female deserves to be treated as second class citizens compared to male. Also, the concepts of filial piety, children submitting to elders, younger sibling submitting to older sibling detailed in the Three Hierarchies and Five

Relationships were clearly upheld by my grandmother. Perhaps it was all these inequalities I experienced that gave me the ultimate valor to resist an unfaithful husband.

My grandmother, like most senior women in Chinese families, held a lot of power in the household. Everyone, especially my mother—the daughter in law must kowtow to her. She favored the male grandchild over the female one as demonstrated. I used to hate her for that, and such strong sentiment motivated me to study psychology later at university, because I struggled to understand my own feelings and the thoughts and behaviors of others I observed. My internal script told me that “my grandmother was wicked, I was innocent.” I needed to go to university to study about human relationships to prove my beliefs. But my thoughts/feelings were later altered due to the new experiences I had at university. Again, the *seasonal fluctuations* has been observed. I learned that human behaviors are constantly changing and modified on two-way traffic—action and reactions. So my occasional rebellious reactions to my grandmother’s unkind actions might have conditioned her to have further excuses to justify her continual abuse on me.

Sometimes during the family outings, I recall my mother telling stories about my father being a national traitor because he worked for the Japanese troops. My father was an improviser who could make up jokes, nonsense skits and played music on the piano when put under the spotlight, and we always laughed uncontrollably. My mother used to tease him by calling him the “bullshitologist of the house.” Although my father was not well educated, he is a very creative and funny person with a fighting spirit that motivated him to do self-study and engage in life-long learning. He became a *Jack of all trades* including being an import-export dealer of Ceylon tea from India to China, a hands-on manufacturer of cosmetic moisturizer which exported to Japan, a skilled craftsman of jade from the cutting of raw stones to polished and refined jewelry and an artistic candle maker.

When I was growing up, I often day dreamed about the interesting places that my father’s products might have been shipped to; I was never content with living in a small city like Macau for my entire life. My father must have had the same desire to leave the coastal town for a bigger world outside. When he decided to make a break-through in his life, he went to learn to become a chef at night school and hoped to secure a job in Chinatown once he came to Australia. He then travelled to Melbourne alone by the huge overseas cruise liner. Later, he not only became the top chef at the most prestigious Flower Drum Restaurant in Melbourne China Town among many others, he also learnt to speak very good English with a heavy Australian accent, by earnestly listening to English Bible story recordings, and befriending Australian neighbors. My father has never stopped exploring the world; he used to travel on his own to interstates with a caravan, before the whole family was re-united in Australia. At his retirement, he spent at least six months per year travelling the world before his unfortunate stroke in 2011; his footprints would have been imprinted on all continents except Antarctica and Africa. My father was an influential figure in shaping up my personality— my love to travel, my desire for life-long learning; also, my adaptability, humor, optimism, creativity, artistic sensitivity and risk-taking spirit are all inherited from him. To reiterate, from my paternal family, I witnessed an illiterate grandmother with a strong will to survive in adversity, but failed to stop the tragedy to pass on, by imparting gender biased views on me which impaired my innocent childhood. I have learned to become an emotionally strong person as a child although I always know that female oppression is rooted very deeply in Chinese culture. The unpleasant experience with my grandmother had molded me to become an active advocate for the marginalized people in our society, which later placed me in welfare organizations/hospitals as a counsellor/psychotherapist. For example, I worked for the government as an advocate-counsellor, conducting community welfare and mental health awareness programs (depression and suicide) among the ethnic Chinese. At one stage, I also worked as a therapist in the psychiatry department at a local hospital. I recall my favorite patient

being a pilot who had an ongoing fear of death through the manifestation of panic attacks in midair. I was especially interested in the promotion of democratic citizenship, and access and equity issues among the lower socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities. One of my targeted initiatives was to pioneer a *Talking Newspaper* for the visually impaired individuals; this was extremely well received by the Chinese community. I coordinated and mobilized a large team of volunteers to roster for the weekly reading, recording, high speed dubbing and distribution of the tapes to households all over the state. The Observer notices that The Writer writes herself and others into stories which connect to the social issues outside the frame of the characters in the stories. This demonstrates the usefulness of autoethnography as a method in research and practice.

