POETIC INQUIRY:

MY JOURNEY IN LANGUAGE

by

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Poetic Inquiry: My journey in language

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Abstract

This dissertation is a poetic inquiry of my experience in language. Poetic Inquiry incorporates original poetry in academic writing, which ancient poets and scholars had been doing for thousands of years. However, it is not merely a repetition of the old tradition, but uses creative poetry in academic research in a systematic and diverse way. Poetic Inquiry is an umbrella concept to describe the various possibilities for using poetry in research. But, Poetic Inquiry is not any piece of writing with poetry in it. Poetic Inquiry “revisits the philosophical ideas of knowledge generation” (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xiv). Poetic Inquiry highlights the importance of individual expression, and generally involves poetic truth-seeking and poetical examination of inner and outer experience.

The poetic inquiry of my personal experience is anchored in Chinese culture. I use eight words 春秋匪懈，享祀不忒 as the frame and themes of each chapter. These Chinese words come from the first collection of Chinese poetry The Book of Songs (11th century B.C.E.-6th century B.C.E.), and they mean that the Lord of Lu worshipped god and ancestors incessantly. My dissertation sums up my former experience and my family stories, and it is a dedication to my ancestors. After these eight chapters of narration, Chinese poems and their English translations, and some English poems, I conclude that Poetic Inquiry grants ordinary people1 a chance to speak out their “impulses and desires” (Dewey, 1997, p. 71), and that collectively, ordinary people can contribute to the revision and reconstitution of the world by telling personal stories.

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1 Amitz’s (2003) explained “ordinary people” as “I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth. No earthshaking event accompanied my birth. I wasn’t anything out of the ordinary” (p. 87).
Lay Summary

My dissertation conducts a poetic inquiry of my experience in language. I ruminate on my own family stories, and thus invite my readers to take writing as “a way of living in the world” (Leggo, 2012, p. xvii), so that we can explore the dimensions of our spirits and selves “that normally lie smothered under the weight of living” (Winterson 1996, p. 137). This dissertation also provides my readers with an example to understanding setbacks and tragedies in their own lives. After my poetic inquiry in language, I conclude that ordinary people can speak out their impulses and desires, and that collectively, ordinary people can help revise and reconstitute the world by telling personal stories.
Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Botao Wu. The previously published 17 Chinese poems and one English poem were all originally composed by Botao Wu. In this dissertation, I rewrite all these 17 published Chinese poems in English. The Daoist symbol (p. 4) is handcrafted and photographed by Botao Wu, the calligraphy (p. 215) is written and photographed by Botao Wu, and all photographs of original collage art and personal property are taken by Botao Wu.
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I’m very grateful to my exam chair professor Nicholas Hudson and university examiners professors Anthony Clarke and Samuel David Rocha. I thank my external examiner(s). I also thank my supervisory committee consultant Zhao Laoshi. I thank them for sharing their thought and care.

I owe thanks to many professors whose classes I have attended, and A, M, R, J, S, and so on. I thank them for their wisdom in the classroom and beyond. It is a blessing for me to work with many brilliant people.

Finally, I thank my mother for her contribution to the well-being of my family members. I thank my late father for his uprightness, talent, dedication, generosity, and most importantly for his love for my family members. I thank my other family members for their help and encouragement, too.
In Carl Leggo’s (2018) academic last will and testament, he asked us to hold fast to “H” (p. 15), and he took “H” as “happening” (p. 15), and delved into three dimensions of the alphabet: “hole” (p. 17), “hope” (p. 18), and “heart” (p. 20).

This is what I seek to do in my poetry—to be attentive, listening with care, seeking to learn by heart.
--Leggo, 2004c, p. 31

There is a spark (that) dwells deep within my soul.
--Heidenstam, 1919, p. 81

I am seeking to live with joy.
--Leggo, 2019, p. xi, as cited in Pinar

Happening is an ongoing process. The universe is a system of ongoing processes, and the human species represents a cog in this complex system. As a commoner, I enjoy the simple happiness of everyday life.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors, my late father, my mother, and my other family members.
Prologue
A glance at a historic figure toward the end of the Ming dynasty gives us a taste of the conflicting ideas regarding a person. A late Ming dynasty military leader, Yuan Chonghuan (袁崇焕, 1584-1630), was killed by the Chong Zhen emperor (Zhu Youjian 朱由检, 1611-1644) as a traitor and all his family members over 16 years old were sentenced to death as well. The narration in the official historical book *Chong Zhen Chang Bian* (Wang, 1982) seems legitimate that Yuan cheated and betrayed the Emperor, and that Yuan intentionally let enemy troops go to the capital city. But Yuan was lauded as a hero by many influential figures. Among them were the Qian Long emperor of the Qing dynasty (Yan, 1984, p. 159), Zhang Tingyu (1974), a Qing scholar who compiled the Ming History, Kang Youwei (2007, p. 468), a well-known educator and politician at the end of the Qing dynasty, and Jinyong (1994), who attached an article about Yuan to one of his novels, quoting from scholars and history books in his argument.

We are all “imperfect human beings living in the world” (MacKenzie-Dawson, 2018, para. 5). Why do we “ignore the importance of personal impulse and desire” (Dewey, 1997, p. 70) to express and celebrate our own lives? After many “speakable” (Whitlock, 2015, p. 127) and unspeakable life experiences, bearing witness to all the heated arguments happening in history and in the present, why not calm down, sit down, and write down our own stories in poetry?

My “experience” is the “backbone” of my poetry (Bugeja, 1994, p. 97). Poetry is highly personal and accommodates “different interpretations” (Wheatley, 2002, second last paragraph), and poetry is a way to avoid argumentative confrontations and to “cultivate myself” (Sexton, 1982, p. 49). Lyons (2008) claims that “poetry can help us pay attention to...the quiet work of stitching together everyday life” (p. 81). Behar (2008) states that poetry is “the larger desire to speak from a deeper part of the self, which is the goal of all artistic expression” (p. 60). Leggo (2008) encourages us to write poetry to “learn to appreciate the significance of our own lived experiences” (p. 92). Writing and researching with the use of poetry improves my understanding of myself, and helps me live better in the world.

Many of our life events are unspeakable due to their contentious historical backgrounds. My family history was influenced by some major historical events that happened in China and in the world, and my family events were related to the major historic events that happened.
concurrently. But, I didn’t witness the past historic events myself and don’t have a panoramic view of the international and national, political and social knowledge of these events, so I don’t delve into them. I prefer to focus on my own family stories in my research, so as to learn lessons and to improve my character and abilities. Like purifying water, I collect my life experience, removing debris and harmful ingredients, keeping encouraging and constructive ingredients. I distill poems from my life.

However, poetry is not merely an “honest duplicity” (Cook, 1968, p. 63) of life, but “saying one thing and meaning another” (Frost, 2007, p. 147). This is like Dickinson’s notion of telling the truth but telling it on a slant (Franklin, 1998). Or as Gerber (1966) said, poetry is the “true lie” (p.132) of life. The so-called slant or lie is the part of our expression that is “more than words can say” (Prendergast & Galvin, 2012, p.7). Jerome (1968) elaborated this conception in a remark,

Poetry is art, but it is not merely art. Its material is life—the subject to which the poet addresses himself, which is often his own life, his own experience. Art is the selection, manipulation and arrangement of that material. (p. xxii)

Fenellosa (2008), an American pioneer researcher on Chinese poetry, said that “life is pregnant with art” (p. 54). “Playing with” my own artwork, poetry, narrative, and photography, grants me “the opportunity to explore creative unblocking” (Wallace, 2015, p. 1) and reframes my past life events in a positive and constructive way. Having survived the ups and downs in life, we can “reframe” our own “past events” (Manovski, 2014, p. 242) to “make peace with the voice of our inner” self and “the voice of society” (Wallace, 2015, p. 83). This mental work makes “grief somewhat easier to bear” (Prendergast & Galvin, 2012, p. 7) and the reframed life story corrects the things that went wrong in our lives, and helps us live better at present.
Photograph 1. Digital photograph. A Daoist symbol handcrafted and photographed by Botao Wu.
Part 1 Poetic Inquiry
What Is Poetic Inquiry?

Poetic Inquiry was promoted and brought to the forefront of arts-based research by Butler-Kisber, Leggo, Prendergast and other scholars. Butler-Kisber published an article named “Poetic Inquiry” in 2004, and two other articles with the same title in 2010 and 2012. Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima’s edited book on Poetic Inquiry in 2009 set Poetic Inquiry on its feet, and it is the beginning of a series of compiled books, containing the papers for the biannual international conference titled International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry initiated by Prendergast, Leggo and others in 2007.

Poetic inquiry has a long tradition. The first Chinese poetry anthology, The Book of Songs (11th century B.C.E.-6th century B.C.E.), introduced the tradition of collecting songs and ballads gleaned from different parts of China. Traditional Chinese poets wrote poems to express their desires and ideals, to convey the Way, and to express feelings (Li, 1999). They wrote in a random and intuitive way. This is the same as the current poetic inquirers’ concept of “taking its data from the poet’s (researcher’s) life experience” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii).

Poetic Inquiry is also a new methodology that invites innovation (Leggo, 2004), and inclusiveness (Shidmehr, 2009). Prendergast (2009) thought it might be problematic that all poetry could be regarded “researcher-voiced” poems if they were taken as “a re-searching of experience and sorting into expression and communication through language” (p. xxii). She also found that “researcher-voiced” poems form half of the projects in this field. In my doctoral comprehensive examination paper approved by my supervisory committee on May 17, 2016, I proposed to use “poetic inquiry” to refer to the thousand-year-long activities of composing poetry in scholarly endeavor, and “Poetic Inquiry”, the capitalized proper noun, to describe the various possibilities and different terms in contemporary research, especially those ones after the Second World War. After this worldwide warfare, humans gradually realized that we cannot afford large-scale wars, and that we have to turn to art for redemption, relief and reconciliation, be it language art or art in other forms. I argue that poetry is a form of research: it’s the difference between “poetic inquiry” and “Poetic Inquiry.” In ancient times, writing poetry was a scholarly activity; while now we have to reintroduce writing poetry into the academic field. We
have focused on doing scientific research in humanities and social sciences for so long that we may have developed a mindset that if research is not scientific then it’s not academic research. But when considering the nuclear weapons that we have deployed, the transgenetic techniques that we have advanced, and the AI robots that we have created and accepted as citizens, I have to ask a question: has science solved all the “problems”? The answer is a resounding no. It solved some problems, and brings other problems. We still have to carry out research “by heart” (Leggo, 2004c, p. 31) so as to live well in the world. Exploring human emotions, feelings and thoughts is not to solve problems, but to express humane concerns for ourselves. We can look at Poetic Inquiry broadly, regarding the involvement of poetry in scholarly activities for thousands of years as poetic inquiries, and define Poetic Inquiry narrowly as a new trend in arts-based research that can be examined from different perspectives.

Poetic Inquiry is not merely a repetition of the old tradition of writing poetry as “a re-searching of experience” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii), but uses creative poetry in academic research in a systematic and diverse way. “A re-searching of experience and sorting into expression and communication through language” is called “researcher-voiced poems” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii), which are used in almost half of poetic inquiries. These poems should be framed in “a research context” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii) to qualify as Poetic Inquiry. In Poetic Inquiry, poetry is “a powerful way to access deep emotion”, and “to express the inexpressible” (Prendergast & Galvin, 2012, p. 7), and can integrate multiple techniques in different genres, such as narrative, autobiographic writing, “photographic essay” (Manovski, 2014, p. 198), music, drawing, film and so on. Poetic Inquiry “transcends conventional methodological and disciplinary boundaries” (Prendergast & Galvin, 2016, p. xi).

Poetic Inquiry is an umbrella concept to describe the various possibilities for using poetry in research (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Butler-Kisber, 2012). Although the term Poetic Inquiry is used by the pioneer practitioners of the discipline, there is a wide difference in their usage. Butler-Kisber (2012) framed Poetic Inquiry with found poetry and generative poetry. Found poetry is to create a poem with some words and phrases from another piece of writing. By making changes to the original text, a found poem has a completely new meaning. Prendergast (2009) classified Poetic Inquiry into three groups: “poems about
poetry and/or inquiry”, “researcher-voiced poems”, or “participant-voiced poems” (p. xxii). Still other scholars (Grace, 2001; O’Connor, 2001; Sullivan, 2012) have thought all poetry is inquiry. But, Poetic Inquiry is not any piece of writing with poetry in it. Galvin and Prendergast (2016) suggest that Poetic Inquiry “revisits the philosophical ideas of knowledge generation” (p. xiv).

I see Poetic Inquiry as a genre that accommodates different intentions and possibilities. Though some readers may interpret this dissertation in a political way, I never set out to write it with any political intentions. I am a language teacher and locate my work in the “Researcher Voiced Poems” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii). I notice that the present poetic inquiries are characterized by the celebration of individuality, poetic truth-seeking in research, poetical examination of inner and outer experience, and other innovative ideas. The following part 1 of the prologue further this discussion by reviewing each of the characteristics.
The Importance of Ordinary Individuals

The celebration of individuality is the first characteristic of Poetic Inquiry. A glance at narrative inquiry, autoethnography, life writing, and Poetic Inquiry, which are often used together by qualitative researchers, gives me the impression that these qualitative research methods all promote the importance of the researcher and the researched as ordinary individuals.

Chase (2005) traced the three waves of narrative inquiry from the first half of the twentieth century when sociologists and anthropologists favoured the life history method, to the following wave when feminists and sociologists reinvigorated personal narratives and oral narratives, and finally to the present when narrative inquiry bears multiple analytic lenses and approaches. Chase (2005) concluded that narrative inquirers listen to and interpret the narrator by summarizing, supporting, and interacting with the narrator’s stories, and by examining their own emotions and thoughts through the “refracted medium” (p. 666) of the narrator’s voice. Readers may be moved by the narrator’s story and then imagine their own way to tell their stories (Chase, 2005).

Autoethnography shares the same spirit. It explores the personal experience of the researchers and focuses on their own emotions, thoughts, and concerns (Richardson, 2005; Ellis, 1997). Autoethnography is often used together with other qualitative research methodologies and bears other names such as autobiography and autoethnographically based personal narrative (Wall, 2006). In the eighteenth century, life writing was used as a synonym for biography, and autobiography was a sub-genre of biography, and the broadened sense of life writing was about the self and the individual that favours autobiography, diaries, and letters (Kadar, 1992).

The “blurring genre” (Richardson, 2005, p. 961) or the common core of the above-mentioned research methods is that we don’t have to be omniscient researchers and claim to know everything. Knowing something that is personal, partial, and situational is also worthwhile (Richardson, 2005). Neuman (1994) went a step further and asserted that every researcher describes her or his own “personal experience” (p. 74). The emphasis on our individuality and
ordinariness is common in narrative inquiry, autoethnography, life writing. Poetic Inquiry also stresses individuality by paying close attention to individual researchers’ and subjects’ emotions, feelings, and lives.

Many poetic inquirers wrote about their own emotions in their research. In Shira’s (2010) dissertation, we can find her deep love of animals, nature, poetry, and the gates on the farm that were significant for her life. Kramer (2014) also expressed her concern for and empathy with children in the Iraqi war. Graham (2012) began her article by recalling the loss of her parents, and connected her emotions with quarry lives, moths, and cottonwood trees. In the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-589 C.E.) of China, scholars had realized the importance of individual expression in their sporadic poetic inquiries. A poet and poetry theorist, Lu Ji (261-303 C.E.) commented in his prose “Wen Fu” (2002) that writing should arouse readers’ empathy with true emotions. He underscored strong and true emotions in poetry instead of logical and moral didacticism. A later poetry theorist Liu Xie (465-521 C.E.) highlighted feelings in his book Wen Xin Diao Long (1984) as well. He took feelings as a natural response to and a consequence of the changing world. He also used the human body repeatedly as a simile in his discussion of writings. The word Gu (骨), meaning bone, appears in his book Wen Xin Diao Long more than 30 times, the word Ji Fu (肌肤), meaning skin, appears seven times, and the word Xin(心), meaning heart or mind, appears more than 100 times. Other contemporary poets and poetry theorists like Zhong Rong (468-518 C.E.) and Tao Yuanming (365-427 C.E.) all called for a concern for individual human beings in their writings.

Poetic inquirers have studied all kinds of ordinary people’s lives and feelings in varied ways. Their subjects can be a teacher (Buttgnol et al., 2001), a homeless person (Finley, 2000), a mother (Richardson, 1992; Barg, 2001; Eisenhauer, 2011), a refugee (Hones, 1998), a poet and scholar (Clarke, 2014), and a plurilingual researcher (Prasad, 2012). Sameshima, Vandermause, and Santucci (2012) examined 450 emblazoned shirts collected by the Washington State University clothesline project and composed “empathic poetry” and “found poetry” in combination with a “hermeneutic phenomenological method” (p. 280) to draw attention to the individual life of women and their traumatic experiences. Spier and Smith (2012) took the autobiographical poems by Jon Seaman, a patient with End-Stage Renal disease, as their
research data, and explored his feelings and thoughts about doctors, donors, and medical machines.

Poetic Inquiry is concerned with and delves into ordinary individuals’ emotions, feelings and lives, and integrates original poetry into academic research. Seemingly, Poetic Inquiry is different from “traditional texts” (Butler-Kisber, 2012, p. 144), and the tradition she mentioned is “scientific” studies (Vincent, 2018, p. 51). Science can be “orthodox science” (Irwin, 1989, p. 1), “conventional science” (Irwin, 1989, p. 2), or pioneer science, and Poetic Inquiry is not “a way to avoid the stringent nature of scientific studies” (Vincent, 2018, p. 51). It integrates scientific studies with the thousand-year-long philosophical and artistic tradition of scholarly research. “Human experience has a range of different dimensions” (Irwin, 1989, p. 10), and marginalized disciplines may turn out to be great breakthroughs in human history. Von Karman (1957), who advanced aerodynamics greatly, admitted that “every historian of aviation starts with legendary examples” (p. 3), which are the primitive yearnings of human beings. He also quoted a saga “originating in the fifth century or earlier” (1957, p. 4). It used poetic lines to describe people flying in the sky like birds. He then “proceeded from legend to history” (1957, p. 4) and examined many artists and scientists’ ideas about how to fly. While, the dominant notion at that time was that “the notion of rockets to space was impossible” (Taylor, 2017, p. 9), several decades later, it is common sense now that rockets can fly into space. Poetic Inquiry is a new way of thinking of the current scientific research in humanities and social sciences, and it embraces different perspectives, philosophical insights, artistic beauty, and humane concerns that our ancestors have pursued for thousands of years. Researching on the interconnected issue of “experiences of people” (Irwin, 1989, p. 2), Poetic Inquiry accepts and harmonizes the two “traditions.”
Poetic Truth-seeking

In this segment, I focus on the most obvious characteristic of Poetic Inquiry, the involvement of poems in scholarly research. Poetic Inquirers use poetry to demonstrate their thinking processes and ruminations in research. There are three perspectives guiding research attempts to theorize Poetic Inquiry. Some scholars believe all poems are poetic inquiries, others offer standards for Poetic Inquiry, and still some others are trying to connect poetic inquiries with other qualitative research.

O’Connor (2001) and Sullivan (2012) embrace all poetry in Poetic Inquiry. O’Connor (2001) wrote research poems to learn about other people, and claimed that “all poetry is a form of inquiry and a way of knowing” (p. 84). Sullivan (2012) furthers this idea and adds that Poetic Inquiry can be complicated and multiple ways of knowing. Grace (2001) wrote ardent but vague poems proclaiming that poetry is inquiry, but he didn’t defend his assertion fully by explaining his ideas beyond the poems.

Alternatively, Sullivan (2009) explored six qualities or “occasions” (p. 112) of Poetic Inquiry: concreteness, poetic voice, emotion, ambiguity, associative logic, and tensions, claiming that these six qualities are interconnected in Poetic Inquiry. Her research aimed to set the standards for Poetic Inquiry. Faulkner (2009) recorded her theoretical meditations on the character of good/effective poetry: a good poem should be authentic and memorable, and an effective poem should use poetic technique in expressing meaning. Leggo (2016; 2015; 2011a; 2011b; 2007a; 2007b; 2005a; 2005b; 2004a; 2004b) researched and wrote about living poetically again and again, taking living as a way of poetic expression. To Leggo (2016), poetry is a life style and a way to live well with “wisdom” (p. 72).

Lastly, Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) reviewed poetic and performance approaches, bringing these two disciplines together in a single chapter, and invited further research on the combination of these two areas. Prendergast (2009) also reviewed the current literature on Poetic Inquiry. She gathered all the statistics on academic articles that involved poems and that were published before 2007. She displayed multiple possibilities of Poetic Inquiry with telling examples. For instance, she used Richardson’s comment on generating poetry out of participant
data to explain that Poetic Inquiry is a fresh, vivid, and affective way to do research. She quoted from some other poetic inquirers and participants that Poetic Inquiry is a creative and performative act. Her research harnessed data, numbers and analysis to define and describe Poetic Inquiry.

