



The
TAC *Of*
**INTERRACIAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Edited by
H.Y. Chen and J. M. Yates

The Tao of Interracial Relationships
跨国跨族的情爱之道

Edited by
Dr. Hongyun Chen & Prof. J. Michael Yates

Translated by
Hongyun Chen & Hongliu Chen

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Preface

Dr. H. Y. Chen and Prof. J. Michael Yates

What truly gets rid of racism, prejudice, and stereotypes is not physical or verbal warfare, but rather love and marriage, interracial. When people of different colors, cultures, and languages come together and treat each other's differences patiently, tolerantly, and understandingly, the differences have a chance to lead to a brand new congruity. And, the world will thus have more beauty and more harmony. Of course, this journey is not full of flowers and smooth rides; it can have more obstacles than anybody imagines: not long ago, interracial relationships were still a forbidden topic. Even now, not many talk about it. That is why many Eastern and Western readers eagerly wait for books to address possible problems and solutions related to interracial relationships. Some of those people hope to find guidance and advice for their existing or future interracial relationships from books; some need them for sociological research, and others are simply curious—maybe even a little prejudiced. Our anthology is an effort to satisfy those needs. It includes the laughter and tears of twenty four authors' real or close-to-real interracial relationships, and we are sure those who are actually looking for answers will smile after reading it.

Many thanks to the judges of the Chen-Yu Writing Contest: Lily Liu, Secretary-General of the World Female Chinese Writers Association and former President of the Chinese Canadian Writers Association; Ann Lee, President of Worldwide Foundation of Education and Culture (Canada) and Secretary-General of the North America Multicultural Foundation; Helen Wang, Vice President of North America Multicultural Foundation and Deputy Secretary-General of the World Female Chinese Writers Association; Shen Huihui, Member of the Chinese Writers Association and China Association of Translators; Zeng Xiaowen, President of Overseas Chinese PEN and *Sing Tao Daily* columnist. Their volunteer work is greatly appreciated. We'd also like to thank Ms. Julia Yu and Ms. Xiuya Chen for their generous sponsorship of the writing contest, and we are obliged to all the

authors as well and to Ms. Hongliu Chen, one of the English translators of this book.

Introduction

Dr. Jan W. Walls

According to the 2006 census, nearly 300,000 Canadians were in mixed marriages or mixed common-law relationships, a rise of nearly 30 per cent since 2001 (Globe and Mail, April 3, 2008). This number is expected to continue growing at increasing rates as our urban populations grow more culturally and ethnically diverse. As ethnically diverse young people associate with each other and learn from each other as classmates, as co-workers or as neighbours, they naturally come to see each other's differences not as mysteriously, inscrutably, or intimidatingly different, but rather as interestingly, even excitingly different and at the same time similar. In classrooms, for example, they face similar challenges in learning new material, and naturally find themselves with much more in common than they or their parents had imagined. They find themselves, as the Chinese would say, “同舟共济” [tóng zhōu gòng jì people helping each other in the same boat]. The more they discover they have in common, the less they will focus on mutual differences, and the less reluctant they will be to commit themselves to longer, more intimate relationships.

In light of the above statistics and most likely trends, *The Tao of Interracial Relationships* containing recent personal experiences in intercultural and/or interracial marriages is a welcome publication, useful not only for students of sociology, but for anyone entering into, or even considering entering into a “mixed marriage”. When I was a young man, the term “mixed marriage” most often referred to a marriage between a catholic and a protestant, or a Christian and a Jew, and while it was not forbidden, it was certainly not encouraged. Marriage between different races was not only frowned upon, in the U.S. it was actually illegal in many states until well into the 1960's, when the Supreme Court declared such discrimination unconstitutional. But now, how times have changed!

I cannot resist the temptation to add my own experience and advice to the rich collection in this book: In 1965, I was a graduate student at Indiana University, majoring in Chinese Languages and

Literature, minoring in Japanese and Asian Folklore. Ever since my high school years, I had dated many girls, even "gone steady" with one or two at different times, but all of them were monolingual English speaking Caucasians. I had never dated a girl of Asian heritage before. On the first day of classes that fall, I found myself in the same seminar as a young Chinese lady who was studying Comparative Literature under a prestigious Fulbright grant. It was a rather small seminar, so I had the opportunity to observe her behaviour—how she related to other people, how she dealt with complex questions in class, her sense of humour, etc. She began to fascinate me, so one day I asked her to join me for a cup of coffee after class, to “discuss some of the issues that arose from our reading assignments”. We got along well and eventually coffee after class led to dates, and dating led to engagement, and in less than a year we were married. So far, I don’t see much difference between our motivation and process of courtship and marriage, and that of most “intra-racial” processes.

This spring (2011), we celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary. Why has it lasted? For the usual reasons that make any marriage last: good communication skills; a core of common values and interests; common life goals; and genuine respect for each other as individuals, as well as respect for each other’s cultural traditions. Whenever thinking about “cultural differences”, we make a mantra of the Chinese saying, “殊途同归”(shū tú tóng guī), “different paths to the same goal”. But above all, we have seen our marriage primarily as a bond between two mutually understanding, mutually committed, mutually loving and caring individuals, and have never regarded it primarily as a marriage between products of two different cultures or races. We regard our differences—individual or cultural—as the variety that is the spice of our married life, which has been a long-lasting relationship between two individuals whose difference is on the visible surface of an underlying core made of love.

“Vive la différence”, et vive la commonalité!

April 2011

Back Cover:

Physical or verbal warfare can never rid us of racism; what we need is love and marriage, interracial: When people of different colors, cultures, and languages come together and treat each other's differences patiently, tolerantly, and understandingly, the differences bring forth a unique congruity. Of course, this journey is not full of flowers and smooth rides; it can have more obstacles than anybody imagines: not long ago, interracial relationships were still a forbidden topic. That is why many Eastern and Western readers eagerly wait for books to address possible related problems and provide solutions. Some of those people hope to find guidance and advice for their existing or future interracial relationships, some need case studies for sociological research, etc. Our anthology is an effort to satisfy exactly these needs. It includes twenty four stories encompassing all kinds of tears and laughter related to interracial relationships. Those who are looking for answers will have a knowing smile after finishing the book.

About the Editors and Translators:

J. Michael Yates: BA, MA, PhD, LLD. A well-known writer and university professor, Yates was born in Missouri and did graduate degrees at the Universities of Missouri and Michigan. A unique voice in the literary field and a widely published author of poetry, fiction, drama, translations, and philosophical essays, he has won numerous literary prizes, including the Major Hopwood Awards (both poetry and drama the same year) and the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Arts and Sciences from University of Missouri.

Hongyun Chen: Born in Linchuan, Jianxi, China, Chen did her degrees at the Second Military Medical College (M.D.) and the University of New Brunswick (Ph.D.). She began writing initially for Chinese Electronic Magazines around 1995 and hasn't stopped since. Her essays and short stories have been widely published in Chinese and English both in North America and China, some of which won Chinese literary prizes in the U.S. and Canada. She is one of the two translators of this book.

Hongliu Chen: Hongyun's sister, Chen is a translator for a French company in Hangzhou, China. She studied International Business Management at the University of Aalborg, Denmark. She loves philosophy, literature, writing, and most of all, soccer.

Praise:

This book containing recent personal experiences in intercultural and/or interracial marriages is a welcome publication, useful not only for students of sociology, but for anyone entering into, or even considering entering into a "mixed marriage". –Dr. Jan W. Walls

These interracial tales deal with all kinds of conflicts arising from interracial relationships and involve mainly the Chinese, Japanese, English, Irish, Swedes, Americans, and Canadians—both Anglophone and Francophone. Very entertaining, educational, and thought provoking. –David Li, Vancouver

My wife is from China, and we have been waiting for a book like this for years. –Giancarlo Polozzi, Montreal

This is a book I intend to use for my Ethnic Studies course in 2012. –Professor Juana Chan, Evergreen University

As a Ph. D. candidate in sociology, I have studied the differences between oriental and occidental cultures for many years. Nowhere have I seen these differences expressed more clearly—or viscerally—than in these stories. –Audrey Askew, the University of Aalborg.

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Excerpt:

Hai-kun and Ki-go

Joanne Ford

It was the 1980's and Japan was an economic power-house threatening to "take over" the United States, buying up blue chip companies, providing all the major innovations in technology, snapping up Elvis memorabilia, Van Gogh paintings, and N.Y. skyscrapers by the bushel. The Karate Kid could "take out" Rocky and Sean Connery's Armani-clad, white-haired James Bond had turned corporate Samurai and "knew" the enemy in Rising Sun.

