

# My Autobiography at Age 80

By

June Chien-yu Tsao



I lost my father at a young age; my mother was Cao/Tsao (*née* Fan) Shouqin, a descendent of the notable Fan Zhongyen. I had an eldest sister who married early to a Mr. Gao from Shanghai. I had three elder brothers, and our father passed away when we were all very tender-aged; I was the youngest and most inexperienced. My original hometown was in Jiangsu province, Yixing county. When my father was young, he went to Jiangyin as a doctor, and he finally settled there. After I graduated from elementary school, I tested and entered into Suzhou Provincial Number Two Girls' Normal School, and from then onward left home and my days spent back at home were limited. From then on, I traveled the world over, and I almost forgot about my home. These days, I travel around to the homes of my four children—where is my real home? I originally was incapable and timid with people. My mind was clumsy, and I could not express myself well; my words did not express my thoughts, and I was not good at flattery. I was not a politician, and I would not amount to great fame; thus, I was not able to accomplish outstanding achievements, willingly only able to be behind the scenes, quietly working hard. I was not a literature writer; I was not good at writing for long intervals, and every time I wrote, I was not satisfied with what I wrote; whatever I wrote, I discarded it and never wanted to share it with other people, nor wanted to send them out for publication or anthologize collections of essays to leave behind for later generations. Even for my most dedicated scientific journal essays, after a while their relevancy evolves, because science changes every day and every month. Even though I never had an earth-shattering masterpiece, I still never preserved my collected writings. Therefore, I left behind [my writings] like scratch paper. I felt that I already dedicated my heart to my work at one time, and later, what is there left to say? And yet, my beloved children have their own achievements, and they love their parents, especially their mother. They always wanted me to write something, or verbalize something, and for me to leave bits and fragments [for them] to commemorate [me].

All of my life can be divided into a few large periods. The first was the period of my studies. The second was being a foreign student in America. The third period was when I returned to Shanghai to teach. The fourth period was during the War of Resistance [against Japan, i.e., 1937-1945]. That period of eight years can be divided to two parts: the first was the period of raising children at home, and the second was when I taught at Baisha Women's College in Sichuan (National Women's Teachers' College) for four and a half years. Then fifth was going back to Nanjing to work. The sixth was the period of teaching at Tainan

Normal School in Taiwan. The seventh was teaching at Chengkung University; initially it was a provincial engineering college and later was promoted to become National Chengkung University. This last period of time can be said to be my most energetic and mature period, when my professional tenure was the longest, my contribution was the greatest, and I was most dedicated. If I did not have great achievements, it was because of the conditions of my environment, and I have nothing left to say. Now I have exhausted my heart and strength [in old age], I can only reminisce and read books, but I am still quite interested [in matters] regarding scientific progress. Now what I am most interested in is aging and anti-aging, diseases, hygiene, dietary methods, and daily exercise, for health and longevity; if I can do it myself, I do it, and I do not want long-term dependence on others. Or, I should say this is my independent character, my inner pride, and my indomitable spirit—outwardly gentle while inwardly stern.

The above-mentioned periods of my life represent the dedication and hard work that I experienced in those eras and conditions. I am not a saint, and I am not a genius. I can only say that I have done my best to be different from ordinary people. I advise others to not have conceit and pride; it is not easy to be without capabilities and success like me. Self-satisfaction brings harm, humility brings benefits—this is the way I have lived my life—what else can I say?

## **Early School Memories**

### **1. Elementary School**

I came from a humble home, as I lost my father at an early age, but fortunately my mother came from a learned family—a descendent of Fan Wenzheng—and she raised my elder sister, three older brothers, and the youngest—me; at the time, the social norms were conservative, and the daughters of relatives and neighbors got married young in order to serve their in-laws; it was rare for girls to get higher education. But I was determined to study; there were already elementary schools which were so-called county elementary schools near my home. I walked to school on time daily. At the time I felt muddle-headed and did not know why I was learning. One time there was a textbook on Xinjiang geography. I remembered the book said, “Hami melon and Hetian jade are most famous.” On the exam, the teacher asked, “What are produced in Hami and