Along with research to theorize Poetic Inquiry, other poetic inquiries validate the practical use of poetry in research. Leggo (1997) applied reader response and semiotics in secondary classroom poetry education, revealing that poetry provided “an environment for reflection, and a venue for discussion about experience and life” (p. 11). Fidyk (2016) used Poetic Inquiry to examine the life span of Emily Carr, and composed a found poem based on her journal “Hundreds and Thousands.” Glenn’s (2016) research explored the strength of Poetic Inquiry in her own life. She described how she suggested that her students do poetic inquiries by sitting with the collected data for a long time, and she believed that learning and writing are a “truthful way of living” (p. 102). Kramer (2014) used Poetic Inquiry to address issues of Iraqi children’s “exile, loss, and hope” (p. 1), in order to “write the world well” (p. 3).

Given the above theoretical and practical research on Poetic Inquiry, I reflect on its character of truth-seeking and find that it is trying to explore an alternative way to do academic research by writing poetry, by setting standards and guidance for doing poetic inquiries, and by applying Poetic Inquiry in multiple academic research projects and educational practices.
Poetically Examining Inner and Outer Experience

Poetic Inquiry’s third characteristic is its dedication to examine and express people’s “internal and external” experiences (Sullivan, 2012, p. 92). Addressing life experience (Lyons, 2008, p. 81), Poetic Inquiry can be as simple as the expression of the researchers’ “inner dialogue” (Fidyk, 2016, p. 3) or their understanding of the outer world (Porter, 2016).

Many studies survey people’s inner experience. A poetic inquiry of the participant’s inner world is usually about a certain group of people or an individual. Ann et al. (2009) used Poetic Inquiry to research the inner worlds of female prisoners, trying to improve their well-being. Similarly, West et al. (2009) investigated the life of a deaf family. These researchers either examined the participants’ original poems or composed poems out of the interview data. Another kind of research examines an individual’s life and feelings. Yallop (2016) carried out a project to trace his grandmother’s aboriginal heritage by telling stories and writing poems. Grace (2001) researched a gay teacher. Santoro and Kamler’s (2001) research involved a teacher of color. The exploration of a researcher’s inner world is sometimes autobiographical. For instance, Walsh (2012) openly wrote about her practice of meditation in the Shambhala/Buddhist tradition, revealing her fear, her surrender, and her understanding of poetry and meditation.

Some other poetic inquirers turn their attention to the outer world and take poetry as a conversation with the environment (Raingruber, 2004). Caddy (2003) observed the natural world throughout the year, explaining that the practice of observing nature connected the writer and reader to the world. Shira (2012) also delved into her experience on Butterstone Farm, opening her gates of loving inquiry in nature.

Like the abovementioned modern poetic inquirers, Lu Ji (261-303 C.E.) regarded writing poetry as a response to the writer’s inner and outer world experiences. The prologue of Lu’s “Wen Fu” started with the author’s observation and meditation on the natural and human world and his reading of classic books. It then moved to his emotional response to the outer world and ended with the expression of his responses to the outer world. The work asserts that writing is the meditative and emotional response to the inner and outer worlds. Similarly, Liu
Xie （465-520 C.E.）emphasized the natural way in writing and the beauty of nature and these thoughts can be found repeatedly in his book. I’ll expatiate upon these ideas in part 2 of the prologue. Ancient Chinese scholars and modern poetic inquirers all observe the world, think over their observations, and respond to the outer world, expressing their feelings.
Innovations of Poetic Inquiry

Poetic inquirers are very innovative in their research, which is the fourth significant characteristic of Poetic Inquiry. Beauty, open-endedness and new skills and ideas are present in poetic inquiries. Many poetic inquirers line up their stanzas beautifully or integrate photos and images in their research to enhance the vividness and visual attraction of their work. Shira (2012) engages with aspects of visual design and beauty. When depicting “droop” she aligned the letters so that they actually flow down on the page, and she also included many vivid photos of gates to concretize the theme of her work: how she lived on a farm and led a simple daily life with love. Wu (2015) formed a tree with poetic lines in my concrete poem “Leaves.” In the poem, leaves that fall every year metaphorically represent generations of scholars who contributed to human knowledge. Sullivan (2009), Hurren (2009), Clarke (2014), Morawski (2009), and Oughton (2012) all used photos or images to enhance the beauty of their research. According to Strachan and Terry (2011) and Jerome (1968), poetry is a piece of art, and visual beauty is omnipresent in Poetic Inquiry.

Poetic beauty can also be found in ancient poetic inquirers. In “Wen Fu” (2002), Lu (261-303 C.E.) argued that poetry should be beautifully (绮丽) written. Comparing writing to music, he pointed out five common mistakes in writing and described his ideas about what kind of beauty a work should have. First, he discussed monotonous and lackluster writing, comparing it to an uncoordinated and ineffective musical performance. Then, he addressed the combination of different language styles, and advocated harmoniousness and consistency in writing. He continued with the third problem in writing and criticized those pieces that were not written with authentic emotions and feelings and then became unattractive and uninviting to readers. Next, he was concerned with the kinds of writing that were not elegant. Finally, he called for attention to skills in writing.

Additionally, “open-endedness” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 119) or multiple interpretations are typical of poetry, and it is significant for Poetic Inquiry to embrace the uncertainty in poetry (Man Lam et al., 2007). In Poetic Inquiry, when dealing with the same interview data, different researchers can produce different poems. The understanding of the same poem can be diverse.
for different people—hence, the ongoing experience of complexity (Shotter, 2010). A definite and objective result of research is not necessarily reached, and “complexity” (Rapport & Hartill, 2012, p. 224) and “ambiguity” (Quinn-Hall, 2012, p. 117, p. 129) are respected in Poetic Inquiry.

Lastly, poetic researchers have experimented with new tools in Poetic Inquiry. James (2009) used Poetic Inquiry to consider junk email and created “spoetry” out of spam emails. Found poems, which have been discussed since the 1960s, “encourage people to examine the effects of the shape and the structure of poems” (Leggo, 1997, p. 17). Created on and sent out from mobile phones, text poems can engage the writer “in a dialogue with the possibilities of language, with audience and with the nature of meaning itself” (Tracey, 2012, p. 247).

Language itself is a creative invention of human beings to convey ideas. Playing with language with new technology opens up innovative ways for us to receive and respond to language, technology, and the world.

Similarly, innovative ideas can be found in ancient poetic inquirers from China. Poetry theorist Zhong Rong (468-518 C.E.) introduced the natural way of composing poetry. He believed writing poetry was a natural response to outside stimuli. He said (1996): “The atmosphere stirs things, things move people, so people’s nature and feelings are swayed, and then are embodied in dancing and poetry chanting. As for chanting and expressing sentiment, why stress the use of allusion? (气之动物,物之感人,故摇荡性情,形诸舞咏。至乎吟咏情性,亦何贵于用事?)” (p. 1). Zhong (1996) suggested that people should feel the world and express their feelings naturally without quoting too much from earlier texts. His idea directed the attention of his contemporaries to daily life and the present.
According to Edghill (2009), a poetic inquirer is granted the opportunity to see the familiar in new ways, and they overcome the limitations of traditional print methods, disseminating research through written or performed poetry. I agree with Sullivan’s (2012) belief that the poet’s way of knowing is as effective as other ways of knowing. Poetic Inquiry “synthesizes experiences in a direct and affective way” (McCulliss, 2013, p. 88), and it touches on our “deepest level of existence” (Brady, 2004, p. 630).

I’m also confident about McCulliss’ idea (2013) that Poetic Inquiry “brings focus to ideas and data that are most relevant to the research” (p. 88). Actually, poetry “not only enhances the presentation of ideas, but also stimulates and formulates the conception of ideas themselves” (Taylor, 2009, p. 16). Leavy (2009) said that “poetry as a research strategy challenges the fact-fiction dichotomy and offers a form for the evocative presentation of data” (p. 63), and we can use poetry to represent data “imaginistically, metaphorically, symbolically” (Piirto, 2009, p. 87). Because poetry expresses people’s minds in a more vivid and direct way than “snippets of prose” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522), poetry becomes a “conversation” (Glenn, 2012, p. 100) between the researched and the researcher, and we know each other’s voices and ideas better during a poetic inquiry. Through this conversation, we can acknowledge and recognize our uniqueness and the uniqueness of others while inquiring poetically (Shidmehr, 2009).
Who Am I?

I am a language teacher, arts-based researcher and poet, a “scholartist” (Glenn, 2014, p. 138). For more than five years, I taught English in schools and colleges in Beijing, China and Mandarin in Kentucky, USA. While I was teaching, I began to understand the beauty of both languages. My study at UBC is improving my understanding of poetry, life, and education. This time has been decisive in what I’m doing now and for my future. Just like a toddler beginning to recognize his identity and building autonomy and interests, I recognize my identity as a bilingual poet, scholar, and teacher. I anchor my interests in Chinese and English poetry composition and try to establish a niche in the poetic and academic arena by constantly writing. I realize the significance of my upward endeavour and am working towards becoming a better scholar and a better person.

“Some things are so much part of the to and fro of living that we rarely reflect on them” (Clarke, 2002, p. 137). If you were a prisoner, a senior nearing the end of life, or a patient who could not enjoy the simple pleasure of walking, thinking or eating, how much would you desire the regular things? The precious aspects of simple life are similar to oxygen. We aren’t aware of its value until we lose it. A poet “framed the world for us to see things with special lenses”, and “through the eyes of a poet” (Roberts, 2014, p. 47), we can appreciate the simplest yet blissful blessings of regular life.

As a poetic inquirer, I learned to appreciate my own growth and my trajectory as an “embryo poet” (Carpenter, 1942, p. 15) and write this dissertation as an example for my readers to acknowledge and celebrate our ordinary but valuable lives. In the Holy Bible, the power of growth is vividly demonstrated by the contrast between the tiny, almost invisible, mustard seed and its final result—the largest of all garden plants (Mark 4:30-32). I am inspired by the wisdom in this story.

In my writing, I expatiate my “inner and outer work” (Cohen, 2012, p. 15) by representing my curiosity about myself, my community, the world, and nature. I write to respond to the ripples that stir in my heart. There is poetry in the air. If you listen carefully you can hear it when people talk to you—even more when they talk to themselves. When the
mountain talks to the brook, the brook to the river, the river to the sea, and the sea to the sky, they talk in poetry (Bjørnson, 1917). As Leggo (2004) proposes,

In poetry I am researching autobiography, and I am asking unsettling questions about the past, but I am mostly learning to dream again, to challenge the images that have, for a long time, shaped me and my perceptions, in order to imagine other possibilities. (p. 35)

A self-focused or “confessional” (Leggo, 2012, p. xv) indulgence in our own lives is a high tribute to life. Poetry opens me to a self that is usually hidden, a self that only comes out in dreams. I write myself in my poetry, exploring my past and my imagination of the future. I write to perfect myself, to help myself to be a better person. I write to explore many possibilities for myself and maybe for the world.
My Transcultural Identity

In my meditative and poetic truth seeking, I connect Poetic Inquiry with Chinese literary heritage. I couldn’t realize how profoundly I’m indebted to my own culture until I lived in another place for a long time. Classical Chinese poems consoled me greatly in my more difficult times abroad. Reading others’ poems was not adequate for understanding and expressing my own feelings and ideas, so I began to compose my own poems. Translating my Chinese poems into English turned out to be a part of my poetic research, and “translation is a linguistic as well as a cultural practice” (Venuti, 2013, p. 6).

Like young plants divided from their roots, I was transplanted to Vancouver from North China. The multiple cultures and erudite teachers at UBC guided me toward transcending the limitation set by my experience, education, and culture. I learnt that writing poetry can be a means of academic research, and I decided to integrate Chinese poetry into Poetic Inquiry. Transcribing my thoughts in meditation and in classes, I seek similar ideas from predecessors and learn from them. Tracing my family stories since about a thousand year ago, I attempt to find the causes of the misery of my family. In Canada, I recall stories about my family history, my present family members and relatives, and learn lessons from these experiences. This research has transformed me into a more confident scholar and poet.

Translation is rewriting an original text in another language, and rewriting involves necessary changes to make the new writing acceptable in the other culture (Lefevere, 1992). Some original ideas were altered in translation and others that are commonly acceptable between the two cultures get introduced to the translated language. Lefevere (1992) admitted that the new ideas and genres introduced by translation play a positive role in the evolution of a society and culture. I accept the Daoist notion that an individual is a miniature of the human world and the cosmos (Carlitz, 1986), and that my study in the West, particularly in Poetic Inquiry, is useful for my improvement as a scholar. I examine my own transition in the two cultures to find a viable identity for me in both cultures. Translation helps me find this transcultural identity.
Why Do I Inquire Through Poetry?

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
--William Blake (1910, p. 601)

I was born in the Bethune International Peace Hospital, a military hospital in memory of Norman Bethune, a Canadian born physician who is very famous in China. When my mother was about to give birth to me, she had very bad labour dystocia, and almost died when I was born. She had one arm for intravenous fluids, and another injected with cardiotonic steroids. Maybe my difficulty of entering this world was a foreshadowing of the hardship that my family was going to face.

My grandfather, a kind and simple farmer, passed away very early in a farm accident. His funeral left me with a vague memory of myself as a toddler asking my mother to hold me in her arms so as to catch up with other mourners in the ritual. Upon my graduation from high school, my father was killed by his co-worker in an accident. As a truck driver, he proactively went to fix the tailgate of the truck, but his co-worker backed the vehicle while he stood at the back of it. My maternal grandfather died years before my father’s accident, and my maternal grandmother a few years after that. Tragedy after tragedy. I couldn’t understand what was wrong. I decided to travel to the West to seek truth, universal truth, in a poetical way. For me, Poetic Inquiry avoids partisanship and judgement and it accommodates ambiguity and blurriness. Doing poetic inquiries, I don’t judge the world as a whole, so I can avoid making mistakes that may be unbearable to my family. I focus on my own familial life and try to address the things that went wrong in my family. To stitch together the “everyday life” (Lyon, 2008, p. 81) for my family, I would “listen with care” (Leggo, 2004c, p. 31) to the “spark deep within my soul” (Heidenstam, 1919, p. 81), meditate over what’s wrong with my family and myself, and improve my character and abilities.
The Frame of My Dissertation

I often meditate on the Daoist symbol on page 4. Guiding my “pure breath” through my organs in “concentrated visualization” (Kohn, 2010, p. 137), I “become aware of psychological agents connected to the organs, the spirit” (Kohn, 2010, p. 138), and beyond. I “overcome the limitation of this world” (Kohn, 2010, p. 141), and connect myself “actively with the greater universe” (Kohn, 2010, p. 139). The roundness of the Daoist symbol represents the origin of everything (Zhou, 2005). It can be a symbol of the world, the harmony of a family, or the inner alchemy of a person. Harmony and peacefulness do not mean that we all should be the same (Confucius, 2008). Like the symbol, there is white within black, and black in white.

Reaching its extreme, the Yang (white) will turn into the Yin (black) (Huang Di, 2005). To keep a balance, the dominant Yang cannot eliminate the Yin within its sphere, and the dominant Yin in the other half of the circle cannot remove the Yang either. With this idea in mind, I enter my own family story to the framework of Chinese culture.

This dissertation recalls and rephrases my early experiences, and it involves narration, Chinese and English poetry, photography, calligraphy, and so on. It consists of three major parts: the prologue, the eight stanzas (collections) of poems and narrations, and the epilogue. In the prologue, I reviewed Poetic Inquiry and explained why I wrote this dissertation in Poetic Inquiry. The epilogue serves as a conclusion of my writing. The eight stanzas in the middle were arranged within the frame of 春秋匪懈，享祀不忒 (Cheng, 2004, p. 554).

春秋匪懈，享祀不忒 are two poetic lines from The Book of Songs (Cheng, 2004, p. 554), meaning that the Lord of Lu (-627B.C.E.) constantly worshiped gods and his ancestors. I use the eight Chinese characters in these two lines separately as the eight themes to frame the stanzas between the prologue and epilogue. Etymologically, the word “stanza” means a stopping and standing place. In each stopping place, I examine my inner and/or outer experience through poetry and try to gain a better understanding of myself, my family, and the world. Poems in each stanza are gathered around a common theme represented by one of the eight Chinese characters. The poems are related as they share a standing point. Yet, they’re independent poems that record a separate and certain moment of my life, and these moments are not
necessarily connected immediately as they’re snapshots of fluid emotions and life events. I compose a traditional Chinese poem, Jue Ju, at the beginning of each stanza to explain each theme and then I write another poem in the classical Chinese Ci form as a wrap-up conclusion for each stanza.

春 means spring, the beginning of a year. Metaphorically, spring is a burgeoning time, full of hope and possibilities. My poems in this stanza are generally about scenic beauty in spring and my enjoyment of language. The simple enjoyment of language is the main reason for my pursuit of a doctoral degree in Poetic Inquiry.

秋 is autumn, a season of mellow fruitfulness and a symbol of maturity. In the first few poems of this stanza, I mention my current location of being away from my homeland. In the last poem, I express my other two reasons for leaving China: Becoming a professional poet is more attractive for me than worldly success, and some inharmonious events in my own family drove me away from home.

匪 has multiple meanings in Chinese. In this specific quotation, it means “non” or “no” as it combines with the next character 懈, meaning “non-stop” together. In this stanza, I’m trying to explain that I’m not a man of multiple aims and multiple tasks. My aim is very simple, to find my identity and to find consolation in language.

懈 means indolence, and 享 means enjoyment. I write some poems in a light-hearted way, depicting some of the happy and relaxed moments during my study in Vancouver. It is really an enjoyable and unforgettable experience here. I also include poems that expressed myself being on the edge of despair. In this situation, poetry always tides me over.

祀 refers to the worship of heaven and of the spirits of the deceased. Traditional Chinese people take worship and sacrifice as the tie to their ancestors and their hometown. Personally, I saw many people burning ghost money here in Vancouver, and many Chinese shops carrying joss paper and traditional Chinese gods’ statues. Ancestor and hometown are bittersweet words. Staying in a foreign country, I clear my thoughts and remove the debris in my experience that was connected to the two beautiful words. 不 and 肆 are used together, meaning “constantly.” For these two stanzas, I mainly write about my family.

Poetry, story-telling, and photography offered me ways to express my pent-up emotions
and feelings, to face my experiences bravely, and to tell them peacefully. I enjoy and celebrate the splendid and ordinary existence of myself and others in this world. I agree with Amitz’s (2003) interpretation of “ordinary people”: “I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth. No earthshaking event accompanied my birth. I wasn’t anything out of the ordinary” (p. 87). Amitz wrote extensively about ordinary people’s daily life. She depicted the sudden appearance of a husband’s lost brother, a girl’s misbehaviors in childhood, and other daily and familial stories. Similar to her, I’m interested in exploring “my ordinary life” with curiosity. The hero “I”, “my”, and “me” in the narrations of this dissertation is similar to Amitz’s definition of her heroes and heroines. She (Amitz, 2003) asked her readers not to “identify” the protagonists, and suggested that her readers “regard them favorably, recalling that ‘one must not judge his fellow until he finds in a similar situation’” (p. viii).
Part 2 Poetic Inquiry in Ancient China
Zong (1997, p. 208) commented that the Wei and Jin dynasties were the most turbulent periods in Chinese political history, the most bitter period in Chinese social history, but the freest, most emancipated period, and the period with the richest artistic spirit. This artistic spirit is a result of the political, social, and ideological realities at the time.

Cao Cao, the great politician in the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280 A.D.), abolished the traditional official selection rules, which highlighted moral standards and benevolence, and proposed that all able persons should be selected, even if they were morally flawed. This new rule influenced the contemporary ideology, and undermined the dominant Confucianism. This happened in the war time.

On a social level, the people of the Jin dynasty worshipped freedom and personal liberty. In the Wei and Jin dynasties, society was in constant turmoil. People’s lives were not predictable. The harsh social environment led to people’s disbelief in order and courtesy. They wanted to free themselves from such things, and pursue their independent personalities. Consequently, Confucian doctrines gave way to the coexistence of multiple ideologies.

Confucianism, which used to be the sole ideology in tradition, was weakened in its influence during this period. The harsh political and social realities made people bitter and angry. Scholars wanted to appease them spiritually, an aim fulfilled by Daoism and Buddhism. Daoism emphasized quietness and inaction in the face of nature and overwhelming social turmoil, and Buddhism sought common ground with Chinese cultural tradition since it came to China. Gradually, Confucianism’s dominance was replaced by the coexistence of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In this setting, the poetic theories and poems of Lu Ji, Liu Xie, Zhong Rong, and Tao Yuanming came into being, and in their poetic theories and poems were the primordial forms of modern Poetic Inquiry.