Fate was written all over my meeting and eventual marriage to Hiroshi Uehara. He had been born in Tokyo in 1962 when I was graduating from high school and headed for Ohio State University. There was a 19 year age difference on top of the oceans between. What were the "odds" of our ever meeting, much less marrying? I taught English at a small college in South Eastern Ohio and when he came to study in the U.S. he'd gone to Atlanta—not Ohio.

At the time, there was a pipeline leading from the Japanese student community in Atlanta to Rio Grande College in Ohio. It was because we offered graduation credit for ESL (English as a Second Language) courses that a tsunami of Oriental students rained great financial profits on our college for about 10 years.

But it was not through this conduit that Hiroshi found his way to Rio and to me—it was a much stranger and more fateful route he took. He had "not done well" in a music school in Atlanta, where he studied opera by day and "partied hearty" at Atlanta's various disco dens all night and so found himself "booted" and leisurely making his way through the mid-west, sight-seeing, heading haphazardly westward and staying with Mormon families to cut costs (he hadn't told his parents yet about his travels).

He went past our small Rio Grande College sign in the one block that is Rio Grande Village and would probably have kept on, but he was hungry and he saw what appeared to be an Oriental student crossing the road to Bob Evan's Farm Restaurant.

He stopped to ask if there were any form of Oriental food to be found in the area and was happy to discover a fellow Tokyo-ite in the middle of nowhere, who invited him back to his apartment for Japanese “obento” (lunch, usually served in a specially designed lacquer tray.) During the course of the meal they bonded and Yo Goto remained Hiroshi’s buddy all the years he was at Rio. Yo sang the praises of the ESL program and told him that while there was no music department that could accommodate his opera studies there was a kickass show choir and a formidable music director.

Hiroshi decided, on the spot, to enrol. He was an English major and Music minor and the show choir found a way to exploit his operatic voice in comic skits where he’s burst out with that trained voice and astound everyone with his big, fat lady singing, tenor. It was an awesome voice, especially coming from a small man.

He was hard not to notice in a community of be-flannelled farm boys and corn-fed co-eds. He had an artist’s sense of singular style and dressed Tokyo G.Q. Then there was his hair. It was a Billy Idol punk, a blond Mohawk with black tick-tack-toe on one side. He was in all my sophomore and junior English literature classes, and believe me, I noticed him.

In Creative writing we “went round” on Haiku. He was very traditional about Haiku and didn’t “drop dead” over my radical theory that you didn’t need “season words” but could substitute anything that gave the feel of an eternal background (for instance, cosmic or vast historical time spans) juxtaposed to a Satori moment or “happening.” The Japanese word for “season word” is “kigo” and he mockingly called me Professor Kigo. He’d also told me that “cun” was a diminutive like “little dear or little love;” I teased back calling Hai-kun when I saw him coming across campus. Thus our pet-names for one another stuck over the years.

We began as friends—instant friends like we’d known each other all our lives. My best girl friend, at the time, was 8 years younger than I and thus only 11 years older than Hiroshi. Dr. Paula Thompson was a stunning blue-eyed blonde, who resembled Grace Kelly. Paula was the first object of Hiroshi’s interest (which he admitted to me also had an eye out for a green card as well as passionate love).

I agreed to “feel Paula out” on whether she’d date a student—and specifically him. As it turned out she was definitely not interested in dating a Japanese Billy Idol-Luciano Pavarotti wannabe. She dated computer nerds and lawyers—so, after the rejection, Hiroshi turned a green-card- yearning eye toward a second choice—me.

I was absolutely too old for him (the Japanese are very particular about marriage being for the children and only young women should bear children) and he really preferred elegant blondes to ancient hippies with long black hair just like all the girls back home. But I did love opera (and Paula didn’t) and I did have punk-leanings (and Paula didn’t) and we just had tons of fun together.

I think I started to love Hiroshi when he wrote an essay on Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (this is a novel by Anthony Burgess) for my Comparative Literature class. He compared Beethoven and Alex and wrote of how they were both extra-alive and how outside the box both were. Best essay I have ever gotten on *A Clockwork Orange*.

Hiroshi has an artist’s ear for language as well as for music and one of the joys of the years I was with him was the words he would create on the spur of the moment. I can think of two that I still use to this day. We watched a movie that starred Luciano Pavarotti called, *Yes, Giorgio!* In the film Pavarotti played an opera singer named Giorgio Fini and after seeing it, whenever Hiro finished anything he would declaim: “Giorgio Fini!!!” Just yesterday, at the gym, when I had finished my workout I said, under my breath, “Giorgio Fini!!!” The second word creation was also grounded in a name. I had a student in one of my classes named Rodney Pullins and so if Hiroshi pulled on or was pulled by anything it was a Rodney Pullins.

Hiroshi and I didn’t have children, but we had cats. I had one already when we married. A black mass of mayhem I’d named Raskolnikov and was variously summonsed by Raskol or Skull, but over the years we acquired more and Hiroshi got the honor of naming them. One we found on a tennis court – she was the ugliest cat I had ever seen and if we hadn’t taken her in she would have spent her life in the wild. He promptly named her Another Cat, which I mellowed to Ano-cat. Ano was killed by a car and her

substitute was Hiroshi-named Extra Cat. This worked on several levels because she was a tiger cat and “tra” in Japanese is tiger. So she was x-tra. Anyway, after the death of Anō, the cats were no longer allowed to run free, but since they liked the out-of-doors, we developed the habit of walking them. We got long clothes-lines and that way they could go way ahead and “hunt” and it is a fond memory how we were “Rodney Pullinsed” all over the woods behind my house: Hiroshi was hanging on to x-tra for dear life and I used all my strength to reign in the 18 pound black ball of will-to-power.

Over the course of our 14 plus years of marriage there were many moments of cultural misunderstanding. None as embarrassing as the first. When we got married I made a cultural faux pas that I still blush when I think about. Hiroshi informed me shortly after proposing that his parents wished to send me a wedding present and had asked him to relay what I would like. Well, I have one cousin, older than I am, who was in the Korean War and who had, while on leave in Japan, sent my mother a “kimono.” I had liked that very much. It was only a silk robe with kimono sleeves and while it was all silk and of good quality it certainly hadn’t cost “a fortune.” -- So, I ignorantly asked for a “kimono,” thinking of a pretty robe for the honeymoon. When it arrived, Hiroshi explained to me that it cost the equivalent of an American automobile and was the “real thing.” It was superb, heavy-heavy black silk, with silver cosmic swirling patterns that looked like forming nebulae. It had all the accoutrements, from “zouri” (the wooden shoes, the male version are called “geta”) to undergarments and purse and the designer had “thrown in” a second summer kimono simply because the original garment was so expensive and that is the way the Japanese business people “reward” their good customers.

I was very grateful when Hiroshi told me that his father was a banker and his mother an executive at an insurance firm and they could afford the gift and were very happy that I had asked for something that they were proud of in their heritage.

How could I thank them for a gift so thoughtful, so beautiful, and so costly? I got lovely stationary and wrote a Thank-you Haiku (without kigo):

Centuries of silk
Bend stiff back into a bow
Sloe-eyes rise smiling. . .

It took Hiroshi three pages of Japanese to translate it. Sigh. But I am sure that he managed all the subtle nuances I'd intended.

The honeymoon is a story all by itself. It had its ups and downs and it resulted in two newspaper articles about the odd mixed racial couple. First we went to New York, where we went to the Met and a punk hair salon down in the Village. There I had my Joan Baez, below-the-butt, hippie length hair cut and dyed into an Annie Lennox buzz with one long black braid left to dangle asymmetrically from one side of my head, in a style Hiroshi directed the stylist to cut.

He was totally pleased with the result and I sat in the chair paralyzed with loss and weeping. That is where a reporter from the "Post" found us and did a story on the college professor from Ohio getting punked in the Village and her opera-singing Japanese consort.

Next we travelled up to Montreal, where we visited my college chum, Lois Siegel, who had become a famous photographer and film maker. The first night we got in Lois had to go to the International Film Festival, so she took us along as her guests. Again we attracted the press and Lois later sent the story about "the most interesting couple at the festival, not being Marcello and Sophia, but a couple of tourists from Japan and Ohio; who just happened to be married." The press guy couldn't go, so he gave us press-seats to a Huey Lewis and the News concert out in the suburbs of Montreal—so we left the festival and went to the concert.

