

MY COLLEGE DREAM

– *From a peasant, a soldier and a worker to a professor*

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Preface

Everybody has had ideals and dreams in the childhood. These dreams bring hope, set goals for the future, and change lives in the struggle to make those dreams come true.

As a professor, I watch year by year new freshmen beginning their college years. From time to time, I cannot help recalling my college years and the long journey during which I realized my college dream. It was 16 years from the first time I dreamed of being a real university student to the time when my dream finally came true. During those 16 years, I twice enrolled in colleges as a sit-in student. When I finally enrolled in a university as a full-time student, I knew what university meant to me because I had been out of school for ten years. During those ten years, no matter if I was on the farmland surrounded by endless mountains, or if I was at the navy military construction sites next to deep blue sea water, or if I was in the tall workshop with numerous noisy engines, Gao Yubao's story¹ would often come to my mind, and a voice constantly cried out from my heart: "I want to attend university!"

Childhood

My father told me once that his grandpa Yu Weihuan was an intellectual, who was awarded the title *xiu-cai*² after passing the annual national examination in the late Qing Dynasty. His hometown is a remote mountain village called the Lixi District in Yihuang County, Jiangxi province, and his grandpa was the only one who had been awarded such a title in his hometown's history. My father also told me that his father Yu Daoxian had become a medical doctor (in Chinese medicine) through self-education. My mother's father Xu Changgeng graduated from a teacher college and taught in the only high school in Yihuang County. My mother Xu Huixia taught in that high school too and my grandmother Chen Mengjing was once a teacher in an elementary school.

My father Yu Qianjiu graduated from the medical school of Zhongshan University in 1949, before the Communist revolution. He was the first college graduate in his hometown. The reason he selected a medical school is that his family was not rich and could not afford the tuition, while medical schools and teacher colleges were tuition free then. Because he

¹ Gao Yubao was a poor Chinese farmer boy before the Communist revolution. He wanted to go to school but could not afford to. After the Communist revolution, he learned to read and write. He later wrote a popular novel with a title "I want to go to school", based on his real life experiences.

² There were 3 different titles for intellectuals then, *xiu-cai* is the lowest level

did not have enough money, when he went to the university in Guangzhou, several hundreds miles away from his hometown, he had to carry his luggage himself, walk on foot hundreds of miles of mountainous road and sometimes stay overnight under a bridge.

My father wanted me to go to medical school too. I remember the winter that I was 8 years old. My mother bought me a new coat made in a rather Western style. My father smiled at me and said, "Now you look like a university student." I was too young to understand what a university student meant. "It must be big," I thought because the words "a university student" also mean "a big student" in Chinese. Under my father's guidance, I began studying Russian and then English at the ages of 6 and 9, respectively.

The first time I enrolled in a college as a sit-in student was between 1962 and 1966. I was 11 - 15 years old then. I took English and Russian classes at the Guangzhou Broadcasting and Television University (or TV University). Upon completion, I would reach the academic level in English and Russian equivalent to a four-year university graduate for non foreign language major.

The TV University required that each applicant be more than eighteen years old. Since I was the only applicant who was underage, my father tried very hard to persuade the teachers in the TV University to make an exception for me. As a compromise, the TV University wanted the leader of my elementary school to write an official letter to state that I was not overloaded as a pupil in the school. In order to enroll me in class, my father ran back and forth between the university, which was in downtown Guangzhou, a city of more than 4 million people, and my school, the Sibeitongjin Elementary School, which was on the east side of the city. Since I was the best student in my class, my teachers and school leaders in my elementary school, most notably Mrs. Meng Yinong and Mrs. Zhong Baolian were supportive of my application to the TV University. In the end, the university offered to give me permission as a sit-in student because there was no precedent.

We students of the TV University all studied in our spare time. We listened to classes on the radio from 6:00 AM to 7:00 AM, 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM, and 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM each day. My radio was a crystal receiver made by my father. From time to time I had to adjust the position of the needle to the crystal to make the radio work during lectures. He later made a better transistor radio for me so that I could sit quietly to take lessons. We also watched televised evening class every two or three days from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM at the District Worker's Cultural Centers (there were four of these centers in the city). The television set in the Dongshan District Worker's Cultural Center was a 12 inch black-and-white one. I do not recall anybody owning a TV at home back then. Over the weekends, we students took buses to attend classes at the classrooms rented from No. 34 Secondary School in Jie-Fang-Zhong-Lu (Central Liberation Road) of downtown Guangzhou, where professors gave additional lectures, went over homework, handed out lecture notes, textbooks and solution sheets for the homework, and gave exams. We used 6 textbooks entitled "English" by Professor Xu Guozhang, that each cost about one U.S. dollar. I do not recall exactly how much the tuition was, maybe 10 yuans a year (or roughly 8 U.S. dollars), a quarter of a young worker's monthly salary.

When I sat in the classroom for the first few weeks, I was nervous because my classmates were all so "big" (from a kid's eyes). They were all between their twenties and forties. But it did not take long for me to get used to it, as my exam grades were above

80. My parents still keep one of my midterm exams. I got a 92 on that exam. At the TV University, I got a taste of college study. "I want to be a real university student in the future," I said. After three years of study, I completed the English course with a grade of 80 or above (out of 100) on the final exam. My second year of Russian study was interrupted by the political chaos in mid 1966. As a sit-in student, I was not eligible to get a certificate. But I certainly gained a lot from the study in my life.

In 1964, Guangya Secondary School, one of the two best secondary schools in the city of Guangzhou, admitted me as student. Before the new semester started, it was a tradition of Guangya that all freshmen who were the cadres of the young pioneer team in their elementary schools were invited to a summer camp. It was not a surprise that all the freshmen in my class were invited. In the camp, my classmate Jiang Baogen asked me: "What do you want to be in the future?"

"I want to go to college and then become a scientific expert," I answered without any hesitation. Indeed, I was confident that I would be admitted to a university, even though the competition would be tough and I was not the best student in my class. After all, Guangya, which was founded more than 100 years ago by Zhang Zhidong, the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces back then, was famous since 98% of its high school graduates entered colleges and universities.

At that time a popular propaganda slogan was, "Be a worker, a peasant or a soldier after growing-up". Ironically, several years later, I actually did become a peasant in a mountain village for more than two years, then a navy soldier for more than five years and finally a tractor-manufacturing worker for another two and half years, before I finally became a full-time university student.

I must say that I had a happy childhood. After more than twenty years in wars, China finally had a peaceful period since 1949. Most people were happier than they were before the liberation, the society was stable, public order was in the best state Chinese people had ever experienced, the environment was very safe, and the whole social atmosphere pushed one to be honest, to work hard, and to help each other.