According to Lu, meditation over the outer world is the beginning of writing. He said in “Wen Fu”: 
Standing in the middle of the earth\(^2\), I deeply observe the world; reading widely the books written in remote antiquity, I reserve my sentiment and ambition. Following the change of seasons, I lament on the passing of time; looking at all things, my thoughts are numerous. I feel sad about the falling leaves in cold autumn, and happy about the twigs in spring. My heart is vigilant and prudent, embracing the frost; my aspiration is far, reaching the clouds. I laud the great achievements of people who and whose forefathers are all virtuous, and praise the nobility of ancestors. Walking through the forest and treasury of books, I extol the refinement of gorgeous poems. With deep feeling I drop the book and hold a writing brush. (Translated by Botao Wu)

This paragraph begins with the author’s observation of the natural and human worlds and his reading of classic books, then moves to his emotional response to the outer world, and ends with an expression of his meditation on the outer world. He stood in the middle of the earth, observing the world. He read books, which is another way to observe the world. He was moved by falling leaves, and new shoots of trees. Then he wrote down his deep feelings. Writing becomes then the meditative and emotional response to the inner and outer world.

Lu’s literary theory and his practice match exactly. In his “A Song About Full Moon” (月重轮行), there is an observation of human life and a lamentation. “Walk From the West Gate to the East Gate” (顺东西门行), is a combination of his observation of the natural world, his grieving over human life, and his meditations on these. “A Short Song” (短歌行) is a more

\(^2\) There is no consensus on what 中區 means. Some say it is a study, others say it is the universe, still others say it is the place of the heart, the human world, or the middle of the earth.
complex poem precisely proving his literary inclinations: concern for people, looking inward, and examining the inner and outer world.

Poetic Inquiry shares the same premises. Poetic inquirers begin their research with observation of their inner and outer worlds. “Poetry writing would start as a response to a series of potential triggers such as real-world events, strong emotions, and sensory images” (Hanauer, 2010, p. 30). Hanauer thought poetry writing begins with the triggers, and the effects of the triggers in a way similar to the consequences of Lu’s observation. Gerrish (2004, as cited in Hanauer, 2010) also presented poem triggers, such as strong emotions, images and textual influences, that initiate the process of writing (Hanauer, 2010, p. 29). Lu, Hanauer, and Gerrish, all regarded the examination of the inner and outer world as the first step in writing poetry. A poet experiences the world, feels the world, and then begins to write.

Poetry writing addresses the poet’s inner and outer experiences. “Poetry writing would seem to be a form of therapeutic self-discovery that allows strong emotions to be explored, explicated and expressed,” (Hanauer, 2010, p. 16). Similar to Lu who wrote down “deep feelings,” Hanauer (2010) regards writing poetry as realizing oneself, and expressing one’s strong emotions, which is engendered by the experience of the world. In like manner, Sinner, et al. (2006) state that “arts-based researchers frequently respond artistically to lived experiences that emerge from a community of inquiry and/or from self-reflection” (pp. 1246-1247).

Lu Ji and poetic inquirers all regard writing poetry as a response to the writer’s inner and outer world experiences. Lu and poetic inquirers all ask poets to observe the world, think over their observations, and respond to the outer world, expressing their feelings. Lu’s “Wen Fu” argued that poetry should be beautiful (绮丽). Comparing writing with music, he pointed out five common mistakes in writing and delineated his theory of what kind of beauty a work should have.

Someone writes words in too short a composition, faces the end of the text making a solitary affective image, looks down into the stillness finding no companion for them, and looks up into vast space seeing nothing following them; it is like the limited range of a string, which strings alone and has clear sound but no response. Some others write
lines with dreary tones, which have only languor and lack splendor. This mixes the lovely and the ugly, and encumbers the good with blemishes. This is like the pipes in the lower part of the hall played too fast, so it is not harmonious though there is response. And some others disregard the principle and keep the strange, pursuing in vain the empty and the subtle. Their words lack feeling and love, and their lines drift aimlessly away. It is like a string strung too tight, so there is no strong emotion though there may be harmony. Some others rush into concordance, and play a din, which has bewitching beauty. This only pleases the eye and matches the common taste. The sound is loud, but the tune inferior. Understand the difference between “Keeping the Dew Away” and “Among the Mulberries.” Though it has strong emotion, it is not dignified. Still some others are pure and gracefully restrained, always getting rid of the complexity and the excess. They don’t have the hidden flavor of ceremonial broth. It is like the red string flowing chastely. Though one sings and three sigh, it is dignified but still not alluring.

(Translated by Botao Wu)

或託言于短韻,对穷迹而孤兴₃, 俯寂寞而无友,仰寥廓而莫承;譬如絃之独张,含清唱而靡应。或寄辞于瘁音,徒靡言而弗华,混妍蚩而成体,累良质而为瑕;象下管之偏疾,故虽应而不和。或遵理以存异,徒寻虚以逐微,言寡情而鲜爱,辞浮漂而不归;犹絃么而徵急,故虽和而不悲。或奔放以谐和,务嘈囋而妖冶,徒悦目而偶俗,故高声而曲下;寤《防露》与桑间,又虽悲而不雅。或清虚以婉约,每除烦而去滥,阙大羹之遗味,同朱弦之清汜;虽一唱而三叹,固既雅而不艳 (Lu, as cited in Owen, 1992, p.157-164).

The first point Lu made is about the diversity of words and content. He thinks writing should not be like a solo in music, but should contain consistent and various words and content. Lu highlights the richness in diction and content, and some poetic inquirers do write in the same way. While some other poetic inquirers use found poetry to restrict their word choices to

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₃ The 兴 here is the same to the 兴, in the Great Preface to the Book of Songs (毛诗序), not the “stirring” by Owen.
an existing text, so as to make an independent poem with different meaning to the original text. The limits are not disappointing as the researcher doesn’t necessarily need to find the most suitable words but plays with the existing words to describe a certain story with its nuances (Butler-Kisber and Stewart, 1999).

Lu’s focal point then moves to the unity and coherence of writing. He regarded discontinuity in writing as combining two musical styles, which are not harmonious. On the other hand, as a poet and poetic inquirer, Sullivan emphasized the special logic in poetry. Sullivan defined coherence in poetry as “web-like relations” (2009, p. 120) or “associative logic” (2009, p. 121). She found that poetry does not obey traditional Western logic but has non-linear, interlocking, and web-like connections.

Lu also accentuated dignity in writing. His dignity is not strictly the conservative Confucian “right way” (正道), as he was also influenced by Daoism and accepted newness and innovation. Dignity, or “ya” (雅), is “a restraint that enforces hierarchy and distinction in relations,” (Owen, 1992, p. 165). While in Poetic Inquiry, no rule leads to hierarchy. Poetic Inquiry highlights equality and variety, and it is an alternative genre to hierarchical approaches.

Finally, Lu emphasized the importance of the allure of a piece of work. “Allure”, or “yan” (艳), is “a sensual attractiveness that draws us toward the text” (Owen, 1992, p. 165). Poetic Inquiry aspires to visual beauty; all the poetic effects, like rhythm, rhyme, assonance, onomatopoeia, alliteration, naturally add to the vocal attractiveness of Poetic Inquiry when applied in research. Poetic Inquiry may also include photos directly, connecting “the visual with the verbal” (Gladwin, 2014, p. 111), and adds another space for conveying ideas. In Lu and Poetic Inquiry, the beauty of a text is not separated from its content. They all write with rich content.

If we say Lu’s passage is a highly condensed research on how to write, Liu’s book “Wen Xin Diao Long” is a meticulously designed system about writing and literary criticism. “Wen Xin Diao Long” is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese ideology and culture. The book is written in line with Confucian ideology, but in it we can also find the influence of Buddhism and Daoism. Liu’s methodology and logic reflect the influence of Buddhism, as his book was written during
his ten-year experience of helping a monk compile Buddhist Scriptures. Liu’s work has some primordial thoughts about Poetic Inquiry in this Chinese soil.

Spring and autumn take turns in order, and Yin and Yang ebb and flow, with the movement of the color of things, the heart is also touched.
“春秋代序，阴阳惨舒，物色之动，心亦摇焉” (Liu, 1984, p.177).

Years have their physical embodiment, and things have their appearances; feelings are changed as things change, and our language comes from feelings.
“岁有其物，物有其容；情以物迁，辞以情发” (Liu, 1984, p.177).

People have seven feelings responding to things. Being touched by things and chanting are natural.
“人禀七情，应物斯感。感物吟志，莫非自然” (Liu, 1984, p.18).

Exploring the intention of hill climbing, presumably it is feeling aroused by seeing things. Feeling is aroused by physical things, so the meaning must be clear and dignified; watching things with feeling, so the words must be skillful and beautiful. (All these quotations are translated by Botao Wu)
“原夫登高之旨，盖睹物兴情。情以物兴，故义必明雅；物以情睹，故辞必巧丽” (Liu, 1984, p.27).

Feeling is emphasized in “Wen Xin Diao Long.” To Liu, feelings are a natural response to or consequence of the changing world. Human beings are moved by seasons, the essence of everything (Yin and Yang), and the movement of the color of things. As the outer world changes, people’s feelings change. Chanting poetry is a natural outcome of the feelings.

Raise the head to watch the radiance emitted, and lower the head to see the loveliness, the high and low are determined, so liangyi are generated, and the human being, who is
endowed with the divine spark of consciousness, joins in to make sancai. The human being is the flower of the wuxing, and is actually the mind of the earth and heaven. Language is established after the mind is generated, and the magnificence is manifested after the establishment of language. This natural course is the way. (Translated by Botao Wu)

“仰观吐耀，俯察含章，高卑定位，故两仪既生矣惟人参之，性灵所钟，是为三才。为五行之秀，实天地之心。心生而言立，言立而文明，自然之道也” (Liu, 1984, p.1).

As cited above, Liu emphasized the natural way in writing and the beauty of Nature, and these thoughts can be found again and again in his book. Observing the natural world to determine the high and the low. The essence of everything (Liangyi) and the heaven, the earth and the people (Sancai) come to being naturally. Language is created naturally after the creation of the human being and the enhancement of the human mind.

Approaching tens of thousands of categories, animals and plants are all magnificent. Chinese dragon and phoenix display good omens with their intricate and colorful grains, tiger and leopard are frozen in their gestures with their visual beauty, the color carved by clouds is better than that of a painter, the lush grasses and trees don’t depend on a skillful embroiderer. How could these be external adornments, they are of Nature. (Translated by Botao Wu)

“傍及万品，动植皆文，龙风以藻绘呈瑞，虎豹以炳蔚凝姿云霞雕色，有逾画工之妙草木贲华，无待锦匠之奇。夫岂外饰，盖自然耳” (Liu, 1984, p.1).

People understand their seven feelings, responding to objects and they have feelings, and being moved by objects they sing of their ambition, these are all natural. “人察七情，应物斯感，感物吟志，莫非自然” (Liu, 1984, p.18).
Momentum is designed with advantages. It is like the crossbow bolt came from the trigger machine, or the winding stream between mountains. It is the inclination of Nature.”

“势者，乘利而制也。如机发矢直，涧曲湍回，自然之趣也” (Liu, 1984, p.117).

Just like swift water forms no ripples and withered trees have no shade. It is the momentum of Nature.

“譬激水不漪，稿木无阴，自然之势也” (Liu, 1984, p.117).

The mind generates literary language, processing and cutting with thousands of considerations. And the high and the low need each other, which naturally pair.

“夫心生文辞，运裁百虑，高下相须，自然成对” (Liu, 1984, p.134).

Nature brings together these subtleties, like flowers and trees’ shining with flowers. (All the above quotations are translated by Botao Wu)

“自然会妙，譬卉木之耀英华” (Liu, 1984, p.154).

To Liu, the natural way is the most organic one, which just happens by itself and doesn’t involve subjective maneuvering. In a natural way, people respond to their admiration and the objects that touched them, and people chant their ambition naturally. To show the natural way, he uses charged examples like crossbow, stream between mountains, swift water, withered trees and flowers. Everything in the world is magnificent. The Chinese dragon and phoenix display good omens, tiger and leopard demonstrate their visual beauty, and the beautiful clouds, and grasses and trees are all natural objects. Writing should be natural: the literary mind generates and processes literary works, and the writer also considers the natural parallelism in paragraphs. His natural way is similar to Lu’s theory about the natural response to the outside trigger. To Liu and Lu, when there are outside stimuli, the writer naturally gets inspired and then writing happens as a consequence.
Writing naturally and writing about the beauty of nature are also common in Poetic Inquiry. “Some of the most beautiful poems we have, some of the loveliest songs, happened into the world simply because a person who had no intention of being a great poet experienced joy or sorrow deeply, and eased his heart by putting that feeling into words.” (Gilchrist, 1932, p. 67). And according to Thoreau, “Good poetry seems so simple and natural a thing that when we meet it we wonder that all men are not always poets,” (Bloom, 2007, p. 114).

The metaphor of writing being similar to the human body shows Liu’s concern with human beings themselves. In “Wen Xin Diao Long”, a book about writing, there is active engagement of the human body. Bone (Gu) is used metaphorically with several meanings. For example, the structure of the article, the essence of the writing, and strength like bone. Below are just a few examples.

When beginning to conceive the components of an article, you should understand the grand design of it, construct its structure (Gu) according to Yi Xun and Yao Dian, and select words in a grand and sumptuous way. (Translated by Botao Wu)

“构位之始, 宜明大体, 树骨于训典之区, 选言于宏富之路” (Liu, 1984, p.81).

Word is the branches and leaves, and ambition is the essence (Gu). (Translated by Botao Wu)

“辞为枝叶, 志实骨髓” (Liu, 1984, p.109).

As to Lu Ji’s The Book of Jin, it is very sharp, but the excessive ornaments are not deleted, which reduces the strength (Gu) of the writing. (Translated by Botao Wu)

“及陆机断议, 亦有锋颖, 而腴辞弗剪, 颇累文骨” (Liu, 1984, p.92).

In English poetry, the human body is also very important. Vernon (1979) wrote that “poems themselves are bodily gestures, they will naturally express this personality as well as the way the poet dresses or lights his cigarette” (P. 54). He also said that a poet “speaks from his body and drives the gestures of his body into the words of his body” (1979, p. 1). Jabes
stated that words themselves “are bodies whose members are letters” (As cited in Bachelard, 1971, p. 50). And “poetry is speech metamorphosed by the body” (Vernon, 1979, P. 58).

Whitman asserted the other way around that, “human bodies are words, myriads of words, (In the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's, well-shaped, natural, gay, every part able, active, receptive, without shame or the need of shame.)” (Seery, p. 278). These western and eastern scholars all agreed that “poems are bodies” (Vernon, 1979, p. 56).

Liu’s “Wen Xin Diao Long” was one of the earliest monographs on literary writing, while a later literary critic Zhong Rong wrote in a different way. He divided poets into different grades, and ranked them accordingly in his book Shi Pin. In the preface to his book, he also expressed his opinions on poetry. Zhong wrote about the relationship between feelings and poetry and the importance of poetry. He asserted:

Climate changes the scenery, the scenery moves people, so people’s nature and feelings are swayed, and are embodied in dance and chanting. Poetry shines on the heaven, the earth and people, making all things brilliant and beautiful; gods get sacrifices accordingly, the hidden and minute expressions clearly depending on it. Moving the heaven and the earth, touching apparitions and the gods, nothing can do this job better than poetry. (Translated by Botao Wu)


In Zhong’s eyes, the natural world is an inspiration for poetry. The changes in nature cause people’s emotional responses, which engender literary works. Again, nature is the trigger, human feelings respond to it, and poetry is the final product. To Zhong, poetry is very important. It makes everything brilliant and beautiful, even god depends on it. Poetry moves heaven and earth, and touches the ghost and the god. Not only the natural world, but also the social world can give rise to poet’s emotions, which also lead to poetry. Zhong went on:
As to vernal wind and birds, autumn moon and cicadas, summer clouds and hot weather rains, winter months and extreme cold, these are the feelings of four seasons that are expressed in poetry. Good gatherings entrust family bonds to the care of poetry, leaving the crowd people express resentment with poetry. This extends to the official of Chu who leaves the capital, or the concubine of Han who bids farewell to the palace. Someone’s bones lie in the northern wild, and spirit goes after a crown of daisies. Someone shoulders a dagger-axe garrisoning the frontiers, and the fighting spirit goes up in the borders. A stranger at the border wears clothes of a single layer, a widow in the boudoir cries until she has no tears left. Some scholar releases the seal of power and leaves the court, forgetting to return. Some lady raises her eyebrow and enters the palace to accept the emperor’s favor, she turns around and looks, which makes the whole country admire her. All these scenes move our hearts, how can we extend our emotions without poetry? Without long chanting how can we express the feelings? Confucius said: “Poetry can make people gregarious, and help people express their resentment.” To make the poor and the humble feel at ease, and to ease the gloominess of the recluses, nothing else is better than poetry. (Translated by Botao Wu)

Zhong made it clear that poetry responds to nature and human activities. Vernal wind, birds, moon, cicadas, clouds are the natural triggers of poetry. The activities of an official, a concubine, soldiers, a stranger, a widow, a scholar and a lady, and a pile of bones the poet sees as the resources of poetry. This argument was pretty advanced in Zhong’s time (468-518 A.D.). It is an improvement over the ancient doctrine: poetry is to express aspiration (诗言志). It helps poets to turn their eyes to reality and daily life instead of Confucian doctrines. The emphasis on nature and daily life can also be seen in Western poets. “Romantic-period writing in general is
often characterized by an increased interest in the natural world” (Mahoney, 2011, p. 555).

Wordsworth worshiped nature and said: “nature never betrayed/ The heart that loved her” (1991, p. xxv). To Wordsworth, nature is the spring of happiness and through the contact with nature people get spiritual and mental pleasure in silence. Shelley also wrote: “I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests: Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains” (p. 116).

Wordsworth chose to poeticize “subjects from common life” (p. 253). Coleridge expressed this concern and compassion for the poor in “To a Young Ass” Keats’ “Isabella” has the undisguised depiction of the brothers’ enjoying others’ words (Keats, 1926, p. 167). In writing style, Zhong also favored the natural way. According to his preface,

Climate changes the scenery, the scenery moves people, so people’s nature and feelings are swayed, and are embodied in dance and chanting. As to chanting and expressing sentiment, why stress the use of allusion. Missing you like the flowing water”, this is thinking over what the eyes can see; “On high stages there are always grievous winds”, another thing that can be seen; “In the morning, I climb on a high mountain”, there is no citation in this; “the bright moon shine on the accumulated snow”, there is no citation in it.” Looking at the beautiful lines in ancient time and nowadays, they do not pull old lines together or make use of allusions, but are directly expressed. In the Da Ming and Tai Shi reigns, articles are almost like copying books. Recently, Ren Fang, Wang Yuanchang, etc. don’t treasure the novelty of the diction, but compete to use new literary quotations. Writers since then have gradually gone in the same direction. There is no one who doesn’t use quotations in every sentence, in every discourse there is always allusion, the constraint to cite literary quotations has gnawed badly at literature. It is rare to see people who are only natural with beautiful meaning. If the discourse and diction are not superior, then it is suitable to add literary quotations, though it lacks
talent, it at least shows knowledge, which is one reason for doing this. (Translated by Botao Wu)


Zhong emphasized the use of natural response and natural language instead of the common practice of citing literary quotations in his time. He criticized the over use of literary citation. He treasured the use of novel diction. This was revolutionary in an age when making citations was common in writing. He favored the natural way of writing. He emphasized the direct connection between the writing of original poetry and the outer and inner world.

All the above-mentioned Chinese writers were literary critics, while Tao Yuanming focused on writing poetry. His poems are a direct expression of the idiosyncratic beauty of countryside and his leisure life as a farmer. He is respected also because he refused to serve the government and led a simple and self-sufficient life as a farmer and poet. He is the ideal of a Chinese scholar. In Tao’s poetry, the poet’s inner and outer experiences and common life are widely involved. A delightful example is his “Back to Country Life.”

怅恨独策还，With a cane I walk home feeling vacant and regretful,
崎岖历榛曲。The road twists and I pass by a bushy land.
山涧清且浅，The mountain stream is clean and shallow,
遇以濯吾足。I see it and bathe my feet.
漉我新熟酒, I strain my newly brewed wine,
只鸡招近局。I cook a chicken and invite my close friends.
日入室中暗，After sunset it is dark in the room,
In the poem, Tao described his feelings during the journey back home, the bumpy road, mountain streams, and bushy land and his happy feast with friends. Washing feet, cooking chicken, and burning firewood are activities in ordinary life, which do not usually appear in poetry; but Tao used all these things in his poetry, which demonstrated clearly his love of common life and his idiosyncratic way of writing poetry. Tao did not follow the Confucian tradition. In tradition, physical labor work was regarded as inferior and was despised by literary man. But Tao did all the work on his farm, and felt proud of it. Even though his grandfather was a high-ranking general, he didn’t see himself as an heir to a noble family, but more as an ordinary person. He wrote in “My Rural House in the Spring of Gui Mao Year” (癸卯岁始春怀古田舍):

先师有遗训，The past Confucius has left a teaching that
忧道不优贫。We should worry about the way, not poverty.
瞻望邈难逮，I watch respectfully and find it too far away to catch,
转欲志长勤。I then turn to set up a goal of working hard. (Ding, 1916, p.617)

Tao acknowledged the Confucian teaching in the above poem, but he described it as too good to be realistic. He set up his own goal of working hard to support himself. The abandonment of this paramount Confucianism was commonly seen in Wei and Jin scholars, especially in the three critics mentioned above. This phenomenon comes as a result of the social, political and cultural turmoil of the time, when people didn’t believe in what the government taught anymore.

