

**Author's Note**

This project was written as a deeply personal gift to my daughter and a reflection on my journey across cultures, generations, and inner growth. It weaves together family memories, cultural insights, and educational philosophy through the method of Narrative Métissage.

Because the stories are drawn from real life—often tender and intimate moments—I kindly ask that readers approach them with care, respect, and an open heart. While names and contexts are kept anonymous for privacy, the emotions and lessons shared here are real. My hope is that this work may inspire others to reflect on their own stories and the quiet wisdom found in everyday life.

With gratitude,

The Author

# **Roots and Wings: A Voyage of Culture, Compassion, and Resilient Growth**

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## Acknowledgements

Removed to protect author's anonymity.



## Land Acknowledgment



**Thompson Rivers University campuses are on the traditional lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops campus) and the T'exelc (Williams Lake campus) within Secwépemc'ulucw, the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc. Our region also extends into the territories of the St'at'imc's, Nlaka'pamux, Nuxálk, Tsilhqot'in, Dakelh, and Syilx peoples.**

**I would like to thank the land as within the boundaries of TRU; we are sharing our knowledge and learning new things.**

*In Memory of My Grandparents/外祖父母*

*For my daughter*

## A letter to my daughter

Dear [daughter's name],

As I write this, my heart is full of love and gratitude for you. You are my greatest joy, my deepest pride, and my constant inspiration. This project, these stories, and every word on these pages are for you—a gift to remind you of where you come from and how deeply you are loved.

You are growing up so quickly. Each day, I watch you take another step into becoming the incredible girl I know you are meant to be. Born in Shanghai and now growing up in Canada, you are navigating two worlds, two cultures, and two languages. That's no small feat, my dear. At some point in life I know it can feel like you're being pulled in different directions; I know there will be moments when you feel uncertain, moments when you doubt yourself or wonder where you belong. In those moments, I want you to have something to hold on to—something that reminds you of your roots and strength, something that lets you hear my voice even when I'm not there. You don't have to choose. You are a blend of both, and that makes you extraordinary. You have the roots of our Chinese heritage grounding you and the wings of your Canadian journey lifting you. They are also your superpowers.

This project is that gift. It is filled with stories from our family's past, with lessons from the challenges we've faced and the values that have carried us through. These are not just my stories; they are your stories too, because they have shaped the person you are and the person you will become. You carry within you the resilience of your grandfather, the quiet wisdom of your ancestors, and the courage that comes from being part of something larger than yourself. You've got resilience in your DNA.



But more than anything, I wrote this for you because I want you to know how deeply you are loved. Every word, every story, every reflection in these pages is my way of saying: You are never alone. You are cherished beyond measure. You are my greatest pride and my greatest joy.

This project is not just about the past; it is about your future. It is my way of walking alongside you, even when you are forging your own path. And I know you will. You are destined for incredible things, and I am so honored to be your mom.

With all my love,

Mom

## Introduction

This project is a gift from the depths of my heart to my daughter. It is a mosaic of family wisdom, cultural reflections, and deeply personal stories—an enduring companion for her as she grows. This is not just a mother's advice, but also my beautiful expectations for her future growth. Through this project, I hope she finds strength in our shared heritage and comfort in the love and resilience that have shaped our family. “We understand the past in stories, and we seek to know the future in stories” (Leggo, 2011, p. 3). This is more than a project; it is my way of reaching across time to be with her during moments of doubt, joy, and discovery, offering her the guidance I wish I had at her age.

In crafting this project, I turned to the method of Narrative Métissage, a powerful way to intertwine personal narratives with cultural and historical reflections. This method mirrors the complexity of life itself, where stories, cultures, and identities weave together in a rich tapestry of meaning. Through these pages, I share the threads of my life, from my childhood in China, to the new world I discovered in Canada. These are not just stories—they are bridges connecting past and present, culture and identity, mother and daughter.

[Daughter's name] was born in Shanghai and grew up in Canada, standing at the crossroads of two cultures. This duality, while enriching, also brings its challenges. Inspired by Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space, I hope to show her that these intersections of culture are not fractures but opportunities—a place where new meanings and possibilities emerge. Through my experiences, I want her to see that it is possible to honor her roots while embracing the new, to live authentically in the in-between, and to find beauty in the balance.

This project is also my attempt to preserve the stories that history often forgets, to document lesser-known historical moments from Chinese history that have profoundly shaped

my identity and values. Stories of the Great Chinese Famine, the Cultural Revolution, and my father's quiet perseverance are more than historical accounts—they are lessons in resilience, hope, and the enduring power of compassion. These stories signify that history is not only about the grand narratives but also about the lives quietly lived with courage and grace.

While grand historical narratives focus on monumental events and collective achievements, they often obscure the personal experiences and emotions of individuals. Yet, it is in these personal stories that the true complexity and humanity of history emerge. Personal narratives reveal the emotional depth and moral complexity of lived experiences through specific actions, emotions, and self-awareness (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Even in the darkest times, there is light to be found, and the values we hold—compassion, perseverance, and humility—are what carry us forward. As Todorov and Golsan (2001) argue, the act of remembering history should serve a greater moral purpose, drawing universal lessons that prevent the repetition of past injustices and guiding societies toward ethical progress. By preserving these narratives, ensuring that the lessons of resilience and humanity found in these historical moments remain a source of inspiration for future generations.

[Daughter's name], my spirited and independent daughter, has already taught me so much about life. She approaches the world with a strength and clarity that I often admire and hope to nurture. This project is my way of reciprocating her gift to me: the gift of seeing the world through her eyes. It is a conversation between us, one that I hope she will revisit when she needs reassurance, guidance, or simply a reminder of her mother's love and belief in her.

Above all, this project is a reflection of the values that define our family—kind, compassion, resilience, and the courage to seek meaning in a world that is often unpredictable and challenging. My greatest hope is that my daughter will carry these values not as heavy

expectations, but as quiet strengths that guide her through life's uncertainties. When the journey seems shaky, I want her to sense their presence as a soft hand on her shoulder, guiding her. I want her to know that she is never really alone as she develops and goes her own path. The stories, knowledge, and love of her predecessors surround her; they are her wings and her roots.

## Literature Review

This project employs the method of Narrative Métissage to interweave my life experiences, family stories and academic theories, hoping that these contents can help my daughter understand identity in a multicultural context, and also give her some inspiration as she grows up. Métissage is a creative method that interweaves diverse texts, including personal stories, poetry, gestures, and images (Chambers et al., 2008). Métissage is “a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis” (Chambers et al., 2002, para. 1). I have interwoven the values I want to pass on to her. Moreover, I was moved by the words of Baldwin (2005), who wrote that "story is loose in the world, and the people of the world are communicating as never before" (Baldwin, 2005, p. 33).

Growing up in a foreign country often means a child is torn between two cultures. This cultural interweaving can be both a rich experience and a challenge. My daughter was born in Shanghai, China, and grew up in Canada. She carries our family's Chinese cultural background and is faced with the challenge of finding a balance between her country and culture of origin and her new-found home. Phinney (1998) points out that adolescents from immigrant families are usually torn between the culture of their family and the culture of the dominant society and are prone to identity confusion. However, Berry's (1997) theory of cultural adaptation provides insight: if two cultures can successfully merge, adolescents will be psychologically healthier and socially more adaptable. Through this project I hope to help my daughter confidently embrace her Chinese cultural roots while also integrating into her multicultural environment in Canada and find her place within it.

In this process, I have come to deeply understand what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the ‘third space’ - not only is this a challenge that my daughter and I face together, but it is also an

opportunity for us to understand each other and to grow. According to Bhabha (1994), the “Third Space” refers to a conceptual and discursive space where cultures interact, overlap, and transform, leading to the creation of new, hybrid identities. Bhabha emphasizes that the Third Space is not a mere combination of two distinct cultural elements, but rather a dynamic and fluid site of negotiation where differences are neither simply absorbed nor rejected. Instead, they are continuously reconfigured to generate new meanings and possibilities. By telling my own stories of growing up, I hope my daughter can see that even when you are caught between cultures, you can still find your own path. These stories are my message to her, hoping that she can find herself in this “third space” and keep moving forward.

Compassion, resilience, and hard work have always been core values in our family. A large part of the transmission of these values comes from my beloved grandfather. He told me Buddhist stories such as “Sacrifice to the Tigress” since I was a child, and these stories have deeply influenced my understanding of kindness and love. In Buddhism, “anatta” emphasizes the interdependence between individuals and others (Abhayawansa, 2018). Appleton (2007) argues that Buddhist stories are not only a tool for moral education, but also a profound way to help people understand the relationship between self and others. I hope that through these stories of my grandfather, my daughter will understand that compassion in life is not just an idea, but an action that needs to be practiced in everyday life. Lao-Tzu's teaching of “the highest good is like water” teaches us to be gentle and firm in life like water. This is not only my grandfather's education for me, but also the wisdom of life that I hope my daughter will understand and practice in the future.

My father's love of education has deeply influenced me. He always emphasized that “learning is a lifelong process.” Dweck's (2006) theory of “growth mindset” resonates with my

understanding. She believes that seeing failure as an opportunity for growth, rather than a limitation of ability, can help us face challenges more calmly. My father taught me how to overcome difficulties through hard work and perseverance. His teachings continue to inspire me and have become guiding principles for my education of my daughter. Duckworth's (2007) theory of "grit" further emphasizes the importance of perseverance. My father changed his own destiny through self-study in a difficult environment. His story has convinced me that education is not only a means of acquiring knowledge, but also a force that shapes our inner qualities. I hope that through these stories, my daughter will understand the value of hard work and have the courage to persevere when she encounters setbacks in the future.

Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, demonstrating flexibility, strength, and a capacity for recovery. It is a dynamic process influenced by personal, relational, and contextual factors, enabling individuals to navigate life's challenges effectively (Luthar et al., 2000). Emotional intelligence is not only the ability to understand the emotions of others, but also how to maintain inner balance in complex social situations (Goleman, 1996). My father always set an example by teaching me how to resolve conflicts through resilience and kindness, and these teachings have become a guide for me to face challenges in my life. In this project, I hope to pass on this wisdom to my daughter, helping her to experience my understanding, empathy and tolerance in her interactions with others. I hope that as my daughter grows, she will learn how to maintain the strength of gentleness in difficult situations, and also know how to speak up for herself and defend her boundaries when needed.