When I was in schools, I had no worry and no pressure. In my elementary school years, I was the number one student in my grade. In my sixth grade year, I took part in the city mathematics contest and won an award of the third class. Even though I was in the twelfth place from the bottom, out of 100 or so winners in the city of more than 4 millions people, in my school I was the only pupil who got an award in that competition.

I recall that when Teacher Meng took our class to learn swimming in the kids swimming pool of the Dongshan District the first time, I managed to swim several meters away in the pool. The coach of the children swimming team in the District was satisfied and I was admitted to his team. I thus had the advantage over the other kids in my generation to swim three times a week after school.

My father bought me a violin and sent me to a music class in the Children's Home of the Dongshan District. After several lessons, I realized that I did not have the talent, was not interested in violin and was not motivated. My father understood and did not forced me, even though a violin was quite expensive to him. So I dropped out without punishment.

In my middle school years, even though I was no longer the number one in the class,

I was well above the average. All my school homework was finished before 4 o'clock in the afternoon. After that, I went to play soccer or to swim. In the evening, I did homework from the TV university, while my classmates did their school homework (Guangya was a boarding school). I recall that once in a music class, Teacher Xue asked me to sing and then gave me a score of 100. Right after that the whole class burst into laughing, because he just gave another girl Xia Jimei a score of 95. She was a member of the school chorus and had a beautiful voice, while I had a cracking one. Besides, even though I was taking the Russian lesson in the TV university, in the middle school she was always number one in the Russian exams, while I was number two. Now it was the opposite in singing. No wonder everybody laughed.

Farm

In 1966, the infamous Cultural Revolution broke out. Two years after that, most secondary school kids were sent by the government to the countryside to be peasants, or in the words of those years, "to be re-educated by peasants". Twenty percent of my classmates were able to go on to senior high school, after a strict selection based on their family backgrounds; they were mainly from workers' or peasants' families. The main reason was that the economy was in bad shape due to the Cultural Revolution and the government adopted this policy to dissolve the unemployment trouble. I was young and naive. I did not know what was really going on. One day in October 1968, after it was clear that in a few days I would be a peasant in a mountain village called Ma Village in Paitan District of Zengcheng County, 100 km away from Guangzhou, I walked through the campus of Zhongshan University. I understood that I might not be able to fulfill my college dream because there would be no colleges and universities anymore. They were all closed down by the government because Chairman Mao Ze-Dong believed at that time that the youth should be educated by peasants rather than by professors in the universities.

Chairman Mao said that the countryside had wide open spaces and a middle school or high school graduate could accomplish a lot there. According to his call, thirty million young city kids (rusticated youths) were sent to the countryside by the government between 1968 and 1976. It is now clear that this was a bad policy. The experience of being a peasant made me believe strongly that knowledge of science and technology is important for people and for myself. Without it, it is difficult to make a big contribution to society or to make a better life for ourselves. As a middle school graduate, I did not have enough of such knowledge. I grew up in the city and in an intellectual family. When I went to Ma Village, I began to learn the difference between the city and the countryside, and the difference between workers and peasants. A peasant in a rich village in the suburbs of Guangzhou earned 1 yuan a day. But a peasant in a poor village in our commune only earned 20 Fens (0.2 yuan) a day. Ma Village was one of the richest villages in our commune. A farmer earned 50 fens a day. Eight years later, I became a worker in Guangzhou and I earned 45 yuans a month. As a worker, I had weekends off, but peasants did not have pay if they were off on weekends.

Ma village is at the foot of a hill, called Fu-chuan-gang (Overturned-boat-mountain), because it looks like a boat overturned. It took us 2-3 hours to get to the top of the hill, where there was a trench in which a company of the Chinese army fought against the Japanese invader in the second world war. All but one cook were killed by the Japanese

in that fighting. A brook went through the village. We were told that the hill was a dense forest in the 1950's, with a waterfall year round near the village. The environment deteriorated with the fast growing population. By the time we went there, the forest could only be seen on the top half of the hill and we could only see the waterfall during rainy days. An old Chinese saying goes, "ren-qiong, shan-guang, shui-you-jin", which means when people are poor, the forests in the mountain are cut down and the brooks are dried. When I went to Ma village, the peasants in Ma Village had enough food and were self-sufficient. This was much better than the situation before the Communist revolution, according to the old peasants. They could also afford to buy cloth for their clothes, but nothing beyond that. Bikes and watches were luxuries for peasants. In the village of more than 200 people, only one person had a watch. He was a retired army officer. Most villagers could not afford to see doctors and the medical facilities were not adequate in the countryside.

I saw gradually how I could make a difference. So I learned some basic Chinese herb medicine and acupuncture from my father, who was a teacher in a medical school. I spent one month with my father when he was training a group of navy nurses. I learned injection, acupuncture, herb medicine and some basic medical knowledge in a navy hospital. My father took me to the operation room to watch surgery. Then I returned to Ma Village where I settled, with a set of acupuncture needles, alcohol and cotton balls bought by my father, and continued my study from the college textbooks on medicine that my father gave me. I used this new knowledge to help villagers with their ailments in my spare time.

To prepare for treating the peasants, I often practiced acupuncture on my own body. When I got sick, I also tried the herb medicine myself instead going to see doctors. Once I got hepatitis with jaundice. The symptoms of the disease showed up clearly on my face, eyes and urine, because they all appeared a yellow color. Several classmates in our commune got this disease and went home to have treatment. I could too. However, I was not in a panic, I thought that I should have confidence in myself and in the medicine I learned. Otherwise, how could I have confidence to treat the patients? I followed the books to pick the herbs such as wild chrysanthemums, ban-ben-lien, etc. in the fields and to boil them, then I drank the soup. I became more and more confident as I felt better and better each day that I took the herb medicine. It happened that after a month, my mother came to see me. She was very concerned after she got to our village and heard about my story. She took my urine sample back to her hospital. She was a lab technician in her hospital. After her examination, she confirmed that I did recover completely.

In the countryside nobody assigned me as a "bare-foot doctor" (a multi-functional nurse who works in the field like other peasants rather than in a clinic when there is no demand from patients). The villagers trusted me because they believed that my father was better than any single doctor in the commune and even in the county. When they got sick, the first thing they often did was to see me and ask for help. I treated them with acupuncture or told them what kinds of herb medicine would help them and asked them to go to the fields to pick them up, to boil the herbs themselves and then to drink the soup. The peasants often recognized those herbs, though they may not have known their medical functions. I relieved some farmers' pain in this way and it cost almost nothing.

Once in our village, a boy whose last name was Wen contracted infantile paralysis.

He could not move his legs and lied on the bed. I went to his home to treat him with acupuncture and herb medicine. After more than a month of treatment, I helped him recover to the extent that he could run again. The news spread and even patients in the nearby villages sought my help. However, my knowledge in medicine was limited and I could not treat serious medical problems. The desire to do better reminded me of my college dream.