The second year of marriage I weighed more than I ever have in my life—almost 130 lbs. and it was all due to his cooking. He loved to cook Japanese foods and having grown up on Uncle Ben's; the rice, that sweet, white rice melted in my mouth and I loved helping him make the rice in our new rice machine. I loved washing and rinsing the rice until my hands ached and the icy cold water went from milky to see-through clear. Perhaps if my favourite Japanese food had been Sushi I wouldn't have gained the weight, but California roll was the only Sushi I liked.

My favourite Japanese food was Katsu-don. And while the pork was lean—it was coated in batter and fried. I also loved the sweet egg he put on top and the indescribable sauce that made my taste buds moonwalk like Michael Jackson. I could eat Katsudon 24/7, 365 days a year. Oh how I miss it and even when I get to a city big enough to have a Japanese restaurant that makes more than steak-house fare—they can't duplicate the way he made it.

During the first five to seven years of our marriage Hiroshi kept me not barefoot and pregnant, but up-side-down (Literally, his favourite expression of affection was to turn me up-side-down) and constantly moving. I was over 40 and ready to slow down a little and he was a hyper-active 23.

He relished going to tennis matches, opera events, rock concerts (David Lee Roth, David Bowie, Madonna, Eurhythmics, Roger Waters sans Pink Floyd and Prince are a few I remember) and he still liked the disco scene (which I disliked.) His favourite time to play tennis was under the lights at midnight on hot summer nights. No wonder that these days I am in bed by 8 p.m.; for close to 15 years I never got to sleep before 3 a.m.

Another thing I remember from our years together was all the singing. I don't just mean his rattling the roof practicing arias until dawn each night, but the songs he taught me to sing with him. I never learned to speak or write Japanese—I was just too lazy—but I did know many words and phrases and the lyrics to those wonderful childhood songs. Hiroshi not only loved opera but to sing the songs he remembered from his school days. I remember every time it was going to rain we would sing the “Pichi, pichi chapu, chapu” or was it chopu, chopu song?

One full-moon night we were driving back from Cincinnati—I think we'd been to a drag-show at a club, or a tennis match and he showed me the “Rabbit on the Moon,” and taught me the “Usagi” song, which has those long drawn out hollow notes of sadness that make one hear a bamboo flute even when one isn't sounding.

Then there were the Birthday dinners at the Japanese Steak House in Columbus, where Hiroshi became friends with the owners and they would come to our table to talk and then if it was my birthday, we'd get out the drums and bang “paparummpa, paparummpa” as we sang: “Odori o dor u na ra, Choito Tokyo, On do. Yoi. Yoi.”

During the late '80's and early '90's there were also some ugly scenes when we ran up against the Redneck prejudices against mixed racial marriages. At Rio Grande, where the hicks abound we were accepted, but at my Alma Mater, and later Hiroshi's where he got a Masters in Fine Arts we went to one of the bars in Athens, Ohio (home of Ohio University—seat of diversity and culture) during a holiday and were surprised when a pack of brawny frat boys came over to our table and started harassing us about being a mixed couple and the Japanese “take over” of America. Hiroshi, who is all of 5'5” and weighed about 130, offered to fight them but they backed off. He could be very intense. Generally I wasn't all that happy with his Samurai tendencies—but that night, I was impressed.

There were other nights when the Samurai put in an appearance. At one time we were getting annoying phone calls from a group of high school thugs who somehow knew we were the odd couple they sometimes saw in super markets and on the streets. Hiroshi, who was always up late singing his head off, started having long arguments with these creeps and then one night at 3 or 4 a.m. he woke me to go with him to the parking lot of the local Cinema 6 where he had challenged them to meet him face to face. I was not a happy cat when I saw him remove the Katana from its place on the wall as I crawled into sweats and wiped the sleep from my eyes, which had visions of the next day headlines in the Gallipolis Tribune: **FOUR DECAPITATED HEADS FOUND IN PARKING LOT!** Thank the gods, they didn't show up and the phone calls ceased.

Hiroshi is definitely more Samurai than Zen Master, but the Katana story reminds me of a more recent story he told me over the phone a year or two ago.

About the time our marriage was dissolved, he had moved to New York City to pursue an opera career—that didn't materialize (he never had a high “C” he could count on and he refused to learn techniques of falsetto that would have allowed performance at the professional level). Despite a voice that could be honeyed and rich the tenor just didn't realize itself, but he does still perform with independent Japanese companies and a troop out of Mannes College of Music in the city—and with choirs that perform Beethoven's 9th at New Year Gala Events.

He has found his niche with Japan Airlines, where he sells group tickets to art companies. Like when a Broadway show is travelling to Japan or a Ballet Troop or Symphony Orchestra has to fly hundreds of people and instruments to Japan, he does the arrangements for flights and accommodations. This allows him to go to Japan himself often to see his parents. His father has had Alzheimer's for years now and he likes to go and help his mother take care of the father. This job is "sales" and that must disturb the artist in his soul, but it does keep him in touch with the art community and he makes many contacts and friends who are musicians and theatre people.

That was a long digression to get to the Samurai-Zen Master story he told me. He had, he said, recently booked a flight to Japan for a Zen sect, who was travelling to meet with and hear a series of lectures by a Master, whom they idolized. They wanted to convert Hiroshi and invited him to their temple and had a dinner for him. (Hiroshi loves to debate philosophy and enjoyed a few rounds with the Mormons—he was overjoyed the one time I went with him to the Church and did battle with them over their policies on polygamy and Black people).

So, here he was arguing with his Zen friends about Buddhism (about which he knows nothing) and putting down their guru. He got himself in some logical corner he couldn't talk his way out of so he got angry—and very Zen about it—he went silent and intense for a long time and then he rose suddenly, walked straight to their sacred portrait of their Master, and drew a moustache and goatee on the placid face.

The congregation (if that's what a collection of Zen practitioners who have a temple and a Master are called) sat for a moment in shock and then their leader got up and put his body between the sacred image and Hiroshi's blasphemous sharpie. The guy "assumed the position"—karate, I supposed Hiroshi meant. He said he did nothing but glare at the man and then turned on his heels and left.

The cult was dumbfounded. A week later when Hiroshi was expecting a bill for the damages to the portrait, he received instead a phone call saying that the group had a meeting and had unanimously voted to abandon the old master and they humbly offered to become Hiroshi's disciples—because what he had done

was more enlightened than anything their Master had ever said or done. He laughed and hung up. That's my cun!!!

Our marriage was, I'm quite sure, very frustrating for Hiroshi. I don't think it had to do with our being of different races. It was our "personal velocities" that ultimately separated us, I think. He was a perfectionist, someone who was driven in all he did. He was a Virgo, if you are "into" the stars—and I a Sagittarius. My "whatevers," drove him up walls. Now that he's gone—I don't dust much—and I'm "cool" with that.

What happened with the marriage was the proverbial two-way street. I was working on the Ph.D. I'd lived without for 20 years too long and while I slaved away at the dissertation—I no longer had time to "play" and so I left him to the care of one of my students. A girl closer to his own age, who liked to keep moving as much as he did and of course the inevitable happened and I found out too late. I had thrown them together. Anyway, when he moved to New York I didn't and it wasn't long until there was another girl and she was Japanese and pregnant and he needed not to be married and so we were dissolved or got a dissolution rather than a divorce. There were no children in the marriage and no one was hurt very much.

For the last ten years he's been in New York with yet another Japanese girl and I think he is settled and they are happy—but he still calls every month and when I die he will inherit what little I have and we are and always will be best friends. Just today my "care package" came from New York, with lots of foods from the Japanese Market in New Jersey.

I no longer remember how to say "I love you" in Japanese, even though I said it every day for 14 years—what I remember is how to say, "Happy New Year!" Maybe because his parents always called on New Year's Day and I had to memorize "Akemashite omedeto gozaimasu!" and say it correctly.

One night during our marriage I had a dream. In the dream I was the tutor of a Chinese girl, who was a tennis champion. When I woke up I had a phrase in my head that I couldn't shake. I don't know whether I had read it somewhere or it was generated by the terms of the dream images. It was: "Orientals form firm and lasting attachments." I am a Freudian in all my teaching and most of my understanding and I am prone to interpreting my own

dreams. At the time, I was sure that the phrase had sexual innuendo or double-meaning and referred to Hiroshi's ability to hold an erection for longer than the Cialis people would consider healthy—but now—after all these years, I rather think it was a Jungian dream about spiritual bonds.

