

**AN ECHO OF SILENCE THROUGH THE VALE OF OPPRESSION:
NAME, LITERACY, AND MEMORY**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how one's name and the ways in which that name is employed in various social contexts affects a person's self-knowing and knowing of the world, focusing specifically on the challenges of literacy acquisition in oppressive nation-states. The work, which employs a narrative methodology, draws upon my experiences of persecution through the Chinese Cultural Revolution, during which time officers of the oppressive regime blacklisted my family name. Being in the stages of early literacy at the time, I came to know my formal identity through glimpses of my name angrily crossed out on blackboards and in other public places. I, along with children like me, was forced to reject my identity in order to fit in the new social order. If, as Norris et al (2005) observe, literacy acquisition "requires some appropriation of the ways-of-being and values of a social group" (p. 779), how do oppressed peoples come to acquire literacy? This work entails an inquiry into the significance of names/naming in relation to three important aspects of knowing: self-image, literacy, and cultural memory.

The thesis consists of three primary parts: 1) a general background of the Cultural Revolution in which my family and our experiences of persecution are situated; 2) a discussion of the theoretical implications of name/naming, literacy, identity and cultural memories; 3) and a series of anecdotes that exemplify the inextricable relatedness between name / naming and literacy.

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My father used to say to me, “One thing leads to another.” The idea of writing about name / naming one day took shape while I was at my supervisor Dr. Teresa Dobson’s home, chatting about how I remembered my father’s name being publicly crossed out in the act of humiliation during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Teresa had suggested to me, “Why don’t you write about name / naming for your thesis?” I thank Teresa for inspiring me to write about such an intimate subject just as I am indebted to her guidance, encouragement, insightful comments and thought provoking questions throughout this study and in particular for her rigorous attitudes towards scholarship in general. I also would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Carl Leggo, whose poetically narrative style has influenced my writings found within this work. I am deeply grateful to Professor John Cooper whose particular interest in Chinese history has encouraged me to write about China and my life in China. He has read my thesis draft and provided generous comments and has been unsparing in giving me encouragement and suggestions over a period of two years.

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DEDICATION

为纪念我的父亲黄永丰和大哥黄蜀都
献给我的母亲陈学渊和哥哥黄铭

In memory of my father, Huang Yongfeng
and brother, Huang Shudu

To my mother, Chen Xueyuan
and brother, Huang Ming

1 AN INTRODUCTION

1. 1 An Echo of Silence

An echo of silence through a vale:

A vale of oppression,
A vale of humiliation.
That was my hometown.

That was a faraway place:

A remote memory,
A firm grasp, and
A breath of life.

That was the place I landed upon:

A platform I crawled on,
A board I jump from,
A terrain I walked upon...

That was the earth I rooted in, my sediment

The clay that molded my frame
The cement that congealed me,
The edge that moulded me.

An echo of silence

Through a hollow,
A hollow of calamity,
With sediment beneath.

I was born into a Huang Family,

A fifth offspring of Huang Shiling
A great name marked in the history of arts
From the Qing Dynasty.

“Huang” was not my surname, however,
But “Chen” after my mother’s name.
Why so? – Not to carry down
Such a great ancestor’s name?

My father gave me my name

For his love for my mother,
That was what he said,
To change the name of my clan.

Also, “To keep you alive!”
Whispered my father.
Indeed, I am still alive,
Through the vale of oppression.

Underneath the hollow of calamity
Rambled the long ten years
Of the Chinese Cultural Revolution!
I remained alive, still.

I’m still alive,
“Chens” in my family are alive,
But my father and eldest brother,
Both “Huangs,” became shapeless.

A name is an image,
A form— a special peck of life;
Some are solid and tangible,
But some amorphous and impalpable.

I learned my name while little
An utterance,
Then identifiable strokes,
That was my first literate knowing.

Yet my name shaped my frame,
And marked my selfhood,
I printed a specifiable “Me”
Into a running stream of lives.

I thereby embarked
On a long journey of life;
From there, or from here—
From my name and my life.

My name kept me intact
In the shattering era—

An unprecedeted time,
How lucky was I.

I survived with a solid shape,
And adorned with skills of literacy;
Was it because of my name?
Who knows?

But here is what I do know:
My heart pumped at my name written,
My pulse beat when “Chen Hong” echoed
That was how my nerves were pinched.

A kindling of my existential being,
That is my name,
That is my identity,
And that is me.

An echo of silence
Across a plain,
A prairie of lives
And a vale of oppression.

An echoing of silence,
With an echoing of name
An echoing of self
Through an echoing of life.

(A poem by the author, October, 2005)

This study originates from my personal experiences of being oppressed in China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. My narrative inquiry seeks understanding of the nature of literacy for those raised in oppressive nation-states. Such personal experiences show how individuals who are raised under oppression, in particular those who suffer from the stigmatization of being “blacklisted,” will indeed undergo change and

transformation in identity and literacy development. My study will examine how the experience of having one's name blacklisted influences one's identity and literacy development.

Hall (1993) observes how the "Practices of presentations always implicate the positions from which we speak and write" (p. 392). Hall calls this the "positions of enunciation," from which we assert our positions and reflect on our identities. Identity, he suggests, is never constant and "not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" (Hall, 1993, p. 392). In agreement with new cultural practices, naming provides a process for a person's literacy acquisition and development in the ongoing production of identity (Hall, 1993). It is not possible to pinpoint the single moment when name carries such an influence; rather, the influence of one's name in identity formation is gradual, affected through a gradual process of interaction, intermingling, assimilation, resistance, and acceptance. Each time one's name is enunciated, a particular cultural connection is recognized and a particular self-image emerges coupled by a particular awareness.

A person's name is the inceptive signal of language that encourages him or her to be cognizant of patterns of language. The individual employs thoughts and perspectives, although such a frame of cognition can be fragile, evanescent, and transient. The arbitrary imposition of the naming then becomes the preoccupation of the person beholding the name that defines and gives form to his or her identity, encapsulating his or her identity in language.

Of significance in this study is the influence of names or naming on identity

formation and literacy acquisition in situations wherein one's name is challenged or shunned by society. It is essential to examine how names or naming influences literacy acquisition, particularly in situations where one's name is not accepted by society.

Since this study deals primarily with the relationship between name / naming, literacy and cultural identity, there is a sociocultural and political perspective residing within this work. As stated earlier, in this study I present my views on the importance of names for identity formation and the acquisition of literacy. I agree with Muller, Brown, and Smith (1992) that a person's name "identifies and draws boundaries" (p. 34). In this view I further contend that recognition of one's name delineates the beginning of one's understanding of language. Once named, individuals become self-aware, cultivating an awareness of the boundaries and environment in which they are situated. There is power in naming and in being named. In instances where individuals are outcast from their community and their names are "blacklisted," these individuals' experiences of identity and literacy are necessarily altered; in this manner, naming and particular names may negate or privilege.

1.2 A Note on Method

This work employs a narrative methodology. I reflect on my personal experiences during the Mao Zedong's era in China, which witnessed the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. During this time officers of the oppressive regime blacklisted my family name. Being in the stages of early literacy at the time, my identity was formed through

glimpses of my name angrily crossed out on blackboards and in other public places.

I have selected several key experiences which I regard as representative of different events in which name / naming may influence individuals' self-images and identities, and potentially influence their literacy practices. In this manner, I focus only on discursive interaction with name, identity acknowledgement, and interpretation of the literacy experiences inherent in these events. I use narrative to locate myself specifically in assimilation with or resistance to oppression and to argue that the linguistic quality of naming is of import to identity and cultural literacy in addition to other qualities of socio-political and cultural concerns. The sections that follow encompass much personal reflection on and theoretical discussion of how naming has affected and transformed areas of my own life and how my experiences have shaped my sense of the nature of identity and literacy itself.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) observe that "The search for self-identity is a key determinant of post-modern consumption" (p. 131); thus it is essential to understand the concept and dynamics of names, the symbolic relevance of the person. This work demonstrates a model of the dialectical relationship between literacy and self-identity, both of which arise from the initial literate act – personal names or naming, a mediated experience of self-symbolism (names) and sociocultural symbolism (mediation).

Previous studies have drawn attention to names and their relational connection to

identity information and semantic features of language. Among these studies, Taylor (1998) points out in her findings that “Name writing was a notable feature of the children’s literate endeavours” (p. 61). Hildreth (1936), according to Taylor, notes how “Name writing results from the child’s interest in practicing, not solely from the child’s being told how to do it” (p. 301). Morton (1969, 1979), who has studied the models of word recognition, describes the relational onset of language and naming: if upon perceiving a stimulus one is able to name something, one should always be able to give supplementary information, regarding who or what it is (Brennen, David, Fluchaire & PELLAT, 1996). My study offers personal accounts put forward as an examination of why and how names/naming influenced my identity shaping and shifting, literacy recognition and acquisition. A series of three-subtitled accounts in Chapter 4 (pp. 70-114) offer narrative chronologies of my life amid the oppressive era of the Cultural Revolution of China.

While research has examined the relationship between names/naming and identity information (Brennen et al., 1996), the effect of naming on literacy acquisition is remarkably little studied. My study forms a contribution to ongoing efforts to understand individual literacy aspirations, particularly those of individuals who are oppressed. There is the need to comprehend how a person’s literate and cultural identity frameworks are shaped, negotiated, and consolidated through name and the very naming process, including the antecedent histories, assumptions, and cultural knowledge embedded in any interchange (Norris, Brown, Reveles & Kelly, 2005). This view is one

that synthesizes sociocultural theories of literacy and identity.

The thesis is divided into four chapters: Chapter 2 provides a general background of the Cultural Revolution in which my family and our experiences of persecution are situated; Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical implications of name/naming, literacy, identity and cultural memories; Chapter 4 relates a series of anecdotes which exemplify the inextricable relatedness between name / naming and literacy in relation to cultural identity and memory.

2 IN A PLACE, AT A TIME, WITH KINSHIP

Tuojiang River, My Native Heath!

I

Tuojiang River,
A bosom of life
Sweeps in a thin veil of water,
Irrigating a stretch of land.
Niejiang, a city of sugarcane
Imbibed in Tuojiang water,
Absorbs its taste of sweetness.
The flowing of the water
Mirrors a myriad of my dreams.
The water I drank
Endeared my heart.
I loved Tuojiang River—
In the sweet city of Sugarcane.
This is the place where I was born,
Where also I grew up.

II

Until one day,
Tuojiang River turned into
A bed of death roaring ghastly waves,
Beneath the sable-enveloped sky.
The roaring water of Tuojiang,
In transfusion of lethal current,
Engulfed a little form of life—
Shudu, my 14-year-old brother...
The bitter water of Tuojiang
Denounced its sweet caresses,
Like a shattered mirror;
Multiplied the images of my sorrows,
Broken asunder my hopes, and my fears.
A place where I was born,
Where also I grew up.

III

The vestige of dreams and fears—
Life, a flash of light, is fragile.
Like dreams, evanescent, inevitably transient.
The incessant rise and fall
Rose and fell,
In the convolute flowing of water,
From generation to generation.
The placid running water of Tuojiang,
And the roaring waves of Tuojiang,
Melted my hopes and dreams
In warm solute words;
Encompassed my little frame
And smothered me with its wavy caresses.
That is the place where I was born
Where also I grew up.

2. 1 The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China (1966-1976)

We, thrown upside down, were enmeshed in snares of truths and untruths, historical and irrevocable; we were struggling aimlessly and hopelessly, like insects caught in a spider's web.

2. 1.1 An introduction to the Cultural Revolution

Until the early part of the twentieth century China was controlled by a succession of ruling families or “dynasties,” where the method of rule was determined by two major forces of dynamic change in Chinese history. These forces, Wong (1971) observes, manifest an “internal unrest and foreign depredation” developed in ascending intensity and “converged during the third century of Manchu rule” of China’s final dynasty (p. 1).

During this time there were numerous internal peasant rebellions (e.g., the “White Lotus Society,” a nationalist-racialist rebellion of 1796-1804) and foreign wars (e.g., The Opium Wars, 1840-1842, and the war in 1900 against an Eight-Country Allied Army). The monarchical rule of dynasties was increasingly questioned after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). After a series of small-scale revolts from 1895 to 1911, a full-scale revolution occurred, which culminated in the overthrow of the final Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty (1644-1911) and the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC), where the government from 1927 to 1949, under Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), was to dominate (Wong, 1971). The People's Republic of China (PRC) led by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung) was established in 1949. The factors leading to termination of the monarchical form of government in China and the formation of the Republic are outlined in a number of texts (Wong, 1971; Hsu, 1975; Purcell, 1977; Wasserstrom, 2003; Hacker, 1986); suffice it to say that the revolution largely expressed the frustration experienced by intellectuals respecting the weakness of the ruling Qing Palace and the creeping influence of foreign ideas such as democracy, republicanism, and capitalism.

The establishment of the “New China” (PRC) in 1949 witnessed the entire framework of the party and government of China “subjected to a period of extreme confusion” (Wong, 1971, p. 99). After a series of meetings of the Preparatory Committee of the Political Consultative Conference held in Beijing in 1949, China's future government was determined as *People's Democratic Dictatorship*. This view of the nature of China's government was philosophically publicized in Mao Zedong's article

“On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship.” Mao Zedong, when accused of being dictatorial, declared: “You are right; that is exactly what we are” (Jen, 1991, p. 1417, Trans. by the author). According to Mao Zedong, in order to enact and realize the people’s democratic dictatorship, the right of reactionaries to voice their opinions needed to be abolished and only the people were allowed to voice their opinions. Two aspects were combined to form the people’s democratic dictatorship: democracy among the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries. The “people” in Mao Zedong’s definition at this stage referred to the working class, the peasant class, the petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie. These peoples, under the leadership of the working class and the Chinese Communist Party, were to carry out a dictatorship over the lackeys of imperialism: the landlord class, the bureaucratic capitalist class, and the Jiang Jieshi’s Kuomintang (KMT) reactionaries and their henchmen representing these classes.

Between 1950 and 1957, a multitude of foreign and domestic events and movements were enacted which included the Land Reform Movement (a struggle against the landlord class) followed by the Thought Reform Movement of 1951 launched among intellectuals, especially those who had lived under Kuomintang’s rule before 1949. Then, in 1951 - 1952, two further movements were launched: the Three-Anti (corruption, waste, and bureaucracy) and Five-Anti (bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing of economic information) within the Chinese Communist Party, aiming to maintain the revolutionary purity of cadres. Outside the Party, the movements were directed against those who continued to resist

Communist rule. In May 1956, Chairman Mao proposed the launching of a campaign to invite public criticism of the Chinese Communist Party. This movement, known as a “Hundred Flowers,” was also termed *Letting a Hundred Flowers Blossom and a Hundred Schools of Thoughts Contend* (百花齐放，百家争鸣: standing for a policy set forth by Mao Zedong for promoting the progress of arts and sciences and the development of a flourishing socialist culture).

A year later, in the midst of a mounting torrent of criticism, the Chinese Communist Party muzzled its critics and counter-attacked by launching an Anti-Rightist Movement against dissidents both within and outside the Party. The years 1958-1961 saw the forced march in China (Wong, 1971). A program, *Three Red Flags*, was carried out to inject rapid economic growth and consisted of (1) *General Line of Socialist Construction*, (2) the industrial *Great Leap Forward*, and (3) the formation of People’s Communes after four years, instead of the originally planned eighteen years, promising a step-by-step socialization of agriculture. During 1962-1965, a combination of the *Great Leap Forward*, natural disasters, and the withdrawal of Soviet aid brought China to “a situation bordering on economic collapse” (Wong, 1971, p. 136). The Chinese Communist Party was forced to use every means to bring about stabilization and eventual recovery.

Thus began the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which “may be characterized as a mass movement inspired by Mao Zedong to make China safe for the future of revolution” (Wong, 1971, p. 114). As Xi and Jin (2006) state when describing the

Cultural Revolution, China underwent an “internal disorder . . . launched by the leaders” of the Chinese ruling class that was used by the counterrevolutionary clique; this civil strife, however, ultimately became disastrous to China and to the Chinese people. In exploring answers to what directly caused the emergence of the Cultural Revolution, Xi and Jin (2006) note three critical elements which, in their opinion, encompass the nature, emphasis, and form of the Cultural Revolution. For them, the Cultural Revolution was a political revolution of “one class in the overthrow of another” (p. 2, Trans. by the author). The emphasis of the movement, then, was to punish the leaders, the so-called *capitalist-road-takers* (走资本主义道路的当权资派), of the Party while the form of the revolution was to “mobilize hundreds of millions of masses at all levels in order to expose the dark side of the Party and the state in order to wield entire power” (p. 3, Trans. by the author).

In their analysis, Xi and Jin (2006) continue to stress that China’s Cultural Revolution was singular in the history of communist movements, emerging as a unique *product* under China’s special historical situations in which three factors were implicated: (1) the interplay of the “Leftist” theory and “Leftist” practice, (2) the interplay of individual dictatorship and worship, (3) the interplay of international and national prevention of revisionism. The individual dictatorship and worship that Xi and Jin conclude in their analysis reveal how the paramount leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong, started the Cultural Revolution in May 1966 for the purpose of creating a “New World” in a manner that would “change the world” (Wang, 2005, p. 2,

Trans. by the author). However, Xi and Jin contend that these three interplays interacted and intervened with one another, driving the revolution to extremity “in a vicious circle” (2006). This situation is aptly expressed in Wang’s (2005) statement: “The Cultural Revolution is a catastrophe” (p. 1).

Studies that focus on the origins of the Cultural Revolution, over the years, have been many. Some attribute the immediate cause of the Cultural Revolution to Mao’s entirely erroneous appraisal of the political situation in the Party and the state and his venting of personal spite against his colleagues and intellectuals (Barnouin & Yu, 1993; Davin, 1997). Mao believed that the socialist society at all levels was undermined by capitalist and revisionist agents whose purpose was to restore capitalism in China. The Cultural Revolution was regarded as a phenomenon directly linked to Mao’s theoretical, political, and social perceptions, his status among leadership, and his personality. From 1962, Mao disapproved of the measures that were being taken by his colleagues to repair the damage of *The Great Leap Forward*, which Mao had initiated. Ultimately, a disaster resulting in 20 to 30 million deaths ensued (Davin, 1997). He believed that “education and medicine were increasingly elitist in their development” (Davin, 1997, p. 78), while literature and arts were governed by intellectuals who dared to confront his authority. All these issues would be fought over in the Cultural Revolution. Whatever the truth concerning the origins of the Cultural Revolution, Barnouin and Yu (1993) state that without Mao Zedong “the Cultural Revolution would not have occurred” (p. vii).