The love of silence and nature, and looking inward are commonly seen in Wordsworth and Tao. In Wordsworth’s poems (1991, pp. 110-111, p. 217), silent wind, enormous clouds, hedge-rows, wood, wreathes of smoke and a still nook are naturally sprinkled throughout their
poetic lines. The rising smoke, the dwellers in the houseless woods, and the hermit all indicate that it is silent in nature.

我爱其静，I like the peaceful sight,
寤寐交挥，I long for it day and night.
(Ding, 1916, p.598)

静念园林好，In silence I think that the garden and the forest are the best,
人间良可辞。I certainly can leave the human world.
(Ding, 1916, p.629)

闲静少言，In idleness and silence I don’t speak much,
不慕荣利。I don’t aspire to honor and riches.
(Tao, 1979, p.175)

Tao liked peace. He treasured the garden and the forest; because of these, he would depart from the human world. He didn’t pursue worldly things, and would prefer to enjoy silence. He meditated idly. Wordsworth and Tao seemed to be attracted to the mind at peace, and they both favored silent thinking. But Wordsworth is an observer of nature and Tao becomes a part of nature. Wordsworth regarded nature as a landscape. This suggests that he stood apart from nature with the lens of a human being, like a visitor observing nature. After his departure from nature, the pleasure with nature would come back to him in silence from time to time. Wordsworth was a worshipper of nature, observing nature like it is another being or object. Tao wrote,

结庐在人境，My shabby hut is built in the human world,
而无车马喧。But I notice no noise of vehicles and horses.
问君何能尔? You ask me how I can do this?
心远地自偏。Any place is tranquil for a peaceful mind.
采菊东篱下，I pluck chrysanthemums by the hedge side,
悠然见南山。And leisurely I see the Southern mountain.
山气日夕佳，The haze enshrouds the mountain in fine weather,
飞鸟相与还。The flocks of birds are flying back home together.
此中有真意，This scene contains some truthful meanings,
欲辨已忘言。I want to say it but have already forgotten the words. (Zheng, 1999, p.1059)

Tao’s living place is physically located in the human world, but in his mind’s eyes there is no noise of vehicles, or horses. He had a peaceful mind. In his spiritual world, chrysanthemum, mountains, haze and birds are all his companions. He didn’t even bother to remember the truthful meaning beneath nature. Tao and Wordsworth both had ambitions before their withdrawal into nature. For various reasons, they didn’t succeed; nature became their consolation. They came to nature not only because they loved nature, but also because of their setbacks in society. Tao had the aspiration to fly far away like a bird in his youth. Flying far away is a metaphor of political ambition in classical Chinese poems, such as Li Bai’s (usually written as Li Po in Western books) “to soar up to nighty thousand Li” (扶摇直上九万里). (Li, 1992, p.320):

忆我少壮时, I recall the time when I was young,
无乐自欣豫。I was happy though there was nothing that made me happy.
猛志逸四海, My strong ambition rushed the whole world,
骞翮思远翥。I stretched my wings and thought about flying far away. (Ding, 1916, p.629)

Tao and Wordsworth both expressed their personal feelings in their poetry. Tao mostly expressed himself in an indirect way. Whereas Wordsworth liked to convey his feelings directly. Similar to other typical Chinese scholars, Tao liked to express his thoughts and feelings through similes. For example, to indicate his loneliness he used stray bird (Ding, 1916, p. 621), lonely
cloud (Ding, 1916, p. 631), flying out of the forest (Ding, 1916, p. 631), and standing alone with my shadow (Ding, 1916, p. 602). Wordsworth would say openly that he was lonely as a cloud. Although the two poets of different cultures expressed themselves in different ways, their poems are equally touching and engaging.

I quoted some romanticists when I examined ancient Chinese scholars because I was educated in modern Chinese language, which is influenced by English Romanticism. Furthermore, I am partial to romanticists and share with them some common ideas as they have influences on my way of thinking and being in the world. In the early twentieth century, many Chinese poets and scholars promoted English Romanticism in China. These earliest Chinese scholars were Liang Qichao, Lin Shu, and Luxun. They took different directions in their introduction of the romanticists. Liang advocated the political insights in romanticism, Lin focused on the sentimental and popular novels in the English Romantic period, and Lu devoted to the “Satanic Romantics such as Byron and Shelley” (Ou, 2018, p. 16). Then, Wen Yiduo and Xu Zhimo pursued self-examination and self-expression, and they favored the beauty of nature and the unity of nature and literature (Ming, 2019). I involved some romanticists not to deviate my readers’ attention, but to acknowledge the heritage of Romanticism and its influence on modern Chinese scholars, including myself.

The four Chinese writers I have considered in this chapter are the most significant figures in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, and their works shine with tinges of Poetic Inquiry. All four scholars concerned themselves with their inner and outer experiences, preferred the natural way of writing, eulogized and involved nature in their writing. Life experience is also included in poetry by later poets like Du Fu, Li Bai, Zheng Zhen, to mention just a few. The depiction of inner and outer experience can be found in Huang Zunxian (Schmidt, 1994, P. 54), and Zheng Zhen (Schmidt, 2013, p. 197). All these suggest that classical Chinese poetry and Poetic Inquiry have been well connected for a long time and in a deep way.
Reading and writing poetry is an instinct of human beings.

--Yeh (2015, as cited in “Guang Ming Daily”)

Part 3 Translation and Aesthetics
I concur with the “creative possibilities of translation” (Venuti, 2013, p. 4), and agree that translation is actually re-writing the original text (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii). Venuti understood creativity in translation in terms of a translator’s space to digest the cultural differences in the two languages. He takes translation as “original” work (Venuti, 1995, p. 1). Lin Shu (1852-1924), one of the earliest Chinese translators, couldn’t understand English and asked others who knew English to tell him the English stories, and he would creatively write a Chinese story based on the English one. His rewritten stories were well received by readers, but criticized by some scholars for his dramatic change of the original text. This is an example of a translator’s contribution to rewriting stories from one culture to another, and an example in the extreme.

“To translate a poem has often meant to create a poem in the receiving situation” (Venuti, 2013, p. 174). Poetry translation can’t be tantamount to the original poem and doesn’t have a similar poetic effect, because a translator is writing “in a different language for a different culture” (Venuti, 2013, p. 174). The “source-language poem” disappears “inevitably” in translation (Venuti, 2013, p. 174). I compose my own Chinese poems and rewrite them in English. My Chinese poems are translated into English to the best of my knowledge and fluency, and this is part of my artistic endeavor. Translating my own poems, I don’t have to “repress” my own “personality” (Venuti, 1995, p. 8), nor do I have to be “subjectless” (Venuti, 1995, p. 294). Actually, I’m “authoring” (Venuti, 1995, p. 7) my writing in two languages. By doing this freely, I reveal and revise my family story and reconstitute my world.

My Chinese poems in the classical vein were translated into free verse English, dropping the metrical and rhythmic character of their original text. “Archaic poetics” or classical poetry, is more difficult to translate (Venuti, 2013, p. 81), as classical poetry can’t be “easily imitated in English,” (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). Pound, Underhill, and Beck attempted to translate traditional foreign poetry into rhymed modern English poems. Pound practiced “a calculated recontextualization” in his translation (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). But even Pound himself admitted that this recontextualization was not an exact fit and was not recognized by every reader. Another criticism of Pound’s method is that he “distorted the historical difference that a foreign archaic poetry signifies in its own language,” (Venuti, 2013, p. 82). Pound’s response to this
objection can be problematic as he thought “a degree of historical adequacy is possible between the source and translated texts” (Venuti, 2013, p. 82). Beck’s work can easily cause criticisms as well, because she added extra words, and because her meters and diction were at odds with those of the original text (Venuti, 2013, p. 87).

Venuti (2013) recognizes that “literary traditions and practices” produced the “source text” and made it historically, culturally, linguistically and stylistically “meaningful” for readers of the same tradition (p. 80). He said it was almost impossible for a translator to reproduce a similar context in translation. In the twentieth century, the common practice in translating traditional foreign poetry was to “assimilate the source text” to “the forms that dominated English-language poetry” (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). Thus, the rhymed and metrical foreign poems turn into “free verse” in English (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). This is how I render my own Chinese poems written in the traditional form.

Most of my modern Chinese poems are not rhymed. But I apply alliteration and rhyme to the Chinese poem “Deer Lake.” As explained in my supplementary explanation, I wanted to denote the sense of “purity” and “peacefulness” by adding these poetic devices. This specific poetic beauty of Chinese language is “agreeable and natural” to itself, and it is impossible to find an equivalent in English (Sowerby, 2006, p. 66). Poetry is not translatable in the sense that something always gets lost in the translated poem, be it meaning or poetic devices. I decided to focus on translating the meaning of my Chinese poem, instead of attempting to create meter and rhyme which can turn out to be at odds with those of the original text (Venuti, 2013, p. 87).

The notion of translation as “interpretation” (Venuti, 2013, p. 180) further convinced me of translating my rhymed poem “Deer Lake” without rhymes. Interpretation precedes translation, and is “enacted during the production (translation) process” (Venuti, 2013, p. 179). A translator uproots the signifiers from the original text and rearranges them in the target language. In this process of “decontextualization” and “recontextualization”, the “source-language context” is “lost” (Venuti, 2013, p. 180), and a new network of “intertextual and interdiscursive relations” (Venuti, 2013, p. 181) are established. And there are also “subjective and random choices made by translators who are free to translate or not to translate, to follow or not to follow the original closely” (Gouanvic, 2005, p. 158). “Translation as a practice has
little to do with conforming to norms through the deliberate use of specific strategies” (Gouanvic, 2005, p. 157). “Norms are more likely to be dominant linguistic and cultural values that the translator learns and applies in a manner that is preconscious or unconscious” (Venuti, 2013, p. 7). As a result, “a reader of a translation can never experience it with a response that is equivalent or even comparable to the response with which the source-language reader experiences the source text” (Venuti, 2013, p. 180).

Contemporary translators usually translate from another language into their first language. While I’m creatively writing a dissertation with English as my second language, I have access to multiple English resources, be it British, Canadian, American, or Australian, and I don’t have a long-established preference for a certain dialect of English. All the expressions seem legitimate and acceptable to me, so I utilize whatever lingual expression from any of the sources when it best suits my purpose. On the other hand, my Chinese education was deeply rooted in Mainland China, specifically Northern China. I have a particular taste for Chinese language that was cultivated in my education of over twenty years in Mainland China. Some Chinese words and expressions that are popular in other Chinese speaking countries and regions sound unnatural and ineloquent to my ear, though I admit they’re also legitimate and expressive to the native speakers of these dialects.

Translation helps “in the evolution of a literature and a society” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii). Translation is necessary as “no language can afford the stagnation that results from restricting or excluding contacts with other languages” (Venuti, 2013, p. 3). My translation introduces “new concepts, new genres, and new devices” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii) from and into the two languages I’m translating. There are ample examples in my translations. Poetic Inquiry is an established genre in Canada and other English-speaking countries. I can find copious Chinese scholarly works that can be named as Poetic Inquiry, while the theorization of this field is scanty in China. I’m translating and communicating Poetic Inquiry to my peer scholars in China.
Antinomy

Venuti listed many translators’ work to introduce the concept of domestication (Venuti, 1995, p. 1). A translator changes “the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text,” and supplies “familiarised” and “domesticated” texts for “the receiving situation” (Venuti, 2013, p. 11). The translator would use modern English instead of archaic, standard English instead of colloquial, and would also avoid foreign words, such as “Britishisms in American translations and Americanisms in British translations” (Venuti, 1995, p. 5). The best domesticated translation should seem “transparent” (Berman, Berman, & Sommella, 2018, p. 40) “natural” (Venuti, 1995, p. 5) and “fluent,” (Venuti, 2013, p. 178) “not translated” (Venuti, 1995, p. 5). But, domestication can risk reducing “individual authors’ styles and national tricks of speech to a plain prose uniformity” (Venuti, 1995, p. 6).

Venuti presented the idea that translation can be “an act of violence against a nation,” as nationalist philosophy assumed that a “metaphysical” and “homogeneous” “concept of identity” is essential for a nation with particular “language and culture” (Venuti, 2013, p. 116). Then he discussed the contradictions to this attitude by pointing out that translation can strengthen national language, culture and literature. He also believed that translation has to assimilate the “source text” to the pre-existing “national identity” of the target language (Venuti, 2013, p. 117). Ultimately, he admitted that translation benefits “the formation of national identities.” The reasons are two-fold. The “source text” is carefully selected to suit the need of the target language and society (Venuti, 2013, p. 119). And the translation strategy should represent “a distinguishing characteristic of the nation,” integrating into the “national discourse” and the “national language” (Venuti, 2013, p. 119).

“Cultural otherness” and foreignness (Venuti, 2013, p. 3) inject new blood into a long-established language. Berman asks translators to “disclose the Foreign as Foreign in its own linguistic space” (Berman, 1999, p. 75 as translated and cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186), and called for the respect for “the differences of foreign texts and cultures” (Berman, 1999, p. 76 as translated and cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186). Translators “foreignize” their translation by maintaining the differences of the original text (Venuti, 1995, p. 29). Then “new concepts, new
genres, and new devices” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii) will be introduced to the target language. “World literature” is “a distinctive form of textuality” and “mode of reception” (Venuti, 2013, p. 5). In this process, “foreign form” crosses “linguistic and cultural borders” and joins “to local content” (Venuti, 2013, p. 5). Overcoming the confines and limitations of languages, translation communicates “the universal spirit” or “the human spirit” (Venuti, 2013, p. 118). I myself am trying to explore the meaning of being human, or “the universal human spirit” in my dissertation.

Yeoman (2012) has a good understanding of domestication and foreignization. Domestication can make readers of the target language to “relate to” the original text, and to “feel they belong to the same world” (p. 46). This is beneficial for the promotion of the original work in the world of the translated language. But this will mislead readers of the target language in a way that they don’t know how different the world of the original text is. Foreignization invites readers to “learn from the other without possessing or even identifying, but simply accepting their alterity” (Yeoman, p. 46).
Shift

The concept of “shift” was developed since the 1960s (Venuti, 2013, p. 14). Venuti realized the “textual effects” (2013, p. 14) of a translator’s decision-making for readers with different cultural and lingual backgrounds. Venuti also took Creagh’s “polylingual mixture of standard and colloquial, British and American” resources in his translations as an example for the “conversational quality” of translation (2013, p. 14).

I pronounce some English words the British way and use “trousers” to refer to “pants.” My first English teacher spoke some words with a British accent and my first English textbooks used “trousers.” When I encounter a new English word and look it up in online dictionaries I see different meanings of the same word from Cambridge Dictionary, Longman Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Macmillan English Dictionary, and Oxford Dictionary. For example, “story” is not labelled as verb in the online Cambridge Dictionary. The online Longman Dictionary contains three meanings of the verb: “telling a story”, “reading a story”, and “writing a story.” The online Merriam-Webster dictionary demonstrates two out of five meanings of the verb, and classifies it into an archaic verb. Similarly, my literary Chinese is also influenced by my different cultural and lingual heritage. Every Chinese dynasty has their own standard and colloquial Chinese languages. I read Chinese poems from those first collections of Chinese poetry all the way to modern Chinese poems. I compose my traditional Chinese poems based on my reading and understanding of classical poems in different periods of China, and my modern Chinese poems according to my education in the language. A similar situation is the juxtaposition of “classical” and “vernacular” languages. A famous poem attributed to Qin Guan (1049-1100), “On Snow in a Boat at Red Cliff”, borrowed an elegant image of a fisherman fishing in a “solitary boat” (Tian, 2018, p. 318), but added zhen’ge (真个, truly, indeed), a highly vernacular expression, to “evoke a sense of ‘what really is in real life’” (Tian, 2018, p. 319).

When I quoted Heidenstam’s “there is a spark dwells deep within my soul”, I thought there is something wrong grammatically, but I trusted the authority of the translator and the publisher. Most importantly, I liked the spirit conveyed in this poetic line. Later on, my supervisor reminded me the problem in this quotation. I checked again the original source and
found the same sentence as I just cited in this paragraph, but I had to address the editing suggestion from my supervisory committee. Then I put a “that” in parentheses in my quotation. I could appreciate the poetic beauty of the translated poems of Heidenstam that were published in 1919, and I also respect the expertise of my supervisory committee.

By using multiple-resourced language, I agree with the idea that the register of words is “fluctuating and artificial” (Hudson, 1998, p. 82) and is changing all the time for different people in different regions. Pender St. in China Town, Vancouver is translated into Chinese as 片打街, which is very odd for Mainland Chinese speakers, as it literally means “beating a bunch of people.” But it is recognized by Vancouver municipal government. And the Chinese words are shown on the official road signs in Vancouver. This kind of change is bidirectional. The sentence “Long time no see” in oral English originates from Chinese English. It was a “wrong sentence” decades ago. Now it is at least partially accepted by English speakers. I don’t have a panoramic view of the social and cultural, political and economic landscape of all the English countries, and I take all the reputable resources as proper and acceptable.

Venuti takes translation as “an interpretive act with far-reaching social effects” and this is “enabled and constrained by specific cultural situations.” “Cultures never exist in a pure state but are constituted in and through negotiation with other cultural practices” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 136). And “our world is a sort of cluster of different cultural identities”, either recognizing or excluding each other (Buden, Nowotny, & Simon et al, 2009, p. 198). In this “fluid and unstable zone” of cultural differences, cultural identity is “produced through the constant negotiation between past and present, here and elsewhere, absence and presence, self and other” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 159). “The translator’s interpretation is always performed in and influenced by a cultural situation where values, beliefs, and representations as well as the social groups to which they are affiliated are arrayed in a hierarchical order of power and prestige” (Venuti, 2013, p. 182). In this hierarchically arranged cultural situation, translation helps form people’s “cultural identity” (Venuti, 2013, p. 182).

I like the London accent of British English, and I also favor the American pronunciation emphasizing the sound “r.” Now I’m in Canada, and I try to learn from my Canadian friends how to pronounce words like “herb,” “project,” “again” and so on in Canadian ways. Besides, I know
even the speakers of a same dialect of English can explain their penchant for their lingual expressions or ways of doing things as having “many reasons” or “a multiple reason.” Language is changing gradually all the time, and is connected with other disciplines. I regard words from all resources as equally expressive as long as they suit my specific purpose. In terms of my language usage, I follow the direction of my supervisors and my internal and external university examiners. Thanks to the idiosyncratic cultural and historical heritage in Canada, I was allowed to write a dissertation that respects and accepts cultural and lingual heritage from multiple resources.
My Aesthetic Decisions

I have to expatiate the following part of the poem “Dream,” as it involves an image that is a long tradition in Chinese culture. 太息 is a deep sigh made when people feel despondent. Here I take my sigh as if it is a tangible object and I press it in my heart. The sad feeling fills my heart and intensifies the tension of the poem. Then, there is a change in the next line, I see a silhouette in my window, which alleviates the tension. And this silhouette in my dream is my late father.

太息 A sigh
凝固在 solidified
渺茫的心房 in my vague heart

Sometimes I have the feeling that words lead a private existence of their own, apart from us, and that when we speak or write, especially in moments of strong emotion, we do little more than hitch a ride on some obliging syllable or accommodating phrase. At such moments, words disclose their secret autonomy. We feel their power, the power of an energy as ancient as humanity itself, and which we are merely privileged to borrow for a time. (Ormsby, 2001, p. 13)

I quote Ormsby’s comment on poetry to begin my explanation of the aesthetic decision-making in my English poem “Rose.” I composed this piece when I was roaming in the city of Vancouver. I saw the flower with raindrops on it and was touched. Just like Ormsby wrote, English words flashed into my mind as if they were living creatures. I sketched them down and decided to write this concrete poem. The shape of the poem is like a pair of wings. With it, I try to convey the meaning that the loose petals are going to fly in the air. I intentionally change the word order of the last line so as to have it rhyme with “petals” in the above line. I use the literary words “vernal” and “behold” to add some lighthearted and old-style flavor to the poem. Again, I sprinkle some old-fashioned words to express my nostalgia. Also, I intentionally change
the word order in the last line to have it rhyme with the above line, and I acknowledge that the natural word order should be “have a special look.”

The next English poem “Sparrow” is a concrete poem. I line up the poetic lines to form a shape of two connected arrowheads. I also try to rhyme the adjacent lines. In terms of word choice, my poet friend who is a native English speaker, suggested that I use the verb “fly” consistently in one poem. But, I use “swim” as a verb in the third line, because I appreciate Daoist master Zhang Zhishun’s interpretation of longevity. He asked his students to imitate flying birds and swimming fish in meditation exercise.

花

Flowers

夙夜春雨急 Vernal rain falls incessantly,
风啸引鸥啼 Gull squawks as the wind howls.
卷帘半推窗 I roll up the curtain, open the window half-way,
花若洪流宕 See a torrent of flowers flooding.

