12-2000

# From caterpillar to butterfly: an action research of educational program based on the Satir model for women in Taiwan

Bei Yang

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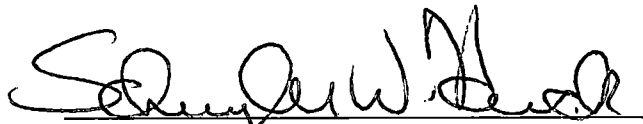
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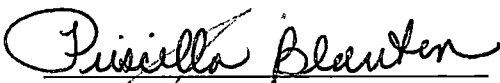(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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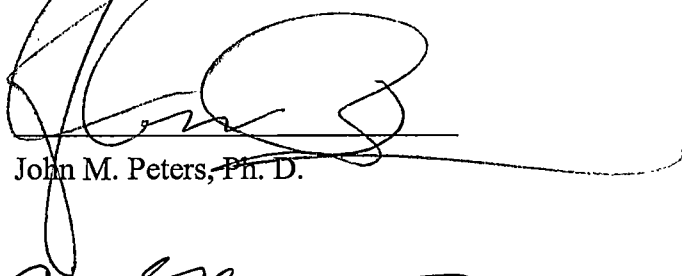
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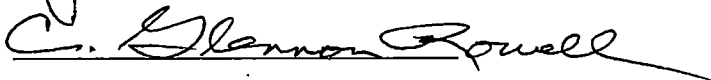
We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Priscilla Blanton, Ph. D.

John M. Peters, Ph. D.

Glennon C. Rowell Ph. D.

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

From Caterpillar to Butterfly:

An Action Research of Educational Program Based

on the Satir Model for Women in Taiwan

A Dissertation

Preserved for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Yang, Pei

December, 2000

To all the persons

who

facilitate my learning,

inspire my growing,

And

enrich my life meaning.

# Abstract

The way toward autonomy and individuality for Chinese women in Taiwan is an unavoidable learning process while they were impacted by modernization. They have been struggled between conformity and rebellion with traditional Chinese culture for more than half a century. The Satir Model was characterized as an experiential and growing approach to change by the field of family therapy in Western world. The objective of this research project was to look at the process of how the 24 Taiwanese women experienced the educational program based on the Satir Model, and what they have learned about themselves and the group process.

This project was designed as an action research. The participants, as co-researchers, offered their journal and oral feedback during each session of the group process to adjust the development of the program. They were interviewed about their learning and changes after the program.

By analyzing the journal of the participants and the researcher, the audiotapes of group process, and the transcripts of post-group interviews, there were several main themes were identified. First, the causes for the "urge" to change towards self-growth come from group interaction and personal commitment. Second, non-defensive acceptance of those in one's family of origin can be the turning point for generating an urge towards self-growth. Third, in the process toward self-growth, awareness and reflection are critical factors. The internal transformation--changing one's mind, the authority issue and the way that Taiwanese women learned were discussed.

# Preface

I have pleasant memories of that warm and bright afternoon as I walked toward the volunteer institute of social services from school. In particular, I remember my mood. I was a bit elated and anticipatory. I recall the moment when I entered the building. I felt a sudden change of temperature—the coolness from the air conditioner refreshed my whole being from the heat of the sun outside.

I walked pass the doorman, who was dozing in his chair. He slowly opened his eyes, looked up and glanced at me, and then, closed his tired eyes again. I walked in to the elevator and pressed the 10th-floor button. The door opened. A crowd of people walked about hastily behind the clear glass doors that stood in front of me.

When the automatic glass doors opened, I approached the people. Endless laughter and quarrelsome voices were so apparent. Their voices seemed to have suddenly made the room smaller and claustrophobic. Yet, in a special way, their voices and chatter brought them closer. After greeting the organizer, I expressed my thanks for having been invited. I remember noticing that she and I were about the same age. Yet, there were some distinct qualities about her: She had a clear-cut voice—full of energy—and a precision in her movements. She had just finished her lunch. Then, very naturally and effortlessly, she called everyone to the workshop classroom.

This time, the workshop was held in the conference room. The room was small. In it, large glass windows stood on one side, with the sun shining through vividly, while on the opposite side of the windows, a row of file cabinets leaned against the wall. Above those cabinets in the center, a framed plaque hung with golden calligraphic writing on a black background of their organization's vision.

There were twenty-five of us women sitting around a U-shaped table. Little things and arrangements in the room made it evident that the room was used for other purposes. The room seemed even more crowded and smaller with all of us in it. However, the

joyful chitchat of these women seemed to convey a message: they were quite comfortable in that crowded space. Perhaps that room was just a familiar place to them. During the organizer's introduction of me, I saw eyes of curiosity and expectation. I glanced through the room and saw familiar faces—their eyes sent greetings. I also saw anticipation and estrangement on some of these women's facial expressions and in their bodily gestures. For the most part, there was a friendly, intimate, and open climate in the room. I felt supported in this new initiative.

In her introductory remarks, the organizer said that to participate in the program was an honor. They had limited the number of participants, and some women felt disappointed because they were not accepted. I was a bit surprised to hear this. My past experience told me that, despite the fact that research programs like this are based on a volunteer basis, usually, participants feel burdened by the mere fact that they have to devote so much of their time and attention. Therefore, the enthusiasm for volunteering is typically low. I remember thinking to myself, "No matter to what these women understood the nature of this research to be or to entail, they seemed to be honored to participate." The fact that they were enthusiastic came from their strong incentive to actively engage in this research. I, too, was moved by this energy. A voice inside spoke to me, "Help them to understand the nature and purpose of this research right from the beginning, so we can creatively make this whole process work!"

In this group of women, the youngest was 28 and the oldest was 56. There were two participants under 30; seven between the ages of 31 to 35; five between 36 to 40; nine between 41 to 55; and one 56 years old. A total of 24 participants joined this program. Over half of them were once married; most of them were still married. Among them, five were housewives, and the rest had a diverse range of careers of their own— some had higher positions and status in their careers than others. However, each of them contributed to the research uniquely and equally.

The individual experiences of these women reminded me of my own past. In fact they embodied my past 20 years in a nutshell. Although each one of them was unique, we

all had a similar background growing up as a Chinese woman in Taiwan—all of us shared a familiar life story in the same epoch. On the one hand, we had to live up to an "endorsed version" of life by Taiwanese society where the role of women bear the heavy load in the society. On the other hand, amidst the transitory and precarious state of affairs in politics, education, economics, and social-family structures, we often struggled between the fine line between conformity and rebellion with traditional cultural values. To my mind, from the perspective of an individual's growth and development, this was quite unfortunate. Despite these conditions, every woman in that culture is striving to the best of her ability to fulfil a meaningful life that offers freedom and autonomy. For those 24 women in particular, the process toward autonomy and individuality required a movement away from archaic Chinese traditions, where women are down played. It was akin to "caterpillar" becoming "butterfly!" We do not know how far we have walked. Only those who continue the journey on this path will live out their deepest experience. Of course, we can use secular standards to measure the degree of which we have succeeded or failed. However, from the perspective of process, where individuals' diligent strive toward wholeness and meaning, there can never be failures.

This research project was only a small point in time in the lives of those participants. Nevertheless, I believe it served two functions: One, more awareness of the upbringing process in our family of origin; two, discovery of and trust in the potentials we have within us and the world around us. In my own life learning, I believe an individual can understand more about herself, others, and the world through coming in touch with the major roles they play in life and understanding all the various inner meanings we give to such roles amidst all kinds of distortion and homeostasis of the given society.

The traditional meaning of learning in modern culture is questionable. In order to learn and understand the world, and ourselves, we are taught that we should acquire as much as we can from the external world. We come to believe that the materials for

understanding our own internal processes come from the outside. We also believe that learning is an accumulative process of *perceived* and *interpreted* information.

My experience in this research leads me to reflect on another way of learning: What would happen if we can, with openness of mind and in an accepting and friendly climate, try to understand and *reinterpret* the life in our family of origin with new perspectives, where the locus of evaluation is in the person, not outside? I believe that the degree of self-awareness is perhaps the most important factor in predicting the learning of individuality and autonomy. What kind of effect would this process of learning, which focuses on internal transformation first, have on us and on our future?

I believe that each phase of life is like a link in a long chain extending to the future. Although we cannot re-experience the past, we can, through discovery and learning, at least consciously and autonomously "choose" a more meaningful life process in the future.

The process of this research provided an opportunity for everyone, including myself, to reflect and take actions to turn "caterpillar" into "butterfly". Different from other researches, although I initiated this project, I felt that this research belongs to all 25 of us. Those 24 women were my co-researchers. Not only did they participate, they also provided their valuable reflections during their processes, and I listened and adjusted the program to their needs and feedback. I followed *their* lead rather than mine.

The "needs" of human beings often emerge and unfold in a gradual process of inter-action. For this reason, not only did we learn from this program, we reflected on *how* we learned. The results speak for themselves. Not only did the participants increase the depth of their learning, this approach also allowed them to experience their own unique way of integrating new understandings. Every one of these 24 participants was a researcher in her own right

I played different roles in this project: I was the researcher, the designer, and the facilitator for the program. Also, during group discussions, I was a participant who shared with them the content of the program. We walked through the group process together. I

joined them with my many years of workshop facilitating experience and other professional skills.

I do not pretend to be objective in my research. In this report, you will find traces of my knowledge and emotions, as well as my professional training in analysis and personal projections—I was a colored pallet. Besides the original colors on the pallet, I allowed other colors to blend in. I wanted to see what kind of painting we could create. Meanwhile, my other role as a researcher witnessed all of this and recorded various informations carefully. I also allowed the "researcher" to have plenty of space to think and discover, as she guided my every action and decision. Therefore, I was also "the instrument" for this research.

For the purpose of allowing myself a quiet place to carefully reflect and write this report, I often found myself wandering between Taipei and the States. This research has not only accompanied me for three years, it has become a part of me as I have walked through the most important part of my life. Therefore, I am grateful to my professors for carefully guiding me in research methodology and giving me space to conduct this project. Their strong encouragement and support for me while writing this dissertation in this way, in hoping that it would be of interest to readers, is greatly appreciated. I believe I am a unique person. And this is not a traditional research dissertation. I believe this dissertation will reflect my person. I anticipate your engagement while reading this essay and hope it will meet your life story.


**Pei Yang, 2000**

# An Important Note

Toward the end of organizing my research summary and filling in the gaps of my reflection and feelings, I gladly accepted the suggestions from the faculties of my committee. Because the research data were transcribed in Chinese, some parts of this dissertation were written in my native language, Chinese. Afterwards, it was helped in translation by a friend in the United States and edited by my major professor, Dr. Huck. My friend helped me select appropriate wordings and bring out the nuances of the English in order to correspond accurately to the original meaning of the Chinese. Dr. Huck helped to make this dissertation more understandable. During this process and in comparison with the English, I realized that my Chinese writing style tends to be "circular," whereas the English tends to be linear and logical. I felt a tad bit frustrated at this distinction. It is my wish that you, the reader, will try to enter my "circular thinking world" and try to experience the typical Chinese way of articulating ideas.

The arrangement of the chapters in this report is unusual, which is divided into four parts. In the first part, you will read some quotes from the participants. Those quotes are part of the "results" of this project, which have been positioned near the beginning in order to give readers a taste of this research. Following the initial quotes, background information is described to provide a context for the reader's understanding. What follows in the second part is an account of some of the experiences and reflections of this research. The Satir Model (an experiential and humanistic approach of family therapy theory founded by Virginia Satir, the mother of family therapy) and the preliminary study are also described. Part Three includes the process of data analysis and organization, and the themes extrapolated from this research. I also interpreted the data to discover what I thought to be of importance and relevance to this research. Finally, I conclude this report with my own learning and reflections. Thus, the arrangement of this dissertation is circular too.

# Content

**Part I Quotes**

# Introduction

This part begins with selected quotes from the participants' journals and is followed by a brief introductions to their stories. In order to assist the reader to understand how the participants' life stories developed, the social-cultural context of Taiwanese society will be introduced as well.

As an action researcher, I wrote my own journal during the research period. Here is an excerpt:

> *That night, my heart was touched and my whole being was astonished by what I witnessed. I recall vividly that the atmosphere of the women's group, in which I was facilitating, was pervaded by a sense of nobility. Each of these women dignified in he own special way, shared intimately with each other the hardship in their lives. Each, embedded in the trappings of Chinese society, was destined to live out her life under the expectations of others. Yet, under such circumstances, they were able to regain their self-assurance and esteem. When I saw their faces, I asked myself, "what kind of courage and struggle have brought them to their present situation?" Behind their stories, I wondered, "was it the strength of profound love that gave them life?"*
> *Touched and delighted, I felt these women were like grass that grows between the cracks of rocks—even though there are not much soil for their nourishment, they are still able to survive. Typically, that kind of grass grows toward the sun. --Pei*

# Chapter One
# Quotes and Stories

We begin with the self-disclosed "stories" of three Chinese women. The three different women whose particular circumstances were highly varied. Nonetheless, there is a common thread that joins them together.

## 1. Shiu-yu

> *My father was an inflexible man; he was never good at expressing his feelings. Though he loved us, it seemed often enough that he would unintentionally say or do things to hurt us. Thinking back, I believe the time when I was hurt the most was the first year of working at his firm after my graduation. It is natural for those who began working for the first time to be nervous. Father never particularly gave me guidance or condolence. I recall one time during a family gathering when one of my relative praised me in front of others, including my father. But before she even finished what she was saying, my father—with a look of disapproval on his face—silently shook his head. I held back the tears with all my strength that was welling up around my eyes. I made a promise to myself, "I will never give you another opportunity to be displeased."*
> *After several years, when father proudly praised me in front of his friends as his "24-hour secretary," I felt neither joy nor dignity. Instead, what I experienced was sadness. I simply could not forget those uneasy feelings of disapproval, rejection and despair... I no longer wanted father's affirmation nor praises at work. I still had one expectation though—I wanted him to treat me as "his daughter" and not his "24-hour secretary." After all, there must be more things to share between father and daughter than business and politics*

This woman is typical of many working women who have grown up in Taiwan. Her way of speaking was to the point and clear. She was friendly during the interview, yet she easily exhibited a strong sense of competence that came from years of working.

She comes from a good family. Besides her parents, there were three siblings around the house; she was the eldest. What is unusual about her is the fact that she is now in her forties, unmarried, still living with her parents, and has been working at her father's firm for more than 17 years. Her life-style is simple; besides her career, she devotes her time as a volunteer in social welfare. The questions I asked of myself are, "Why did she work persistently for her father for the past 17 years, despite her feeling of dissatisfaction?" "Why was her father's affirmation so important for her?"

## 2. Mei-foun

*My name is "mother." I am indebted to my children. Ever since they were young, I was unable to provide them with an undivided, fortunate family. Loneliness, weariness, lifelessness, and lack of resources characterized the reality of our single-parent family. I think my children were underprivileged compared to other children. I hope that each of them will have a stable and fortunate family of their own.*

*Now, my sons and daughter have all grown up and have started their own families; I now have grandchildren. They have lived out their lives in accordance to the everydayness and norms of the society. They have also brought forth the fruits for their hard work. Even though I am not that old, I am no young woman. Although I have tasted the sweetness of their prosperity, I am still worried because I have a new set of "rules" now:*

1. *I should save some money for my old age.*
2. *My children still lack a solid foundation so I must provide more assistance.*
3. *I should return to college and finish my studies.*
4. *I should continue my volunteer work, for in the midst of serving others I can learn how to love myself this is the source of my personal growth.*

This woman was in her fifties talking. She had a unfortunate marriage; while her children were still young she divorced her husband, because her husband had an affair with someone else. She brought up her two sons and one daughter single-handedly. Because she does not have a higher education diploma, her jobs were mostly manual

labor. Today, all three of her children have married. Besides her active participation in local district activities and volunteer work at the church, she spends the rest of her time rearing her grandchildren. It was only after 50 that she began thinking about herself and her future. Why was this mother's sense of responsibility, or what she called 'guilt,' toward her children paid back through unconditional giving? Why was it that in her world there are only others? Why was she "absent" in her own world?

## 3. Dai-wei

*I have always thought of myself as independent. I grew up with my mother and, sometimes made the major decisions around the house—although I never asked for that job. Because I realized that I was raised **almost** like an "only child" (I was the one constantly next to mother's side), I often hoped for a younger sibling. It seems to me that ever since I was young, my "privilege" as the youngest child was taken away from me; meanwhile, all these years this is really what I wanted... I wanted to "receive". I wanted mom to love me. Although mom did give me much, it was hard for me at the time to appreciate that... whatever task my sisters could not accomplish, mother always wanted me to finish the job. Yet I needed her to pamper me. I remember I had to work outside during my 2nd grade. In 4th grade, I had to carry bags of rice home everyday... I saw the pain and hardship mother endured, but I was the youngest; she **should** have loved me more! I've never felt I had enough love... what is important for me now is to face all these things that I wanted as a child. Mother had to go out to work and I always had to stay home alone... The only thing I did every day ritually was to run out of the house and go to that place where I used to cry. Then to myself I would tell mother, "Don't come back anymore..." Twenty years have now passed. Instead, I have realized that I always wanted to tell her **not** to go anymore. My behaviors were opposite to my inner feelings. Whenever I wanted something, I would say I didn't need it... I **had** to be strong, stronger and better than mother. When I recall these deeply ingrained, hard-to-confront memories, I see that my mom did not mean to have things turn out this way, and that she had exhausted all her strength trying to do better. Mom endured all the pain that she could have endured. In the past, it was easy for me to see what mother did **not** do. Now, I see all that she **has** done for me, and*

*indeed, she has done so much... it was not until the last session that I saw how fortunate and blessed I was.*

After all these years, not only is she a mother, she still cannot forget that"little girl" who needed to be loved and pampered. Is it not possible for such a person to grow up as she advanced in age? As she came to understand her life process and was able to let go of the past, she realized that she already had received much. How is it that her "life story" did not change, but, in facing her past, her attitude changed?

The above three excerpts are extrapolated from the process of this research—they were only three among many. Even though they do not fully represent the rest of the participants, and certainly cannot represent all those Chinese women who grew up in Taiwan—for everyone's life story is so unique—there are commonalities behind these stories. For one thing, these three women courageously walked through a process of inner struggle and sought after their life fulfillment and life meaning for no one else but themselves.

If we are to answer the questions that were posed after each woman's account, we need to investigate them through two streams of processes: one is individual process; the other is their context of the society and culture in which the women lived. Individual process is simply their "life story". These stories are being performed everyday, and we can witness them as either spectators or participants. These stories are not "scripts" one reads from a printed manuscript on stage. They are more like "backstage" monologues. Often these monologues emerge as dreams at night from the depth of one's heart. More often than not, they cannot be seen nor heard. Yet without any awareness, they inform, influence, and assume the "screenplay" we read on the stage everyday.

The social and cultural process is a bigger stage behind our individual lives. Imperceptibly it controls the course of everyone's "script." Temporally, traditional Chinese culture has always had a direct bearing on the way women are positioned in society, especially in the stereotypical roles of women. These expectations are liken to

"golden rules." Once the "hat" is put on, every woman knows how to play that role. Spatially, because of modernization and intercultural value exchanges between the East and the West, new perspectives are instilled into traditional expectations of women's place in Chinese society. Change has been the result. This intertwining of time and space have produced turbulence for women on the big "stage" of life. Sometimes, the influence of society and culture can not only be a playwright but be like a director. And the actresses' responsibilities are, to their best abilities, devoted to fulfilling their "roles." Thus their true feelings can only be articulated backstage in monologues. Still, they have no way to escape the given social framework from which the society interprets their experiences of joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness.

When a society becomes more open and pluralistic, the members' performances on the "stage" is afforded more freedom. The "actresses" have more room to decide how to perform their roles. That is to say, each individual has more room for monologues—in turn, she will be able to influence her daily speech on stage. This process increases the autonomy of the screenplay. Thus, the changes in the society's culture and the individual's script occur simultaneously. They mutually influence each other.

In the present research project, I have focused upon the monologues of these women. Besides answering the questions raised, I have also closely examined the participants' daily "speeches" on stage and their subjective influence of those speeches on their scripts. However, before we enter their world of monologues, we should try to understand the structure of Taiwanese society and its culture.

# Chapter Two
# The Context

This chapter provides a general socio-cultural background of Chinese women in Taiwan. For the last century, traditional Chinese society has been facing a huge transition from tradition to modernity due to the influence of industrialization and democratization. In order to show the contrasts between these two cultures; this chapter will elaborate on the traditional Chinese beliefs and their current social situations in Taiwan. This discussion will serve as a background to help the reader understand the quoted stories from the women in the previous and future chapters. One point of interest: 99% of the residents in Taiwan are of Chinese origin.

## 1. Traditional Beliefs in Chinese Culture

Contemporary Chinese society has inherited a whole set of traditional value systems that hark back to Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Patriarchal beliefs and patrilineal social systems have been a stabilizing factor in Chinese social structure for a thousand years. And Taiwanese society has retained a number of these traditional beliefs about Chinese women, many of which serve as factors of social norm in present-day society. All these have a great impact on Taiwanese women's development today.

First of all, a traditional woman obeys her father, husband, mother-in-law, and then her oldest son one by one in a sequential manner. Although this custom is not followed so rigidly now, a woman will still be submissive to her own family of origin and her husband's family. This correlates to the fact that a marriage should *always* have the parents' approval, even to the extent that sometimes it is even arranged by parents.

Sacrifice and compliance are traditional characteristics of Chinese women. These

characteristics have been incorporated by the socialization process in the idea of filial piety, which is considered to be the foundation of all virtues. Filial piety means the children have to please, obey, and support their parents, particularly their fathers, when their parents are alive, and mourn and ritually serve their parents after their death. Furthermore for men, they have to reproduce and continue the family line (Yang, Thornton, & Fricke 2000). For women, they learn to sacrifice and comply with the rules of their parents and husband in order to contribute to the "harmonious family atmosphere."

In traditional values, marriage provides Chinese women with the status of being accepted into her husband's family permanently and integrated into the ancestral chain, thereby ensuring her acceptance and care both in this life and in the life after death. This was one of the reasons for marriage for women. Otherwise, both the woman and her family would receive great social pressures (Croll, 1995).

Accordingly, a Chinese woman is expected to be a very filial daughter in her family of origin with responsibility to comply with and take care of her family members. Doing this, she becomes a very filial daughter-in-law in her husband's family after marriage as well. It is a natural obligation to live with her parents before marriage, and take her husband's side and live with her husband's family automatically after the wedding. In those circumstances, she is not only married to a husband, but to the entire family of her husband. Currently, 70% of parents still live with their married son in Taiwan (Lee & Sun, 1995).

Opportunities for women's higher education are limited, despite the fact that education has always enjoyed a high value in Chinese Culture. Not only is being educated prestigious in itself, it is also a major means for upward social mobility (Hsieh, 1996). There is a belief that the more a woman is educated, the less her marriage will be satisfactory and the less she will be devoted to her husband's family. Usually the old generation would say: "Why would a girl want more schooling? What would be the use

of an educated woman? If she has too much study, no one will marry her." Thus, research has shown that there is a high correlation between women who have higher education degrees and staying single (Lee & Sun, 1995). They usually move out from their parents' family and live alone to avoid family pressure.

There is also a tendency in Taiwanese culture to make female intelligence seem both different and naturally inferior, which causes women's study to be oriented toward liberal arts and female-related disciplines (Honig & Hershatter, 1988).

Naturally, a woman's opportunity is limited if she does not bear a son in her marriage. Traditionally, only a son could carry on the family name (Verschuur-Basse, 1996). Thus, a Chinese woman has the "responsibility" of having at least one son to continue the husband's family name to the next generation. Fulfilling this responsibility helps a Chinese woman to establish her self-esteem and to acquire some kind of status in the family. Otherwise, she may be shadowed by an extra-marital affair of her husband and be rejected by her husband's family.

Here is a vivid description from one of my friends:

> *When my first baby was delivered in the hospital, my parents-in-law came to the hospital and found that the baby was a girl. They left right away without even seeing the baby and me at all. When my second baby was delivered after my husband and I made a lot of effort, they were told the baby was a boy, they came to see me and gave me a red envelope filled with money as a greeting gift. After I went back home from the hospital, I found that my bedroom was air-conditioned, all prepared, so to speak, for their grandson.*

There is always tension and pressure in a marriage until a son is born, though having a son is not a warrant for the harmony of the marriage. This traditional value of wanting a son still affects Taiwanese women's preference of children, notwithstanding the improvement of women's status, which has been brought about by women's increased educational level, active labor force participation, and independent income (Lee & Sun, 1995).