In an endless effort to search for answers for the causes of the revolution, Wang

(2005) points out how “The Cultural Revolution was not a fortuitous occurrence” (p. 5, Trans. by the author). There is a well-known Chinese proverb as follows: It takes more than one cold day for the river to freeze three feet deep. According to Wang and other historians, ten years preceding the Cultural Revolution had seen a zigzagging path of development in exploring China’s socialist construction. As Xi and Jin (2006) and Wang (2005) contend, history passed its verdict, perceiving the Cultural Revolution as an internal disorder which was wrongly launched by the leadership of the ruling government. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most tumultuous and dramatic periods of China’s modern history, marked by “violence, factionalism and economic disruption” (Barnouin & Yu, 1993, p. vii). The very disorder that Mao himself had defined at its start became the basic strategy of the Cultural Revolution, which would later lead to the establishment of a new order (Barnouin & Yu, 1993). Certainly, the wounds and residual scars of the unmatchable civil strife linger deep and unhealed, compelling one to reflect on the events of these years.

2. 1.2 A recalling of the Cultural Revolution in Sichuan, China

In 1963, before the start of the Cultural Revolution, a small-scale *Siqing Yundong* (the Four Cleansings) unfolded. *The Four Cleansings* was a campaign launched to call upon the people and the lower-level cadres to give a clean account of their political and ideological stance, family background, and financial situation. In 1966, a full-scale campaign of the *Four Cleansings* was carried out over the nation. My mother was sent

to Ziyang, a county about 100 kilometers from our home city Neijiang, to carry out the task. Thereafter, we three siblings were put to the care of our nanny *Lei Popo* (Grandma Lei). The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China called on every province to hold meetings to enhance the studies of Chairman Mao's teachings. In September 1966, Lin Biao, Mao's close-comrade in arms, called upon the state to study Chairman Mao's *Lao san pian* (Three Old Essays). The titles of the Three Old Essays are: "Serve the People," "Commemorate Dr. Bai Qiu'en" (Norman Bethune, a Canadian medical doctor who died on November 12, 1939 in the event of saving a Chinese soldier during China's 'Anti-Japanese War'), and "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains." On October 28, 1966 *Renminribao Shelun* (People's Daily Editorial) stated that the three magnificent essays of Chairman Mao were powerful weapons of thought to overcome selfishness, foster public spirit, and reform the souls of people, allowing *Lao san pian* to be regarded as a compulsory course in fostering new communist men. Lin Biao demanded: *Lao san pian* is "our motto" and people at every level are to read and revolutionize our ideas (Sanlian Book Associations, 1966).

Prior, in August, slogans were shouted and plastered everywhere, "Xuexi Shiliu Tiao" (学习十六条, Study the Sixteen Points), "Xuanchuan Shiliu Ttiao" (宣传十六条, Propaganda of the Sixteen Points), "Zhixing Shiliu Ttiao" (执行十六条, Implement the Sixteen Points), and "Hanwei Shiliu Tiao" (捍卫十六条, Defend the Sixteen Points). The Sixteen Points of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution were directives approved by the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee on August 8, 1966 for the

purpose of regulating the activities of the Red Guards. These directives were important in determining the direction of the Cultural Revolution, three months after its onset in May 1966.

On June 4, 1966, after the announcement that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China had Reshuffled the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and Reorganized the Party Committee of Beijing University, institutions of higher education of Chengdu and Chongqing in Sichuan began to position Big-Character Posters against the school party committee, criticizing the university authorities for persecuting the Cultural Revolution because they were afraid of “drawing fire against themselves.” The situation became dreadfully tense. On June 10, the Provincial Party Committee issued a mandate asking all universities and colleges to suspend classes to join the campaign (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999), while in August of 1966, answering to the Central Party Committee’s call, Red Guards nationwide went on to destroy the *four olds* (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits). Slogans were posted which read “Uphold the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party!” According to the *Neijiang County Annals* (Neijiang County Annals Compilation Committee, 1994), in August, university students from Beijing, Chengdu, and Chongqing enlisted Neijiang students into *Dachuanlian* (the great exchange of revolutionary experience). Shortly afterwards, schools in Neijiang spontaneously established their Red Guard organizations.

The State Council and the Central Committee called all provinces, districts,

municipalities, and counties to organize teachers and students of institutions of higher education and had them travel to Beijing to visit the Cultural Revolution campaign and to be received by Chairman Mao himself. Thus China's "Red Guards' Nationwide Great Exchange of Revolutionary Experience" had begun. In responding to the announcement of the Central Party Committee, the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee and the Provincial People's Committee sent out their calls, which saw Sichuan's teachers and students traveling across China in October, 1966. The first group of Red Guards of Sichuan province, inspired by the Beijing Red Guards campaign, established their Red Guards organizations in the middle of August, 1966. Their organizations originated from the middle schools (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999). My two elder brothers at this time were still very young and in primary schools, and thus did not join the cross-country travel.

In the same month, October 1966, the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee demanded that all universities and colleges in Sichuan, without exception, suspend school in order that students and teachers could join the revolutionary campaign in openly criticizing and repudiating *Bourgeois Academic Authorities* and *Bourgeois Representatives* who opposed the Party and socialism. In the same month, the Central Party Committee issued "An Announcement with Regard to Resuming Classes and Waging Revolution of Universities, Middle Schools and Primary Schools" (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999, pp.128-129, Trans. by the author). Thereafter, primary and middle schools resumed, whereas universities and colleges were

deeply affected by factionalism with the effect that students did not attend school until their job assignment upon graduation. Chinese higher education institutions were obliged to assign their graduates jobs and units upon graduation. At the same time, the Red Guards and the whole nation became absorbed in the learning of the Chairman's teachings, termed the *Seas of Quotations*, or the *Red Seas*. Everywhere one could find Chairman Mao's quotations and recorded teachings on the chests of the people, in their hands, in their pockets, on the walls, and in rooms. One was expected to read "quotations" and sing "quotations" before and after meetings, before and after work.

On August 27th, 1968, Sichuan's *Gong Xuandui* and *Pin Xuandui* were garrisoned in schools. *Gong Xuandui* and *Xuandui* are the abbreviated form of the Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams (for urban schools) and Poor Peasants' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams (for rural schools). The Workers Propaganda Teams garrisoned Neijiang High School, and did not withdraw from schools until the end of the revolution when Jiang Qing's counterrevolutionary clique was crushed in December 1976. These two teams were sent to schools to administer the schooling and the *Stinking Intellectuals*, the teachers, were regarded as *choulaojiu* (the Old Stinking Nines). The term *Choulaojiu* actually originated from the 1957 mammoth Anti-Rightist Movement, which was aimed at the intellectuals, and was used to name them in the Cultural Revolution because the targets of the revolution were the following nine groups of people: landlords (地主), rich-peasants (富农), counterrevolutionaries (反革命分子), bad elements (坏分子), the rightists (右派分子), traitors (叛徒), special agents (特务),

and capitalist-road-takers (走資派). The ninth target was intellectuals, the so-called *reactionary academic authorities* who were often termed the “Old Stinking Nines.”

Mao Zedong regarded intellectuals as bourgeois and was worried that the bourgeois intellectuals not only would rise as an elite group, but would also spread bourgeois ideology. As Lee (1978) observes,

Whenever Mao renewed his vigilance over the class struggle, the Party’s attitude toward the bourgeoisie abruptly changed from acceptance to harsh treatment, particularly toward those who were outside the power structure and hence a part of the masses rather than the elite. (p. 52)

Therefore, the major thrust of the movement was directed against the bourgeoisie, particularly in the Hundred Flowers Campaign previously mentioned and the Socialist Education Movement. The intellectuals were treated as “the major target of the movement” (Lee, 1978, p. 52). My father was one of these Old Stinking Nines, “outside of the power structure,” a target from the start of the Cultural Revolution. Over the years I constantly heard people call my father *Choulaojiu*, which summoned notions of my father’s intellect and knowledge combined with the condemned image of an erudite people.

The nationwide “Cleansing of the Class Ranks” campaign, abbreviated as *Qingdui* (Ranks Cleansing), was fully launched in October 1968, purging those who did not follow Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line. Just as in Beijing, “that movement continued through the spring of the following year of 1969, claiming, among other victims, 3,512

deaths through suicide” (Schoenhals, 1996, p. 371). In Sichuan, as early as July and August of 1968, the Provincial Revolutionary Committee had convened the province-wide “Cleansing of the Class Ranks” (*Qingdui*) following its earlier start and small-scale massing in January. *Qingdui*’s main targets were “Traitors,” “Special Agents,” “Incorrigible Obstinate Capitalist-road-takers” (顽固不化的走资派), “Counterrevolutionaries,” and “Kuomintang Dregs of the Old Society.” Following the experiences of “Six Factories and One University” (六厂一校), a model of the “Ranks Cleansing” campaign, every district and city, county and town were to have the “Cleansing Target Plucked Out,” paraded through the streets, with *niupeng* (cowsheds) to detain them. This campaign was directed under the “Left Thoughts,” and “thus created numerous wrong, fake, and misjudged cases” (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999, p. 147). My father and mother were the targets of the movement and were categorized to be “cleansed.” My father, regarded as a subversive, was detained in a cowshed sometimes for a period of a few days, and at other times for half a month while my mother was allowed to come home at night.

In the same year of 1968, Mao Zedong issued “A Call Concerning Educated Youths Going to the Countryside,” and Sichuan educated youths, like those of other provinces, began their *hangshan-xiaoxiang* (上山下乡) campaign. It is generally understood that the educated urban youths were sent to work in the countryside and mountainous areas (China Social Sciences Academy, 2003). Middle and high school graduates in 1966, 1967, and 1968 were settled in the countryside, a movement which came to be called

chadui luohu or anjia luohu (插队落户/安家落户), meaning “making one’s homes in the countryside.” Until October of 1969, the number of Sichuan educated youths who went to *anjia luohu* had amounted to 200,000 (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999).

In 1969, a nationwide drive emerged to reform the cadres by sending them to the so-called “May Seventh Cadre Schools” (五七干校), most of which were recently evacuated labour camps. After April 26, 1969, cadres from various regions of Sichuan who went to the May Seventh Cadre School were dismissed in succession from the May Seventh Cadre School. My parents were sent to a work farm in the *Beimu* area. This sort of disbandment was not finished until 1978 (Sichuan Compilation Committee of Local Annals, 1999). Then, in 1969, the whole country implemented Chairman Mao’s *Liu Erliu Zhishi* (Directive issued on June 26th): “In medical and health work, put stress on the rural areas.” Mao galvanized city medical personnel to go to the countryside and make their homes there and to establish commune medical treatment. The movement was devised to turn medical treatment to the rural areas and foster the training of *bare-footed doctors*, a trope used for temporally-trained “doctors” whose main job was to grow crops and plough the paddy field with bare-feet and yet who were trained in the rural setting by transplanted urban doctors to treat local sick people. In this manner, the rural people were able to have their own doctors. My mother was assigned on a “mobile medical team” to “settle” in Yinshan Town to treat the rural sick and to assist bare-footed doctors.

In 1973, the State Council of China approved and transferred the Science and Education Group's "Opinions Concerning 1973 Institutions of Higher Education Enrolment," which suggested that those who were recommended to universities and colleges should take *wenhua kaoshi* (general knowledge examinations) in order to ensure that the enrolled students would have an equivalent to the middle school graduate level and above. Nonetheless, on the 10th of August the same year, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) carried the article "An Answer to the Examination Paper that Calling for Deep Thinking," which stated that the admissions test was the restoration of higher education enrolment and a bourgeois counterattack upon the proletarians. As a result, the university entrance examinations became null and void. From then until 1976, university and college enrolment implemented "recommendation" admissions.

The year 1976, a year Barnouin and Yu (1993) declare as "perhaps the most eventful one in the history of the Cultural Revolution" (p. 289), marked an astonishing time for Chinese people because the top three figures of the Chinese Communist Party passed away and because it was the year of elimination of the "Gang of Four." The events began on January 8th, with the death of Zhou Enlai at the age of 78, China's premier and second ranking in the Party hierarchy. Then Marshal Zhu De, vice chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, member of Politburo Standing Committee, prime minister, died at the age of 90 on July 6th. Finally, on September 9th, Mao Zedong died at the age of 83 when he was then chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and of the military commission. Mao Zedong's death "precipitated the power struggle between the radicals

and moderates which ended with the arrest of Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen and Yao Wenyuan” (Barnouin and Yu, 1993, p. 289), known as the “Gang of Four Anti-Communist Party Clique.” “The Gang of Four” was denounced by the administration led by the premier and the first deputy chairman of the Party, Hua Guofeng, “a relatively unknown moderate” (p. 289) who was in line to become Mao Zedong’s successor (Davin, 1997).

This year also marked the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China. Following, in December 1977, China’s post-secondary examinations for admissions were resumed after a lapse of ten years. That was the year when all high school graduates of the previous ten years finally had the chance to take the competitive entrance examinations for university admissions in China. The number of individuals who took the test totalled 5,700,000, among which only 270,297 were admitted. The ratio was 21:1. My brother Huang Ming and I took the ’77 Grade admissions examination. Unfortunately, this transpired at the end of the Cultural Revolution at a time when class status or family background was still seriously considered. The Neijiang District Education Bureau allowed my test results to be sent to the admissions committee, but my brother Ming’s examination papers remained in Neijiang where he continued to reside as the re-educated youth in the countryside. Gossip circulated in Neijiang: allowing one of the Huang family children into university revealed, presumably, the generosity of the Party. There was no need to admit another. I wished that my brother Ming had been given a fair chance. My brother did not give up. He

took '78 Grade admissions examination, but was rejected by Neijiang District again! The first term of '78 Grade had started; my brother Ming went to Chengdu to plead in Sichuan Higher Education Bureau, which decided to admit him as a singular case. He then began his university life from the second term, February 1979. As a result, my brother Huang Ming and I went to the same school: Nanchong Teachers College (currently named "West China Teachers University").

Figure 2.1 Brother Huang Ming and I at the entrance of Nanchong Teachers College (February 1979)



Source: personal photo collection

In December 1978, the new Central Party Committee began to re-examine and redress all previous unjust, false, and misjudged cases of past political campaigns. Work

was launched to uncap those who had been wrongly “capped” (meaning unfairly named or persecuted), which included, for example, the “*four kinds of bad people*” (四类分子) publicly known as landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements. In June, a call from the Central Party Committee announced a speedy redress of unjust, fake, and misjudged cases. Similar to the countless *four kinds of bad people and five black categories*, our family were exultant in the hope of being redressed from past wrongs.

2. 2. My Native Heath

We wish to know who we are and where our families come from. And to understand the history of our family names while formulating a link between people and places that are familiar to us.

2. 2. 1 My family and my family names

I was born into in an intellectual family and spent my childhood and adolescence in Neijiang in the era of China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Neijiang city, often called “Sweet City of Sugarcane,” is situated in the Central South of the Sichuan Basin, in the midstream of Tuojiang River, in the middle reaches of the Chengdu-Chongqing railway. However, my *zupi* (ancestral home) is in Yi County, Anhui Province. My father was the only direct heir of the Huang Family, which we later knew from literary works of Chinese history and arts (e.g., Han, 1993; Li, 2003, Shanghai Museum, 1984) was one

of the prominent families in the late Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty, the last empire of China. My father's great-grandfather Huang Shiling (黃士陵), styled *Mufu*, (牧甫), attended *Guozijian* of the Qing Dynasty (Jia, 1995). *Guozijian*, founded in 1287, was the Imperial College and the highest educational administration in feudal China (Xia, 2000). Huang Shiling was considered one of the greatest four artists in the late Qing and was accomplished in calligraphy, painting and carving, and particularly eminent for his artistry of Chinese *Yinzhang*, "seal cutting" (Xin, 1994, 1995).

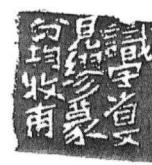
**Figure 2.2 Examples of Huang Shiling's *Yinzhang* - Seal Cutting, with his aphorisms
(Trans. by the author)**



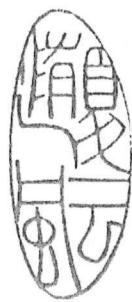
黄士陵印章
(Huang Shiling Seal)



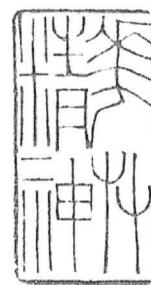
黄士陵印信长年
(Huang Shiling Official Seal)



人生识字忧患(款)
(Learning to Read Starts from Hardships)
(款, *kuan*: A piece of calligraphy presented as a gift or the name of the sender /receiver is written on a painting)



夏云随风
(Summer Clouds Drift with the Wind)



花草精神
(The Spirit of Flowers and Plants)
(To be continued...)



空即是色
(Void Is Colour)



色即是空
(Colour Is Void)



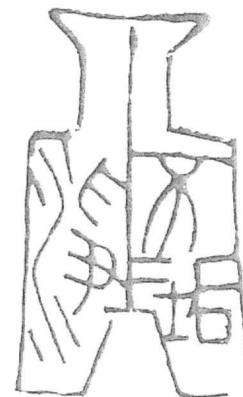
恨古人不见我
(Regret that our forefathers don't See Me)



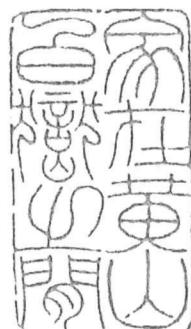
外人哪得知
(How Does An Outsider Know)



无智亦无得
(No Wisdom, No Gain)



不垢不净
(No Filth, No Cleanliness)



家在黄山白云间
(Living between the Yellow Mountain and White Clouds)



化笔墨为烟云
(Turning Pen and Ink into Clouds and Mist)

Source: personal photo collection

Figure 2.3 Examples of Huang Shiling's calligraphy and painting



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 2.4 Great-great grandfather Huang Shiling, 1849-1909, at age of fifty-three, with his calligraphy



Source: personal photo collection

My father's grandfather, Huang Shaomu (黃少牧), the eldest son of Huang Shiling (黃士陵), the direct and sole heir of Huang Shiling's first wife, was also an artist, painter, calligrapher, seal graver and an important Qing high-ranking official. "The father and son of Huang family," to whom people often referred, marked a stage in the history of Chinese art of seal cutting (Xin, 1994).

Figure 2.5 Great grandfather Huang Shaomu (sitting second left)



Source: personal photo collection

Although my father would have benefited greatly from his family then, he was rebellious, left home at a very young age, and later joined China's Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and Civil War (1945-1949) that took place directly following the Japanese surrender between the Nationalists (led by Jiang Jieshi) and the Communists (led by Mao Zedong).

Figure 2.6 My father, at the age of twenty-one, played a leading character in Drama "Family" (家), one of the well-known Chinese dramas (1942)



Source: personal photo collection

My father tried to change the position of women in the Huang family, which caused him to name me “Chen” after my mother’s family name. He used to say that women in the Huang Family had no position and received no respect. They were not supposed to eat at the same table with the Huang males. He harbored and voiced a deep respect, gratitude and love for his grandaunt, *Huang Weizhang* (黃慰璋), who once had given him when he was nine years old a very valuable gold hair pin of the Qing Dynasty that he later pawned to attend the university.