### **My Maternal Family**

My maternal grandparents' family was one of the richest families in Macau at that time whom ran many businesses consisting of building and property development, and taxi cab chains. All my mother's eight siblings were either professionals or business executives. As a child, I heard fascinating things about my uncles and aunts (retold by my mother), that I wondered what it would be like to visit each of them at work and experience the thrill for a day. Through story telling; my mother cultivated my imagination and my enquiry mind.

The belief that my maternal grandparents held was that females, educated or not, should submit to their husbands based on the Three Hierarchies and Five Relationships, and observing *filial piety* to all elders was of course an expectation rather than a virtue. Also, once married, female children would lose the family surnames forever, therefore they should never be treated equally as male children. My mother was a product of such ill treatment. When she got married, my grandfather built a two story Spanish villa for the couple and gave my mother a maid of a life time to go to the married home with generous dowry. However, when the family capital was divided on the death of my grandfather, all three female siblings in this family only received a large amount of jewelry; whereas all male siblings inherited a number of streets with properties built on them as well as actual cash. I remember my mother told this story with a touch of anger, but I did not anticipate the same scenario was about to happen to me like a vicious cycle repeating itself after generations, although my mother suffered the inequality herself.

In fact, my only brother, being a high earning consulting engineer himself, inherited a number of properties from both my mother and father here and overseas. And the bulk of the money generated from the sale of some houses went to my brother while I was only given a small portion, because I am the daughter who is traditionally denied of inheritance. Without a doubt, this had caused some form of resentment in me although I knew that in many cultures, this treatment is the norm (Gibson & Gurm, 2011). Both my illiterate grandmother and educated mother accepted their fate as it was. The Interpreter now wonders if she should have voiced her concerns of gender inequality in her ancestry when both of these women were still alive. Such questions might have invited fruitful discussions among the female in this family. The Observer notices the internal struggles of both The Writer and The Interpreter who yearn for answers to those unanswerable questions. Fortunately, my childhood experience of gender discrimination at home, coupled with my training and practice in psychology had equipped me for such uneventful incidents. I only had a short episode of frustration over all this and decided to let it go, my brother and I have always been in telephone contact although his family lives in Western Australia. I am also influenced by the Confucian teaching that "one who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over in which one must pass" (CA).

My mother was a school teacher of music and fine arts who believed that "there is no boundary to learning," "learning is like boating against the current— if the boat is not moving

forward, it has already been left behind” based on Confucius’s teaching (CA). I recall that I was amazed when an aunt told me that my mother used fine human hair to do embroidery, and she did a lot of calligraphy and ink paintings in her maiden years. My mother was the one who inspired me to become the story teller I am now. I remember seeing my mother lying down on her bed on lazy afternoons to read newspaper, and watching neighbors coming to our house after dark to listen to the newspaper events my mother retold every evening. Television was just invented in mid 60s and most ordinary people still relied on the radio to be informed about world news.

Our spacious lounge room could accommodate five visitors on top of five of us. I remember having heard a lot of interesting stories in this *green room* because the walls were painted in pastel green and the L-shaped sofas were in darker green. Across the yellow with contrasting red squared terracotta tiles, there were a number of wicker chairs of different sizes, shapes and colors spreading geometrically. This room also gave me fond memories of my mother, having her put me on her lap while listening to all sorts of exotic music on the radio including Western Classical music, Portuguese folk songs, Spanish guitar music, Italian and French Operas as well as traditional Cantonese operas and Cantonese pop songs

To sum up, my mother fostered my aesthetics in visual art, and my love of story-telling. These skills were then applied in my job as a community advocate. As explained, I did some broadcasting work by initiating a *Cantonese Talking Newspaper* for the visually impaired in collaboration with the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, as well as engaged in freelance writing for community magazines. Apart from these, my mother nurtured my aural ability, mentored my appreciation of world music, as well as encouraged me to be the best I could be. I successfully learned to play a number of orchestral instruments besides being an accomplished pianist, singer, composer and choral conductor. My story is congruent with research findings that the home environment and the nuclear family members are the primary determinants to school achievement (Garber & Ware, 1972; Shapiro & Bloom, 1977) and musical success of individuals (Asmus, 2005; Brand, 1986).