Compared to me, my daughter has shown greater independence and self-awareness. I am relieved that she firmly expresses her opinions and sets clear boundaries. In contrast, I was more inclined to obey and be submissive at her age, and her bravery and confidence are exactly the

qualities I hope she will maintain and develop. Through our conversations during the project, I have been able to demonstrate the understanding and growth that we have achieved. I hope that in the future, she will be able to draw strength from our family traditions while also firmly carving out her own path. As Einstein said, in one of the final interviews of his life, “Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value” (Life Magazine, May 2, 1955). I hope that she will become a person of value, not just one who pursues success.

This project is more than a letter to my daughter but also offers her my blessings and my hopes for her in years to come. Through the method of Narrative Métissage, I hope to pass on our family stories, cultural wisdom and the educational concepts I have learned to her. I hope that she can find strength in them when facing the challenges of the future, and hold fast to her beliefs in this rapidly changing world.

Through discussions of compassion, education, resilience and a growth mindset, I hope she will live balance in her life and become a wise and responsible person. In the future, I believe she can find guidance in our stories and leave her own mark on her life's path.



## Story One: The Seed of Compassion

*“The highest good is like water.  
Water benefits everything by giving  
without taking or contending.  
It likes the place others dislike,  
so it follows closely the divine law”* (Lao-tzu, 2016, p.23).

上善若水。  
水善利万物而不争，处众人之所恶，故几于“道”矣。老子·道德经—第八章

When I was just two years old, I had to leave my parents and move in with my grandparents. The birth of my younger brother meant I could no longer stay with my mum and dad. You might wonder, why did I have to leave home just because my brother was born? The reason lies in China’s One-Child Policy at the time, which strictly limited most families to having only one child. If I had stayed with my parents, it could have caused significant trouble for our family.

I lived in my grandmother's home and could only see my mum and dad during the holidays.

My grandparents became the center of my world, shaping my earliest memories and experiences. My grandfather, a devout Buddhist, filled our home with an air of tranquility. The house was lined with Buddhist scriptures and storybooks, and his deep reverence for life profoundly influenced me. While other children grew up listening to fairy tales told by their parents, my childhood was steeped in the ancient stories of Buddhist scriptures.

In my grandfather's collection of books, the stories of Buddha Shakyamuni were the ones we turned to most often, and among them, the one that left the deepest impression on me was the tale of Sacrifice to the Tigress. Long ago, in one of his previous lives, the future Buddha was born as a compassionate young prince named Mahasattva. While walking through the forest, he came across a starving tigress, so weak that she was about to devour her own newborn cubs. Deeply moved by their plight, the prince realized that without food, both the mother tiger and her cubs would perish. In an act of ultimate compassion, he decided to sacrifice himself. The prince offered his body to the tigress, allowing her to survive and nurture her cubs.

According to Appleton (2007), in her article, "A Place for the Bodhisatta: the Local and the Universal in Jataka Stories," the story of "舍身饲虎" (Sacrifice to the Tigress) is mentioned as an example of the Bodhisatta's selflessness. Appleton notes that this story, also known as the "Vyāghrī-jātaka" or "Mahāsattva-jātaka," is one of the tales where the Bodhisatta (future Buddha) gives away his body to save others. In this particular story, the Bodhisatta offers his body to a starving tigress and her cubs, who are on the brink of death due to hunger. This act of ultimate generosity and compassion is symbolic of the Bodhisatta's boundless compassion and willingness to sacrifice for the well-being of others.



*Cave 254 in the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang: Sacrifice to the Tigress*

As a child, I couldn't grasp the profound wisdom of the Buddha. My young mind was filled with questions: How could the Buddha have the courage to leap off the cliff and offer himself to the tiger? Didn't it hurt? Why didn't he run away? Was he not as fast as the tiger? Wasn't life supposed to be precious? I couldn't comprehend such selfless devotion at the time, yet I felt a powerful force behind the story. Even though I wondered why the Buddha didn't seem to value his own life, this tale left a lasting impression on me, teaching me about the power of compassion and planting the seeds of altruism deep within my heart.

Years later, as I grew in my understanding of Buddhism, I came across the concept of *anatta*, the wisdom that there is no permanent self, which resonated deeply with the story of the Buddha's sacrifice. Now, when I share this story with my daughter, I make sure to remind her that life is precious and should be cherished. I explain that the Buddha, being eternal, doesn't truly die—he simply offers a part of himself for the greater good.

The term "anatta" in Buddhism refers to the doctrine of non-self or the absence of a permanent, unchanging soul or self within beings. It is a core principle in Buddhist teachings, emphasizing that what we perceive as the "self" is actually a collection of impermanent, interconnected processes and components rather than a singular, enduring entity (Abhayawansa, 2018). As noted by Abhayawansa, "The term anatta in Buddhist sense finds its significance mainly because of the nature of change of conditioned phenomena" (Abhayawansa, 2018, p.11). This idea, captured in the Buddhist teaching of anatta, helps us understand that the Buddha's act wasn't just about self-sacrifice, but about a deeper, timeless compassion that transcends the individual self.

### **Grandpa's/外公 practice of compassion**

As the years went by, Grandpa's compassion remained as steadfast as ever. He retired and became a vegan. He didn't just teach me through stories; he lived out his understanding of compassion in every aspect of his life.

I vividly remember a winter day in 2016, though it was unusually mild, almost as if spring had arrived early. That day, I was on a video call with my grandmother, our usual routine. As we chatted, I noticed Grandpa moving around the room with an unmistakable sense of joy. Curious, I asked Grandma what had put him in such a good mood. She smiled and told me that she had just returned his salary card to him.

Since Grandpa's retirement, Grandma had been the one holding onto the card, managing the family's finances—a common practice in many traditional Chinese households where the matriarch oversees the budget and household expenses.

I wasn't surprised by this turn of events, as Grandpa had been talking for years about donating his salary to charity. The only reason he hadn't done it sooner was because Grandma, ever the frugal and cautious one, had never given her consent. Having lived through years of hardship and scarcity, Grandma had always been careful with money, ensuring that every yuan was spent wisely. But on this day, something had changed, and she had finally agreed to let Grandpa fulfil his long-held wish.

'He has decided,' Grandmother said slowly on the other end of the line, no reproach in her tone, but more than a hint of calm.

'You agree?' I asked, somewhat surprised. I was well aware of Grandpa's stubbornness, but Grandma had always been frugal, and the fact that she had agreed to Grandpa's decision was a bit surprising to me.

Grandmother was silent for a while, smiled and said, 'He has always wanted to do this; I can't argue with him; maybe I should have supported your grandfather a long time ago.'

Hearing this, a warm current surged through my heart, both relieved that Grandpa had finally realized his wish and moved by Grandma's silent support.

Grandpa donated RMB 80,000 to the Red Cross Society of China in 2019, which was two full years of his retirement salary.

I had planned to visit Grandpa and Grandma during the Chinese New Year in 2020. However, the sudden onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic brought all plans to a screeching halt. When I finally saw them again in May 2021, the world had changed, and so had my life. I was preparing to take my family to Canada in July to start a new study life, and that visit was supposed to be a simple goodbye, but I didn't expect it to be my last meeting with Grandpa.

When I met Grandpa and asked him why he had decided to donate his pension, I could feel a deep sense of inner peace and unwavering resolve in his words. To him, it wasn't a sacrifice—it was a source of pure joy. “This is something I’ve longed to do for a long time,” he said steadily. “Now that I have finally realized my wish.”/ “这是我一直以来的愿望，现在我终于如愿以偿”。

Puzzled, I asked him why he felt it necessary to get Grandma's permission—after all, it was his pension, and he had every right to decide how to use it. Grandpa listened and fell silent for a moment. When he looked at me, his eyes were filled with a gentle wisdom, the kind that comes from a lifetime of understanding and compassion.

He began speaking slowly, his voice low yet firm.

“You must understand that giving is a good thing, and helping others is a virtue. To be able to support those in need has always been my wish. However, a good deed isn't just about the act itself; its true essence lies in the harmony and warmth it brings to the world, and that harmony must start within the family.”/ “庆童，你要明白，施予是一件美好的事情，帮助他人更是一种美德。能够扶持需要帮助的人，一直是我心中的夙愿。然而，善举的意义并不仅仅在于行为本身，它的真正精髓在于为世界带来的和谐与温暖。而这种和谐，必须从家庭开始。”

He paused, reflecting, then continued.

“I know very well that Grandma has stood by me all these years, and her life hasn't been easy. This family depends on her. When we were young, we didn't have the material comforts you have now. It was thanks to your grandmother's hard work and frugality that our children had enough to eat and wear. So when I think of giving to others, it's important that I don't ignore her feelings. If I did, my act of kindness would no longer be pure; it might carry a trace of neglect, perhaps even harm. Confucius once said, ‘Conduct with morals, resolve conflicts in your family, advance the prosperity of your nation and bring righteousness to the world.’/“修身、齐家、治国、平天下” This means we must first cultivate our own hearts and care for our families before



we can take on greater responsibilities. Good deeds should consider not only those we intend to help but also those closest to us.”

When my grandparents were young, they suffered the Great Famine in China, and my mother was born during that period. The period from 1959 to 1961 in China is commonly referred to as the "Three Years of Natural Disasters" or the "Great Leap Forward Famine," resulted in one of the deadliest famines in human history, with estimated death tolls ranging from 16.5 to 45 million people (Meng et al.,2015). "With a population of roughly 660 million in 1958, the year marking the origin of this famine, 30 million amounted to a loss of close to 5% of the country's population" (Kung & Lin, 2003). Officially, the famine was attributed to natural calamities; however, academic research has increasingly suggested that policy failures might have been the primary contributing factors.