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Finally, Chinese people, both men and women, are known for their emphasis on 'harmony' or cordiality in social relationships and within social groups (Lin, Tseng & Yeh, eds. 1995). " To maintain harmony is a family's prosperity" is an old saying for the Chinese for centuries. In order for a relationship to be harmonious, both men and women must behave in accordance with those prescriptions that rule their respective roles, so that their mutual expectations, formed from role norms of the patriarchal society, will lead to a stable social structure. Socialized to be a compliant person seems to be the only way for women in Chinese society. Behind the pursuit of interpersonal harmony is a traditional value called *yuan*, or affinity

Although the Buddhist idea *yuan* (affinity or sometimes translated as 'conditionality') is not originally a pessimistic idea, it has in Chinese culture become an extremely fatalistic factor believed to "predetermine" the occurrence, type, duration, and final outcome of an interpersonal relationship. In the eyes of traditional Chinese people, an individual cannot be the active creator of a relationship. For example, a husband and wife are merely passive recipients of the workings of "cause and condition," even though they may have "freely" chosen each other as partners. Since every relationship is predestined by *yuan* and therefore bound to occur, the only sensible thing for the involved parties to do is humbly accept the relationship, stay in it, and peacefully fulfill its requirements.

This defeatist belief system strongly affects the way Chinese women think and behave to avoid guilty feelings and interpersonal hostility when faced with misfortunes. In doing this, they are able, on the one hand, to maintain harmony within their interpersonal relationships and themselves, and, on the other hand, to hope for a better future. This hope can be even projected on to the next life, especially when they continue working ardently to "pay back" what they have "owed' in a previous life (Lin, Tseng & Yeh, eds. 1995).

As a frontier and immigrant society of China since the seventeenth century,

Taiwanese society has retained the above-described characteristics of Chinese society. Although changes in this society are in progress, following industrialization, urbanization, and westernization, the deep-seated ideas and behavioral patterns associated with traditional Chinese belief have not been overturned.

## 2. The Current Changes in Taiwan

A lot of changes happened to Taiwanese society since 1949 when the KMT government moved to Taiwan. All of the social, educational, economical, and political changes have influenced women's lives in Taiwan.

First of all, immigrants from Mainland China had fewer traditional cultural constraints imposed by their extended families, whose members may have been destroyed or separated by wars. Thus, traditional belief systems became less rigid and more flexible, simply for the sake of surviving. The pessimistic belief in *yuan* was challenged by the beliefs in the right of education and the right to have courtship and marriage by individual choice. These challenges originated from the shift of political ideology toward a democratized and westernized orientation. Meanwhile, the idea of equality between men and women was introduced to Taiwanese society, which then caused changes to women's social status.

Recently, 91.33% of women graduated from junior high school, 46.7% from senior high, 53.3% from technology schools, 44.7% from colleges, and 27.9% from master's programs (Lin, ed., 1995). Evidently, gender equity in education is much better than before.

Education leads to change in the lives of individuals. This has been especially true for Chinese women in Taiwan. Since education brought economic independence by labor force participation and the sense of well being in each individual, ideas about egalitarianism and feminism have become the most important part of the life struggle of

Taiwanese women. Along with participating in the labor force, they have earned some power in the family system. Yet, they still struggle for the fight against social pressures, originating from traditional belief system, and for their need for personal growth. Usually the struggles are manifested in home and at work.

It seems that a Taiwanese woman pursues a higher academic degree in order to provide more money for her family and to find a competitive husband. Whenever she marries, the money she earns often goes to her husband's family to show her loyalty to her parents-in-law, and to prepare for her son's birth. Thus, a job is most likely considered to be an instrument. Even though a woman may have a professional career, which can be meaningful for her, it is not to be seen as the most important part of her life by her family and society; she needs to fulfill all the expectations of her family when she pursues her career life. This reality, more often than not, causes pressures from "role-overload" and "role-conflict."

Women still believe that the *yuan* binds them to their husbands, so the roles of wife, mother, and a daughter-in-law are their something "predetermined.' This is probably the reason why 38% of married women leave work due to marriage but only 17% due of childbearing (Lieu, ed., 1995).

Maybe the increased divorce rate (which has tripled during the recent two decades) and the two divorce peaks among the groups of women whose age range from 35 to 39 and beyond 50 can better explain the struggles of Taiwanese women (Lin, ed., 1995). The group of women whose age range from 35 to 39 has already fulfilled the basic childbearing stage; the group of women whose age is beyond 50 has faced the "emptiness" stage of their families. I believe that the fact that those women have already fulfilled the major tasks of childbearing in their families had been a major reason why they divorce. Besides, the remarriage rate for women is much lower than for men, especially for the group of women aged 40 to 44, which has the lowest remarriage rate among all divorced and widowed women.

I conducted an interview-based research study to exam the life stories of Chinese women in Taiwan whose ages ranged from 30 to 55. The following are some common facts extrapolated from my interviews, which provide a realistic picture of contemporary Taiwanese women.

1. They are not the valued children but they contribute enormously to their families of origin.
2. Their persistent endeavors propelled them to accomplish formal education at the college level.
3. Their occupations are usually economically-oriented, with many starting a personal business around 40.
4. They married around 25 and gave birth to their first child within 5 years. Fortunately, they all had one or two sons to keep the "family name."
5. They tended to take care of their families first, then themselves. However, they began to gain a sense of 'independent self' between the ages 35 to 40.

# Part II Sources

# Introduction

Descriptions and reflections of group sessions in this research project will be introduced in this part. The process and the post-group interviews will be summarized as well. While I did this data collection and analysis I reflected my own growing experience. I inserted my own personal life story to reveal any subjectivity I had.

As a background for this educational program, the Satir Model will be described. Then, the pilot study will serve as a rationale for this research project.

I want to share another journal entry of mine:

*As I walk into the lived stories of these participants, I feel as though I am traveling through a tunnel of time. During my facilitation of the group, it was as if I could experience their joy, their sorrows, their life fulfillment, and the struggles they experienced. I lived through the traces of their life experience.*

*It seems to me, almost certainly, that a sense of self-worth can only be actualized by a process of letting go self-pity and developed that further with awareness. This kind of transformational processes typically arises from openness and full acceptance to one's life situations. An openness of mind is indeed very difficult, sometimes even painful, but it can bring about discoveries of our hidden potentials, new ways of experiencing things, and alternative awareness to one's inner resources. Careful and gentle introspection nourishes our sense of self; they are the main ingredients for increasing sensitivity. Difficult as they may be, pain and sorrow make us feel we're alive; they also make us stronger in our determination and courage. Even though life is difficult, each step we take can be an occasion for realization.*

*This course is much like the natural process of opening our palms to grasp at the things we want; the process of self-transformation toward congruence is also a natural course of letting go and picking it up. The more we let go, the more we can learn. The more we experience life, the clearer we become, and the more we appreciate the meaning of our lives. --Pei*

# Chapter One
## Process of Group Sessions

This chapter is going to summarize the process of the group sessions. Because I served as a researcher and a participant, my reflection will be included as a part of the process. After expressing my regards to everyone, I shared my feelings upon entering the conference room. I felt excited, but a bit nervous. But what is more important is that I felt encouraged from the atmosphere of the room. I encouraged everyone to freely share her feelings of the moment. Most of them expressed that they were quite comfortable and full of anticipation. Some expressed their edginess because they weren't sure what was going to happen. I took this opportunity to introduce what I had in mind for this research project and its sessions. I also explained how I would keep all information confidential and guarantee everyone's anonymity. I also encouraged them to raise questions and offer their opinions on the course of this research.

Whenever there was a question, besides explaining to the questioner my original intentions, I also invited her own thoughts and opinions on the matter. I wanted to start afresh and do away with the traditional hierarchical structure of the "teacher" and "student" relationship. Instead, I wanted this process to be one of collaboration. Besides, questions raised could only help the whole group gain a clearer picture of this project. For example, someone asked whether they had the right *not* to participate in any particular group process, especially those that would make them feel uneasy; someone else asked whether they would know for sure that the type recordings will be destroyed; still, another asked whether it was alright for her to use the designed programs anytime outside of this group. All of these questions were resolved by our extensive group discussions. I wanted the participants to have the privilege of asking questions. In my introduction, I emphasized that this project was not built upon the hierarchical structure of traditional

education and that the heart of this project relied on everyone's subjective experience. The meaningfulness of the program content and process could only come from everyone's effort and immediate response. In other words, this project had "25" researchers. I do not know whether I had overly projected my own thoughts, but what I saw when I said this was many lively faces of anticipation.

The plan of the whole research was finalized on the basis of the participants' discussion and agreement. The plan included the course direction, procedure, time schedule, and location. We also decided that I would record the whole process and have them sign an "informed consent" agreement.

Even having taught for 18 years and led large and small group workshops for over 20 years, this project was still a new experience for me. It posed several challenges: Would I be able to put aside the roles of a traditional teacher and a professional therapist and still fully participate in this process? Am I able to fulfill my dual role as a participant and a researcher? There was one thing I was sure of: I felt humbled and respectful toward this project, because I know that to enter this group process was to enter into the "life story" of each and every participant.

This pre-group session went unexpectedly well—most of the participants were ready to start the first session; only three or four women were a bit reserved in their enthusiasm. In the group, they were considered "juniors." I remember asking myself, "Should I encourage them or just let things be as they are? What will happen when "seniors" and "juniors" are mixed together?" Before I came up with any new ideas, I fall easily back on my habitual mode of thinking—my past experience told me to "wait" and "observe" before I make any decisions.

## 1. First Session

The course design had two main objectives: First, to familiarize participants with one another. To this end, I arranged the whole group into "triads," or three-person sub-

groups, whenever they engaged in sessions of sharing. This arrangement mimicked the "basic family" structure. Second, to become aware of the "gap" between their ideals and the reality they live in. According to the results of the pilot study, this kind of awareness may advance self-reflection, through which greater acceptance of their future process can take place.

In the first session the participants were asked to freely form triads. They were asked to shared what they thought would characterize an "ideal mother." Afterwards, the whole group convened and articulated their results. Next, they grouped again in threes and shared what they thought would characterize an "ideal father." In the following large group discussion, we had a realization: We noticed that the standards and expectations projected on to the father, in comparison to the mother, were much more lenient; and their projected "requirement" of the mother were high and strict. Afterwards, they compared their "ideals" with the "reality;" the comparison and verification stimulated all sorts of reflections.

The following are excerpts taken from the journals:

> *Talking about it today, after so many years since their death, brings deep feelings of gratitude, nostalgia, and anxiety over separation. If only I had a second chance to allow them to be themselves instead of imposing my ideal parents on them.* --Shui-huai

> ...

> *All of these [requirements] have to do with the personality of my parents. Some of the qualities of those requirements were already present in them; most came from my expectations. Some seemed like ideals that I wanted to fulfill or I wanted my 'partner' to have.* –Hsin-chu

> ...

> *Hearing... the many roles that the "ideal mother" has to fulfill, I suddenly felt at fault... all I heard were "projections!" But come to think of it, if someone can **really** fulfill all of these requirements, she must be a Saint! I was relieved from this idea. I stopped blaming myself.* –Mei-foun

...

> *When I saw how privileged the 'ideal father' was, in terms of his responsibilities and so on, I began to think whether this was caused by the idea that "the more the person involves herself to role tasks, the more others will have demands on her." This was how mother was. Since "fathers'" usually cannot involve themselves completely to their families (they usually worked outside of it), are they relieved from fulfilling different responsibilities? Is it enough to ask the person who is standing outside the door to stand at the doorstep? Is it enough to ask the person who is standing at the doorstep to step inside the house?* –Dai-wei

...

> *I was taken aback thinking about the ideal father because to me a father is not only the most important person but has a lasting impact on the whole family. Even though we [her family members] all knew that my father took care of the whole family and loved us dearly, we "carefully" related to him and tried to always please him.* –Mei-lin

I introduced an interlude called "stopping the music." Whenever I called for this, we would temporarily leave behind the previous topic and reflect on what just happened. We tried to become aware of what we have observed and understood of ourselves in relation to the rest of the group. The majority of people thought the topic under discussion correlated easily and applied to their day-to-day experiences. In the heated discussions, their familiarity with one another naturally grew.

In the third small grouping of triads, the participants were asked to find new partners. I wanted them to try to experience their new partners in a much deeper way. This way, when they made their final decision for choosing their triad partners, they could have had many people to choose from.

The topic of this time was on their "birth order" in their families of origin:

> *The personality of the "eldest sibling" makes her an easy target. Though it was a dignified and respected position, in the end, all the things that*

*needed to be done always ended up in my hands! Though I tolerated the responsibilities, inside me there were many complaints... this situation reminds me of my work.* –Yi-pin

...

*I felt consolation after listening to other "second children" saying that they shouldered a large load of responsibility in their family—I thought I was the only one. But I also thought that it was time to "let go" of this heavy load of responsibility. I wish gradually to actualize this wish.* –Hui-min

...

*There is no belief in "favoring males over females" in my house. At that time of age, that was indeed "rare." Yet at the same time because of this, being the eldest gave me a lot of pressure. I am and will always be the eldest... I do not feel inferior among men nor feel uncomfortable.* –Shin-hua

...

*While I was renewing my ideas about my relationship with my brothers and sisters, I understood that I have always wanted a "protection shield" and more freedom. These mentalities have influenced my working attitude and interpersonal relationships.* –Mei-lin

...

*I realized that I was the kind of youngest child who was always the closest to her parents. Because I also knew the high expectations my parents had toward my siblings, therefore, whenever they could not fulfill or accomplish a task, I very much wanted to accomplish it for them. However, my parents never wanted their "youngest child" to accomplish those things. Thus, I have become both compliant and rebellious.* –Min-yin

...

*I suddenly feel conflicted inside. On the one hand whenever I take up responsibilities I feel honored and contented, yet, at the same time I feel pressured... now whenever there are things to be done, father always find*

*my younger brother to do them. I feel relieved, yet at the same time I feel lost... when a girl grows up, she will eventually be someone's wife and become a mother herself.* –Mei-lin

The last triad is made up of members selected from their previous three groupings. They decided who they wanted to be in their party. This last triad would last till the end of the project. After a period of chaos, they were finalized. Because I was not involved in any groups, they were able to form eight triads.

This time their topic for sharing was "How I feel about my name?" The purpose of this topic was to allow everyone to focus on the self is not associated with the roles they play in life. When members of the large group shared their feelings, there were opposite extreme feelings:

*I have never felt my name was beautiful. Yet, that night, I felt my name was so beautiful. I was surprised by such feelings... I became aware that I was proud in some areas of my being.* –Shin-hua

...

*While doodling in class—it all happened when I began to scribble my name—I felt that the pictures correlated accurately my actual feelings at the time; the feeling was wonderful... I felt serene and at ease. But I was not paying attention in class.* –Lai-lai

...

*I do not particularly like it because it is nothing special... whenever I see others with the same name as mine, I feel that dad had probably given me my name arbitrarily.* –Mei-yu

...

*Somehow I didn't feel anything in that moment. It was as if everything went blank. After I calmed down, I realized that I never really paid much attention to myself. It seemed as if I forgot about me.* –Mei-foun

...

*I felt it was not as good as others because it was not sophisticated enough. It sounded dumb and I didn't like it, although it wasn't awkward or anything... it was not until I found that not many people have the same name as mine that I began to like my name... It did not matter who called out my name, I always felt as if I had done something wrong or I was lacking something.* –Jen-chu

...

*All the accumulated emotions inside have left me with only one feeling toward my name—no feelings... suddenly, I experienced a clarity of some sort: to me, a name is just a indicator. This is like the different phases of my life; all of them are just a part of on me. I hope others, and my self, can whole-heartedly try to know my whole being.* –Kai-min

The first group session had finished. At the end there was another interlude of "stop the music," during which two issues were raised and developed into topics for the next session. First, "Why did this group get so deeply involved so quickly?" Second, "During our selection for triad partners, my choices made me feel uncomfortable." Everyone passionately shared her ideas on the first topic of discussion. The following are excerpts of some of their main points:

*I realized there are commonalities among us. I was quite happy without having to stray from the topic of discussion. I enjoyed very much the atmosphere we created was very relaxing and at the same time collected.* –Yen-fen

...

*The whole process guided by the facilitator/teacher has allowed me to see her gentle attitude and careful attention to everyone. An unnoticed sense of secure feeling and trust arose in me. I only had one question: Just what was happening in the group? Her presence seemed to have unified the group and give it cohesion. Did the facilitator/teacher cause this to happen or did it come from the predisposition of the students?* –Shiu-yu

...

*The introduction in the beginning clarified everyone's right and responsibility; I was quite touched by this and felt grateful. I often feel that the problems between people come from a lack of clear boundaries between each other.* –Kai-min

. . .

*... I felt more grounded after signing the informed consent because I could now sincerely express my feelings openly to the group members without reservations.* –Hui-min

Only one triad had feelings of discomfort about the sub-grouping arrangement. After I explained that the reason for sub-grouping the participants into three people groups induced changeability and how everyone had the opportunity to reflect on their interpersonal relationships outside the project, this is how they responded:

*I fear they will have conflicts so I didn't look at them. I just hope that everything will turn out peacefully. Was this my "ostrich mentality" appearing again?* –Min-yin

. . .

*I really admire their courage to openly express their discomfort. The facilitator's composure and unconditioned patience also gave me an insight: Why do people have to have their ways?* –Shin-hua

. . .

*No matter what, people should always express their own needs. Everyone needs to learn that which they lack.* –Ai-mei

. . .

*Originally my mood was not influenced. But now it seems I am being influenced gradually. I feel anxious and unsettled. I guess this is another kind of learning.* –Fon-jen

**Reflections**

In terms of the content of the programs, the group process is progressing on track as originally planned. They have indeed opened more doors for reflection during those topics for sharing. The depth of their sharing was beyond my expectation. I have my own views on the things they shared and have summarized them under different categories:

1. They have experienced and realized the existence of positive and negative feelings toward their parents in the depth of their heart.

2. They have also realized that their expectations toward their mother is much more stricter than their fathers.

3. They have moved toward acceptance of their parents and were able to accept them as they are.

4. They saw the connection between their order of birth in their families and how it has invisibly influenced their interpersonal relationships outside their families.

5. They became aware of the heavy load of role expectations. Although they want to let go of the load, they cannot.

6. To face their "names" was like facing the "self." And this self is something they have often forgotten to take into consideration.

These inductions led me to an impression that these participants must have already, in bits and pieces, thought about their own situations in daily living. Therefore, when we began the programs and they were in an environment that encouraged and structured their previous fragmented thoughts, they were able to quickly dive into self-reflection. At the same time, because they were all social welfare volunteers with demands for extending care to others and other social work trainings, they were able to focus on each topic and go deep into themselves.

Actually, facing this kind of result, I feel at once pleased and worried. I feel pleased because the plan they came up with matched their needs. I feel worried because the Satir Model is originally a model for family therapy. And by applying this type of therapeutic model to an educational program, since education and therapy cannot be clearly delineated and, once this program progresses to an extent and depth that the issue of ethics arises, will I have to put on my therapist's hat and intervene in their process?

The group process was also unexpectedly smooth, including the last session where a few people expressed discomfort. That was also very meaningful. I believe the causes were:

1.  The pre-group session indeed gave everyone a sense of security and trust;
2.  Most participants knew each other;
3.  Women volunteers have always had strong motivations for learning;
4.  Participants for this project were limited in number; and they felt privileged to be a part of it;
5.  The triad format gave participants a feelings of being rooted, especially when everyone convened as a large group;
6.  Because they were all women, it was easy for them to inspire each other to the same depth of involvement.

The last episode has caused me to see a possible conflict:

1.  Would each woman have the courage to speak out for her discomfort?
2.  Would they, after clarify the issue, compromise and "give in" the group?

I did not know whether "speaking out" was a way to gain their right or to gain "attention?" This has led me to further ideas. Modern women, who live in this structured society, feel on the one hand restrained and want to step outside of their roles and, on the

other hand, feel compliant to shoulder their role-tasks that society has given them. This is like the eldest daughter of a family. On the one hand, she complains of the heavy load of responsibilities. On the other hand, she strives so hard to please her parents. Behind this phenomenon is the psychological dynamic of wanting to be important and confirmed. "I" want to be seen, "I" want to be important, "I" want to be confirmed—how do these feelings influence their wish to change (the triad arrangement)? What kind of learning process will it take for one to move from "the courage to speak out" to realizing that they only wanted "to be heard?" I could not help but to recollect how I have learned.

## 2. Second Session

All participants arrived at the research facility on time. I guided everyone through a short period of meditation to draw everyone's attention to their immediate room and their physical bodies. Then I introduced "temperature reading."

'Temperature reading" is a way for group members to assess their experiences, feelings, and ideas generated by their human environment (in our case, their past and current sessions) into a five-fold scheme:

1. Appreciation and excitement
2. Worries, concerns, and puzzles
3. Complaints and possible solutions
4. New information
5. Hopes and wishes

In order to avoid limitations, participants can pick the ones in which they feel they are most interested and meaningful to share. After they offered their feelings from the previous session, most of them expressed that they have tried to understand their own parents with new perspectives and, being mothers themselves, despite their

imperfections, the results of their sharing allowed them to be more accepting and self-affirming. Many also expressed their appreciation because their relationships with their children had previously been tense and rigid.

I also shared my own ideas and feelings with them. I also read them a letter I wrote to my daughter. The atmosphere of the group was very moving. The atmosphere of the group also moved me to read to everyone the journals I have collected from them because I believed they contained the same issues that those 24 women shared. Besides reading to them descriptions of some people's feelings and response, their journals conveyed many insights:

> *I very much appreciate... the mutual respect, equality, and our way of communication... I think that the only way to love ourselves is to courageously face and accept ourselves.* –Jin-hui

> ...

> *I realized that my continual support for your (her daughter's) pursuit for advance studies—to have an opportunity to go to another place—has cost me to experience the pain of separation.* –Mei-lin

> ...

> *I envy their mutual consideration, support, respect, and affection. When I think of my sterility and my relation with my mother... we were considerate of and respectful to each other; most of all we were supportive to each other, but we lacked intimacy. I guess this is what I envy the most.* –Shin-hua

> ...

> *I think that my parents have always been helping their children in a quiet way without them knowing it. They also did not know how to express their feelings... we have also learned not to disclose our feelings of failures and frustrations to mom and dad... I think that we were overly considerate of one another, but we ignored the real need inside us.* –Min-yin

> ...

> *I have understood that only oneself can only pave the road to autonomy,
> one step at a time. These steps are likening to accumulate experiences of
> exploration, learning, and discoveries. And the greatest support comes
> from her family's encouragement, understanding, and respect.* –Hai-shui

Next, the group engaged in another topic: construction of the 'family map,' Through this workshop, participants can clearly layout the structure of their family of origin, its members' description (by using three adjectives), and their relation to one another (by using thin and thick lines to demonstrate the level or depth of their intimacy). Within the triad, if they are trying to construct A's family map, then B interviews A to get all the information and C actually draws it out. This way, A can wholeheartedly concentrate on what she would like to say. Everyone takes turns being A so by the end of the workshop everyone has a family map.

Because there wasn't enough time to finish everyone's family map in the first session, people suggested that we continue this workshop at the next session. After a period of discussion, everyone agreed.

### Reflection

In the beginning of the session I realized that everyone was very excited. The level of energy was quite high and the atmosphere was waft. Of course, this is the judgment of a so-called "professional" therapist. There is another judgment associated with the first one: it is not easy for any deep reflection or learning to occur in such an atmosphere.

I thought about my previous concern about a therapist's intervention. Myles Horton's words came to mind: "If I am the expert, my expertise is in knowing not to be an expert or in knowing how I feel experts should be used." (Bell, Gaventa, and Peters, eds. 1990)

Therefore, I decided to put on the therapist's hat and guided everyone through a period of meditation in order to focus and calm the atmosphere of the group. At the same time, I tried to observe my own intentions and behavior carefully every moment.

Because I was very relaxed, fortunately I did not get stuck on my own thought process. I felt that my mood and thoughts were unobstructed; with ease, I was naturally one with the whole group. I felt bad that I could join them in their three-person discussion, so I decided to treasure every moment of the large group sharing process because I could share with them my own feelings and ideas. I was content with my decision and actions. It allowed me to relate to myself in this group as a human being. Consequently, the interaction between the group and me was mutually influencing.

The group was silent after I finished reading to them the letter for my daughter. This silence contained a conglomeration of mixed feelings of being touched, admiration, envy, and introspection. All of these feelings were evident in their journals. However, I had a different perspective on that period of silence. Chinese people have always expressed their complex inner emotions through silence. Such permitted and unexpressed feeling is like an undercurrent that moves ever so slowly behind Chinese family interactions. This is very common, even now. Such reaction is most glaring when an authority is the object of such feelings. Evidently, this cultural element was also present in our group. I could not stop thinking, "Where is the wonder and beauty of human relations? When to be quiet and when to voice one's feelings?" All this made me think about my own upbringing and educational process, how both of my western and eastern values on education were actively interacting. What will happen to the women who are born and raised in Taiwan? What will happen to those caterpillars? I really don't know.