Giorgio Fini!

I Married China

J. M. Yates



“Will like an empty glove.” That is a metaphor by Israeli Poet, Yehuda Amichai. Another by American, Theodore Roethke: “Silence of water above a sunken tree.” A metaphor is a marriage. **The process of metaphor/marriage is the yoking of two unlike things into a third which did not exist before.** The two elements of the metaphor are changed in the yoking process. You cannot subtract one or more elements without destruction. With luck, a great line or a great relationship entity is created which will endure until one of the various ends of time.



My life is full of high purpose. This is what it looks like: to keep my beautiful wife, Yun, happy and laughing.

Because we teach at home, Yun and I have been together in very close proximity for eleven years. Most people go off to work or travel to another country on business, spending very few hours a day together. But we have been right here, 24/7/365 nose to nose for all these years. And we happily persist.

Yun and I have many laughs during the course of a day. We seldom pass without a kiss and an I love you.

Once or twice a day, we begin to quibble about the details of teaching: where are books, call the photocopier guy, where are the files? But the presiding motto saves us: *MEI GUAN XI* (IT DOESN'T MATTER). Nothing matters more than the peace of mind of the other person.

Yun is very beautiful. Very beautiful. Certainly she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. And she ages beautifully. I tell her constantly that so long as she keeps me around, she will be young and slim. I make her look great.

She is also the most intelligent person I know. And a prodigy: she began medical school at age 15. At 20 she was teaching Physiology at a medical school in Ji Lin, a city in Northern China. And she learns faster and more effectively than anyone I've ever

met. Her powers of concentration—even with my pestering her about this and that—are astounding. I say this having been a teacher for 51 years. I’ve met some fast learners.

We tutor almost everything. On the spectrum, she begins on the side of sciences and I on the side of arts. We meet in the middle teaching English. She knows much more English grammar than I do. English is such a ridiculous and messy language that there are parts of English grammar she has explained to me a dozen times and I still don’t get it. However, she is always around to explain to me—and my student—once again.



I have white hair and am both big and tall. Yun is young and small and with not a single white hair. The incongruity of our appearance often creates funny anecdotes for us.

One day we entered a high-class Chinese restaurant in Burnaby and were seated. A waiter—I noticed him as we came through the door; at the sight of us, he frowned—came over with a scowl and barked in brilliant Chinglish while fixing me with his angry eye: “You wan fock?” I smiled sweetly at Yun and replied: “Look at this beautiful young woman in my company who is my wife; why on earth would I want to fuck you? Chopsticks will be just dandy.” He went away strumming his lip.



We were shopping in a Safeway we had patronized for several years. Yun was with the cart—far off the side of traffic—and gazing at cereal brands. I had gone to fetch something at her behest and returned just in time to see some pinkie (there are no white people—unless they’re dead; if alive, they are pink like me) ape veer over toward her with his cart and say in a loud sino-phobic voice: “That’s just the way you people drive on the street, isn’t it...?” He might have said more but I crowded between him and his cart and faced him with our noses almost touching and roared: YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH HHHH. Hoping to give him a heart attack. I could see something resembling a reply forming behind his eyes and so once again I

howled AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH. He left his cart and ran out of the store shouting over his shoulder, “You’re crazy. You’re crazy.” And we can’t really fault this racist pig for accuracy. I am crazy; crazy enough to traumatize an idiot without incurring any legal jeopardy myself. Ho ho. Also a little intimidating, having spent half my professional life as a university teacher and the other half as a maximum-security prison guard and a member of a SWAT team. Guys like this make us *guai lao* stereotypes look really bad.



Another time we were in a Chinese market and a Hispanic couple standing in line to check out asked if we were together. This is fairly frequent; the sight of us is traumatic to both pinkies and Chinese. Were we together? Yun looked at me and giggled, knowing I was plotting drama. “Are we together? We are together. Very together. We are so together that we sleep together and do the nasty together. Wrap your tiny mind around that. Unimaginable, isn’t it?”



Certainly the most ironic anecdote in this comedy of ninnies is this: We were moving and we have many, many books. Classically, the containers that teachers use for books are liquor boxes because books are heavy and the booze boxes prevent overloading and destruction to the back. You need to train one or two liquor stores by going in and politely inquiring what day they have the greatest numbers of empty boxes available, etc. Then when you go in, you nod appreciatively toward the boss, then yard them out the door, four or five at a time.

We had been in a liquor store a couple of days and stuffed the cars with boxes without a hitch.

This day, working up front was a tragically short eastern European guy in a bad mood and full of tiny-man syndrome. I went in first with Yun, and he was civil, sort of. However, the second time, I went in alone. Still no problem. Then I remained at the car and Yun went in, then came out perplexed. The little fart had told

her that the store needed to keep some for internal use. We stood by the car thinking about this. Just then, a fat, blonde, pinkie woman went in and came out with as many boxes as she could carry. Then another white woman came out with a load. Enough of this, come on. We went in and up to the administrative counter. I asked noisily whether they had a complaint form because **WE WANTED TO MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT RACIST POLICIES IN THIS STORE.** The big boss woman immediately appeared and guided us through the form which we both signed and then she darted back in for a picture of her kids: mixed race: she was married to a Chinese. She said the idiot out front was temporary and we would never see him again in that store. We went outside with all the boxes we wanted and high-fived before driving home.



Despite the racist anecdotes we have lived through, after living together for more than ten years, we are now a third culture, we have the same colour skin, we are the same age: we don't know where the previous distinctions went and we really don't give a damn.

We do have Chinese friends who occasionally turn to me and begin with, "I don't know how it is in *your* culture..." This annoys me mightily. I explain carefully that I am tri-racial: Irish, Black, and Native Indian; I am a globalist and a feminist, but not by culture—my family were slave owners. And racist and chauvinist long after the Civil War (some of them). The slaves all took on the family name of Yates. That is why there are many dusky-skinned Yateses who live in Missouri. You call that a culture?



Our lives easily meshed from the beginning. I already knew how to use chopsticks and loved them. She educated me in matters of Chinese (and Thai and Vietnamese and Japanese) food. I liked it all except for *la* (*hot, spicy food*). "You'll get used to it," she said. "I don't think so," I replied. I could handle the *wasabi* of sushi—for one thing, it's my favourite shade of green, but the hot from

chilli peppers was a bit much. I explained that I had lived in Texas three times and was in Mexico for two years being hidden from the polio virus by my mother; still, chilli peppers and I did not mix. Occasionally, when the hot is not too flaming, it isn't bad—on such occasions, she reminds me that she told me I would get used to it. I look at her suspiciously. Sure as hell, the next time I taste spicy food, it is hot enough to singe the hair off a brass mastodon.

On the few occasions when we have gone south to visit members of my family, I tell her to watch how complicated and troublesome the Americans make getting food from plate to mouth. If they have a piece of meat, they must first move the fork from right to left hand and turn it over. Then they pick up a knife with the right hand and cut. Then the right hand puts the knife daintily down on the right side of the plate. Then the left hand hands the fork to the right hand which must turn the fork over and then put the morsel in the mouth.

This is more complicated than the point system in high diving: back, pike-position, triple twist, and no smacking your lips when you hit the water. Or talking with your mouth full. Occasionally we have practice pinkie meals for our boys and students in case they have to break bread with pinkies at business meals in the west. None of us is likely to convert (or recidivate) to pinkie etiquette in the near future.

Yun loves me and would make any sort of meal I desired. I don't desire pinkie table settings.

Recently we (the two of us and our two sons) were on vacation in the Caribbean and they didn't offer us chopsticks nor serve the food in "dishes." However, everybody ordered something different and all of us reached over and speared anything that looked good on anyone else's plate (*dishes* are *dishes*). Not really Chinese, but not pinkie either. The dusky waitress with a fascinating accent watched us with curiosity, but said nothing. What could one expect from such a medley?



Some think mixed marriage odd. We don't think so. We are part of the new norm. To verify this, you have simply to look at the icons with which we surround ourselves like Barack Obama, Halle

Berry, and Dwayne Johnson, Ho Hung San. Vancouver is full of mixed relationships and children. At least half of the personalities one sees on CNN are mixed. CCTV in China is very fond of panels involving mixes of Chinese, Blacks, and Pinkies. If one thinks of the ethnic minorities, China is probably the mother of mixedness.