I did not get paid for my service and did not get less of a workload either. However, when holidays came, almost all families would send us their homemade rice cakes for their gratitude. When that happened the family formed by four of us young kids from the city, Liang Chunsui, Liang Meiduan, Han Suisheng and I, would not need to cook for two or three days. We had to finish the food quickly because we did not have a refrigerator.

Even though I lived at the bottom of society from today's point of view, the experience of being a volunteer nurse gave me happiness for being useful in the society, and won me love from the villagers. They helped me in their own ways.

Since we were not familiar with how to plant our vegetables in a well-planned fashion to keep our supply coming smoothly, from time to time, we were out of vegetables. The farmers gave us vegetables for free when we were in need. They often found that out from our vegetable garden and we got vegetables from almost all the families in the village.

They taught me patiently all kinds of farming techniques and knowledge. They taught me how to plow the fields with the farm cartels, how to make the fields smooth with a rake, how to sow seeds and to transplant rice seedlings by hands, how to cut rice with a sickle, how to thresh and how to dry rice. They taught me how to grow vegetables and tobacco, and to dry tobacco leaves.

I even learned from them bamboo rafting and spent one month along the Zeng River to float a big bamboo raft from our village to the construction sites in the City of Guangzhou, 100 kilometers away, together with several villagers. Rafting is an interesting experience. When we were in the upper stream, water flew slowly and we sat on the raft most of the time, watching the ever-changing scenic view along the river. The river zigzags, sometimes we had shallow water and sometimes we came to a rapid. The water was often quite deep when the river turned direction. When we encountered a rapid, we needed to be very careful and work very hard, otherwise, the raft might have been broken by the rapid. In that case, the bamboo would spread around the river and all our effort would be in vain. When I first learned to raft, I often dropped into the deep water at the turn corner of the river or at the rapid, because I did not know how to use the bamboo punt-pole. With the help from the farmers, I picked up the skill soon. Whenever, there is an emergency, I would point the punt-pole in the right direction and would push the raft away from dangers. Then I relaxed and enjoyed the view.

The experience in the countryside gave me confidence. Most important, the experience motivated me to study more. When I first got to the village, as a seventeen-year-old young man, I could not even compete with a thirteen-year-old country girl in farming. I was really ashamed of being useless. Finally, I became a qualified peasant and became needed and trusted by the villagers through studying medicine from the textbooks of medical schools. An incident in Spring 1970 was a turning point.

In spring 1970, Mr. Xiong baiqiu, the newly-elected team leader of the village was

unhappy with some associate team leader and temporarily resigned. The two associate team leaders did not want to take the lead. All of sudden, everybody in the village stayed home waiting. A village was basically a collective farm. The living standard of the villagers was based on the harvest of the village itself. The team leader organized the production, the life of the village and the distribution of the earnings, under the supervision of the villagers. Since the 1960's, the head of the village, called the team leader, had been elected each year by popular votes of the villagers through secret ballot. As an old saying goes, "Spring is the important season of a year in farming." The villagers could not afford to waste time in waiting or they would suffer from hunger. After I realized what happened, I volunteered to serve as the acting team leader temporarily. The peasants in the village of more than 200 people accepted my leadership, even though I was only 18 years old, I was not an elected or an appointed leader, and I was not a member of the Communist Party or the Communist Youth League. I quit the acting-leadership several weeks later after I helped the elected team leaders to settle their problem. The farming of the village did not suffer. This incident showed that I had won the trust of the villagers. At the end of 1970, I was honored as an excellent rusticated youth of the Zengcheng County and the Huiyang Region.³

Navy

At the end of 1970, December 13, I joined the Chinese Navy. Mao once said, "The People's Liberation Army is a big school." Indeed, young soldiers including me learned a lot from the army. The PLA has a great tradition, strict discipline and glory history. I am proud of being a member of such army once. In the Chinese navy, I was in an engineering company. Our tasks were to construct airfield, sea port and underground defense projects using engineering machines such as tractors, bulldozers, dredging machines, road rollers and carry-scrapers. Before I joined the navy, I rarely saw any machines in farming, and just used simple ancient farming tools. Now all of sudden I saw the great power of these machines and was deeply impressed. The first weekend after I went to our company, I walked seven miles to the county bookstore and bought some books about engines and tractors. It was a hard labor work to be a driver of these machineries. There were many control poles and we needed to use our feet and hands on clutch, brake, and two different poles simultaneously. Besides, in summer, it was extremely hot inside the tractors. Thus, it was often that two soldiers drove a machine in turn. In order to learn the repairing technique, when it was my turn to rest, I usually checked whether in the construction site there were some machines that were out of order. If so, I would go over to learn and to give a hand. In some sense, skill comes from experience. Since I did a lot repairing projects, I soon became one of the most skillful operators in my company. I became a technician in the "big school".

However, "big school" did not serve as a substitution for college. The army needed college-educated people. When I joined the army, those machines were getting old and needed to be repaired. Most of the engineering machines such as tractors, bulldozers, dredging machines, road rollers and carry-scrapers, were imported. Many of the tractors and bulldozers were from the Soviet Union. Thus their manuals were in Russian. Some

³ *the Guangdong Province is about the size of Florida and consisted of eight regions.*

bulldozers and dredging machines were from Japan or Romania, and their manuals were in English. From time to time, in the discussion on how to repair the machines, someone would say that it should be explained in the manuals and it would be a great help if someone in the company understood the manuals.

Nobody else in my company or my battalion could read the manuals, so I volunteered to translate them from Russian and English to Chinese using the knowledge I learned from the TV University. There were 5 of them, a total of more than 600 pages. I needed dictionaries in Russian and in English. It was very difficult to find them during that period of time. Our company was in Zhanjiang, a coast city in southern China. A Guangya school-mate Ling Yunfeng worked at Zhanjiang too. She introduced me to a Guangya alumna Chen Huiji, who worked at Zhanjiang Agricultural Machinery Institute. He borrowed some technical dictionaries for me from the institute library.

At the beginning, I could only translate a few lines a day. Gradually, I became familiar with the technical languages and I could do faster. Since my English was not as good as that of a university graduate majoring in English, I was not sure how to translate a dozen sentences. I asked Mr. Chen for help again.

One summer evening, I went to Mr. Chen's home. It was a 10 square meter room. His family was outside in the yard of the institute because there was no air-conditioning then. In fact, there was not even a fan in the room and we needed mosquito-repellent incense to drive away mosquito. In this small room, Mr. Chen, a graduate of Qinghua University, one of top two universities in China, spent more than an hour explaining to me all the difficult problems.