Hetian?” I naturally answered, “Hami produces melon, and Hetian produces jade.” After the exam, everyone submitted their papers. The teacher stood in front of the class reviewing each exam, and all the students wrote the [exact] lines from the book [i.e., “Hami melon and Hetian jade are most famous”] and I was the only one who directly answered the question and nothing else. The teacher praised me as the best, and because of this, from then on I stood like a flamingo amongst a group of chickens, and yet there is nothing very special about me. I graduated in two years and then transferred to Temple Qigong Girls Upper Elementary School. In those four years, I was often asked by the teacher to do arithmetic at the blackboard to demonstrate to visitors of the school. At the Parents’ Open House, I was asked to either draw maps on stage or recite brief English essays, etc. In after-school embroidery class, mine was the best, and I was awarded a colored world map; incidentally, we were learning world geography, and it was convenient for me to reference. My memory was especially good; every few weeks, the teacher suddenly would ask different kinds of questions, and everyone was surprised; for every question, the teacher would point at students, starting in the first row, asking each student, one after the other, and no one was able to answer. But, I would remember everything that was explained, as everything all showed up in my head with clarity. In my head I wondered why the teacher did not call on me sooner, because I would be able to answer promptly. But, because I was tall, I sat in the back row, and the teacher had to point at me in order to get the answer. If other students did not know the answer, they did not think it strange, and now that I think about it, my memory was very strong when I was young, like photographic memory, and I retain it for a long time. And now today I am old, and [my memory] is lapsing; it is regretful.

When I was young and read, *Guwen Guanzhi* (Collection of Ancient Classics and Poems) early in the morning I would read it three times, and then I was able to recite it. The more I read it, the more the paragraphs were clear, and writing them out felt natural. I remember when I was young, I traveled out the north gate of the city of Jiangyin to Mt. Jun, which is adjacent to the mouth of the Yangtze River; looking to the north was the bank of the Yangtze River, and you could not see the base of the mountain. When I went back to school, the teacher asked us to write travel notes, and I wrote this: “Looking to the north along the side of the river, the water and the sky merge, and this is enough to prove that the earth is round. From the mountain looking down on the field, it looks surprisingly like roof tiles. The farmers tilling the fields look like birds with bones in their

beaks...”. The teacher double-circled all of it [in praise], and my young heart was filled with joy—up to now I have not forgotten. These days I am forgetful, and my thoughts are cloudy, and I am unable to write such lofty sentences anymore.

With regards to handicrafts, besides my top prize in embroidery, I knit a hat for my little nephew. On the top was a lotus flower, a dragonfly, a butterfly, etc. Teacher Zhang praised me, saying, “You are only ten years old, and already you can do this; your mother will be very happy to see this....” Now my hands shake and are weak, and my penmanship is not attractive—how can there be such decline? At the time, I also had an extracurricular embroidery of a white crane that was one-foot in size, which was left at school for display, and I never got it back.

It is said, “Good men do not speak about their past bravery.” Now I feel a bit embarrassed to write about the events of my childhood, as the world has many great talented children with little bits of brilliance, so do we need to speak about it? Therefore I am writing out from my memory, in order to tell later generations, because I felt that studying was easy and interesting, and that I was able—in very conservative times [to do so], when people believed that graduating from elementary school was good enough, and there was no need to continue. But, I was very ambitious when I was young, thus I was able to continue to struggle under extremely difficult circumstances, without stopping. Although I did not have great achievements, at the time there were reasons for my [under-accomplishments].

After I graduated from elementary school, there were no more schools for me to attend in my small town. Fortunately, there was one enthusiastic teacher who knew that near Suzhou was the Hushuguan School of Sericulture and in the city of Suzhou was the Number Two Provincial Teacher’s School, both of which could be tested into. The teacher especially chartered a little boat to take the whole class from a little river to Lake Tai to Hushuguan; when the boat was in Lake Tai, we encountered great wind and rain and was almost capsized. Near our boat was an old lady who was chanting Buddhist prayers for help. The children and I were curled up like balls and did not dare move, and the boat’s oarsman steered us to the bank [to wait out the storm]. When the rain stopped, we continued until we arrived at Hushuguan to first test at the School of Sericulture. When that exam was completed, we then went to Suzhou Provincial Number Two Teachers School for its examination. In those days, whomever showed up for exams could be tested. We temporarily stayed at a friend’s home who provided room and

board. After the exams, we again chartered a boat to return home; the round-trip fare was only a few dollars. After returning home from the exams, and about a month later, the newspaper reported the exam results. Some of my classmates were happy and some were distraught; there were some who only tested into the School of Sericulture and some only to Suzhou Provincial Number Two Teachers School. Only a few others and I tested into both schools, and a few did not test into either school. From then on, more than ten of us parted ways towards our own futures. Naturally, I entered into Suzhou Teachers School thinking that the education there would be more complete.

I cannot remember whether or not there was a report card during elementary school. At the end of every semester, there seemed to have been a sheet of crude paper with rough edges, and also a star-shaped gold medal was given as a prize to the top students. At home, my mother and brothers did not pay attention to this, not to mention me; I only paid attention to the passing of each semester so that I could continue to matriculate, and that was all [I cared about]. At that time, no one paid much attention to studying, not to mention the scores or grades. In comparison, parents now urge their children to get top marks to be perfect to get prizes, which is completely different [from my time]. But, after so many years, after I returned back from the United States, I heard that in elementary school, I was number one, and at my elementary school, there existed my class picture. Today, I have lost everything; people and events are completely different; if I was able to see my childhood picture, it would be very interesting, but that would be almost impossible.