△

I think one must elevate marriage higher than the level of religion. Not even religion dares to interfere with one's value of marriage—if success of marriage is important to you.

I spent a lifetime telling myself that, as a professional writer, nothing would be allowed to confound the process of writing poems and plays and stories—and anything else I could lose money writing. If a university where I taught to support my habit of poetry was in any way hostile toward an ideal writing context, I quit and moved on. I alienated family because I didn't attend family functions and didn't run around visiting everyone. You can call this passionate commitment to the making of art and sometimes get away with it, but it is just another form of workaholism and it is death for relationships. All workaholism is lethal for relationships.

When a girl came through the front door of a possible relationship with me, I issued my usual arrogant warning: Never get between me and the keyboard (pen, pencil, whatever) or...

The girl: Oh, I would never do that.

Not long thereafter, she would be rushing out the back door screaming: "You love that typewriter more than you do me." Usually this event occurred when I was deep into a play or something and scarcely noticed what was going on and I didn't look up until I finished it.

When I did look up, it was sometimes with regret, but this was the price I had to pay for being an artist (*a sensitive artist and a tragic and melancholy figure: family joke*)—I am sure this is exactly how I saw myself. And this was reinforced by all the writers I knew. I was the world's victim, art's victim and it was all bullshit. I was a cliché and life went streaming by without me.). I guess it worked out well enough for the writing, considering the number of books with my name on them. But it was not a life.

When I met Yun, it was an epiphany from Looie Freeman (a deity I invented a few books back). I saw some sort of light and blurted out to her that I would never let the goddam writing get between us (her side of “us” includes two sons by a previous incarnation). I’m sure she hadn’t an inkling what I was talking about. Over the years, she has glimpsed what I was talking about. I think she viewed writing as something one did in his spare time.

This is not how it works with professionals, and here I refer to all the drunken, druggy, multi-relationship suicides of planet Earth who are the very opposite of citizens—yet they produce the art which society builds museums and libraries to house and thus protect the artifacts from weather and centuries.

It could be said that our wonderful relationship began the instant my status as a professional artist ended. I have never regretted the choice.

These days I usually write at my wife’s behest. Like right now. We work on projects like this one. The deadlines are never important. The fact that we work on them together is.

Most everything we do is Chinese in value—except that because of orthotics for my feet, I can’t run around shoeless in the house. Everything else is Chinese. We have good luck things hanging all over the house and usually stuff from last Chinese New Year. We celebrate every Chinese holiday we can remember and make a big deal out of birthdays (I dread my birthday because she always wants me to eat two hardboiled eggs per Chinese tradition) and I’m not a fan of hardboiled eggs. We have a sign on our door (with the implication that this is an east-west household) a sign which says in English and Chinese: *Please Remove One Shoe* (half eastern tradition, half western tradition, get it? Get it? Dumb joke, but it seems to entertain most people—after they think about it for half an hour). Someone—not me—has been known to tell little kids at Halloween that the sign is, yes, very serious and they have to do exactly that to get the candies.

I love my family-by-marriage in Nanchang and Lin Chuan (Jiang Xi) inexpressibly. There are six sisters and a brother: well-educated, industrious, savvy and funny. My father-in-law is the wisest man I have ever met, and he has a finely honed sense of humour. He says, “We have a harmonious family.” True words. It is a joy to be there and just watch them interact.

I am the ideal son-in-law. My Mandarin is so lame, I could not possibly say anything in China (or on the phone) that would get me into trouble. My excuse is that I was deaf when we met. I tried taking a class but couldn't hear the tones.

Yun signifies triumph—that I could finally achieve something significant—being her husband. Last June we went to China again. In one of the family dinners with all my in-laws, I said, “Thank you very much. You treated us like King and Queen.” Then I pointed at Yun, “She is the king.” She is my king. I meant it.

Red Guard Marries American Imperialist

Huang Hefeng

Xiao Min met Charles while she was taking a cruise on the three Gorges River.

It was a calm and cool morning in early autumn. Xiao Min leaned on the guardrail of the back deck on the Dong Fang Hong river steamer and enjoyed the scenery before her: the Herculean propeller was continuously writing a big Chinese character “人” (*ren* means person) on the silken wide river. The strokes, those huge white thick lines, stretched smoothly to the two banks of Yang Zi River and then disappeared into the overcast horizon. Xiao Min was enmeshed in this vastness and serenity, so happy that she felt as if she were walking on air. Only when the noises inside the ship spread to her ear did she realize it was time to go back to the cabin to get ready for some breakfast.

She turned around, and there was Charles, leaning against a wall several steps away and smiling at her. She wondered how long he had been standing there without making a sound.

Actually, since boarding, Xiao Min had noticed the tall and handsome Charles on the deck and heard his chirpy laughter. He was the only blue-eyed foreigner on the ship; therefore, he was always surrounded by people. He seemed to enjoy the opportunity to practice his Chinese. Xiao Min did not like big crowds, so she had never talked to him. Little did she imagine that she would meet him face to face like this.

It was an earnest smiling face, and she would hate herself for not saying hello to him. So, Xiao Min blurted out, “Ni Hao!” “Ni Hao!” Charles replied. It was weird for a Chinese to hear a foreigner speak Chinese; there was always something in the tone that was not that right. Xiao Min couldn’t help but laugh and felt relaxed after the laughter. She had been too shy to talk to a Caucasian before.

That was how everything started.

After a while, Charles noticed a small Teddy Bear attached on Xiao Min’s backpack. He said, “You must be fond of Teddy Bears.”

Xiao Min smiled, “Yeah.”

This reminded Xiao Min of a question: “Where did the bear get the name Teddy?”

“You found the right person to ask this question. I happen to know,” Charles grinned. He told Xiao Min the whole story of Teddy Bear in clumsy Chinese and body language: the origin and popularity of Teddy Bear had something to do with the then U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt, or Teddy, as his family and friends called him. He refused to shoot a baby bear while hunting. This piece of news first got spread in the newspapers, and then based on the story, a cartoonist named Clifford Berryman published a cartoon titled “Drawing the Line in Mississippi” in 1902. It caused an immediate sensation and was reprinted widely. A shopkeeper who sold candy and toys wrote to the president and asked whether they could use Teddy to name the wife’s toy bear. The president agreed. Since then, the sweet, innocent Teddy Bear has been seen everywhere in USA.

Xiao Min thanked Charles profusely and found him well-informed.

Xiao Min and Charles became quite close when the ship passed the Three Gorges. They stood together on the deck to enjoy the splendid landscape and take pictures now and then.

Xiao Min arrived at her journey’s end first. Before disembarking, she went to her new friend Charles’ cabin to say goodbye and gave her mailing address to him. While walking away, she could feel his eyes following her. She hadn’t the courage to look back and soon stepped out of his sight with both joy and emptiness in her heart.

As Xiao Min expected, she received a long letter posted from Seattle by Charles, with a picture of his enclosed: he had shaving foam on his face. On the back, he wrote in Chinese, “Come in, please! Sit down, please!” Xiao Min smiled knowingly when she saw it: he said the same thing on the ship when she passed by his cabin one day and he invited her to come inside.

The next two years letters from and to them diligently crossed the Pacific Ocean. They also sent and received gifts during holidays. The first gift Charles sent to Xiao Min was a brown Teddy Bear; a card came with it, which read in Chinese, “Good night, Little Bear.” He also made her a nice necklace with her

name in the middle spelled out using colourful letter beads. On her birthday, she received a surprising gift as well: a T-shirt with her profile and a background of Three Gorges printed in the front and the scenery of Black Dragon Pool, a picture he took during his Yun-Nan tour, in the back. He secretly took her picture when they first met! “The big bad wolf!” Xiao Min was happy and vexed at the same time.

In return, Xiao Min sent him a heart-shaped pouch crocheted with several kinds of red threads; inside were ten red bean-like seeds, picked by her from an acacia tree on Hai Nan Island. The red bean-like seed had special meaning to the Chinese. They call it “Missing You” bean.

Xiao Min put the Teddy Bear near the pillow and looked at it every night before going to bed, as if she could hear Charles saying, “Good night, Little Bear!” She also put all his letters into an elegant box, read them again and again, and then absorbed herself in sweet daydreams.