Nobody assigned me the job of translating the manuals. I borrowed those manuals from the officers or the technicians of the battalion myself and worked on them. I did not get paid for doing it. In fact, I did not even get less workload from doing the extra work. I just did it in my spare time. Mr. Chen didn't get any pay for helping me either. In those days, it was shameful to ask for reward for your service.

Moreover, in those crazy days, most intellectuals were being discriminated and it was considered quite stupid to study, especially to study foreign languages. But nobody laughed at me. It was obvious that my work helped the construction projects in our battalion. My fellow soldier Hao shuzhou helped me to copy my work to a proper paper and had it xeroxed with the assistance of a friend in the engineering department.

The job confirmed to me the value of higher education. Even though I did not get paid, I got a lot from doing the extra work. It gave me the opportunity to learn techniques and machinery and to improve my foreign languages. It gave me experience as a translator. It made me a skillful mechanic in my company. Moreover, it gave me the encouragement to progress further.

Being a junior high school graduate, in fact with only two years of secondary school education, in order to make up the missing secondary school education, there were a lot of courses that I needed to take: physics, chemistry, elementary algebra, geometry, trigonometric functions, and analytic geometry. I never stopped studying, even during the Cultural Revolution.

In order to study, I needed textbooks. It was not so easy to find no-nonsense textbooks between 1968 and 1976. Old textbooks were forbidden to be published and the new high

school science textbooks were full of political nonsense. For a period of time during 1966-1968, I lived in the library of Guangya. Books were all over the place, on the shelves or on the ground. One day, I saw a textbook named “Collection in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry Textbooks for Self-study.” I was very amazed and searched for the rest of them. I found most of them in the collection and “stole” them, though nobody cared. A lot of those books were later burned or destroyed. The librarians were all sent home and we were the occupants of the library during the political fighting in the Cultural Revolution. At that time I started to study these textbooks. I did not get the complete collection. Before I left for the countryside, I managed to borrow senior high school textbooks from my schoolmate Liang Jiasheng who was a senior in 1966. He went to a farm in Hainan Island in 1968.

In order to study, I needed a desk too. When I was in the mountain village, we could not afford a desk. There were plenty of bamboo forests around our village. With the help of the villagers, we learned how to make a support using bamboo. Putting a plate on the bamboo support, we made an excellent desk. When I was in the navy, we lived in a hut made of straw, bamboo and mud. We were engineering soldiers and lived in simple facilities most of the time. The bed was my desk. It did not bother me, as long as I had textbooks. I finished all the missing high school courses in this environment. I did have a real desk and a chair during 1973 and 1974, when I was assigned to manage the kitchen and shopping for the company. I had a desk to put the money for food for the company in. At 5:30 AM, we got up to cook breakfast. By 8:00 AM, we finished cleaning and I rode a bicycle to the free market in downtown Zhanjiang and bargained prices for vegetables and food. When I came back, I worked with the other soldiers in the kitchen to cook lunch. By 1:00 PM, we finished cleaning the kitchen and feeding pigs. Between 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM, and between 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM after dinner, I studied at my desk. Nobody bothered me. During those two years, I translated the manuals. With three or four big dictionaries around, it would be quiet inconvenient if I did not have the desk. Usually, soldiers in our battalion would stay in this position for at most one year. They preferred to work with the machines so that they could learn more mechanic techniques. The techniques they learned would give them an edge in getting a good job in cities after they retired from the navy. I was so fond of the desk that I hinted to my officers that I had no problem in staying in the kitchen until I retired. My fellow soldiers and the officers liked me to work in the kitchen because I bought a cook book and learned to prepare 7 varieties of food for breakfast, such as rou-juan (meat steamed bread), tang-bao (sweet steamed bread), hua-juan (onion steamed bread), man-tou (steamed bread), zao-juan (jujube steamed bread), noodle and rice noodle, so that each day of the week the breakfast was different, in comparison to three varieties a week before I went to work in the kitchen. I also managed to make the best out of the money for food during my term. Thus I stayed in the kitchen and owned a desk for two years.

In 1971 or 1972, Chairman Mao Ze-Dong decided that, “Universities are still needed.” The news was like thunder and lightning in the dark and renewed my hope. By then I had almost finished all the secondary school science courses by self-education. But the hope went away faster than the lightning, when I saw that my fellow soldier and my best friend Huang Jianxin, who joined in the navy together with me in the same time, was chosen

to the Nanjing Military Engineering School, because he was not only a good soldier in my company, but was also from a worker's family, which I was not. During the Cultural Revolution, there was no examination for college admission. The government assigned some quota of admission to some universities to a large unit (a battalion in the army, a commune in the countryside, or a large factory). The leaders of the unit made the selection. Whether the person had a qualified senior high school level was not relevant in the admission process. If one was from a landlord or a counter-revolutionary family, then the person had almost no political future.

The class of landlord was one of the enemies the Communist revolution wanted to beat down. After the revolution in 1949, children whose parents were landlords or rich people before the Communist revolution were subject to political discrimination. There was a government policy then called the "policy for the educable children". Its original intention was to emphasize that the children who obeyed laws should not be discriminated against because of their parents. The words "educable children" sounded better to the children of landlords than "gou zai zi" (which literally means "son of dog") during that period, but was a curse to other kids who did not belong to that specific group. In the political environment in the 1960's and 1970's, if somebody said that you were an "educable child", that was the same as saying that you were subject to political discrimination in a polite way. Otherwise, nobody would mention that you were an "educable child." In reality, the term "educable children" was extended to "educable grandchildren," that is, grandchildren of enemies of the revolution, or even "educable relatives," that is, relatives of enemies. A person who was viewed by leaders as an "educable child, grandchild or relative" had to make a much greater effort than ordinary people in order to earn the right of promotion and high education. Under the political environment, in order to protect themselves, many leaders would prefer not to promote "educable children". Otherwise, they themselves might be criticized as not being firm on their class standing and thus their political future was in jeopardy.

Because I am a grandchild of landlords, for a long period of time since the Cultural Revolution, people treated me as an "educable child," except for the period when I was in the countryside. In the first two years of the Cultural Revolution, like many kids whose treated as "educable children," I was humiliated and criticized on the big-character-posters in the school and even beaten once badly by a group of seven or eight kids whom I did not even know near my home, simply because of my family background. I have no blame for the people who criticized me or beat me. To be honest, during the Cultural Revolution, I also joined some meetings for criticizing our teachers and wrote several big-character posters criticizing my teachers, until I myself became a target of posters. None of my points in my posters were correct, looking back now. We were all misled by the ultra-leftist ideology then. From my own experience, I understood what kind of political pressure I had contributed to my teachers by writing those posters. I sometimes think that it was fortunate that I was treated as a second class citizen and a target so that I started to be sympathetic to my teachers. Otherwise, I might have done more crazy things, like the others did to me. Those kids who criticized others or whom were criticized were all losers of a stupid political movement.