During the temperature reading process, I saw some of the participants change. These changes have two characteristics: first, they have increasingly become aware and accepting of the reality of their own existence. Second, they have allowed more space for interaction and adjustment as the result of this acceptance. Of course, the group also saw these changes; that's why at times they would ask themselves, "How is it that we can go so deep so quickly?" At those times, despite their voiced introspections, basically they had not left the sense of security, trust, group cohesion, and motivation.

## 3. Third Session

As soon as the members of a three-person group arrived, they naturally began to finish their family mapping by themselves. After an hour, participants used temperature reading to share with everyone their process of constructing the family maps. Afterward, they used "stop the music" to reevaluate that process. What follows are excerpts from their journals, which reveal a variety of feelings of being lost, rejection, discovery, and doubt:

> *After seeing more negative than positives descriptions of my family members, I screamed in my mind, "No! That is not my home; it is not.' I felt saddened and wanted to cry, to escape. It was as if I could not accept imperfections.* –Hui-min

> ...

> *It is very difficult to describe my family of origin. I feel they are so close, yet, so distant from me.* Shin-chu

> ...

> *Looking at this family map, I feel somewhat of a mixed feeling... of course the family has not fallen apart or anything; there were no real big quarrels, but neither was there warmth and joyfulness. At times I really feel happy to have been born into this "ordinary' or 'normal" family, which gave me the freedom to be myself and the opportunity to be independent. How ironic!* –Ai-mei

> ...

> *I really appreciated my partners for asking those questions that I simply have never thought of. I have discovered new things about my family and have gained new ways of looking at my family relations.* –Yen-ju

> ...

*Even though I have always wanted an intimate relationship with members of my family of origin, I realized that actually I am not quite comfortable with that kind of relationship. Keeping a distance gives me more freedom; I would feel better this way.* --Yi-pin

...

*More and more I am closer to myself, understanding of myself... optimistic, fond of studying, tendency to simplify things—how typical of me!* Kai-min

...

*I have noticed those women who are over fifty seem to be living out their lives with such ease and with a relaxed and joyful attitude. In stead I feel as though, being forty, I have just begun the journey toward chaos.... how I wish I could feel more and more self-at-ease.* –Yen-fen

...

*I suddenly realized that we were never that close to one another (between family members).... it seems that I have never looked so closely at our relationship... if we could just adjust our mutual expectations closer to reality, then we would be more accepting and flexible toward each other.* –Shui-yu

...

*I realized that I have a fixed mode of thinking. And that is, I think, the way things should be.... I long, hope, and try hard to attain my goals. Every time I fail, I allow myself to settle down.... and readjust my values. This process is very tiring and painful, but worth it.* Hai-shui

...

*After they have finished their family maps, their attitudes is such that they all will assume a more lenient attitude and lower their expectations toward their fathers. I, on the other hand, had fallen into a different introspective mood.... It seems that I have never given up my dissatisfaction toward father... yet I feel guilty for my expectations... perhaps an appropriate distance among family members can sustain that balance of peace.* —Shui-yu

...

*How often we do not know how to express our love toward others. Today I have realized that it can be quite simple. By "attentively listening' to others is itself a form of acceptance. When others find that I have "understood' them, they feel they are important and are being accepted and loved.* –Shin-hua

...

*Today I have seen the joy and esteem of being over fifty. I also saw the possibilities open to those over forty. We are the ones in control of our changing process to create our dreams. Away with those formatted values imposed on us. How wonderful is this! This is indeed something worth celebrating—to the future of mature women!* –Mei-foun

## Reflection

It was a very touching evening. Everyone was walking into their own inner world of family relations and sharing what they had experienced, apparent and concealed. In the room, sadness and joy, crying and laughter existed simultaneously. I was moved by this intense climate to write down my feelings. I shared it with them during the temperature reading and it induced further sharing of their feelings. Min-Yin had this to say in her journal:

> *Tonight's sharing seemed very philosophical—the climate was consistently alive with feelings. Perhaps this mood had touched everyone's inner world. There were melancholy thoughts and feelings of powerlessness. Yet, in the midst of this vulnerability, one can also sense these women's determination and insistence. It also contained contentment with their imperfect families. This inexpressible feeling touches me! Indeed, there is a basic goodness in human beings.*

Hai-shui also wrote:

*I am quite touched by tonight. I want to give myself some homework assignment... I want to recollect all those people who walked into my life, disregarding of their influence on me and the duration of our knowing each other.*

Many facts became evident to me tonight:

1. The willingness to discover and relate to others can bring new perspectives and understandings, which in turn can transform and extend our subjectivity.

2. After their re-examination and analysis of their families, they altered and/or gained more perspectives on top of their original outlooks.

3. By re-examining their family systems, they naturally relate better to their own self-understanding and acceptance.

4. Under such circumstances of understanding and learning, they not only enter into a realm of "discovery" but also can easily respond through actions and further their openness to learn and inquire.

5. Group dynamics come from the creativity of its members. This is a reality. The leader only needs to be one with the group.

6. Perhaps their focus on relationships with their parents was an extension from the first session. It is also possible that parents are the most significant other in the child rearing process.

The conclusions above come from my objective observations. But all of my feelings come from participants' revelation. I observed myself why I am always so moved by life's sorrow and joy. I discovered that I resent the vanity and superficiality in daily living, even though I know they are an indispensable part of human survival and development. Yet, self-transcendence and transformation is the most valuable ability of being human. Sorrowful and joyful life-moments conceal their innermost emotions and values—these are the most genuine qualities of existence and one's bases of self-

transcendence and transformation. Whenever human beings are in the process of discovering their feelings and values or beliefs, they are learning how to transcend and change themselves. I believe this with conviction and insistence.

## 4. Fourth Session

Besides guiding them through the meditation sessions and facilitating the temperature readings, I asked everyone to create "family sculptures." I explained to them that within a family there are five types of communication or survival stances for its members: placating, blaming, being super-reasonable, and being irrelevant and congruent. Each survival stance has its own "posture" and the meaning derived from that posture. These five types of postures demonstrate how members of a family communicate with one another. Each posture is known as family sculpture. Family sculpture is three-dimensional, in motion, interactive, and is an externalization of one's inner feelings. Thus, the internal and external correspond to one another. After my explanation, we demonstrated how to do the actual "sculpting." Then, each triad worked on its own sculpting. The whole group convened afterwards to share their discoveries. Due to the number of participants in each subgroup and a lack of space, we decided to narrow the "family sculpture" to only each participant's relationship to their father and mother.

This workshop lasted for five hours, a whole afternoon. No one was absent. One after another, the women staged their triangular relationship with their parents. Here aresome of the things they said:

> *Today, I finally understand my close relationship with my father and mother. That relationship included envy and jealousy. Furthermore, unconsciously I developed a critical and faultfinding attitude toward my mother and I really yearned for father's attention and caring. But today I am much clearer. If I can diminish my criticism of mother and lessen my expectations toward father, we would get along much better. —Yen-ju*

...

*After seeing how my family of origin operated, I really wish I could adjust my way of relating to father. I don't think it's so difficult... at this moment my heart is content.* –Jen-chu

...

*In the process of sculpting, there are discoveries. But how far are these realizations from "reality?" It is hard not to doubt.* –Mei-lin

...

*This time I have regained all of my feelings... I realized that I played the placating role... I used to always think of myself as being fortunate. Now I realize that in the past I exerted so much effort fawning. But what is more important is that my whole family was involved in my growing process; they shared my experiences.* –Dai-wei

...

*I realized that everyone in the family system plays an important role, despite outsiders' perception of a particular member as rotten, irresponsible, and isolated... [but] after experiencing some emotional ups and downs, feelings of being touched, and many discoveries, my mood is much more stable.* –Chen-tien

...

*During the sculpting, body postures are burdensome, ... after hearing the person who played my father complains about his pose; I could not help feeling rueful. Before, my response would have been to maintain the same situation, without wanting to change. Now, I want to give it one more try and draw close my father and improve how we interrelate to one another.* –Hui-min

## Reflection

Today, I gave a lecture on survival stances that included a demonstration. I became aware that I had returned to a traditional role of a teacher. Because of this, I had an

insight. The traditional role of a teacher is self-protecting. Most of the task of a teacher is to be involved through the intellect and less of emotional involvement, or what I call being human. When I put on the façade of an authority figure, all I have to do is to use the neocortex or my "thinking brain" to do the talking. If I were to use Satir's theory to analyze this behavior, the character trait of traditional teachers is that of "super reasonable. "That is, only one-way teaching happened in the learning situation. Yet, most of the participants were used to this way of "receiving knowledge." Only Jin-hui responded differently in her journal:

> *Everyone else was as totally involved. Three-person small group discussions were heated, as usual. However, there was something different. People spoke out less and less. In recalling this process, I felt stifled and pressured in the first half of that session. I do not understand the cause of that pressure, or how it operated inside me. I knew that it was better to share whatever feelings or thoughts I had, but I really had trouble expressing them. At times during a sharing process—especially during those moments when I felt strongly about something—while speaking, my thoughts would drift outside of the group. What could I have done? I feel so sorry toward the teacher.*

I believe that my "fatigue" did not come only from five hours of talking. I think most of it came from limiting my own participation. Because everyone came from our traditional system of education, they were already in a habit of allowing their thoughts to "roam freely outside of the topic of discussion"—in other words, they permitted themselves to be inattentive. For this reason, they didn't bother to ask themselves, "Why was I inattentive and absent-minded during the sharing session?"

In Chinese culture, responsibility for learning lies totally with the students. When they cannot learn, they think it is their fault. They *should be* sorry to the teacher. This model of learning presupposes that the teacher is *always* right. For this reason, authority always absolutely lies with the teacher. This system of belief in Chinese culture has existed for thousands of years. The impact of this belief is present today and, since the

source of authority is always ascribed to the parents or teacher rather than the learner, responsibility for learning resides with the student. For this reason, learning is passive and education is a process of control and domination. How wasteful and unfortunate this is!

Nevertheless, the group had other voices:

> *There is a great difference between knowing the sculpting process and actually doing it. It is easier to appreciate the meaning of sculpturing from the process of knowing to doing. After the performances, hearing the teacher's explanation and integrating it through recollection trying to re-experience the process, I can appreciate much more what family sculpture is about. –Yen-fen*

Reports such as this cannot help induce self-reflection and re-evaluation. Despite the fact that I dislike the traditional role of the teacher in Chinese society, if the needs and the predispositions of the learners are known, considering the primacy of the learners' learning process, appropriate explanation can be an effective learning method. On a different note, this way of thinking is debatable. After all, who decides the needs and predispositions of the learners? What is the appropriate content and timing for teaching? Coming from this kind of reflection, I can now safely reinterpret my "fatigue" as "boredom." Compared with the previous sessions we had done, it is clear that "exciting" learning should include an exchange of knowledge and feelings, and there should be involvement in the experience. What makes these experiences exciting is their interactivity.

Apart from this, participants were all caught up with their own family issues. Everyone came up with her own discoveries. What surprised me was how so many participants gained insights into their relationship with their fathers and, as a result, increased their level of acceptance. Comparing their experiences with my own—especially my relation with my father and my status in my family structure (oldest among the siblings)-- brought forth new insights.

The father figure in Chinese culture represents authority. Furthermore, due to the male dominated Chinese societal structure, daughters in the family structure are not given their due recognition, despite their contributions and efforts to show their importance in the family. They are not even comparable to a spoiled and rotten son. This caused me to see the participants' need to be recognized and to be given their due "attention.' Therefore, the relationship between a daughter and a father can directly influence a woman's self-esteem and self-worth.

If this cultural value placed on women does not change, and if Taiwanese women continue to carry the wish to be recognized without gaining any recognition, then will not they project their expectation to be recognized on their future husbands when they finally have their own families and have given all they have to it? In order for a "caterpillar" to become a "butterfly,' will it try to fulfill this expectation or let go of it? Furthermore, for those women who are over 50 years old, does it mean that their sense of autonomy and freedom comes from finding the subtle balance on such expectation? Or does it come from being an authority figure themselves?

All of these reflections remind me of my own learning process. How did I confront authority figures? How did I face my own father and husband? How did I work out my own needs and expectations? How did I become who I am now?

## 5. Fifth Session

Up to this time, from the perspective of the program content, every participant entered the family relation that she cares the most for. The family relations of these women had some breakthroughs as a result of a series of observations, understandings, and acceptances on the part of these women. What I mean by a "breakthrough" is that these women, through newly gained insights, changed and relinquished their old ways of interaction. For this reason, this session was devoted to examining everyone's own family rules, with the presupposition that every behavior comes from a set of invisible "rules"

that shapes it. Only when these rules change will the following behavior change. Yen-ju wrote:

*Rules:*
1. *Husbands and wives should live in harmony; they should encourage a peaceful atmosphere at home and avoid quarrelling.*
2. *When parents are quarreling, even though the children are dissatisfied, they should never butt in or raise their voice against the parents.*
3. *Problems at work should be worked out by children and should never reach the parents' ears, lest they worry about you.*
4. *Women should get married before they get "too old," lest the parents worry.*
5. *One should set a time regularly to reunite with her parents. Otherwise, one will have not fulfilled her duties of filial piety.*

*Moderation and Change:*
*If one were to change the **should to can**, or even add an **occasionally**, then the negative emotions and the rigidity of these rules will naturally be moderated, to the possibility that another kind of space may be available. It can thus distance and ease the conflict between the parents and oneself.*

Indeed, the imprint of family rules on our lives is clearly apparent yet invisible. For this reason, the path from identifying our family rules to actualization through positive change is long. For these reason, the fifth session was divided into two parts. The first part was dedicated to identification, the second to moderation. In other words, the first task was to recognize those family rules that caused one to have negative feelings toward interaction with other family members. Then, in the second part, we consciously relaxed these rules in our minds, causing them to be more fluid. This path, of course, was neither easy nor relaxing:

*Not only are my rules everywhere, they are unyielding and stubborn. How amazing! It was hard for me to accept the fact that these rules are operating inside of me. Are these rules me? I even had some minor "rhetorical debate" with other participants trying to justify these rules. –* Shiu-yu

Between relaxing and altering these rules, we experience inner struggle:

> *For a long time, I rejected the word "rules." the more I did this the better. I didn't want to be confined or restrained. However, I have realized that rules have always followed me and influenced every emotion I experienced: happiness, anger, sadness, and joy. To a certain degree, these rules living inside of me have caused me pressure and anxiety. Even though I know very well that to do without them would be a great relief, it is extremely difficult. And even on those rare occasions when I was able to relinquish them, the dis-ease and remorse felt in turn became another form of pressure! Indeed, to throw away the rigid rules, so as to experience a more fruitful way of interaction with members of my family of origin and friends and to be able to live more at ease, takes continual introspection, insight, and letting go.* –Shin-hua

> ...

> *Perhaps after peeling away layers of myself, I can discover deep inside those ambiguous and wooly rules. Yet aren't these rules a symbol of my self? It is off course desirable to leave behind these restraints, but what is left may be a self-isolated and without any context. I fear existing like that. On the other hand, such freedom and openness is appealing. How paradoxical.* –Wun-huai

Some participants were quite insightful and grounded in their observations:

> *I saw how I was conditioned by the rules of my family of origin... I could not disobey but had to follow the will of my parents. I could not talk back. I had to strive to excel, lest allow my parent lose face... all of these are the rules by which I lived. That is why I am not happy. Why was I so compliant toward my parents but now my own kids are so disobedient? Sometimes I think my kids are doing it on purpose, making me angry... now I understand that my rules and my children's rules do not line up. I have asserted too much of my own emotions in my relationship with my kids.* –Mei-lin

> ...

*I have come to realize that the "family rules" I grew up with have now in turn become my own expectations, and I impose them on my own family. Perhaps these rules are a burden for my husband and children. I am using the rules I have learned from my own child-rearing process to make demands on them; I am using my own way to love them. –Mei-yu*

...

*I see that the way my parents showed their love has over-protected me. This led to my own dependency on them and my failure to be autonomous. When I try to be independent, doing what I want, making my own decisions, inner conflict begins. It is as if to be "independent" means to deny my parents and not to be filial. Those disquieting thoughts trouble me. However, because of my insistence to relate to my parents in a new way, I shouldn't feel guilty. --Fon-jen*

## Reflections

In the Satir Model, the process of moderating rigid family rules is an important technique for transformation. It allows participants to see what restraints condition one's experience and inhibits change. By going through this process of discovery, participants can permit themselves an opportunity to "choose." They can choose to relax their grip on those factors.

Conceptually all of these participants knew how much they were influenced by their own family rules. They also realized the meaningfulness of those rules. However, when they confronted situations that require choice, doubt, hesitation, contradiction, and fear inevitably set in. I think that the reality of "change" is essential to living, especially when it unfolds in the moment-to-moment meaning of our existence. Sometimes change is carried out consciously; sometimes it happens naturally; some changes are under our control, some not. The heart of learning hinges on discovery and observation— discovering and observing *how* we change, in all aspects of our being. The more we can discover and the deeper we are able to observe, the more we will understand ourselves.

Perhaps by so doing, we're able to be in charge of the timing of every changing process. Ideally, this is how we can better enable ourselves to attain self-directedness.

What if during the process of discovery and observation people return to their original choices? I tell myself: that kind of decision, *after* the process of discovery and observation, is something quite touching. What if during that process of struggle and conciliation, a person loses her spirit and freedom, and still cannot change her old ways? I can tell myself again: The beauty of the struggle that a heroine went through is worthwhile. This kind of self-dialogue allows me to realize my own rule: The dynamism of life needs continual change and creativity; it is in this process that life meaning unfolds. This kind of thinking actually comes from the influence of my father. My mother, on the other hand, always tried her best to pull me back to be more "stable" and "unchanging.' These two forces clashed inside of me. For better or worse, it seems that the influence of my father won this battle: I recall in my youth, the issue that my parents quarreled over the most was the fact that my father changed too much and was full of dynamism. He seemed to have many "great ideas," one after the other, confusing my mother and making her unable to follow his thinking. And what disturbed my father was my mother's nagging and control. Even though they each insisted on their own ways, their differences actually balanced each other and helped to maintain the continuance of my family. These two forces become a crucial dynamic of our family.

Both of my parents grew up in a time of change and confusion. My father escaped from China to cross the sea to Taiwan with nothing in his pocket. Everything began from zero. I believe his charisma and positive attitude attracted my mother, who grew up in a large farming family of a rural village. Due to the superstitious belief in her family that a boy would be born after my mother, she was sent to another family to be raised. Therefore, she grew up in two households. When my father and mother married, they did not receive blessings from their respective families. Their different customs and different backgrounds caused this. After marriage, mother wanted very much to give birth to a

boy. It was only after giving birth to six girls that a boy was born. Only then did she stop having children.

Those years during which mother and father raised us were a period when father was the most "stable." But he had always been very active, both before and after. In my memory, father has always been actively in pursuit of life meaning. He gave all he had to fulfill his dreams. Even though he would often fail, he would exhaust his resources to actualize his new discoveries in daily living. Therefore, in my mind, father was always unpredictable. Even today, close to eighty years of age, he is always on the run traveling here and there.

My self-dialogue has also led me to believe that I am a very "process oriented" person. I can be quite self-satisfied when I can gain insights into and learn from each moment of my life's process. Among the participants, there were similar views. Here is one:

> *Every time I returned to my triad, I couldn't stop even if I want to.*
> *Perhaps if we knew clearly how long the session would take, what the*
> *group process would be, and its goals and so on before we started, then*
> *maybe, from this type of regulated and system teaching, our learning*
> *process would be more efficient. But we would have lost the possibility of*
> *learning anything new. Why is efficiency important anyway? For whom is*
> *it important?* –Hai-shui

The above passage also reminds me of how I try to be an "efficient" elder sister, an "efficient" teacher, an "efficient" wife, and an "efficient" mother. Efficiency is for the purposes of completing a task successfully, accomplishing a set goal, and fulfilling a responsibility for others and oneself. When others confirm us, we feel our existence is meaningful. I cannot recall when I first "saw through" this game of wanting to be approved by others. On the one hand, I can see the value of this need in a particular period of an individual's life process. On the other hand, I often question myself, "Does being efficient have any inherent value in my life?" Therefore, I now search for meaning.

What I have discovered is that the process of learning is the most important learning process. Knowing how I learn and knowing how I change have caused my past and present experiences to come alive. Because every experience is a learning instrument, I have realized that the "meaning " of my life continues to change from one moment to the next.

## 6. Sixth Session

From my experience as a therapist in therapeutic counseling, when an individual discovers the family rules that condition and restrain him or her, he or she also discovers unfulfilled needs or expectations. These expectations can be expectations received from family members, toward family members, or toward oneself. When an individual develops new positive perspectives of family members, expectations can sometimes be abandoned. Family relations can thus change as a result. However, there are many kinds of expectations operating inside of us without our knowing of their existence. Often they take the form of invisible rules. When these rules are exposed, the expectations may also be recognized. According to the Satir Model, these expectations often trigger the deep-seated needs in people. In Satir therapy, to let go of these ingrained unfulfilled expectations is an opportunity for change. Therefore, toward the end of our program, it was necessary to explore our expectations.

It is important for participants first to identify those who had influenced them the most. Next, it was crucial for them to look into the relationships they had with these people and find out whether there were any unfinished expectations of them and of oneself. Finally, the participants tried to imagine the possible consequences if they were to let go of those expectations. Some participants were gradually able to connect their family rules with their expectations and go a step further to understand more about their own authentic needs:

*Whether it was in daily living or at work, I always willingly played out my roles to fulfill others' expectation of me. In order to satisfy my parents, I only reported to them the "good news" without ever mentioning "bad news." I alone carried the weighty burden of misfortunes. I feel as if I did not exist... father's and mother's influence upon me has been great. They have taught me since I was a little girl that to be a "good Samaritan" is to be straight, that I should peacefully relate to others even allow myself to get the short end of the stick. They also taught me that I should never take advantage of others. I feel so exhausted and helpless! Whenever I want others to express their appreciation of me, to fulfill the need inside to be cared for, I feel guilty; I feel it is wrong of me to do so because these are contrary to my principles. At times, I would suppress my own needs to follow and obey those principles of **proper** behavior. But lately, I find myself asking the question: Do I want to repress myself this way? Of course not. Thus, I have been trying to express and share my needs and opinions with others. I hope to become more relaxed about being me. I want to be happier and more at ease with myself and the world around me. –Hui-min*

Some participants came to realize that they hold the key to self-transformation:

*After these sessions of practice and investigation, I realized that all of my pressures from negative emotions mostly came from rules and unfulfilled expectations. Whenever I could not let go... our interaction becomes either tense or alienated, and our mood was subsequently influenced. When I let go all or some of my own rules and expectations, there was more room for a more peaceful way of communication. At least my own feelings became more relaxed and at ease. Happiness can only be a result of this. Creative living can thus be realized. –Mei-lin*

...

*The more I held tight to my role as the "elder sister," the more expectations I had toward my parents to understand my pressure. I also expected my younger brothers and sisters to take on more responsibilities toward our parents. But I realized that the problem resides with me. When I let go of these expectations, the mountains and rivers are still the same. My parents and sibling are all just fine as they are. I, on the other hand, felt quite relieved... actually when problems arise; it is I who should reflect more. When I change, problems subside by themselves. –Wun-huai*

Besides these responses, participants made other important points:

> *The reason we have expectations of others and toward ourselves is because we experience a sense of lack and longing. A sense of lack means we wish ourselves to be other than we are, so we seek it from others externally. It is not easy. Nor is it natural. So we experience apparent conflicts. The greater the distance between our reality and our expectations, the greater is our anguish. Reflecting on all of this, I cannot help but laugh at my own foolishness.* –Sue-jen

...

> *There are an awful lot of unreasonable expectations. ... When two individuals face each other, is there a moment without expectations?" There is an intimate link between our expectations and the roles we play.... If we can be free from roles, then expectations will disappear.* -- Shiu-yu

...

> *For someone like me, in order to live out a fully and authentic life, courage alone is not enough. It will take A LOT of courage to shake up those deep-seated and indestructible rules and creeds.* –Min-yin

At the same time, there were others who felt self-assured and gratitude:

> *There is a wealth of resources inside of me waiting to be discovered and explored. It seems to me that the process of aging, marriage, and child rearing are still things central to being a woman. It is through this process that made me more mature. However, whether I will be wise will depend on my own efforts. It is odd that I do not feel pressured; instead I feel grateful. I am grateful to have this opportunity.* –Shin-hua

I reminded everyone that there would be only one more session left of this program. I then discussed with them the schedule and location of our follow-up interviews. We came

to the conclusion that we would conduct the interviews at my research office. Three participants came ahead of the interviews to decorate the room.