"We provide evidence that an inflexible and progressive government procurement policy (where procurement could not adjust to contemporaneous production and larger shares of expected production were procured from more productive regions) was necessary for generating this pattern and that this policy was a quantitatively important contributor to overall famine mortality" (Meng et al.,2015).

Similarly, Kung and Lin (2003) emphasize the role of policy missteps during the Great Leap Forward, including excessive grain procurement and political upheaval, which exacerbated the crisis. They argue that the sharp decline in grain production, along with wasteful communal dining practices, were key contributors to the famine, highlighting the combination of natural and institutional causes.

There is growing academic attention on the role of institutions in shaping national development. The recipients of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, Daron Acemoglu

and Simon Johnson from MIT, along with James A. Robinson from the University of Chicago, were recognized for their groundbreaking research “for studies of how institutions are formed and affect prosperity.” As noted by the Nobel Committee, “Although the poorest countries have become richer, they are not catching up with the most prosperous. Why? This year’s laureates have found new and convincing evidence for one explanation for this persistent gap – differences in a society’s institutions” (Nobel Prize, 2024).

Acemoglu et al. (2024) revealed that the long-term prosperity of a country depends on the inclusiveness and fairness of its institutions rather than just on natural resources or short-term policy adjustments. Their research further shows that institutional change is the key to changing a country's economic destiny. A society that can establish an inclusive institutional framework can not only effectively respond to short-term crises, but also improve the living standards of its people in the long term. In contrast, if the system is closed and rigid, the development of the country will inevitably be limited, and it may even fall into a vicious cycle of poverty.

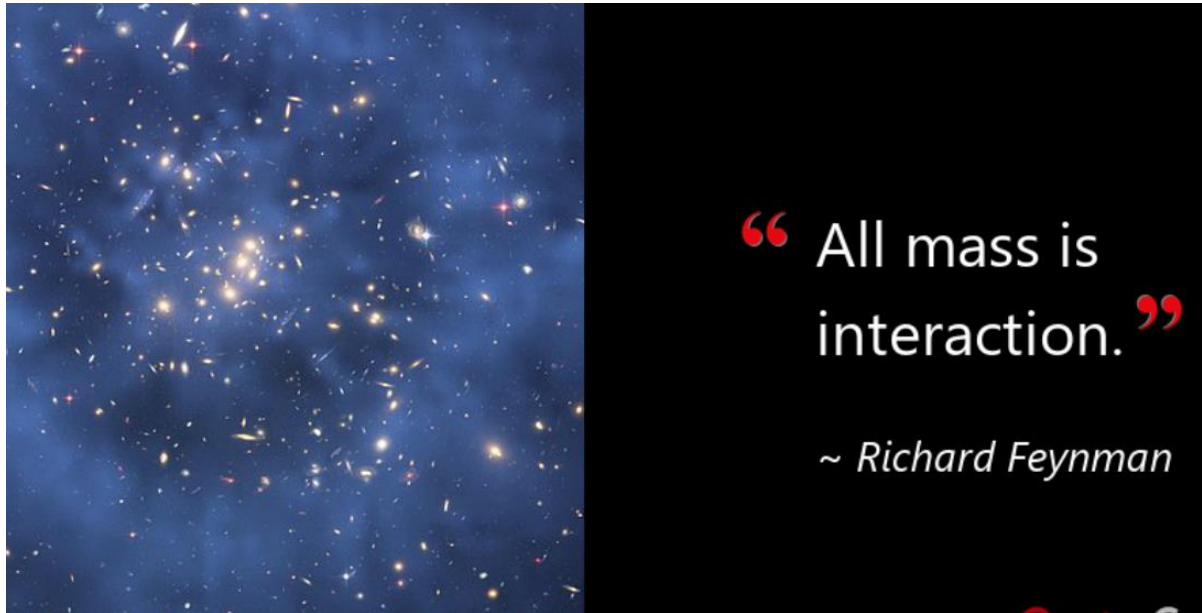
This perspective provides a deeper understanding of the causes behind the Great Chinese Famine of 1959-1961. While the official narrative attributed the famine primarily to natural disasters, academic research points to a deeper cause - Institutions not only determine how effectively a country can utilize its resources but also influence its capacity to respond to crises. The policies of the Great Leap Forward, which led to a drastic decline in agricultural output, inequitable food distribution, forced rural collectivization, and an overemphasis on industrialization, exacerbated the severity of the famine. These policy missteps played a crucial role in amplifying the disastrous consequences.

It was an era in which people had to carefully manage every resource, especially food, and any misstep could lead to disaster. That's why my grandmother was always so frugal. In such

times, frugality was not just a virtue but a necessary practice to maintain harmony within the household. And for many, this caution became second nature. Starvation loomed if that balance was not carefully maintained. Grandpa told me that balance is the key. The balance should be taken into account in everything you do.

I felt the power of balance again in Dr. Handford's leadership course. Dr. Handford (2023) describes how leadership is an inherently interactive process—nothing exists in isolation, and every decision, no matter how small, ripples through a broader system. This aligns closely with Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey's (2007) Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT). "Complexity Leadership Theory focuses primarily on the complex interactive dynamics of CAS (Complex adaptive systems) and addresses how individuals interact with this dynamic to enable adaptive outcomes" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 314). Which posits that leadership is not merely a top-down influence but an emergent, dynamic interaction within complex adaptive systems. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) emphasize that every decision made within an organization can have a "ripple effect" across the system, influencing various interconnected elements in unpredictable ways.

Dr. Handford's leadership class is a profound reminder that to lead is to acknowledge the complexity of relationships and the subtle interdependencies that form the foundation of true leadership. Richard Feynman won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965 for his work in quantum electrodynamics. The concept here is that whether it is in Physics or it is in an organization, all mass interacts. This is key to leadership understanding.



*Leadership class Dr. Handford's class materials*

In another conversation in Dr. Handford's office, Dr. Handford emphasized the importance of forbearance, a concept that, at first, felt familiar. During that conversation, I realized how forbearance in leadership is the wisdom to hold back when necessary, to weigh the needs of the collective against the desires of the individual. Forbearance is not about retreating or conceding; it is about seeking balance, a practice I had witnessed growing up with my grandfather. His tolerance for those around him, particularly his family, was a manifestation of deep love and understanding. He, too, believed that balance must be maintained, not just in action, but in intention—knowing that in time, everything would align, and only then could good deeds achieve their full purpose.

Dr. Handford's words stirred something in me. As she spoke about how every decision interacts with a larger system, I felt a deep connection to the wisdom passed down from my grandfather. Leadership, as I now understood, is not about force or control. Instead, it's about nurturing relationships, cultivating balance, and recognizing that the greatest strength often lies in self-restraint, in setting aside one's own desires for the greater good of the whole.

This forbearance, I realized, is grounded in compassion. It is the very same quality my grandfather exhibited, his kindness as unassuming and natural as flowing water. Lao Tzu once said, "The highest good is like water. Water benefits everything by giving without taking or contending." In Dr. Handford's class, I felt this truth reverberate through me. The forbearance and balance she described mirrored the wisdom of Lao Tzu, who taught that true leadership is not about grand displays of power or recognition but about supporting those around you in quiet, consistent ways.

My grandfather had shown me that compassion could be both gentle and powerful—he was like Prince Mahasattva of compassion, willing to give of himself for the good of others—not out of pain, but out of a genuine desire to help. Through his actions, he taught me that true compassion isn't about grand gestures or charity from a distance; it's about heartfelt empathy and care, a kindness that's cultivated daily in small ways. It's this spirit of "doing good in small things" that has shown me the true power of kindness and selflessness, and it has strengthened my resolve to live by these values in my own life. In much the same way, Dr. Handford reminded me that leadership, too, must emerge from a place of empathy and compassion. It is this delicate balance of strength and kindness that shapes not only leaders but the communities they seek to uplift.

Grandpa's life was like a gentle stream—unassuming, yet endlessly nourishing those around him, guiding me forward on my path.

## Story Two: The Hidden Gift in the Scratch

*"Preserve your dignity as a nobody;  
promote the social welfare as a somebody"-- Mencius*  
“穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下”—孟子

As a child, I often wondered why I couldn't live with my parents. No one told me back then that it was due to China's One-Child Policy. According to Peng (2011), China's family planning policy has greatly changed the country's population structure and social environment since its implementation in the 1970s. This policy has not only effectively controlled population growth, but also brought about complex social challenges, including the aging problem and the gender imbalance in the population. For children like me, this policy has affected our close relationships with our parents, causing profound changes in family structure.

Even though every wall in town was painted with slogans like, “Every family should have only one child; having more is shameful,” I never associated the word “shameful” with my own family. When adults discussed families who were punished for having more than one child, they spoke with sympathy, never blaming those families. This contradiction in societal attitudes reflects what George Orwell (1949) described as 'doublethink' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—the ability to accept two opposing beliefs at once without feeling conflicted. As Orwell explained, “Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously and accepting both of them” (p. 223). This social contradiction was something I felt deeply, even as a child. On the outside, everyone seemed to comply with the strict policies of the time, nodding in agreement to the slogans and regulations that were everywhere. But underneath, I could sense a quiet empathy, an understanding that wasn’t spoken aloud but was always there, lingering in the pauses and the looks people gave each other. It was like everyone was playing along with the rules, but deep down, they didn’t really believe in them—not in the way they were supposed to. It was as if we all carried two versions of the truth inside us, one for the world to see and one that we kept tucked away, close to our hearts.

My grandmother told me that after my brother was born, my mother didn’t have the time or energy to care for both of us, so I had to live with my grandparents. As a child, I believed this explanation without question, thinking that if I could prove myself—if I could become self-sufficient by doing my own laundry, cooking my own meals, and keeping up my grades—maybe then I would be allowed to return and live with them. I threw myself into learning all the household chores, and I studied hard, hoping that this would earn me a place back in my parents’ home.



When I finally saw them, I was so excited to tell them everything I had accomplished. I told them how I could now take care of myself, help with the housework, and still excel in school. I was hopeful, truly hopeful, that this time, they might say, “Come home.” But it never happened.