### Sibling Rivalry

Sibling rivalry can be regarded as threatened loss of love (Stern, 1989) and stimuli for comparisons between siblings (Ross & Milgram, 1982). I find this to be true in my childhood. Although there was only one other child besides myself at home, I was never comfortable with my brother who is two years senior. His birth order and sex determined him to be the most loved child—the heir of our family tree. I was an outstanding student who was sent by my primary school principal to the highest fee-paying secondary school in Macau. My brother went to an average school. We were both immersed in church events, went to the same youth group, sang in the same choir; but we had different bunches of friends, and we rarely had our pathways crossed or dreams shared. In hindsight, I think what alienated us as children were the cultural beliefs that valued male over female in most Chinese families. The ways that the adults in my nuclear/extended families behaved were the products of such prejudice. Perhaps, they subconsciously conformed to the normative cultural practice; because that was the way they had been conditioned to. I am my parents’ only daughter which is meant to be *the pearl of their palms*, according to Chinese saying. The implication is that ideally I should be loved and cherished, because the pearl must be handled with tender loving care. Also, I was regarded as a *special child* by my school principal. None of these could buy extra love from my surrounding adults unfortunately.

Perhaps my brother was innocent in terms of being an *active contributor* to my emotional pain, because he was also just a child who did not mind the extra attention from the adults. Every time I complained to him about living under his shadow, he said he did nothing

wrong. He said it was not a crime to be born two years early, and he could not control how the adults think about the roles of male and female within a family/society. At one point, my brother admitted that he also observed that I was being treated less than fairly by my grandmother. However, he was the bystander who did nothing to stop the plague to spread and contaminate others. To that end, I believe he was a guilty accomplice to my grandmother who delivered all the offensive actions.

As mentioned, my brother received a large sum of money from the sale of my parents' properties. Although he did not need that extra inheritance being a high profile engineer, it never crossed his mind to share his wealth with me. Again, my brother did nothing and let inequality persist in our world. Once, I confronted him on the phone along the lines of parental favoritism among different children; he said he would never treat his older daughter with lesser love compared to his younger son. Yet, my brother did not treat his only sister fairly. The contradictions between words and actions and the confusing messages he sent out continue to trigger immediate resentment and emotional roller coaster in me as I talk about it. Such double standard of human nature is the norm rather than an exception, and I consider my lived experience with gender biases as the tip of an iceberg only. The Interpreter notices The Writer seemed to have forgiven her brother back then. But when The Writer is forced to relive her past traumatic experiences, undesirable feelings toward her brother comes back. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that the researcher's notion of *seasonal fluctuations* of human emotions is valid, and it is an important aspect of autoethnographic research.

It was not difficult to predict that the child who feels herself oppressed, growing up to be a social activist who was determined to see justice done in all inequalities. Although sibling rivalry is seen as a negative and hostile relationship, it could also generate positive outcomes (Rimm & Lowe, 1988). I believe that the sibling rivalry rooted in the sentiments of envy, jealousy, bitterness, rejection and anger, served as powerful fuel that sustained me through many obstacles in my life-long learning. Numerous research also confirmed that sibling rivalry was perceived to enhance mental toughness which helped to develop an overpowering desire and motivation for success (Bedford, Volling, & Avioli, 2000; Connaughton, Wadey, Hanton, & Jones, 2008). As will see later, through studying psychology, I have acquired coping skills to help me to reframe all adversities in a new light, and I often activate my own defensive mechanism to emotionally detach from unhappy memories that in turn lead to internal harmony and long term peace of mind. In hindsight, The Interpreter acknowledges that the principle of compensation is at work in her life: The blind man acquires a heightened sense of hearing; the emotionally impaired child acquires coping skills to move on with life. The Observer notices that The Interpreter gives new meanings from The Writer's simple telling of story, and transformed it to a new level beyond the scope of the original story, in an effort to turn negative experiences to positive life lessons.