### Reflections

The program is now coming to a close. More and more, I am convinced that women are limited by the acceptance of their family rules, allowing themselves to live forever in their incessant expectations. When their expectations cannot be satisfied, then helplessly they begin to interpret their lives as "destiny." Very often traditional Chinese society describes a woman's life as a tale of melancholy, or as a series of providences. Nevertheless, through "knowing" and "discovering" how they were raised, and despite family influences (of course, family culture is in itself a product of the society), which is itself a limiting process, these women can choose what kind of life they wish to lead. There is a Chinese proverb, "It takes one who ties the knot to know how to untie the knot." This program allows these women to untie their knots.

Those things that the participants discovered: being unable to express their needs, being unable to let go of the roles played in their family of origin, being unable to confront unreasonable expectations, and being unable to live out their lives in authentic way. They are all subservient mechanisms for living. This "enmeshed" way of existence comes from experiences of self-suppression. The process of accepting one's current stance and learning to make decisions in every relationship, without refuting others and at the same time affirming oneself, is a process of discovery and change. And the subject of this learning process is oneself.

### 7. Seventh Session

I hope all of these participants will in their lives continue to have discoveries and surprises. But the continuance of learning process is often unpredictable. For this reason,

I selected Satir Model's self-mandala to conclude this program. The mandala of the self describes Satir's holistic concept of eight resources that are universal to all human beings. We use these eight perspectives of physicality, intellectuality, emotionality, sensuality, interactionality, nutritionality, contextuality, and spirituality to relate to ourselves. Ideally, not only do these eight facets require our attention, there should be equilibrium among them. I propose that if an individual can always be mindful of the self-mandala, even in the midst of a busy life, he or she will not forget to engage in introspection. Furthermore, he or she will be able to utilize what has been experienced so to take good care of.

During this session, the participants discussed and shared their entire experience of this program. They also arranged their interview schedule.

### Reflections

Today, everyone earnestly concentrated on her own self-mandala. They also made further progress. However, most people did not take care of their own physical bodies. Over-involvement can cause physical strain. Could this be another symptomatic burden latched onto the role of women? Second to this lack of physical wellness is an emotional lack. This is because one third of the participants were unmarried, though they had passed the usual age range for marriage. A passage from one journal describes this clearly:

> *After much reflection, I realized that the causes were related to family rules. Since we were young, we have learned from those being criticized by parents and elders that young ladies should conduct themselves with dignity and proper demeanor. One should be-well behaved in relation to men. Furthermore, ladies should be subservient and indirect, etc. All of these rules have shaped the way we relate to the opposite sex, making us uneasy around men. As a result, good opportunities often pass us by. We cannot take the initiative. And we criticize those girls who take initiatives and attract men. But behind that criticism, we feel envy and jealousy.... –*
> Yi-pin

I believe that being "trained" to be a good young lady means being trained to be passive. For this reason, women cannot freely express their feelings. This makes me think of the pervasive stereotypical roles marked in the process of our education. I also thought of the process by which I came to be sympathetic to other women's struggle. Because of women's passivity, what follows is obedience and dependency. My parents taught me to be a good daughter, but their standards were different. My mother wanted me to be a typical kind, gentle, subservient, and capable lady who could help out the chores around the house. My father basically agreed with mother, but many times he would treat me as his "son." Therefore, from early in my life, I learned that girls *could* also be cool and direct, that I didn't have to loose to boys, let alone depend on them. This kind of upbringing caused me much struggle before I decided to marry. Why? Because marriage for women in Chinese culture means taking up their "proper role" of being obedient and subservient.

Today, I am glad and proud of my decision for marriage, because it is during these years that I clearly learned how to establish and interpret my life meaning.

# Chapter Two
# Post-group interviews

The post-group interviews began one month after the closing of the group sessions. The plan was to interview every participant separately for 30 minutes in a comfortable space. I had planned to finish all the interviews to be finished within two weeks. Everyday, I wanted to conduct three consecutive interviews so the women would not loose the sense of freshness and concentration.

In conducting the interviews and reviewing the transcripts, it was my goal:
1.  To use the interviewees' own words to describe their experiences during the group sessions
2.  To articulate what they gained from those experiences
3.  To articulate their sensed impact of those experiences

I found out from the first participant that the time allotted for the interview was too short. Once the "capsule' of the interviewee's story was opened, they could not stop themselves from pouring out their own narratives. These narratives were their striking and touching life stories. Their sincerity made me unable to interrupt them. Besides, I also realized that to recount their experiences was a good way to organize them, which reinforced their impressions from and clarified the group process. Thus, after the first day of interviews, I decided not to limit the interviewee or myself. Although the schedule of the days of interview remained the same, the time allotted to each person was extended. What was interesting was the fact that they all "tolerated nicely" the extension of others' time before getting to their own interview. It seemed to me that they had an implicit rapport to allow each other to savor and enjoy the interviews with the teacher to the fullest extent. They even jokingly mocked each other as "nonstop radio broadcasts!"

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**1. Using interviewees' own words to describe their experiences during the group sessions**

Most of the participants thought of this program as a process of self-investigations. Even though the emphasis of their investigation focused on the relations in their family of origin, they themselves gained the most benefit. A few interviewees' comments were most touching:

> *This experience for me is a process of letting go because relationships in my family of origin, from my perspective, are kind of tense and rigid... I used to blame myself, thinking why do I have to be so stubborn and inflexible? Sometimes I think I should simply be carefree... whenever I refuse to take up the burdens I used to take up, I would feel guilty... not that I now blame my family members for my problem. Far from it. I see that my siblings, even though they have come from the very same family, all have different worldviews. It is a simple fact that everyone is unique. I will no longer use this [refusal to take up family burden and afterward feeling guilty] in the family as an excuse to criticize myself. –Mei-lin*

> ...

> *It was a certainly a revealing process! What I went through, if I may use a metaphor, was like removing garments. First I had to remove my coat, then came the shirts. After that, the undergarments had to be removed. Layer after layer, the garments had to be removed in a particular sequence. It's impossible to remove all the clothing at once... but when each layer was removed one after the next, everything became clear and apparent. –Shin-hua*

> ...

> *It has allowed me to see that change is a process. I saw that my "placating" personality diminishing. I also saw traces of my change toward being congruent... I have come to know my own capability and have slowly progressed in uncovering my own resources. I have also learned how to loosen up... However little I have discovered has led to*

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*that many more new ideas and perspectives. As a result, I have tried to adjust myself a bit. Changes lead to more changes, however little they are. I will no longer feel disparaged and depressed, because I know that I don't have to be the kind of person my family of origin has conditioned me to be.* --Shui-huai

...

*It was certainly a new experience for me, to say the least, especially when we got to "family rules," which was indeed quite an astonishment... I feel that our individual ways of being are conditioned by our previous family rules. Very much like an unbroken thread, this thread ties our family experiences to my current situation. This feeling I have is quite deep.* Dai-wei

From the transcripts of the interviews I had with them, it is evident that they all realized that they want through some kind of "experience." Furthermore, these experiences had an "imprint" on their lives. Because of this imprint, they were able to recollect all the experiential ups and downs, and the changes they have seen, in themselves, in the group session. The fulcrum of this learning process is themselves and their relation with their families. A few of them were able to recognize that this process itself was a learning method.

## 2. Focusing on what they gained from those experiences.

The interview process had two main components: (a) the "content" of their learning, and (b) the "process" of their learning. The "content" of their learning centered on experiences gained from self-introspection and their relationships with members of their family of origin. This was accomplished by the various methods and group activities, such as family maps, sculpting, etc. The "process" of their learning refers to the understandings they gained from *witnessing* oneself going through such processes and group sharing on those processes. One such activity that enhanced their ability to do this was "stop the music."

Stories seemed to be the natural way for these women to share the content of their learning. The stories they told disclosed their feelings, new outlooks, and discoveries of adjustments made in their relationships, etc. Meandering through these experiences, they would finally return to the point of the story. For example:

> *...I thought to myself: "Why am I a replica of my mom?" I have been playing the role of what others expect me to be for the past 30 odd years... just like this, I did what was expected of me; whatever needed to be done, I did it. I don't know why things are the way they are, but I sure don't want it to be that way from now on... I had high expectations of myself. Many feelings have emerged to initiate my desire to discover my placement in the world... but to change is not an easy thing; it is really difficult unless I change my own family... all I can do now is to be aware of this reality and put it aside. This realization itself is a great help. I feel relieved.... Dai-wei*

> *...During family sculpture, I heard my "father" (played by a fellow classmate) say that her scolding my father was a way to ventilate her own anger. This caused me to reflect that my unwillingness to forgive my father was a way to stand up for my mother. When I heard that scolding my father was a way for my mother to vent her resentment, suddenly I turned my attention to father. I discovered that I had always stood on my mother's side to look at father. I also realized my previous lack of thoughtfulness for my father. Just then, I felt a paradox inside me. On the one hand, I felt wronged; on the other hand, I still could not forgive him. Later, during the session of 'unfinished expectations,' I saw my own inability to let go of the expectation I had for father, hoping him to change his ways. One time when I decided to experience letting go my expectations, I coincidentally had to discuss with him certain issues. It was at that time that I realized my father's attitude was unlike the image I painted of him... I think that before, I had been too subjective, too rigid in holding on to my opinion of and attitude toward things. Under a whole series of positive interactions, I was able to see change... I am not really an un-filial daughter... when I changed my subjective opinions about my father, naturally, as a result, my perspectives of him changed. Mei-lin*

From the above words, one can see that this woman was quite absorbed in the group sessions. From observing other to self-introspection, she was able to gain insights and new perspectives. Her process included contradictions, self-reflections, and an experiment before the transformation took place. Actually, this part of her learning was quite similar to others' experiences as revealed in their journals. The only difference is that after one month of integration and organization of their experiences, most participants became clearer of what they had gone through. For example:

> *I found out that I had always felt a strong sense of justice. My mom got married at age 16. I was the oldest of her children. Whenever my siblings made mistakes, I would pay the price. I felt my mom was unfair, so I never used to cry or shed tears when she hit me... I felt that to cry was like letting her win. I was very stubborn, but I knew that was my way of rebelling or defending something... anyway, I felt no one cared for me... During the program, I recalled these experiences. I really could not hold my mother responsible for what she did; at a young age, she was sent to another family to be raised. Also, she was poor and was not able to be schooled. It is only recently that she returned to elementary night school. I know that my parents have had a great influence on me. Now I understand my perspectives better... and I feel at peace with myself... change can only be done by myself. If we do not walk out our own lives, no one can help us. This is what I know of myself. –Jin-hui*

Obviously this woman changed from feeling frustration toward her mother to forgiving her for all the injustice she felt. She also saw that although her experiences had already left an imprint on her, her attitude toward those experiences could be changed. Furthermore, she came to understand that the key to change is in one's own hands. This kind of learning experience happened to many of the participants.

Most of the participants were not familiar, at first with group process and dynamics. Because of this, we designed the practice of "stop the music," where they could stop and reflect on what had happened. During the interviews, many participants found this method intriguing compared with their previous learning methods. One woman expressed these thoughts during the process:

*...It was different than the classes I have taken before. I was expecting to have a course outline and description. I used to write a summary after each class and compare it with the previous class... now I take the initiative to do these comparisons without being required to do so. Participating in this program has led me to realize that I am conditioned by my previous learning method. To know what to expect can obstruct the effectiveness of my learning... this program made me feel like a blank sheet of paper. I didn't know what to expect from the sessions.* —Mei-yu

Other women shared their view of the group:

*Actually I feel very connected to this group of women.... this made me feel relaxed and at ease. Whenever a member shared her own feelings, others responded with sympathy and similitude... I was also surprised that people felt safe to speak frankly of their private feelings, some of which were even negative.... This group seemed to have a high level of acceptance for these things.* —Yen-fen

...

*This process of learning was important for me.... initially I was really not with it—quite baffled by the whole thing. But about two-thirds through the program, the whole picture came together. I learned to use "process" to guide others. For example, in relating to my kids, there is no need for "direct decrees".... Instead, I see more room and flexibility in our relationship. Then I will realize the limitations of my own views and logic. When conversing in this open way, I can be more accepting. My preconceptions will also disappear.* —Min-yin

...

*Everyone was open to one another... from the first day on; everyone was focused and involved. After the can is opened, there is no room for pretense... the triads were important in that they did not cause pressures... in fact, the more one opened up, the more that woman seemed to benefit. That process gave me self-assurance... I believe I am now more open to others and less timid. Boy, I used to be diffident! Now I will think: so what if I am afraid of!* —Shiu-yu

These citations reveal what happened to those women's attitudes, attitudes that were changed by the atmosphere of the group process.

One in-depth interview shed light on the "interrelationships" among the participants:

> *The teacher did not give us much. She simply allowed us to discuss among ourselves. Many times during our conversation, I saw myself while listening to others. Sometimes I saw new ways of thinking by listening to others' opinions... Just like this I lit up what I had inside me. You might say we were mirrors for each other... actually in such a process, one can find her own directions toward things. Sometimes, just to be aware of what's happening inside is sufficient; there is no need to have "answers" to everything. I am able to face what I discover. If I cannot adjust myself, I will simply let be.* –Yen-ju

Generally speaking, two observations can be made from what the women gained from those learning experiences during group sessions. The first is that the group augmented a safe and trusting environment. This had a definitive effect on participants' learning process. Second, because this process-oriented and experiential learning model differs from traditional modes of learning, it required each participant's full engagement and self-adjustment, after which she could find out through integration what was the most suitable learning method for her. It is also evident that these women increased their self-worth and self-determination.

## 3. Articulating their sensed impact of those experiences

The participants talked about various impacts of these group experiences during the interviews. What follows represent what the participants had to say:

> *For the past few months, I was discussing marriage with my family. Originally my father did not agree to the marriage... after understanding his reasons and perspectives on this issue... I changed my attitude to becoming more respectful of his opinions... it just so happened that I was*

*able to apply what I have learned to daily circumstances... at least I had the motivation to change my attitude... although I was unable to change the circumstances even after realizing the causes of this opposition, at least I was able to feel more relaxed about it... Circumstances are flexible, nothing has to be the way I we want them to be. —Ai-mei*

...

*I am usually more initiative with family member. Even though I am unable to change others, I do my best with what is within my power. This transformation of attitude is what I have gained. –Shin-chu*

...

*I am still reliant on my parents. But, I used to be conflicted and to deny it. I believe that I haven't been honest to myself. Now, I am able to live more at ease with myself and accept that I am just a dependent type of person. I mean I can accept the fact that I do not like this aspect of myself. –Yi-pin*

...

*No matter what role I took on, I always wished to be praised. I thought of my character as perfect, flawless. Come to think of it now, no one ever saw me; what they saw was merely a straw woman. I was alerted to the fact that I had many deep, unfulfilled yearnings. I only sought out ways to alter the external environment... when I realized that I always played the role of the one taking care of others, I realized that deep inside I was the one really needing to be cared for... I seemed to be waiting for some opportunity to arrive for me to be taken care of. –Hui-min*

...

*Family of our origin has indeed cast its influence on us. I try to give space to my own kids, hoping that they would not have to go through what I had to go through... I don't know what I will be able to do. What I will do is to give it my best effort. –Shiu-yu*

Similar content to the above citations was found in nearly all the interviews, and in their journals. In summary, these women's experiences can be roughly characterized as follows:

1. The women engaged in sincere confrontation and acceptance of their situations, and began to make decisions for themselves.

2. Through this personal experience, they became aware of their inner longing to be affirmed and loved.

3. Realizing that change must begin with themselves, they took the initiative to change their relation with their family members.

4. They chose to show more respect and given more space to their family members, especially their parents and children.

## 4. Reflections

During those three weeks of one-on-one interviews, the women's stories gave me insight into their thoughts and feelings. However, they also instilled deep meaning into my being, arousing my own recollections of what I had experienced during my life. Simply stated I was moved and became, myself, one of the "research participants"

I was born into an old and down-to-earth city—Tainan. Though not greatly populated, it is prized as one of Taiwan's most historically and culturally attractive regions. My home was located in a park, next to my father's workplace. My playmates were mainly adults, and I was often pampered. Perhaps growing up around nature had its impact on me; even now, I still love to roam in leisure, refusing to be restrained.

One by one, I began to have younger sisters and finally a brother. I was trained by my parents to be the capable "big sister." My personality is amiable, filial, and optimistic. Therefore, to assume the role of a "good daughter" was indisputably natural. My school grades were also good. Being a 'good student," I also involved in many extra-curricular activities. All of these made my parents very proud of me. Furthermore, teachers liked me. To please others is effortless. But besides being compliant, I sometimes was purposely disobedient to my heart's content. For example, I used to bring my younger

sister along to steal my neighbor's sweet potatoes; as a class leader, I used to lead other classmates to scheme naughty things to do such as leisurely roaming around places after school when I had been told to go straight home, etc. All of these things came back to me in vivid memories.

In my teen-age years, I allowed my grades to fall and I didn't work very hard. Though I was not mischievous, I certainly had many fantasies. I loved to pamper myself reading novels of chivalry or prowess swordsmen or classics stories—I often imagine myself playing important roles in the classics, such as, *Journey to the West*[1] or *Dream of the Red Chamber*.[2] Besides imagining myself as some kind of female Robinhood who sought justice, the other character I loved to imagine myself, as was the supernatural, disruptive menace to society—Monkey King. Otherwise I would imagine myself as the Buddhist monk of the Tang dynasty in the *Journey to the West*, whose ultimate concern of life meaning led him to far away places. In regard to *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the "Prospect Garden" felt like the environment I grew up in, full of different characters and changes. I imaged myself as "Granny Liu," able to have a panoramic view of sentient beings without loosing her own pure character. What is interesting is that all of these personalities are still very much alive inside of me, often manifesting themselves through my behaviors.

In my later teens, I was able to enter Taiwan's best all-girls high school. I left home for Taipei to study. Leaving home at that time allowed me to realize my own dependency and love toward my home; it also allowed me to learn to be independent and take care of my own affairs. My physical care of my siblings ended then. But our closeness took another turn when I returned home twice a month. It was during that time I consciously felt my responsibility as the "big sister." I also knew that because I loved them dearly, that responsibility was proudly mine. Till this day, I still feel this.

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[1] See Wu Ch'eng-en, *Journey to the West* 1st ed., tr. Jenner, W. J. F. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982).

[2] For an excellent translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in, *The Story of the Stone* (5 volumes), tr. David Hawkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

During college, I majored in something that people at that time thought was undemanding—sociology. Half of my classes were majoring in the field of sociology; the other half social work. For the first two years or so, I spent my time ridiculing the college educational system and searching for the value of learning and education to me. For this reason, aimlessly going through school just to get by was my main livelihood. Things changed during my third and fourth year. Classes offered in social work department caught my interest. They were "hands-on" courses that involved actual participation—I interned in a mental hospital for one year. At that time I did not believe I could "help" people -- and this feeling still holds true today -- but I knew that I was interested in people and loved their company. I also enjoyed doing things together with other people.

In my fourth year in college, I had a big dispute with my father. He wanted me to go abroad to further my education. I insisted that I would do that only when I wanted to. I won. My first job was a social worker in an undeveloped area of Taipei. My second job entailed counseling with juvenile delinquents. During those years of working with people, I realized that, although I was doing what I wanted to do without following other's expectations, I was lacking in professional training and education. Thus, I finally decided to go to America to pursue on MA degree. I always wanted to determine my own future, despite the fact that, in appearance, I looked submissive.

It was during my Masters years that I discovered the conducive environment for learning. Many conditions made that happen, one of which was the encouragement I received from professors to have my own views of things. I learned that one of the more important responsibilities of a teacher is, besides transmitting knowledge, to stimulate and inspire creativity in students. I finally confirmed that learning is one's own business; it is something that one should come to take pleasure in. Most of the people at that time came to study in the United States in order to stay. I decided to apply in Taiwan what I learned in the field of education. Of course, this decision amply made my father disappointed. However, he was sanguine about me becoming a Ph.D. scholar.

Marriage was another big decision in my life. At one time I had decidedly never to get married. That decision came as a result of a car accident. Life is impermanent. Why waste time on the entanglement of having to take care of children. Thus, I backed out of my engagement. Later, due to various reasons, I decided to have my marriage ceremony arranged before my grandmother went back to Mainland China, so she could witness her eldest granddaughter's marriage. Of course, the groom was the same poor fellow whom I dumped years earlier. At that time, I told myself clearly: "this marriage is my own decision. I should be fully responsible to myself." This decision has subsequently motivated and sustained my efforts to play the roles of a "good wife" and a "good mother."

I was married in 1980. Four years later, my oldest daughter was born. In 1989, my second daughter was born. In 1994, I began, bit by bit in a periodic manner, to make use of my vacation from teaching to finish my PhD degree. In 1996, I brought my older daughter to live in the United States for one year. A year later, I became a Buddhist; I began to learn Chan, or better known in the West as Zen. During that time I even had thoughts of leaving home to become a Chan Buddhist nun. I do not know what will happen in the future. All I know is that I feel like a traveler, who continues to reach for a destination—searching for life's ultimate concern. Along this journey, I continue to observe the evolving of process rumination and shifting relationships with people.

From my own upbringing, I have come to three conclusions: First, I am on "the same boat" as those women in my research program; we all try to fulfill the expected roles ascribed to us. Through our hard work, we are confirmed of our selves by other's affirmation. From this angle, you might even say that I have been very "Successful." However, I was fortunate. Due to various stimulating conditions, I was nourished in favorable surroundings and did not receive much pressure in my interrelation with my parents. Therefore, this leads to my second point: I value self-determination and responsibility.

I once contemplated the question: Am I a feminist? After some time looking into this question in relation to myself, I think I am a humanist. In light of the hard fact that this society may never be without authority figures, it is my intention that through the process of learning, individuals can gradually realize and accept themselves, and adjust themselves in relation to authority figures. I am walking my own path. The people around me can only assist me on this journey. Therefore, my role in this research program is to "accompany" those participants, to "walk" with them, and allow the whole group to walk out its own path.

Third, an individual can only come to know herself through the process of growing up. Only by going through this process and becoming aware of *how* one has gone through this process can that individual know her life meaning. Therefore, learning to see this process is invaluable.

The above three points permeate my views and behaviors throughout this research project. They establish the paradigms and concerns of this project. Thus, they also influence my interpretations of data from this research. Yet, this is something that I have been aware of every moment of this project.

Besides the above, the role and function of a "teacher" or a "facilitator," is another main point worth reflecting during the interviewing process. The extended time for interviews and the participants' gestures and tones of voice exhibited three messages. The first message I received was the fact that they wanted to be accepted and understood by me as an authority. This particular message was ubiquitous and apparent in everyone. Another message was that each one hoped to be a "good student" in front of me. The paucity of this message only manifested in some women. The third was their hope to be "healed" by me as a therapist. When I caught these messages, two interpretations arose in me. The first is that we had developed necessary rapport and trust; the second, I was still looked upon as a "professional" with authority. Now looking back at their group sessions and journals, I consider these interpretations to be two sides of the same coin. I have asked myself these questions: when inner needs are accepted and one's conforming

behavior matches what's inside. Does that individual have an initiative to learn? And how does self-determining learning impinge on one's self-transformation?

Based upon the group sessions and my transcription of the interviews, many ideas and ruminations lead me to reconsider the underlying theme of this research program. Why did I select the Satir Model? What kinds of spirit and features have led me to believe that it is important for me to work in an educational system?

# Chapter Three
# The Satir Model

Virginia Satir is one of the leading figures in the field of family therapy. Her approach to family therapy is well known for her emphasis on communication and self-esteem, and it is usually categorized as an "experiential family therapy" (Braverman, 1986: Bischof, 1993). Because of her unique and important contributions, others have called her the originator of family communication theory (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Turner, 1986; Nichols & Schwartz, 1995; Gladding, 1995).

Satir's approach has a very strong belief in human values, equality, potentiality, and the capacity to grow (Satir et al., 1991; Banman, 1986; Grinder, Bandler & Satir, 1975). It emphasizes an individual's well being and is based on an acceptance of one's uniqueness through social interaction. From this conceptual framework, each person can become his or her own choice-maker (Satir, et al., 1991; Satir & Baldwin, 1983). Continually demonstrating acceptance and understanding instead of judging, one can look with appreciation at his or her inner resources, using them to grow and become more fully human (Satir et al., 1991).

The Satir Model inherited the positive extentialism of Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, and Johann Heidegger. Satir believes that human beings are manifestations of positive life energy, and that this energy could transform people's dysfunctional coping into high levels of self-care within the context of high self-esteem (Satir et al., 1991). Family therapists who follow Satir's advice attemp to transform any "client's" thoughts about his of her problem from an individual, intrapersonal, linear view to an interpersonal, systemic one.