I ached to hear those words, to be told that I could live with them again, that we could be a complete family. But instead, there was silence. And I didn’t dare ask. I was too afraid to hear a ‘no’ that would crush the small hope I held onto so tightly.

However, my parents' love never waived. My mother knew my favourite dishes for each season, and she never got them wrong. She showed her love through each carefully prepared meal. My father, on the rare occasions when we had time together, would share life lessons and stories of wisdom that he hoped would guide me to a meaningful life. My younger brother, knowing how much I loved collecting coins, saved every single one he got throughout the school year and handed them to me like precious treasures when I came home.

Yet, no matter how heartfelt these gestures were, they couldn’t replace what we missed out on. My biggest regret is not having those ordinary moments of family life. I never argued with my parents the way most teenagers do. I never had the chance to have silly, trivial fights with my brother. We simply didn’t have the time together to build those shared memories.

We loved each other, but there was always a distance—a gap that neither good grades nor carefully cooked meals could bridge. We were a family, but we were apart. We were connected, but never truly together.

Even though I lived with my grandparents, my life was secure and comfortable. My grandparents provided a stable and loving environment that fostered my resilience. Fisher, Sepehry, and Maglio (2023) emphasize that such supportive surroundings are crucial in helping

children develop resilience, even when facing adversity like disrupted family structures. Their study shows that protective factors, such as positive adult relationships, can significantly impact a child's ability to adapt and thrive despite challenges (Fisher et al., 2023).

My grandparents worked in a socialist collective enterprise known as the ‘Sugar Factory,’ which not only produced candy and sugar but also took care of its employees’ needs. Our apartment was allocated by the collective, and we didn’t have to pay for utilities like water, electricity, or heating. Even bus rides were free. During holidays like the New Year or Mid-Autumn Festival, the factory would distribute rice, flour, cooking oil, and fish. All our daily needs were met by the collective.

Things began to change around 1993. First, the hot water was no longer available 24 hours a day. Then, the holiday fish and fruits stopped coming. Eventually, even the winter heating was no longer guaranteed, only available for a few hours each evening—if at all. And, of course, the workers hadn’t received their salaries for months.

My grandfather watched the news every day. Through the TV screen, I learned that the Soviet Union had collapsed and that the people of Germany had torn down the Berlin Wall.

"At the heart of these changes were domestic and foreign policy choices made by the Soviet Union. In domestic affairs, the Communist Party gave up its political monopoly, then collapsed, glasnost has aired historical crimes and failings, and socialist economics is being abandoned" (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1991).

According to Moran (2004), the everyday life of Berlin came to an end in November 1989. The Berlin Wall fell. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolized not only the reunification of Germany but also the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe (Dale, 2006).

That winter was brutally cold. I was used to wearing short sleeves indoors during the winter at my grandparents' home, but that year I had to wear a heavy coat just to stay warm. My grandmother didn't have any winter slippers for anyone, so I remember wrapping my feet in the sleeves of an old sweater while I did my homework. I thought she would scold me for that, but instead, she smiled and praised me for being clever. There were no fresh vegetables that whole winter, but my grandparents were exceptionally gentle and kind to me.

Then, even the bus service stopped. I had no choice but to ride a bicycle to school. It was the autumn of 1994, and 12-year-old me was riding a bike almost as tall as I was, often falling along the way.

The summer of 1995 was unforgettable. After the final exams, I returned to my long-absent home. As soon as I entered the courtyard, my heart raced—a ruby bicycle stood there, gleaming in the sunlight as if adorned with a thin layer of radiance. The basket in front was ruby too, and the whole bike looked like it had come straight out of a dream.

“Is this for me?” I shouted, my voice trembling with excitement.

“To reward you for coming first in class,” my father responded matter-of-factly, linking any reward to my academic achievements, as usual. Despite feeling uneasy—almost as if I needed to be exceptional to earn his love—I didn't say a word. I just silently accepted it.

My father showed his love by rewarding my academic achievements, which sometimes made me feel that his affection was tied to my achievements, the impact of this expectation on my development was complex. Research indicates that when parents link their emotional support to their children's academic success, it can increase pressure and anxiety, particularly when children feel they are unable to meet these expectations (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). Moreover, Elliott and Dweck (1988) argue that if children's primary goal is to avoid

failure rather than to grow, this pressure can undermine their sense of self-worth and identity. Therefore, while my father's intention was to motivate me through this method, I sometimes questioned whether I was still deserving of his love when I fell short of his expectations.

How happy was I that summer? Every morning, the first thing I did after getting up was to wipe down that ruby bicycle until it shone brightly.

Finally, the school term began, and my father took me back to my grandparents' place, with my new bike in tow. It takes about an hour by bus to go from my parents' house to my grandmother's apartment. At the station, I saw a familiar face - the driver who helped load the luggage was a former Sugar Factory worker. Today, he earns a living carrying luggage for passengers at the station.

My father had to go to the bathroom, leaving me with instructions, "Ask the driver to place your bike in the designated spot," and then he walked away. I felt anxious because I was too short to see how the luggage was being arranged. Luckily, there was a low wall nearby, so I climbed onto it to get a better view. The driver seemed inexperienced, carelessly arranging the luggage and placing my bicycle next to a dirty machine.

I anxiously shouted, "Could you please put my bike in the proper spot?" But he ignored me completely. I felt both angry and worried that my new bike would get damaged.

Soon, my father returned. I complained to him about the driver's carelessness, but he didn't seem to think it was a problem. "It'll be fine, it's just an hour," he said.

"But it's not fine! He put my bike next to a machine with sharp blades!" I protested.

"Oh? Let me see." My father stood on tiptoe to take a look, then frowned.

"The driver doesn't know how to do his job! He has no experience!" I added.

My father glanced at me, signaling me to stop talking. He didn't scold the driver directly. Instead, he walked over, smiling as he initiated a conversation with him. "Busy day, huh? Lots of passengers today."

The driver said with a tired smile, "Yeah, it's been tough. We haven't been paid in five months. Got to find some way to get by."

My father nodded, continued chatting, and then offered to help rearrange the luggage. A few minutes later, the luggage was neatly arranged, and my bicycle was placed safely.

The one-hour journey felt like two because I was constantly worrying about my bicycle, but finally, we arrived. Though unfortunately, my bike still got a small scratch on the paint, and I was devastated.

"He didn't like my bike because it took up too much space and he couldn't sell more tickets!" I complained angrily.

My father stopped abruptly and looked at me, his voice stern. "You shouldn't think like that, and don't assume others have bad intentions."

He took my hand gently and said, "You need to learn to view people's actions with kindness. Even if sometimes others do things that might not be in your favour, you need to know that everyone's words and actions have power. By understanding them with kindness, you can guide the situation toward a better direction. And more importantly, it sets a good example for others."

He paused, then continued, "Understanding others with goodwill, using positive language, and finding common goals—these are ways to resolve conflicts. There's no challenge too big to overcome; there are always more solutions than problems."/"善意地理解他人，使用

积极的语言，寻找共同的目标，这些都是解决冲突的方法。没有克服不了的困难，办法总比困难多”。

Thirty years later, I became a student of Dr. Handford. She introduced me to the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. “Derrida's will have been the most important philosophical contribution (in French, at least) of the last 30 years” (Bennington, 2017). Derrida's deconstruction emphasizes the importance of resisting absolute judgments and understanding the complexity of intentions and actions, and he emphasizes the fluidity of meaning and the importance of understanding context (Rojas-Moreno, 2019). I believe my father's teachings embody this philosophical perspective, which is to view people's actions with goodwill and not to assume ill intent. Similarly, Derrida's dialogue in "From the Word to Life" reflects the idea that human interactions are nuanced and layered, and our understanding of others requires a constant openness to different interpretations and meanings (Derrida & Cixous, 2006).

My father explained that knowledge acts as a filter, helping us distinguish between what is valuable and what is not. He believed that the goals we set should not just align with personal interests but should also contribute to the greater good. This idea resonated with me even more deeply when I took Dr. Alana Hoare's philosophy class. Dr. Hoare emphasized that education and research must go beyond theory, urging us to ensure that our work leads to real, positive change. As she so aptly puts it, "Qualitative pragmatism is about action. Researchers and teachers have a responsibility to ensure their work makes a meaningful impact on society" (Hoare, 2024). Her words reinforced the lessons I had learned from my father—that knowledge is not just for personal advancement, but a tool to create lasting, actionable change for the greater good. My father always stressed the importance of continuous learning. He said to us that continuous learning plays a critical role in this process—it allows us to broaden our perspectives and

ultimately create value for society. Through education and experience, we are better equipped to identify meaningful objectives that serve not only our individual aspirations but also the needs of the wider community.

As a child, I didn't fully understand him, but his gentle tone calmed me down. He always emphasized seeing the positive side of things and ensuring that our words and actions were constructive. He taught me that everyone, whether a leader or an ordinary member, should take responsibility for the well-being of the community. And when you have the ability, you should take on greater responsibility and create value for society. As Mencius said, "Preserve your dignity as a nobody; promote the social welfare as a somebody." / "穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下".

Even though my mood had improved, I still felt sad looking at the scratch on my bike. It was like spending hours writing a paper, only to accidentally hit the delete button without saving it—that's how I felt, as if all my efforts were wasted.

Back at my grandparent's home, the first thing I did was search the tool room for paint to fix my bike. But to my dismay, there was only red, white, and blue paint—none of the ruby I needed. Just as I was about to give up, my father walked into the room. He looked at me without saying a word, then quietly picked up a paint can and a palette and started mixing the colors. A few minutes later, the perfect ruby appeared. In that moment, I felt that the problem I had been crying over for half a day was effortlessly solved by my father in just a few minutes, and I felt a bit foolish. I remember my father's gentle smile as he sensed my frustration. He had often spoken to me about the importance of learning, and this time was no different. As he calmly picked up the paint can, his words carried the wisdom that would shape much of my understanding later on. He explained that without knowledge, many things might seem impossible, like trying to solve a

problem without the right tools. Just as one could mix colours to create the shade they needed, learning provided the skills to navigate life's challenges.