When I was in the navy, after the officers in my battalion heard of my family back-

ground, the door to promotion or further education was closed to me at least for the near future. The political instructor (the officer in charge of our company) Mr. Huang Meizheng and other officers comforted me several times between 1971 and 1975 that the policy to “educable child” was applicable to me. Even though they put it in a positive tone and they were kind to me, I knew that I became a “second-class citizen,” despite the fact that my father escaped from the arrest by the Chiang Kai-Shek regime (supported by the U.S. government then) for his participation in the peaceful students demonstrations for democracy and freedom, and then joined the Communist guerrilla unit called “Dong-jiang-zong-dui” before 1949. That was the main reason that I was not selected to go to senior high school in 1968 and also not selected to go to the college in the navy. Otherwise, at least in the navy, I should have been a candidate to go to college, because in the first year in the navy and before they heard of my grandparents, I was honored as one of the role models of that year in our battalion and was the only one among all the new soldiers in the company.

I have no intention to make comments on whether it was fair or not. The policy was finally abandoned by the Chinese government in the 1980's. It was our history. It was the society we grew up in. Even if I knew that it was an unfair policy, what could I have done about it? I was just a small figure facing a strong force of society. What I struggled for was to make some contribution to the society and to make a better (meaningful and happy) life for myself within my reach.

Besides, after the experience in the countryside, I realized that I was better off than most of the peasants. They had endured through all their life the differences between city and countryside, and the difference between workers and peasants.

Compared to my parents, I was better off than them in the sense that I got less suffering politically. Because my mother's father was the Yihuang County party secretary of the Guo-Min-Dangan (the National Party), an officer corresponding to a county mayor of the old government during the Second World War, it became an easy excuse for others to attack my parents in the life competition between people.

Because of that, my father was removed from his position as the president of a hospital in early 1950s for a mistake he never made. The evidence of the so-called mistake was made up by his colleague so that nobody could be against him and the “evidence” was related to my grandpa. After more than 25 years, the authority announced my father's rehabilitation.

Also because of that, my mother was put in jail for a non-existent “crime” imagined by her co-workers during the Cultural Revolution. She could not even be allowed to see me when I was sent to the countryside. She was released after a half year because there were simply no evidence.

Compared to my grandparents, I was luckier than them, because I did not have to go through painful wars. My grandparents' generation suffered from 20 years of wars. Their hometown happened to be a battle-ground from time to time. When fight broke out, they have to escape to the forest. The Japanese army burned the whole village of my grandparents' hometown, including their grocery shop, and wiped out my grandparents' life-long saving.

Living through the half century, I understand that there is not a single society that is fair to every group. Each society manages to keep something of a balance between each

group of people, the balance each group of people can tolerate.

I still remember the words my company political instructor Huang Peizheng said to me “Mr. Yu, you will have a difficult journey ahead of you. However, I believe that if you are persistent, the door to success will eventually open for you.” Even though I was upset from time to time, I decided to face the challenge and to fight hard to change my fate. I made an important plan in 1973 that I would complete my university study through 10 years of self-study. I knew I could do it. But where could I get the textbooks? I got critical help at this moment. One day in 1973 on a ship back to my dormitory in the navy base in Zhanjiang, I happened to run into an alumnus of Guangya, Chen Fengjun, who graduated from the Harbin Military Engineering University. He worked in a shipyard of the navy. When I discovered that he was a university graduate, I asked for his help. He generously lent me his calculus textbooks, written by professors in the Qinghua University. I started to study university mathematics and physics courses in my spare time.

It was difficult to study those courses on my own. For a long time, I did not understand the concept that a number ϵ tends 0. It is sometimes treated as a zero and sometimes as a non-zero. I used to say to myself then that it was a magic number of mathematicians. Mathematicians could set it to be anything they liked it to be. Anyway, I took what the textbooks said and digested it as best as I could.

In the meantime, I worked very hard in my position, as if I was treated fairly. My hard work finally paid off. In 1975, the political discrimination on me as a second-class citizen finally ended. In the middle of 1975, strongly recommended by my fellow soldiers and officers in the company and supported by the superior officers in the battalion, an official process to promote me to be a platoon lieutenant began. I remember that before they proposed to promote me, our company commanders Mr. Li and Mr. Zhang said to me that they felt sorry for me and they were willing to take the risk to act on my behalf, even though they did not know the outcome. Their honest words made me think of the words of a great politician: “When we are in difficult situations, we should see our achievements and the bright side, raise our spirit and courage... [and] We should trust in people.” There are two ways to survive under difficult circumstances. One is to go with the flow and follow others, and the other is to take advantage of it as much as possible. Each society consists of people and people everywhere are eventually fair, though they may not be so in a certain period of time. It is possible to win the trust of the people even under an unfair political environment.

The promotion process took more than half a year. In the meantime, I was appointed as an acting platoon lieutenant. Had I not accidentally criticized a superior officer who came to visit our battalion before the official process on my promotion was almost completed, I would have already been promoted to a platoon lieutenant and stayed in the navy. Anyway the promotion process itself was an important turning point politically in my life. It indicated that I won the recognition of society of my hard work, skills and ability, and earned the equal right for promotion and higher education. Even though it came late, I appreciate my fellow soldiers and our company commanders.

Manufactory

In 1976, I retired from the Chinese navy on March 8, and became a worker in a factory on April 5. Two weeks after that I became a group leader in charge of 45 workers. Nobody

has called me an “educable child” since then.

In my heart, the hope of going back to university never really went away. Even though I finally earned the equal right for high education, by the rule at that time, only young people of the ages 25 or less could be admitted into universities. I was 25 then and I understood that it would take a least one year for the leaders and workers in the factory to know me by person and to consider my candidacy for college, if there was a quota to college for the factory. By then, I would be 26 years old. I had the feeling that fate was making fun of me: first it did not give me the equal right as the others to go to college. And then, when I finally earned the equal right, I was not eligible to go to college. I thought of the words by Zhu Geliang⁴ “mo shi zai ren, cheng shi zai tian”, which means that it is up to you to make an effort to have your dream come true but up to God to decide whether you would succeed. “It’s over,” I said to myself, “go your own way through self-education.”

It became increasingly clear that China needed college education. In modern civilization, no country can make progress without a modern education system. In the mid 1970’s, in addition to regular universities, some large manufactories set up their own schools for college education for their workers. They were called “worker universities,” and were recognized by the government as college-level. Age was not a limitation and it was full time in three years with pay if one was qualified. What a sweet deal!