For Virginia Satir, the "difficulty" of human existence is not the problem. Rather, it is the way people cope. By strengthening and enhancing individuals' coping skills through new ways of viewing and handling situations, people can come to see that they have the

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capacity to make choices. Her emphasis is on the process of feeling competent and coping rather than on the task of isolating specific problems (Satir & Baldwin, 1983). Thus, regardless of any external condition or circumstance, she believes one can change on the inside through shifting oneself to a place where offers alternative perspectives and allows one to see the whole picture. As a consequence, people can have a more meaningful and productive life rather than merely surviving and tolerating painfulness.

Obtaining perspectives and wholeness requires awareness. Wholeness is always beyond what people can see and understand. By questioning our perceived world, our knowledge and perspectives are increased or changed. This awareness benefits our coping. That is why Chinese say, "The mind conditions the way we perceive the world."

Increasing awareness changes how we define a relationship, how we define a person, how we explain an event, and what attitudes we have toward change. Ideally, a dominant/submissive relationship, which implies a form of superiority, can be distinguished from the hierarchical role structure to a person to person equality. One's definition of oneself, initially depending upon others' rules, can be explored toward uniqueness. Events explained in a single cause-effect mode can be seen as a set of essential variables contributing to a joint outcome. While love serves as the base of encouragement, people feel free to express one's feelings and differences and to take risks, which move a person beyond the status quo and forward to personal growth. Thus, change is essential and inevitable.

"Congruence" is one of the main constructs in the Satir Model. Satir saw incongruence -- a discrepancy between one's words and feelings -- as a state of being out of harmony with the self. The process of human growth is a process of learning how to resolve this discrepancy by keeping the verbal and nonverbal messages congruent in a person. This intrapersonal congruence can be obtained through "centering" ourselves, by going inside for self-validation and staying in the present by accepting our context, the other person, and ourselves (Satir, et al., 1991)

The process of self--validation is a process of discovering one's "iceberg," or

totality of self, which includes one's feelings, expectations, perceptions, and yearning (p. 67). This process expands self-awareness and facilitates self- acceptance, which may promote self-esteem and the ability to communicate within an interpersonal congruence. This interpersonal congruence helps people to make and share meaning. Thus, communicating congruently with high self-esteem is the major goal and ideal in the Satir Model. Virginia Satir believed that human beings could eventually be connected in the universal life force through congruent communication (pp. 68-69). Congruent communication holds a holistic view of human interaction, which is beyond the restrictions of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Incongruent communication usually follows a rigid pattern. Normally, it is rooted in a childhood attempt to cope with the stress of threatened self-esteem in family life. Actually, incongruent communication is a survival stance from a state of low self-esteem and imbalance, which comes from a mixed messages of one's past experiences, especially when one have a sense of harm. Survival stances protect one's self-worth from perceived and presumed threats. Change is basically an internal shift of each person's self-worth that in turn brings about external change. Also change is a process of transforming the incongruent surviving stances to congruence within intraperson and interpersonal relationships.

In Satir's model, there are four survival stances: placating, blaming, being super-reasonable, and being irrelevant (pp. 31-35). Placating denies our self-respect and gives people the message that we are not important. This attitude causes us to repress our anger and manifest physical disorders instead. Blaming can protect us by harassing and accusing other people or circumstances. Also we tend to refuse requests and disagree with suggestion whenever we feel vulnerable. Meanwhile, we act and speak the way we do as a means of survival. The characteristic of being super-reasonable is that of being inhumanly objective. We do not allow ourselves or others to focus on feelings, nor do we permit ourselves to reflect on society's value on 'the ideal mature person' as unmoving and having no looking, touching, or feeling emotions. Being irrelevant is to be amusing or clownish as

a means of distracting people's attention from the issues under discussion. As long as the people who are irrelevant can direct attention away from topics that carry any degree of stress, they believe they will survive (pp. 36-52).

People to protect themselves use these survival strategies. However the incongruence of these behaviors will lead to misunderstandings and helplessness that cannot help the perceived threats. They may even threaten one's self-esteem further. Thus, trying to add congruent communication into our survival strategies is more effective in dealing with threats.

This transforming process of the survival stances is a change process that may need to confront feelings, reactive feelings, family rules, unmet expectations, and deep yearnings (pp. 147-174). In this transformation process, a person separates his/her present from the past and works towards a greater freedom from restrictions imposed by their defenses. This process also allows them more choices as to how they define and value themselves.

Satir encouraged therapists to make contact with their clients on the basis of equality in value as human beings (pp. 82). This implies empowerment for both, and it bolsters each person's sense of inner-strength. Thus, Satir-based training devotes considerable time to helping therapists become congruent and to be able to communicate congruently. Only after they achieve these important goals are they in a position to empower their clients. Thus, therapists become an agent of any changing process of their clients.

## 1. Techniques of the Satir Model

Virginia Satir provided an experiential process to explain her concepts. She always filled her work with images and wanted to breathe life into the learning process that is an integral part of the living process. There are several techniques of the Satir Model selected, which will be described briefly below. These facilitate the learning process of the

participants and to promote congruence intrapersonally and interpersonally.

## A. Family Map

The basic form of family maps includes the primary triad (the parents and the child) and can expand to include three generations, if necessary. In addition to giving the demographic information of each person on the map, three descriptive adjectives, primary survival stances, and relationships with each other are given. The family map simply helps us learn about the internal and external reality of our family life, which can be a preparation for a family sculpture.

## B. Sculpture

Sculpture is one of the most representative experiential activities used by Virginia Satir. Sculpting is an in-motion interaction to make overt the interrelating patterns and to externalize people's internal processes. A person is asked to show the relationship to one or more other family members using bodily positions and gestures to represent degrees of closeness and survival communication stances (Satir & Baldwin, 1983). By adopting these positions in sequence, participants become aware of their preferred interactional pattern, its meaning for themselves, and its meaning in relation to others. They also discover the meaning of the incongruence that occurs when internal feelings do not match their external expression. This behavioral demonstration of the sculpture is much more accurate in reflecting communication than a verbal description. It also makes past experience live in the present (Satir & Baldwin, 1983).

## C. Other Vehicles of Change

Virginia Satir developed some vehicles or approaches to facilitate change over the

years. They are meditations, self-mandala, temperature reading, and family rules transformed into guidelines. The approaches of meditations and self-mandala help people enter and make use of the right hemispheres of their brain to empower the intuitive side and nourish their personal sources. The temperature reading focuses directly on the group process to improve group communication and the members' self-esteem. Transforming the family rules into guidelines can facilitate congruent communication, increase self-esteem, and help people become more relaxed, free, and in touch with their own values and truths.

Each vehicle has its own function and steps, and each one may be used in individual therapy, family therapy or in our own personal growth (Satir, et al, 1991, pp. 274-316). The detailed steps described in chapter 3.

## 2. The Influence of Virginia Satir

Virginia Satir is credited as being "the mother of family therapy" (Cowley, 1999). The Satir Model, founded by Virginia Satir, is a powerful approach to family therapy and has had a wide influence on generations of therapists (Cheung, 1997). For example, she made a significant contribution to humanistic psychotherapy by liberating therapists and clients so they could have "communicative freedom" (Barton, 1992; Sheverbush, 1998). There are several articles that discuss the relationship between the Satir Model and Psychoanalysis (Braverman, 1986), Adlerian individual psychology (Bitter, 1988), Ericksonian therapy (Zeig & Lankton, eds. 1988), transpersonal psychology (Cowley, 1999) and Chinese Taoism (Brothers, ed.) as well.

Social construction theory is one of the major ideological forces that inspire a new way of thinking in contemporary times. Cheung examined the compatibility between the Satir Model and social construction theory with respect to (a) how the Satir Model sees reality and reconstructs the client's reality as a major form of therapy, (b) a narrative approach of the therapeutic process, (c) a social interchange process, (d) the role of therapists as participant-facilitators, (e) the prime importance of language, and (f) a process

of cocreation. This analysis revealed many commonalities between the two approaches in their applications to family therapy (Cheung, 1997).

In addition, the influence of the Satir Model is widely utilized in many parts of the world other than North America and Western Europe. It has been used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, East Europe, and Venezuela (Chan, 1996; Pan, 2000; Cheung, 1997; Serrano, 1995). These research papers and professional reflections provide clear evidence that the Satir Model has been cross-culturally practiced.

Virginia Satir's impact on others has come not only from what she herself did but also from what her many students have done. For example, in Dr. Maureen O'Hara's graduation speech to the Saybrook Graduate School in San Francisco, she mentioned that the founder of the anti-racism National Coalition Building Institute – recently selected by Clinton as a model program – was started by a student of Virginia Satir (O'Hara, 1997). Satir's emphasis on awareness and acceptance of one's unique self, and harmonizing the body-mind-spiritual by externalizing the internal conflicts to make new perspectives to oneself and the world, has been her contribution to human society.

## 3. Research Studies on the Satir Model

A computerized search of the literature was conducted in the fall of 2000 to locate empirical investigations of the Satir Model. This search turned up only three studies. Because of the widespread use of the Satir Model, this author was surprised to discover that only a few formal investigations had been conducted.

The research studies identified by the computerized literature review were conducted by Caston (1995), Freeman (2000), and Pan (2000). Caston's research provided evidence that the Satir Model could significantly increase the self-esteem and reduce the burnout of primary family caregivers. Freeman's study showed that there is almost unanimous agreement about the congruence of the Satir Model with a gender-sensitive orientation. In her study, Pan applied the Satir Model to college student clients in Taiwan

and found that participants gained significant increases in their sense of "family role" and in their relationships with family members.

If the Satir Model is so popular, what accounts for the small number of studies focused on its efficacy? Pan ( 2000) offered a possible answer to this legitimate question. She pointed out that while most empirical studies are outcome-based research, the change process of participants cannot be measured via simple designs, such as the popular randomized groups pretest and posttest design.

The dearth of formal studies on the Satir Model underscores the value of this dissertation project.

# Chapter Four
# The Preliminary Study

This preliminary study examined how the Satir Model for family therapy relates to personal or self-growth, and what significant parts of the Satir Model need to be emphasized in designing an educational program. In accomplishing the goal of the preliminary study, I interviewed seven people who have been trained as Satir Model therapists and have practiced the Satir Model both personally and professionally. Since the dissertation was conducted in Taiwan, the interviewees solicited were all in the helping profession. This avoided the problem of misinterpretation in the transmission between different cultures.

## 1. Description of the Interviewees

The seven persons were all female and had practiced in helping professions for years. I selected these seven professionals purposefully in order to cover a variety of ages, years of working as a helping professional, years of working as a Satir Model therapist, occupations, and formal educational backgrounds. A brief description of their backgrounds can be found in the chart on the following page. (See table 1.)

Their age range was from 34 to 60 with two persons in their 50s, three persons in their 40s, and two in their 30s. Their working years ranged from 9 years to 26 years. Three of the interviewees worked in their field for more than 20 years. Three of them have worked between 10 to 20 years. Interviewee B was trained as a Satir therapists in the United States 20 years ago. Interviewee A, C, and D began their involvement in the Satir Model with Satir's first trips to Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1982 and 1983. For E, F, and G, they concentrated their practice in the Satir Model when Dr. John Banmen (one of Satir's close colleagues) offered professional training and supervision in Taiwan in 1993.

**Table 1. The Background of Interviewees**

| Interviewees | Age | Years of working as a helping professional | Years of working as a Satir Model therapist | Occupation | Formal Educational Background |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 60 | 26 | 15 | psychiatric social work | B.S. in Social Work |
| B | 59 | 24 | 20 | psychiatric social worker & professor | ph.D. in Social Work |
| C | 49 | 14 | 14 | counselor | B. S. in Home Economic |
| D | 47 | 18 | 15 | counselor | B. S. in Law |
| E | 45 | 21 | 3 | psychiatric social worker | B. S. in Social Work |
| F | 37 | 15 | 3 | psychiatric social worker | M. S. in Social Work |
| G | 34 | 9 | 3 | counselor | B. S. in Physics |

In addition to the above, the interviewees who worked as psychiatric social workers had formal educational social work. The other four had various disciplines in different fields. They all were married and had children except D. In order to gather information from a variety of respondents, I tried to choose interviewees who represented the population, which is familiar with the Satir Model in Taiwan.

## 2. Main Questions in the Interviews

In accordance with the goals of this preliminary study, I focused my interviews on several main themes:

1.  How does the Satir Model experience impact on your personal and professional life?
2.  How would you describe the process of the experience of the Satir Model's impact on you?
3.  What are your clients' experiences when you practice the Satir Model in your settings?
4.  Which of the techniques of the Satir Model are effectively used in your practice?

These questions were probed during the interview process in order to get more detailed and specific information. Sometimes the interviewees could not stop talking on unrelated topics. I did not pause their talking but tried to return to the original issue later on. I would classify these interviews as semi-structured interviews.

## 3. Description of the interview process

I interviewed each individual alone for 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were held in different places, such as offices and coffee shops. Each of the interview sites was quiet

and comfortable without any interruption.

Before the interviews, I introduced my proposals and procedures to each individual and explained to them how I would use the collected data. If they felt uncomfortable with the interview content or the interview process, they could stop the interview at any time. Also, the interviews were audiotaped. I later listened to the tapes by myself and made notes using pseudonyms. After all the explanations, I allowed time for the interviewees to reflect and decide whether or not they would like to be interviewed.

After the interviews, I asked about how they felt during the interview process and if they had any suggestions for my dissertation.

The audiotape was the major tool for collecting the interview information. These tapes were duplicated into copies as a back up. These tapes and copies were stored with my personal belongings.

## 4. Data Analysis

Since the interviews were conducted in Chinese, it made no sense to transcribe and translate them into English. Thus, I listened to the tapes carefully and made notes in order to be sure that the notes covered all the issues and themes that the interviewees mentioned. I then categorized the data into personal growth and professional growth in addition to the original interview questions. In reality, the personal growth and professional growth sometimes overlapped or interacted. However, I tried to categorize the overlapped or interacted data according to the words that the interviewee used.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The findings will be described by the sequence of the interview questions. In each question, the description of the interviewees has been categorized by personal growth and

professional growth. Under the categories some major themes would be substantiated.

## A. How does the Satir Model experience impact on your personal life and professional life?

### a. Personal Growth:

#### 1. Being sensitive and aware of one's own feelings

Every interviewee talked about her experiences of becoming aware and sensitized to her own feelings. They all agreed that to be sensitive to feelings was a necessary path to accepting one's self-worth. If there were no feelings involved in the process of self-acceptance, the self-acceptance was limited on the surface.

In addition, understanding one's own feelings can help differentiate the boundary between self and others. Three interviewees used "de-enmeshment" to describe this process. Every interviewee also described the process in different ways, such as: "clarify who I am," "take the responsibility for my feelings," " understand how I project my anger on others," "staying in a negative feeling was not so bad," "feel more close to myself." It was clear that being aware of one's own feelings was a positive experience for these interviewees.

Traditionally, Chinese culture does not encourage individuation and provides a very enmeshed family system to nourish the society. Thus, the expression of feelings was prohibited and the boundaries among family members were vague, which may repress individual growth. However, rapid social change facilitates the need for personal development and growth. Becoming aware of one's own feelings is a good and necessary way to facilitate the process of human growth.

## 2. Understanding one's perception and belief

Five interviewees mentioned that they began understanding how their family rules impacted their perceptions. One of the interviewees said vividly:

> *I was well educated as a traditional Chinese woman in my family of origin. After graduation from the college, I married my husband and lived with his family. I have borne fine children and stayed at home as a full-time housekeeper. I was depressed seriously without knowing the reason. I went to Virginia's workshop. I found that I did not belong to myself. I belonged to my family of origin before the marriage. After the marriage, I belonged to my husband's family. I had no self. But when I tried to find myself, I was stuck by many rules , which originated from my family. It was hard to change these rigid rules into more flexible ones. For instance, one of my family rules was that women should stay home and serve every family member's need. But I struggled to work as a professional. There was a big conflict in my mind even though my husband's family supported me to be a professional. I had to face my guilty feeling for a long time.* –
> Lai-fun

One interviewee said that understanding what the perceptions or assumptions were behind her behavior helped her take the responsibility for her behavior. Then she could understand the others with more respect and acceptance. Some also mentioned that to understand the rules behind behavior could help them to be more flexible. Because the rules behind the behavior were not rigid, the choices and alternatives increased. Thus, they always had a hope.

Rigid family rules help keep the family system operating in some way, but constrain ones development in some other ways. From the Western standard, a Chinese family would be seen as a rather enmeshed family with a lot of rigid rules. Working through the rigid family rules can help a Chinese family regain a new balance. More flexible perceptions and beliefs among individuals can enhance self-confidence (Chan, 1996).

### 3. Increasing the intimacy among interpersonal relationships

There is a metaphor to describe the individual who experiences an intimate relationship—butterfly. One may imagine that people interacting as a "caterpillar" is a good relationship. After a process of self-growth, the interviewees recognized that to be a "butterfly" was necessary to get along with others intimately. Most of them mentioned these metaphors during the interviews. They also recognized that clarifying the impact of the family of origin was a critical step in becoming a butterfly.

By clarifying the impact of one's family of origin, one can learn how to let unmet expectations go and gain a more integrated wholeness. By doing this, in human relations, one can balance giving and taking, say "no" assertively, become more aware of reality, and carry less burden. There is less judgment and more curiosity toward self and others.

Two interviewees described how they faced their problematic relationships and created opportunities to understand each other with courage. They all thought this was very important to learn in a relationship, even if the other person is in a process of difficulty.

It was definitely true that traditional Chinese women are caterpillars and feed everyone with their endless social pressure. It was sad that Chinese women convinced themselves with such a distorted way to gain intimacy in interpersonal relationships. For Chinese women, learning to be a butterfly is an alternative to gaining intimacy in relationships by only accommodating others.

### 4. Difficulties

The interviewees mentioned difficulties in the learning process. Sometimes accepting reality is frustrating and takes time. And the process of congruent communication was very embarrassing and required courage in the beginning. The peer group support was a vital back up.

One interviewee described her painful experience of accepting that she was not the

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most important child in her family of origin even though she realized that trying to be an important person was her drive to survive. She said that she might need to spend her whole life trying to let the unmet expectation go. Most of the interviewees also talked about the hard time they had figuring out what congruence was, and they described how difficult it can be to communicate congruently with family members. One interviewee said that the concept of congruence was very abstract. She suggested teaching the clients about the congruent communication after enhancing the self-awareness.

### b. Professional Growth

#### 1. Increasing the ability to understand clients

The interviewees mentioned how their ability to understand clients had been increased in different areas:

    1. Sensitizing the feelings and non-verbal expressions of clients.

    2. Feeling more comfortable with slow and subtle changes of clients by understanding the change process.

    3. Achieving deeper understanding of client's iceberg.

    4. Understanding deeper meanings of family interaction.

    5. Noticing and enhancing the strengths of clients.

    6. Increasing curiosity of the meanings behind behavior.

    7. Feeling less need for control of the process of therapy

#### 2. Deeper and more equal relationship with clients

These psychiatric social workers began to look at each patient as a person, thus changing their interaction patterns. Their clients gave them very clear feedback about how the relationship changed. All the interviewees felt closer to their clients with less judgment. By achieving a good rapport and working "with" their clients, they felt more self-confidence and more acceptances from their clients.

### 3. Refresh feeling in the field of the helping profession

Because the learning process of the Satir Model usually involves a group form at, most interviewees emphasized the importance of group support. Most of the interviewees were senior workers in their field. The group brought out and then moderated their burnout. One who worked as a psychiatric social worker for 26 years said that she had confidence in human change again and she found more meaning in her career. Although the medical system was still rigid, she had the strength to do something again.

### 4. Difficulties

Any experiential model is vague and needs a process to help people understand its concepts. The abstraction of the Satir Model made it hard for an insider to explain it to an outsider. The interviewees mentioned that it was difficult to describe what the Satir Model looked like to their medical team members and colleagues.

They also talked about the rigidity of Chinese family rules and felt frustrated about the struggle between the Chinese value system and the western value system. Some of them suggested having some kind of educational process about the Satir Model in a group while clients were in the therapy situation.

They recognized that the congruence of a therapist was the major influence in the Satir Model of family therapy and would be the most difficult part of the Satir Model. This notion—the "congruence of a therapist" means a therapist can aware and accept one's feelings, values, expectations, and his or her own being.

**B. How would you describe the process of the experience of the Satir Model's impact on you?**

Most of the interviewees recognized the experience as a learning process in multiple directions (in their own words):

1. Learning to be self and in charge of the self congruently.
2. Learning to respect and be involved in different interpersonal relationships with clear and flexible boundaries.
3. Learning to be a more humanistic therapist.
4. Learning to have more self-passion.
5. Learning to appreciate the growing process in one's family of origin.
6. Learning is endless when I learn from others and myself.
7. Learning to make contact with my strength
8. Learning to let go.

**C. What are your clients' experiences when you practice the Satir Model in your settings?**

Most of participants observed some changes in their clients, who had a lot of similarities with their own changes. The most significant change was the increasing self-awareness and the flexibility of personal rules. But when their clients initiated some changes, there were some chaotic conditions, which was unusual for clients and threatened the clients' confidence to change. One interviewee said:

> We have a more clear picture of how changes happened in our mind and we have full support from Dr. John Banmen (who was the trainer for these helping professionals) and the whole group of peers. My clients did not have any idea about the change process and they usually got support only from me. You know I was not Virginia Satir who always had so much love. Therefore, my clients' experiences were more vulnerable than mine. I have

*thought about how to teach my clients in an appropriate way in order to give them some ideas of the Satir Model in the beginning of therapy.* –Yin-min

Another interviewee said:

*You know I think I am lucky because I have so many supportive colleagues keeping company with me while I am in the process of change. This support empowered my strength to go on. If my clients had such a strong support, they would feel more confident to change. Maybe I should try some work in groups.* –Mei-ju

In addition to the self-growth of increasing self-awareness and flexible personal rules, if the clients would have a more successful change process if they could experience the Satir Model with a strong supportive group.

### D.  Which of the techniques of the Satir Mode are effectively used in your practice?

By summarizing the techniques that the interviewees used effectively, some common interests emerged: survival communication stances, sculptures, icebergs, family maps moderating the family rules, and temperature readings. The interviewees didn't do parts parties or family reconstruction much because these techniques needed a number of participants. Some interviewees suggested that we could assemble our experiences to formulate some possible steps for each technique. One interviewee said, "we are not geniuses like Virginia Satir, so we need some clear guideline to follow in the beginning."

### 6. Conclusions and Reflections

In summary, my findings are as follows:
1.  Validating feelings can enhance self-awareness and self-acceptance.
2.  Understanding one's perceptions and beliefs by exploring one's family rules can facilitate these perceptions and cause one to be more flexible.

3. Clarifying the impact of one's family of origin can help establish one's personhood, which may increase the intimacy of interpersonal relationships.

4. Creating an equal relationship with less judgment facilitates deeper understanding with others (including clients).

5. The experience of the Satir Model may prevent, or refresh a therapist from, burnout.

6. It takes time to practice congruent communication.

7. It is necessary to have strong support when one faces difficulties during the change process.

8. Designing a learning process of the Satir Model is possible.

9. More specific steps are needed to concretize the abstraction of the learning process of the Satir Model.

10. The change process involves extensive learning in the Satir Model.

11. Some techniques are used commonly: survival communication stances, sculptures, icebergs, family maps, moderating the family rules, and temperature readings.

These findings were helpful to my dissertation in several ways. First, the findings have convinced me that the Satir Model can be translated into an educational program for "average" people. Because the helping professionals who experienced the Satir Model in training sessions and the clients who experienced the Satir Model in clinical settings experience similar changes in the self-growth domains, I gained confidence in designing an educational program for average people based on the Satir Model.

Second, I have learned that I will need to emphasize the validation of feelings, the exploration of family rules and family history, and the understanding of one's survival stances to facilitate congruence. To make the emphases understandable, it will be necessary to design each activity specifically.

Third, I have come to realize that, when I facilitate the learning process of the

educational program, it is essential to build strong support and create equal relationships among the participants in the learning group. However, a group leader or educator will be seen as an expert with authority in Chinese culture. To support and facilitate a group without authorities continues to be a challenge for me. In addition, I have learned that patience with the learning process is important, especially for the learning of congruence.

After the interviews, I discussed the interview process with the interviewees. There were several reflections from the above interviews. First, I learned that my questions were not specific because I tended not to limit the interviewee's thinking. This approach might have influenced the interviewee's answer to be ambiguous. The interviewees suggested that more probing in the interview process was needed.

Second, most of the interviewees thought the Satir Model had philosophical characteristics that made it difficult to verbalize. They suggested asking for more examples during the interviews. Third, I found that self-growth is a series of subtle changes in a process. The interviewees agreed that keeping journals was a good method for exposing the subtlety. They also agreed on the value of this study because they had suffered from the lack of a relevant research method to enhance their professional development and to bridge the gap between theory and practice for the practitioner.