“So never stop learning.”/ “学无止境” That was likely the phrase my father repeated most often to me and my brother.

My father didn't just say it; he lived it. In 1966, when my father was ten years old, the Cultural Revolution broke out in China. "China's college enrollment system came to a sudden halt as the Cultural Revolution started. Virtually no students were admitted to colleges from 1966 to 1969"(Li & Meng, 2022, p. 981). The Cultural Revolution resulted in a massive disruption of education in China (Deng & Treiman, 1997). This meant that he had to discontinue his studies at the age of ten. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the closure of schools and the



emphasis on political ideology over education severely hindered students' learning (Huang et al., 2020). An entire generation, including my father, was deprived of the opportunity for formal schooling.

My father never had the chance to attend high school, but his pursuit of knowledge never stopped. He shared with me how, at the age of 23, driven by a thirst for learning, he returned to the very classrooms of the town's high school to study physics and chemistry. The classroom was filled with teenagers, barely 13 or 14 years old, while my father—already a grown man—sat awkwardly among them. He stood out in the crowd, an odd figure in the sea of young faces. The students gave him puzzled looks; after all, outside the classroom, they knew him as "Uncle." In our small town, the sight of a man his age in a classroom full of children was anything but ordinary. Yet, despite the discomfort, my father pressed on.

He wasn't there just for himself. His determination to learn wasn't fueled by personal ambition alone but by a desire to give back to the society that had shaped him. He believed that through education, he could create something meaningful for the greater good. In 2010, this belief bore fruit when he was recognized at the national level for his contributions to corn cultivation techniques. My father's perseverance, both in learning and in life, left a legacy that continues to inspire me.

The story of the bicycle doesn't end there.

Another semester flew by, and it was time to go home again. After dinner, my family gathered to play cards. My father suddenly began another "class."

"Remember what you learned when we fixed your bike? Share it with your brother." My father was always like this, encouraging me and my brother to share what we had learned, especially with the family.

I hesitated, feeling like I had forgotten most of it, but with my father's prompting, I stammered through a rough retelling. My father's intention wasn't just to review; he had a deeper

purpose. That semester, my brother's grades had been poor. After several semesters of struggling, he had lost not only his motivation but also his confidence.

"But sometimes, even if you try hard, things still don't go well," my brother murmured.

My father was silent for a moment, then spoke gently yet firmly, "Yes, effort doesn't always guarantee the outcome we want. You may prepare thoroughly and still fail. Accept it; it's a process everyone goes through. No one can win all the time. You might make mistakes, but remember, a single failure doesn't define your life."

My brother and I listened quietly, the only sound in the room was our father's soothing voice. My mother was in the kitchen, washing fruit.

"Behind every failure, there is a hidden gift," my father continued softly. "That gift might be a lesson, or a new direction for your efforts. You have to learn to find that hidden gift; it's the key to your growth."

His words flowed gently into my heart, especially when he mentioned the "gift." It was a positive interpretation that transformed failure from a stumbling block into a steppingstone, an opportunity for learning and growth. He was teaching us not only how to face failure but also how to approach life—with a mindset of kindness and positivity, ready to embrace whatever challenges came our way. Even if we stumbled, we should get up and search for the gift hidden in the journey.

His idea reflects what Dweck (2006) describes as the growth mindset, which suggests that viewing failure as a learning opportunity rather than as a measure of personal ability can help individuals effectively tackle challenges. According to Yeager and Dweck (2012), a growth mindset fosters resilience, enabling individuals to learn from setbacks and persist in the face of adversity. My father's teaching embodied this philosophy; he encouraged me not to see failure as

an endpoint, but as an inner gift that would guide me toward greater achievements and deeper understanding. His message also aligns with what Angela Duckworth (2007) describes as “grit”—the combination of passion and perseverance in the face of long-term goals. Duckworth argues that grit, more than talent or intelligence, is the defining factor in success. “Across six studies, individual differences in grit accounted for significant incremental variance in success outcomes over and beyond that explained by IQ, to which it was not positively related” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1098).

As I grew up, I gradually understood my father's wisdom. He taught me not only to confront setbacks but to draw strength from them. This strength would carry us through more storms, helping us become stronger and wiser individuals.

Many years later, I heard a phrase that echoed my father's teachings: ‘Through hard work, with humility, for humanity.’ At that moment, I understood the depth of what he had tried to instill in me.

## Story Three: The Courage to Stand Alone: Finding Strength in

### Vulnerability

*“Having heard the divine law,  
a good scholar follows it;  
a common scholar half believes in it;  
a poor scholar laughs at it.  
If not laughed at, it cannot be the divine law.  
Therefore, it is said the way to light seems dark;  
the forward way seems to go backward;  
the smooth way seems rough.”* (Lao-tzu, 2016, p.115).

“上士闻道，勤而行之；

中士闻道，若存若亡；

下士闻道，大笑之。

不笑不足以谓道。

故建言有之曰：明道若昧，进道若退，夷道若颡。上德若谷，大白若辱，广德若不足；建德若偷；质真若渝。大方无隅，大器晚成，大音希声，大象无形，道隐无名。夫唯道，善始且善成”。老子·道德经—四十一章

As a child, there was one question I dreaded more than any other: “Whose family are you from?” My father’s last name was Ye, and I shared it, yet I’d grown up in my grandparents’ home, where the family name was Fu. We lived in a small sugar factory—a close-knit socialist community with some two thousand residents. Colleagues were neighbours; everyone knew everyone else. Many people knew my grandfather, but among those two thousand people, there wasn’t a single family with the surname Ye.

Whenever someone asked, “What’s your last name?” and I replied, “Ye,” I’d see puzzled expressions flash across their faces, followed by hushed murmurs: “Ye? Which family is that? How do I not know them?” Another voice would join in, “Yes, I’ve never heard of them either.” They’d continue their discussion as if I weren’t standing there, and I would just stand silently, awkward and unsure. In those moments, I felt like I didn’t belong, as if this place wasn’t truly my home. Eventually, to avoid the discomfort, I would say, “I’m from Fu’s family.” They’d nod,

finally understanding. “Oh, you’re from Fu Xishan’s family—I know.” But the conversation never ended there. “Oh? Does Fu Xishan have such a young daughter?” I’d quietly clarify, “Fu Xishan is not my father; he is my grandfather.”

One experience, however, left a deeper mark on me than any of those questions.

It was the spring of 1992, my fifth-grade year. At recess, our favorite game was hopscotch. Usually, we split into two teams, with a penalty for the losing side. That day, a sudden idea struck us: the losing team would have to crawl five laps around the hopscotch squares on the ground. I was confident in my hopscotch skills, certain that my team would win. But things always go wrong, and the team I was on lost. As agreed before the race, we had to crawl five laps. We kept our promise and started crawling.

The first lap was manageable; the other kids just watched silently. By the second lap, jeering voices could be heard in the crowd, soft but loud enough for everyone to hear, “Look at them—they’re crawling like dogs!” Laughter erupted, filling the air with taunts and mocking gazes. The ridicule felt like tiny needles pricking at my skin, and I felt my face roll like it was on fire. Soon, two of my teammates stood up, refusing to continue. Three of us were left, including me. By the third lap, the other two had given up as well, unable to bear the laughter. I was the only one left on the ground. As more students gathered to watch, the laughter grew louder and louder.

I was the only one crawling on the ground. I was thinking to myself, if only I was shorter, then I might look cuter and not look like an idiot. I wanted to give up, yet something stopped me. At that moment, a voice broke through the crowd—it was my homeroom teacher, Mr. Chen. His accent was very easy to recognize because he wasn’t a local; he was a new teacher at our school.

“What’s she doing?” Mr. Chen asked. A few classmates explained the game's rules and the promises to be kept by the losing team.

“Who’s that on the ground?” someone asked in the crowd.

“Oh, that’s Fu Xishan’s granddaughter, Ye Qingtong,” someone replied. I don't like it when people talk like that; why do they have to add Grandpa's name when they mention me? My face was burning hot like fire, and I shuddered to think how I was going to get up and face my classmates who laughed at my stupidity, some of whom I knew, some of whom I didn't.

Then, to my utter amazement, Mr. Chen quietly lowered himself to the ground beside me and began to crawl. “Hmm, not a bad way to exercise,” he said, smiling as he went along. Seeing him—tall and lanky—awkwardly shuffling on his knees beside me, I had to admit, he looked far more ridiculous than I did.

With Mr. Chen at my side, I completed the five laps. The bell rang, signalling the end of recess. Due to his presence, the unbearable shame I’d felt lightened, though my face remained red, and I kept my head down as we walked back to class together. Along the way, he said softly, “Qingtong, you did well.” I couldn’t tell if he was comforting me or genuinely praising me, but I knew that without his support, I wouldn’t have had the courage to walk from the playground back to the classroom. At that moment, I felt like I belonged.

Mr. Chen was my Chinese literature teacher, and ever since that day, my writing had always been the best in class. It was also the first time I realized that the voice of the majority isn’t always right. As Gustave Le Bon pointed out in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, crowd behaviour is governed by emotion and irrationality; individuals in crowds lose their self-judgment and follow the opinion of the majority (Le Bon, 2023).

When I got home, I put on a cheerful face and chatted with my grandmother. Somehow, I always felt responsible for making her happy, to make her feel as though all was well, even if I couldn't quite place why I felt this need so strongly. This unspoken duty tugged at me, though I could never fully understand where it came from.

Sometimes, I hear people say, 'This little girl has a high emotional intelligence,' but they did not realize this skill had been cultivated since I was two years old. My grandmother adored praise, and as a child, I'd intuitively found ways to compliment her—the clothes she made, the food she prepared, or even the stories she told. Watching her face light up with each word of appreciation, I felt a strange warmth, a sense of accomplishment, as if I'd been able to give something back to her.