Around the end of 1976, in the factory I worked at, the Guangdong Province Tractor Manufactory, the worker university began to recruit a class of 46 freshmen. The admission process was complicated comparing to Western standards. Each applicant first took a written exam in math. Then the workers in the applicant’s group would evaluate the person’s performance (such as whether the person was a good worker) and make a recommendation. After that, the leaders of each workshop (in charge of 6-10 groups) would make suggestions on possible candidates according to the quota assigned by the factory. Finally, the worker university decided who would be admitted among those candidates suggested by workshops.

This time the hope was real. I was so excited, and I applied. The written exam was taken in winter. But I felt the heat of competition. I was one of the top five among all applicants. The principal and the party secretary of the worker university soon knew me by person. However, I also soon learned that the main leaders of my workshop, the party secretary Lao Jian and the workshop director Mr. Yan Feicheng, were not very enthusiastic about my application. They liked me as a leader of my group, and they had been very supportive in my work. My group was one of the four largest groups in the workshop. Without their support, neither my group nor I would have been on the honor list of the city for that year. That year, only five groups from my factory were on the honor list of the city. But there were about 7 or 8 workshops in our factory and there were 6 or 7 groups in my workshop. I was also one of a dozen workers from my factory (of more than 2 thousands workers) that made the honor list of the city that year as role models. They had to make a strong case for my group and myself to win over the nominations from other workshops. They trusted my leadership. They wanted me to stay and continue to lead the group.

Three young workers, Wu Zhaoquan, Rui Jing-e and Zhang Taoguang, were on the list

⁴ *Zhu Geliang is a premier in ancient time of China and a famous politician.*

of my workshop to the worker university and they were all later admitted by the school. I was not on the list! I have to say that all of the three young people were excellent. They were all good workers and they were all group leaders. None of them was a relative of the workshop leaders, so I could not say that there were any “back doors” for those three people. But I had a higher mark than theirs in the written exam and none of them were on the honor list of the city that year. These two facts were in my favor.

I still believe that the leaders in the workshop were all nice to me, including Mr. Lao. They reacted according to their instinct. The two main leaders Mr. Lao and Mr. Yan were both promoted from workers. On the other hand, Ms. Xue Zhuhua, who graduated from the Nanjing Engineering College, was merely a technician under their leadership then, after she graduated for 6 years. This was the culture during chaotic years. Intellectuals were looked down upon and criticized, as though they were all stupid and useless, but workers were promoted. In their view, in addition to their trust in my job, I was fine as a worker and was on the same hierarchy ladder that they had gone through, so why bother going to college? To quiet me down, they selected as one of the three candidates an associate group leader in my group. The workshop leaders wanted to show me that they were fair to my group.

I did not want to make an enemy of Mr. Lao and the other workshop leaders. After all, they were not really mean to me. But I did not want to give up so easily either. I went back and forth between the school leaders Mr. Li Shouyun (principal) and Ms. Liang Fengyan (the party secretary), and my workshop leader Mr. Lao. The school leaders were very supportive of my case. They promised that if I could persuade our workshop leaders, they would let me in, even though they had finished recruiting.

I finally proposed a compromise that Mr. Lao accepted: I would be an informal student in the first year, half-time student the second year, and full-time student the third year. What it really meant was that I would only go to classes only when my shift was over in the first year and go to some of the classes no more than half time of my shift in the second year, and become full time only in the third year. I assured Mr. Lao that during the first two years I would make sure that my group would be in good working order. The school welcomed me with its full heart. Due to this strange arrangement, I was again enrolled as a “sit-in student” for the first two years.

Finally, at the beginning of 1977, I moved into the dormitory of the school, which was on the top floor of one of the two administration buildings of the factory. There were 48 students. It was so nice to be a college student, even as a sit-in student. By that time I had already finished calculus, general physics and mechanics. I had confidence that I was at least a year ahead of my classmates. Still, I kept track of the progress of the lectures. Each month, I had a week of night shift, instead of day shift. During those weeks, I went to class. I took each exam alone when the exams were given during my shift. When I took exams, I got the exam papers from the teacher and went to the classroom, which was often empty, since it was after 5:00 P.M. No teacher proctored me. During those years, exams were not taken seriously and besides, the teachers trusted me. One day, when I took the calculus exam, I solved all but one problem and got stuck there. There was only one student there taking her turn to clean the classroom. She noticed that I got stuck when she passed by. She was one of the best students in the class. She smiled at me and

gave me a quick hint on that problem. So I settled it with the help of her hint. This was the only time in my life that I cheated on an exam. It simply indicates that I still need to be watched in an exam because it is so tempting to cheat. It is difficult for one to be perfect. In my later teaching career, I have tried to enforce strict disciplines in exams. It is not that I do not trust students. I realized from my own experience that a system of supervision helps us to be perfect.

Mao died in 1976. A new era in China began. On October 20, 1977, encouraged by Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the late supreme leader of China, the Chinese government changed its college admission policy. During the Cultural Revolution, students were admitted based on their family backgrounds and behavior. There were no examinations on academic levels, except for in 1973. This policy caused a big problem in college education. Between 1971 and 1977, students in a college class had different academic levels because they were not screened in advance. Imagine a class where many only were at elementary school level, some were at junior high and some senior high school level. It was difficult for both professors and students in those years. In 1977, for the first time since the Cultural Revolution, admission was judged mainly by examination on high school knowledge. Every young adult under the age of 31 was eligible in principle to take the entrance exam, unless the person was currently a full-time student in a college or worker university.

What news! I was thrilled. I was eligible to apply! Like an old Chinese saying, “Sai-weng-shi-ma, Yan-zhi-fei-fu.” It translates as follows: an old man (living at the remote area border) lost his horse. It turned out that it was not a bad luck, but a blessing. In my case, being a sit-in student was a blessing indeed, had Mr. Lao permitted me be a full-time student in the worker university, I was not eligible to apply for college. There is a quite a difference between four-year college and the three-year worker university.

Unfortunately, there was a catch in the policy. Each applicant needed approval from the leaders of the unit where she/he works, especially those 26 years of age or over. In particular, the policy said that those who were between 26 and 30 and had particular talents could also apply. What was the meaning of special talents? It was anybody’s guess. It almost killed me.

I stated in my application that I had learned two foreign languages: English and Russian, and that I had translated 7 books (technical machine manuals) from English and Russian into Chinese during the past five years. I argued that these deeds and achievement could be considered as a “special talent.” At the workshop leaders’ meeting on this matter, Mr. Lao did not agree to put my name on the approved list for application on the ground that I was 26 years old, disregarding my argument.

Another leader of my workshop Mr. Zhong Shibiao thought that it was unfair to me. He could not persuade Mr. Lao and the other leaders in the meeting. So he brought this up to the president of the factory, Mr. Du Huashan, an old Communist. In the weekly factory-cadres-meeting of that week, which was one day before the application submission deadline, Mr. Du criticized Mr Lao and said: “In the assembling workshop there is a young worker who knows two English languages (all foreign languages were English to him) and applies for college. But the workshop leaders do not let him apply. This is not right. We should make excellent products, as well as prepare well-educated working forces for our future.” His words saved me.