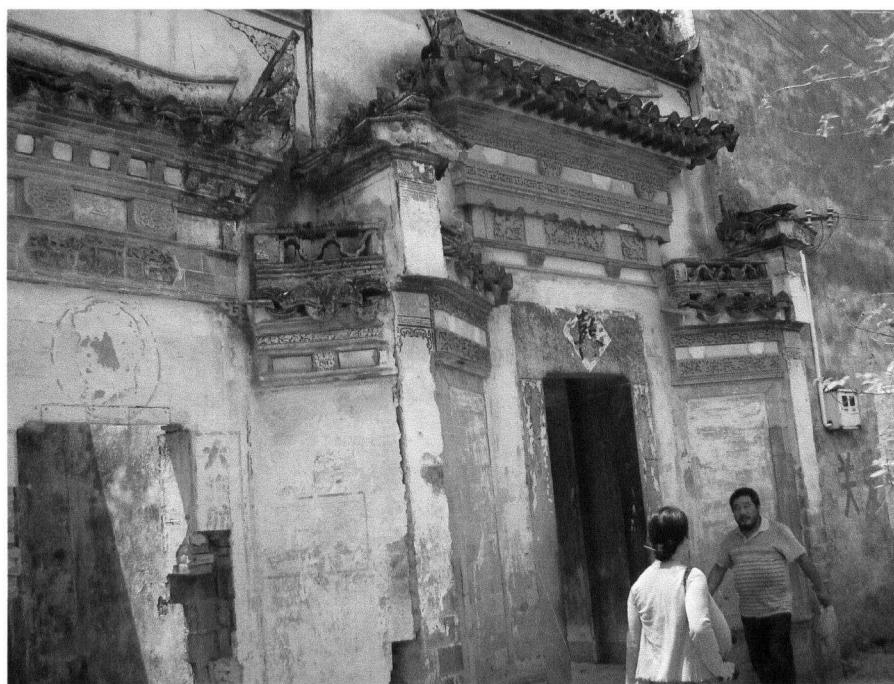
Following the new China (PRC) that Mao Zedong proclaimed in October 1949, land revolution and agricultural collectivization was initiated in 1950. In efforts to eliminate inflation and restore fiscal stability following the badly disrupted economy in the wake of wars, Mao’s new government launched a vigorous agrarian revolution. My father’s ancestral house in the Huang Family Garden near *Huangshan* (Yellow Mountain) was confiscated in the *Tugai Yundong* (the Agrarian Reform Campaign, which reformed feudal land ownership), usually abbreviated as *Tugai* (Land Reform).

Figure 2.7 The current Huang family house and the Huang family garden, which is now a patch of wheat field (August 2005)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 2.8 The front door of the Huang Family House (August 2005)



Source: personal photo collection

During the Land Reform Campaign in 1950, my father's grandfather, Huang Shaomu, was severely criticized and publicly denounced and was eventually tortured to death in 1953. During the whole Land Reform period and before his last days, my great-grandfather wished to see my father, his eldest grandson whom he raised from a young age. My grandparents had left their ancestral home as early as 1932, taking only their second son Huang Yonggang (黃永剛) and youngest daughter Huang Yongan (黃永安).

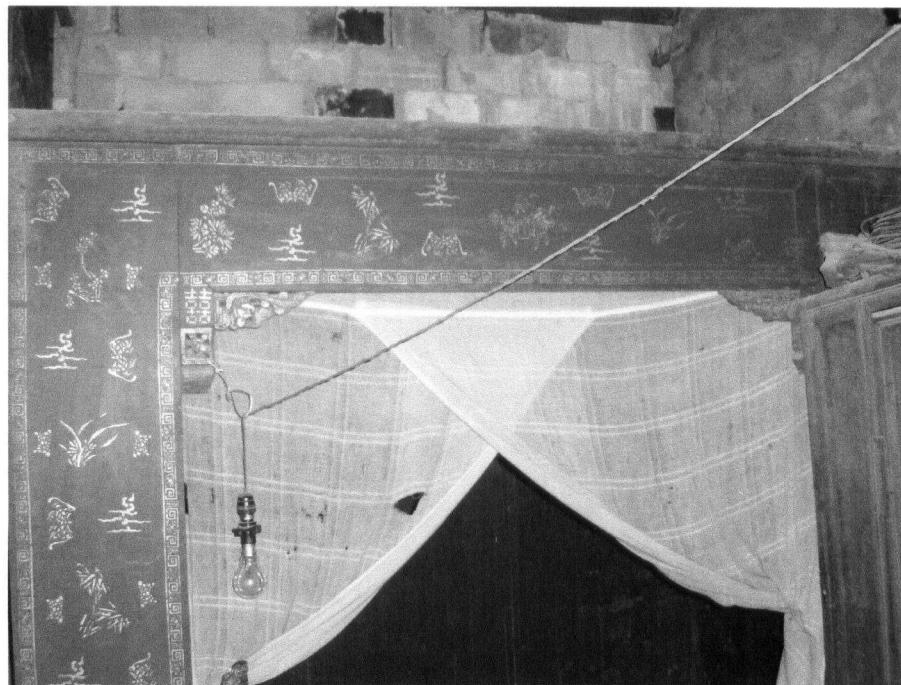
Figure 2.9 My grandfather, grandmother, uncle Huang Yonggang and aunt Huang Yongan (1941)



Source: personal photo collection

At that time my father was only eleven years old and, when he reunited with my grandparents after 36 years of separation, my father was aged forty-seven.

Figure 2.10 The bed of my great-grandfather, Huang Shaomu, in which he died (2005)



Source: personal photo collection

Unfortunately, my great-grandfather's only wish, to see my father for the last time, was never granted. While my great-grandfather was being "reformed" in the Land Reform Movement during 1950-1952, my father was acting as a reformer himself, risking his life to carry out the Communist task in Ziyang, Sichuan.

My father left his hometown and joined Mao Zedong's liberation army as an ardent youth after graduating from the Mathematics Department at Zhejiang University in Zhejiang Province in 1949. The Chinese five-year Civil War (1945-1949), also referred to as the Chinese Liberation War, had nearly ended. This is considered China's third national revolutionary war where oppressed nations and classes fought for their liberation (China Social Sciences Academy, 2003). My father was appointed to the Second Field Army's Political University of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. This

enormous and powerful revolution army, under the leadership of General Chief Deng Xiaoping and Marshal Liu Buocheng, pressed onward into the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and the Kangding area. The campaign was called “To Liberate the Great Southwest!” Following this a campaign of “Imposing Grain Levies and Suppressing Bandits” was waged in order to crush the so-called “Great Southwest Line of Defence,” which the Kuomintang (KMT) Jiang Jieshi had taken great pains to build before they retreated to Taiwan in 1949.

Following the “Imposing Grain Levies and Suppressing Bandits” campaign, my father was assigned as chief of the Culture and Education Department of Ziyang County Committee. It was there my father met my mother, a beautiful young daughter of a rich peasant.

Figure 2.11 My mother and father (1953)



Source: personal photo collection

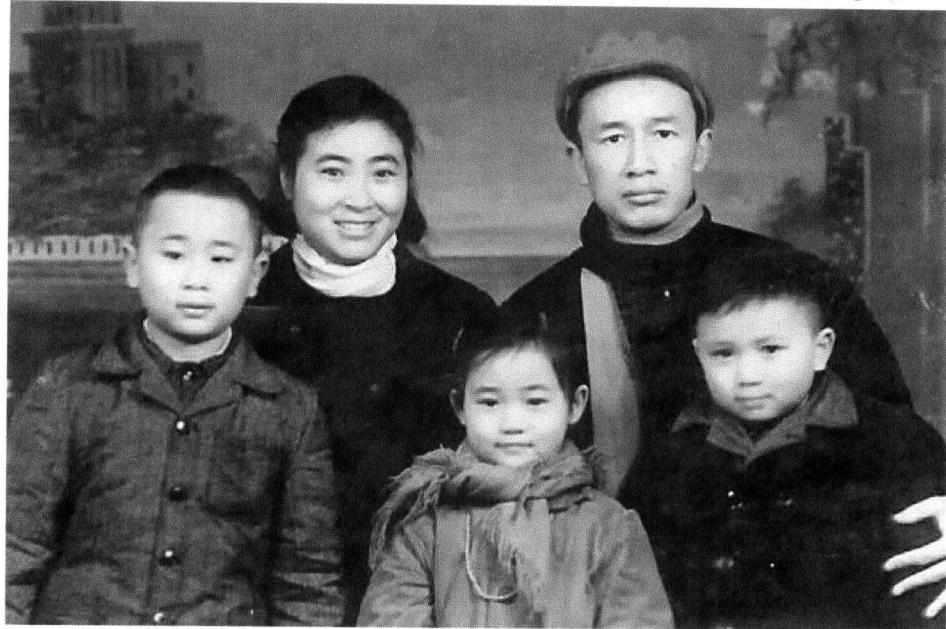
They were married and moved to Neijiang City, where my father taught in Neijiang Teachers School and my mother worked in the First People's Hospital of Neijiang District. Soon my two brothers were born, my eldest brother Huang Shudu, and my second brother Huang Ming. My father longed for a daughter. After I was born, my father named me Chen Hong (陈红), as a gesture of love bestowed to my mother. My father also said that the Huang family women were prone to short life, so he surnamed me "Chen" after my mother's family name. My given name "Hong" (Red) is perceived as the symbol of *smoothness, success, respect, happiness, and jubilance* in Chinese culture (China Social Sciences Academy, 2003). However, this inspired token of love and benediction of my given name assumed different connotations for me when the "Red Storm" blew over the entire land of China in 1966.

Figure 2.12 My family with Nanny, Lei Puopuo: mother, father, brother Shudu (right), brother Ming (centre), and I (1960)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 2.13 My family: mother, father, brother Shudu (left), brother Ming (right), and I (1965)



Source: personal photo collection

My two brothers were named following Chinese naming tradition and practice, where the male heirs take the paternal name line of “Huang” (黃) to carry on the Huang clan. Their given names form partial references to the locales in which they were born.

Tuojiang River, My Mother River!

It was constantly shadowed
By an endless cloak of clouds.
The murky water, however,
Raised generation after generation.

I was born by Tuojiang River,
In a hospital 500 meters away.
My brother, *Ming*,
Too, was born by the river.

He was called Tuojiang boy,
Shudu, my eldest brother

Lucky was he, born in Chengdu,
The provincial capital of Sichuan.

Shu, means Sichuan, and
Du, means Capital.
Thus, he was named *Shudu*.
Shudu excelled in School.

(Written by the author in November 2005)

However, when the “Red Storm” blew over China in 1966, existence for us at that time had lost its substance; our bustling world had become oppressive and stifling, imminent and ominous. My eldest brother Huang Shudu, while swimming, tragically died at the age of fourteen in the Tuojiang River when one day its water was “accidentally” electrified. It was the year of 1968. My grandparents came to visit us and reunited with my father after a lapse of thirty-six years.

Figure 2.14 A family get-together without my eldest brother Huang Shudu; the youth in the back centre: a student of my father (1968)



Source: personal photo collection

2. 2.2 What does a name mean to the one who bears it?

At a very young age I realized that my family name was to decry my existence. Our name, when heard or read in public, seen on posters, walls, blackboards, on a board hung across our chests, carried a stigma. We were forced to live up to this name, even in spite of its apparent arbitrariness, its having been bestowed upon us without consent. From time to time I reinvented or denied my name in order to fit what the social context required. I realized that my name contained merits and demerits, which spawned in me a survival instinct. I adapted to what was publicly acceptable at any given moment in my life, claiming my name when it suited, and denying it in time of peril.

Chinese family genealogy, boasting a distant source and a long stream, delineates an important branch of Chinese traditional culture (Hunan Provincial Genealogy Studies, 2001). Ren (2002) succinctly states that Genealogy “is a unique cultural form among our national cultures” (p. 10). Name or naming is the core element of genealogy. I agree with Yi’s (2005) statement:

What is “name?” In *Contemporary Dictionary of Chinese Language* it is defined as “surname and given name,” but I rather say that name is a culture... In short, naming culture is an important part of traditional cultures. (p. 5, Trans. by the author)

One’s genealogy or family tree does not only record a clansman’s basic pedigree, but may render an account of the source of clansmen’s surnames, clans’ regulations and teachings, important occurrences, local conditions and customs, and clansmen’s

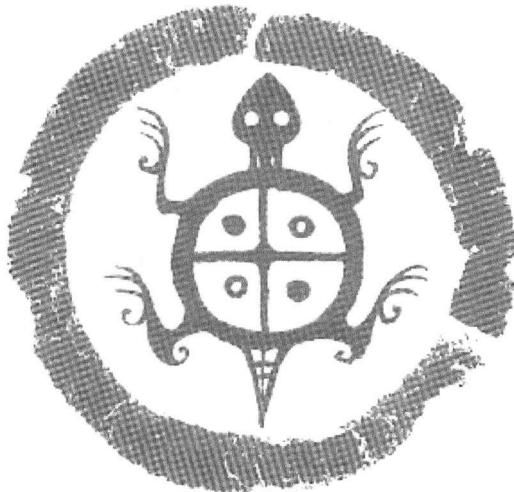
authorized biographies. The following excerpt further delineates the meaning of name and naming in relation to Chinese genealogy (Hunan Provincial Genealogy Studies, 2001):

Therefore, genealogy appears to be the history of a clan, but it in essence involves history, population, economics, mankind, heredity and other sciences; and also it is the main historical source for studying social development. So it can be stated that Chinese genealogy is fragmentary lumps of history, and, in its unique way, it unveils the history and culture of a colony and of a region. (p. 40, Trans. by the author)

My father's family name belongs to the "Huang Clan," a famous and prosperous clan. The *Huang* surname is listed as the eighth surname among the "Chinese One Hundred Family Names" (Shao, 2001, p.10). In ancient times, in northeast China, tribal coalitions consisted of nine foreign regions that used "Bird" as their clan emblem. There lived one tribe, the "Huang foreigners," who wore jade pendants on their chests, which were historically called *peiyu* (佩玉, adorning jade). This effectively traces the "oldest source of Huang surname" (p. 19). Jade pendants in remote ages represented the Huang people and symbolized their clan spirit – "developing and opening." The shape of the jade pendant originates from the oriole bird, though the symbol in the figure below may not resemble a bird but rather a turtle. The emblem then was the base for the form of the written character of *Huang* (compare the "黃" character with the figure below) in the Chinese language, while its pronunciation mimicked the cry of the oriole bird (Du, 2002).

黃

Figure 2.15 Excerpted from Du's *Huang Name* (2002)

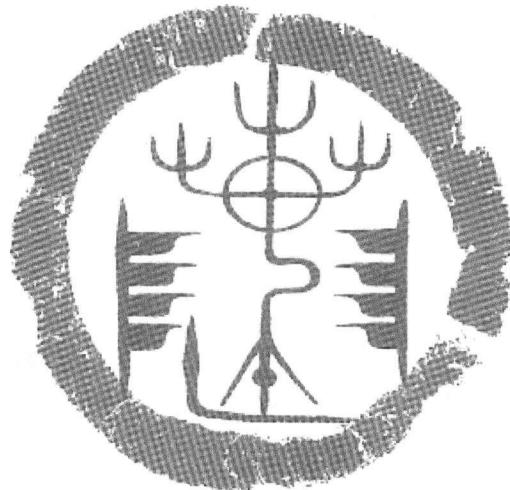


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Huang, the clan name, originally was used to name *Xuanyaun Huang-di* (Xuanyuan Emperor). The totem of the *Huang* name shown above marks the ancient Huang Clan's emblem.

My mother's family name, *Chen*, the fifth of the most popular names (after Li, Wang, Zhang, and Liu), was the name originally given to people who settled the lands in China where the *Fumu* tree grew. The following figure depicts the Chen Clan's totem.

Figure 2.16 Excerpted from Ren's *Chen Name* (2002/2005)



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The Chen Emblem was composed of *Dong* (direction: East) and the ladder of the sun-rising, in which the “East” (*Dong*) indicates that the sun was in the centre of *Fumu*. In Chinese myth *Fumu* (also *Jianmu*) was a tree used to monitor the height of the sun and thus to generate the calendar. The areas where there were *Fumu* were ruled by a tribe called *Chen*; therefore, in ancient times there existed “Chen Barns,” “Chen Stays,” “Chen Land” and so forth, all of which were the places for astronomical observation as well as *Shoudu* (the capital) or *Jingcheng* (capital of a country). The character of the name more or less resembles the symbol above:

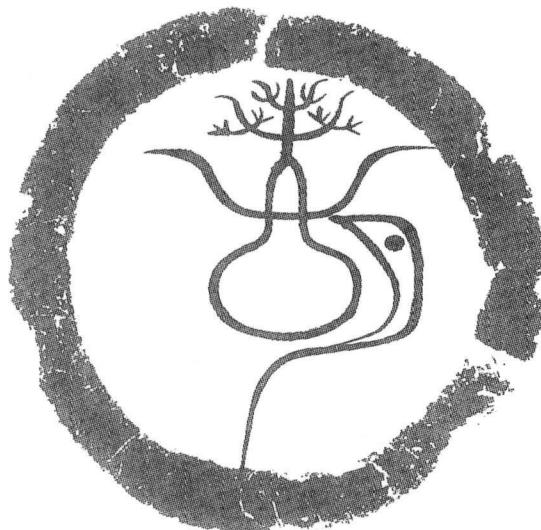
陳

For one more example, my patrilineal grandmother’s family name, *Hu*, originated from the symbol of calabash as the totem of *Hu* tribe as shown in the figure below. The

Chinese character *Hu* (胡) has a resemblance to a calabash and is comprised of two character components: 古 (a left component), a tree called *fusang* on an elevated earthen-stand that observes the height of the sun, and 月 (the right component), meaning the moon.

胡

Figure 17: Excerpted from Ren's *Hu Name* (2002)



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Examining the tradition of Chinese naming culture enriches one's very definitions of tradition and literacy. Employing this enriched vision, I turn now to examine theoretical perspectives on name and literacy.

3 NAME AND LITERACY: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

3.1 A General Question: What's in a Name?

Naming is a basis for self-recognition mediated through language. When one sees or hears one's name, there is the recognition of one's very being and identity, which elicits an awareness of language.

A person's name is not a mere individual or family matter; rather, it speaks of a collective and social interaction.