I have always felt that the concept of emotional intelligence is widely misunderstood. Too often, it's reduced to the ability to say the right things, to charm, or to pick up on others' feelings and respond harmoniously. However, scholars emphasize that emotional intelligence involves more than just perceiving the emotions of others. True emotional intelligence also involves gaining an in-depth understanding of others and using that understanding to foster meaningful relationships (Fernández-Abascal & Martín-Díaz, 2019). Taking action to help others (Boyatzis et al., 2006). This commitment goes beyond mere empathy—it involves actively supporting others and fostering a sense of justice in complex social interactions (Vieten et al., 2024). Furthermore, as Sun and Lyu (2022) suggest, regulating not only one's own emotions but also positively influencing others, contributing to better social interactions and overall well-being.

In my opinion, the ability to perceive and recognize others' feelings is just the starting point—it is not the end goal. The true value of emotional intelligence is reflected in action: when you recognize another person's pain or struggle, are you willing to take that extra step to help, to



offer support, to advocate for them if needed? True emotional intelligence involves a commitment to kindness and justice, turning empathy into meaningful action. It is not just about surface-level social skills but involves a deeper, ethically grounded understanding and response—a way of using our understanding of others to promote goodness and fairness in the world.

Looking back, I can see how much my father shaped this side of me. He always made it a point to show gratitude in even the smallest interactions, thanking people, complimenting them sincerely. From a young age, he instilled in me the value of gratitude and sincere appreciation. I can still hear him saying, “When you achieve success, remember to thank those around you, and when you face failure, take responsibility without hesitation.” I’d listened to these words a thousand times, and they had taken root.

While helping my grandmother prepare dinner, I tried to sound casual.

“Grandma, today I was such a little idiot. You’ll never guess what silly thing I did.”

“Oh? Tell me all about it,” she replied, smiling with interest.

Then I recounted everything—how we’d lost the game, how to fulfill a promise to crawl five laps, and how, in the end, I was the only one who finished all five. As I described how I’d been the last one crawling, I laughed aloud, as if saying it like that would make it a little less embarrassing.

“Ah, I really am an idiot... Surely, no one could be more foolish than me, right, Grandma?”

To my surprise, Grandma looked at me thoughtfully, her expression warm.

“Qingtong, you did the right thing,” she said gently, with a small smile.

“True courage is doing what’s right even when no one is there to accompany or encourage you. Today, that’s exactly what you did.” Her words caught me off guard. She lightly patted my shoulder and added, “You’ve met a great teacher. He didn’t join you because he enjoyed crawling; he joined to protect you from feeling alone. He’s a thoughtful person, helping and teaching his students in ways that are subtle and silent. Perhaps you should write a journal about it and keep this memory.”

Honestly, I couldn’t fully understand her words at the time. What did “helping in ways that are subtle and silent” mean? Of course, being a playful child, I did not write that journal—there was always other homework to do.

After dinner, as I worked on my homework, I overheard my grandparents talking in the living room. Grandma was telling my grandfather what had happened at school that day.

“This new teacher, Mr. Chen, really is an outstanding young man,” she said with a tone of appreciation.

However, then I heard my grandfather sigh deeply.

“Yes, such a good young man. These young people are admirable—they deserve a better future.” I heard that Mr. Chen had once been a top student at a university in Shanghai. Two years earlier, something had happened—some kind of rule-breaking incident—and he’d had to leave his studies and come to our small town to teach. That was the first time I made a connection to the city of ‘Shanghai’. It lingered in my mind, sparking a sense of admiration and curiosity for this faraway city I’d never seen. Then Grandpa and Grandma talked in a low voice, and I couldn’t hear anything.

It was many years later that I came to understand the storm that swept through the summer of the late 1980s. In those years, some young people paid a heavy price in their

pursuit—not only of the truth but also of their dreams. Some had to abandon their paths, and Mr. Chen - was one of them.

When I graduated from elementary school, my class went on a graduation trip. I plucked up the courage to ask Mr. Chen and took this picture with him.

## Story Four: Echoes of Time: A conversation between two thirteen-year-olds

*“Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.” — Albert Einstein*

My daughter is different from my grandmother, my mother, and me. In her, I see a continuation of our family line, but it's imbued with a spirit entirely her own. I am proud of her, not only does she breathe fresh life into our family's legacy, but also because she shows me all the time that she is who she is.

She often becomes a sounding board for my project. I share my progress and stories with her, and her insights never fail to surprise me. When she read the story about how my bicycle got scratched and how I tried to find the exact same color to restore it, she looked at me with a playful smile and said, “Mom, why do you need to find the exact same color? Why not use different paints to create a pattern of your own? That way, your bike would be one of a kind!”

Her words stopped me in my tracks. I wasn't surprised by her suggestion, but by the simplicity and freedom it reflected. Coincidentally, the story of the bicycle took place in 1995, when I was thirteen years old and in eighth grade. Now, twenty-nine years later, in 2024, my daughter is also thirteen and in eighth grade. Yet, the difference between us is striking.

I had been raised to fit into the “right” mould, to strive for harmony by conforming to expectations--a common value emphasized in many collectivist cultures (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). The idea of celebrating my individuality, of intentionally breaking away from the norm, had rarely crossed my mind. However, here was my thirteen-year-old daughter, showing me another way; as Amabile (1996) highlights, fostering creativity and individuality can lead to a sense of empowerment and innovation, qualities my daughter seems to embody naturally. Her

perspective reminded me that life isn't about blending in but about embracing what makes us unique. Her suggestion wasn't just about painting a bicycle; it was about how we approach the world—boldly, creatively, and unapologetically as ourselves. She reminded me that in the pursuit of perfection, we often miss the beauty of imperfection and the joy of simply being who we truly are. As Brown (2010) explains, embracing imperfection is key to living authentically and finding joy in our uniqueness.

Through moments like these, I have come to see that parenting is not a one-way street. Parents often grow and learn through their children, gaining new perspectives and insights into themselves (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009).

**Image removed to protect anonymity**

Just a few days ago, I asked her, “For my project, I might need to write a story about you. Would that be alright?”

Without hesitation, she replied, “No, don’t write about me.” The firmness and decisiveness in her voice rang out as if she were drawing a clear line in the sand.

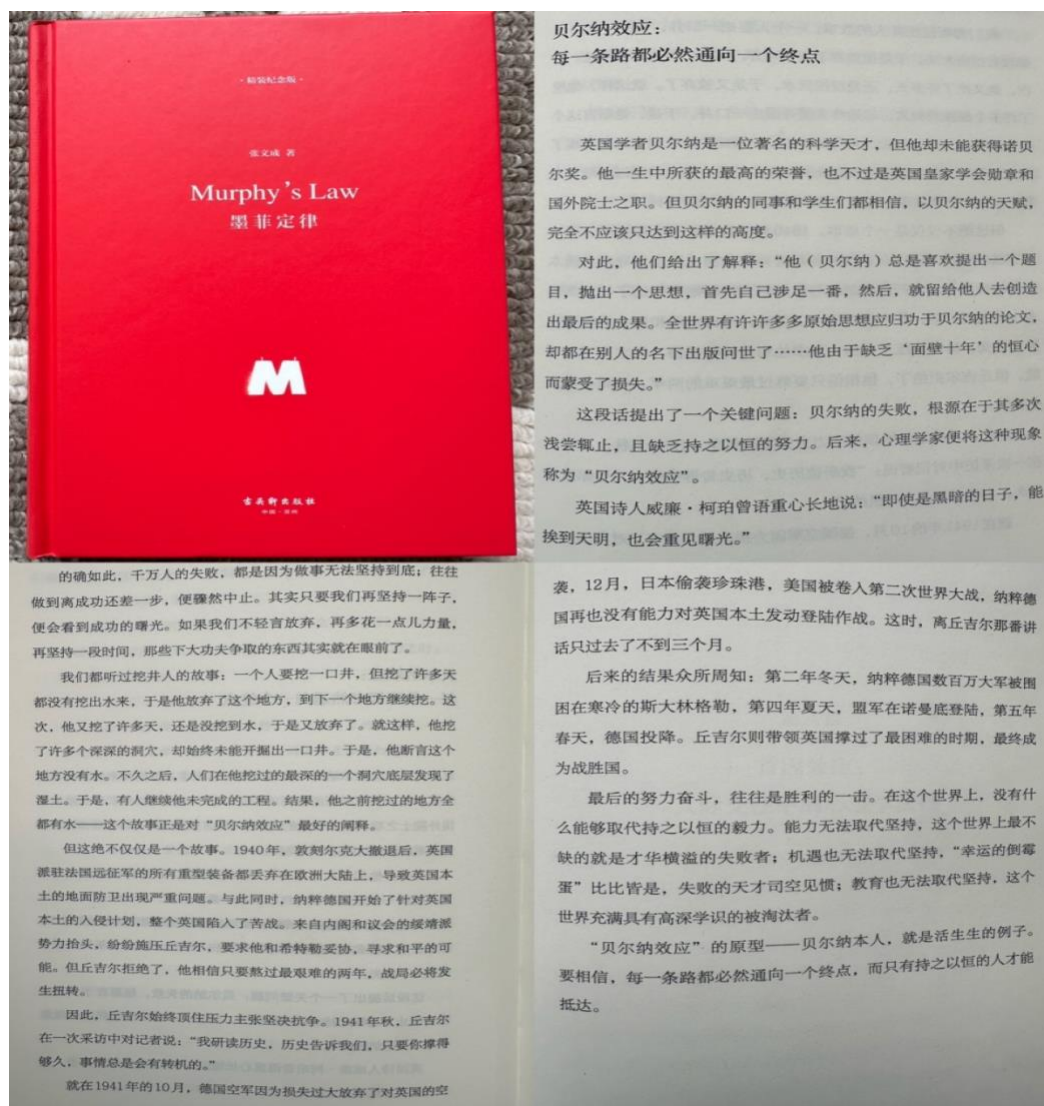
I realized once again the difference between her and me. She expresses her thoughts openly and has an almost intuitive sense of boundaries. She has made it clear that anything involving her requires her consent; If we’re going on a trip, she expects notice in advance; she has her own schedule to consider. When I was 13, so accustomed to compliance that the idea of questioning my elders was unthinkable. I followed every word, burying any unease deep inside. But my daughter? She is like a guide, revealing to me a new way of living, one marked by freedom and strength.