### **My Education and Work**

At primary school, I carried a glorious record of being an exemplary student—a competent athlete, a hilarious story teller and a musician who led numerous school assemblies, a confident actress in productions, an artist-writer whose calligraphy, art work and essays were often showcased around the school, an excellent student who was never ranked below the top three in class throughout my primary education. As mentioned, I was sent to a very prestigious secondary school on principal's recommendations. I stayed in that school until our family came to Australia to be reunited with my father. At year seven, I began to play the piano for church events, and taught songs/games to pre-school children at Sunday school, in addition to doing monthly visitation to a local refugee camp which was part of our outreach program. I never shy away from interacting with strangers; my assertiveness is seen as a positive trait that benefits

my career in counselling and teaching later. One month before I left for Australia, a friend asked me to keep her company for a singing competition. I wrote my first English song at fifteen, and we sang a duet by accompanying ourselves on two guitars. We received a triangular flag as the champions for this competition; and this led later into my long career in music compositions. Although her time in Macau concluded beautifully; The Interpreter never considers herself as a happy child. Her experience with gender bias at home continues to haunt her throughout her life. Because of this, she realizes she was pushed to grow up faster than an average primary school child; the things concerned her at year seven such as *relationships and pathways* were not the topics of discussion among her peers.

As mentioned, I attended Christian schools and learned English in my primary and middle years before coming to Australia. However, I only started to speak English when I had to in the new country. At year twelve, I began to learn Mandarin because my secondary school career teacher thought that I should take Chinese-Mandarin as an extra subject in order to get a higher score for the university entrance exam, since I was born a Chinese. Unfortunately, Mandarin has a different grammatical structure and phonetic system from my mother tongue Cantonese; our combined ignorance led to an undesirable result. The Chinese saying of “fighting relentlessly until victory is claimed amidst continuous failures” reminded me if I did not give up, I had a chance to win one day. Given the fact that I did not get extra mark, but had my overall performance curtailed down the bell shape-normal distribution; I decided to make a combat at university. I took on Mandarin-Chinese studies as a minor sequence in my Bachelor of Arts.

In two years, I spoke Mandarin beautifully and secured an on-call job as a qualified interpreter-translator in both Mandarin and Cantonese. In 2013, I presented a paper in Mandarin in the World Confucius Conference in Mainland China. At this point in time, I did not feel inferior to the mainlanders. I communicated with them on equal par without power struggles. My learning outcomes were influenced by Confucian teachings which asserted that “the man of virtue makes the difficulty to be overcome his first business, and success only a subsequent consideration,” “study the past, if you would divine the future” and “our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall” (CA). It is observed that The Writer continues to explore the interplay of her former/current self with cultural descriptors mediated through idiomatic and psychological languages that are linked to her ethnic/educational backgrounds. This is indeed the essence of ethnographic research.

At university, I began to teach at music schools and at home, while studying a Bachelor of Arts which allowed me to major in psychology and music; I also studied Chinese as a minor subject. Due to my expressive writing skills in Chinese, I became an amateur writer of several university and community magazines. I began to publish short stories, as well as starting to work as an interpreter-translator. At my final year, I received a prestigious scholarship and graduated from the University of Melbourne. My mother was especially proud of me for making a start in writing, because she could see her youthful self in me through my story telling. What she might not have realized was that I needed a platform to vent frustrations through creating writing. One piece of my published work entitled “Wind, maple leaves and madness” depicted a mad man’s fantasies as he gazed at the maple leaves dancing romantically with the breezes of autumn wind. It appears to be a tranquil picture where a man admires the beauty of nature. Underneath the surface, it was the cruel wind (the executor) that forced the leaves to be cut off from the mother tree. Another piece called *Dandelion* which described the illusionistic freedom of the dandelion seed where its fate is determined by the course of the wind. Both stories reflected my psychological imbalance where I felt I was coerced into migration as a minor.