One beautiful sunny day, Xiao Min received Charles’ proposal letter written on a bright red sheet of paper.

Her dream came true: She was going to marry someone she truly loved! She heard her heart beating irregularly as if it wanted to jump out of her chest. When it at last quieted down, she realized that she was going to live in a strange country far away from everything she was familiar with. The uncertainty scared her: it was great for a romantic story to come to a good end, but she would definitely have to give up all she had. There was no turning back, though. She knew: once the road was chosen, all she could do was conjure up the courage and believe everything would work out in the end. At least, she had him to stand by her.

Having made up her mind, Xiao Min started to learn English and everything about the West, as well as theories about love and marriage, etc.

Charles was coming!

Xiao Min looked forward to that moment with expectation and nervousness. She held a red rose bouquet and waited at the exit place of the airport.

Charles appeared with his backpack and suitcase. As if in a dream, he hurried towards Xiao Min with a big smile on his face and embraced her with a big hug. All the people in the crowd stared at them. Xiao Min was already flushed and her heart beating with no control, yet she couldn't push him away. This was in the early 80's; people seldom saw lovers hugging in public in China except occasionally in movies. But for Charles, it was unimaginable not to show his affection when meeting Xiao Min, someone he missed so much and for so long.

Charles showed his uniqueness when they started to prepare for the wedding ceremony. He took the initiative to sketch out the statement to be published in the newspaper. Trying hard to hold back chuckles, he said, "We should state: Red Guard marries American Imperialist." Between 1966-1976 China had gone through a movement called the Cultural Revolution; many high school students worshiped Mao Ze-Dong, the leader of China at that time. They called themselves Red Guards of Mao to show how much they loved him. Mao considered Americans the imperialists because many of them were against the Communist China. Charles was familiar with this part of Chinese history. He also suggested that their wedding party be held outdoors in a park, by a riverside, or in a garden—places with open spaces. This way, he would be able to arrive from nowhere and surprise the bride.

His suggestion was partially adopted: the wedding party was held in a big hall located on the narrow peninsula surrounded by Min River and Mei Brook.

Charles used his Chinese quite creatively. On the wedding day, the guests came and asked where the bride was. He said, "She's painting her face with brushes." The fact was that Xiao Min went to have her makeup done in a salon professionally. Charles thought she made too big a deal out of it. He was then asked to put on a silken "Xin Lang" (literally New Man, means Bridegroom) banner, but he replied, "Xin Lang? New Man? I'm not new; I am old."

After the wedding dinner, some naughty friends crowded the bridal chamber to "Nao Xin Fang": make fun of or play tricks on the new couple publicly, embarrassing them as much as possible.

The newlyweds, of course, try their best not to become too embarrassed. Thus, it is usually a fun battle of wits and bargains.

The first game designed by the friends for Xiao Min and Charles was for them to pose ten numbers from one to ten on the bed together.

The first number was already a big challenge to the couple. All the proposals Xiao Min and Charles made were booed by the friends. After many turns of negotiation, they finally passed it when Xiao Min put her head on Charles' feet while their bodies superposed. Then came the second number, the third one...

It was already late at night when the guests left with satisfaction. They were both extremely tired, but before they went to sleep, Charles didn't forget to look at Xiao Min and say tenderly, "Good night, Little Bear."

The next day, Charles followed Xiao Min to her work place to distribute the wedding candies, another Chinese tradition. A colleague asked Charles whether he would live in China, and he said, "I would love to, but I don't think I can find a job here. When I used up all my money, I might have to swim the Pacific Ocean since I would not be able to afford an air ticket." He laughed like a little kid after doing the swimming gesture.

Nevertheless, they planned to buy an apartment for them to stay in whenever they returned to China. The real estate agent showed them an apartment one day. When the storage room door was opened, they smelled something stinky and were shocked to see a pile of faeces there. Xiao Min felt so awkward that she wished some magic would make her invisible. Charles reacted quickly, though: "Ha! Is this the gift you prepared for us?" Everybody laughed; the embarrassment was gone.

Xiao Min and Charles' new life together began when the merriment and freshness went away. The culture and personality differences which originally drew them to each other now became a source of conflict. For example, in Xiao Min's opinion, love is based on trust; a family is a whole. However, Charles believed that everyone is born sinful; feelings can't be mixed with business. This was his starting point to deal with others. When Xiao Min first arrived in Seattle, Charles was very nice helping her to get her identity card, buy monthly bus passes, register at the university, and so on. Then, he opened an account for her at the bank, putting

a few thousand dollars in it. At that time in China, the banks only offered savings account services, so Xiao Min asked Charles why she needed an account; she didn't even know that almost everybody had his or her own bank accounts in USA. Charles said frankly, "This way you will build up your credit; it will benefit you in the future in the USA. Also, I don't want to put your name on my accounts. What if you run away with all my money?" Xiao Min was astonished: the American way of life was totally different from the Chinese one, but how could he insult her integrity like this after calling her sweetheart and honey every day? Why marry her if he did not trust her? This was outrageous.

She was so furious that she wanted to shout at him, but she cooled down in the end, seeing that he was sincere and didn't mean to hurt her. Later she found out that America was really quite different from China. A person, in China, has a registered permanent residence, a workplace, and a home, so it would be hard for him or her to disappear. That is why Chinese people like to say, a monk can run away, but not a temple. But in the USA, sometimes a wife can disappear without a trace when the husband returns home at night. Xiao Min was a foreigner and more or less a stranger; Charles had more reasons to be careful.

Xiao Min told herself to take it easy and give Charles some credit first. Charles was just too honest to be hated; such a man would not hurt her on purpose. She was able to make up her mind to leave her own country and family for him precisely because everyone could tell he was a nice man. He was as honest as a child. When walking on the streets of China, he often gave a hand pushing a cart, or helping elderly ladies crossing the street. He also proved himself a good citizen who abided by laws all the time. He never littered, and he picked garbage up whenever he saw it on the street.

Separate accounts proved to be beneficial later on. With a shared account, one might have to be responsible for his/her spouse's debt. Moreover, Xiao Min could be relatively free in managing her own money after sharing some household expenses. Of course, she would hate it if they had to go Dutch even for buying a bottle of chili sauce. More conflict was waiting for Xiao Min as a result of differences in cultures and habits, however. Sometimes it was so silly that she didn't know whether to laugh or

cry. For example, When Charles asked Xiao Min something, such as “Shall we go to Chinatown together?”, Xiao Min would answer, “Um!” He didn’t understand that “Um” meant “OK” and became upset thinking Xiao Min didn’t pay attention to what he said. What’s worse: he was not used to asking her again, so it resulted in all kinds of misunderstandings between them.

Another time Charles brought with him some bread crumbs and enthusiastically asked Xiao Min to come to the backyard to see something. Xiao Min thought it must be something fantastic and followed him excitedly. All she discovered was a nest of beetles under some rocks. They were so slimy and disgusting that she had goose bumps right there and then. However, Charles squatted on the ground, turned over the rocks, and fed those insects with great patience. “See how joyful they are!” he admired. Xiao Min could not help but walk away immediately, leaving him alone to continue his appreciation of nature.

Charles used to have a carefree life style, and almost every day after work, he went to a pub or a café to have fun instead of going home right away. He did not change this habit after he got married. Xiao Min found this impossible to adapt to because she was taught by her parents that the table could not be set unless every family member was home. But now it was rare for Charles and Xiao Min to have meals together except for eating out. Even when Charles came home for dinner, he preferred to watch TV while eating rather than talk with her. No matter how many times Xiao Min complained, he would not change. Xiao Min could only let him be in the end, persuading herself this was not a huge deal. It was good that he never criticized the dishes Xiao Min cooked. He gave plenty of praise when the meal was tasty, or kept silent when it was not, more or less like a real gentleman.

The worst was Charles’ bad habit of keeping the TV on all the time. He turned it on as soon as he came home and finished hugging his wife. It would be on for a whole night if Xiao Min didn’t switch it off. He also had to turn the radio on at high volume around midnight whenever he went to the toilet, making big and annoying noises. Xiao Min complained again and again, but it was no use. If Xiao Min switched the TV off, Charles switched it on again after she went to bed. One night Xiao Min was really annoyed; she went to turn the volume to the highest, so loud that

Charles jumped out of the bed and yelled at Xiao Min: “You are going to wake up the neighbours and they will call the police!” Xiao Min only needed to do this a couple of more times, and he was subdued eventually.