At times, it feels as if she’s walking ahead of me on this path of growth. While I teach her how to face life, she, in turn, teaches me how to face myself.

A few weeks ago, something happened that brought this all into sharper focus.

I was reading a book on *Murphy’s Law*, which introduced a concept called the “Bernal Effect.” It told the story of British scientist J.D. Bernal, a talented crystallographer and molecular biologist. The effect points out how Bernal, despite his brilliance, often left his projects unfinished, leaving others to pick up his ideas and carry them forward. His tendency to start projects and abandon them midway was seen as a lack of perseverance—a reminder of the importance of seeing things through to the end (Zhang, 2019). As I read, I thought this might be

the perfect lesson for my daughter, an opportunity to talk about perseverance, a story to impress upon her the importance of persistence and finishing what you start.



### Murphy's Law

I handed her the article with a smile. “Here,” I said, “take a look at this.”

She read through it quickly and looked up, a mischievous gleam in her eyes. “I’m done,” she said.

“So, what do you think?” I smiled back, waiting expectantly.

“Can I ask you a question instead?” She tilted her head thoughtfully.

“Of course,” I nodded, curious.

“If you planted one sapling in a field, what would you have a year later?” she asked, her voice calm and confident.

I paused, taken off guard. “Well...a small tree, I suppose.”

She nodded, then continued. “And what if you scattered a handful of seeds instead—flowers, grains, different plants—what would you have after a year?”

I smiled, catching her train of thought. “That would be a great harvest! I’d have flowers, fruits, all sorts of wonderful things.”

She smiled, satisfaction lighting her face. “Exactly. A single tree can grow tall, but it keeps everything beneath it in shadow, claiming all the space for itself. But if you scatter seeds, you’ll see an entire field come to life. It’s like this scientist, Bernal. By leaving ideas in so many different areas, he allowed others to follow his steps and cultivate new fields of knowledge. Isn’t that a kind of value too? By planting seeds in multiple disciplines, he left the world with more possibilities.”

I sat there, my fingers resting on the page, momentarily at a loss for words. My carefully prepared lesson about perseverance felt hollow in the face of her insight. I fumbled for a way to bring up the importance of seeing things through, but she had already turned the story on its head, and her interpretation felt richer, somehow. She had glimpsed a truth that I hadn’t even considered.

Before I could say more, she smiled, adding, “Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.”

Astonished, I raised my eyebrows. She laughed, amused by my surprise. “Oh, don’t look so shocked, Mom. I didn’t come up with that—it’s an Einstein quote!”



Her words settled gently in my heart like a seed. Looking at this thirteen-year-old girl before me, I felt warmth and pride fill me. She does not, like me, my mother, or my grandmother, suppress her thoughts. She knows what she needs, stands firm in her choices, and speaks her mind with confidence. In her own unique way, she had stirred something deep within me, guiding me to a wider world of thought, of freedom.

I suddenly realized that, perhaps, she has already set foot on paths I have yet to tread.

P.S. I got permission from my daughter to write this part.

## Story Five: Patience and the Flow of Life

*“Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished”* (Lao-tzu, 2016).

“道常无为而无不为”。老子·道德经—三十七章

If my father's educational guidance was the guiding light of my intellectual journey, then my love of learning comes from an irrepressible desire deep in my soul. As I grew older, this desire transcended the pursuit of utilitarian scores or worldly achievements and became a pure love of knowledge. Learning is real and fun for me. It makes me feel the process of exploring the mysteries of the world. As Zhang Ru-Lun (2008) said, the true meaning of learning is to ‘become aware of what you don't know.’ Learning is not only a path of personal growth but also a responsibility to continue and pass on human wisdom. Every study is a step forward to pass the baton of civilization, but also to inject more wisdom and strength into the future world. Whenever I face an area that I don't understand, I am always filled with awe and excitement, as if I were on a wonderful adventure, eager to become more fulfilled and complete through each exploration.

This longing for the unknown is an indescribable resonance of the soul. Whenever I start to learn something new, I feel a profound excitement and anticipation rising in my heart. This is not just a thirst for knowledge, but also an anticipation of the infinite possibilities of the unknown world. Every new learning and exploration is a sublimation of self-knowledge, as if every new discovery continues to broaden my understanding of the world and myself. This journey of learning is full of endless possibilities. Every step I take makes my world wider and my heart stronger.

Along my journey of pursuing knowledge, there have always been people I deeply admire. They are all knowledgeable, Integrity and kind people. Their wisdom is not only

reflected in their profound understanding of knowledge, but also in their personal charm and moral character. They are like beacons, guiding me bravely forward on the path of knowledge. They have made me understand that the true meaning of learning is not just the accumulation of knowledge or superficial success, but rather the pursuit of truth and the upholding of kindness and justice. In them, I see the perfect combination of learning, character, thoughts and actions, and it has strengthened my belief in the pursuit of knowledge.

"At the beginning of 2018, President Trump started taking protective tariff measures against products from China in a sequence of events which started a 'trade war' between the United States and China" (Egger & Zhu, 2020). The economic relations between the two countries entered a tense phase. The Trump administration has accused China of engaging in unfair trade practices, particularly forced technology transfer and intellectual property theft, and in March imposed tariffs on \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods. China responded by imposing equivalent tariffs on US goods (Wang, 2018). This trade war has had a profound impact on the global economy and triggered a broad discussion on global trade rules (Son, 2022). For the Internet finance industry, where I work, the uncertainty caused by this trade war is particularly prominent. Internet finance companies are highly dependent on global technical cooperation and supply chain, and economic fluctuations caused by trade wars have brought the development of this field to a standstill (Miao et al., 2023). The flow of capital has become stagnant, investment decisions are fraught, and many companies have had to slow down and postpone large capital investments that had been planned. Many strategic layouts have been shelved or reevaluated. As one of them, I have felt the aftermath of this storm.

I benefited from my father's teachings, and when I encountered challenges, it was often an opportunity to reflect and grow. This crisis has forced me to pause and re-examine the real

purpose of our work. We worked hard, and had more social resources, for what? Is the mission of people just to chase personal success? Is it possible that entrepreneurs run businesses simply to make a profit? What is entrepreneurship? These reflections stirred a sense of unease within me. In the process of the evolution of entrepreneurship, this spirit has gradually transcended the boundaries of profit-seeking and innovation, and is moving in the direction of altruism, social welfare, and taking on more social responsibility (Ye, 2024). Also, as the Chinese educator Gu Mingyuan (2013) critiques a troubling aspect of education, a negative element exists in those values of education—education is regarded as a way to improve an individual’s social status. I questioned such educational values.

The crisis has taught me to slow down and rethink my work-life balance. In fact, this crisis has become a valuable opportunity for me to reflect on my self-worth and re-chart my future direction. With some questions in my mind, I went back to school and entered the EMBA programs at Fudan University and National Taiwan University. I firmly believe that what I am not able to understand, education will give me the answer.

My EMBA supervisor at Fudan University, Dr. Hua Min, is an economist who has made great contributions to the Chinese economy. During the trade friction between China and the United States, he used history as a mirror to analyze the trade frictions.

“Looking back at Chinese history, it is not difficult to find that the dynasties and periods with the best economic development in Chinese history all attached great importance to foreign trade, such as the Tang Dynasty, as well as the Southern Song Dynasty, which founded the Maritime Silk Road, and New China, which opened up to the world after the reform and opening up” (Hua, 2018).

No country in the world can achieve economic growth without trade (Taylor, 2012). Hua (2018) suggests that, historically, surplus countries have lost to deficit countries. More than 200 years ago, Britain, the world's largest trade surplus country, lost its largest overseas colony in a trade war with the United States, which was in a deficit position. What started as a trade war eventually evolved into a sovereignty war for the independence of the North American colonies (Grossman, 2013).

After the trade friction between China and the United States began, I keenly observed that the criticism of American policies within Chinese society was overwhelmingly one-sided. However, this tense situation sparked a deeper reflection in me: Should I broaden my horizons and explore the world beyond? I felt an increasing desire to experience different cultures and economic systems firsthand, as I realized that understanding complex global issues requires a more nuanced perspective. Viewing the world from a single lens is limiting, and only by embracing its diversity and complexity can one truly grasp the full picture. “Indeed, it is time for more, not less critical research” (Harvey, 2023).

Building on this reflection, Dr. Hua's other lecture brought further insight. Dr. Hua critically analyzed China's fintech market using the theory of Muhammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. While some fintech products in China claim to provide inclusive financial services, Dr. Hua pointed out that many are designed to encourage unnecessary consumption, leading to heavier financial burdens, particularly on young consumers. This model is a serious deviation from the vision advocated by Yunus, which aims to empower the poor by providing small, collateral-free loans to promote sustainable economic development (Hua, 2020).

At the same time, in my classes at National Taiwan University, my professor and thesis supervisor, Ruey-Shan Guo, who also served as vice president of the university in 2018, introduced me to management thinker Charles Handy's theory of the "Second Curve." Handy (2016) argues that it's essential to begin developing a second curve—representing new ventures and directions—before the first curve, or one's current trajectory of success, reaches its peak. This concept resonated with me deeply, as it underscored the importance of not waiting until stagnation sets in but proactively seeking out new opportunities. Also, Dr. Guo (2020) suggests that life needs to be managed and innovated more than a business. He applied business theory to life, rethinking the direction of life and practicing it himself. Inspired by Charles Handy and Dr. Guo, I began to contemplate the next phase of my own career, striving not only to ensure its continuity but to foster innovation and personal growth, thus embarking on my own "second curve."

## Story Six: Arriving in a New Country--Growing with Change

Arriving in Canada marked the start of a deeply transformative chapter in my life. For someone like me, with limited English skills, the transition was overwhelming at times. Every interaction required immense effort, and the challenges of navigating an unfamiliar educational system added to the pressure. However, the kindness and support of my supervisors, instructors, and fellow classmates made all the difference.