It would seem that the story ended then. But it did not. Another old Chinese saying goes, “Hao-shi-duo-mo,” which means that nothing comes easy, or wonderful outcomes take time. In the fall of 1977, I took the entrance exam and got a 265 out of 400 (100 points each for Chinese, political science and math, and 50 for physics and chemistry. I did poorly in Chinese and political science and my score was 15 short of the minimum requirement for the top 100 universities (called key universities), though I passed the threshold of 250 for ordinary colleges. Eventually I was not admitted that year.

My failure was due to my grave mistake in dealing with the additional college-level problems in the exams of math, physics, and chemistry. In 1977, not too many young kids understood the materials at high school level. The summer announcement of the entrance exam, which was taken in the fall, caught everybody by surprise. If one could do well on the basic problems, he/she basically made it. However, I thought that those additional problems were essential to people like me, whose were more than 25 years old. I did all the additional problems in math and physics, which required one to know calculus, linear algebra and university physics. The effort cost a third of my time and prevented me from checking my answers to the other questions in basic materials. I lost more than 40 points in the basic problems of math, physics and chemistry. I thought that I had got more than 40 extra points in solving the additional problems. Quite the opposite, in the end, the points on the additional problems were not even counted. Had I concentrated on those basic problems, I would have scored 300.

In fall of 1977, 10 million young people of ages under 30 applied for college, inspired by the new change. But some quit before the exam because they chickened out. Indeed, between 1966 and 1977, it was paradise for middle school and high school kids. There was no pressure from teachers and parents on their study either. There were basically no homework and exams. However, they did not learn much either, as a consequence of happy study. They should have been scared by the entrance exams. 5.7 million kids eventually took the entrance exams. Only 273 thousand made it into college that year. In fact, the new semester started after February 1978, due to the late start of the entrance exam.

My wife Ye Ling was one of them, though we did not know each other then. She was also a rusticated youth during the Cultural Revolution. She scored more than 280 in the exam, above the minimum score for key universities, and enrolled in Zhongshan University. Most of the students enrolled in 1977 were quite special and talented ones. My wife later got her Ph.D degree in physics at the City University of New York and is now a professor in a college too. When she was a postdoctor, she confirmed in her experiment for the first time in history the theory called localization proposed by Nobel prize winner Dr. P.W. Anderson. Due to that research achievement she had the honor of giving a one-hour invited talk at an annual meeting of the physics society. On Christmas Eve of 1983, we married in New York City in a humble 16-square-meter attic of a three story house, in which I could only stand up half way. I was 32 years old then. Most people in my generation married late due to going to the countryside. I just did a little bit later than most of them. We had our marriage certificate in the Chinese Consulate in New York. A consul told us that we were the first couple among Chinese oversea students who got registered in marriage through Chinese Consulates since 1949. We did not go to church for our wedding party, and just invited a few classmates over to the wedding party. That night, we went to the

Rockefeller Center and the World Trade Center and took pictures under the Christmas trees. Even though it was a humble wedding party, it was more magnificent than any wedding party among our rusticated youths. We simple could not imagine that we could marry on Manhattan.

In 1978, the policy on college admission remained the same. I worked very hard to prepare for the exam. In the meantime, I kept track of the progress of the courses in the Worker's University and took care of the jobs in my group. Having gotten a lesson in the 1977 entrance exam, I knew that I might fail again in the coming exam and I could not afford to give up the alternatives.

In summer of 1978, I took a deep breath in the entrance exams and stayed until the last minute of each exam in order to make sure that everything I knew was correctly written down. In the English exam, 15 minutes into it, half of the 40 or so people in my classroom were gone. Half an hour into it, only two or three were left in the room. One hour into it, I was the only one left in the room. I was puzzled. A female teacher who was proctoring us noticed and told me, "Don't worry, you are alright." The exam lasted for two hours. I finished half an hour before the end and spent the rest of the time checking. In 1978, the English score was listed as additional, but everyone was required to take the exam. It was not counted in admission except for applicants majored in foreign languages. Many freshmen in the years 1977 and 1978 had to start English from the ABCs.

I got a 50 out of 100 in political science, 76 in math, 78 in Chinese, 81.5 in English, 83 in physics, and 88 in chemistry. The minimum total score for key universities was 340. My total score was well above the minimum score. In fact, even without counting English score, my score was among the top 800 applicants in Guangdong province, and more than 10 thousand were admitted to colleges that year in the province. It was funny enough that math was my major in college but I got almost my lowest score in math. On the other hand, I never did any chemistry experiments and got the highest in chemistry among all of my exam scores.

I still remember that it was about seven o'clock in the evening when I got the information on my exams scores. I got the information one day before the formal announcement posted in my factory. The brother of a worker in my group worked in the education office in the Haizhu District, where the reports of exam scores were issued. He told me that I got an excellent score and congratulated me. Then I rode my bicycle home. It was a five-mile ride. Even though it was in the evening, everything looked so bright. When I got home it was about eight o'clock. My parents were waiting for my news nervously. "How was it?" they asked.

"Not very good. I got only 50 in political science." I tried to trick them. But I could not hide the joy and told them the truth right away.

University

Soon I received the acceptance letter dated on September 21, 1978, which I still kept. I was admitted to Zhongshan University, the campus I walked through and admired so much before. I was informed to go to register between October 5 and 7.

The main gate of our tractor manufactory was facing the western gate of the Zhongshan University, separated by Xingang Lu (New Port Rd.). What a dramatic coincidence! I would terminate my life as a worker-peasant-soldier here and start a new journey in my

life from the new port. On October 7, I went back to the manufactory early in the morning as usual. I got all necessary paper works done in the factory. Then I left the main gate, crossed the Xingang Lu and went into the Zhongshan University. I sat in a classroom of a college for the third time in my life. But this time I was a full-time student and it led to my new career. I had ended my junior high school in October 1968, so I had been out of school for ten years by 1978. Sixteen years after I had the college dream, the dream came true. I am deeply indebted to the late supreme leader Mr. Deng Xiaoping and those friends who helped me in the long journey.

5.9 million people took the entrance exam in 1978. 401 thousand of them were admitted to colleges. Out of the four kids who went to Ma village with me, all but Han Suisheng made it to college that year. In my department of more than 130 freshmen in 1978, the oldest was 31 years old, and the youngest was 15. I was 27.

It is worth mentioning that the next year, 1979, the policy changed. Every applicant had to be less than 27 years of age. Lucky me, I was 28 years old then. The age limitation in China has been lifted more recently, thanks to the fast development in the past twenty years in China.