Being awarded with a bachelors’ degree was never enough to quench my intellectual thirst, I then moved to Monash University to study a Diploma of Educational Psychology,

which provided the essential qualification for me to be registered as an associate member of the Australian Psychological Society as an intern psychologist. On the same year, I took some subjects at the Monash School of Music. With the impressive results I achieved, I was offered a scholarship to pursue a Master of Arts (Music) there. I took up this opportunity while commencing to work as an ethnic teacher's aide at a high school as well as engaged in teaching at weekend language schools. I wrote a master thesis, and my research was considered as a pioneer in the Music Psychology field in the 80s, where my name was used to name the device I invented to measure music cognition among children. This thesis received High Distinction and it was later published by Monash University. This momentary victory did not give me any everlasting joy, because I was caught up with other things in life. What I did not know back then was such result qualified me for a full research scholarship twenty- three years later. Today, The Interpreter sees this as serendipity; it is a consolation prize of delaying the opportunity to pursuit a PhD in her youthful years.

Upon graduation, I was offered to do a PhD by my thesis examiner at the Callaway International Centre for Research in Music and Music Education in Western Australia. I declined the offer because I was planning to have a family. Before I finally became pregnant successfully a few years later, I had been working in various settings including welfare organizations and hospitals as a counselor and advocate. These gave me a lot of exposure to the media among the ethnic newspapers and mainstream TV. I also took professional development training to become a qualified Orff Dance and Movement Instructor. Simultaneously, I studied a Graduate Diploma of Education at Monash University to get my teacher's qualification. In my heart, I believe I could achieve great things. Instead, I did teachers' training in preparation to become a school teacher one day, in order to have the holidays to raise a family-to-be, as well as putting off my offered PhD opportunity. My willingness to sacrifice my intellectual pursuit was grounded on my cultural beliefs which required me to be submissive to my husband, and be a responsible housewife and mother-to-be. I knew it was wrong to view women as less important than men, but I chose to support my working ex-husband through an industry based doctoral program, while I stayed at home full time to look after a young family later. Unfortunately, he got bored in his studies and found a new female companion at work instead. In hindsight, The Interpreter thinks if only she had been treated fairly in her early years, she might have demanded equal share of study/career opportunities in her married home.

I took a ten year break from full time employment to take care of my young family, while teaching music at home and Chinese in weekend language schools. In 2003, my mother passed away. In memory of her whose Christian name was *Joy*, I formed the Sound of Joy Music Ministry and embarked on music compositions eagerly. In collaboration with a publisher-distributor who was a former academic at the Baptist University, I signed a ten year contract and continue to release choral music with sound files into the Hong Kong sacred music market. Apart from this, I also taught at high school for ten years after I separated from my ex-husband.

On school teaching, I was granted with a three-year long Language Teachers' Scholarship by the Commonwealth Government. I enrolled in a Master of Education at Deakin University on the year that my divorce became final, specializing in the teaching of ESL and LOTE (Chinese), which would benefit my own school and distract me from the emotional trauma. So, for the second half of my teaching career, I took up the teaching of Chinese which was in demand at the time. At Deakin University, I was an award winner of the Australian Federation of University Graduate Women—the Pat Kennedy Bursary, which was a monetary grant to sponsor my compositions of therapeutic music for depression sufferers. At that time, I had already released many volumes of song collections with CDs in an overseas market. All along, I tried to make the most out of every opportunity amidst adversities; my actions were

guided by my value system molded by the Confucian teaching of self-perfection. I believe success only comes by continuously overcoming obstacles. To me, endurance of hardship, determination and persistence are the most important qualities in personal development and maturity. During my own recovery from the aftermath of divorce, I redirected my energy into something productive and I composed therapeutic music for others. The Interpreter recognizes the whole process was just as therapeutic for her symbolically.