Without their patience and encouragement, it would have been nearly impossible for me to persist. I am profoundly grateful for their willingness to guide me through moments of uncertainty, offering not just academic support but also a sense of belonging. Their unwavering belief in my potential allowed me to slowly overcome the language barrier and adapt to a new way of learning. According to Thomson and Esses (2016), peer mentoring significantly improved the sociocultural adaptation of international students in Canada, fostering a sense of belonging that enhanced both academic and personal experiences. Similarly, Oloruntoba et al. (2022) emphasize that mentorship can provide crucial guidance in addressing the unique challenges of language and cultural adaptation, significantly contributing to the academic success and emotional well-being of international students. It was through their mentorship that I found the strength to continue, even when faced with doubt.

The kindness and support of Dr. Handford and Dr. Hoare, my two supervisors, left an indelible mark on my journey. Reflecting on their influence, once again, I'm reminded of Lao Tzu's words: "The highest good is like water. Water benefits everything by giving without taking or contending. It likes the place others dislike, so it follows closely the divine law." They chose to help me, a student who wasn't excelling in an English-speaking environment, and their choice to extend such kindness mirrored the virtues of water as described by Lao Tzu. They embraced

me, much like water flows to the lowest places, demonstrating compassion and patience when I needed it most. Their willingness to help me, even when it wasn't easy, taught me not only about perseverance but also about the value of lifting others up. This act of kindness reminded me that leadership is not about awards or recognition but about making a difference when it truly matters.

As Tory so powerfully wrote in *Debwewin*, "Not that Sam ever did any of this for an award... Not that Peter ever did any of this for awards" (Handford, 2023). As Hoare (2024) discusses, true leadership goes beyond traditional recognition, and it is for uplifting those in vulnerable positions. My supervisors supported me, not for accolades but out of genuine care for my growth. The impact of their mentorship goes far beyond academic support—it's about embodying what it means to be a true leader and educator. Moreover, their actions exemplified leadership that focuses on empowering others, much like Lao Tzu's analogy of water—empowering others and creating meaningful impact.



Initially, the Canadian approach to education—emphasizing critical thinking, self-guided exploration, and open dialogue—felt foreign to me, as I was more accustomed to structured and directive forms of learning. However, with the help of those around me, I began to appreciate the strengths of this educational model.

Bergmark and Westman (2015) highlight that participatory learning environments foster critical thinking and autonomy, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. This shift aligned with my own experience, as I gradually embraced this approach, which fostered a sense of intellectual curiosity that extended beyond the classroom. Carini et al. (2006) further support the idea that active student engagement is key to intellectual growth. Handford and Leithwood (2019) show that students who are encouraged to participate in open

discussions and critical thinking activities tend to achieve better learning outcomes and develop deeper intellectual curiosity. In Dr. Hoare's philosophy class, her belief in the communal of learning also has profoundly influenced how I view education. As she states, learning is not a solitary pursuit, but one that thrives on collaboration, shared responsibility, and the collective wisdom of the community. With the support of my supervisors and peers, I gained the confidence to contribute meaningfully to discussions and embrace a learning style that promoted deeper reflection and independent thinking.

This chapter of my life is more than a story of personal growth—it is also a testament to the power of community. The support I received from my supervisors, instructors, and classmates played a fundamental role in my journey, and I am forever grateful for the kindness and patience they extended to me. The lessons I've learned through this experience continue to guide me as I strive to grow, not only as a student but as a person committed to making a positive impact, much like those who supported me on this journey.

## Conclusion

This project has been a journey of excavation—a journey to uncover the connections of our identity and family history and transform them into wings that guide us with values and lessons learned along the way. It is more than a collection of stories; it is a dialogue across generations, a bridge between the past and the future, and a testament to the enduring connections that shape who we are.

Through the method of Narrative Métissage that has taught me to embrace the web of lives stories interplayed within each other's embrace. By reflecting on my family's experiences—my grandfather's compassion, my father's resilience, and my own navigation of cultural hybridity—I have come to see the stories of our lives not as isolated moments, but as threads in a vast tapestry of human experience. These stories have taught me that identity is not fixed, but fluid and ever evolving, shaped by the trials we endure and the values we uphold.

History is both a mirror and a map, for us all to follow ahead. It's not about looking at what has happened but also, about influencing what's yet to unfold. Forgetting history, as Todorov warns, is a betrayal of civilization. However, memory itself should have a purpose. Not just recalling the past but triggering compassion, wisdom, and meaningful actions. Through preserving these narratives, I hope to illuminate the resilience, hope, and quiet grace that lie within even the darkest moments.

To my daughter, this project is more, than words on a page—it's a heartfelt message from me to you. I hope you find in these stories the courage to face the uncertainties of life, the wisdom to honor your roots while embracing new possibilities, and the strength to navigate the complexities of your identity. You find yourself in a place where different cultures intersect – it's, in this space that I believe you can discover your true potential; not by favoritism towards one

identity or the other but, by crafting your own unique path. Importantly from this endeavor I've learned that the principles we uphold of kindness, compassion, resilience, hard work and humility form our authentic heritage. They don't weigh us down; instead they illuminate our path enabling us to perceive the world and make choices. When I contemplate the teachings of my family the traditions of my heritage and my personal experiences I am reminded that lasting legacies are not measured by wealth amassed,. By the enduring love and insight we impart to others.

[Daughter's name], my hope for you is simple yet profound: to embrace these principles not as mandates but as instruments to mold your journey through life. May you navigate with elegance and bravery while carrying a sense of duty towards the world that surrounds you. Always keep in mind that you have companionship. The tales of those who preceded you and the affection of those by your side will illuminate your path forever.

The core of being human is our ability to draw lessons from history and form connections with each other as we work towards a brighter tomorrow. If this piece prompts one act of kindness, a moment of contemplation, or a surge of bravery it will have served its intended goal effectively.

## Ten Life Lessons for My Daughter

### 1. Embrace the Unknown with Courage

Life is full of mysteries and challenges. Approach them with an open heart and a curious mind. Remember, the greatest growth often lies just beyond your comfort zone. When you talk about your dreams, you might as well think bigger.

### 2. Compassion is Strength

True compassion is not just a feeling but an action. Kindness is an active choice, not just a passive sentiment. As your great-grandfather taught through Buddhist stories like Sacrifice to the Tigress, kindness and selflessness should guide your interactions with others.

### 3. The Balance of Strength and Gentleness

Whether in relationships, work, or personal goals, seek balance. Balance allows you to navigate life's complexities with wisdom and grace, as your grandfather's teachings and actions have shown. Forbearance is wisdom; patience and restraint are not signs of weakness but marks of wisdom.

### 4. Learning is a Lifelong Process

Education is a lifelong journey. The joy of learning lies not in grades or accolades but in the process of expanding your understanding of the world. Curiosity and a love of learning will open endless doors. As your grandfather said, "Never Stop Learning."

### 5. Find the Hidden Gifts in Failure

Life may sometimes feel overwhelming, but every setback carries a hidden gift. Challenges are not the end but opportunities for reflection, growth, and resilience. As your grandfather taught me, "Behind every failure, there is a hidden gift." With persistence and a growth mindset, as Dweck's research highlights, you can overcome obstacles and turn

adversity into a stepping stone toward your goals. Remember, stay resilient in the face of adversity.

## 6. Cherish Family Bonds

Family is a foundation of strength and love. Draw from the wisdom and resilience passed down through generations, and let those lessons guide you as you build your own life.

Life will not always be fair. At times, you may feel the unbearable weight of burdens you never deserved, falling upon your shoulders like unforeseen storms. There will be moments when rumors and false accusations spread about you, painting a picture of someone you do not recognize. In those moments, you must bow your head, work harder than ever, and stay true to your goals. "Truth takes time" (Handford, 2023, p. 8).

It is during the darkest and most challenging times that your true character is revealed—not when life is smooth and effortless, but when everything feels like it's against you. Hold fast to your values, even when the path seems impossible. Act with integrity and stand for justice. Never, ever give up. Remember, no matter how long the night feels, the dawn will come, and clarity will follow the chaos.

Through these trials, you will gain wisdom. Experiencing injustice will teach you the deep value of fairness. Feeling the sting of betrayal will help you understand the strength of loyalty. Facing rumours and darkness will make you cherish the light and the truth all the more. Enduring loneliness will remind you never to take friendship for granted.

Every challenge, no matter how painful, shapes you into someone stronger, wiser, and more compassionate. Always carry the belief that even in the harshest moments, life has the potential to transform into something beautiful. Keep this wisdom close to your heart as you move forward.

## 7. Respect and Preserve Your Roots and Embrace Cultural Identity.

Your cultural heritage is a treasure. Embrace the richness of your Chinese roots while confidently navigating your multicultural environment. Remember, identity is not fixed; it's a beautiful blend of past and present. Your identity is unique. See the world through multiple lenses. Broaden your horizons and embrace diverse perspectives. Only by seeing the world's complexity can you truly understand its beauty and challenges. Be a lifelong innovator. Life, like business, needs constant renewal. Always look for your "second curve," as Charles Handy suggests. Embrace innovation in your personal and professional life to stay dynamic and resilient.

## 8. Courage to Be Yourself

Your assertiveness and clarity are your strengths. Continue to express your thoughts with confidence and maintain your boundaries, teaching others the value of mutual respect. Your confidence and independence already inspire me, and I hope you continue to carve your own path with strength and purpose. Success is fleeting, but being a person of value leaves a lasting legacy. Choose actions that align with your principles and contribute to the greater good. As Albert Einstein said: "Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value."

## 9. Leave Your Mark Through Kindness

At the end of the day, your actions define you. Take action (Handford, 2024). Choose kindness and make a positive impact, however small, on the lives you touch. Let your actions align with the greater good. Words have power; use them to build others up, as your grandfather taught me: "Understand others with goodwill, and use positive language to resolve conflicts."

10. Always express gratitude for the people and opportunities in your life. Gratitude is a reminder of life's abundance and a way to stay humble.



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