3.1.1 Name: a type of culture

Vygotsky (1962) points out, “A word without meaning is an empty sound” (p. 120). A person's name is by no means an empty sound. A name is a complex symbol of a person, the connotation of which steps beyond its primary implication. This identification is the avatar of the individual: it draws a particular image and influences one's interactions with others. Linguistically, an individual's name elicits his or her emerging awareness of language. It is an important notion that a name is not simply a symbol of a person, but a linguistic way for that person to find a sense of being and belonging, and thus of a self-identity that is deeply embedded in social and cultural memory and sediment. Consequently, naming is a particular part of “cultural identity and representation” (Hall, 1993, p.392). In defining a name, Yi (2005) perceives name as one type of culture, because every nation has a traditional culture embedded in the sediment

of history. In short, the practice of naming is integral to the traditions of cultures.

Take Chinese naming customs as an example. Traditionally, the practice of Chinese naming stems from the patrilineal principle of kinship, which dictates that the inheritance of the family is to be carried down in the male line from father to son. The family name symbolizes the clan system. It is important for a family to have a male heir to carry on the patrilineal name, although the female descendent of the family traditionally does not change her family name to that of the man she marries. This patrilineal name therefore represents inheritance and succession. In the Chinese tradition, a name denotes a person's self-identity in order to distinguish the blood line in cases of an external-clan marriage (Wang, 2002). The name therefore represents the person's social, cultural, interactive identities. Expectedly, there is a clear distinction between personal names or first names and family names or surnames. In this distinction, family names convey a person's clan and lineage. Luo (2002) describes how family names or surnames originate from a need to distinguish the blood origin of the marriage between the tribes and clans. It is also true that personal names or given names originate from a need to call one another in the tribe.

Chinese names also indicate many other social and cultural aspects of Chinese life, including folk customs and superstitions. As in folklore, one's name is considered to affect one's fate. A superstitious person would take the name of another person as an omen of his or her own fate and act upon that name. This is called "name and fate" (Wang, 2002). For example, in the Northern Song Dynasty, the emperor *Zhao Kuangyin* (赵匡胤) commanded troops to embark on an expedition. Before their departure, a

messenger named *Song Jie* (宋捷) appeared. His surname, “Song” (宋), is a homonym for the word “deliver” or “send,” while his given name, “jie” (捷), means “triumph.” Realizing that the name of the messenger was an auspicious token for their expedition, Emperor *Zhao Kuangyin* granted *Song Jie* a great award.

Chinese naming practice is an extensive art. In addition to choosing a symbol for an individual, personal names are attributed with colours (Yi, 2005), instilling a host of connotations. For Yi, naming children is no doubt a literary creation of the parents. In his book, *The Name Culture of the Chinese and Naming Art*, Yi lists the possible ranges of Chinese naming practices: natural sceneries (astronomy, geology, plants, and animals), and human phenomena (moral self-cultivation, literary allusions, articles of everyday use, and earth and sky). As Chinese name practices and customs ingrained in Chinese culture are too exhaustive to be treated fully here, a few examples must suffice. One finds examples of natural scenery in the following names: 丁川 (*Ding Chuan*, “rivers”), 于海 (*Yu Hai*, “seas”), 山涛 (*Shan Tao*, “great waves”), 王树 (*Wang Shu*, “trees”), 向柳 (*Xiang Liu*, “willows”), 韩麒麟 (*Hang Qilin*, “unicorn”), 聂豹 (*Nie Bao*, “leopard”). In cases of human phenomena one finds such names as 于恕 (*Yu Shu*, “forgiveness”), 姜实节 (*Jiang Shijie*, “moral integrity”), to name a few.

Similar to other traditions, the Chinese naming tradition has taboos that are not to be violated, and there are records of some troublesome consequences if these taboos are broken. Yi (2005) summarizes seven rules found in Chinese naming practice. First, it is necessary to avoid the use of uncommon words for the sake of good communication.

Second, taboo words should be avoided. This includes words that are unrefined or derogatory in meaning such as *dog*, *pig*, *ass*, *fool*, *slyness*, *baldness*, *curse*, *excrement*, and *foul smell*, to name a few. Third, words that have several pronunciations are to be avoided, such as the character 乐, which has two pronunciations as a given name meaning *le* (“happy”) or *yue* (“vocal music”). Fourth, character components comprised of name(s) with repetitive structures should be avoided. Fifth, the reiterative locution in surnames and given names is best to be avoided; that is, given names that resemble surnames in pronunciation are to be avoided. 丁丁(*Ding Ding*), 方芳 (*Fang Fang*), 袁圆 (*Yuan Yuan*) provide examples. Names that are homonyms for taboo words are said to cause serious consequences. For example, there was once a prostitute named *Qi Yaxiu* (齐雅秀). *Yaxiu* (雅秀) means “elegant” and “beautiful.” However, people teased her by frequently calling her name as a homonym for *Qi Xiachou* (脐下臭), meaning a “smelly abdomen.” This hurtful and somewhat vicious calling of her name put her to shame, or so the story goes. *Wang Guojun* (王国均) is another example of homonym naming. *Wang Guojun* achieved the top ten ranking in the highest imperial military examinations. His family name, *Wang* (王), is a homonym for the word “losing” or “loss.” In the given name *Guojun*, “*Guo*” (国) means “state” or “country,” and “*jun*” (均) means “even.” Both family and given names together are homonyms for a phrase meaning “the monarch of a conquered country (亡国君).” When the queen mother heard his name, she shouted out, “It sounds so bad!” Thereafter, this homonymic name became the ruin of the man’s future.

Lastly, Yi (2005) warns that naming should not attempt to follow fashionable words favored at certain political or economic periods. For instance, from the 1920s to 1960s, words were favored such as 建国 (*Jianguo*), meaning “building the state,” and 卫东 (*Weidong*), meaning “safeguard the east (China).” Suddenly, in all regions of China, one could hear *Li Jianguo*, *Zhang Jianguo*, *Chen Jianguo*, *Ma Jianguo*, and *Du Weidong*, *Liu Weidong*, *Zhao Weidong*. As well, particularly in rural areas, it was customary to use words carrying the meaning of common objects, such as *Shitou* (石头, “stone”), and *Douzi* (豆子, “peas”), for this was thought to make the raising of the child easier.

A person’s name does not stand in isolation but exists in a relational context with other social beings; nor does one’s name remain fixed in the “never-complete” identity “production”; instead, a name is always in process and is “always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1993, p. 392) of the social, cultural, and literate milieu. On the occasion when one’s name is enunciated, a particular setting or context is embedded, a particular self-image emerges from the cultural identity and thus a particular cognitive awareness is fostered. One comes to realize and acknowledge his or her name at the intersection of individuals and society.

Since the realization and acknowledgement of one’s name is at the intersection of the personal and the sociocultural, naming is both a public and personal interaction of literacy: a name is a linguistic code that is bestowed by the community as a form of acceptance and celebration of the new member. That individual is later formed and shaped by the designated name. Empowered by their names, individuals begin to

recognize and acquire the power of literacy, using it to affiliate themselves with the larger world and to identify themselves. My Chinese name, *Chen Hong* (陈红), provides an example connoting the name of a Chinese girl and a daughter of a blacklisted family in the era of the Cultural Revolution. My name shaped my understanding of my self-positioning, my self-image, and my acquisition of literacy. This will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

3. 1.2 Name: a symbol of self

Previous theoretical literature and case studies (e.g., Falk, 1975; Seeman, 1980; Carney & Temple, 1993; Green, 1998; Brennen et al., 1996) have shown the intimate relationship of name to identity. Falk (1975) proposes that the answer to “What’s in a name?” may be “Identity’s in a name” (p. 647). In studies of brain injury, researchers (e.g., Carney & Temple, 1993) have argued for the separation of the name from other identity information. Brennen et al. (1996), however, postulate that “There are potential problems for the notion of a separation of name from other information” (p. 95). Seeman (1980), in arguing that name is the choice of identity, posits that the “infant’s characteristics influence the choice to some degree, and, to a degree, a name affects the person who bears it” (p. 136). In addressing the relationship between name and identity, Seeman affirmatively states that “Identity, though complex, can be recoded in a name. The name bears the stamps of the namers’ tradition and their hopes for the child” (p. 136).

Considerable evidence from many paradigms has shown that revealing or calling a person's name always parallels the revealing or calling of information related to one's identity (Schweich, van der Linden, Bredart, Bryer, Nelles, & Schils, 1992; Young, Hay & Ellis, 1985; Brennen et al., 1996). Such instances show that where accurate identity information was recalled concerning a person, there is a parallel recalling of the person's name (Brennen et al., 1996). This shows that a person's name is always associated with his or her identity information.

Drawing from the perspectives of these studies, I propose that naming and acknowledging names is a process of identity formation. Name is one of the primary sites where one's self-image and self-recognition are formed and displayed. Through being so named, called repeatedly, or simply through hearing their names, individuals often form their impression of others based upon how others understand and express their names. In short, there is an interaction of personal and social context, through which individuals consciously shape their own identities and construct meaningful relations in accordance with their literacy needs and abilities.

3. 1.3 Name: a cognitive element of language

Lab studies of naming (e.g., Hay, Young & Ellis, 1991) have provided evidence in favour of semantics. Such studies demonstrate, for example, that once a subject names a face correctly, the subject is also able to offer correct semantic information about the person. Further, data reported by Brennen et al. (1996) and also by Shuren, Geldmacher,

& Heilman (1993), demonstrate that naming remains intact, relative to verbal fluency and spontaneous speech, in cases of dementia. This further demonstrates the link with the reverse process where the challenge of naming inseparably calls upon language recognition.

In studies of naming objects and faces (e.g., Seymour, 1979, Warren & Morton, 1982; Bruce & Young, 1986), evidence has shown that access to a name is dependent on prior access to the semantics associated with the item. In his earlier studies, Morton (1969, 1979) illustrated the models of word recognition, where if one is able to name one item, one should always be able to give supplementary information about it. In this view I contend that names, whether fortuitous or intentional, embody the related cognitive stimuli of language features, as names or naming are formulated within a set of linguistic elements codifying characteristics of sound, rhythms, and semantics. In a study of the relationship between identifying an item, name, and information, this feature is considered as “hierarchical organization” referred to as semantics: namely, name sequence (SNS) (Brennen et al., 1996).

3. 1.4 Name: a force in the world

The name of the person, once bestowed, becomes the entity of the being of the name-holder as well as the marking adornment of that being. Similarly, naming, whether symbolic or indicative, is perceived not as an object but as a force acting in the world. The impact of such a force is integral to the formation of the person’s ideology, his or her

shaping of identity and incipient language awareness. In this view, a person's name or naming is not strictly a family or personal matter. Not only does the name act as a symbol of a person or as a carry-on of the family, it also serves as a medium of interaction with the outer world. This view of the functions of one's name is similarly found in Knoblauch (1990), who observes that "Literacy never stands alone... as a neutral denoting of skills" (p. 75). This force of the name, as a public medium of communication as well as personal signification, differentiates, merges, and categorizes the name-holder and his or her relationship with others in a rich variety of social, cultural, political and historical situations. Name is a force in a world, empowering all who forge and wield it. Name or naming therefore provides a tangible basis for discussion. Name recognition and processing lend a significant contribution to one's literacy performance.

3. 2 A Brief Glance: What Is Literacy?

Literacy is a need and an effort for an individual to "take control of his world" (Freire, 1984), to construct his identity; literacy enables one to "claim a sense of agency – one that encompasses a sense of confidence and self-worth" (Yagelski, 2000).

3. 2.1 How does Literacy correlate?

Before addressing the indispensable relevance of a person's name and the relation of name to literacy acquisition, I would like to question the nature of literacy and how literacy correlates with the essential aspects of determining and transforming oneself.

Some earlier assumptions, as Lunsford, Moglen, and Slevin (1990) point out, view literacy as being “simply and neutrally defined as the ability to read and write” (p.3). Similarly, Yagelski (2000) observes how “In the popular mind – and in the minds of many educators – literacy is a set of basic reading and writing skills possessed by individuals” (p. 8). According to this assertion, it is not to be influenced by race, gender, or class. It will not be “acquired outside the contexts of compelling personal and social purposes” (Lunsford et al., 1990, p. 3). Lunsford and others, however, contend that literacy, as “context-dependent,” is “inextricably embedded in culture” (p. 3). The ability to read and write is not simply a linguistic issue, nor does a person’s name serve solely as one’s personal symbol. In referring to both illiteracy and literacy education being inevitably political, Freire (1985) has written, “illiteracy is not a strictly linguistic or exclusively pedagogical or methodological problem. It is political, as is the very literacy through which we try to overcome illiteracy” (p. 10). The same, I would argue, holds true for naming.

3. 2.2 Literacy: beyond reading and writing skills

Freire (1984, 1985) has put forth a broader view of literacy by rejecting narrow conceptions of literacy as a set of discrete rudimentary skills. Freire and Macedo (1987) call for “a view of literacy as a form of cultural politics” (p. viii). In their analysis, literacy becomes a set of practices that function to “either empower or disempower people” (p. viii) -- that is, “a concept of literacy that transcends its etymological content”

(p. viii). They claim that

(L)iteracy cannot be reduced to the treatment of letters and words as a purely mechanical domain. We need to go beyond this rigid comprehension of literacy and begin to view it as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general milieu in which learners travel. (p.viii)

Freire has argued for the political implication of literacy and the social self of reading and writing. He has addressed the dialectical relationship of the world and the word, in the contention that the world, never static, is constructed through language; it is constantly in the process of being made through the word. For Freire (1984), to be fully literate is to be critically literate. Fully literate beings are able to take control of their worlds. Therefore, literacy is an ongoing undertaking to become “fully human” (p. 33). This full humanness is embodied in one’s name as both personal signification and humanity, the latter of which is something Freire suggests oppressed peoples must work to regain.

Literacy also encompasses, as Jerrie (1988) has conceptualized, our multi-sensory ways of coming to awareness. Royster (1990) emphasizes the relation between the functioning skills and humanistic aspects of literacy: “Literacy is the skill, the process, the practice of ‘reading’ and being articulate about ‘men and nations’, which is more than just simplistic isolated decoding and encoding skills” (p.107). Collins (1993) regards literacy not as a basic skill, but as “an essential aspect of social order and disorder” (p.

180). Such notions of literacy, in concert with those of Freire, clearly demonstrate the dialectical relations between name (a way of self-identifying and self-knowing) and literacy acquisition (the effort to be articulate about men and nations).

3. 2.3 Literacy: “implies individual and collective possibility”

Yagelski (2000) has argued for a conception of literacy that rests on the notion of participation in discourses that shape our lives, a notion that “implies individual and collective possibility” (p. 9). From this view, names or naming and literacy have an intrinsic relationship in the interplay of individual and collective possibility. No one can deny that a particular name is the symbol for a particular person. Yagelski proposes that literacy is “at heart an effort to construct a self within ever-shifting discourse, in order to participate in those discourses” (p. 9). Based on post-structuralism in analyses of language and discourse, Yagelski posits a conception of literacy “as a local act of self-construction within discourse” (p. 9). Literacy and literature do more than encourage reading and writing, they help us shape and reinvent our identities.

In his forward to Yagelski’s book, *Literacy Matters: Writing and reading the social self* (2000), Victor Villanueva states that literacy becomes a “simple (or even complex) cognitive will and effort,” and “the single, key path to economic well-being and self-actualization” (p. x). Again, however, every culture and subculture finds its own definition of literacy (Yagelski, 2002; Knoblauch, (1991); Brodkey, 1986; Heath, 1983; Schriner & Cole, 1980). In addition, Brodkey, following Ohmann (1985) and Resnick &

Resnick (1977/1980), have observed how “the history of the word ‘literacy’ in a single society shows remarkable variation over time” (p. 47).

3. 2.4 Literacy: reading the world

Human development and growth, based on understanding both one’s own experience and the social world, is seen in part as the actual act of reading literacy texts (Freire, 1983) and as a reading of the real world. Freire contends, “Reading the world thus precedes reading the word and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world” (p. 5). Thus literacy and reality are actively intertwined. Further, Freire states, “writing a new text must be seen as one means of transforming the world” (p. 5). In transforming the world, we weave our reading and understanding of the world to write ourselves into being. In exploring a writing process, we begin to own language because we “own some piece of reality that feels worth describing” (Malinowitz, 1990, p. 161).

Taylor’s (1998) analysis of the relationship of skill and comprehension, use and form, and similarly, Cazden’s (1980) performance and competence, have laid a solid basis for understanding the reciprocal relatedness of comprehension and form. My experiences support this notion that it is “not skills” that “precede comprehension” but “use that precedes form” or performance that precedes competence (Cazden, 1980). Similarly, individuals experience or explain the uses of their names before they learn the form of written language.

To conclude this discussion of literacy, I would like to quote the following words of Freire and Macedo (1987) from *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World*:

The act of learning to read and write has to start from a very comprehensive understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do before reading the words. Even historically, human beings first changed the world, secondly proclaimed the world and then wrote the words... Human beings did not start naming A! F! N! They started by freeing the hand, grasping the world. (p. xiii)

3. 3 Kinship: How Does A Name Form Identity and Shape Literacy?

Naming or name is the first act to inform our understanding of literacy and to shape our identity in the political, social and cultural contexts that restrain or enable the realization of literacy.

3. 3.1 Name and its epistemological status

Name or naming is effectively an initial way to situate a person in epistemological, ideological, sociocultural, and political contexts of literacy. As such, our names or being named becomes an onset of literacy, from which point we reluctantly or willingly, consciously or unintentionally, acquire skills in constructing our identities in existential situations. We may willingly formulate a writing in order to enable ourselves to “claim a sense of agency – one that encompasses a sense of confidence and self-worth” (Yagelski, 2000, p. 121). Writing our names is an act that is part of becoming “fully human,” to use Freire’s phrase. In our striving to construct a self by exercising some measure of control

over our social, economic, and political existence in the face of “institutional and financial obstacles,” as well as of social and political perils, we struggle “to accept” ourselves even as we hope for “acceptance from others” (p.161). Consequently, we write ourselves into social and political discourses that themselves have positioned our existential status and needs.

While it provides an outlet for individual identification, naming is also a form of connection existing within and positioning us in social discourses. As Boshier (1968) observes, one’s attitude toward one’s self is related to one’s attitude towards one’s name. Naming is thus a form of interactive discourse where names indicate a multitude of individual, social, and cultural aspects of life.

3. 3.2 Name and Identity

Seeman (1980) observes: “Although identity is a complex concept, many of its attributes can be telescoped into a single morpheme, the name given to a child at birth” (p. 129). Name has thus become the place “where linguistics, anthropology and psychology meet” (p. 129). Name or naming has always been a primary family activity, one central to the Chinese community as well as to other cultures and traditions. When I was born, as is generally the case with a new-born baby, my mother and father chose a name for me, in part to connect with me emotionally and to facilitate communication. When I was an infant, I am told, I was called *Meimei* (“little sister”) or *Sanmei* (“Sister Three,” as I was the third child in the family), as terms of endearment. Later on, formal

names, more or less falling into the traditional ways of Chinese naming customs, were given to register my existential status. From then on, I was encoded, deliberately and yet in some ways arbitrarily, with linguistic symbols. The name given to me encompasses the cultural heritage, historical and contemporary intention of my parents.