I add “I” in the third line in my translation of the above poem. When writing a poem with a persona in it, generally I would take the character as the poet. Yet, this poem is not a realistic description of what happened. The flower is planted in my neighbor’s garden, but my window does not face my neighbor’s garden. Also, the curtain here in Vancouver cannot be rolled up. Rolling up the curtain is an image in ancient Chinese literature. The whole poem is a mix of reality and imagination.

春

Spring

Cold clouds just left, the phoenix tree in my yard seems taller
In my shabby alley only a plantain and a sweet olive spike up
The tweeting vernal warblers, welcoming my guest
In blue mountains and green water, we enjoy the shallow lakes
Some literary Chinese words are intentionally used in the above Chinese poem. A critic may call them archaic, and I take them as classical. Many modern Chinese poets write in similar ways, and some poetry journals accept this kind of classical poetry. I myself have recently published some Chinese poems of this style. In the process of composing I aim at creating a “foreignness” in the poem. I make a world in this specific context, where there is no human struggle, but happy faces, no pollution and contamination, only natural and rural beauty.

In my translation, I use “phoenix tree” for 梧桐. The academic name for the tree is Firmiana simplex, which is not appropriate in poetry. Some other English translators use its Chinese pronunciation “Wu’tong.” A foreign word such as “Wu’tong” has no meaning for English readers, except for its obvious “foreignness.” I use phoenix tree to connote the Chinese culture of 梧桐 being a tree that the phoenix lives in. Phoenix tree may not be exactly 梧桐 according to botanical classification, but in terms of culture, phoenix tree is the best translation for 梧桐.

In the concrete poem “Leaves,” I form the poetic lines in the shape of a tree, so that the shape of the poem fits the theme and atmosphere of the poem. I also use some obsolete and rare words like “scion” and “olivine” to reminisce about the past.

I also creatively add some background knowledge both in my translation and as supplementary texts, so that English readers can understand what my poems are about. My supplementary materials explain the cultural heritage in my original text to the English readers, so that my poetry can make sense in the context of “Western thought” and culture (Krupat, 2009, p. 12). For example, in the poem below, I explain in a footnote why “selling fake donkey meat” was punished. In the Chinese poem, a gap is left for a Chinese reader to piece together the whole event. The context in the Chinese poem suffices to have a Chinese reader understand what is going on, especially when they connect the third and the fourth lines. The third line is talking about restaurants in Beijing being punished, and the next line about butchers in Hebei province still buying donkey meat. Here the adverb “still” (仍) is enough for a Chinese reader to get what the restaurants were punished for. If a Chinese reader knows the event described in the Chinese poem, they don’t even have to read through my poem to grasp the idea. I also add
“real donkey meat is expensive” to my supplementary text. Without this phrase, an English reader may be puzzled about why people dared sell fake donkey meat in the capital city. An English reader doesn’t consume donkey meat and doesn’t know the cultural significance of it. Donkey meat is thought to be very nutritious and precious in Chinese culture. And a donkey grows very slowly. Because of high demand and short supply, some people gamble and try their fortune at selling fake donkey meat.

Word choices in translation are unconscious and can be based on “linguistic and cultural values” or “sheer personal preference” (Venuti, 2013, p. 32). Venuti understands “the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities” to be a reflection of “the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text” (Venuti, 1995, p. 1). The above Chinese poem mentions two locations, 京城 (Peiking) and 直隶 (Zhili). These are the obsolete names for the capital city Beijing and Hebei province respectively. The present Hebei province, where my hometown is located, was part of Zhili province in the Ming and Qing dynasties. I intentionally use the archaic denominations to produce an old-fashioned aura. It is also a decision based on cultural and social considerations. In the Ming and Qing dynasties when my province was still called Zhili, and when scholars still wrote in classical Chinese, my family was safe, respected, and prosperous. Subconsciously, I yearn for the good old days, and feel nostalgic when I compose the poem. I use “archaism” (Venuti, 1998, p. 100) to express my paradoxical feelings toward the past of my family history. I explain my aesthetic choices and decision-making in my translation so as to enrich the dissertation and open up another way for the reader to understand my writing.
In the above English translation, I add the location Vancouver, which doesn’t appear in the Chinese poem. My major consideration is the metrical beauty of the poetic lines. And the three Chinese characters 溫哥華 for Vancouver are too long for a short rhymed Chinese poem. I have to leave space to express meaning instead of pointing out my location. Actually, I don’t have to mention my location where I composed the Chinese poem. I repeatedly indicate that I am in Vancouver when I write my dissertation. Poetic Inquiry is a systematic application of poetry in research. Without specific notes, all the poems in this dissertation are composed in Vancouver where I carry out my research. In my English translation, I want to give the reader a clearer sense of what the first two lines are talking about. Also, by adding Vancouver, I invite my readers to compare the different situations in the three places.

When I shared the following poem “Silent Contemplation” with my teacher back in China, he suggested that I replace “clear autumn (秋高)” with “deep autumn (秋深)”, as it is not possible to see the sky according to his life experience. But in Vancouver, it is typical that the sky is clear. It is also normal here that raindrops fall and the sky is clear. Not to mention ancient times, even decades ago, most Chinese cities were not polluted, and now the Chinese government is making efforts to regain clear skies and green mountains.

静思 Silent Contemplation

秋高夜雨鸣 On a clear autumn night, raindrops are blaring
蜡炬泪寒生 A candle cries and coldness crops up
墨卷忧欢浸 Test papers immerse me with anxiety or laughter
诗肠寸管耕 My poetic intestines are quieted by the writing brush

On a summer day of 2013, my hometown Shijiazhuang witnessed heavy snow. Some local people, especially those who are superstitious, associate this abnormal weather with an omen of bad luck. While in Calgary, you can experience all the seasons in one day, and it is nothing special for people there. A poem written in a specific location and time may not be readily understandable by people in other places and times. Poetry is not only culturally, but
geographically and historically significant, so we communicate by contributing to “a chorus of voices” in “a crowd, a network, a collective, a community” of poets (Leggo, 2019, p. x, as cited in Pinar).

Traditional Chinese artists usually leave space for readers to guess and imagine. Here I have provided a glimpse of my aesthetic decision-making process for my readers to understand my writing. I invite my readers to explore Chinese and English cultures in their favorite ways and find their own habitus.
If a translator imposes a rhythm upon the text, a lexicon or a syntax that does not originate in the source text and thus substitutes his or her voice for that of the author, this is essentially not a conscious strategic choice but an effect of his or her specific habitus.

--Gouanvic, 2005, p. 158
Habitus

In poetry,
I travel to ancient China,
I return to modern China

In poetry,
I live my ancestors’ lives,
I live my own life

In poetry,
I travel to the U.S.,
I travel to Canada

I try to find myself
In poetry.
Stanza 1
春

春深波淼雾迷蒙
野树低垂岗上风
浩浩千年今又见
山狐田鼠笑孤鸿

Spring

Deep spring, rough water, and opaque fog,
Wild trees hang low in the wind on the hill
A thousand-year history sees again
Mountain foxes and field mice laughing at a lonely swan goose

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4 My Chinese poems are immediately followed by their translations. However, due to formatting and aesthetic consideration a number of my Chinese poems are translated on the following page. In these cases, I add an explanation under the title of the translation saying that this is a translation of the above Chinese poem.
A lonely swan goose appeared in classical Chinese poetry as a representation of noble, outstanding, and ambitious people. The image of a swan goose in my poem at the beginning of this chapter is to express my respect for great poets of the past. I admired their mighty words composed based on their life experiences. After reading them, I enjoy ordinary life more than anything else. I take poetry as a way to alleviate my overwhelming feelings and emotions, and as a magnetic compass guiding me toward a brighter future. I’m a poet trying to find my way in the complex world.

I enjoyed poetry by feeling it. I would feel the texture of lined-up words, immerse myself in all the wild imaginations of words with musical and picturesque backdrops produced in my mind. I would form vivid scenes in my head when I tried to write each sentence. I aligned words the way I liked and delineated the scenes I saw. I just played with words in the most unadorned way. I called them my primitive poems in a simple and naïve style.

“Poetry is the most intense, most highly charged, most artful and complex form of language we have” (Grossman, 2010, p. 93). Grossman tried to produce similar rhymes and meters when she translated Spanish poetry into English. Translating poems, Pound also made attempts at “recontextualization” (Venuti, 2013, p. 81). But, even Pound himself realized that recontextualization didn’t fit exactly and was not accepted by every reader. When I read Pound’s English poems translated from classical Chinese poems, I could barely recognize which Chinese poems he had translated. When I read other translated Chinese poems, I couldn’t find their Chinese counterparts either. My peer Chinese scholars have the same feeling. In translation, something always gets lost. Pound produced rhyme schemes that are acceptable in English, but the poetic effect is not an equivalent to Chinese poems at all, especially for Chinese readers. This is an inevitable consequence of the fundamental differences of the two languages. For example, Chinese characters have tones for themselves, while English words don’t. Chinese characters don’t have stress, while English words have. Trying to create some poetic effects in English, a translator always has to add extra words, and to use different meters and dictions from those of the original text (Venuti, 2013, p. 87). This attempt is readily criticized.

An alternative and common practice in Chinese and English poetry translation is to focus on meaning. Translating my own traditional Chinese poems, I didn’t try to produce similar
poetic effects in English. I focused on translating meaning. The Chinese characters themselves are foreign enough for English readers. If my translated poetry can pique their curiosity, then they might begin to learn Chinese characters and then Chinese culture.

I write and translate not to fight, but to console myself, and set an example for other people to take writing as a way of living. I write poems to reconstitute my world as poetry accommodates blurriness. I write poems to avoid political and cultural conflicts. I write poetry for me to dare face the unspeakable past. When there is something wrong in our lives, it is easy to criticize others or the circumstances. The outside world affects us, to some degree, but cannot define and confine our lives. We control our own thoughts and reactions to things that happened to us. It is more rewarding and valuable if I focus on my (re)interpretation of the outside world, and on correcting the things that went wrong in my life. I write to discover aspects of my family members and me that need further improvement. I’m an “imperfect” human being, aiming to live well “in the world” (MacKenzie-Dawson, 2018, para. 5). I reinterpret and rewrite my family history for a better future.
梦

冷雨
滑落
撕裂清朗的面颊
太息
凝固在
渺茫的心房

萤窗
蓦然
画出你的身影

凝眸
却
打碎了
迷乱的梦
Dream

Cold rain
Rolls down
Tearing
my bright cheeks
A sigh
Solidified
In my vague heart

Firefly-illuminated window
Suddenly
Outlines your silhouette

My disorderly dream
Begins
To
Break
Into morning\(^5\)

--To my father

\(^5\) This poem is rewritten based on the Chinese poem on the previous page.
Sometimes, I would look around the environment and search for some interesting, yet unobtrusive things that I usually ignored in my daily busyness. I tidy up my thoughts, combing through all the memories and events that happened to me, and finding reasonable explanations and excuses for me to feel at ease. In such a process of exploring the outer world and examining my inner self, I come up with poetic lines. Poetry is an effective way to dig into the deepest part of myself.

I try to write as many poems as possible about spring as a tribute to ancient Chinese poets. They usually carried out similar activities as pastime. With borrowed images from classical Chinese poems, I seemed to travel back to the age when poetry was an inseparable part of scholarly life. Poetry and nature are a peaceful and quiet haven for me.

寻幽

月夜鸟啼风瑟瑟
山花初放隐蒿蓬
桑榆萝径寻幽处
蕙草禅宫若一梦

Seeking Seclusion

In moonlight, the crow caws and the wind sighs,
Mountain flowers just appear in the wild grass.
On a trail flanked with vine-decorated mulberries and elms, I search for a secluded place,
Fragrant plants at a monastery fill my senses like a dream.

The above Chinese poem is rhymed and rhythmmed, and the word choices are generally literary Chinese. We don’t say 蒿蓬 and 禅宫 in modern Chinese. I used these classical Chinese
words, as well as the classical Chinese poetry form to create an imaginary scene. In such an imagined world, I indulge in the sheer beauty of nature, and comfort myself accordingly.

When I translated the Chinese poem into English, I bore Benjamin’s words in mind “no translation would be possible if, in accord with its ultimate essence, it was to strive for similarity to the original” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 155). I appreciate the understanding of “task” not as “duty” or “responsibility”, but as searching for “a solution within the domain of language” (Berman, Berman, & Sommella, 2018, p. 43). I asked my intention of writing and translating. I was not trying to bind myself with more doctrines. In writing, a globally recognized human right, I’m not interested to curb my free will, although I definitely confine my writing to my own life.

In my pursuit of freedom in language, I also noticed the importance of “fidelity in translating” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 160), and I agree with Benjamin that English words “can almost never fully render the meaning it has in the original” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 160). Benjamin thought the original meaning is “fully realized in accord with its poetic significance for the original work not in the intended object, but rather precisely in the way the intended object is bound up with the mode of intention in a particular word. It is customary to express this by saying that words carry emotional connotations” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 160-161). Also, a language has its long-established cultural, societal, ideological, psychological and literary tradition. This tradition cannot be translated to its full potential, or even may not be accepted by readers from another culture. In this situation, I don’t cheat my English readers by offering a wrong interpretation of Chinese culture. I try to avoid the controversial cultural backgrounds.
When I visit a lane
In vernal rain
I behold
A rose
Her robe’s
Loose petals
have a look special
Sparrow

Angry
Noisy birdie
Swims in the sky
Like a sharp arrow fly
Straight
Into my heart’s hollow
Make my body bow
In front of you
Oh, you
Willow Catkins

Slim fairies
Dance with wind’s
Rhythm

Angels
Calling for life.

But we frown,
“Willow catkins
are dirty in water.”
Maple Leaves

Not far away
Maple leaves drip
With dew’s music

In autumn’s haze
A small girl launched
A little boat
On the great river

Her heart flowed away
In its V trail
Yellow

An almighty painter
Dabs the landscape
With
Dandelion dots
From
The realm of gold.

They murmur,
“Breeze,
please be gentle,
I’m still growing,
And am not dried
On the canvas
Yet.”
A thing of beauty is a joy for ever

--John Keats (1888, p. 7)
Flowers

Vernal rain falls incessantly,
Gull squawks as the wind howls.
I roll up the curtain, open the window half-way,
See a torrent of flowers flooding.
美是春天的候鸟

一树树樱花
用翻飞的清香
铺满你的心头

蒲公英
把鲜嫩的金黄
任意泼洒

草地最是轻柔
扇动翠绿的翅膀
在温哥华
每条小巷

美是春天的候鸟
(Wu, 2017a, p. 159)
Migratory Bird in Spring

Cherry blossoms'
Faint fragrance
Drifts and settles
On your heart

Fresh, tender,
Dandelions
Scatter arbitrarily

Soft grass lawns
Flutter their verdant wings
In the gardens
Of Vancouver

Each petal applauds
The migratory bird in spring\(^6\)

\(^6\) This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
春

春

春

Spring

Cold clouds just left, the phoenix tree in my yard seems taller
In my shabby alley only a plantain and a sweet olive spike up
The tweeting vernal warblers, welcoming my guest
In blue mountains and green water, we enjoy the shallow lakes
Hearing the Verdant Steps of Spring

Frogs crawl out from mud holes
Their unseasoned yet familiar tones
croak out their primitive
Music.

Schools of fish
Raise their shimmering heads from water’s surface
To produce
Ripples
Of blossoming bubbles

Lotuses vie
To pierce the silence
Without trumpet
In ancient times, Chinese poets introduced the image of a lonely person lingering at the window. Staying at the window can be an alleviation of the person’s loneliness and expectations. On the other hand, some other poets depicted a lonely person’s lamentation over the scene outside the window, and thought this could aggravate one’s bad feelings. Both explanations make sense, and I prefer the latter one, so I don’t approach the window when I’m not in high spirits.

忆江南

鸥声断，清梦客无言。心意冷诗情索淡，诉衷肠意乱歌狂。只影莫凭轩。

To the Tune of Yi Jiang Nan

The sound of seagulls stops. I awake from my sweet dream, wordless. Disheartened, I have no interest in writing poetry. I try to express my feelings by chanting self-indulgently. When I’m alone, I don’t linger at the window.
Stanza 2
秋

细雨红枫醉晚霞
秋风杨柳戏残花
登高怅望南飞雁
碧落迢迢刺海涯

Autumn

Raindrops and red maple leaves, intoxicated by the sunset glow,
Autumn wind and willows play with withered flowers.
I climb high, gazing melancholically at the south-flying geese,
Seeing the endless sky meet the coastline.
Autumn has a binary connotation in Chinese worldview. It represents mellow fruitfulness and augurs the past of the best time. The lamentation on the sad side of autumn is plentiful in Chinese literary works. Chinese scholars, especially the pessimistic, tend to link autumn with the elapse of the best years of their lives. For instance, Du Fu, the genius Tang poet, wrote eight poems inspired by autumn, each of which was enshrouded in a sad tone and atmosphere, and his worry about his country. Ascribing a scholar’s emotional vulnerability to changing weather is not uncommon.

I thought I was already immune to emotional stimuli, but an ordinary scene on a grey afternoon engendered my thoughtful forlornness. After a long walk from a lecture on ancient Chinese poetry at the Buchanan Building, I performed my duty as a graduate assistant by sitting in an office located in the basement of another building, which few students visited during this gloomy afternoon. I’d just finished a book on Romanticism and had no other book to read. Having nothing to do means having nothing to feed the running machine of my mind. My vacuum mind invited a hollow heart. Loneliness seemed present in every oxygen atom I inhaled. The exhaust fan was the only audible object that accompanied my loneliness. With the humdrum sound, my thoughts flew back to the time when I arrived in Vancouver.

When my plane circled above Vancouver, I was amazed at the beauty of the sea. My parents took me to a sea when I was a child, but I never saw such blueness from above. It reminded me of Mona Lisa, and of her mysterious and charming smile. Getting off the plane, I was a little disappointed at the withered grass. In my mind, I compared the city with the verdure of Kentucky where I enjoyed a visual feast for a whole year. How could grass turn yellow in early autumn! Then I muttered a “wow.” The weather was very mild and humid. I left the airport, lamenting about the sausage and pork that were slipped into my backpack by my mother and confiscated by a customs officer in the Vancouver airport.

I remembered mother again. My mother succeeded her father and worked in the subsidiary factory of the teacher’s school in my county. My maternal grandfather was a master craftsman in the industry and brought all the skills and knowledge the factory needed when it was being built. In exchange, the headmaster of the school, an old friend of my maternal grandfather, promised to help one of my maternal grandfather’s children secure an official
position in the factory. However, after the factory was running smoothly, the headmaster only had my mother work under contract. The explanation for his changed mind was that he wanted to help a boy of my maternal grandfather’s, but my maternal grandfather asked my mother to work for the factory. A government employee wouldn’t worry about benefits, promotions, or lay-offs, while at that time, a contract worker’s future depended on the economic performance of the factory.

It seemed that my maternal grandfather was cheated, but actually it was a matter of gaining insight about people and the world. My maternal grandfather’s parents were also farmers. For generations, farmers didn’t need to deal with all kinds of people on farm land. A piece of land is a small, closed society. Farmers harvest what they have sowed. My familial tradition of being honest and credulous was cultivated duly. When the outside world changed, we didn’t learn the ability to understand it quickly. Another reason might be that my maternal grandfather didn’t do exactly what his old friend asked. My grandfather thought a girl was the same as a boy, but his friend didn’t react the way he and his daughter expected.
When I was at home, I liked to visit the biggest park in my hometown. The artificial lake in the park used to be a resort for me to practice fishing. My mother’s call from home was the only order that I couldn’t refuse, as I knew a sumptuous dinner was ready. When I’m in other cities, my mother would sit beside an elm in the park and watch magpies nesting. The bird is a symbol of happy omen in Chinese culture. She said she hoped the magpies would bring her good news from me.

慈母

喜鹊勤衔枝
构巢累数日
慈母倚树望
游子何时归

An Affectionate Mother

Diligent magpie brings twigs to her nest
She commits many days to her building
An affectionate mother leans against a tree, observing
Wondering when her son will return home
A Beauty

Bright moon and plum blossoms grace her chaste heart
I drink fine wine with her
Her white and tender fingers push away the dense tassels
As she plays zither, draws pictures, and writes poems about our chess game
My mother looks nothing like the description in the second poem, but her virtue is much more laudable. She is not the kind of person who knows her rights and still pushes for more. Instead, she never takes advantage of her rights, but concedes any of her belongings for the benefit of the family.

In terms of diction, I intentionally used some allusions like 青州从事 and literary words like 寒英 in the above second poem. 青州 is a location, and 从事 the name of an official position. They were used together in classical Chinese literature to refer to good wine. The two characters 寒 and 英 literally mean “cold” and “flower” respectively. In poetic language, the phrase is figuratively used to refer to plum blossoms, which bloom in cold winter. It is a literary tradition that a poet uses classical Chinese to write traditional Chinese poems. This kind of word choice also helps me create a poetic world that is aloof from the real world. In this imagined world, I can stay away from the struggles and the impurity in the real world. I meditate, change my memory of the past, and rewrite my past stories.