**Part III Story Meaning**

# Introduction

Twenty-five women have together lived through 22.5 hours of scrutinizing the "embryo" of their life—their family of origin. Added together, these seven sessions do not even equal a day's time; yet, during this "day," many important events took place. Previous sections touched upon those occurrences. However, aside from the limited space given, there was no way to employ mere words to articulate fully to you, the reader, what everyone went through. I extracted from their stories the essential features to show commonality and variety. I interpreted them through my personal experience is like seeing sky through a pipeline, needless to say what I present will be limited. Nevertheless, during my examination of these stories, I was persistently aware of my own possible subjectivity. Therefore, I believe that the interpretation and discussion of these data are also valid.

Being a woman baptized with higher western education, when I look back at the experiences of Asian women, it is my hope that I will be able to provide a more open and inimitable space that fosters the self-growth of Taiwanese women. Here is another reflection excerpted from my own journal:

> *Walking in the streets of Taiwan tonight after the group session, fatigued and absent minded, impressions of street lamps, people, and busy cars streamed through my mind. My mind also became unsettled; it flew along with these impressions. I tried to find a place that can bring me some peace and stability.*
> *Thoughts of all those joyful events brought me no joy. Instead, these recollections gave me a sense of unfamiliarity and estrangement. I then thought of those dear to me. However, feelings of solace were fleeting. Thoughts of my home also offered no lasting security.*
> *I asked my self, " Where shall I go so I can gain some lasting peace?"*
> *There were no answers to this question. As I passed by a street lamp, I*

*casually saw my own shadow. "Why not rest my heart-mind on my Self?"*
*Coming in touch with myself in that moment, a sense of groundedness*
*arose. My steps became lighter. I felt uplifted.* –Pei

# Chapter one
# Theme Identification

## 1. Main Themes:

The "raw data" in this research project can be described as being quite "rich". Information was gathered not only from recordings from the group processes, but also from participants' journals, recordings of post-group interviews, and my own notes from the group process. From these data, I have extrapolated three major themes:

A. The causes for the "urge" to change towards self-growth come from group interaction and personal commitment.

B. Non-defensive acceptance of those in one's family of origin can be the turning point for generating an urge towards self-growth.

C. In the process toward self-growth, awareness and reflection are critical mental factors.

These three themes emerged and crystallized during my process of organizing the data. At this point, it is important to define what "change towards self-growth" is.

Change implies continual transformations and adjustments. Every living organism is characterized by this moment-to-moment changeability. Sometimes these changes are positive, sometimes negative. Change toward self-growth refers to positive change.

Embedded in all changes is an individual's subjective decision. Decisions are made in relation to the value of one's cultural and societal milieu and contingent upon the time and place from which the choices are made. Here, the decision of whether a change is positive or negative comes from the participants' own subjective judgment. Therefore, "change towards self-growth" is defined by the participants themselves.

The reason I focused in on the participants' own subjective beliefs about positive changes toward self-growth is that each individual constructs the meaning of her daily living. When experience is processed through an individual's interpretation, feelings arise and decisions are made. From these feelings and decisions, meaning structures are created. Therefore, what is most important is the fact that participants themselves feel that they have derived benefits and have grown.

Actually, these ideas did not crystallize or exist in the beginning of the research. Instead, it came into shape gradually. Just like the themes of this research. For me, this research, especially during the phases of organizing and analyzing the data, was an exciting process of contemplation and induction. The following is an account of that process.

## 2. Process of Analysis

Data collection and data analysis is a cyclical and continual process. And each and every data analysis is a contingent chain of reflections. This process fully influences the formation of the researcher's (in this case, my) perspectives and feelings. The actions that follow seemingly come from my perspectives and feelings, with these actions being inseparable from the data analysis. At the same time, these actions shape the way data are collected. This cycle is something familiar to any action researcher. But what is most precious is that every research experience is unique, like pearls in the deep ocean—each one sparkles like crystal and is different from each other.

Because the process of this research was complex and continuous, for the sake of clarity for the reader, accounts in Chapters Three and Four represent only a small portion of the complete data collection and analysis. Those two chapters contain the data organization and analysis of the group sessions and post-group interviews, and they reveal the process by which the themes were formulated.

Here, it is important to point out to the readers the situational conditions of the process. Because this research was carried out in the familiar environment and routine of Taiwan, and my home and work are also in Taiwan, everything was taken for granted. For example, in any given afternoon, I could be reading the journals of the participants. But when it got to be 4:30 PM, I would quickly pack up my materials and go to pick up my little daughter from school. Therefore, without awareness, I could shift my role from being a researcher to being a housewife. The different roles I played in my daily life were connected to one another. Without much self-awareness, the roles crowded in my mind that made me unfocused. The time I could devote to this research was fragmented. Therefore, I could only make use of my summers to return to UTK, to separate myself from my involvement in Taiwan, and create an inductive environment to organize and analyze my data.

The change of location from Taiwan to America has not only changed my attitude. It also introduced cultural differences. When living in the States, while *thinking* about middle-aged Chinese women living in Taiwan, what I was *seeing* and *hearing* was an entirely different culture. For this reason, it was easier for me to become aware of the differences and come to reflect, with utmost interest: If what I have come to know through my personal experience is not to be taken for granted, then what is the truth? Therefore, my dialogues with professors, the words in the library, the mothers and children who playfully hung out at the dormitory pool, pedestrians, and the mixture of nationalities at the International House on the campus of the University of Tennessee, all became a mirror for this research.

Aside from these conditions, during the past three years of organizing and analyzing the data, I began participating in Zen [Chinese: Chan] practice. This required that I trained in intensive meditation retreats twice a year in the United States, each time for seven days. Those experiences gave me room for reflections and an opportunity for learning. Many times during those intensive retreats, thoughts related to this research project, whether rational or irrational, would emerge. Often after extended periods of

cultivating calm and awareness, these research data revealed another layer of information. If the mental space created after Zen meditation is said to be beyond the conditions of the world, then the perspectives derived from it may contribute to my research data another facet of reflection.

I reviewed over and over the transcriptions from the post-group interviews, the journals from the participants, and my own notes. In the beginning of my perusal, I roughly divided these data by their content and process. This kind of division was quite interesting. As stated in Chapter One, the "content" is like "scripts" of the stories told, and every "actress" during their act has her inner process. Other "actresses" (participants) in the environment also cast their influence on one another's next "scripts" and process. Since the Satir Model embraces many levels of introspection, content and process cannot be clearly distinguished. However, after much consideration, I (1) categorized all the experiences and reflections derived from using the Satir Model as "content" and (2) categorized anything related to group process as "process." Here is an example of "process":

> *Our triad felt like one family... it felt more intimate than the group at large. Actually I am kind of surprised that I can openly talk about my life story, especially from a not-so-positive angle.... Although I did not receive direct encouragement to do so, I felt this group could accept whatever I had to say.* –Jin-hui

I continued to distinguish different experiences and reflections of experiences within the categories of content and process. In terms of content, descriptions of experiences include participants' investigation of their own family of origin during their group sessions and memories of their upbringing during post-group interviews. For example:

> *Ever since my marriage, my brother's children, because of schooling, came and lived with me... after my divorce, two more nephews came and lived with me. I felt obliged and didn't refuse them. I was denying my own feelings without knowing it.* –Mei-foun

Reflections of experiences include participants' interpretation and learning, as well as the changes of these interpretations and feelings. Often, these concerned the evolution of their change. For example:

> *I have never thought about it like this. It seems to me that my attitude at age 50 is quite different than when I was younger ... recollecting and reorienting some of the past, unresolved events, at this age, has led to further evolution... now I can interpret and look at the past with new perspectives. –Mei-yu*

In terms of "process," descriptions of experiences refer to accounts of group process by the participants. For example:

> *The teacher did not give us much. She simply allowed us to discuss among ourselves... we were mirrors for each other... actually in such a process, one can find her own directions toward things.  --Dai-wei*

Reflections are interpretations and viewpoints that participants have toward this process. For example:

> *Actually I feel that the sessions were well structured. I realized this from my own notes. The sessions were also connected to one another... I have learned to view phenomena from another angle; I think it is safe to say that it is a new method for me to critically locate the core of any phenomenon. –Chen-tien*

Repeatedly reviewing the initial categorizations of the data was very important, lest some data be overlooked or misconstrued during this phase. New notes continued to emerge. These notes, on the one hand, needed to be reviewed and incorporated into the process of reorganization and, on the other hand, also needed to provide initial possible findings for other themes to be further investigated.

In the beginning, these new findings were just unedited passages grouped together. I often questioned myself as to why I grouped them together in this way? I often asked,

why have these words spurred my interest? If I did not group these passages this way, how else could I categorize them? These questions led to attempts at regrouping the data and extrapolating the main topics behind them through editing. What is interesting is that it was at those times that I really begin to see clearly my own subtle value system. It was through those values that I perceived what was essential and what was not. For example, I tended to be easily drawn to the role and functions of the oldest daughter in her family or origin... how she interacted with her parents and younger siblings, how she gains self-assurance through taking care of the family, etc. Even though my attention was drawn to this area because such information repeatedly emerged from the data, my own upbringing also reflected this reality. I realized that I had a tendency to affirm the important role of the oldest daughter in a family. Also, when I returned to re-organize the "process" data, I tended to interpret them from the perspectives of the sense of security and trust engendered. This tendency came from my years of experience working with groups. For this reason, it was something easy for me to do. Behind this stood a belief: only by feeling safe and trusting toward the other can an individual develop openness and self-growth. This realization helped me to question myself: If I abandon my values, are there other possible ways to sort out and interpret the data?

Of course, during the process of organizing the data, the participants, my colleagues, friends, teachers, and family members, all enriched my notes. They encouraged me to return to the original data and engage in deeper consideration and verification. If I were an "authentic action researcher," I would continue this process without end! Therefore, to feel I have somewhat of an accomplishment, after innumerous attempts of organizing and synthesizing the data, and after the differentiation of various topics had developed, I told myself to call it quits. This kind of feeling is similar to an artist facing her own creation: on the one hand, she wants to perfect her art and, on the other hand, the deadline for the project is up.

Aside from this, the decision to leave out certain data was very difficult I believe all researchers in their initial research project have their own original interests. However, in

the course of their research, especially when faced with an immense amount of data, they wish to, in the process of synthesizing and selecting topics, include as much information as possible. As a result, their themes become more abstract. Here, the researcher's greed and uncertainty (towards the results of the induction and selection) becomes evident. Finding and investigating the appropriate evidence can resolve the researcher's uncertainty or lack of self-confidence. But when faced with greed, the researcher can only tell herself: let it go—this is not the last research in this life. Actually it is oneself that one is letting go, in an attempt to avoid being burnt out and in order to maintain clarity of mind.

Here, what is worth mentioning is the most devastating earthquake that ever happened in Taiwan on September 21. During my involvement in helping the victims, I saw the fragility and strength of humanity and witnessed the beauty and ugliness of human nature. This watershed experience directly stimulated many of my previously held beliefs; some of which were challenged and overthrown, some became more solid. I told myself: there is a great difference in our values in situations when a person faces life and death as compared with situations in which one is living in safety and pleasure. How to integrate both of these two values is something I'll need to work on during the second half of my life. A satisfying and painful two and a half years has passed. Actually, even as I type these words, I feel like looking over the data and topics again to make further corrections. However, the past 30 months of continual self-discipline have allowed me to see that beneath my easy-going personality there is an austere self-demanding side of me. So, I have told myself to bring this research to a conclusion. Therefore, I have decided to finalize the data analysis of this research at the beginning of year 2000. I knew that if I didn't conclude this project, I would easily extend this process of data analysis for two and a half more years. Now, I can only say that what follows is simply the result of my "latest" data organization and analysis.

## 3. Synthesis and Sub-themes

A. *The first main theme is " causes for change towards self-growth come from group interaction and personal commitment." In point of fact, there are sub-themes under this rubric.*

### 1. Participants had a high motivation to involve themselves in this project

Similar to Part II, this conclusion comes from the response of the participants in their group process, journals, and post-group interviews. Because these participants were recruited through a limited, invitation-only arrangement by a corporation, there undeniably was a degree of honor and competition. One participant has stated this explicitly:

> *Even though I have just entered this group of women, I feel a strong sense of belonging... even though I do not recognize more than half of the women. Still, being that I am younger than most of them, I felt quite fortunate to be chosen to join this research program. I am a bit nervous. At the same time, I am hopeful that I may derive some real benefit from thist. –Shin-chu*

A good beginning is halfway to success. The high impetus of the group allowed them to avoid many unnecessary defenses and uncooperativeness. Of course, it was possible that their original motivation might be diminished through the course content and process. Therefore, it was important that a strong motivation be coupled with an appropriate course and method in order to sustain that original enthusiasm.

Two women mentioned that the informed consent contributed to their incentive to participate:

> *I felt safe and trusted the teacher, seeing that she was so meticulous and sincere in explaining every detail in her introduction. I was actually*

*moved. I felt respected... I told myself not to view this research project like other ones. –Shin-chu*

...

*I had a special feeling when signing the informed consent... I think it came from listening to and participating in the opening session of this research, which I feel a part of it and have a sense of responsibility for it. –Mei-lin*

These quotes reminded me that every segment of research is related. Unless a researcher is genuinely sincere about appreciating every segment, he or she is bound to neglect the details, which might affect the whole research process. Thinking back, I feel reassured by how I carried out this research.

All of the participants also brought with them to this research expectations of self-growth:

*I was excited and had high expectations for this research. Beside wanting to understand the impact my family of origin had on me, I also wanted to increase my sensitivity... besides being excited, I wondered whether or not I would be able to concentrate and absorb all that this research has to offer. –Min-yin*

This passage commonly expresses participants' feelings.

### 2. Participants were actively involved, which led to a sense of security and trust.

High incentive or motivation to participate in something will naturally bring active involvement. But here, active involvement means something much more profound. People interact with their surrounding environment. In this interaction, people continuously become aware of whether their involvement makes them feel comfortable. If they are not comfortable, they withdraw. "Active involvement" here means that they

are enthusiastic from beginning to end. For example, towards the end of the group sessions, the following passages were a common thread in their journals:

> *It is really a joy to openly talk about my rigid rules this way... I believe we are gradually entering each other's deepest belief system, which is something we seldom do in our daily lives. –Shiu-yu*

> ...

> *My partner told me solemnly after the group sessions that she has been worried for some time now whether I will use what I now know of her to judge her and hurt her... I was glad she was able to express her concerns openly. –Yi-pin*

> ...

> *This research is coming to a close. I asked myself what my feelings were. For sure I will miss it. After each session, I always had so much feelings. It was through my journals that I articulated those feelings. As the research advanced what I had to say in my journal over flowed. I am guessing that most of my fellow participants had the same experience.*
> *__Hui-min*

Besides the fact that these women were actively involved within themselves, they were actively involved in an interpersonal way. In the world of participants, "Everyone could openly engage in sharing," "After the first day, when the participants were so involved in sharing their ideas and feelings, it was hard *not* to talk and to hide one's deepest secrets..." "Our dialogues had a flexibility to them that promoted a strong mutual acceptance." I identify these accounts as non-defensive interactions. What characterizes non-defensive interaction is openness and acceptance, which has been the preferred form of human interaction as encouraged by humanistic psychology in the West. Behind this view is the belief that openness and acceptance can augment a sense of security and trust in human relationships. And such relationship will help cultivate self-growth.

Evidently, the group sessions were full of this kind of positive atmosphere. For example, a participant gave us the following accounts:

> *The whole session had a smooth and relaxed atmosphere. I felt no need to protect myself, which allowed me to have the opportunity to discover what I had avoided and to face the problems that hampered my self-growth...--*
> Mei-yu

> *...I believe human relationship is based on an intuitive feeling... that being able to "listen to others and understand" is itself a kind of feeling. It is subjective. I have understood that, in turn, when others can listen and understand me, I have been accepted.* --Shin-hua

Similar comments were also made in the post-group interviews. For example:

> *It was easy to express myself when I felt safe in the group sessions... in the triad group I was also able to share my thoughts sincerely and get into deeper reflections... and I realized that I was not the only one with the problem. Naturally, everyone felt bonded together ... I wish we could have extended the time for the triad discussion and group sharing!* --Hai-shui

Most everyone affirmed the arrangement of triad sub-groups. Because privacy was kept in the intimate triad groups, everyone was able to openly express himself or herself without restraint. It seems to me that the triad groups had a direct bearing on the active involvement of and the benefits gained by the participants.

### 3. Low directive instructions substantiated participants' learning process

The instructions during group sessions were limited intentionally. The responses about the low directive instructions were:

> *The teacher was always there for us, continuously. Yet, she allowed us to walk our own paths and face whatever was there and to observe our own*

*processes. Whenever I had questions that cropped up from trying to understand and sort out different parts of myself, she'd always allow me to ask and resolve them myself. –Sue-jen*

...

*This is indeed a refreshing method for holding classes. I have never experienced it before... In the past, it was always the teacher who speaks, and students only listened; even when we engaged in some kind of game or activity, they never led to anything really important... It's truly wonderful to really listen attentively to others and to genuinely participate during group process with such intensity and concentration. Furthermore, what was great about it was that we had ample time for triad sharing. I felt unreserved and at ease... I was treated as an adult. –Mei-lin*

...

*Very often I would observe what you (the teacher/researcher) were doing. You didn't speak much, and were often reposed in your attitude about things. Yet whenever you spoke, you had the ability to point out directly the heart of any issue. The thing is, you simply "pointed" to it without much elaboration, which allowed a lot of space on our part to discover... that space permitted people to sort out different things themselves... those participants who did this tended to go through the processes faster than others who were slower in their ability to self-reflect. –Shui-huai*

The above three quotes attempt to show how participants' responded to the structural design of the research and method of teaching. Words and phrases such as: "space," "flexibility," "openness," "not relying on the teacher," "the teacher can naturally join us in the sharing," repeatedly appeared in the post-group interviews. This design of this teaching style is in sharp contrast to the traditional Chinese method of education, which relies heavily on the one-way didactic dialogue, wherein the teacher's responsibility is to teach rather than for the student to develop independent learning competences. For this reason, "experiential learning" is something unfamiliar to Chinese people. The response of the participants seemed to have justified this kind of experiential learning. However, some participants needed a process of adjustment.

Some women shifted back and forth between "wanting the teacher to be more involved" in terms of giving more directive instructions, on the one hand, and imbibing the "space" and "freedom" given to them, on the other. Their conflict seemed to occur whenever I insisted not on giving directives. However, even these participants gradually change their minds. One participant states:

> *Perhaps I am not used to expressing my feelings and opinions and wish that you (the teacher/researcher) could say it for me and get it over with... towards the end of the discussion, I felt that this kind of course was helpful to me. Now, it is I who is helping myself.* –Hui-min

The changes that occurred in their learning process required shifting virtually the whole responsibility of learning to the students, a swing away from traditional Chinese education where the teacher has complete control of students' learning process. Compared with the traditional education system, this kind of course can be structurally loose, but it must follow the participant's group dynamics. The teacher/facilitator only needs to introduce and clarify the main theme of the session and guide group discussions and sharing sessions of individuals. The authority of the teacher/facilitator in the sessions is reduced to the minimum. At the same time authority is distributed to all of the participants themselves. Unexpectedly, this kind of design allowed participants' to discovery of the roles they played in their family of origin. This last idea will be elaborated in the next chapter.

**B. The second main theme is that a non-defensive acceptance of members of one's family of origin can be the turning point for generating an urge towards self-growth.**

There are two facets to what is mentioned here as "family of origin." The first refers to the women's way of being in the family of origin; the other tacitly implies the

relationship had authority figures. These two facets are in fact related. An individual's way of being in a family entails a complex amalgam of interior experiences such as feelings, perceptions, expectations, and yearning, etc. (Satir, 1992). And these experiences impinge on the way that an individual relates to his or her family members, which naturally influence relationships with different members of the family. Since fathers and mothers are the main figures in a family, they are the 'significant others" with the power of authority. In the process of relating to one's parents being brought up can involves learning how to relate and live with authority. The participants in this research have indeed substantiated this idea. What follows is an example from my interview with one of them:

> *When I look back at my relationship with my parents and siblings, I realize that our relationship stopped short of being only superficial... I tried to relate to them using their points of view or perspective...but I realize that I am protecting myself even now through my own interpretations... Actually, dad didn't have many "needs." I was held back by my own desires... I projected my own self-dissatisfaction on my father. For this reason, I always was so dissatisfied with my father... members of my triad said that I have begun to loosen up. It is not easy to make a sudden change in my relationship with my father because I still have expectations... but now I can at least come to accept my father's behaviors when I look back at them... you may say I have learned a new method. Whenever I feel low spirit, or feel that I am binding myself, I am able to understand my situation and adjust accordingly. –Shiu-yu*

This quote clearly expressed not only her eventual understanding and acceptance of her father, but also of herself. What is more important is the fact that her coping with difficulties was one of self-transformation, not expecting her father to change. Of course, these participants' self-reflection contained some common elements. What follows are some principles, or "common ground" experiences, distilled from their process.

## 1. Recognition and acceptance of one's negative emotions.

Most people dislike their negative emotions, especially when such negative emotions are geared toward their own families. The reason why they find such emotions shameful is because a wonderful, loving family is presupposed as a cultural norm in society. Therefore, when negatives arise, most often they are suppressed or denied, which leads to further isolation.

> *In the family map, I saw that my negative descriptions of my family members exceeded my positive descriptions. I could almost hear a voice inside, 'No! That's not my family.' I was heartbroken and wanted to cry, to run away. My acceptance level for imperfection is quite low...*
> *(Excerpted from the second group session)*

> ...

> *I envy others' courage to face difficulties and meet challenge. I can only stand aside and admire them. And I know that's only me wanting to 'save face'... when will I be able to directly confront this problem? (Excerpted from the third group session)/*

> ...

> *Right now my mind is so 'full;' I can no longer tolerate anything else. Scattered thoughts continue to arise and I am unable to be at ease. I feel exhausted.... so tired. Other women seem to be able to quiet their minds and here I am filled with noise and chaos in my mind (Excerpted from the fourth group session).*

> ...

> *I saw my own emotional ups and downs and the rule of inimicality in me. How can I tolerate someone such as myself? I was so fortunate to be a part of the triad. We almost got into an argument, which led me to see my stubbornness and what a jerk I am. What began as an intriguing and enticing 'self-growth' program ended up being my discovery of how ugly I really am (Excerpted from the fifth group session).*

> ...

> *I recall that session when we did the family sculpture and how many tears I shed. But today in our sharing of "unfinished business", I saw my ability to be open and at ease. Although I am still hopeful, there was a change in my mood; it was as if a cloud has dispersed and the sun is shinning again... it seems to me that from now on I will be able to, step by step, to continue to work on myself. (Excerpted from the sixth group session) –* Min-yin

The above excerpts all came from one woman's journal. Her descriptive accounts reveal her understanding of her negative emotions. Confrontation and acceptance is a courageous process; it is also the entrance towards change. She talked about her own perception of self-transformation in the post-group interview:

> *Before this program, I always tried to avoid 'human contacts" in family gatherings. Now, I do not run away. It seems to me that when I am able to admit my negative feelings toward them, I am able to reduce much of that resentment and be more understanding... and when I see myself like this, I am more able to accept myself as I am...all those past experiences seemed to be relieved.* –Mei-lin

Self-acceptance, especially accepting those parts of oneself that one dislikes, is a process that allows one to become more stable. Negative emotions most often represent some kind of inability to accept oneself. Once this process of acceptance begins, negative emotions begin to attenuate and one's heart transforms. The Chinese have an idiom, "situations are transformed by the mind." My meditation teacher Venerable Sheng-Yen often said: "When the mountain in front of you cannot be moved, change your course; if the course you take is inflexible, change yourself; and if you yourself becomes rigid, change your mind!" When the mind changes, it will be at peace. When what is seen and heard changes, our situation and relationships will be changed. Such examples emerged through out this research. Below is a self-introduction related to me in our post-group interview:

*I always wondered whether I should move out and live by myself... that proved that I was an independent person. I didn't worry myself with this or that, and I didn't concern myself with family affairs, even the relationship I had with my parents. Those relationships could be better dealt with this way. After all, when I didn't see them, things were better... actually I was weak and timid. I needed to be with someone... during the sessions, I realized that even though my family quarrels were at times intolerably noisy to me, I was quite dependent on them... I felt as though I was still a kid, needing people to take care of me. Although I was ashamed of this, there was nothing I could do... at least this is what I see now. I hope in the future I am really able to be independent... after I decided not to move out, my parents' arguments no longer seemed so intolerable. As for family affairs... I am a bit relaxed about it; when I feel like dealing with it, I just deal with it; when I don't feel like it, I just leave it and go to my room... --Jin-hui*

Actually, "change your mind" refers to accepting one's way of being in one's family of origin *after* one has let go of or at least attenuated those negative feelings. Only then will one be at peace. Therefore, accepting one's negatives directly correlate with accepting one's way of being.