There was also a good side. Charles mentioned his ex-girlfriends when they were talking about some other things. Xiao Min thus told him about her ex-boyfriend and asked him whether he minded. He said, “You are such a great woman; it would be really weird if nobody had dated or loved you!” It seemed that he didn’t feel uncomfortable at all about his previous competitors; instead, he was proud to triumph over the rivals and marry the girl in the end. Xiao Min loved this about Charles: she found western men tend to focus more on the existing relationship rather than the past. Some Chinese men minded the wife’s past very much while never caring whether they themselves were male-chauvinist pigs or not; some even wanted to control the thoughts of their wives. They were not only looking for trouble for themselves; they could also ruin the marriage as well.

Time flew along with the couple’s bickering now and then, and their son was born. For many small families, falling in love is the cheery prelude, marriage is the lifting of the curtain, and a child’s birth is the richest content in the drama of life.

Xiao Min was raised in China to follow Chinese traditions while for Charles what the doctor said was the Bible. During Xiao Min’s pregnancy, the doctor suggested that Charles attend all the activities including the physical examinations and prenatal courses, and he never missed any. After the baby was born, the doctor told the young parents to take temperature and feed the baby milk every two hours in the first week, and also gave them a sheet to record how much the baby ate and discharged every day. Charles had two weeks of paid leave; he became a programmed computer and took the temperature of the baby every two hours even when the baby was asleep. Xiao Min wanted to feed the baby a little honeysuckle juice, according to Chinese tradition, but the new father disapproved firmly: “The doctor said, the new born baby needs lots of nutrition; we can’t feed him anything other than milk. He might be malnourished.” If the baby choked or coughed a tiny bit, Charles would call the nurse immediately to ask whether they

needed to see the doctor. Xiao Min called her mother for advice or tried to solve the problems with herbal medicine, but Charles would hold the baby, pace back and forth in the room, and stare at the little face anxiously “The police will come and take him away if we don’t take the baby to see the doctor,” he said.

Being a new father, Charles was also excited all the time. The sky displayed a rainbow after the rain on the second day the baby was born. Charles took the baby outside and pointed at the rainbow: “Son, see the rainbow, see the rainbow. So beautiful.” It was questionable whether the baby could see things that far. Moreover, the baby was wrapped only in a thin blanket. What if he caught a cold? Chinese babies used to be kept indoors until they were one month old. Of course Charles would not understand all that; he didn’t think he was doing anything wrong while Xiao Min asked him not to do this or not to do that. He was especially not convinced that one can catch cold when not wearing enough clothes. He argued logically, “Not keeping yourself warm enough is not the reason for an illness; flu is caused by virus.” Xiao Min asked him then, “Why do you need to put on thick clothes and cover yourself with warm blanket when it’s cold?” “That’s only because the cold makes people uncomfortable.”

Xiao Min could not help but snap at him in Chinese, “Gun Chu Qu (Get out)!” The word “Gun” in Chinese literally means “roll over.” He didn’t grasp what she meant first because he had never been told “Gun” could be used with “Chu Qu (out)” to mean get out. He was puzzled, “Are you telling me to roll over? Okay.” He then did just that. Xiao Min did not know whether she should be angry or laugh. She was told American men were like kids; now she knew it was true.

Later, whenever something came up, Charles would say, please go ask your mum what to do, and Xiao min would then reply, go ask the doctor. When he put on a coat or needed a warmer blanket, he would say, mind the cold.

Charles couldn’t understand the “cool” or “hot” nature of vegetables and fruits, either. When he ate some fruit, he always jokingly asked, “Sorry I forgot. Is the pineapple cool or hot?”

Life continues. This means the arguments will not stop, and so are the laughter and jokes.

The only thing Charles never forgets to say to Xiao Min before they go to bed is this: “Good night, Little Bear!”

Jing Yi and Bob

Hong Yun

A petite woman of forty from Southern China, Jing Yi had a pretty round face, tidy short hair, and big black eyes. David was her fifteen-year-old son; they came to Vancouver from China five years ago. Bob was her three-years-older fiancé, and they had lived together for almost two years.

Jing Yi remembered clearly the first day when she and her son arrived in Canada. With no friends in Vancouver, she booked a room located in Vancouver East and found the place easily after taking a taxi from the airport. The landlady opened the door for them and disappeared after telling them where to go buy phone cards at the nearby plaza.

“Mom, I’m hungry,” David told Jing Yi after they put down their luggage.

“Okay, let’s go find a restaurant in the plaza,” Jing Yi answered readily and got out, holding David’s hand. Following the landlady’s instruction, they soon found the plaza and picked a small Chinese restaurant. They each ordered a bowl of beef noodles and finished it in less than ten minutes. “Let’s go buy a phone card and call Grandma,” Jing Yi said to David. “Mom, I want to sleep. I don’t want go,” David begged. They did not sleep at all on the airplane. Seeing his eyelids fighting to stay open, Jing Yi softened her tone: “You lie down on this bench then. Stay here, okay?” “Okay,” David promised and lay down immediately.

After asking several passersby, Jing Yi finally discovered the booth selling phone cards. After another five minutes, Jing Yi found the public phone. When at last the call went through and she heard her mother’s familiar voice, Jing Yi could not help crying: she and her son were finally safe; her ex-husband’s evil hands could not stretch as far as Vancouver no matter how hard he wanted to try.

Not wanting her to spend too much money on the phone, Jing Yi’s mother told her to hang up after talking just for a couple of minutes. Jing Yi promised to write letters as often as she could. She then began to look for a bank. HSBC was not far, but it was

closed. Next door was a grocery store; she went inside and bought a box of instant noodles.

Stepping out, Jing Yi suddenly felt a cold sweat: Oops, she forgot her way back to the restaurant as well as its name. If David woke up and could not find her, he would be scared to death.

Thirty minutes passed before she ran into the restaurant again. David rushed into her instantly, "Mom." Four strangers came over, too: "How can you call yourself a mother!" "This is outrageous!" "What you did is illegal!" She turned and saw four angry faces: one Chinese and three Caucasians. "Eh...eh...Sorry. Very sorry," she spoke guiltily and backed out with David. As soon as they reached the door, the two began to sprint.

"Whew."

They looked at each other after stopping at the red light, laughing.

"Mom, how do we get back?" David asked.

"Let me think." Jing Yi frowned. This strange place looks the same in every direction. She took out the address of their new home from her trouser pocket.

"Can I help you?"

A warm and friendly voice.

Jing Yi looked up. It was a handsome face, a little like Brad Pitt, the only Western actor whose name she could remember.

"Thank you! We need to go back home, but don't know how," Jing Yi said, handing him the address.

"It is very close to my place. I can take you there. Just follow me."

Jing Yi hesitated for half a second, a little worried about the big stack of cash in her bag. Maybe I could walk on the opposite side of the street, she thought to herself. She then shook her head and strolled along with the stranger while holding David's hand.

"I am Bob, and you?"

"I am Jing Yi, and this is my son David."

"Jing Yi? the same Jing as in Beijing?"

"Close. The meaning is different, though. Jing means peace, and Yi means comfort.

"Peace and comfort. Great name. I love it," Bob nodded.

"You look like a David," he turned next to the shy boy.

“How old are you?”

“I...I...” David looked at the ground and tried to hide behind his mother.

“Go on, answer Uncle Bob’s question,” Jing Yi urged.

“Ten.”

“A big boy, eh?”

Three of them then started chatting. Jing Yi was happy because she could actually understand most of what Bob’s saying. She thought she had long ago forgotten her English.

They soon reached her place, which was only two houses away from Bob’s.

“Come visit me if you have time and don’t hesitate to ask me if you need any help,” Bob told Jing Yi and then waved goodbye.

Jing Yi was a traditional Chinese woman, after all. Although new in Vancouver and facing all kinds of difficulties, she resisted the temptation of asking Bob for anything. Later she found a job in a boutique store in Metrotown and moved to Burnaby, and Bob gradually became a distant memory.

It was almost three years later when Jing Yi and Bob met again. During these years Jing Yi first had two small jobs, the boutique store one and the one as a dealer in a Casino. Both jobs demanded that she work late; in the end, she had to give them up because she had no time to take care of David. Fortunately, she was able to get unemployment insurance, and Service Canada suggested that she go get a professional diploma. She applied for a draftsman program because she had been an architect in China. She was told it was very hard to get in, so she applied for an accounting program, too. Surprisingly, both accepted her. She didn’t want to waste the opportunities, so she studied day and night. Soon she graduated from both programs and found a full time job at an architecture firm with mainly Caucasian employees while a tax company offered her a part time job helping people file tax return during weekends.