## **2. Period of Suzhou Normal Teachers School**

Getting accepted into Suzhou Normal School, naturally I had to go. The others who were accepted at the time were Xu Manying, Yang Xian, Tao Cuiying, Liu Suyu, and others. My family was in a difficult situation at that time. I only brought a small suitcase, bedding, and a small net-covered basket, and then I left for school. First, I rode a small steamship for half a day to the neighboring county of Wuxi to make a transfer to the Nanjing-Shanghai train line, where I got off at Suzhou. I hired people to carry my luggage to the outside of Changmen (“Heavenly Gate”) of Suzhou Normal School. Once inside, I was assigned to a dormitory. Each unit in the dormitory had two connecting rooms, and the beds were arranged in a row; each room could sleep ten people, and each person was

separated by a mosquito net, and so each person could occupy the space of only one bed. Everyone shared two desks, although no one sat there to study. Studying was all done in the classroom; after dinner was two hours of independent study, and teachers took turns to supervise us. Our lives were completely scheduled, and bells rang out from morning till evening as signals. For example, we rose at 6 AM, ate breakfast at 7 AM, and the first class started at 8 AM; there were four classes in the morning, every class was 50 minutes, and there was 10 minutes of recess between classes. At 12 o'clock noon, we lined up to enter the dining hall; seven people sat at each table; for every lunch and dinner, there were four dishes and one soup, and the rice was eaten collectively. Breakfast was always rice porridge and four small dishes. Now looking back, from the perspective of nutrition, it seemed like it was not enough. We were all growing teenagers [served] one small square of meat, one small piece of fish, plus some vegetables, and eggs and pickles in the morning; the quantity was all very small, only using rice and porridge as the main course; we all grew up just barely not hungry, and that was already pretty good; the room and board were free, and students paid very little fees.

Regarding coursework, the first year was spent doing preparatory work, and after that began the regular curriculum; graduation was after five years, and the level was somewhat equivalent to today's middle school and high school. What we mainly learned were self-cultivation of moral character, Chinese, mathematics, physics and chemistry, Chinese and foreign history and geography, handicrafts, paintings, physical education, music, education, natural sciences, cooking, etc. Originally there was English [in the curriculum], but because graduates of Teachers Schools are trained to teach elementary school, and English was not taught in elementary school, we therefore did not need to study English anymore. So, although in my youth I studied the English alphabet and elementary English, at this time I completely forgot it. Even though the school was asked to have another teacher to teach us supplementary basic English on Sundays, but it was only from simple, easy textbooks and actually was not very useful. I personally once asked the natural history teacher, Mr. Yang Gengqing, to tutor me in the Japanese alphabets and simple grammar. After a period of self-study, I was able even to translate some Japanese books during summer vacation. Unfortunately, because of the "national crisis" events of May 7th and May 9th [1915] with Japan, I greatly lost interest in Japanese, and after a long time I forgot a lot, and now I regret that I never re-learned it.

In my five years at Teachers School, I completely lived in the school's dormitory, returning home only during winter and summer breaks. Once I entered the school gates, I did not leave school again. Only after my third or fourth years there, when Jiangsu Province hosted an athletic competition, my physical education teacher led the entire class once to compete in Nanjing. Or, once when it was spring break, everyone went to the famous tourist attraction of Tiger Hill Mountain in Suzhou. Our farthest trip was to Hangzhou, around West Lake, and we were very happy. In addition to the above, some others and I, because our homes were too far, we often stayed at school and did our own activities; it was only after my fourth year that I even toured through the city of Suzhou, occasionally having meals at my classmates' homes. Because fourth-year students in the second semester needed to practice teaching elementary school students in Suzhou, I inevitably had to learn the Suzhou dialect. At the same time, the national phonetic system was being implemented, and so I also had to learn Mandarin. My classmates came from all over the province of Jiangsu, and as a result, I learned all the different local dialects. At the time, I could speak Shanghainese and the dialects of Suzhou, Wuxi, Jiangyin, Yixing, Liyang, Changzhou, etc., and it was really regretful that I could not speak English. Academically, I was always on top. On the one hand, I did not want to fall behind others, and [on the other hand, this was] also because I was learning the self-cultivation of moral character, for example teaching us about the Great Emperor Yu not wasting time; and an inch of time is an inch of gold, but an inch of gold cannot buy an inch of time; therefore I could not help but day and night conscientiously [work] for fear of wasting time, which once past can never be retrieved, and so therefore I developed the habit of working hard—to use time efficiently, for fear that I would not complete something. Lights were out at 10 PM, and bedtime could not be extended. Therefore, I would rise early in the morning and feel around in the dark to exit the dormitory to read Chinese outside, which was very beneficial [to me]. During the day, other than attending classes on time and eating three meals, all of my spare time was used to its fullest extent. For example, after breakfast I practiced calligraphy, after lunch I re-wrote my class notes, in the evenings there were two hours for independent work, and before sleep I wrote in my diary to cultivate the ability to write lengthy prose without error, which had many benefits for my [later] essays, correspondences, and writings.