Once I was in the university, I realized that my other childhood dream of being a scientific expert had not come true yet. I did not waste time and battled to skip back to the class of 1977. I wanted to prove that I belonged to the class of 1977. Even though I had completed three-semester university courses of engineering major before I entered the university, the courses I was facing in the mathematics department were quite different from what I had learned. I had learned calculus and advanced mathematics. Both of them are of engineering major and their focuses are on applications of mathematical formulas. The corresponding courses of mathematics major were called mathematical analysis and advanced algebra. The focuses of these two courses were on the proofs of the formulas. Some courses such as material mechanics, mechanism of machinery, mechanical drawing, process metallurgy, etc., were not mathematics major courses. Only English and general college physics were the same as what I had learned. Nevertheless, I had some advantages over my classmates. In the three and half years in the university, I spent all the summer and winter vacations studying the courses of the class of 1977 in advance. Then during each semester, I took additional courses one at a time and passed the exams. In fall of 1981, I passed all the exams needed for the class of 1977 and the university agreed to let me skip to the class of 1977. I succeeded again! In February 1982 I got my BA degree from Zhongshan University, together with the class of 1977. In December 1983 I got my MA degree, and in May 1986, I got my Ph.D degree from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

After I went to the graduate school of UCLA, I learned that many of my classmates in UCLA were much better than me. My classmate Dr. Shu Chiwang is now a professor and a department head in Brown University. My classmate Dr. Tan Lin, now a professor in a university in Philadelphia, skipped to the graduate school two years after he was admitted to the famous Zhejiang University in 1977. My classmate Dr. Wang Shicheng, now a professor in Beijing University, skipped to the graduate school of Beijing University one year after he enrolled in a three-year college in 1977. My classmate Dr. Wang Ju, now a professor in Chinese Mathematica Sinica, failed the college entrance exam in 1977,

but passed the entrance exam for the graduate school of the Chinese Mathematica Sinica in 1978. The last two classmates I just mentioned never went to a senior high school in their life, like me. They all self-studied college mathematics in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution and they are all smarter than me.

In the graduate school of UCLA, I started to get a taste of being a scientist. Under the guidance of my adviser Professor T.S. Ferguson, I worked on a problem in statistical decision theory: “Does the empirical distribution function have the optimality called admissibility?” The empirical distribution function has a lot of applications. For instance, we may want to find out the percentage of the patients with certain disease whose ages are less than 1 year, 2 years, 3 years or in general t years old. These percentages are called a distribution function. The empirical distribution function based on a sample data from the patient population is the percentage of people whose ages are less than t years old in that particular sample. The empirical distribution function is a estimate of the true distribution which we may have difficulty to obtain. There are other types of estimates and the question is that whether the empirical distribution function is an optimal one, and if it is not then which estimate is a better one. The problem was open for at least a dozen years. In my Ph.D dissertation, I gave a complete answer to the question (see [1]). I showed that if there are only two or less numbers in the data set, the answer is yes and otherwise the answer is no and I provided a better estimate.

Since 1985, I have made several achievements in scientific research. For example, in 1983, I was a graduate student and took an advanced statistics course. From a classical textbook (see [2]) we used in that course we learned that in statistical decision theory there was a longstanding conjecture (since the 1950’s), namely, that the empirical distribution function has an optimal property called minimaxity. A year after I got my Ph.D, I proved the conjecture jointly with Professor Mosuk Chow, a colleague in Northeastern University. Both the result and the result in my Ph.D dissertation were published in a first-class statistics journal (see [3]). That is one of the contributions I have made in the palace of science.

In Chinese history, many great poets liked to write poems on the walls of famous scenic sites. Nowadays, many travelers in China mimic those poets and carve on the walls or trees of those scenic sites. “XXX came to visit here once.” I can proudly say that I carved “Qiqing Yu came to visit here many times,” on a wall of the palace of science. The wall is called “Science Citation Index”. I have published more than thirty papers in the journals cited in “Science Citation Index”.

Now I have gone through the academic ladder of assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor. I also get to understand what a scientific expert really is. In English, scientists include scientific experts and scientific researchers. In this sense I can say that my dream of being a scientific researcher has now come true.

However, a scientific expert means an expert who broadly and deeply knows their research fields, such as Professor Qian Xuesen, the leading scientist in making an A-bomb in China, or my adviser Professor Thomas Ferguson. They have remarkable talents in memorizing things and in logical thinking, and I do not think that I possess such a quality. In this sense, I can only say that I was naive when I was a child. I am still not there and will probably never be there. Even if the Cultural Revolution had not happened, I would

still not be there. Without the Cultural Revolution, I probably would not have had to suffer what I did, however I also probably would not be as strong as I am now. I can't go back in time, so who knows. Anyway, I have tried and I have made progress in getting closer to it. In the process, I learn by first hand that what kinds of dreams can come true in my lifetime and what kinds of dreams are unrealistic. The title of scientific expert does not belong to me anyway. I will not have regret for the rest of my life.

Postscript

Looking back, life is full of the unexpected and surprises. We may have setbacks, difficulties, disappointments and misfortunes in our life. We should also have hopes, dreams and ideals for the future and make every effort to fight for a better life. With this attitude, even when we live at the bottom of society, we still can find joy in our life. I feel lucky that I was able to overcome all the difficulties that our generation had suffered and come out with success. I also feel lucky to have had the chance to live at the bottom of society and to experience the bitterness first-hand. Life is like dishes. There are 5 different tastes in dishes: sour, sweet, bitter, hot (spicy) and salty tastes. Many people enjoy all of them or at least like to try each of them from time to time. We can say that there are 5 different tastes in life too. Sweetness corresponds to happiness and successes, sourness refers to envy or disappointments after setbacks in love, marriage and promotion, hotness may correspond to exciting or interesting times, salty taste may refer to a simple and peaceful period, and bitterness refers to hardships and poverty. Tasting bitterness is an adventure. After hardships, we really enjoy successes. That is why we say that life is beautiful.

I often think that it is wonderful to taste all of them for real in my lifetime, though it was not my original intention or plan and it turned out to be a tragedy for most people in my generation. The grass-root life experience taught me many things that the normal education system could not offer. It makes my life more colorful. Nowadays, I plant vegetables and flowers with my wife in my back yard and front yard, thanks to being a peasant; I have confidence and know how to handle it when there is something wrong with my cars, thanks to being a mechanic; I enjoy cooking at home, enjoy shooting, swimming, hiking and skiing, I have built a strong will and a healthy body, thanks to being a soldier.

I had two childhood dreams and have tried very hard to make my dreams come true. I have realized my college dream but only to find out that the other dream is not realistic. Even though I gave up the dream of being a scientific expert, I still have a realistic dream for my future: visiting the palace of science more often. It is a beautiful and sacred place. It is worth my effort to visit again and again.

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