It is only natural that when we are given our names we know little about the title that empowers and forms us and delimits what we are to be. In addition, we are unconscious of how our names bring us to awareness of whom and what we are as well as our possibilities for the future. Nevertheless, when a name is bestowed one must live up to that name, thus living into one's identity; as Jayaraman (2005) states, "individual identity is reflected in personal names and surnames" (p. 476).

However, Hall (1993) points out "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" (p. 392). As previously discussed, in the never-complete production of identity a person's name, although always 'fixed' and individual, forms a particular part of one's cultural identity and representation (Hall, 1993). Naming thus provides a process for the incessant production of identity, and for recursive literacy acquisition and development. Each time a name is articulated, a particular context is then situated, and a particular self outcrops, reflective of a particular cultural identity.

3.3.3 Name and Literacy

A person's name, as stated previously, is a symbol for self, forming a basic identification expressed by linguistic symbols. The name of the person stays inherently

intertwined with his or her literacy understanding and development and becomes an interpersonal process of functional utility, which facilitates the development of a “meta-linguistic awareness” (Ehri, 1978) of written language forms. This inherent relationship between name and literacy can be delineated, as literacy and defining literacy, according to Brodkey (1986), “are explored as tropes which invariably express a social relationship between self and other” (p. 47).

Defining literacy brews a social relationship between the literate (“a literate self”) and the illiterate (“an illiterate other”); that is, literacy is to be used “to justify or rectify the social inequity” (p. 47). Name is the embodiment of this “self.” Consequently, the definitions of literacy denote the cultural terms by which a person lives. Name or naming, in my view, has become a precondition for identity formation and literacy acquisition. Name imbues the person with voice in the shaping and growing of his or her awareness of language.

Lofty (1990) observes that learning to write “is influenced by students’ socio-linguistic backgrounds, specifically by their oral language” (p 39). Speaking and hearing one’s name is an act of distinctive oral language in which the influence of cultural frameworks is as fundamental as learners’ modes of perceiving themselves in language and discourse. Since language is a shaped medium (Johnstone, 2001), literacy mediates one’s identity, which remains clear and distinct, but which also flows and interacts with others. Consequently, the reading and writing of names is introduced to the child as an essential feature of his or her language, which joins with speaking and hearing

the name in the association with families and society.

Hall (1993) has stated, “We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific” (p. 392). He continues, “What we say is always in ‘context’, positioned” (p. 392). In such contexts and positioning, the person’s name is employed as the inception signal of language forced by its own nature that solicits the person to be cognizant of the patterns of language that one uses to contain thoughts and perspectives, although such a frame of cognition can be fragile, evanescent, and transient. Application of a person’s name becomes a means of allowing one to learn words and their meanings through the socially significant and literate activities in which the individual is engaged. This is because “names are the first words most children write” (Green, 1998, p. 226). For example, children are asked to write their names in different forms and colours, which is a form of self-identification and an early act of literacy.

Taylor (1998) states that

(I)t was within this context that their awareness of written language forms developed. It was a whole language process in which listening, talking, reading, and writing grew as interrelated forms of a communicative system. (p. 76)

This view is also supported by Hildreth’s (1936) earlier statement that “Maturation in name writing parallels speech refinement, refinement in perception...” (p. 302).

When considering literacy in a broader context by juxtaposing the experiences of families with perspectives of literacy gained from other contexts, I agree with what

Taylor (1998) observes about the best development of literacy in the relational contexts which are meaningful to the young child. A child's name is intrinsic to his or her experience of literacy. In her study *This is My Name*, Connie Green (1998) observes, "learning to write their names can be highly motivating for preschoolers" (p. 226), such as the sign-in process upon entering class at elementary school. Indeed, those who have worked with children in the emergent literacy phase will know that learning to write one's name is often the first act of literacy.

Thus, the naming experience of literacy is part of "the very fabric of one's life" (Taylor, 1998, p. 87). As Southgate (1972) notes, learning to read and write one's name as a young child is one way of belonging and knowing in addition to a way of living. As such, literacy and the mediation of naming experience illustrate that a child's life is encompassed by the name or being named, forming an integral part of one's environment. As previously discussed, the recognition and acceptance of the name is viewed as a social process in which a child's literate experiences are mediated through their incessant interactions with situational contexts. Taylor (1998) delineates and emphasizes this point as follows:

(L)iteracy is viewed, on another level, as a filter through which the social organization of the everyday lives of the families is accomplished... It enables them to build new social connections as well as to establish new environmental relationships. (p.26)

As integral members of the social organization, children use their names as one medium

through which they can master their surroundings. And the meanings of their names lie in the “inventive constructions of literacy in their daily activities” (Taylor, 1998, p. 26). This form of literacy acquisition gives the children both “status and identity” (p. 87).

Recognizing name and self, in interaction with relational contexts, either individual and collective or social and political, contributes to the basic and primary steps of such interplay. I relate this notion to Sheldon’s (2004) view about the way in which human beings are understood through their various interactions and relational ways:

Some of these ways focus on a person’s emotional life and experience, others on cognitive growth and the creation of the meaning; others on the development of identity, others on positive relations between the person and his or her intimates and community, others on positive functioning or efficient action, and others on the attainment of rewards and reinforcements. (p. 11)

Hence, the naming process has demonstrated the intrinsic correlative context, which enables children “to use print (words) in the mediation of their relationship” (Taylor, 1998, p. 93). As one of the ways of facilitating literate learning, name or naming provides social settings that “initiate, absorb, and synthesize” the literate influences in the person’s environment (Leichter, 1978, p. 240).

Congruent with Taylor’s (1998) notion that literate pursuits are “an integral part of the working routine” (p. 26), I posit that naming is part of such a routine. Similar to the routines that accomplish daily tasks in which “writing plays an important role” (p. 29), both at work and at home, naming is present in conversation, communication, and other daily activities. One writes one’s name, records friends’ names and telephone numbers.

We write others' names and ultimately our own. Such activities constitute simple and routine activities involving reading and writing. A person's name is used on many levels in his or her daily life and "all conduct" (Taylor's, 1998, p. 39), which is, as Dewey (1922) states, "interaction between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social" (p. 11). Therefore, writing names, similarly hearing or speaking of names, is one of the ways in which individuals remind themselves of their social status and relationships with others.

3. 3.4 Name, identity, literacy, and social and cultural contexts

Each time a name is called upon, or enunciated, or applied in written form, it is embedded in a social, political, cultural, or linguistic context. Literate experiences are always mediated in different ways through the "interplay of personal biographies and educative styles" (Taylor, 1998, p. 12). For example, while speaking of the social humiliation of my experiences as a child in the Cultural Revolution, I immediately internalized what I encountered when others put my name on my back, on the blackboard, or when my name was abusively called upon together with my fathers' debased name. This very realization of being and knowing also allowed me to internalize my name and relate it to my social identity, to what I read and what I was to write in the accepted way of the outer world. The recognition and conservation of my daily literate experiences with my name and the names of my family members during the Cultural Revolution were manifest in the repetitive linkage between my personal interactions with the collective.

This “implicit linking” (p. 23) was also evident in the saying and writing of our names in culturally situated settings.

Language can influence our growth; it can lead us somewhere else, to the place where we live, to the world, and to the world as it might be. Certainly, it leads us to “somewhere else,” to where we begin our names and stories, to where our lives begin and grow. Further, practices and presentations of our names always implicate the positions and images from which we speak and write. I identified this earlier as the position of enunciation (Hall, 1993). Thus name and naming are designated in the social and cultural context of literacy, wherein they play a significant role as an essential part of “localized identity” and human carriers (Schweitzer & Golovko, 1997, P. 167).

Personal names, as symbols of identity, have played a significant role in the social and cultural context of literacy. Our names are signatures of what and who we are. Our names – how we say or act upon them – embody our existing beings, our identities, our incipient cognition of literacy and discourse. Also, our names are a source power. Each time our names are called or written, the self is realized in a social and literate context: we exist in relation to others and we are able to express our desires and needs as known and named entities.

We learn to use our names in mediating our social relationships; this comes in part out of a need to explore the environment in which we live. Scribner and Cole (1978) write, “Social organization creates the conditions for a variety of literate activities” (p. 35). An example of this is the lives of those blacklisted people who met the standard of

the oppressors in China during the Cultural Revolution. Their names led them to a full awareness of their lives, their activities, their thoughts, and their feelings because they were blacklisted and marginalized from the community, and the larger world. Being subjugated and oppressed, some of them expressed themselves through silence, some through rebellion, some expressed their anger in words, pleading for redemption of their debased names – thus their demeaned selves and demeaned existence. “Condemning the injustice and the inequities of racist, sexist, and economic oppression” (Royster, 1990, p. 108), they used their writing to justify themselves, to reinvent their personal identities, or to “define and label relationships with the society...to respond to power, and to offer solutions to pressing problems” (p. 108).

In exploring these facets of naming and literacy, the questions that constantly arose were: 1) What are the social and cultural roots and memories associated with ones' personal names / surnames? 2) To what extent does one's name and the way in which one's name is accepted or rejected in social contexts influence literacy acquisition and identity formation?

In the subsequent chapter, I discuss how I, a subject of oppression, experienced my name in the context of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution. I speak of the way in which I was marginalized and taunted, along with my family, and of the way in which I eventually reclaimed my self, my self-image, my identity, through the empowering force of literacy. I articulate my vision of reality, of knowing, and of becoming in the face of the impositions of my suppressors.

This way of knowing and becoming allowed me to write myself into being, and by doing so, “to claim creative and intellectual power over information and experience (Royster, 1990, p. 107). Royster (1990) describes how those who resisted fighting against the ruling class wrote in powerful language, rationally ordered words, and conjured compelling images through their writing. I, as a six-year-old daughter of those who were blacklisted, wrote to *Renmin Ribao* (“People’s Daily”), China’s superior daily newspaper, in an attempt to release my father from jail: my letter strongly demonstrated my understanding of what it meant to live and to claim my identity.

4 THE NAME AS A LITERATE ASSIMILATION AND SEDIMENT

4. 1 The Weight of Our Names

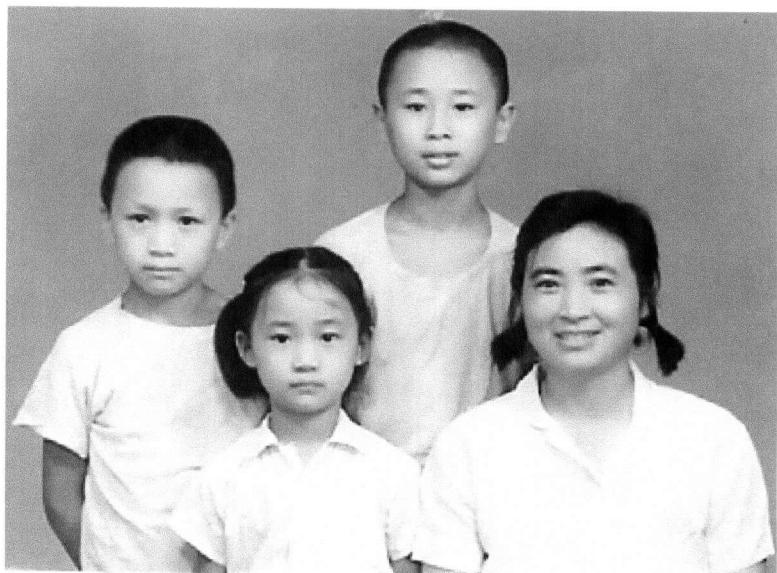
In the oppressive regime of China, there was a distortion of naming, of values, of language, and of life. I consciously remember my name radiating as a distant sound, forming itself into a tangible essence. The weight of the linguistic sediment of being called upon and having my name written in characters has hardly diminished through the ensuing years.

4. 1.1 “Big-Character Posters”(大字报) on the Wall

My family, upon our return to Neijiang city, was immediately immersed in the events at the start of China’s unprecedented Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966. Two years before, my father had been transferred to Sichuan Teachers’ University in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan, to teach in the Department of Mathematics. He had taken me along with him because my mother was unable to leave her job; thus my two brothers remained with my mother while I, a three-year-old preschooler, accompanied my father. After two long years of unbearable separation, we returned to Neijiang to reunite with my mother and brothers. Our family of five lived in a two-room apartment in the dormitory compound of the First People’s Hospital of Neijiang District, where my mother worked as a gynecologist and obstetrician. The Cultural Revolution swept into every corner of China. Our family, like other families in China (in particular, the intellectual

ones), did not escape the ordeal. The catastrophe that befell us was forceful and shocking.

Figure 4.1 My mother with us three siblings; my father was sent away to attend “Study Classes of Mao Zedong Thought” (1966)



Source: personal photo collection

It happened one day in 1967 when my mother was away in Ziyang County to carry out the “Four Cleansing Campaign.” Three of us siblings were with my father, who was teaching at Neijiang High School. I was about six and my two brothers were eight and twelve. One early morning I woke to fetch breakfast for the family from the hospital dinning hall. It was a fairly long walk from our dormitory compound to the dining hall, passing the road toward the gate of the hospital, through the Outpatient Department, which included the hospital Emergency Room, Pharmacy, Injection Room and so forth, then through the gate of the Inpatient Department, with its buildings for internal medicine, gynecology and obstetrics, and finally arriving at the surgical building which

led downward via steep stone steps to the dining area for the hospital staff. This meal-fetching trip would almost take us on a complete tour through the First People's Hospital.

I was alone on this occasion. When I was about to pass the Outpatient Department facing the entrance of the hospital, my eyes fell upon two "big character posters" (大字报) conspicuously plastered on the wall under the Outpatient Injection Room Window: "Pluck out Chen Xueyuan's Counterrevolutionary Husband, Huang Yongfeng!" "Down with Traitor, Kuomintang Special Agent, Huang Yongfeng!" Over my father's name "Huang Yongfeng," I detected a bold scarlet boorish cross (董永生) indicating exclusion and elimination. The words on the posters appeared so blazing as to blind my eyes, particularly the "big character" names of my mother and father. I felt as if I had been struck in the face. Why was my father's name published here in my mother's working unit?" I could not discern why. As I passed the poster slogans, a pang of faint and fear seized my body. Terror and humiliation engulfed me, a girl of six years old. My legs became as heavy as lead and my feet could not move, as if they were weighted to the ground. My eyes avoided the crossed-out name of my father, which seemed too heinous even to glance at. The road to the dining hall appeared long that morning. At every step I felt eyes upon me like the remorseless sting of wasps. I felt so ashamed that I lowered my head, low enough that my chin was tucked against my throat. I only dared shuffle my feet to move forward step by step and in this way managed to drag myself through the gates and passages. I do not remember how I retrieved our breakfast that

morning, but I do recall that from that day onward the sight of my father's name horrified me whenever and wherever I heard or saw it. Returning to the supportive environment of our family dormitory, I broke the news to my father and brothers. My father, a stoical man, remained silent and undeterred.

The naming of my parents on the wall posters and the manner in which I came upon these names that day was a determining moment in my identity. What happened in the meal-fetching trip that morning – and what would happen in the days and years to follow – enforced, extended, and uncommonly shaped what I, a six-year-old, had habitually known about names, particularly my father's name. Reading the names on the posters compelled me to further identify my parents and myself with and within our social group. As discussed, a name is one of the primary sites where one's self-image and self-recognition are formed and displayed. That morning's encounter with my family name led me to a growing awareness of my surroundings and the world, which recalls a description by Freire (1985): it was a moment "through which the self learns and changes" (p. 6). This viewing or reading of the world allowed me to "perceive and comprehend the seemingly invisible text" of my life (Fishman, 1990, p. 34).

As mentioned earlier, names function as a public medium of communication as well as a personal signification that differentiates, blends, and ranks the individual who bears the name. It was there and then that I entered into a frame of reference which classified me alongside my parents as one who was unlike others and viewed as an outsider. Seeing my father's name that day became the initial stimulus to situate me in the epistemological,

ideological, sociocultural, and political contexts of literacy. This moment marked the point at which I, reluctantly or willingly, consciously or unintentionally, began to construct my own identity in direct response to literacy experiences. What I came to understand and accept illustrates Freire's point that one has read the world before one reads words. In this fully literate context one must read the world and the words together. The relation is dialectical; one interprets the meaning of the words about the world and, in turn, one uses the words to continue to read the world (1983).

When seeing or hearing my father's name in the ensuing years, I consciously reflected on how others used his name in the posters – a social image, an image of a “traitor,” a “counterrevolutionary,” and a “special agent” who was an outcast. In his foreword to *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (Freire and Macedo, 1987), Condord observes:

Meaning is thus present from the outset as learners “problematize the existential.” In sketches of a primitive hunter or of a squalid kitchen, or in response to a bowl of water or other codifications, they name what they see and remember, identifying and interpreting the significance of what they see. (p. xvi)

4. 1.2 “Criticism and Denouncement Meeting” (批斗会)

One early morning, there was a rapping on the door and in burst four men from the Workers Propaganda Teams of Neijiang High School. A man of middle years in an olive green uniform (绿军装) stepped forward. I hid myself behind my mother's back, tugging

at her sleeves, numb with fright. Instantly I heard a voice, almost shouting, bellowing at my father: “Huang Yongfeng, you have to go with us!” Upon hearing my father’s name, “Huang Yongfeng,” my head pounded and a tremor began to travel through my body. Indiscriminately, the men bundled my father with an oversized rough rope and dragged him away with no words as to where they were taking him. The incident occurred so suddenly that none of us was able to utter a sound.

Later on, outside in the street, someone was shouting, “Ten thousand people are going to the ‘criticism and denouncement meeting’ in Meijiashan!” At this my eldest brother, Huang Shudu, grabbed me by the hand and ran out of our dormitory room while my second eldest brother, eight-year-old Huang Ming, followed behind. We dashed directly toward Mount Meijia Square (*Meijiashan*), arriving there out of breath, amid a crowd that was already densely packed.

From a distance I gazed at my father’s hunched back and his bent head, with a large board hanging over his chest. We managed to squeeze in sideways near the front. Looking more closely, I saw my father kneeling on ground covered with coal cinder and broken glass. I tugged at Shudu’s right arm firmly as if to lift myself so as to not allow my feet to touch the ground. My father’s arms were pinned behind his back. His face was waxen and his head was forcibly pushed down. A huge wooden board was slung over his neck, on which “Traitor Huang Yongfeng” was written in black characters bearing a red cross over the centre of his name (叛徒 ). The ostentatious strokes of the characters behind the bold scarlet cross deeply engraved themselves in my mind. Whenever I see similar

characters, I still tremble and feel pain in my chest.