I received a language teachers' fellowship to become a cultural ambassador for Australia that went on a study tour in China upon graduation. I took two years of part time studies to finish my masters, on top of school teaching and parenting two teenagers. With the remaining one-year scholarship; I completed a Graduate Diploma of Language, and graduated with an average of 96% which honored me as the top performer of my class. I only used a few days of study leave during the course to attend exams; hence the residual of the study leave money was credited to my school. On the same year, I took a study trip with Deakin University to India to learn about documentary filming. This experience was an eye opener for me because the country was made for the camera; the vibrant color and the spices in Indian cuisine and drumming which stimulated all my senses had been most memorable. In 2010, I was privileged to receive short-term language teachers' training at a university in Shanghai as well. In 2013, I presented a paper at an international conference in Shan Dong-Qu Fu on a university travel grant. The bonus to all these trips is that my dream of travelling the world is gradually coming to full realization. Over the years, I had accumulated an impressive travel record; I desire to emulate my father's spirit of entering into the unknown and experience life with endless surprises.

In April 2014, I resigned from school teaching to take up full time research at Monash University. I bought a red memento book for students and colleagues to make their final remarks about my departure. There was a common theme among these 204 entries written—Ms. Fung was considered to be a very funny teacher. A year seven student wrote, "There is no other teacher fun enough to help me stay awake." The teacher who gave a speech about my work said, "Annabella is a quite achiever who travelled the world; we miss your expertise and sense of humor." At the final school assembly, I received the award of *Making Everyone Laugh*. I am pleased that my school teaching career concluded on such a high note, knowing that to be stimulatingly funny is a great gift in the teaching profession especially in the secondary classrooms. My humor and fun approach to life are genetically linked to my father (the bullshitologist) inevitably. The Interpreter views her sense of humor as a defensive mechanism which was gradually acquired in her childhood through her lived experiences with gender/racial discrimination and identity crisis. She needed to laugh and reframe undesirable circumstances in order to survive the human jungle—re-imagining pity to opportunity, tragedy to comedy.

## Findings and Conclusions

From birth, I was destined to be like the Moon Princess and fortunate enough to have almost lived like one. Believing in the Confucian ideology of constant betterment and self-perfection, I had strived to become the best I could be; although I suffer from the superiority-inferiority complex occasionally due to gender bias I experienced in my childhood, and the identity crisis and racial discrimination during my early settlement in Australia. I believe I am scarred for life, but the way I perceive those scars are fluid across time and space. I continually re-create and re-imagine my former self into my current self with my notion of *seasonal fluctuations*. Yesterday's hurtful scars may be viewed as smiling faces today, but it can turn back to scars tomorrow depending on my forever changing circumstances. In Ellis's words, "at all times until death, we are in the middle of our stories, with new elements constantly being

added” (2009, p. 166). On the one hand, I am proud of what I have achieved so far. On the other hand, I am still uncomfortable about my perceived views of others who treat me as an ethnic minority, or as a female who just got lucky because I received the *left over* from what men did not want. No matter how impressive my CV may evolve to become, I sometimes have the lurking feeling of the imposter syndrome. I feel vulnerable and confused, then I sense I begin to drift into a bottomless black hole, and doubt if I actually deserve to be receiving good fortunes in a lucky country like Australia. My psychologist friend who works with artists commented that “perfectionists are most prone for depression, and my mood swing episodes are very common among highly creative people.” She said I should embrace rather than resist the highs and lows, and my unique personality will bring me innovation and insights in composing and creative writing.

It has been demonstrated that I am a practitioner of my beliefs in “self-perfection through life-long learning” and *compelled to excel* which are solidly founded on Confucianism. Confucius said, “I want you to be everything that’s you, deep at the center of your being” (CA). I have utilized my potentials as much as I am consciously aware of indeed (more to unearth later). The following Confucian quotes continue to be the guiding principles of my life—“What you do not wish upon yourself, extend not to others,” “the will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential...these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence” (CA).