I first translated the literary Chinese lines into modern Chinese, and then rewrote them into English free verse. For the same reason I’ve explained in former translations, I didn’t try to create poetic devices in English. I focused on conveying the meanings of my Chinese poems, and the cultural background embedded in the poems. A Chinese child raised in the traditional way is supposed to fulfill filial duty and gain fame and honor for the family. An English reader may take some Chinese tradition as “new concepts” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. vii). But Berman called for respect for “the differences of foreign texts and cultures” (1999, p. 76 as translated cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186). I’m willing to withdraw any piece if it is not acceptable to Canadian culture, and I write to better myself, and people around me. I try to overcome the confines and limitations of languages and communicate “the universal spirit,” or “the human spirit” (Venuti, 2013, p. 118).
风
无形，
无味，
的神物，
舔去朵朵积云
在水面跳飞
卷起柳树飘逸的发。
嬉闹
直到黄昏，
当黑暗沁入世间
才睡去。
(Wu, 2015k, p. 136)
Wind

Formless,
Odorless,
Wind’s invisible creature.

Licks away cumulus clouds
Ricochets across water
In ripples
Curls willow’s flowing hair
With hidden fingers.

Wind frolics
Until dusk falls,
And sleeps
As darkness inks the world.\(^7\)

\(^7\) This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
秋思

早秋，
蝉
有气无力地
嘶喊

汽笛声
长带似的
飘扬

零落的
露水
亲吻
微黄的
草尖
(Wu, 2015a, p. 90)
Cicada

Cicadas
Screech
Horn sound of ships
Drifts
Early autumn
Like a lost vessel\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{8} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
秋的味

你可曾品过
秋的味？

那柔柔的风儿
比春风更轻

那氤氲的云朵
可比夏天的云更忧愁。

你可曾品过
秋的味？

那挂满红叶的柿子树
再也招不来蝴蝶

那秋果诱来的松鼠
却异样地勤奋

你可曾品过
秋的味？

(Wu, 2015i, pp. 66-67)
Mellow Autumn

Have you ever tasted
Mellow autumn?

When winds are softer
Than spring’s
Fiercer breath

When dense clouds are
More melancholy
Than summer’s
Bright shapes.

Have you ever tasted
Mellow autumn?

When red leaves on persimmon trees
No longer allure butterflies

Have you ever tasted
Mellow autumn?
When fruits attracted diligent squirrels?⁹

---

⁹ This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
秋雨

秋风把浮云
弹成一曲夕阳箫鼓

浅唱低吟的雨滴
打落一地凄瑟

慵懒的午后
浅梦初醒

一杯淡茶
三两阙诗

寂寥
漠漠谁人诉！

(Wu, 2015h, p. 67)
Rain

Harvest winds pluck the floating clouds,
Making music
At sunset

The pattering raindrops hum,
A forlorn leaf-song
That falls to earth

Languid in the afternoon too,
I wake from a nap

I feel lonely
And don’t know with whom I can talk.

Only the tea light
And a poem

---

10 This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
悲秋

1
清夜枯荷滴玉露，
朝来候雁淋雨霜。

2
秋蝉哀吟菊花乱，
寒鸦凄唱秋草黄。

Sad Autumn (two couplets)

1
In the silent night, jade-like dew bejewels withered lotus,
In the morning, rain and frost shower swan gooses.

2
Autumn cicadas sadly chant the music of “Fallen chrysanthemum leaves”
While cold crow miserably sings about the autumn grass turning yellow.

11 Fallen chrysanthemum leaves is a song written by Botao Wu.
秋风

秋风卷曲的发
触摸榆树的脉搏

喜鹊向着一片月啁啾
回应的却是琵琶的呜咽

异乡人
还记得家乡
飘荡的乡音么？
(Wu, 2015b, p. 135)
Autumn Wind

Magpies twitter
To a slip of the moon
In response
To a Chinese lute’s whimper

A man far away from home
Recalls the dialect
Wafted from his hometown?\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^{12}\) This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem on the previous page.
Solitude

Dropping petals
Usher in
Maple’s down-falling
Leaves

A solitary village road
Winds in wind’s rustles,
Pointing to
My clear heart.
The monotone of the rain is beautiful,
And the sudden rise and the slow relapse
Of the long multitudinous rain.

--Carl Sandburg (1950, p. 51)
In my hometown, rainy days are rare and the rain falls only in spring and summer. Maybe because of its rarity in my early life, rain became one of the most romantic forms of weather for me. I took raindrops for tears of the sky. On a rainy day, I would ramble in the wild, clean my head and make it a receiver for signals from the sky, pondering over whatever naturally came to my mind. I felt purified by the rain and was inspired poetically by it. Here in Vancouver, rain is not a luxury anymore. It is almost a daily blessing.

Raincouver

Patter, clatter, spatter,
Rain incessantly falls.
in Raincouver.

Don’t worry,
It seldom pelts down
But ushers in
God’s serenade.
Labor well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little ones

--William Blake (1904, p. 64)
Moon, Pearl, Tears

The moon is the sun’s tears
Shed toward lonely earth.

The pearl is the sea’s tears
Condensed into an orb.

Your tears
Are the kisses I owed you
In our past lives.
Stanza 3
匪石

疏梅初月玉山寒
瘦马胡笳塞草残
匪石之心常解慰
立心于笔未成冠

Determination

Sparse plum blossoms, crescent moon, gleam on a cold mountain covered with snow,
A lean horse, foreign reed pipe, and withered grass in the frontier.
I ease my dedicated mind by recalling
I’ve longed to be a writer since childhood.
I decided to be a writer when I was a child. I have been trying to organize my thoughts and my life, to write me a bright future. When I confined myself in China, I didn’t know what was wrong with my family. My ancestors were law-abiding farmers. According to oral history, my ancestors were forced to move to my current village about a thousand years ago from another province. Before the journey, they were gathered under a locust tree by government officers. When they settled down, they planted a locust tree in their new village as a monument of the event. Having weathered a thousand years of rains and winds, the locust tree now is hollow in the middle, but it still shoots up new sprigs every spring. I dream of it from time to time. I also dream of the military knife that one of my ancestors left in the village. He passed the Wuju examination (武舉 military official test) and was awarded a military rank. When the imperial edict was delivered to his house, he was working in the hog lot with dirty clothes. He asked the deliverer, certainly a government official, to go to the other side of the village to find the correct person. When the deliverer came back to his house, he had already changed into a new suit of clothes and was sitting upright in the middle of the living room. He did that to save his face and that of the government.

Falling into mazes of memory, I came upon a poem about mirrors. Mirrors are accessible to everyone, and how to use a mirror is not a problem for an adult. But when I felt loss from my proper and balanced role in life, I needed to pick up and remember the simplest skills, such as using a mirror. A journey to the West is a projection of my East-born-and-bred life on the screen of the West.
Untitled

Hot, hot, hot,
Business, money, skyscrapers...
Rumble

Cool, cool, cool,
Blossoms, mountains, seashores...
Sparkle

From one side of a mirror,
I see nothing
From the other
I see me.
Writing

The Muses flutter by
The dell
In a vale,
Waving.

Their sleeves
Mix the sky
And the earth.

Lovely colors,
Frame their
Charming faces

Their happy laughter
And clapping
Lead me to
pick up my
Quill.
A Hug

When I was a child,
Mother used to ask for a hug.

I thought it was nothing, always
Hugged her insouciantly.

Then in aunt’s family,
No more hugs.
I tasted Jane Eyre’s life.

A lucky thing was
I finally went back home
To enjoy a short
Happy family life.

Now mother doesn't ask
For hugs any more,
I get used to an adult’s life
With no hugs.
Leaves

Scion

Foliage

Withered leaves

You experience your life

Olivine

Green

Yellow

You change

your faces

Year by year

You sacrifice yourself to

Enrich the annual ring

--dedicated to all scholars (Wu, 2015e, p. 51)
诗之营养

卡路里
碳水化合物
糖
蛋白质
钠
纤维
维生素 A/B/C/D/E/K/H/P
钙

注：切记
离世之后
归还皮囊
以获得
圣城车票。(Wu, 2016c, p. 151)
Nutrition Facts of Poetry

Calories
Fat
Carbohydrate
Sugar
Protein
Sodium
Fiber
Vitamin A/B/C/D/E/K/H/P
Calcium
...

Note: please remember to
Return the container
After your existence in this world
To get
Your ticket to the holy domain.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 诗之营养 on the previous page.
Poetic Nest

You fall into the secular world
With footsteps of growth
Painstakingly measuring
Innocence’s escape.

You limp in the mundane world
Sighing
Reminiscence
Of the lost holy temple.

Destiny
Bestows
A poetic nest
Upon you,

A commiserative corner
A flashing second.

You can breathe
Sedately
And forget
Life’s poundings.
Mosses

Fluffy

Celadon

Mosses

Climb

Up

The trunk,

F

e

a

r

Not

Of

A

Slippery

F

a

I

I

Mosses creep up the trunk silently. I silently increase my knowledge in different disciplines. Rhizomatic growth is likened to be a “strawberry plant” by Leggo (as cited in Vincent, 2018, p. 52). I can visualize the scene in my mind. I appreciate the spirit of dogged efforts and endless expanding. It is a spirit shared by plants and humans.
Photograph 2. Digital Photograph taken in East Vancouver on March 8, 2016. A tree trunk with moss that inspired my poem above.
The Burrard Bridge with sailing ships inspired my following poem. When I visited Granville Island, I saw some boats upside down in the water. My imagination fled to scenes of shipwrecks. A Chinese saying goes that if you are careful enough, you can travel by boat safely for thousands of years. Yet, we still have lots of recorded and unrecorded shipwrecks. Floating boat is beautiful in its full functioning, and a wrecked boat is also worth attention.
A Shipwreck

Ship Traumata
Kisses
Your bent back.

The briny sea
Bathes
Remnants
Of your ragged sail.

You used to ride the wind and waves,
Now you are beached companion of storm and sand.
Hitches in Life

_Yo Ho Ho Hei_,
Sometimes you shamble,
Sometimes you stumble,
Sometimes you crumble.

_Yo Ho Ho Hei,_
Sometimes you ramble,
Sometimes you fumble,
Sometimes you bumble.

_Yo Ho Ho Hei,_
Sometimes you gamble.
Sometimes you grumble,
Sometimes you tumble.

But life always ambles
With hitches.

---

_Yo Ho Ho Hei_ is a chant of river trackers in ancient China. River trackers are people who pull a boat on the shore to make it travel in the river. I borrow it here to represent the arduous tread in our lives.
忆江南

鸥声断，清梦客无言。心意冷深秋索淡，捣香筛辣置金樽，影只莫凭轩。

To the Tune of Yi Jiang Nan

The sound of seagulls stops, I awake from my sweet dream, wordless. Disheartened, I feel the deep autumn is insipid, so I cook savory and spicy foods and fill my golden goblet, and since I’m alone, I don’t linger at the window.
Stanza 4
Laziness

The red sun hanging high, my beautiful dream mellowing
I’m lazy about reading poems, so my books are covered with dust
Bookworms rush, and the god of dream chides:
Indulging in indolence, you cannot ignore
other scholars are improving like trees growing in spring
My poetic inquiry is a spiral and upward endeavour to gain more knowledge and become more mature in character and more versatile and proficient in abilities. The aim is glamorous and glorious, but the road toward it is slippery. I slither, drop, give in, rest, and regain courage and momentum. Sometimes, I’m distracted from my main duty, namely reading and writing, and pay attention to distractions (Clarke, 2012, p. 53). I indulge in distraction and retrospection, and learn lessons from them. Similar to the nature of my poetic inquiry, I remembered a story of eating meat.

My father liked meat and fed his employees with all kinds of meat when they drove my father’s combine harvester to harvest wheat for farmers. These people were very satisfied for the first few days, as meat was not in daily supply at that time. Then they would be turned away by the smell of meat and begged for fruits and vegetables. I like meat and I like literature. But reading poems and novels every day was really challenging, and sometimes nauseating. Later, I was able to persuade myself to keep reading and writing after I recalled my father’s advice on how to hoe a whole acre of land by hand. He said: “just keep doing it, and when it is done, it is done.”
Night

Goldfish strikes
Water
Gently

Making
Golden
Bubbles—

Alas, my wavy heart
Is already flooded with tears
倦怠

阳光懒懒地在草坪上溜达
风把枯叶聚拢在一起
广告牌静静地站着
你，
坐在窗前
----倦怠
(Wu, 2016b, p. 150)
Ennui

Sun languidly lolls on the lawn
Wind rakes together dead leaves
Billboard stands silently by the pile
You,
Sit listless at the window--
ennui\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 倦怠 on the previous page.
Blank

A firm friend
You visited me

Treated me like a bosom pal
I just responded noncommittally,
Not sure of your intention.

Boredom, you came to my dome
Whistling, wooing, whittling away
My spare time.

Go find another groom.
Modernity and technology have improved human lives, and caused homogeneity in many aspects of life. People now are using the same computer systems, visiting the same websites, buying the same brands of clothes, food and drink, doing the same routines of work, and greeting each other the same way. Life is becoming homogeneous. We need creativity and idiosyncrasy.

Faceless.

I share expressions
With Instagram friends
In Canada,
And similar things
By Wechat
In China.

I go to school,
Learning standard English
In Canada,
And Mandarin
In China.

I go to work
Under ISO9001 quality management
Both in Canada
And in China.

I go shopping
And buy clothes
That are designed
For people of my age and size.

I walk in the streets of Vancouver,
Where the skyscrapers are
As tall and square as those in Beijing.

I am
Standardized,
Stylized,
Systemized,
...

I am a stereotype,
My face as deadpan
As all the others.
Swimming

Womb
The warmest
Swim-place
I’ve ever lived.

Whenever in water
Again
I feel like swimming back
To my origin.

Where is my origin?
思念

对你的思念
像烟一样缥缈

袅袅上升
淡淡的融进晴空

碧蓝碧蓝的
好像从来没有发生过
什么故事

对你的思念
柔软，
却无缝不入
(Wu, 2015g, pp. 66-67)
Smoke

My yearning for you
Is intangible, like
A small wisp rising

It lifts continually
Till it blends in clear sky

In the blue space
Between us
It seems nothing has ever
Happened

My yearning for you
Is gentle,
But pervasive as
A smoldering ember\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 思念 on the previous page.
Hollow

Soft music
Caresses
My badly bruised
throat

My heart
Was already
A sound,
Hollow door
Swinging slowly shut.

Hollow door is a metaphor for becoming a disciple of a certain religion. Here I mean I’ve found my belief in the benevolence of poetry and language.

To write beautiful English articles, I challenge myself and jump through hoops. The very word hoop reminds me of the golden hoop in the novel *The Journey to the West* (Wu, 1980). The hero of the book, Monkey King, wore the golden hoop and accompanied his master to overcome 81 setbacks before arriving at the holy temples in the West. The golden hoop is an incarnation of holy wishes, and a tool to restrain the Monkey King from disobeying his master’s orders. The installation of the hoop is necessary to ensure the powerful monkey can fulfill his task. After they arrived at their destiny, the golden hoop disappeared by itself. The teachings are that difficulties, setbacks, and restrictions are not people’s dead-ends, and that the subsequent success is the good wish that fate/god arranged for us.

I’m addicted to poetry and I write poems to change my memories with something positive and encouraging. I’m loyal to my heart, but after my poems are composed, my next job is to make changes to memories that linger in my mind and write about them in a brighter and more hopeful way. I have lived my experiences and have expressed my feelings in poetry. And that’s it.
Daybreak

Lingering
Fragrance of
Earth’s
Scent

Day
breaks
With the sprouting shadow
Of
Flowers of the other world
Snow

The moon
Slowly
Scatters beams
Across crystalline snow

Pine needles elegantly
Suspended
Tiny spots of
White

I drive through
This snowy land
At a flake’s pace

Leaving
Tinges of
Regret like icicles
From bare branches
Noiseless

Moon light
On window lattice
A silent caress

Insects in grass,
Rustle
And bustle

A distant whistle of horn--
Settles--
Night turns
Even more silent
Since.
Wind

Winter’s windup
Ushers
In winds
That wind through
Your heart--
Leaving whirling
footprints
Nest

Above ground
A nest
Perched high on

Dead twigs and withered leaves
That cannot hide its
Abjection

Dejected,
It is still
Pregnant with
Hope’s eggs
静思

秋高夜雨鸣
蜡炬泪寒生
墨卷忧欢浸
诗肠寸管耕

Silent Contemplation

On a clear autumn night, raindrops are blaring
A candle cries and coldness crops up
Test papers immerse me with anxiety or laughter
My poetic intestines are quieted by the writing brush

寒生 can also be interpreted as a poor student.
Tree

In my next life
I wish to be a tree,
Firmly entrenched in one place
Then I’ll push my leaves
To open the sky
Sand

On a noisy beach
Sands lie silently

They have been
Resplendent corals in the deepest sea
Once they were down by
Stormy waves

Now they lie quiet
Suffering seagulls strolling
And supporting children stumbling
Afternoon

A brisk
Afternoon

Sunlight warms,
Scattering shafts
In my classroom

Maple trees lure
Singing birds back
To their branches--
While my girl doesn’t
Come, nor answer my calls to her

Sadness
Exudes from
My sweat pores

And drops all over the ground
温哥华的雨

温哥华的雨
迈着小碎步
从天上慢悠悠地走下

他们
跟每一个人
匆匆的行人
捉迷藏

他们潜入
人们的衣服
像不舍的老友

冬日风柔
草地依然绿
温哥华的雨
又至

(Wu, 2017c, p. 159)
Vancouver Rain

Vancouver rain
Scuttles down
From the playful sky

Raindrops
Play hide and seek
With every rushing passer-by

They sneak into
Clothes
Like young friends reluctant to part

Gentle winter wind
Green grassland
Vancouver rain
Returns\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 温哥华的雨 on the previous page.
夜
衰草坠露清
古巷送寒声
楼台萦远梦
星夜月胧明

Night

Transparent dew drops from withered grass
Ancient lanes send the sounds of winter
A tower entangles my distant dreams
On a starry night, the moon emits dim light
Litheness

Like a feather
She is
Lithe,

Drenched
In moonlight

Immaculate
Crystal clear

Like the sea
Under the beak
Of a seagull

She disappears
Into the watery
Eternal night

Like the silent drop
of a feather
Rainy Season

Splitter splatter
Raindrops
Declare
Their historic period.

Like it
Or
Not,
You cannot avoid
falling rain.

Why not,
Let it be.

Under dim street lights
You can walk,
Appreciate
Assorted
Styles
Of life

At your wet
Leisure
Pace
Snow Sketch

Seagull
Claws--
White snowflakes

Withered grasses
Sway--
White snowflakes

Fish scales on
Pine bark
Bites--
White snowflakes

Tilted eaves
Groan under
White snowflakes

Thick and quiet
White snowflakes
苏幕遮

雨潇潇，风飒飒。古巷幽深，枫木梧桐杂。夜寂天清盘鹁鸽。欲寄衷肠，怅怅近情沓。
怨沉沉，愁溘溘。撇辣筛香，泼墨消焰蜡。影只斋寒空对榻。细语相思，默默无人答。

(Wu, 2017b, p. 86)

To the Tune of Su Mu Zhe

The rain drizzles, and the wind rustles. In the deep ancient alley, there are maple and phoenix trees. The night is silent and the sky is clear. Pigeons are circling. I want to say the words from my heart, but I feel dispirited by life.

Grudges are concealed, anxieties flow. I cook spicy and savory foods. I write with a writing brush while the candle is burning. My shadow is alone and the room is cold, and I sit in front of an empty couch. I murmur in lovesickness, but no one answers me.
Stanza 5
Enjoyment

In Vancouver, I don’t treat visitors with fruits and vegetables
Because pork and beef are as cheap as earth, and fish are on sale everywhere
But in Peking, many restaurants are punished¹⁹
And in Zhili province, butchers are still trying to buy donkey for meat

¹⁹ Real donkey meat is expensive in China, so some people tried to make and sell fake donkey meat. The last two lines of the above poem are about a news report that the Chinese government is trying to crack down on some fake meat producers and sellers in Beijing (Peking).
For Chinese people of my generation, meat was more expensive than fruits and vegetables. In China, my friends and many other people call a dish with meat Ying Cai (硬菜, a delicious dish with meat that can stay in your stomach for a longer time than vegetables). If we treat friends for dinner without many Ying Cai, it generally means that we are parsimonious and impolite. But here in Vancouver, meats are of similar price to China, while vegetables are more expensive than that in China. So, it is an advantage that I treat friends with meat in Vancouver to express my hospitality.

Classical Chinese poetry, including Jue Ju, usually deals with serious issues. The diction, images and topics I incorporate in this poem don’t appear frequently in classical Chinese poetry. I wrote the above poem to depict my experiences in China and Canada in a slightly playful tone.
Renting My Home

After the excitement of arrival and some sightseeing in the city, I try to settle down and to find a home. A poet’s dwelling place is a practical problem. As a foreigner and a low-income scholar, I finally found a home to rent.