Two men came over. Standing behind his back they pressed my father's head down just as he struggled to position his head upright. The time had come to denounce him. A bushy-browed man pushed my father so hard that his knees dug deep into the ground. At this instant people in the crowd surged and pushed forward. My father disappeared from view and my brother Huang Shudu pushed through the crowd anxiously. I followed him in an attempt to join them. We pushed through, near enough to see that both of my father's knees were bleeding. Another man, wry-necked, stood beside my father, frantically wielding a sheet of paper between his stubby fingers and shouting at the top of his lungs, "Huang Yongfeng is a traitor and special agent of Kuomintang! Huang Yongfeng is a dual counterrevolutionary! And his wife Chen Xueyuan is a rich peasant's daughter!" The crowd roared a deafening slogan: "Leniency to those who confess their crimes and severity to those who refuse to!"

My father quickly demurred, blurting out, "I'm not a traitor! I'm not a ..." but the moment he started to protest, his head and torso were violently pressed so as to nearly make contact with the ground. I tried to reach to my brothers, but in vain. Frightened and in pain, I almost cried out, managing to smother my sobs. I wished that my father would say "Yes, but I am sorry." Like the previous *shushu* (uncle), he would then no longer be kneeling on the broken glass. My father never said yes. I did not understand at the time; however, I knew that he must be right. I only knew that had he said yes, he would not have suffered any pain. Without my brothers, I opted to hide behind a *puopuo* (old

woman) in fear. Again and again the vulgar voice shouted, “Huang Yongfeng, bow your head and confess!” Each time, the crowd roared in unison, engulfing my entire body and mind. I then began to feel as if many eyes were riveted on me, as if it were my name, “Chen Hong,” being called out as Huang Yongfeng’s daughter.

The criticism and denouncement continued until noon. The fierce sun beat down on the seething crowd in the sports field of Meijiashan Square. At the end of the day, my father limped home, drained and pale, and bruised all over. But his face, though livid with exhaustion, radiated smiles of resignation. My mother laid him in bed, washed the blood from his knees, and bandaged the wounds. None of us cried. We said little. That evening, my mother cooked my father’s favorite food and warmed a small cup of Chinese liquor with deep fried peanuts. Late in the evening, I heard mother say that according to a Chinese folk remedy, a little child’s urine was an effective remedy for bruises and injury of sinews and bones. It would help stimulate the circulation of blood causing muscles and joints to relax. Her words meant to comfort us, although she did not follow the custom in administering care. My heart ached when I saw my father’s sunken eyes, his waxen and yellow face under the dim yellow light of the inner room of our dormitory apartment.

Reading my world thus continued. It was there, among the crowd near my abject father, under the blazing high-noon sun, that I felt a vague sense of self in hearing my father’s name. An image of a debased, demeaned, distorted human being was framed in my little mind. I subconsciously connected my name, Chen Hong, with the terrifying image of a tortured and demeaned child, daughter of traitor Huang Yongfeng. Looking

back, I now see that reading the world comes in many forms: viewing and listening, in silence and in sounds, and being inwardly focused and exposed to the external world. The abject person is at the centre of various forces, some internal and self-defining, and others that are external, which in this case include the political ideology of a revolutionary society.

Thus, our names became socially significant both in our lives and in the lives of our relations. Our identities were shaped, constantly shifted, and completed through our interactions in communal contexts. As illustrated in the preceding account, with the understanding of a six-year-old, I could not help but wonder. What I witnessed concerned my father, who was a kind and loving man. I could not reconcile this memory of my father with the distorted image of his present condition. A striking conflict arose inside my heart. How could I put the two together: my dear father and this other man who was labeled with a horrifying-looking name? This disturbed and contradictory image influenced my future literacy practices and became a force acting in my world. In the ensuing years, I wrote my name and my father's name, with powerful strokes. These experiences flowed into my writing and all my self-reflections.

4. 1.3 Slogans on the Blackboard

One morning in early 1967, three of us siblings attended school. Unlike other days, I was reluctant to step onto the playground of the school, fearful of how my classmates would gaze upon me or what they would say about the 'criticism meeting' or my father

and mother, who were held in the hospital the night before. There were many kids whose parents were also working in the First People's Hospital of Neijiang District. Walking to school, I wished the road was longer than it was. But that morning, the road to school seemed unbelievably short, and the traffic was not heavy at all.

The sun was rising quite early in the morning, at around 7 o'clock. The air of the morning was crisp. The stretch of the familiar road that morning was tedious and monotonous. I walked toward my classroom, Class 2, Grade 2, located on the first floor of the rusted orange brick school building. As soon as I pushed the door ajar, before I could grasp what had happened, before I had had time to see the laughing stares of my classmates, I was struck on the top of my head by something falling from above. It was a bamboo dust-pan which was mischievously placed on the top of the classroom door. I dared not raise my eyes and instead lowered my head as far as it could possibly go. I entered the room. My face blazed red. I was ashamed. Having being supported by my parents' optimistic spirit, I had believed I was brave enough to come to school. But this was far beyond my strength to bear. I dragged my heavy feet to the last row where my seat was waiting. My good friend, Zhang Yuhong (张玉红), who shared the same desk with me, sat in silence when I seated myself beside her. Her parents worked in the same hospital with my mother. We were the tallest in class, so we were assigned to sit at the same desk and to share a bench.

Figure 4.2 My best friend Zhang Yuhong (right) and I, wearing Chairman Mao's badge on the chest (1966)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.3 It is the year when the incident happened to me; my classmate Ding Yun (right) and I (1967)



Source: personal photo collection

The staring eyes from all directions of the room stung me. I was at the edge of breaking down, but swallowed my sobs. Thinking of my parents' words, I told myself that crying out would be the last thing I should do in front of others. But I still couldn't raise my head. The other students clamored and sneered, and then someone yelled, "Huang Yongfeng, Traitor, Huang Yongfeng, Special Agent! Chen Xueyuan, Traitor's Laopu!" Each time my parents' names were uttered along with the words "Traitor and Special Agent," it seemed as though my heart was poked by a needle. The shouting was accompanied by a noisy thumping on desks. I lost the track of time. The discernable odd contrast of the road to school being too short earlier and the shouting being too long now made the situation unbearable. I wished the class would start soon. "Start soon, please!" I murmured in my heart. But my wishes dropped into a bottomless pit.

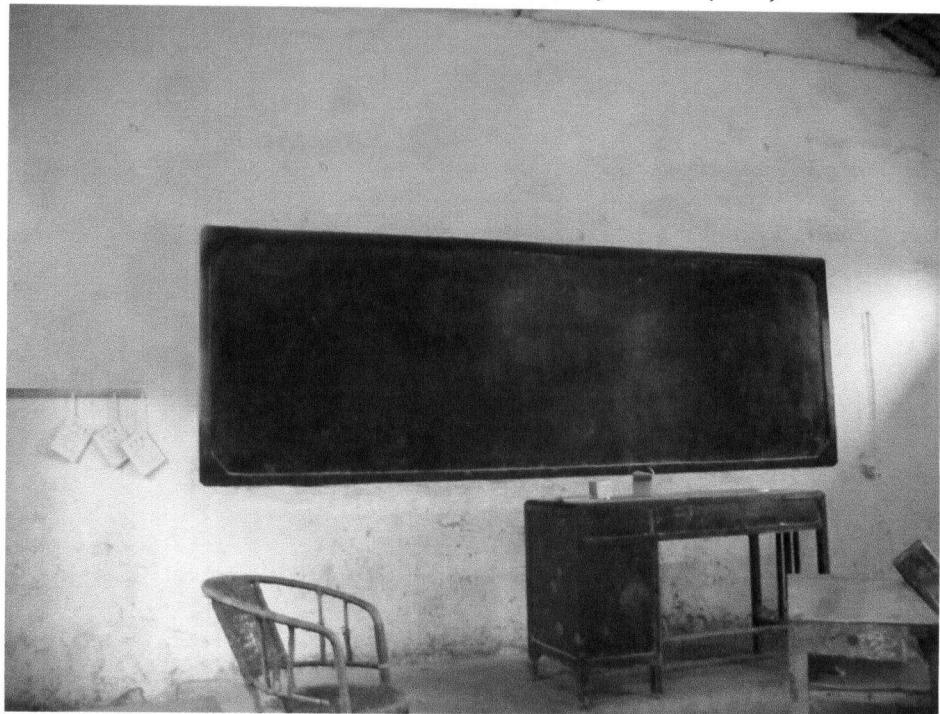
I had to do something to alleviate this *stigma*, so I raised my eyes and saw the commotion in the room. Some boys sat on the desks facing the last row and stomped their feet on the benches; the girls sat at the benches, turning their heads toward me as if waiting for me to respond. I looked beyond them and saw our teacher Guan Juliang sitting in the front of the classroom. She was not standing on the platform. As she was pregnant, her body was quite swollen. Finally the bell rang, but still the class did not start. At this moment, I caught sight of some oversized chalk words on the blackboard: "Down with Chen Hong's father, Traitor Huang Yongfeng! Down with Chen Hong's mother, Rich Peasant's Daughter Chen Xueyuan!" My father's name was overlaid with a cross; so was my mother's. Seeing my name standing along with my father's and mother's crossed-out

names, I felt as if I had been stripped of clothes.

The class was still engulfed in riotous jeering and our teacher was making no effort to erase the large character slogans on the blackboard. Guan was once my father's student in Neijiang Teachers School and had told me that my father was an outstanding teacher with great talents. I had been so fond of Teacher Guan. I liked her eyes. Her impressive facial expressions and cadenced tone when telling us stories had made me mimic her secretly. Why did she suddenly become so indifferent and serious? The class bell had rung minutes ago. I felt a sense of responsibility and, gathering my strength, I walked toward the blackboard. I picked up the chalk brush and wiped off the chalk slogans.

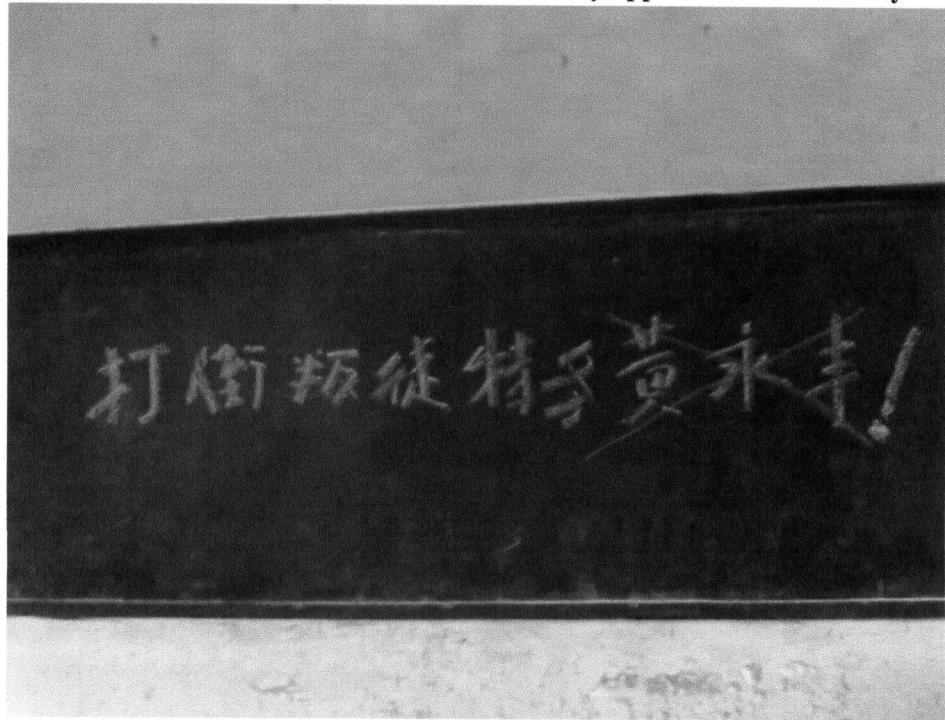
As soon as I finished wiping them off the blackboard, I found it difficult to turn back and step down from the teaching platform. By then tears were welling up in my eyes and I was afraid that they would roll down my face. I waited for a few seconds, facing the blackboard and wishing everything would disappear, just for a few seconds. I wanted to step into the blackboard and vanish from those glares and disdainful faces. There was a momentary silence. I knew I was standing there too long; the silence signaled me to go back to my seat. I turned, finally, stepped down from the platform, and walked through the middle aisle that divided the room into two. At this point our teacher stood up and stepped slowly onto the platform to begin our math class. The class was unusually quiet that morning.

Figure 4.4 An old classroom in Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School (2005)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.5 A similar blackboard in Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School (2005). I have written the slogans on the board to give a sense of how they appeared to me that day.



Source: personal photo collection

Reading my name and my parents' names on the blackboard further raised my awareness of how my name as a spoken and written construct classified me in relation to others. I came to the classroom that morning, not only knowing who I was and where I stood in the community, but also with a sense of what the world demanded and required. The behaviours of my classmates challenged me to accept the unknown and alien occurrences of the world – the dust-pan on the head, the sneering, the shouting and the staring, the horrifying-chalk names. The act of walking to the platform to wipe off the chalk slogans on the blackboard is a moment positioned at the intersection of the personal, the sociocultural, and the political. My name and my parents' names on the classroom blackboard clarified the situation I confronted. I could accept it, or, like my father, choose to reject it. I knew what I would lose by choosing the path of rejection. Evidently, I chose to accept the situation and to act. Literacy encompasses both the act of writing and the act of erasing, both of which define one's being in language. Both naming and erasing the names are public and personal, communal and individual. This positive and negative act of language interacted with my perception of the world; meaning flowed from and into the situation. In this interaction I was subconsciously formed and transformed.

As a result, one adjusts one's ideology, social, and literacy behaviours, which are influenced by the forming and shifting of one's name and identity. It is this influence that imparts power to accept or resist one's social and political surroundings. This self-shaping and formation has the power to restrain or enable realizations of self. Reading these slogans, I was empowered and disempowered by both my name and my parents' names.

Those names identified and affiliated me with the larger world – the classroom on that particular morning. Such self-identification shaped my understanding of my positioning in the world and I became aware of a self-image, perceiving my behaviors in a new light.

That morning was the first time I was publicly “denounced” with my parents. Now, my name “Chen Hong” drew boundaries between resistance against and acceptance of reading and writing, which were imbedded in the tension that I experienced in the classroom. This experience meant that I gained my literacy recognition through my self-positioning, and derived a particular cognition of language and discourse set in that particular environment. I was then able to fashion my writing from the language I heard in or out of the classroom, at home or in public. Once named in this manner, I became cognizant of the boundaries and environment from which arose my self-identity and awareness of language. Through such power of naming and being named, as in the above anecdote, my existence was altered.

4. 1.4 Names Written on My Back: “Chen Hong!” “Huang Yongfeng!”

In school, I was particularly afraid of recess and dismissal times. I was terrified to be among the crowd or to pass through it to go home, and was equally terrified at what the girls and boys would do when they were having fun. That day was particularly so. I walked out of the classroom when school was over in the afternoon. Some boys chased after me, shouting “Chen Hong! Huang Yongfeng, Traitor! Special Agent!” The shout

continued, "Traitor! Special Agent!" Then one boy jabbed my back and the shouting was swallowed by exultant laughter. Someone had written my name on my back! I fixed my eyes on my feet. I burst into tears, the last bit of human dignity and bravery of a seven year-old girl shattered.

Cupping my tear-sodden face, I ran into the corner of the classroom building and pressed myself hard against the corner as if to become one with the wall. How I wanted to feel safe! How I wanted to be deaf that moment! I wished I could disappear, that my father's name would disappear, the ear-thrilling calling would disappear, everything! I wished it were dark, pitch dark, so nobody could see me, my eyes, the name on my back, the cross, and my muddy shirt. Suddenly, a gentle voice invaded my thoughts. It was a woman's voice: "Little Chen Hong, you should go home and tell your mother. Then you will feel better." The voice, calm and gentle, was almost a whisper. With these soothing words the owner of the voice patted me on the left shoulder. I sobbed again. Just a moment ago I was afraid of hearing my name that brought me instant shame, but now my name was so endeared by the soft, accepting voice. I wept even more, feeling pitied and cared for. "Thank you, but I can't tell my mother," I said imploringly, still facing the corner, "My mother has high blood pressure." However, I listened to the gentle voice and headed home in a stupor. I wiped the tears off my face and put on a smile when stepping into our two-room flat in the hospital residence compound. From that day on I wore a mask at home, never weeping or crying in front of my parents.

In this moment, I wished to withdraw from the world that excluded me but to

connect to the one who sympathized with me. I experienced a power of kindness, compassion, and empathy, which came as a soft voice and a gentle pat on my shoulder. In such restrained and oppressive situations, such small language gestures encouraged me to reach out to the outer world in gratitude. This experience allowed me to realize that there are virtues residing within us and in others that should be valued and extended.

As previously discussed, naming and being named are basic literate experiences taking place in social, political, cultural, and linguistic contexts. These literate experiences are mediated in various ways through the “interplay of personal biographies and educative styles” (Taylor, 1998, p. 12). Words fill and empower our lives, our frames of reference, our existing beings, and our behaviors. I knew little about what my name meant when my parents gave it to me. I had no premonition of what was to come, only apart from knowing my surname as my mother’s family name. I had not the faintest idea of what future my name and my family history would bring. My name calling in the classroom and in the schoolyard made me aware of who I was and what I would be, at least on that particular occasion when my name and my father’s name were abusively joined together. Nonetheless, one can be sure about one thing; when I was given the name “Chen Hong,” I was meant to live up to that name. I then had to live into the identity that had, in some ways, been bestowed on me.

Our socio-linguistic backgrounds influence the way in which we construct our identities, so to speak, to become ourselves. In this process, oral language plays a major role, shaping how we record our lives on paper, as in the act of writing. Hearing my name

shouted in the particular context where my parents' names were voiced in hostile, social and political environments ultimately framed me in distinctive modes of perceiving myself in language and discourse. In language, my new image as the daughter of a "traitor" and "special agent" in the Grade 2 classroom mediated my need to read and write, which would, in turn, construct my future being.

4. 2 My Name on the Preliminary List of Dance Academy Admissions

In the oppressive days, any sort of acceptance was a reassurance, a token of survival and a hope for becoming.

The pains and joys of these experiences led us to frustration and despair, but also engendered hope and the will to create and pursue more promising futures.