## 2. Recognizing one's own yearning and needs.

The family environment is the arena in which humans fulfill their most basic needs. However, more often than not, it is very difficult for anyone to say that her family of origin has completely fulfilled her needs. There are many reasons for this. One reason is that in the midst of experiencing various events, while one's emotions are unstable, it is not possible for one to understand what one yearns for. That was the case in the previously quoted passages where a woman discovered that she "needed to be with someone," needed "to depend on someone," or needed "to be taken care of." It was necessary for her to go through a long process of self-introspection, and be able to let go the negative feelings toward her family members, before she came to accept herself this way.

It does not matter what kind of survival stances these participants have. From a perhaps generalized viewpoint, all these women used their own means to gain the love they needed from their parents, because the love from parents tacitly affirms the value of one's existence. This love has not only influenced the participants' self-esteem, it also shaped their self-image.

Example that corroborate this claim can be seen from previous examples of how one lady worked for her father for 17 years and was full of disapproval towards her father; and of how another woman, who devoted all her efforts to please her parents in law, and even after she was divorced, she was still the same but she never received the affirmation and appreciation she deserved. If we were to use Satir's paradigm of personality types, most of the participants struggled to "placate" in order to earn their self-worth. However, after a long sustained period in which they were subservient and tried to fulfill other's expectations, their family relations either became isolated or their feelings have gradually died away. Sometimes their feelings involved a deep sense of disapproval or anger, with family members turning out to be tense or conflicted.

We know that if there is no love and expectations in human interaction there will not be disappointments and hopelessness. In a society where love is the only accepted cultural norm towards one's family, when an individual has contrary feelings of disappointment, she dares not express them openly, especially towards her parents. Especially when that society overlooks the position of women in family, it is particularly hard for them to admit their inner feelings. Therefore, they typically suppress and deny their yearning. Through continual offering of themselves, they wait; they wait for that eventual day when their fathers, in particular, recognizes and understands their pain and affirms the value of their existence.

This kind of hidden process points to the fact that these participants had no sufficient room to accept their own being—they repressed their needs to be loved and affirmed, behind which is actually the idea that 'I am not entitled to request that of others.' One participant stated:

> *I feel that in my past, I spent too much time being sensitive toward others. I was afraid to express my own needs... in the past I thought it was bad to ask for what I wanted; God forbid, that was much too aggressive... now I realize that I can say what I feel. I feel quite bold.* -- Mei-foun

After the participants were able to come, gradually, to accept their negative feelings, they were able to, with more open and accepting attitude, face themselves and their family. Their inner needs and yearning naturally surfaced; there was no need to distort and deny those feelings. An analogy of this would be like seeing two people reunite after years of separation, when, after all the frustrations and worries are relinquished, a feeling of mutual love finally brings them together. In such a situation, feelings of being moved and at the same time of being at peace fills the moment. Being moved comes from long periods of self-denial and disclosure of repressed emotions. Being at peace is the result of self-assurance and openness to one's way of being.

> *I used to not trust anyone in groups... I was also quite reserved among friends... I have always thought that I loved myself too much... actually I am overly protective of myself...perhaps this is because ever since my youth, I had to go all-out to get what I wanted, my parents did not take the initiative to give me what I wanted. That was because I was always in competition with my brother. When he was around, it was as if I was invisible to my parents. I had become very sensitive. Whenever I felt a potential hurt coming on, I ran away... when I went home I just do my things. At work, for the past 14 years, I simply kept my own end of the duty... I never saw myself as overly protective in front my parents and boss. I actually dislike myself like this, unable to listen, to see, and to feel... At least now I can live at peace with and not always struggle against myself, and I do not mind that I am such a competitor and a weakling. I can identify with myself now. I can see how much I want them to recognize me... recently, when I sat with dad to watch television, there was a peacefulness that moved me.* −Yen-fen

### 3. Recognizing and accepting parents as they are

Every child idealizes his or her parents. Actually, this is a process by which we project our needs on to our parents. The mere existence of this process also indicates the disparity we experience between our ideals and reality. This disparity also reveals our unfulfilled needs and expectations toward our parents. Yet, when we idealize our parents, we loose that opportunity to truly know our parents' original face. As a result, both the parents and the children attach themselves to their unfulfilled expectations and never genuinely encounter one another.

There were some differentiations between "ideal" and "real" happened during the group sessions"

> *Ideal parents are always in some way related to one's real parents, their special traits, part of which reveals our expectations we have of them; sometimes it reveals what we ourselves want to be, or what we want our partners want to be. –Shin-hua*

> ...

*Ever since my youth, my mother depended on me... I now feel so drained. I long for someone who can understand me and be with me. Therefore, my "ideal mother" is someone that I do not have in reality. –Fon-jen*

Also, there had some profound understanding about their families and parents' world happened:

> *It is not as if my family is falling apart or anything. There are no real contentions. But neither is my family warm or joyful. Far from it. I feel somewhat saddened and embittered looking at it. Seeing the distance between my second sister and dad, I wonder if they feel lonely inside? And then there is mother. Being introverted and having to live in the countryside with no nearby neighbors to chat with, she must feel lonesome. --Mei-yu*

> ...

> *I suddenly realized that this family of mine, with its members living under the same roof, is not as familiar to me as I thought them to be. I really*

*have to think for a long time to use words to describe them. I have never so seriously looked at them. I thought I know them well, such that my expectations of them were also high... Only when I adjust my ideals of them to match reality can I be accepting of and flexible toward them...* -- Shui-huai

...

*The lady that played my father in family sculpture told me that her posture was exhausting her. I felt sorry and lonely. I was hurt to know that for such a long time my father felt this way at home... history replayed itself during today's session. When I sincerely tried to sense my feelings toward my parents I realized that I had negative feelings toward my mother. I knew the reason, and also found out why such feelings were redirected toward my father. It's a kind of chain reaction.* –Hui-min

...

*Originally I thought it was natural for mom to reproach dad, and that he should not have any discomfort. I have never thought that mom's reproach was a kind of discharge of emotions. And dad simply played the role of the "martyr." Upon realizing this, I was relieved. There was no need for me to feel sad for mother. To my father, I could be more gentle and understanding. My guilt feelings toward criticizing father have also vanished.* –Dai-wei

Therefore, some reflections and actions came from the participants:

*I always doubted I could ever truly let go of these expectations. This past weekend, I went home for three days. Relating to my father, I saw that he did not match the impression I had of him as a stubborn, immobile old man. Instead I found a reposed man who can communicate, on various topics, with his daughters. My mood was easeful on the way back to Taipei... unsurprisingly, whenever one's ideals become closer to reality, life becomes easier, free from pressure.* –Dai-wei

...

*I still feel nostalgic and a faint sorrow talking about these stories, after all these years, after mother's passing. If I could start over again, I would like them to be just as they were. I wouldn't' want them to fit my ideals.* –Mei-foun

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After recognizing and accepting their negative emotions and inner yearnings, the participants were able to better accept the condition of their family of origin. They were also able to accept their parents' way of being. That was a process of self-growth for the participants. In point of fact, the formation of this theme was developed from, in my mind, a very western model of reflection. Moreover, it also tacitly reveals the impact of western individualism upon the East. The theme merely was manifested through these women. I will elaborate this point further in the next chapter.

**C. The third main theme is that awareness and reflection are critical mental factors in the process toward self-growth.**

The group sessions were designed to provide an occasion for the participants to review their process of upbringing "there and then" in the "here and now," much like looking through a pair of memory lenses and going back in time to observe images of their past. By using the perspective of Satir Model to make new discoveries and interpretations in their family of origin, they could derive benefits from this process.

People's emotions and perceptions are conditioned by the moment of each event's occurrence. Although time can diminish feelings, and perceptions can also evolve along with other experiences to give rise to new perspectives, often, through various factors, these changes evolve without our intentions and control.

Both education and therapy are conscious methods artificially devised to advance change in a systematic way. This research attempts to funnel a frequently applied theory and method of therapy—the Satir Model—through the forms of education and apply it to a group of women. In the beginning, I had no preconceived ideas of the outcome. By following the progress of the sessions, I was able to see definite changes in the participants. After reviewing the data, I recognized two distinct areas the participants persistently cultivated during their interaction: awareness and reflection.

From the standpoint of the participants, awareness typically means to consciously perceive themselves and their family situation. However, in this research "awareness" had a different nuance of meaning. Whenever the participants "rewound" back to their early life stories stored in their memory banks, they not only became aware of their feelings and expectations at that time but also brought to light the hidden rules; posed by themselves onto others. They became aware of, for example, their parents as they were and the possible feelings of they may have had in those situations. This whole series of awareness is more like new discoveries from their memory. One participant gives an example:

> *This course has given me not only good experiences but also bad ones because it allowed me to perceive things from other angles, some of which are new discoveries... I became conscious and keen in observing our interactions, whereas in the past I took things for granted. Now I am more observant.* –Kai-min

These new discoveries constitute a process of "knowing." They were able to "concretize,"—that is, to "reframe,"-- their upbringing experiences by applying the Satir Model. On the one hand, they were able to clarify their past experiences and sort them out. On the other hand, they were able to "label' those experiences in a conscious way. Labeling is intriguing. The label we ascribe to a phenomenon-- be it a person, thing, or an event-- already includes our feelings and judgments. Therefore, labeling is a way of constructing meaning. The participants have in the past possibly labeled their experiences without much awareness and have carried those feelings and interpretations without knowing it. This research recalled those past experiences; it also recalled those known or unknown labels. Through interacting with other participants they were able to define and "rename' those experiences, thus deriving new meanings. Their feelings changed as a result. Because those old labels ascribed to experiences occurred unconsciously and now new "labels' were given in a conscious manner, we might say that the participants had moved from a state of unawareness to a state of awareness in their knowing process.

Therefore, it is this knowing process that provided them with a fresh understanding of themselves and their family of origin. The change that occurs afterwards is inevitable. For example:

> *I have had a chance to really know myself... as it turned out; it was the beginning of the conflict with my parents. Although I do not like it, it is beyond my control... I was asked to generate some feeling toward my own name—which I have non-whatsoever. When my partners asked me to describe what it was like to have "no feelings" toward my name, I suddenly opened up. Labels are only signifiers much like all those stages I went through in my upbringing; they are all just a part of me. I hope everyone can use this perspective that I have now gained to experience and understand my **whole** being. –Kai-min*

"No feelings" is actually an old label ascribed that participant to her own name that comes from accumulated experiences. Such an old label conceals a whole host of complex, unconscious feelings and ideas. During the group sessions, under the support of the members of her triad, she was able to confront those past experiences and derive new interpretations—"labels are only signifiers"—from which she was able to "label" it another way and have a new beginning.

Here is another example:

> *When the teacher was introducing the survival stance of "irrelevance" in the five survival stances, my partners commented that I definitely belong to this category. In the beginning I didn't mind. Being nobody is not bad after all. But when I heard that such people feel that they themselves are irrelevant, in other words, they have no self, I was quite shocked and hurt. Could this be the reason that I avoided participation in our group processes? –Yi-pin*

"Irrelevant" is a new label. Because of this new description, that participant began to face her own inner world. It was the beginning of her change.

Do changes always contribute to positive self-growth? Not necessarily. It is impossible to predict changes in humans. Besides, semantics prove that it is the nature of language to change radically under the infrastructure of any given society and culture. Therefore, a new label to characterize one's experience can sometimes bring negative feelings, especially in sensitive situations where one is dealing with one's own self-worth or in people relations. It can be like opening a sewer cover and allowing the stench to come out. At this time, aside from the design of "stopping the music" to allow them to become aware of new perspectives, the function of "reflection" is extremely crucial.

To my mind, perhaps the greatest difference between human beings and other animals is the ability to ruminate or reflect. Reflection is a unique space in mind for observing and considering various objects of one's awareness, such as feelings and perceptions. To be free from pain and misery is an innate goal of all human beings. Therefore, the power of reflection, if cultivated, can permit the participants to better accept those new labels, which are sometimes difficult to admit. The journals they wrote and the temperature readings in the group sessions, for example, were very good examples of how they cultivated the power of reflection. In addition to the power of reflection, the awareness they gained engendered new perceptions and meanings. A participant's journal provides a good example of her reflection:

> *When the first session began, the teacher gave us a detailed introduction of the reasons for this research and the rights of the participants. We also signed an informed consent. The teacher's attitude was very sincere and poised. Without awareness, we felt safe and could trust her. But I still had some reservations: what has happened to us? How come we were, in such a short time, totally taken by her? Was it her or our attitudes?* –Shin-hua

From this excerpt from a journal we can see that her observation and thinking has already started, her reflections continue:

*When everyone joyfully returned to the session, there were people who openly expressed their negative emotions. I admire their courage. Would I have done what they did on the first session? It was inspiring for me to observe the teacher's composer during all of their complaints and the tense atmosphere. I asked myself why do we have to behave that way?*

Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese culture is influenced by the idea that "one should reflect upon oneself three times a day." Therefore, the act of reflection is something very common. However, reflection in Chinese culture is filled with moral overtones. Sometimes reflection becomes a process of self-damage. In this research, the Satir Model served as a framework for reflection to reduce that self-damage. It also increased the possibility of self-growth.

For example, in the course of the sessions, the family map and sculpture permitted those hard-to-accept realities to surface and, when after observing their rules and expectations, participants were able to understand that their reliance on their rules pinned them down. Furthermore, these rules may have had their origin in expectations from their parents, or themselves. In that unique space for reflection, they were able to acquire new outlooks—they felt uncomfortable because they were unable to let go. When they discovered that the cause of their misery resided in themselves, they began to work toward positive change. It was at those times that possibilities of self-growth were possible.

A participant, Shiu-yu described this process in her journal from the fifth, sixth, and seventh sessions:

*...In the midst of peeling away my façade, I could see some hidden unconscious rules. But what if these rules are the real me? To leave behind those old rules is something much desired, but that lonely state of not having anything to rely on could be dreadful. Then again, it could also turn out to be that state of total freedom for which I have longed. How ironic?*

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> *...What are the implications of me wanting to hold on to these expectations? What would I feel if I let them go? ... This kind of inquiry and answer is certainly different when expressed instead of than holding them in my mind. When I peel away these rules to get to what lies beneath, will it be like what Buddhists call "emptiness?" That kind of ultimate goal can certainly make the Satir Model sound enticing and exciting...*

> *...One important discovery I have made is to understand that the expectations come from my own sense of lacking and my longing for more. It made sense for me to seek from outside what I lacked inside. It was unnatural, and impossible to ever attain fulfillment; there was a conflict because the gulf between the two was great. The more I searched from without, the greater was my suffering. As I write these words, I can laugh at myself for clenching on at those expectations.*

These three excerpts clearly revealed that this participant, in her space of reflection, persistently questioned and observed herself. She also questioned the validity of her previously held views and was able to take a step forward to gain new insights. What used to be painful for her now turned out to be humorous. This is an incident of "changing one's mind."

From this research we are able to see that, whether it be in the course design or in an individual's story, awareness and reflection are inseparable. Like a dog chasing its own tail, this is a recursive process. The collaboration of these two actions can encourage an individual to change her inner world. In turn, that individual's experience of the external world can also change. Bradford Keeney has, in his *Aesthetics of Change* (1983) quoted a passage from Bugental (1967) that resembles the themes of this research:

> *Indeed, we must recognize that the very process of describing the human experience changes that experience and that the more such a description approaches completeness, the more it is apt to be a basis for change in the very experience it describes...man's awareness about himself acts as a constantly "recycling" agency to produce changes in himself (p.7).*

The only difference with this quote is that the participants in this research reached a conclusion. They know now that awareness brings about change, but only by coupling it with reflections can they bring about positive change toward self-growth.

## Chapter Two

## Interpretations

### 1. Changing One's Mind—A Process of Transformation from Within

During this research project I had a dream. In the dream I was on a boat with a group of people going upstream. Our goal was to find the mythical "Garden of Plums," where people can live happily ever after. In the beginning it was all smooth sailing. But after a while, the water in the river became muddled and marshy, and soon the place turned to a marshland. The boat moved ahead sluggishly and gradually slowed down. Eventually, it stopped. Everyone on board comes up with different ideas and talking boisterously. Finally, I recommended that since we could no longer go forward, we might as well get off the boat and find a place to stay for the night. When the water cleared, I said, we would begin again our journey. Everyone agreed because there was no other choice. Surprisingly, when we got off the boat to look around, the scenery was quite beautiful and the ground was fertile. Each traveler found a good place to inhabit. After being there several days, the water was still not clearing. Someone suggested that we move on and search for the Garden by land. Suddenly, an elderly man came forth and said, "No matter where you may reside, if your heart can be like the flower garden, that's where the Garden of Plum will be." At that moment, my mind opened. I turned around to look at the swampland; it was filled with lovely lotus blossoms. Then I awoke.

In a swampland, a lotus can blossom. Likewise, a caterpillar can turn into a butterfly. In this research project, the group of Chinese women made efforts to turn themselves into lotuses and butterflies. Perhaps this will be a lifetime's work for them, and for me. But the catalyst for change in this whole process was the words from the elderly man—one's situation can be altered by the mind.

While conducting this research, I was able to see an important truth emerging everywhere: people create life's meaning. That is, change rests with each of us. However, an individual's control over his or her environment is limited. Nevertheless, each person has the ability to change his or her own heart/mind.

This belief about change has a strong Chinese overtone. In traditional Chinese culture, the idea that "one's determination can conquer nature" and "to submit oneself to the will of the heaven and one's fate" are contradictory to one another. Ironically, they also co-exist in any Chinese person's world-view (Yen, 1992). "One's determination can conquer nature" refers to the Chinese belief that a person's willpower is contingent on and in sync with the rhythm and inevitability of the natural world. Thus, individuals can govern themselves. Contrarily, "to submit oneself to the will of the heaven and one's fate" means that there is some kind of higher force that governs one's life. Of course, the belief in providence is strong, which leads Chinese people to "endure hardships" and to "suffer insults in order to accomplish a task ".Women, due to their inferiority in Chinese culture, believe strongly in this notion of fate. And so they submit.

When I consider how my own beliefs developed, I see that I have some that are consistent with the idea that "one's determination can conquer nature" while others conform to the idea that we should "submit oneself to the will of the heaven and one's fate." Due to my parent's love and acceptance, my belief that "one's determination can conquer nature" is dominant. But as my age advanced year by year, I came to realize that there are simply too many events in the world that clearly are not under our own control. Still, I was unwilling to submit to "fate." Surrounded by many fateful events of my life, I began the Zen practice of "mind cultivation" to actualize the possibility of "changing my mind." The Satir Model was one of main methods that helped bring about my process of change.

We can correlate this idea to this research project. Given that people's intellectual and emotive traits tend to become fixed at a certain age after reaching adulthood, and that there is no way of being young again, we can say that this is a kind of fate. Therefore, if

an individual wants to live with a sense of self-determination, a process and methods are required to change one's mind to let go of the past and live in the present. Therefore, from a cultural standpoint, "changing one's mind" required on evolution from "submitting oneself to the will of the heaven and fate" to "one's determinations can conquer nature."

It is important to note that the notion here: "one's conquering nature" is different from the western idea of dominating one's surroundings from the perspective of one's sense of self. The difference concerns the notions of "one's self" and "nature." Chinese people externalize the self to merge with the environment; thus, there is the Chinese idea of "being one with nature." (Yang, 1988) For the Chinese, human beings are merely a *part* of nature. It is necessary for people to find the principles of how to be a human being through natural interactions with the world. And such principles include both physical and mental worlds. In the West, human beings are at the center of nature. People here consider themselves able to dominate their external environment by using advanced technology. Therefore, the "conquering nature" idea does not refer to literally dominion over the natural world. Instead, it means to harmoniously interact with and inter-depend with natural forces.

Harmony is the wellspring of happiness for the Chinese. It is the ultimate virtue for handling various things. When there is harmony, there is bound to be happiness and true value. Of course, for the sake of harmony, the Chinese try to avoid confrontations. This is accomplished by squelching self-expression. To display harmony externally, they have strayed far from it on the inside. It seems to me that in order not to spoil one's interrelations and to gain inner peace, the only way is to change one's own mind. Through one's inner transformation, one can create harmony and calm. It is from such a mindset of peace and refreshed perspectives that one sees interrelationships and the world in a new way, thus causing changes to happen. This is a process of transformation from the inside out.

Although the Satir Model is a product of the West, it has several salient features that fit neatly with Chinese values. These features contributed to the success of this research.

First, the Satir Model views individuals within family settings. In other words, individuals are one subsystem of the family system. This outlook correlates quite well with the relationship the Chinese have with nature and society. Secondly, in the Satir Model, honesty and acceptance is strongly emphasized in family interactions, allowing the dark, unpleasant undercurrents to surface without judgment. This allows family members to mutually understand and truly come to accept one another. This connects with the Chinese value of harmony.

Furthermore, the Satir Model places a premium on developing insight into one's own feelings, perceptions, and expectations. This kind of introspection leads to transformation that begins on the inside. Since ancient times, the self-discipline of the Chinese--especially the educated--focused on inner cultivation. And since the Chinese understand the body/mind phenomena as one, "inner cultivation" includes both, which is also a process of discipline helped by introspection that starts with the individual. Thus, from this perspective, these two systems are fundamentally the same. The only difference between the two is that for the educated Chinese, this cultivation is performed alone while in the Satir Model, it occurs within the context of one's family.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that for the educated Chinese, self-reflection is filled with moral overtones and judgments. Therefore, it is easy to fall into the duality of right vs. wrong, good vs. bad. One is encouraged to "perfect self-discipline within so as to gain harmony with the external environment." This makes one congruent inside and out. However, in the modernization of Taiwan, where pluralistic values abound, old values are sometimes forgotten. They are substituted by dubious, insalubrious, and conflicting values and ideologies. The Satir Model provides a way for these women to engage in a process of "changing one's minds."

## 2. Authority

"Changing one's mind" is commonly thought to be an internal process. However, since this research is far from Zen meditation, it is carried out under a carefully planned and structured context of "interaction." It is evident that here "changing one's mind" is wholly "situational.'

In this research, the notion of "situation' plays itself out in two arenas: one's family of origin and the classroom. Due to the design of this study, these two were often inseparable. Only at those instances where "stopping the music" occurred—or when they were reminded of the group process—could the two be separated.

If we were to re-categorize the data according to these two areas, and examine the topics and sub-themes in chapter seven, interesting findings would emerge. First, in terms of the past experiences in their family of origin, it is clear that these women repressed their negative emotions and submitted to the needs of their fathers and mothers. They could not take the initiative to fulfill their inner needs. In an attempt to escape from this difficulty way of living, they continuously provided for others hoping to get confirmation from their parents. In the traditional Chinese classroom, students submissively await their teacher's instructions. The teacher, therefore, has total control of the classroom and as a result, the student is not self-determined.

When we look again at the experiences of the participants, we see that they recognized and accepted their negative emotions, inner needs, and yearnings associated with their family of origin. They also came to accept the situation between their parents and themselves. In the open, safe and trustworthy environment of this research setting, they were able to take full initiative of and participation in what was happening without the teacher's imposition.

As I thought about the family and classroom situations, I saw an underlying theme that ran through them both —"authority." In the session when we focused on their family of origin, the participants saw their reliance on their parent (authority) and were able to

let go of their expectations and then accept their situations. During this class, I limited my (authority) involvement and intervention and increased the interaction among the participants. Additionally, "stopping the music" and post-group interviews gave them more room to reflect. I cannot prove a direct cause-effect relationship, but I am suggesting the possible correlation between them. That is to say, the change that the participants went through was a process of "changing minds.' In fact, one main catalyst for their change was their own decisive change of how they related to authority figures. I believe that the minimum structure and low directive instructions of this research gave the participants the room needed for such change.

To recall a quote in Chapter One, there was one woman who worked for her father for 17 years only hoping to gain the approval of him. She wanted him to see her as his "daughter," not his "secretary.' That is one example of a certain type of yearning, the kind that seeks love and affirmation from an authority figure. Indeed, if I had told her that she was "submissive" or "deferential", that probably would have offended her. However, from her journals and the interview, it was clear that she not only was able to confront her own expectations but also was able to express those feelings in front of the group.