Finally, it must be recognized that one’s identities are framed within complex, changing sociocultural contexts across the life span. Thus, through an examination of my journey, I understand it is important of not making assumptions, encompassing difference and divergence, teaching inclusively, and knowing people as complex individuals shaped by experience. Just because I am a female, it does not mean I automatically want to become a home-bound housewife and nurture babies. Just because I am a musician, it does not mean I cannot do abstract pure mathematics. Just because I have a Chinese face, it does not mean I am less representative in the main stream Australian society. I also acknowledge that qualitative research can have a transformative influence on the individuals conducting the inquiry, as we reflect on our participation in the world around ourselves. By interrogating the meanings of my stories as described by my current self, I not only gained greater understanding of my former self, but I struggle to find ways to better able to change my situations, as well as bringing a new light into the interpretation of my past. By writing my own story, I allow my inner child to come out to play, and my voice or script heard and shared. I know I cannot change my life the way I desire, but at least I have made myself a survivor of the life I was given. By telling and re-telling my story, I reframe my life in ways that are easier to bear for my rational mind and my emotional self. Issues of gender equity and social justice had been discussed in the interrogation of my lived experiences. Sharing my story that connects with social processes might impact others who have similar experiences demonstrated the value of autoethnographic research.

By intimately reflecting on my stories, re-visiting all the confusion, vulnerability, contradictions and emotional pain, I have taken my readers onto a literary and compelling emotional journey. As The Observer, I have documented that I used cultural symbols, analogies, metaphors and idioms extensively: moon princess, pearl, banana, ostrich, fish-eating-cat, living ghost, maple leaves, and dandelion. It has been demonstrated that I am a visual and introspective learner; my story was scanned by my eyes, my heart and my head. To me, my writing is both evocative and provocative that intends to connect a personal experience with my readers, and the “I” was portrayed in multiple layers of complexities in relation to gender/racial issues and social justice. Autoethnography offers the potential to expand scholarship about human experience (Ellis, 2009, p. 16). Indeed, the micro-events in my story

have the power to impact the macro-social structures and conditions beyond the frame of my story.

This has been the most humbling and empowering experience for me, and I have learned so much as a writer, an interpreter/phenomenologist, an observer, or just an ordinary person who seeks answers to humanity through her lived experience framed by her former and current self. My identities remain fluid; I revisit past feelings and relive situations in my mind. These continue to shape who I am and will be the foundation of what I become. There is no definite end, no last word; and I anticipate anxiously what welcomes me in the next turn down the intersection. If future opportunity arises for me to write a meta-autoethnography which is writing an autoethnographic account about the autoethnography written, my story will be re-written with an altered frame, because what happens in the future will modify the way I look at my past. Research confirm that human beings constantly restory their lives so to present these lives as changing, yet continuous and coherent (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2006).

Finally, I admit that autoethnography is easier said than done, because examining and re-examining the “I” could be quite daunting which requires a heightened sense of absolute presence, self-awareness and mental toughness. Revisiting past traumas and reflecting, thinking and feeling the old pain has been emotionally draining, but stimulating and restorative for my personal growth. At times, I felt I was holding a scalpel and cutting my body open on my own operating table. Mentally reliving the old pain activated my internal self-healing mechanism; I continue to rehearse the past scenes in my mind until a positive voice came out to comfort me. The new insight turned sorrow into blessings and laughter at the end. I believe I have interrogated my lived experiences vigorously with sensitivity, creativity and academic rigor. I was mindful of being drown in the realm of distorted histories and augmented realities.

In this study, the role of The Observer occasionally helped me to remain objective and provided me with a pseudo-third-party insight to the intricate web of layering of experiences. I particularly enjoyed the process of subjecting the “I” to the triple hermeneutics. I encourage my readers to embark on self-research because as we dig into our past, zooming back and forth to our present and contemplating our future, juxtaposing and enmeshing current experiences within, beside, around, upon and beneath former ones, we will definitely unearth new things that surprise ourselves in multiple layers of re-creating, re-telling and re-imagining. Especially in an academic community, the ability to be a highly critical-reflexive thinker-practitioner will be a bonus to research in any disciplines. As I journey onto a new chapter of my life, I depart with the Monash University motto “Ancora Imparo”—I am still learning.

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