4. 2.1 A Place to Fit in

During the five years of my elementary schooling, classes were often suspended due to the constant political movements. There was a lack of schooling at any level of education. Higher education during the ten-year's Cultural Revolution was completely suspended; elementary and secondary schooling, though active, were regularly interrupted. Deprived of any hope of pursuing post-secondary education, we were motivated to become skilled and talented in certain areas such as sports, dancing, and singing. Most of my elementary school days were spent rehearsing and performing the

“Eight Revolutionary Model Operas” (including two Chinese ballet operas) advocated by Chairman Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing. The “Eight Revolutionary Model Operas” movement pervaded throughout China, while “Learn, Sing, and Perform the Revolutionary Model Operas!” rang and resounded everywhere.

Having been labeled as “whelps” of “The Five Black Categories,” that is, the classes of social pariahs, we had to find a means to survive. The Five Black Categories included landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements (坏分子), and rightists, and were subjects to reform. That was why my father and mother started me very young in dancing while with my brother Ming took on musical instruments and sports. When I was nine, I was chosen to join the “Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team” of Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School, singing and dancing the “Eight Revolutionary Model Operas.”

Figure 4.6 Words (horizontal) on the flag read: “Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team” and (vertical) “Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School” (1971)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.7 A pose on ballet point shoes (1974)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.8 Brother Huang Ming (right) playing violin in Dongxing Commune after making his home in the countryside as a re-educated youth (1975)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.9 “Winning the Championship,” Neijiang No. 2 Middle School Basketball Team. Brother, Huang Ming (front centre) holds the reward (1975)



Source: personal photo collection

I seemed advanced in dancing and was chosen, at the age of ten, to assume the principal role, Xi'er (喜儿), in the ballet opera “The White-Haired Girl” (白毛女). Soon I became popular as a ballerina, and came to be known as “Xiao Chen Hong” (Little Chen Hong). There were three Chen Hongs on our Propaganda Team and I was the youngest. For a period of over two years, some Neijiang people thought that my family name was “Xiao” and there was a time I seemed to have escaped from being Huang Yongfeng’s or Chen Xueyuan’s daughter. I liked being called “Xiao Chen Hong” because it made me feel being accepted in the group. Last summer (2005), I returned to Neijiang to visit my dance teacher, Ye Ming, and my music teacher, Huang Beikun, who were joyful to see me and endearingly called me “Xiao Chen Hong.” Thus, for a short period of time I was

transformed; I became the other child, the 11-year-old ballerina, *Little Chen Hong*, a name that offered acceptance.

As I noted earlier, Yagelski (2000) observes how literacy rests on the notion of participation in discourses that shape our lives, a notion that “implies individual and collective possibility” (p. 9). Names / naming and literacy are thus perceived to have an intrinsic relationship. Dancing and singing, which had become another means for me to express my thoughts and interact with the outer world, necessitated both individuality and collectiveness. Finally, I had an outlet: I “bought into” the culture of my oppressors through singing and dancing, which earned me acceptance. “Buying into culture” is a phrase I borrow from Freund (1998), who when discussing how commerce cultivates art, describes the significance of assessing “culture within its material context, especially the use to which individuals may appropriate that context for self-renewal and even self-creation” (p. 28). I became concerned with finding opportunities through acceptance and liberation, rather than through victimization and oppression.

As an eleven year-old girl and member of a blacklisted family, I was accepted in the dancing and singing Mao Zedong Thought community, though pragmatically “renamed” *Xiao Chen Hong*. This adjustment, or buying into culture, rendered me a marginalized member in a family shed of identity, partly disguising the connection with my “demeaned” identity as the *Chen Hong* whose father was a counterrevolutionary. Yet the recognition and acceptance of my name, as part of my identity, can be seen as a social process in which my literate experiences were mediated through interactions with a new

environment. Thus, the question of my growth into literacy was complicated by what Taylor (1998) observes as the phenomena of literacies on other levels. Literacy served as a filter through which my everyday experiences interacted with the given social organization. Embracing my name “Xiao Chen Hong” as one medium, through which I could master my surroundings, enabled me to build new social connections as well as to establish new environmental relationships such as those with my dance teacher, music teacher, and other members of the Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team. Even now, after thirty years, those from Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School still refer to me as “Xiao Chen Hong.” I was, in fact, a living illustration of what Taylor (1998) calls the inventive construction of literacy in daily activities.

I became accustomed to the use of my revised name, *Xiao Chen Hong*, in the mediation of my social relationship with the members of the school Propaganda Team, and used the name to explore the environment. As mentioned earlier in the statement of Scribner and Cole (1978), one comes to understand how “Social organization creates the conditions for a variety of literate activities” (p. 35). This mode of thinking or awareness validated the lives of those blacklisted people, such as myself, who met the standard and who accepted the culture of the oppressors to survive in the Cultural Revolution. Names shape our identities and make us aware of our lives, activities, thoughts, and feelings in ways that permit us to reflect on them. In my case, being marginalized and blacklisted meant coming to terms with the larger world that had attached antagonistic meanings to my name. In my new name, the possibility of acceptance of the world became possible.

4. 2.2 Longing to Become a Ballerina

At the age of eleven, I suddenly found myself as “Xiao Chen Hong” or *Xi’er* (the white-haired girl) of Neijiang No. 8 Elementary School. Whether out of passion or instinct of survival, I immersed myself in ballet technical training, rehearsing, and performing the Modern Chinese Ballet “The White-Haired Girl.” One morning, Ye Ming, our dance teacher, came to our classroom door and signaled me outside the classroom, where I joined her and our music teacher, Huang Beikun. They told me that the Provincial Dance Academy of Sichuan came to Neijiang to enroll dancers and they were going to take me to the test centre. At the moment we were to set off, my class teacher, Guan Juliang, came out of the teachers’ room and stopped us. The three of them stepped aside and became engaged in a heated talk. I overheard Teacher Guan say, “Who will be held accountable for recommending her?” Our dance Teacher Ye Ming said, “I will be! I will talk to the Principal later about this. We don’t have time now.” After these words, Teacher Ye and Teacher Huang took me along with another four dancers and singers to the testing centre.

Ten days after the preliminary examination, the primary selection was posted on the entrance wall of Neijiang No. 6 High School. When I saw my name on the wall, my eyes glittered brightly. Pleasure and gratitude ran through me. I wished to pour out my thoughts in words of joy and gratification. At the same time, I felt that a shameful burden saddled on me for so long had been lifted. This ecstasy, though brief, was woven with a mixture of acceptance and hope. The sight of my name signaled the acceptance of my

identity and my existence in the community and the world.

Among the crowd, in front of the poster, I composed myself trying to maintain a sense of dignity, afraid of losing it in the vacant air. I went home, inhaling deeply still with a joy coupled with hesitation, as I did not know how long it would last. There would be the final admissions after the political background check. I had been made to realize that I did not come from a choice background. The seriousness of my family's situation clouded on the lives of every member of our family, at any time and on all occasions.

My sense of identity was reinvented when my name was put on the preliminary list of admissions. I internalized aspects of the culture and community as a way of accepting myself and being accepted. There was a remarkable shift of self-image when I viewed my name listed on the poster, among the group, now firmly situated me in the community again. I reinvented my identity and my position in the larger world. My image, now reshaped with the name Chen Hong, instead of Xiao Chen Hong, connected me with dominant social discourses in the areas of singing, dancing and sport. This connection, a basic and pervasive symbol of my existing being and of my knowing, questions social meanings as well as accommodates them. I entertained myself with the notion that Chen Hong or Xiao Chen Hong is worthy of something. My name on the list became a form of interactive discourse with the new social and cultural aspects of my life.

As discussed in my previous chapter, Hall (1993) observes that the production of identity, as part of a person's "cultural identity and representation" (p. 392) is never complete. In this view, a person's name provides a process for the incessant production of

identity, and recursive literacy acquisition and development. Each time my new name was used I was ever so slightly changed. I was brought into new contexts, and rather than being negated as in the past I was renewed and my new identity re-affirmed; indeed, I can say that I began to enjoy a kind of privilege. The anecdote of “longing to become a ballerina” exemplifies this transformation.

Seeing my name in dancing communications served as one of my earliest literacy experiences. Through learning my name in interactions with others in the dancing community I obtained a means of belonging and knowing as well as a means of living. This instilled both “status and identity,” as Taylor (1998, p. 87) states. Applications of names always implicate our identities and statuses, whether emulating or marginalizing the places from which we speak and write. As noted earlier, this is what Hall (1993) refers to as the “positions of enunciation” (p. 392).

4. 2.3 A Dream That Was Never to Come True

I was solicitous to see my name among the final list posted the following week. To me, the air that day was calm and refreshing. I had to wait anxiously, holding my breath gently as if not to let my dream evaporate in my heavy breathing.

I fretted about the result of the political background check and could not sleep the night after the initial posting. For the following four nights, as well, I could not sleep, and found myself tossing and turning in bed. My mother gave me sleeping pills. On one occasion I recall taking up to four pills, but I still could not sleep. All those days, I tried to

avoid looking at or hearing my name as well as my father's name and mother's name. Even a glimpse of my name or the slightest sound of it being called upon would have pained my heart. But that night I so wished for my name to be written on the admissions list of the Provincial Dance Academy of Sichuan that my heart ached.

When the day finally arrived, I rose early and left home in the morning, wanting to see the list put up. On the way toward the gate of Neijiang No. 6 Middle School, I was gripped by a feeling of disquiet. However, confidence from all those years of performing and receiving acceptance and admiration of the spectators sustained me. Hope coursed through my excited body, though I was fatigued after the sleepless nights. I was burning with passion, hopes, dreams, along with a determined diligence and ambition.

From the distance, the admission list appeared in full view, with a group of people standing in front. I quickened my pace and arrived at the front. But I didn't see my name on the final list of enrollment, and couldn't believe my eyes. Not wishing to give up I riveted my eyes to the list. I don't remember how many times my eyes moved up and down the list. A feeling akin to a stream of ice surged down my spine and then through every limb. No! My name, "Chen Hong" or "Xiao Chen Hong," was not there on the list! While I was still searching hopelessly for a miracle to happen, other girls' names jumped into my view. My eyes were welling with tears, but I suppressed them, pressing them down through my throat to my heart: a heart that had frequently bowed with the weight of denial, rejection, and seclusion.

Unspeakably, a swirl of envy swept through my whole body, traveling to my sinking

heart. Then I walked away from the list and moved with heavy steps out of the school gate, seized by a chill in my hollowed heart, leaving Neijiang No. 6 Middle School with blurred sight and dizziness. On my way home, an inward sadness consumed me and my ill-fated name. Later on, when the enrolled dancers went to the First People's Hospital for a physical check-up, it was my mother, a gynecologist in the Out-Patient Department, who checked them in the gynecology section, where she heard one examiner from the dance academy speaking to the others, "What a shame! How I want to enroll Xiao Chen Hong! But her background is against her..." He then sighed, "Ahh, better to do less than to do more these days. I'm not going to look for trouble."

That marked the end of the dream of an eleven year-old becoming a professional ballerina. I remember I went home and wrote down these sentences in my diary: 我要做一棵小草从石缝中长出来! (I will be a blade of grass squeezing out from the stone crevices!) Then I continued to dance as a nonprofessional dancer.

Figure 4.10 Neijiang No. 2 Middle School Propaganda Team -- Propaganda Mao Zedong Thought in the street (the author, with Red Guard band on left arm, is front centre, 1974)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.11 Dance: "We are Chairman Mao's Red Guards" (Neijiang, 1974)

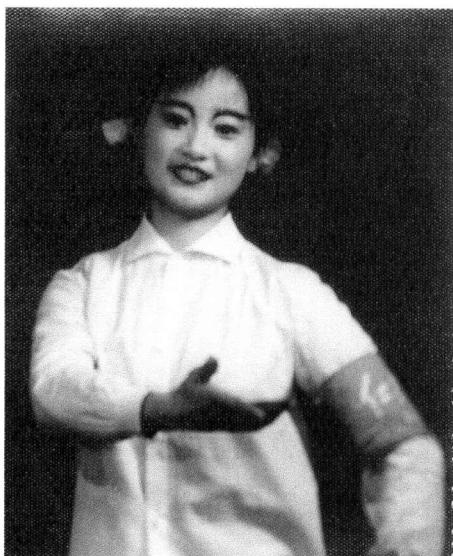


Figure 4.12 Dance of Neijiang No. 2 Middle School Propaganda Team (the author standing in the centre, 1974)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.13 A Pas de deux, “Before Practice” (实习之前), won the First Prize Award in China National College and University Performance Competition (the author: right, Nanchong Teachers College, 1980)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.14 A Pas de deux at the university dance performance: “Seeing You Off,” an episode of Ballet *Ode to Yi'meng* (沂蒙颂) (Nanchong Teachers College, 1981)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.15 A Solo: “Little Radish” (小萝卜头) at the university faculty dance performance (Nanchong, China, 1983)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.16 Hosting (and dancing for) the '91 China Sichuan International Television Festival ('91 中国四川国际电视节); the author (left) at the “Opening Ceremony” (1991)



Source: personal photo collection

Figure 4.17 In the dance production, *Watch Your Step* (dress rehearsal): “My Heart Will Go On”; the author with Julian Campbell (Chaffey College, Los Angeles, 1998)



Julian Campbell dancin' with Rosa Chen in dress rehearsal for *Watch Your Step*.

Source: personal newspaper clipping

I had come to hate the appearance of my name because of the pain it brought me when I and members of my family were publicly denounced. Here, oppression took another form: the absence of my name proved as painful as its defaced presence. This proved a means of being dismissed or excluded from the world, similar to having my name conspicuously crossed out, just like my father’s name. I saw my reality correlated to my positioning in the larger world through how my name was accepted or rejected in social and political venues.

As exemplified in my story, at each defacing of our names, we may bow our heads, lose confidence, only to reestablish “our identity, our referencing to the world, and our

ways of both seeking solitude and putting ourselves forward to the world" (Heath, 1990, p. 290). Knoblauch (1990) observes that "literacy is necessary to survival and success" (p. 75). When one is subverted, an instinct of survival wells up within. That is why I turned to my diary: "I will be a blade of grass squeezing out from the stone crevices!" The absence of my name helped reshape my immersion in literacy and urged me to find strength in written expression and the power of words.

Similarly, in writing this anecdote in my thesis, I have unfolded this experience in memory, communicating the sadness and disappointment, and thinking of how others would describe my reactions upon witnessing the absence of my name on the final admissions list. This has enabled me to bring my identity more fully to light in writing. In addition, rejection, in subverting the opportunity to connect with the community, leads a child to see in the starker possible terms the nature of reality and to force the issue of identity in new and unexpected ways. In this manner, a child is immersed in literacy in all its forms, not only in reading and writing as a technical manipulation of expressive media, but as a set of strategies for making sense of and surviving a world suddenly made hostile.

My name did not stand alone, whether listed in the preliminary admissions or absent from the final admissions, but in relational contexts with other social beings. Similarly, my name did not remain fixed or constant in the "never-complete" process of identity "production," but rather was "always constituted within" identity "representation" (Hall, 1993, p. 392) of the social, cultural and political. I and my name were imbedded in a

particular setting or context, from which a particular self-image emerged and a particular awareness was fostered. I came to acknowledge that my name existed at the intersection of the individual and the collective. This series of events and contextual positionings led me to construct myself amid the always changeable communal relations – where one is positioned and shifted, rejected and accepted. Expressing myself through words and language, I wrote out of a pressing need for survival after I, through my name, was rejected by the community. This particular experience of admission, like that of rejection, fashioned my writing; my name stood at the crossroads of my acquisition of literacy and identity formation.

4.3 Name as Inevitable Connection and Deprivation

In the days of oppression, banning or distorting the truth turned us mute. We found the act of being named by others alternated in assimilation with and resistance to the situated discourse. We guarded the vitality of our words.

When our names and our beings were driven to the extremity of human deprivation and exclusion, a power within us was kindled. As such, there was not the slightest laxity or superfluity in the speaking and writing of the oppressed, no matter the subject. The oppressed do not have the luxury of wasting words.

4.3.1 Three-Day Criticism Meeting

It transpired in the summer of 1977, after the Cultural Revolution had ended. One

morning my father was placed on a *Jiefangpai* lorry (“Liberation” lorry), paraded through the street publicly in what was known as the “criticism and condemnation street parade.” Following that, he was taken to a three-day *criticism meeting* to confess and to expose his counterrevolutionary thoughts at the Sichuan Operas Theatre of Neijiang city. The attendees of the meeting were those within the education and health fields, people from the schools where my father had worked and my brother and I had studied, as well as from the hospital where my mother had worked. The last day of my father’s criticism meeting ended in fury. My father again did not yield by confessing. His tormentors by this time were losing their authority and their power. The Cultural Revolution was coming to an end. Within the country, the political and legal errors of the past were being corrected. The Neijiang local authority wanted to prove that they had not done anything wrong in terms of my father’s case and held the meeting to extricate themselves from this awkward situation. The meeting culminated in a farce because my father had embarrassed the authorities with his witty and compelling tone of control and fearlessness. The masses were laughing at the sight displayed on the theatre stage. The prosecutors, in an attempt to regain their last morsel of power, threw out a thick rope and tied up my father, tightly pinning his arms from behind and forcing him to kneel down like one who was confronting death execution. “No! That’s not true! All this shows how weak you are. You’ve made all these false stories.” My father could restrain himself no longer. Never having succumbed to “confessions,” my father was one to remain resolute and firm in both words and voice.

Cao Yankang, the secretary of the Health and Education Bureau, denounced my father in a frightful rage, saying in an insolent and threatening tone of voice: “Huang Yongfeng! I dare you to plead anywhere or by any means. I will assure you that you will fall into my hands in the end.” His face loomed dark with anger and was threatening, while a corner of his mouth lifted in a sneer. Cao’s words raised a great hue and cry among the attendees. The crowd seethed with noises mingled with suppressed laughter. Cao Yuankang gave a snort of contempt, “Humph!” His caustic voice caused the entire hall to become silent. Following Cao’s words, my father was roped and dragged down off the stage of the Sichuan Operas Theatre. There was a moment when the theatre fell silent. The “audience” had not expected this, especially after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It should have been the time to redeem my father’s wronged allegation; indeed, many of those who were wronged had already had their names restored. At this moment, however, my father was arrested without new allegations. The theatre was then evacuated amid the muffled murmurs of the audience. The afternoon passed in a city silenced by the tumultuous thunder of the authorities. The people of Neijiang, the *Tiancheng* people, or Sweet City people, remained in fear consumed by the decade of insecurity that had just passed. There were questions about why this still transpired even after the overthrow of the Gang of Four. Will Teacher Huang Yongfeng’s family survive this time? After the ten-year Cultural Revolution, intellectuals in the country gradually resumed their original positions, but Teacher Huang was again detained and might even be imprisoned. Ten years of countless meetings, criticisms, and condemnation had become the routine of our

life.