I’d prefer to share part of a house with some UBC students in East Vancouver for the sake of safety, comfort, convenience, and low cost. It is quite difficult to find a place with almost everything you want at a good price. Struggle and humiliation are the nametags of finding a place to live in Vancouver.

Finding a living space is a constant struggle. You have to invest a lot of time, energy, and emotion into the process. You search websites to find places within 40 minutes of UBC, and you search ads for a three or four-bedroom apartment. After copying down all the possible house information, you begin your search.

You contact the rental homeowners one by one. First, you ask them to describe their house, and inquire the rental price politely. If everything seems to check out, you finally ask rather casually whether they would allow you to share the apartment with schoolmates. Some say definitely no, and others will pause to think, so you try to persuade them.

“I will rent your apartment for at least three years. I will keep it tidy and clean. I will provide you with post-dated checks. I will do the gardening.”

It is a skill to argue, defend your position, and make concessions during the negotiations. It is a verbal struggle with other people, and a mental struggle on your own part, since you have to persuade yourself before you can persuade others. This process can sometimes be humiliating. Some owners answer your phone calls in a contemptuous way.

“No, no, no, I don’t want students. They are noisy, lazy, and selfish.”

Others say bluntly that they dislike students, especially students who want to share their house.
“I don’t want many students to squeeze into my apartment. I want it tidy and clean all the time.”

You have to take it easy. You have to go through the process. As the deadline for moving out approaches, you have to invest more and more time, energy and emotion in the search process. You see happy and unhappy faces. They pluck at the strings of your heart and you ruminate over them, only to forget them with the next rental search visit.

Renting a Home

Dial
Greet
Introduce
Offer
Make a counteroffer
Hang up.

Dial
Greet
Offer
Make a counteroffer
Hang up.

... 

A process similar to finding a nest for my poems.
Leeks in My Backyard

Couldn’t resist
The hospitality
Of Winter

They took off
Their dark green
Dresses

They huddled up
On the frozen
Ground

With the lullaby sung by wind
They fell asleep deeply
中央公园

银钩牵挂的池塘
眨着明亮的眸子

盈盈秋水涤荡
落叶的离索

风雨无忧
摇曳湖畔的衰草

野鸭嘎然一声
隐去几多乡愁！

(Wu, 2015j, p. 67)
Central Park
(A translation of the Chinese poem above)

The crescent moon cares about the pond
And winks its bright wink

A sad lady’s eyes wipe out
The loneliness of the fallen leaves

Light-hearted wind and rain
Sway the fading grass by the lakeside

A wild goose honks
And hides how much nostalgia?
Umbrella

Cold night,
Rain curtain.

A poem in the ci form
Can hold up
A slice of clear sky.

In the woe of
Broken
Mountains and rivers,
In a yard full of lichen,
In a pavilion with a painted blind,
I wander
Seagulls

Fly up and down,
Above the dark blue
Pacific Ocean

They weave together
the ocean and the sky
To make

A vast
Silk manuscript.
I wrote the following poem several months after my visit to Deer Lake. Upon visiting it, I was deeply touched by its beauty, an indescribable sylvan beauty. I wanted to write something for it, but couldn’t do it until I heard a song about Lake Baikal, which reminded me of the beauty of Deer Lake. Originally, I titled the poem “Deer Lake Chant.” But I finally found the word chant involved too much artificiality, which doesn’t match the mood of the lake. I think the name itself is beautiful enough for a poem. In the Chinese version of my poem, the first words in all stanzas are homophones, and I use these words, connoting lightness and purity respectively, to summarize the characters of the lake. Also, the last words of all stanzas rhyme with the sound “an”, which means peaceful in Chinese as an independent word.

I didn’t translate my Chinese poem into a rhymed English poem, because there is no equivalent for it. Even if I had figured out some poetic devices and squeezed them in my English poem, a simple criticism can be that I have changed the “shape” of the Chinese poem. Translator Beck has encountered similar criticism for adding extra words in his translation (Venuti, 2013, p. 87). My decision was to put the Chinese and English poems together, showing the beautiful shape of the Chinese concrete poem, and explaining the poetic devices in supplementary texts.
鹿湖

清幽。
草木葱茏，
是你的凝念。

清澈。
碧水潋滟，
是你的慕恋。

轻纤。
荷叶舒卷，
是你的韶颜。

轻灵。
木桥隐现，
是你的依伴。

轻盈。
鸽鸥嬉戏，
是你的眷盼。

(Wu, 2015c, p. 90).
Deer Lake
(A translation of the Chinese poem above)

Quiet.
In luxuriant grass and trees
Lies your deep thought.

Limpid.
In over-flowing water
Lies your clear aspiration.

Fragile.
Rolling lotus leaves are
Your charming appearance.

Dexterous.
An indistinct wood bridge
Is your companion.

Elegant.
Frolicking pigeons and seagulls
Are your nostalgia.
Black Moor

Raindrops
beat the pane
beyond the window shade--
softly
the blows against glass
have already
shattered them
into small pieces,
crystal-clear

Their glittering beauty
in fearless might--
What do they want to penetrate?

A gluttonous black moor
mistakes
the crushed
raindrops
for
fresh, in-season
fish food

With its bulging eyes
it struggles
to break through
the fish tank
on the windowsill
No different from
people
raising their eyes
toward the starry night

Wishing for
refreshed
vigor.
The last day of a feeder fish

Photograph 4. Digital photograph taken on April 14, 2017. A feeder fish bought from PetSmart. The fish was lethargic when it came to this tank. A somewhat blurry photo is used to show the fish’s physical and sensory condition.

I am drifting
in a tank,
only for me--
Where I shouldn’t belong

I am resting,
exhaling
my last
Breath
at the bottom of a tank--
A tank only for me
Ignoble

A tank is a luxury for a feeder fish like me
My destiny was to be the food for predators

I should have died
like my brothers and sisters
In the mouth of predators
Long time ago

But look
My whole body
is crystal white as those
noble fish

The only stigma
Is the crimson around my head,
not as round on top
As the noble ones--
Only this difference
makes me a feeder fish

Although as crystal clean
And lively
And lovely
As the noble pets

...
Photograph 5. Digital photo taken on April 18, 2017, before the feeder fish died. The photo was taken out of focus intentionally as a part of the artistic endeavor. As it was dying, its senses should become vaguer and vaguer, and a blurry photo is to indicate this situation.

I have to go
To see the almighty god(s)

Where and only where
I have justice.
Animal world is the human world in miniature.
We must learn many skills to live well in this world.
If our mind and heart are numbed in the human world, we turn to the natural world for knowledge and redemption.
绮罗香
山宿

绿意红情，枝头寂寞，怨燕雀黄鹉唫？春日渐斜，斜照映掩疏竹。
玉参差，仙乐清韵，接寥廓，循声出谷。石苔翠，蛱蝶惊飞，傍幽泉葺屋过宿。

星陨林麓夺目。桦烛暗山陂邈，森森乔木。酒浊水清，叹粟粥胜粱肉。忽东风，拥覆重衾，已达晨，滴露如霂。独徘徊，错落莎径，莫怀恋福禄。

To the Tune of Qi Luo Xiang
Spending a night in mountains

Green leaves, red flowers,
Lonely, on branches,
Did they blame swallows, sparrows, partridges for flying swiftly?
The sun moves west,
Its slanted sunbeams reflect hidden sparse bamboos.
Jade bamboo flute’s
Immortal music and clear rhyme
Touch the vast sky,
I come out of the dale following the sound.
Mosses on stones are green,
Big butterflies fly off in alarm,
I spend the night in a thatched house by a deep pool.

I see shining meteors drop in the forest
The fire of my birch candle dies and mountain slopes turn dark
Tall trees on the slope look dense
Unstrained wine and pure water
I lament that porridge can be more delicious than fancy food
A sudden wisp of wind
I cover myself with layers of quilt and sleep deeply.
It is morning,
I feel the dew sprinkle.
I pace up and down,
On scattered trails.
I tell myself not to yearn for fortune and prosperity.
Stanza 6
祀

桥头陌路纸纷飞
祀祭年年日影微
两渡重洋心未已
匡扶正气命难违

Devotion

Burning joss paper flying on the field road at the bridgehead
Every Tomb-Sweeping day, before dark, I would worship my ancestors
After travelling to two Western countries, I’m still aspiring
To accomplish my destiny by promoting righteousness
Hometown is a sweet word in Chinese culture, and more than half of the Chinese population visit the place where they were born during the Spring Festival—the time for visiting hometowns. But to me, the place where I was born is hard to return to. I’m a rootless vine that tries desperately to close the door of the memory of past, and a snail that carries his home everywhere. Oh, no, I’m a tadpole.

In my mind flashes a scene of a school of tadpoles trying to find their mother. They met a fish who was teaching its kids to find food, and mistook the fish as their mother because of the fish’s tail. Several days later, when they grew four legs they mistook a turtle as their mother. Finally, when they turned into frogs, they found their mother. Chinese students of my generation were taught the short story in our elementary schools in China. In my mind’s eye, I’m still the tadpole searching for my home.

Like Qian Zhongshu’s (1974) simile of a besieged city, people outside a city think life inside is better than theirs, and vice versa. Similarly, Westerners say people think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. We think that going far away is romantic, mystic and attractive. But actually, our daily lives are valuable in themselves and are as charming as our vain dreams. Poetry and the other side of the fence live forever in our hearts, as long as we appreciate our common lives poetically and take every day as a new travel. Enjoying and celebrating my ordinary life is the way that I try to find spiritual consolation. I write about my ordinary life to reconstitute my life and to express my regard for my ancestors.

My grandfather was a simple, kind and well-educated farmer. He adhered to his forefather’s teaching: you harvest what you sowed. Frugal and abstemious, he saved as much money as he could. Same as his ancestors, he purchased extra land from those who led extravagant lives they couldn’t afford and became bankrupt. My grandfather died from an accident in the field. He tried to fasten the rope on the cart filled with crops, but the rope broke. He fell on the ground and broke his spine.

My grandfather’s accidental death was fated because of my grandparents’ misconception of the status quo. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), travelling to the sea was forbidden by law so as to protect the country and keep peace on the coastline. But, the government’s ban forced many people to turn into bandits (Xie, the Ming dynasty). The
following Qing dynasty (1644-1912) followed the same closed-door policy until it couldn’t secure its safety anymore. For hundreds of years, China tried to isolate itself from the world and encouraged its citizens to confine themselves to their agricultural land. In my grandfather’s time, Chinese society and the global economy had changed dramatically. A farmer’s simple and stable life was fragile and transient in a tumultuous society. Yet, my grandfather’s contemporary teaching was that a good man didn’t leave home to serve the military (Writing Committee of the Biography of Liu Bocheng, 2007). My grandfather didn’t recognize the changes, and adhered to the old teaching of his ancestors and that of the mainstream culture.

My father learned many skills for living and for entertainment. After reading some relevant books, he could assemble a TV set from scratch singlehandedly within a short time. He made many TV sets for village people when TV was still very rare. When he worked at his desk, I used to climb up the chair, sitting on his shoulder, pulling his hair and pretending to ride a horse. My neighbor happened to see this scene and commented that he spoiled me, but my parents never scolded me for playing with them. My father was a self-educated singer and harmonica player, too. He had a good understanding of music and could play harmonica the moment he got the instrument.

My father also learned by himself to drive a truck and transported coal from a mine to other places. He used to work together with his elder brother as a truck driver. When my father and my elder uncle travelled to some dangerous locations, my elder uncle would ask my father to drive and he, himself, would walk on foot. The reason was simply that he had to live for his family members. My father didn’t like quarrels between brothers, so he did what he could do at work. He didn’t report this to my grandmother, as he knew it would create a family conflict. He told his wife and son what happened on the road and tried his best to keep a good relationship with his brother. A truck driver was a much-favored job with excellent pay at that time. My father later bought his own truck, and soon became one of the richest people in my hometown. He always said he enjoyed his daily work, and that he was happy as long as he was able to work.
故乡

为故乡植一株藤
让枝蔓的蒸腾
为她添上
五彩的云朵

为故乡除一棵草
让贫瘠的守望
多份
丰收的希望

我背着故乡的空壳
游走四方
每一次踏出家门
都载着
悲伤的过往

(Wu, 2015d, p. 136)
Hometown

Plant a vine for my hometown,
The stems and tendrils
Will exude watery vapor to
Form a colorful cloud

Extirpate weeds for my hometown
The infertile expectation
Will bear
Some harvest

Shouldering the empty
shell of hometown,
I wander about.

Every time I step out of my door,
I’m loaded
With sadness\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20} This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 故乡 on the previous page.
Language is tricky. Sometimes, I write in Chinese and translate my poems into English, and vice versa. Other times I write only in Chinese or English because I cannot find appropriate words in another language. Also, I would savour the meticulously translated parts and regret other parts that are not very satisfying. By doing this, I try to further develop my understanding of both languages.

Language opens up the world for me. The East and the West have different ways of living and doing things. Sometimes the differences are noteworthy. The other day, I wrote some paragraphs of my dissertation and then went out for midnight snacks. When I sat in front of Church’s Chicken at 41st avenue and Fraser street, enjoying chicken legs, I raised my head and saw a cemetery across the road. Such a scene usually appears in Chinese horror stories. I joked to my friend in China that Pu Songling (1640-1715), who wrote a book of ghost stories, would be mad at me. Pu collected ghost stories, spreading them among ordinary people, while I, myself, was experiencing “ghost stories” without letting him know. But, I was not alone there, I saw some other Asian faces quietly eating their food and even a Chinese restaurant on the other side of the graveyard. Perhaps, it is appropriate to say: “this is exotic” instead of taking it as unacceptable.

Language is a way home. When I grew up, I lived in other cities. My hometown is a county in North China, where my ancestors lived for hundreds of years. I feel at home when I remember the porridge that my mother made for me, and the fungus peeping from a piece of wood at a corner of my adobe house in the village. It was fun to observe ants, net cicadas, and dig out scorpions. Harvesting corn by hand was tiresome labour then, but a sweet memory now. Late at night, I would turn on a video with sounds of birds chirping and creeks flowing and fall asleep peacefully. Physically, I couldn’t visit my hometown frequently due to my busy life. But, I’m a stranger in cities and fly back to my hometown in dreams. I feel at home in my poems.
Crane

Appear

here and there

in and out of the clouds

Picture 1. The barely visible squares integrated in the poem represent the sky with clouds.

Chinese Daoism (or Taoism), a native Chinese religion and philosophy, emphasizes the unity of human beings and heaven, and worships the perfect circle. A crane is a sacred and mysterious creature worshipped by Daoist practitioners. In Daoist tradition, an immortal usually rides a crane. The bird represents longevity, elegance, aloofness from earthly pursuit, and indifference to fame and benefit. It reminds me of the powerful and gallant soldiers who fought for their family, their nation, and lived forever in the heart of people who benefited from their bravery. In terms of my family story, my father is the soldier who sacrificed for the benefit of the whole family.
I enjoy the rain in Vancouver. I would like to wander like a cloud whenever I have spare time. On a Sunday, after doing my homework, I stepped out, hanging out in my neighborhood. Suddenly, I saw a dead tree with an exuberant small tree growing on its branch. What a stark contrast. After a close examination of the trees, I nicknamed the small tree as the dead one’s son.

A Tree and Its Son

“I’ve already ceased to be,
My son.”
Tree said,
“But I will support you
To the utmost height
With one hand,
And with another,
I’ll prop up the sky.”

“Farewell for a while, my son,”
Tree said,
“Whenever you
Miss me,
Read
my heart
held
in the clouds.”

“Farewell for a while, my son,”
Tree said,
“I will always be
In the other idyllic country,
Waiting for you.”

--To my father
Clear sky, like water, over
Remote mountains, like splashes of ink
Both look at my city, quietly.

On a dark grey tree
Warm birds are celebrating
early spring

Everything is delightful
The only thing I don’t dare think of
Is my distant
Hometown

Hazy,
Barren
Crowded
Far-off

But Hometown
Is still
A beautiful
Word.
TV Set

Father, as a TV technician, said,
“You cannot make a TV set big
Without parts big enough, yet a big
TV shows the same as a small one.”

I, a poet, would say,
“I cannot compose a poem long
Without contents long enough, and a long
Poem evokes the same pleasure as a short one.”
菩萨蛮

潇潇雨歇丹枫密，野狼麋鹿俱走逸。凝噎愁思漫，漫影知月寒。
一江水逆溢，岭上村萧瑟。已退食沉叹，叹沧海浚湍。

To the Tune of Pu Sa Man

Rain stops pattering on the dense red maple trees, wild wolves and elks are all escaping. An urge to cry chokes me, and my melancholy overflows, my floating shadow should know the coldness of the moon.

River water is flooding, a hamlet on a mountain ridge is desolate. Resigned my post as an officer, I sigh deeply that the sea waves are too rapid.
不止

桥上车尘接翠空
乱蝉乌鹊聒梧桐
不知三月人依旧
长笛呜呜调未终

Non-stop

Vehicles pass the bridge, dust rises and reaches the blue sky
Cicadas and magpies are clamoring in phoenix trees
They aren’t aware that in the third month of this year, the person is still the one
Who plays flute with lingering sounds
A glance at the imperial families in Chinese history reveals familial conflicts to an extreme degree. In the Han dynasty, empress Lv killed her husband Liu Bang’s concubine Qi by cutting off her hands, feet, and made her a “human pig” (Sima Qian, 1995, p. 322). In the Tang dynasty, the emperor Li Shimin murdered his two brothers to make himself the sole heir to the crown. In the Ming dynasty, emperor Zhu Di snatched the throne from his nephew.

As a miniature of those royal families, an ordinary person’s life is full of ups and downs, happiness and unhappiness. Juexin, the protagonist in the novel Home (1981) by a famous modern Chinese novelist Bajin, had to separate from the girl he loved and marry another girl that his father arranged for him. The Plum in the Golden Vase (Lan Lin Xiao Xiao Sheng, 1993), a novel written in the Ming dynasty, and A Dream of Red Mansions, another novel about a family written in the Qing dynasty, are also loaded with struggles, cheatings, and even murders among family members. Turning my eyes to Western literature, I find similar clashes and struggles in Shakespeare’s (2005) depiction of King Henry IV, and Emily Brontë’s (2009) Wuthering Heights, etc.

People dress up and perform on different stages. The performers change through time and space, but the stories are similar. For all the unavoidable struggles, I’ll NOT STOP trying to reduce them and to improve my family stories. I write to help my family live well in the present.

Before I entered kindergarten, I came along with my mother as she traveled about ten kilometers back and forth between her working place and my home in a village. Just like most people at that time, we didn’t have a car. My mother rode a bicycle, carrying me on the back seat. I still remember once on our way home when it was raining heavily and the mud on the field road was too thick to ride a bike. My mother and I walked in the rain, totally drained. I was about three years old and I was hungry and tired. I cried. Swallowing my tears together with raindrops, I begged:

“Mom, I’m cold and hungry and don’t want to walk anymore!”

My mother responded in pretended anger, “Close your mouth. Or else, I’ll leave you in the field by yourself.”

I dared not complain anymore and ran very fast.
When we returned home, our thatched kitchen roof was leaking so heavily that my mother couldn’t start the fire oven as the firewood was wet. There were no stores nearby, and we didn’t have snacks. My mother finally managed to make some porridge. After dinner, my mother and I huddled, shaking in the cold for the night. The next morning, we got up early again and went back to her factory...

To save me from the uncomfortable trip between my home and her factory, my mother talked to my father about boarding me at my maternal aunt’s. My father promised to give my aunt some commodities as pay from time to time, and he kept his word. At that time, you couldn’t buy everything you wanted even if you had money. My aunt accepted the offer. My parents were very thankful to my aunt. With their kind, simple and believing spirits, my parents thought I was safe and happy, but that was the beginning of my nightmare.

I still remember the first night at my aunt’s. My mother left me there and hurried back home. I couldn’t help crying as it was my first time leaving my mother. I cried louder and louder even though it was very late at night. I didn’t eat or drink, just cried. Finally, my aunt’s husband told me that he would take me back to my home, and he put me on the back seat of his bike and started on the road. The outside was inky dark. I stopped crying with the expectation of seeing my mother soon. We travelled for a while and then he stopped and took me off the bike.

“Stand here. Don’t move.” After these words, he disappeared, like magic.

I didn’t see how my aunt’s husband disappeared. I stood by the roadside, motionless, overwhelmed by the darkness and my fright. I turned around, trying desperately to find him. No one around. No sound. A few minutes later, I saw a bonfire on the bank of the dried-up river beside the road, but I didn’t know who built it.

Standing alone in darkness, staring at the fire, my head was empty and dizzy. Suddenly, I felt someone patting me on my shoulder. I could hear the surge of blood in my ears. I almost collapsed. I struggled to turn around. It was my aunt’s husband. He whispered in my ear:
“Do you see the fire there? It is ghost fire. I’m very scared and want to return to my home. Do you want to go with me?”