When everything was on the right track, Jing Yi’s mother began to remind the daughter to look for a boyfriend. Jing Yi, of course, also wanted a man to love and take care of her. Many men in the company invited her to coffee. However, she did not want to get hurt again. Life had taught her that every man can become

perfect when he is in love, but after being married for a few years, he changes completely and his true nature is revealed. Her ex-husband was exactly like that: he fell in love with Jing Yi at the first sight when they met on the campus of the university where they both studied. He had done everything he could to win Jing Yi's heart: he played guitar and sang every night outside her dormitory, until she promised to date him. After that, he sent flowers, took her out for dinner, and did all kinds of nice or tricky things just to make her smile and happy. However, after they got married and had a child, Jing Yi found out he was violent: he beat people, including his own mother. In fact, the first accident happened because they went to visit his parents and played Mahjong together. At the table, he talked about something and his mother rebuked him a little. He raised his voice and then his fist to her. Later, he began to beat David if the little boy did not listen to him. If Jing Yi tried to protect David, he would beat Jing Yi and David both, and one blow could leave their faces bruised and swollen. If she and David had not secretly immigrated to Canada, anything could have happened to them.

Time flew, and soon it would be the third Christmas Jing Yi had spent in Vancouver. Her friend and she went shopping in Metrotown, and when tired, they went to a Starbuck's for coffee. While they were talking, a man came over and said, "Jing Yi, is that you?"

"Ah, Bob, so nice to see you again!" Jing Yi stood up, amazed that Bob still remembered her name. "Come and sit with us."

"I have to go actually. Let's do this: give me your phone number and I will call you."

That night, Bob called as he promised, and they talked from 9:30 pm until 3:30 the next morning. It all came naturally; neither of them found it difficult to open their hearts. Bob told Jing Yi that he and his wife divorced not too long after the time he first met Jing Yi. He and his ex-wife were high school sweethearts. He was handsome and she was pretty; everybody believed they were ordained by Heaven to be together. As expected, they both went to and graduated from the University of British Columbia, she next found a job as a purchasing officer, he an accountant, and then got married. Soon they had two gorgeous daughters. They quarrelled

once in a while, but nothing serious—that was, until he discovered that she and his good friend Jimmy were having an affair. He said goodbye to her calmly, but the double betrayal made him feel down for a long time. Fortunately, time cures everything. Everything more or less went back to normal after three years.

Jing Yi also told him many things: her childhood in a small town, her university life, her architect job, immigration, and even the hurt brought by her first marriage, something she had never told another soul other than her mother.

Bob also told Jing Yi how he found her special: she had unique beauty, petite but strong, so much so that he recognized her right away even though it had been almost three years since he had seen her the first time. She also told him that she thought of him whenever seeing a movie with Brad Pitt in it.

They began to date. It was always on Saturday: he would arrange ahead things to do, going out for dinner or taking her and David to go hiking, sailing, canoeing, or playing basketball... Sometimes he brought his daughters with him, and everybody got along fine. They lived this way for almost a year, very happy. In a beautiful evening with sunset spreading its red wings all over the sky and birds flying back to their nests, Bob took out a shining diamond ring and proposed to Jing Yi at the famous Top of Vancouver Revolving Restaurant. Jing Yi did not say yes immediately; she loved the status quo. If married, would he still be romantic and caring? What about the differences in culture and habit? After all, they came from two different worlds which were bound to clash someday. When it happened, would each other tolerate and forgive?

Bob was a sensitive man. He held both Jing Yi's hands and said earnestly and sincerely, "I know you have your concerns. They are my concerns as well. However, I want to be with you every day, and I am sure you want to spend more time with me, too. We should at least give each other a chance. If you want, we don't have to have a big wedding; we can buy a new place and move in together. If we still love each other after two years, we can have the ceremony then. You can treat this ring as a token of our love for now."

This is perfect! Jing Yi stood up and gave Bob an affectionate kiss.

So they pooled their money and bought a 2200 square foot house. It was 30 years old, but Bob renovated it both inside and outside and made it charming. He also took out all the messy flowers and grass in the backyard, replanted grass and flowers they liked, and even installed a small fountain with a small boy peeing on top. It was also perfect for everybody to gather there, BBQing or playing in summer when they had parties. Beyond the backyard was a small river. Inside flowed crystalline flowing water, on the bank green trees. The whole family could walk or ride bicycles whenever they had time. Jing Yi was really impressed; she had not expected Bob to be a repairman as well as an accountant.

Because Jing Yi had to drive an hour each way to go to and come back from work, Bob took care of all the cooking. When Jing Yi came home, all she needed to do was sit and eat. David loved his new daddy. When homework became difficult, he could always count on Bob for help. When he got bored, Bob took him out to play soccer or run.

So that year went extremely fast. The problems, however, gradually revealed themselves. First was Bob's complaint that Jing Yi never said thank you no matter what Bob had done for her, but Jing Yi had her reason: in China, you don't say thank you when you are family; if you do, you treat your loved ones as outsiders. As a result, when finishing doing something deserving to be praised, Bob would go to Jing Yi and mimic her voice, "Thank you very much, Bob." Jing Yi laughed, but did not change. Then one day, Bob said, "I have cooked for a year; it is your turn now." Jing Yi hated driving, and after an hour of driving, she was exhausted. So naturally, she was not happy when she had to cook while Bob sat in the living room watching TV. Conflict also arose because of Bob's fastidiousness. Being a typical Virgo, he wanted everything to be spotless and organized. Jing Yi was the opposite: she did not care about messiness; her clothes or socks could be in any corner of their bedroom. She was not passionate about cleaning, either. If she could get by without vacuuming once a week, she let it be. Bob could not stand it, so he whined almost every day. When he did so, Jing Yi believed that Bob looked down on her and no longer loved her. Most importantly, they did not have much to talk about anymore. After a while, nothing fascinating was left other than daily trivia.

The days became more and more boring, and bickering was now the routine. They didn't fight big fights, however. Only Jing Yi sometimes would take off her diamond ring or go to sleep at the guest room, while Bob drank wine or liquor one glass after another.

The change happened accidentally in a party. They met Anne and Mike, a Chinese and a Caucasian, just like them, except they had been married for ten years already. Jing Yi and Anne thus had the following conversation:

Anne: "If a stranger came and asked you for a cup of water, what would you do?"

Jing Yi: "I would give it to him."

Anne: "What if Bob wanted a cup of water?"

Jing Yi: "I would give it to him."

Anne: "Pouring a cup of water and saying thank you, which one is easier?"

Jing Yi: "But Bob and I are family. Why should we treat each other like guests?"

Anne: "The thing is that he wants the thank-you. This means it is important to him. If you don't give what he wants and he does not give you what you need, how can love last?"

Anne continued: "Moreover, nobody is perfect. You and I are no exception. It's annoying when Bob complains, but even Confucius says you should correct mistakes if you have made any and guard against them if you have not. Throwing things everywhere, this you should change. Actually, if you have learned how to classify and organize your things, you can save a lot of time. I used to be just like you: whenever I received a bill, I just left somewhere. Then Mike bought me an organizer; inside there were many pockets, each labelled as electricity, hydro, bank, master card bill, travel, etc. This way, all I needed to do was put my bills into each pocket accordingly, and filing tax has never been easier since."

Jing Yi: "You are right. I should have been more considerate."

Anne: "It's just a matter of acquiring the habit. Just like your brushing teeth every morning. When it is a habit, you don't even need to think."

Jing Yi: "Right."

Anne: "In terms of common topics, do you know there are all kinds of audio books in the library? Many classic and popular

books have been converted to CDs. You can listen to them in the car. After a while, you won't feel tired any more when you drive, and you'll also have things to talk about when you arrive home. This way, you can kill two birds with one stone. Nice, isn't it? I just finished listening to a book about John Lennon and learned a great deal about this singer and song writer who claimed to be bigger than Jesus. When I told Mike about him, he was impressed."

Jing Yi: "Really? I'll have to try then."

Two weeks later, Jing Yi called Anne, excitedly: "Bob started to cook for me and David again!"