To be able to "express" her feelings to others was extremely important for her. According to her, that was the first time in many years that she verbalized her innermost feelings to others, thus exposing herself for others to see and to hear. From the perspective of "social orientation," Chinese society can be seen as supporting a kind of human interaction that emphasizes familial, role, and authoritarian orientations. Not unrelated is the fact that these encourage people to place importance on what the "other" perceives of oneself (Yang, 1992). Under such circumstances, where people seek harmony, compliancy, and patience, with the Chinese often quick to say, "one should report only what is good and conceal what is unpleasant," it is easy to see how routinized repressive behavior can be held up as a virtue of a society. And since the Chinese social tendency is closely related to the authoritarian personality (Yang, 1992), by which "open expression" of one's feeling can easily be interpreted as possible grounds for disharmony

and criticism, any deviation from the "norm' can jeopardize one's relation with the authority figure.

According to Yang in his 1996 report, two particular modes of psychological mindset coexist in contemporary Chinese people. The above-described social-orientation belongs to the traditional mode. The other mode is the result of cultural integration of Western values and ways of thinking. He describes it as self-orientation, independent orientation, competitive orientation, or egalitarian orientation. In Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan, Yang believes it to manifests in different degrees. (Yang 1996) Looking at this phenomenon, on the one hand, from the history of the Chinese—and being of a Chinese decent myself—can be deeply disenchanting. On the other hand, from the perspective of an individual's self-growth, the coexistence of these two modes of psychological mindset can, although bringing inner conflict, be very much like holding two cards of kings; one can choose which card to put down on the table.

There is a clear similarity when we look at this woman's experience. In the past, for a daughter to conceal her feelings was a kind of accepted norm for women; in fact, it was seen as a 'virtue,' albeit a compliant virtue ascribed to women. However, this kind of virtue of "withholding one's feelings silently to wait for recognition," seen on the stage of our modern society, is quite dated and often, leads to a tragic story. The "authority model" evident in this woman's story is gradually disappearing in the development of our pluralistic society. Therefore, in her story, the role of the "father" is a kind of symbol, a symbol for her own authoritarian personality and her need for dependence on and yearning to be affirmed by a higher authority. When this woman openly expressed her innermost feelings, she was actually experiencing the accompanying pain of crossing the transition from tradition to modernity, attempting to let her old values to fall away. She was on the road toward self-orientation.

The second quote in Chapter One provides another instance of a transformative experience of an individual's authoritarian personality. It dealt with a single mother who

exerted all that she had to raise her children. When her children grew up and got married, she kept raising her grandchildren.

The idea of "raising the young as an insurance against the insecurity of old age" is certainly one of the commonplace values in Chinese society. However, the obsolete family systems and traditional values permitted a rather loose social structure. In the past, taking care of one's children was one way of securing the authoritarian ideal, which not only perpetuated the need to rely on authoritarian figures but enhanched it. Yet, at the same time, values of the society have changed. Raising the young as an insurance against the insecurity of old age no longer worked. Instead, raising the young became a duty, not authority. Therefore, this single mother, on the one hand, wanted to reaffirm her self-worth by volunteering to raise the grandchildren, while, on the other hand, she was unsure of her own values and life style in the future. Her process also portrays a transformative experience away from the authoritarian model.

For example, in the post-group interview, she described her experience in this way:

> *I have certain expectations of and thoughts about the future... but I,*
> *without much awareness, have shut myself out from those choices. I really*
> *want to do things outside of the house, but I also want to do **more** things*
> *for my children. There are obvious conflicts; on the one hand I want to be*
> *a nice person and an **ideal** grandmother. On the other hand, there are so*
> *much work because when I come home from my volunteering job, there*
> *are even more things to do around the house. So strange!*

Being a "nice person" and an "ideal grandmother" are both praised roles in traditional Chinese society. Seen in the light of the Satir Model, "placating" is the most salient and prototypical behavior in the society. But behind a mother's authority lies an expectation to be confirmed. As her sense of autonomous "self" emerged in appreciation of the encounter with modern ideas, this woman was sandwiched between the roles of "autonomous self" and familial self.

The "little girl" in Chapter One's third quote has a similar psychodynamic with the woman in the first quote. From these quotes and from other women's story/process, I have deduced the following hypothesis: The self-transformation of women living in Taiwan, where pluralism and modernist views prevail, hinges on changes that take place in the authoritarian part of their personality.

The atmosphere of the classroom provided a liberating, open, safe, and trusted environment, allowing the participants to overcome their self-conscious concern of other's perception of them. There were also no obvious signs of an "authority" figure hovering over and judging them. They also had more subjective control over the course of the research. For all these reasons, they made "daring" moves and leaps toward self-transformation. Of course, a watershed transformation in Chinese traits does not happen overnight. Thus, the daring attempts by those women can be seen as only the beginning of real revolution. Their attitudes towards me can bear witness to this reality.

In the course of this research, I was the teacher. By traditional standards, a teacher wields all the power. In group process, whenever I shared my own experience and feelings, I often instilled an air of responsive and poignant silence among the participants, which echoes the fact that in traditional Chinese culture direct expression toward an authoritarian figure is often considered inappropriate. However, in their journals they were not silent. Instead, they often revealed strong reactions. This happened because writing in a journal is something "indirect." Furthermore, at times some women would express their apologies in their journals. This is also revealing in that they tacitly, most likely without their awareness, attributed the responsibility of their learning to me—the authority figure.

In addition, some participants even went so far as to openly expressed, in the post-group interviews, their wish for my "understanding and acceptance," or "to be a good student in front of me," or " to cure them." These mentalities seem to suggest dependencies toward an "authority figure," and they are consistent with Chu's (1992) insightful perception of the "power complex" in Chinese people. He delineated five

prototypes: (1). fearing power; (2). admiring power; (3). yearning for a powerful authority to do justice; (4). yearning power for oneself; (5). misusing power. It is evident that the above situation is encoded with "fearing power" and "yearning for a powerful authority to do justice." That is to say, because these participants did not want to offend the authoritarian figure, they would rather keep silent or blame themselves. Also, because they perceived themselves as lacking authority, these women waited for my help—the "powerful authority that can do justice" for them. Evidently their connection with me still stagnated at the "dominate/subordinate" relationship.

Perhaps those concerned with westernization and democracy will anticipate the finality of relinquishing authoritarian values, and those concerned with preserving Chinese culture and history will wonder how the Chinese can guarantee the virtues of harmony and homeostaticity that accompany authoritarian values. There will never be concrete answers to such questions because as we attempt to take control of all those things we *can* take control of; there will always be unpredictable changes that are beyond our control. Often, what we are left with is simply an opportunity to "learn" from those experiences. Provided with a liberating, open, safe, and trusted environment, those women learned to face their issue of relating to authority figures, and little by little they left behind their incessant need to be confirmed by those authority figures. In turn, they diminished their own authoritarian tendencies and gradually developed a kind of self that they can live with in harmony with the environment. I believe this kind of learning process is not restricted to this group of women. Rather, it is something to be learned by modern Chinese people in general. Recall the aforementioned dream where no one knew exactly the location of the "Garden of Plums." Even if the people in the dream were only halfway to their supposed destiny, they still needed to blossom their mind-flower in order to truly perceive the Garden of Plums. Thus, the learning and awareness of the present moment is of utmost importance.

## 3. Learning

Generally speaking, learning entails a goal. In the western developmental theory of say, Erickson, people need to learn to fulfill all that is to be fulfilled in every stage of life in order to bring to culmination a genuine, mature human character. To Maslow, human beings need to self-actualize in order to become wholly one's self. To Kohlberg, humans need to abide by certain moral values in order to gain self-autonomy. In the East there are similar goals. Confucius has said, "By thirty one should be able to stand on one's own feet; by forty one should be free from confusion; by fifty one should be in accordance with nature and destiny; by sixty one is able to penetrate into the truth of thing; by seventy one should be able to do as one pleases without crossing social norms." In a society where diversity and change rapidly advances and where instability characterizes everyday life, there is much to be said about cultivating these goals expounded by these theories.

Within the past one hundred years, Chinese people have experienced unprecedented changes, where systems and values at all levels have been altered. Without awareness or subjective choice, individuals changed along side of these occurrences. For one thing, the degree of self-determination has drastically increased on the surface, yet has lost in the rapid changing society. Sandwiched between the East and the West, tradition and modernity, people are uncertain as to what kind of change is most appropriate. This situation is exacerbated by the instability and uncertainty between Mainland China and Taiwan. Since no one on either side of can foresee what will happen, both parties simply make decisions and proceed forward.

To me, the purpose or meaning of learning is in the very process of discovering meaning. If we can learn in this process--that is to say, if we can make the process our goal -- then even if we make decisions as we proceed forward, we will not be engulfed by the ever-changing flux around us. Put in another way, if we can identify and appreciate our own transformation and its process as we transform from a "caterpillar to a butterfly"

(through changing our minds), then we have in our possession a key that opens the door to self-growth. I believe seizing such a "method" allows us to avoid the frustration of not having more self-determination over our lives in the midst of a diversified society . As a result, we will be able to induce our own self-growth.

However, one can not neglect the fact that the structural mechanism of Chinese education has always been inculcated by an authoritarian ideology (Wei, 1988). For thousands of years, authority has always rested with classroom teachers. For most people, "learning" has been more often than not, has involved vaunting one's aptitude to please the authoritarian figure—wielding more power in the interest of gaining affirmation and gaining more power. This is what Chu would call "yearning power for oneself" in his analysis of Chinese people's power complex (Chu, 1992). Therefore, it could be said that education is really a hegemonic cradle for the educated elite, and learning has been their exclusive right. In classrooms, the warranted privileges and roles of the teacher and student are clearly demarcated, with apparent hierarchically marked statuses. Ultimately the teacher controls all the knowledge that students learn.

This research project has the ambitious goal of doing away with all of the above "rules" for education. The necessary repertoire of teaching materials comes from the participants (family of origin), with minimal emphasis on formal structure (encouragement for greater exchange of ideas and interaction), and minimal directive instructions (attenuating the role and function of the teacher). As revealing in this study, such attempt resulted mostly with positive responses, even though a small number of participants said that such an approach felt foreign in the beginning. I still observed many instances of habitual dependence on the authority figure, which reminds me of the Three Types of teaching and learning devised by Peters and Armstrong (1998, pp.78-79):

Type One: Teaching by transmission, learning by reception:

> The teacher has information that he or she assumes students need.
> Students receive the information and accept the relationship set by
> the teacher. That's one-way teaching and individual learning.

Type Two: Teaching by transmission, learning by sharing:

> The mode of learning here is lecture followed by discussion. There
> is more opportunity for students to share personal experiences and
> interpretations of subject matter brought to the setting by the
> teacher.

Type Three: Whether in construction of a new knowledge or the designation
> of the learning process, teacher and learners interactively
> collaborate.

These three modes of classroom learning reveal the different percentages of power distributed to the teacher and the learners. In Type One, the teacher has total monopoly— just as in the traditional Chinese education system. In Type Three, the authority of the teacher diminishes as the self-determinant factor of each learner increases, and authority is equally distributed to teacher and learner. In such a case, where learners have control over their own way of "learning how to learn" they increase their self-determination, autonomy, and possibly find a solution or balance between tradition and modernity. For the Chinese, it is essential for the learner to first identify their dependency on authority; then can they gradually relinquish such reliance. It is my contentions that under such circumstances of equal distribution of authority, in the midst of this ambivalent, diversified environment, the Chinese can find appropriate new knowledge for change. It is a long and arduous road to travel from Type One to Type Three, and the reason is none other than the deep-seated character of authority in Chinese culture.

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This research situated itself between Type Two and Three. From the participants' responses to the design of this research— which they described as "an open, liberating, and flexible" experience—they took delight in the "sharing model" advocated in Type Two and enjoyed the privilege of "formulating the course of the research" advanced in Type Three. Still, assessing their attitude toward authority, I am afraid they stood frozen in their "placating" postures at the level of Type One, in spite of everything, projecting their expectations on the authority. Notwithstanding this disappointment, their process symbolizes an indispensable transition and progression of the modernization of authoritarian ideology. Despite the fact that they weren't able to fully let go of their need to conform to and rely on an authority, those women were able to see an educational model based on self-determination. Perhaps this is an example of what Yang categorized as the "coexistence" of two particular modes of psychological mindset—the social-orientation and the self-orientation—in contemporary Chinese people.

A further point needs to be made. If we were to examine the process of these women from the perspective of Section B, where I have opened up the possibility that their relation to authority was "situational", then the same possibility can be substantiated in the "situation" to diminishing the authoritarian role of the "teacher" in order to induce a change in the way these women learn "how to learn." This very method of "learning" requires of them to "unlearn" their previously acquired dependence on authority.

The essential "content" of the participants' learning in this research was molded by the theoretical foundation of the Satir Model and shaped by the participants' families of origin. The "process" of each person's learning was contingent upon the climate of the whole group. Reflections by the authority figure in the classroom—my own responsive sharing of my feelings and observations of my guiding actions—was limited. Furthermore, the function of these tasks was really "demonstrative," which brought about a change within the participants. Since this process was free from the coloration of the participants' tendency towards "authoritarian principles of thinking," the teacher's role was collectively acknowledged and accepted.

The actual "means" of learning utilized by the participants were awareness and reflection, as mentioned in Chapter Seven. If the "knowing process" toward autonomy and congruent selfhood necessitates the peeling away of layers after layers of dependence on authority, then awareness and reflection constitute the tools needed to accomplish such a task in the participants' learning process, so they can discover that "swampland flower."

# Part IV Ending vs. Beginning

# Introduction

This research was conducted under a cyclical process of participation, discovery, reflections, and actions. In order to clearly know what I was doing and to ensure the efficiency of this project, reflection on what I saw, heard, and thought became an important supplement. Then, through a refinement of these processes, I responded. It would seem that this research has come to a conclusion, but the "cyclical process" of this research has not disappeared. For this reason, I wish to use the following two short chapters to share some of the reflections I have had and the significant insight they produced.

One night I wrote:

> *During the research project, I observed so many emotions that were uncovered and so many feelings that had been concealed. Sometimes I see their inner conflicts, fragility, and confusion. But I realize that the undercurrent of such feelings was actually a deep sense of love for themselves and their families. This love is unseen and steadfast, and most times silent. Yet, its outward appearance is always characterized by passion. Of course such deep embedded feelings must be well protected and preserved; once they are disclosed, the women may not be able to manage it.*
> *At times, this deep-seated love perk out from a corner of a smile, while other times, it manifests as a spark in their eyes. Still, at other times, this love is ever so evident in their tears. You can always tell when their love is accidentally exposed—their whole being comes to life! --Pei*

# Chapter one

# Reflections

From the beginning, I realized that this research was full of "action." That is to say, it was an "action research." However, when I began to write this thesis I did not spoil ink over this aspect. I also reflected and observed this phenomenon in my day-to-day living; I realized that my self-image did not have me characterize as an active person. I am filled with feeling and ideas inside. However, the response I received from those around me is different; they have the idea that in my daily life I engage in many things. In fact, I have never stopped or limited my involvement in things. What was the cause of this discrepancy?

I discovered that I have a basic assumption: an individual acts inevitably from a certain belief-feeling system; it is a natural process. And this is similar to the progress of this research. When I look back on this research, with its themes, topics, and methods, it seems to me that it was a cumulative action from my past experiences. I also think that all of the data analysis and interpretations I did in this research were points of interest that I have developed from my personal growth and years of teaching. I tend to abide by the idea that "what we do should conform to what we know." I believe that my actions are result of what I have come to know. For this reason, I naturally emphasized "knowing" rather than "doing." Therefore, in this research, the themes were all interpreted from the viewpoint of "knowing."

Perhaps this focus is a weakness. It seems that when that which is "known" is not powerful enough, or when within that very "knowing" there are contradictions, one's actions are inevitably limited. One's awareness will also decrease. I often wonder what if I had focused on "actions" instead of awareness. What would happen to the outcome of this research?

This made me reflect on the relationship between a qualitative, action researcher and the research itself. Despite the obvious and distinctively debated paradigms that have developed in research methodology, the fact that the characteristic of "action research" extends the limited "subjectivity" of the researcher to include *both* the researcher and participants is particularly revealing. Such a diverse development in methodology reflects the manifold facets of real human livelihood. But what about our readers? Do they realize their "rights of interpretation," especially when faced with a diverse range of data written from dissimilar perspectives? Or do they still naively accept the "rights of the text" as ultimate truths?

I do not deny my own subjective influence in this research, nor do I leave it as such. I tried to honestly face and respond to this dimension of the research. This was a part of my "action."

I also continued to observe my own "authoritarian personality." I realized that unintentionally, I have internalized and transformed my personality. Since I was young, my parents not only gave me their love , but it seems to me that they also gave me the authority and status of the "eldest son". This has influenced my relation to authority figures. Mentally, I do not bow down to authorities; behaviorally, I realize they need my respect and affirmation. Thus, I have invented a unique "blend" of survival stance, which combines "placating" and "spontaneity." Such a behavioral model works quite well. I would never directly confront authorities.

The "oldest son" needs to shoulder a lot of responsibilities. Of course *this* oldest son did not need to bear the responsibility of carrying on the "family name," but I still need to take care of younger brothers and sisters and "glorify' our family. However, whenever family expectations of me were over the limit, I would snap back negatively. Most of the time, I would fulfill my family members' wishes yet keep my own opinions.

Observing my behavior in the face of authorities, I still rely on the traditional value of Chinese people—harmony. The only difference is that I am trying to find a balance between autonomy and conformity. Especially for this research, "changing one's mind"

is primarily an inner transformative experience, which still falls in the purview of traditional Chinese literati's ideal of "cultivating character." Thus, my own point of departure is still based on traditional Chinese systems, even when faced with modernization . I wanted the westernization of Chinese tradition to filter out archaic values. This intention was hidden from me in the beginning of this research.

For the past 21 years, I have strived to give back the "responsibility" of learning from my students, especially when they are beyond the age of adolescence. Without giving up, I am still hopeful of the day when teacher and student have equal authorities. This research has taught me that there is still a long road ahead of me. Faced with this reality, I came up with an idea: is going through this authoritarian ideology the only road? At this juncture, a feeling of solitude and aloneness welled up inside of me; it was a familiar feeling that often visited me. Now I realize how dearly I hope there can be "partners" to go through this process. Wouldn't it be wonderful , in the process of learning, due to equal rights, to mutually engage in sharing, discussions, and creations between teacher and students? Wouldn't it also be wonderful to build further actions based on this?

Due to the fact that all of the participants were women, it was difficult *not* to take a woman's perspective to reflect on this research. After the data analysis and organization, I realized that there seems to be two possible ways of interpreting this information. One is from the perspective of a feminist; the other, the perspective of culture. I was uncertain which approach to take, although I knew and stated clearly in from the beginning that I am not a feminist. Instead, what concerns me is personal growth. Therefore, I decided to take a cultural perspective in my interpretation. Feminists tend to confront challenges head-on and simply overthrow any authority the father figure may have in the family. I have a tendency to avoid confrontations, and I was also curious about a whole host of other issues such as: What would the process of self-growth be like for males? What would the benefits and loss of the personal growth of males be in this day and age under the authoritarian father figure? If women's relation to authority continues to change, what kind of interaction between males and females in modern Chinese society will we see?

What kind of reflection would it give rise to? Therefore, I would say that despite the fact that my participants were all women, in light of the larger issue of "personal growth," what really concerns me is the possible change that may take place in all of the Chinese people living in Taiwan. For this reason, I have decided to take a cultural perspective to interpret and organize the data.

It should be noted that language and words not only construct and condition human understanding and feelings, they also express them. In this research, I have seen the "malleability" of language; it was hard *not* to alter the meaning, however subtle, of the original verbal expression of the women in the process of transcribing and editing their words on paper and finally translating them into English. It is evident that some subtle and sincere understanding and feelings must have been omitted in this process. Further, with the limitations of language, it is extremely difficult to articulate the subtleties from one culture to another. This kind of difficulty is most likely to happen to other qualitative researches.

Confronted with the profound depth and changeability of human nature, I saw the obstacles in communication between family members. I also saw the heated enthusiasm and fulfillment of the triad members had during their sharing. Furthermore, I also saw the desire in me to "understand" their group process. Whether through words and language or otherwise, "to understand" and "to be understood" is very important to human beings. As testified in the research, they are also a strong motivating factor in human action. Seen from this angle, this research is itself a communicative process between me and myself, the participants, and the reader. This process has inevitable misunderstandings, but if it can be a sparks to new wisdom, it is worth the risk of failed communication. It will be something that only "living" human beings can create.

During this research, I have come to realize that there is plenty of room for me to learn to grasp the subtlety of people's thought process and emotions, not to mention articulating them accurately. Aside from the precise use of language, not only have I witnessed the subtlety and complexity of the human mind, I also understood the cultural

implications of this research. To this end, I wish to offer my experience and understanding in this research report.

# Chapter Two
# Significance

During 1997 to 2000, the three years of my research, I was facing a most important phase of my life. I saw clearly the changes I had gone through, and the repercussion in daily situations at different levels that those changes had caused. This research stayed by my side for these years. The changes haven't stopped. This research simply came to a conclusion. The validity of this research for me has been very important in that I have learned so much. It is here that I wish to share a brief summary of what I have learned.

## 1. From the content of the research:

A. Positive changes toward personal growth come from the following: a conducive environment where a sense of safety and trust abound. Such an environment can permit an individual to freely and openly face his or her own negative emotions and to accept deep-seated yearnings and the relation that the individual has with authority figures. Furthermore, this individual can also come to accept the situation in his or her family of origin.

B. It is especially crucial for Taiwanese women in facing their "authoritarian personalities" and gradually transform it in this pluralistic and diverse modern society. This can help them "let go" of their desire to be affirmed by authority figures so they can fulfill their expectations and find a secure position in this diversified society. The Satir Model is an appropriate method to "change their minds."

C. This research has as its foundation the Chinese traditional value of "the virtue of harmony". It used the Satir Model, which exemplifies the humanistic approach toward self-growth, emphasizing communication strategies. Through this model,

individuals experience inner struggles in order to "change their minds" and find a new balance between their individual selves and the environment.

## 2. From the process of the research:

A.  The participants' change toward selfhood was supported by the low directive and low authoritarian design of this research. It was also supported by their low defensiveness and high motivation.

B.  Awareness and reflection are crucial mental activities that foster the transition from a "not known" to a 'knowing" process. However, it is precisely because of the uncertainty of Taiwanese society that it can utilize this "learning method."

C.  The relationship between the teacher/facilitator and the learners is similar to that of parents and children. Thus, the authority of the teacher/facilitator clearly controlled the process of the participants' learning process.

## 3. From the researcher's learning:

A.  The researcher's personality and her past experiences influences the direction of the research.

B.  There is a whole host of 'traditional Chinese values' working inside the researcher.

C.  This research was one of many "actions" performed in the researcher's life.

All of this categorization reminded me of my experience 20 years ago when I came to the United States to work on my master degree. On the one hand, I was filled with curiosity and was open to everything. On the other hand, I was fearful and at awe with what I experienced. It was my first experience in the West. I was shocked by the cultural gap, and it was the first major "transformation' of my life. The result stunned those who

surounded me. Afterwards, I tried very hard to "fit" my values back to the mainstream Taiwanese society. However, traces of that first cultural transformation still remained with me. Now, after 20 years have passed, this second "transformative" impact leaves a deeper influence upon me. This research was conducted and finished during this transformation, and had already impacted my practice and my way of being. I feel as if I have already left my previous "loop," but somehow I got back to where I started. However, it is not exactly the same place where I started because there is a great disparity in depth and width between the two. Still, my concern is the same: How do modern Chinese people live their lives in a meaningful way?

Perhaps this kind of searching will never end. Therefore, this research is merely one phase in my search for meaning. The results of this research, I know, are not perfect, but the research experience undeniably is a part of my being. So far, I am only able to perceive the mutual influence between this research and myself, and record my own reflections. At some point in the future, I may be able to understand and experience the significance of this research to my own life in a deeper way.

Although the research has come to an end, the action researcher is still alive—merging her own very being with every breath of her reflection and action during her learning process. In a way, the beginning point and the ending point have fused together and have become indistinguishable. This research can be concluded by now but the influences have not yet. This will be a process that I will engage in the rest of my life.

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# Vita

I was born in the south of Taiwan in 1953. I am the eldest child of my parents. With six siblings, we formed a unique family. I finished the elementary and middle school in the central part of Taiwan. Then I entered the First Girl's High School in Taipei which is the best high school of Taiwan. After that I enrolled in Fu-Jen University and finished the B. S. degree in Social Work. Working as a low-income community social work of Taipei city government for two years, I started my master study in Educational Psychology and Guidance in University of Tennessee, U. S. A.. I graduated from UTK in 1979. Then, I began to teach in Dept. of Social Work of Tun-Hai University in Taiwan. In 1971, I started to teach in National Chung-Hsin University in Taipei. The school has been expanded and reformed to National Taipei University since 2000. I teach in the Dept. of Social Work as an associate professor. I started my Ph. D. study in Educational Psychology in University of Tennessee since 1994 till 2000.

I married Mr. Hone Chen in 1971 till now. I have two daughters.