I was beyond myself. I wanted to cry but didn’t dare to make any sound. When we returned, my aunt was satisfied with her husband’s “training.” And she saw my numbness and dumbness, the aftermath of this horror for a three-year-old. She told the whole family to be nice to me. They were really nice to me for several days. After that, my cousin who shared a bed with me insisted that I go out to wash my feet in the yard every night. I didn’t dare to do so alone, nor did I dare to tell the reason was because of my fear of a ghost in the dark. He sniffed and said:

“I don’t like your dirty feet.”
My aunt added, “no one likes smelly feet.”

I looked at everybody. They were busy with their own business. The water tank where everybody washed themselves was beside the toilet in the front yard. I crepted out of the room, ran quickly to the water container and flushed my feet quickly. I didn’t dare to turn around, always feeling something behind me.

That night, I dreamt of being chased by ghosts in the wild. I screamed loudly. My cousin was awakened but he fell asleep again soon. In profound fright, I couldn’t sleep any more, and buried my whole body in my quilt, eyes opened in horror, attending to any tiny sound till morning. I had many nights like this one at my aunt’s. Living under the shadow of a ghost for years, I finally realized that there was no ghost, and that my aunt’s husband had set the bonfire on the first night.

In the daytime, I went to the pre-school in my aunt’s village. There was nothing special in the school that I can remember, except for the big tree in the middle of the yard. It was a tree with a shiny and leafy canopy and a thick and gnarled trunk. I felt safe and comfortable when I sat under the tree. Whenever I suffered from high fever, I would sit at the trunk to relieve my bad feeling. I didn’t dare tell anybody. I didn’t know what to do. I was just suffering,
until some student or my teacher found me and sent me back to my aunt’s or to a doctor. I thought that I wouldn’t have suffered so much if I could be a tall tree. How strong a tree was! How majestically it weathered storms and rough winds!

I was growing fast, but sometimes when I picked up more food at the dinner table, one of my cousins would glance at me or make an unpleasant sound. I knew my share meant less for them. But I hungered for food, and my parents paid for it. I then figured out a way to pretend to drop some potato strips in my soup bowl and pick up an extra bunch from the shared plate. But I still had to explore how many times I could do the trick safely at one dinner.

Schooling at the elementary level was not demanding, and after-class time was enjoyable. Like animals, the school-aged boys formed groups and roamed every nook and crook of the area. Puffing the seeds of dandelions, catching bugs, chasing wild dogs were typical amusements in our wandering around.

One day, my cousin and I went to play in the wheat field with friends. Newly harvested wheat plants were emitting a pleasant fragrance, sparrows darting here and there. We chased wild dogs, caught and cooked insects, and went further away from home. In the farm land, we figured out an exciting game of jumping from the top of a desolate house to the haystack beside it. My cousin yelled and jumped on the hay. The other boys all jumped. I was the last one to climb to the house. I jumped to the narrow space on the haystack that was not occupied by my peers. The moment I touched the hay, I felt excruciating pain in my left foot. I lifted my foot and saw blood everywhere. There were some pieces of broken glass bottles...

Weak and scared, I managed to go back to the village with the help of my friends. After a village doctor’s treatment, I was sent back to my aunt’s. Every day, I counted the days on the calendar that usually sat on the desk of my room. I knew my mother or my father would come to see me every week or so. But before my recovery, I never saw them. I could not imagine what my aunt told my classroom teacher who was from the same village as my father, and how my aunt managed to have my parents unsuspiciously away for months. And thanks to my perfect recovery, my mother didn’t know the accident happened until about 10 years after I left my aunt’s, and for his entire life my father never knew what happened to me at my aunt’s.

About a year or so before I came back to my own home, I found yet another taboo that I
couldn’t violate. Once my teacher asked everybody to pay for some school fees. I asked my aunt for money three times on three consecutive days. She still didn’t give me the money. I knew I was just borrowing money from her, and my mother would pay her back. I didn’t want to be the last one to pay, which would be awkward. After class, I managed to walk to my mother’s factory. It was a long walk. My mother rode me back on a bike and gave me the money. My aunt received both of us warmly. But the moment my mother left, I saw my aunt’s frowning face. She refused to talk to me for several days. After that, without my aunt’s permission I didn’t dare to go to my mother’s factory any more, nor did I dare to let my parents know anything that happened to me at my aunt’s.
挥手

你挥手走向舷梯
辞别三十年风雨

你挥手走向舷梯
放下祖辈的哀怨
放下千年的厚重积淀

你挥手走向舷梯
作别那个叫故乡的
异乡

(Wu, 2016d, p. 151)
Waving

With waving hands, you stepped onto the airplane,
You departed from your thirty years in China.

With waving hands,
Let go of your ancestors’ sorrow,
Let go of the cultural heritage of a thousand years.

With waving hands,
you stepped out,
 waved goodbye to the so-called hometown
That was so foreign to you.  

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21 This poem is rewritten based on my published Chinese poem 挥手 on the previous page.
到站

叹气
欢呼
和孩子的哭声

飞机抵达温哥华，
新的生活开始了，
而五月花也绽放了。
(Wu, 2016a, p. 152)
Arrival

Sighs
Cheers
And children’s cries.

The flight arrives in Vancouver;
a new life starts,
And May flowers blossom.\textsuperscript{22}
Memories

In between book pages,
The scent of ink gradually
Exerts pressure
Producing a dry
Riverbed.

Walking in the riverbed
Of my memories,
I play with
Every piece of
Hard stone.
H₂O ME

I cannot live
Without
Water.

For ME
H-HOME
Is holy water.
Watching A Drama

It is
A short drama,
About two roads,
And two brothers.

We rehearsed the words:
Gap, Divide, In-between, etc.
For the performance
At the beginning,
I thought
It was merely an Act.

When the play started
with its happy opening,
I was enthralled,
Because I had a little brother,
And understood the wonderfulness of
Having a brother.

But when it moved to climbing and falling,
I came to meditate
Heartily,
How blessed I was to have a brother.
人月圆

清云攀蹑窗前过，月坠闪繁星。清香花落，犹萦盛夏，语涩思腾。
青山碧水，风姿绰绰，故道枯藤。痴狂笑我，多情翘慕，澹澹青冥。

To the Tune of Ren Yue Yuan

Clear clouds creep, passing through my window,
The moon falls, and stars twinkle.
Fresh and fragrant petals drop
They are still lingering in high summer
I’m wordless, my thoughts rising.

Green mountains, emerald waters,
Their demeanours are so leisurely,
Ancient road sees withered vines.
Enthralled by all, I laugh at myself,
Compassionately I admire,
The wavy indigo heaven.
Stanza 8
不忒

井市攘攘入眼明
飞檐画栋满双城
山隅海外寻幽秀
忒煞萧疏意未平

Nothing Wrong

Seeing clamorous people on commercial streets, I understand their intentions.
I also notice the cornices and beautifully decorated houses everywhere in my two cities.  
I try to find a secluded and elegant place in remote mountains or foreign lands,
But these areas are so desolate, as my wish is not yet fulfilled.

23 The two cities are Beijing and Vancouver.
Survival was already a luxury for people who had experienced social and political turmoil. As the eldest son of my family, I have to suffer the bitter consequence of my ancestors’ misconceptions, misjudgments, and choices. Yet, blaming others won’t help me become smarter, and negative and emotional reactions only break my peaceful mind and disturb my own life. I would say there is NOTHING WRONG with others. I prefer to trace out my personal and familial history and learn lessons from it.

Summing up the lessons from my experience with relatives, I think it is my own responsibility to acquire the ability to detect their real intentions and decide what is the most beneficial for my family and myself. My relatives have the right to do and say anything, as long as their deeds and words are not against the law and their personal morality. I can’t control their thinking and way of doing things. I need to improve my character, and pick appropriate life models and companions for myself and not to be influenced by others. At the same time, I have to learn adequate skills to deal with certain kinds of people. I have to shoulder the responsibility, no matter how many setbacks I face, how far I travel for seeking truth, and how many piles of books and tons of newspapers I read for enlightenment.

My poetic inquiry helped me understand the bewilderment in my life. After I came back to my own home, I regularly visited the bookshop beside my mother’s factory. There were all kinds of magazines, poetry anthologies, modern and classical literature books. After reading these books, I began to mimic how others wrote. Through writing, I began to explore the innermost part of my heart, and gradually, I dared to face the things that I tried to forget. Years later when I read Carl Leggo’s articles, I realized what I had been doing from childhood was Poetic Inquiry. It is a blessing!
桐

微风晓语花三月
郁翠吴桐满院新
弈谱琴书轩槛静
耕耘百世乐天真

Phoenix Tree

The breeze whispers to flowers in the morning of the third month
In Wu’s home, phoenix trees are dense and green, and the whole garden is refreshed
With only chess manuals, zither and books on the timber railing, it is silent here
My family members have plough and weeded for generations, and we enjoy being simple and sincere
In my poetry, I mentioned many times that “I” was crying. It is not that I was actually shedding tears, but a literary tradition. By saying this, I’m not indicating that every Chinese poet likes to write about crying, although many great poets were inclined to do so, such as Qu Yuan, Ruan Ji, Du Fu, Jia Dao, and so on. I would take the “crying” in my poems as an exaggerated expression of my intensified feelings. Also, I wrote several “To the Tune of Yi Jiang Nan” in the Ci form. They’re very similar in terms of their content and imagery, but are still different from each other. I wrote these different versions to explore the scope for different representations and understandings of a same situation.

忆江南

空山雨，鸥燕掠危樯。云拥月寒光漠漠，雾随风霁色苍苍。诗泪共冰霜。

To the Tune of Yi Jiang Nan

In the serene mountain rain, seagulls and swallows are flying over the tall spars. The clouds embrace the moon, and the vast sky glows. Poetry and my tears pour out together with ice and frost.
Epilogue
I quote MacKenzie-Dawson’s (2018) remark on doing poetic inquiries to wrap up my story: “A way to create spaces for ‘identification and empathetic connection’ (Pelias, 2004, p. 1) where through language both reader and writer, self and other may become part of the greater dialogue about what it means to be human” (para. 9). For all the unavoidable conflicts, my mother and I still endeavor to reduce them in my family. I was confused and frustrated sometimes, especially in front of great familial and social changes that happened in my life. I constantly try to think over my past, gain adequate knowledge to solve my life confusions, and overcome hard times. This process makes me understand the world better and enjoy my current life more. Poetic Inquiry tided me over the hard times, and granted me the chance to examine my life journey. I began to understand the world by an attempt to understand my life and that of my family members.

I exist to fulfill my personal goals and personal preferences. Without a sound understanding of myself, I can easily get lost in the complicated world. I fully realize that I have to understand my personal history and my family history first and then extend to my community, my society and beyond. My personal life is first and foremost influenced by and interconnected with my family members. I have to gain an insightful understanding of my family members’ character, abilities, shortcomings, and advantages, and so on, so that I can serve my family better and find a suitable position in society.

I wrote eight collections of poems to explore my feelings, emotions, and life events in the eight stanzas of my research. The independent poems in each stanza are as “fluid and discursive” as other personal stories (MacKenzie-Dawson, 2018, para. 37). They’re fluid and discursive in the way that they don’t have obvious connections between them. They are records of my thoughts and emotions that I collected in each standing point (stanza). These poems and narrations are the tools that I use to reinterpret my family history in a positive and acceptable way.

I also translated my Chinese poems into English. Some of the poems were written in modern Chinese, others in classical Chinese. In my translation, I understood that it was nearly impossible to translate classical Chinese poetry into modern English in an equivalent and
satisfactory manner. I adopted the most common way and translated my traditional Chinese poem into free verse in English. I have no particular preference for any dialect of the English language, so I used the dictions and expressions that best suited my purpose.

Influenced by her or his education, an author often “consciously or unconsciously” and “willingly” or unwillingly repeats the former writer in certain ways (Swartz, 2018, p. 43). I read academic and poetry books, and write my own poems. Examining my original poems, I found so many items that appeared again and again in Chinese literary history. Yet, they are still as expressive as they were before, because they’re used in new circumstances to explore the inner and outer world of a different person, namely Botao Wu, a scholar who lives in modern society. I adopted a dissertation structure that is indebted to the first collection of Chinese poetry. I revealed my family stories with vignettes scattered in my writing, and didn’t expose the whole story until the end of stanza 8. I expect readers to piece together the stories with their gestalt scheme. Many Chinese writers don’t reveal everything until the very end of their writing. I can find English counterparts in Chopin and O’ Henry. I acknowledge that my writing is indebted to the available cultures and languages.

Withdrawing into retrospection and gaining momentum are inevitable and necessary for a scholar. Tian (2018) analyzed ancient Chinese poets who were “going local, (and) getting personal” (p. 284). She (Tian, 2018) stressed the importance of the poets’ personal encounter with some physical and historical objects belonging to the bygone dynasty, such as “a broken halberd” (p. 285), “an encrusted lump” (p. 286), and so on. These poems derive much of their “weight and power from the claim to firsthand experience” (Tian, 2018, p. 288). In Tian’s (2018) discussion of poems relating to Red Cliff, she mentioned that poets left the capital and went to provinces, and that these personal experiences of the local sites appeared on the “national map” (p. 289). The poets retreated to a remote and local area, and by composing poems they gained better understanding of themselves, the locality, and Chinese history. Then, they expanded and promoted a specific local scenery, the “Red Cliff,” on a larger scale, granting it abiding influence in Chinese literary history.

I take my personal experience to any specific location as “going local,” and my dissertation personalizes my family story. In a “performative and commemorative” manner
(Swartz, 2018, p. 6), I carried out this poetic inquiry in Vancouver to stitch together the “everyday life” (Lyon, 2008, p. 81) of my family, and this dissertation is a reflection on some of the things that went wrong in my family. We are too credulous due to our ancestors’ living and working on a piece of enclosed land, and we lack the ability to understand people’s real intentions. For those extensive family members who have taken advantage of my parents, I don’t blame them at all. I prefer to reinterpret and rewrite the past stories in an acceptable way so as to improve my character and my understanding of people and the world, and to live well at present.

This dissertation is a regard for my ancestors. It is not a blind worship of ancestors, but a calm and respectful reflection of my family history. My writing involves various lingual and cultural sources. I welcome the reader to read my writing based on their personal background. I can’t deny that some of my writing may not be familiar to people with different experiences and cultural backgrounds. I know this is inevitable in the communication between cultures. It is a negotiation process. As “Cultures never exist in a pure state but are constituted in and through negotiation with other cultural practices” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 136), I express English language culture in Chinese and Chinese culture in English. I also produced my transcultural identity “through the constant negotiation between past and present, here and elsewhere, absence and presence, self and other” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 159). Through these negotiations, languages and cultures keep dynamic, instead of stagnant.

As ordinary people, we may have inner conflicts with ourselves; belonging to a family, we may struggle with other members; being a citizen of a country, we hold divergent ideologies and cultures. But, all of us are contributing to a human species (Hawking, 2018). Recalling and examining the events in my family history, I try to find faults in myself and in my family members. It is beneficial that we pay attention to our inner conflicts, speak out our minds, and reach consensus. In this process, we can realize the limitations of our “concept of identity” (Venuti, 2013, p. 116). We reduce and remove “violence” in our writing and translation (Venuti, 2013, p. 116). We respect “the differences of foreign texts and cultures” (Berman, 1999, p. 76 as translated and cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186), and enrich our “language and culture” (Venuti, 2013, p. 116).
Conclusion

Human beings form society and “society shapes our narratives, identities and lives” (Boylorn & Orb, 2014, p. 16). Society is educating individuals, while “anything which can be called a study” in education “must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience” (Dewey, 1997, p. 73). When setting up curricula we must make sure they “have the capacity to speak to as broad a range of human experience as possible, especially the poor and marginalized” (Rocha & Burton, 2017, p. 11). In another word, curricula should address the experiences of the ordinary people. The interaction and bidirectional education between society and its specific and ordinary individuals is a fluid, ever-changing and “reciprocal” (Dewey, 1997, p. 72) process.

I write “numerous stories from my own life” (Manovski, 2014, p. xv) and “linger” (Leggo, 2012, p. xiii) in stories. Storying is “a way of living in the world” (Leggo, 2012, p. xvii). Writing brings me to the “dimensions of my spirit and of myself that normally lie smothered under the weight of living” (Winterson 1996, p. 137). Writing allows me to face gallantly my “trauma” and “grief” (Galvin & Prendergast, 2012, p. 6) in the past. I “relive, relearn, and research my prior experience” (Manovski, 2014, p. xx), and the constant digestion and distillation of lived experience (Leggo, 2008a, p. 92; Owton, 2017, p. 10) brightens me up. Most importantly, “artistic representation” of my life events invites me to have a clearer sense of “the world in which we live” (Rosiek, 2018, p. 38), and to touch its “beauty and complexity” (Grumet, 2018, p. 16).

The beautiful yet complex world is shaped by ourselves. We are in the endless process of “creation and re-creation of new knowledge” that forms the foundation of our understanding of the world, and from this starting point, we continuously create and recreate ourselves (Manovski, 2014, p.116). Recently, I communicated with my mother regarding my maternal aunt’s family. My mother suggested that I look at the bright side of things and forget the unpleasant part. I reminded my mother of some facts. It was she who told me that my maternal grandmother scolded my aunt after my grandmother knew my experience at my
aunt’s. I myself witnessed many times that my mother gave money to my maternal aunt’s children. Yet, now my mother said she had forgotten she gave them money, though she admitted that my father did give my aunt some commodities from time to time. My mother prefers to change the old story in her life, so as to forget the past and live at present.

Although Poetic Inquiry is seemingly about ourselves, it extends to people around us and the world. Writing about our past and living our lives compassionately, we learn lessons from what “we speak out against” (Foster, 2016, p. 141). We set an example for our readers to voice their life experiences and to write in similar ways. My practices “instruct our readers about this world and how we see it” (Denzin, 2006, p. 333). I tell my stories to bring my readers and me (Foster, 2014) “into a shared experience” (Jones & Adams, 2016, p. 139). I examine the wisdom of ancient Chinese scholars and trace back my family stories. My family story is woven with my paradoxical feelings toward my relatives and my hometown. In the West, I can examine my family stories and my cultural tradition through a global lens, and try to correct the things that went wrong in my family and to establish my transcultural identity. I “seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience” (Gouzouasis, 2014, p. 6). This shared experience can involve people in a “collective and creative participation” and help them understand their own lives, and their “social realities” (Foster, 2016, p. 135). Belonging to a same human species (Hawking, 2018), we share stories and wisdom with friends from the East and the West, and try to improve our own lives, and that of others.

Trying to gain a “focused mind” (Tian, 2011, p. 27) and the “right state of mind” (Tian, 2011, p. 34), I recount my past and help myself out of the unfavorable experience (渡己). I “carefully” observe my “desire and impulse” to speak out my personal story (Dewey, 1997, p. 71). My father’s generosity and love for my family were the motives for me to keep writing. My mother forgiving her older sister made me feel very uncomfortable at first. Gradually, I could understand them. They don’t like family conflicts and try their best to avoid conflicts with their siblings, even if their siblings have taken advantage of them and their children. My parents are simple and ordinary people. But I can see glorious character in them. I hold the same opinion as my parents and don’t want family conflicts. I present my personal experience and my identity
as a poetic inquirer. Poetic inquirers write about themselves to “explore the nature of being human” (MacKenzie-Dawson, 2018, para. 11). We are “insignificant” in comparison with “the vast size of the universe” (Hawking, 2018, p. 28), and we are “mere collections of fundamental particles of nature” (Hawking, 2018, p. 27). Yet, we can reveal and revise our world through our writing (Jones, 2005, p. 767), and finally can reconstitute our world (Richardson, 1993, p. 705).
This dissertation is to invite my readers to take writing as “a way of living in the world” (Leggo, 2012, p. xvii). By doing this, we have already started to change our world. Then, we can build on the minute changes, attend to the little improvements, and finally change our lives by growing in strength. The other intention of this dissertation is to provide my readers with an example of understanding setbacks and tragedies in their own lives. When there is something wrong in our lives, it’s too easy and ready to blame others, the environment and our society. But, it’s more beneficial that we attribute our misfortunes to our own mistakes and shortcomings, and improve ourselves. Finally, this dissertation introduces Chinese literature and culture into Poetic Inquiry, and has the potential to disseminate the theory of Poetic Inquiry in China.

I didn’t provide my mother and my late father’s names in the dissertation, because this piece of work is for everyone. Mother and father are how we refer to our parents in English. There are many different ways to address people’s mother and father, such as 娘，妈妈 and 母亲 for mother, and 爹，爸爸 and 父亲 for father. You are invited to contribute to this conversation about our mothers and fathers.

My writing enriches our “language and culture” (Venuti, 2013, p. 116), and calls for respect for “the differences of foreign texts and cultures” (Berman, 1999, p. 76 as translated and cited in Venuti, 2013, p. 186). I thank the inclusive Canadian culture for accommodating this dissertation. I also thank the scholarships that I received from CSC, UBC and other sources. I couldn’t afford the cost of the research when I decided to carry it out. These scholarships helped greatly and cheered me up.
Photograph 8. Digital photograph. Chinese character 渡 (to cross, to ferry, to pass through) written by Botao Wu with a Chinese writing brush.
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