During my father's three-day criticism I performed on behalf of the No. 4 Neighborhood Committee. While my mother and brother Huang Ming were forced to be present all three days of my father's criticism, the No. 4 Neighborhood Committee allowed me to be absent in order to rehearse for the evening performance of Mao Zedong's propaganda thoughts in the Sichuan Operas Theatre. The performance was to be held on stage where the criticism was being held in the day. I had experienced numerous criticisms and meetings that condemned my father, but I had never been forced to dance on the spot where my father had been prosecuted, humiliated, beaten, savagely bound by ropes, and dragged away only hours before.

Worse, for me, was that I would not be able to accompany my father home after finishing my dance performance. When entering the theatre to perform in the late afternoon that day, I saw a huge "character poster" still hung over the entrance of the theatre, which read: "General Criticism and Meeting to Denounce Traitor Huang Yongfeng!" As usual, the three characters of Huang Yongfeng (黄永丰) bore a large red cross.

Having grown accustomed to this pattern of the Huang family, people accepted the irony of the occasion: that the Huang girl would dance Mao Zedong's Propaganda Thoughts opera on the stage where her father had spoken against the authorities only moments before. The family, including myself, accepted this paradox as a necessary part of survival in these troubled times. That night, however, I felt the people exerted an

uneasy and piteous feeling toward me, Chen Hong, a sixteen-year-old girl caught in the political conflict that had engulfed China. Perhaps they wondered how I could still smile and remain captivating for the audience! How could I dance as if nothing had happened? That night, on the stage where I had performed countless times, my anger surged through me as a flood of rage. Later on, when asked how I was still able to smile that night, I recall telling people that my eyes were full of blood.

Figure 4.18 A solo: “Successor to the Cause of Proletarian Revolution”; dancing on behalf of the Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team of the No. 4 Neighborhood Committee (1977)



Source: personal photo collection

I went home after the show, finding our two-room apartment dreadfully silent and empty. My mother greeted me, her face ashen, her eyes moist yet without tears. “Your father was taken away and we found out he is now locked up in “Shanyuanjing Jail” (Mountain Well Tower). She continued while packing two bags, “I’ve packed some fresh clothes and food. You and your brother will take them to your father. He has not had a sip of water since the morning he walked out of the door three days ago.” With these words my mother’s voice softened as if she was holding back sobs, but still her eyes showed no tears. My older brother, Huang Ming, and I went on our way to bring clothes and food to my father.

Figure 4.19 Neijiang Mountain Well Tower located near Shanyuanjing Jail. My father was once imprisoned there. (2005)



Source: photo taken by the author

Both my father and I sought to construct a sense of self by gaining some control of our worlds in the face of oppression. According to Freire (1984), as discussed in the previous chapter, this is a manifestation of literacy. My father protested publicly at his criticism meeting, showing a renewed confidence in contrast to the prosecutor's weak and false accusations. Following that, my father would undoubtedly write to plead for redemption as he had always done. My dancing activity that night somehow defamed my father, yet it was my way of claiming a sense of confidence and self-worth (Yagelski, 2000). We "struggled to accept" ourselves even as we "demanded acceptance from others" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 162). I danced to weave myself into a social and political discourse that had positioned my existential status and needs. Malinowitz (1990) observes that writing is a "tool of empowerment" for oppressed peoples (p. 152). That night, dancing was my form of writing: I danced to justify myself, to reinvent my personal identity, to define my relationships with society and the governing class. In doing so, I could feel my eyes surging with blood, with frustration at the paradox of what I was forced to do in order to gain any form of acceptance in the socio-political nightmare of my existence. I negotiated the relationship that Freire and Mecedo (1987) outline, between the world and the word, under the harsh banner of my rejected family name.

When the oppressed find their names defaced this "defacing of ourselves" becomes a force acting to situate our being in the world. This is accomplished through the instincts of survival. Both my father and I constructed our own means of surviving oppression, whether our agency was suppressed or our field of action limited. The very impact of that

force acted upon our ideology, our identities, and our ability to communicate. This force draws from us a potent need to liberate ourselves through action, whether in dance or in words. Nevertheless, Freire & Macedo (1978) state that “liberation comes only when people reclaim their language and, with it, the power of envisagement, the imagination of a different world to be brought into being” (p. xv). While being labeled, I was not oblivious to my true self and worth, but I did learn to accept the identity society placed on me, to take on a subversive stance as an only means of survival. This imbued me with the courage to dance on the stage that night.

Our names were rejected, and thus our identities shriveled, so to speak. Yet our identities were re-affirmed, even in suppression. When my fathers’ name, Huang Yongfeng, was once again criticized and rejected on the stage, his identity was reinforced in a new way, as a result of the changing context of situation. While in the past this naming would have demeaned him, with the end of the Cultural Revolution the naming now took on a new character; it returned a dignity that the regime had tried to crush. He had been right all along, and the crowd now knew it. When Chen Hong, as Huang Yongfeng’s daughter, found acceptance on the stage, my identity emerged and connected with the larger world. The true self depends on identifying with family, community, society, and language (Moffett, 1990). Engulfed in an oppressive situation, one finds the need to articulate a reality. Our knowing and becoming is based on our position in society, with positions imposed in different degrees for all of us, such as what my father and I were subjected to on the theatre stage. Just as one’s own instincts and needs may facilitate

or impede perception, memory, language, expressions, oppression and subjugation may impede or facilitate knowing, becoming, acquisition of literacy, and ultimately identity. Thus, the acceptance or rejection of one's name is central to the formation of one's identity and to the way one is immersed in literacy. Finally, literacy constitutes a means to power, survival, and ultimately success.

4. 3.2 A Letter of Appeal

My father was imprisoned in Shanyuanjing Jail and unable to send more letters of appeal. The hopelessness of this situation compelled me to plead on my father's behalf. I wrote a letter in the first-person, the voice of a daughter about her father, addressed directly to the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), the newspaper of the Central Party Committee of China. Miraculously, we were given a reply! The letter was not published, but an order of inquiry and investigation was issued from the Central Party Committee to the Provincial Party Committee and passed over to the Neijiang District Public Security Bureau.

My father was released immediately from prison. My mother heard people say that it was Huang Yongfeng's daughter who wrote a letter that touched the superiors. We were so happy and I cried for joy! My parents were proud of me and praised me for knowing how to speak and write. This was the first moment that I truly recognized the power of literacy, of words, style, register, and so on—it was a moment precipitated by my desire to clear my family name and to reclaim my identity. How I wish I had that letter now.

My writing issued from the pressing need of oppressed peoples, and, true to the claim of Freire & Macedo (1978), my reclamation of language lead to liberation. I had to cross a boundary of self-positioning in order to effect this change; I had to unleash the flood that had raged within me on the stage, to express the welling up of my ideas, seeking justice for my father and an evenhanded existence for us. In short, I had to put my literacy skills to effect in claiming my name (which itself had been the first object of my early attempts at literacy).

As noted earlier, Royster (1990) observes that those who resist and fight against their oppressors write in powerful language; their words are rationally ordered and developed, and they conjure compelling images in their writing. Thus, rejection and oppression may define individuals, but the rejected and the oppressed also hold the power to define and defend. I wrote, at the age of sixteen, to plead for justice and for the life of my father. In some senses, my name and my life narrative begins from that moment. From there I moved forward, to the world, and to the world I hoped for. Certainly, the world I have known and continue to know has led me to “somewhere else,” to where I began to speak and to write, and has fostered the development of my writing throughout my life.

Literacy, when combined with family experiences, is gained from compelling contexts. It tells how powerless people can find a tool to pry open the prison gate, or a rope to climb from the bottom, or a weapon to fight against their oppressors. This tool or weapon is literacy. The need to seek meaning in life is shown to be necessary to life as breath and nourishment. Taylor (1998) notes how literacy develops best in relational contexts which

are relevant to children's lives. My letter to the authorities voiced the thoughts and needs of one who had witnessed and experienced oppression from childhood to adolescence. Thus, experiences of my name and the names of my family members have become an indispensable part of my experience of literacy.

5. CONCLUSION

In the oppressive days, words and expressions, formed through thorns, brambles, matted fern and tangled thickets, were imbued with an understanding of life and cognition of language.

5. 1 Final words and thoughts

Our names, written on the blackboard, wall, posters, ground, seemingly everywhere, were crossed out, criticized, condemned, blackened, in all form of demeaning manner, an experience that was an integral part of our daily lives. Every experience of seeing or hearing my name was a darkening stab to my eyes, a deafening thunder to my ears, and a piercing twist in my heart. I had not grown, and perhaps would never grow, accustomed to this treatment of my name and my family name. Our names were associated with meanings such as “traitor,” “special agent,” “class enemy,” “counterrevolutionary,” “whelps,” to name a few.

Such unusual life surroundings established our dispositions. We became accustomed to slights against our bodies, our hearts, our minds, our self-esteem, our identities, our hopes, our desires, and, ultimately, our names. We were labeled according to who and what others wanted us to be, rather than whom and what we really were. Rather than being oblivious to all this, we learned to accept such forced identities and to assume a subversive stance in order to survive. These particular experiences, to varying degrees, served to synthesize, accentuate, and sharpen our senses and our engagement with

language. We felt a strong need to express our surging ideas, to seek justice and an existence that would accommodate our expressions, perspectives, and hopes.

In all these years, our names and the cruel use of them by others formed a position and a context for my literacy awareness and development. Such a realization of selfhood through name—enunciated in various political, social, cultural, and literate contexts—has played a critical role in all my literate experiences. These years taught us and trained us to rein in our freedom and selfhood. The only free pleasure I was at liberty of using was to give expression to my thoughts through dance and, ultimately, written words.

5. 2 My study - an inquiry, which does not end here

This study demonstrates the strong connections between naming, self-image, and literacy. It identifies how these are politically, socially, and culturally situated. It describes the tyranny of name for a group of people in a time of oppression. A person's name is not static, but rather in a constant unfixed state – perpetually shifting. It empowers, disempowers, connects, disconnects, functions as an avatar of the individual, facilitating acceptance or rejection.

Name is also integrally linked to literacy. Beyond the fact that it is at the centre, often, of individuals' first literacy acts, we can also say that one's experience of name modifies one's disposition toward language, written or oral. The way in which one's name is employed in social contexts may motive or restrict literacy development. Within the devastating contexts of humiliation, oppression or shock, one may avoid language,

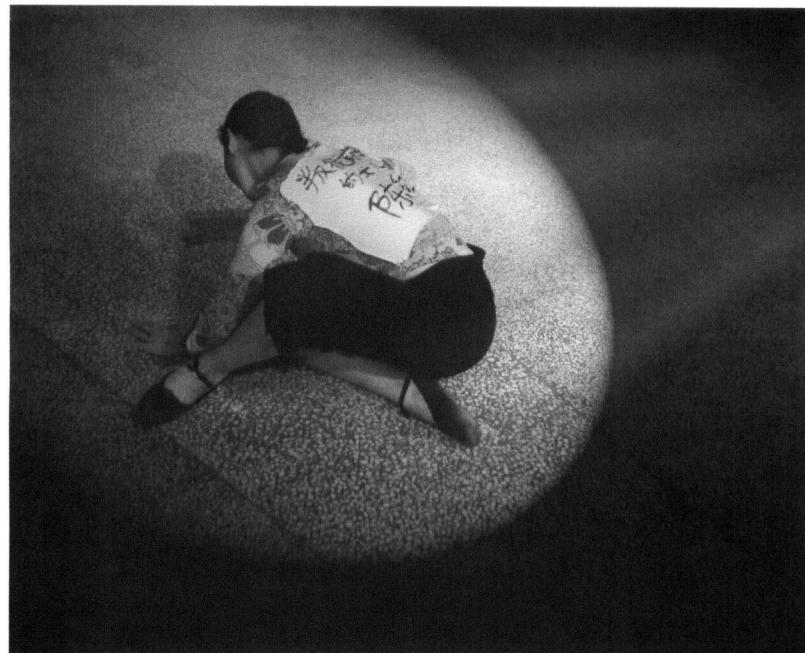
averting one's eyes, holding one's head low, refusing to engage that form of expression that is so tortuous. In those very moments of oppression, language—even the very words that cause offense—may also serve as a balm, soothing open wounds. This was the case when I stood in the school yard and heard my name spoken by a gentle voice or when I stood before the lists and saw my name among the chosen. Finally, for the oppressed, language may also motivate resistance and become a means of resistance. Eventually, following in my father's footsteps, I claimed language from my oppressors. And, ironically, the voice of the young girl, presumably without power, had more strength than all the letters my father had to that point written in his eloquent, professor's voice.

5.3 Words that continue

I am impressed by Malinowitz's (1990) observation: "To own language, one must own some piece of reality that feels worth describing. This is the beginning of exploring a writing process" (p. 161). I have claimed language and other modes of artistic expression. I continue to write and dance. To use Malinowitz's words, I own language—indeed, I can say that I own many languages.

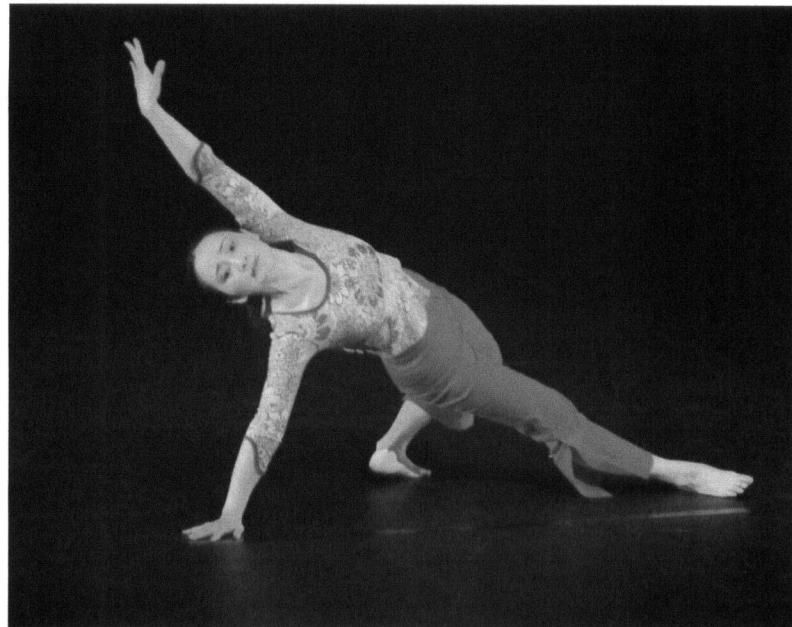
As I wrote this thesis I found at times that the graphic representation of language failed to encapsulate my ideas and emotions. I began to choreograph a dance, "Name, A Symbol of Self," which I performed in May, both in Sichuan Province, at the former Nanchong Teachers College (West China Teachers University), and in Burnaby.

Figure 5.1 A Solo: “Name, A Symbol of Self” at author’s Alma Mater 60th Anniversary Dance Performance. The text on the back reads: *Traitor Huang Yongfeng’s Daughter Chen Hong* (Nanchong, May 2, 2006)



Source: personal photo collection

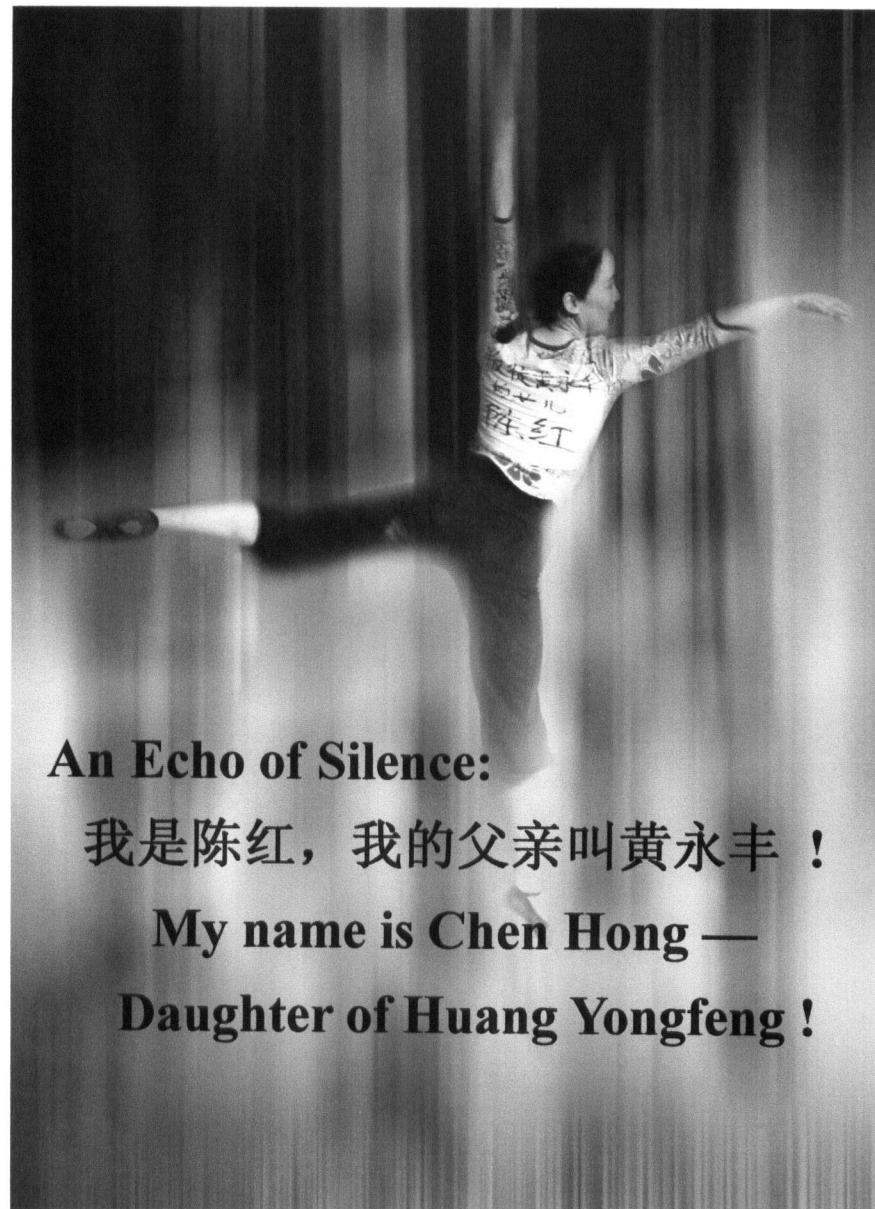
Figure 5.2 A Solo: “Name, A Symbol of Self” at the *Here and Now* Dance Performance with Continuum Modern Dance Company (Vancouver, May 13, 2006)



Source: personal photo collection

To close, I would say I have come to this realization: oppressed peoples own a particular language. It is a powerful, compelling language, one born of the necessity to express one's worth. They own this language because they own a piece of reality, which they feel worth describing, and worth being heard.

Figure 5.3 A Solo: “Name, A Symbol of Self” (Nanchong, May 2, 2006)



Source: personal photo collection

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