## **The Experience of Taking the Exam for Tsinghua University's Overseas Studies Program**

Fifty years ago, with suffocating social rules in China, “a woman without talents is a virtue” was the prevailing practice. Regarding learning, it was enough for a girl to just know a few words, if she could do accounting and write letters, she was ready to be married.

As for me, that was completely not right. I graduated from elementary school and middle school to be a teacher. At that time, there were very few middle schools for girls, so it was fortunate that I was tested and selected for a school for educating teachers. After graduation most became elementary school teachers or got married. I taught children, but that was not my preference, and to get a husband was not my interest. I always thought that there was a special purpose for my being born, so I must live and achieve at work, just like any great man.

I read *Training for Youth* (a reference manual); this training course taught people to value time, just as the ancient Great Emperor Yu who appreciated every second, and to study diligently, even to the point of physical exhaustion, to achieve the unattainable. I also read the Biography of Madame Curie, admired her greatly, so that her achievements even entered my dreams. Thus, I decided that I must study science.

At that time there were few universities, and even fewer accepted females. Fortunately, there was a private Datong University. My uncle Tsao Liang-Hsia (*hao*, Huiqun) and his good friend Mr. Hu Dunfu, his brother and colleagues had organized the “Li Da Study Society,” to create a university to educate the young. Those who taught there did not take any salary (how many would do this today?). Based on present day point of view, it is rational to build a school to make money. To contribute a person's entire effort to teaching youth is most rare at any time in history. The spirit to create Datong University is not prevalent even today.

Datong University was one of the rare schools that admitted females. I had just graduated from Suzhou Teachers School, with ambition to study further. So I went to Shanghai to visit my uncle. He asked the school administrator to prepare paper and pen for the admission test questions, because the test could be given at any time. Even though Datong was named a university, in fact it included a middle

school which allowed the students to matriculate into the university directly. Thus, the level of classes were not uniform, each promotion to the next subject level depended on the performance of the particular student. I was accepted, my math and Chinese were of college level, but as English was not taught in the Teachers School, I could barely make it into the middle school classes. At first I elected seven courses: Chinese, taught by the famous Mr. Zhu Xiangxiao; Algebra and Analytic Geometry, taught by the famous Mr. Wu Zaiyuan; and four English classes: Ulysses, European Geography, English Grammar and English Novels. Datung University was famous for Science and English. Mathematics was taught by the aforementioned Mr. Wu Zaiyuan, Mr. Hu Mingfu, and Mr. Rong Fangzhou, etc. English was taught by the Hu brothers, Mr. Hu Dunfu, and Mr. Hu Xiansheng, etc. My uncle alone taught Chemistry. All the teachers were persuasive and patient guides. Their teaching methods were most appropriate and beneficial to the students. I had no problem with math and Chinese, but found English most difficult. Because in elementary school I only learned the alphabet, ABCD, and the textbooks only had very elementary phrases, such as “Duck, Duck,” and very simple sentences. When I entered Mr. Hu Xiansheng’s grammar class, I did not know how to construct sentences, never mind compositions, which were extremely difficult [for me]. But since I was admitted, I settled down and worked hard to learn and practice. Heaven helps a diligent person, and in four exams of the year, my grades gradually went from D, C, B to A (the only D and C I ever received in my whole life). After one year, my name was ranked amongst the best, and I could compete with my classmates. There were few females in Datung; most wanted to apply to Tsinghua University, where students in the special female class could lead to studying abroad. So, my dream was to apply there and follow the path of Madame Curie.

Tsinghua originally did not accept female students. After Mr. Lo Jialun became president it changed from a preparatory school into a four-year regular university, but not the entire class was guaranteed to study abroad in the US. To support female participation, every year ten girls were selected via examinations. But due to a lack of applicants, only five were selected in a given year. Those girls were special students. Their eight-year education from middle school to college needed to be comparable to that of a college student; also this was a national competition. But the tests were given only in Shanghai and Beijing. I was in Shanghai, so I did not need to go to Beijing. But the girls in Datung were ambitious and wanted to apply. Those who failed would apply

repeatedly, so at least one would be accepted every two years. Also, Datung's training in Science and English was strong because it had outstanding teachers. The entire examination was very tough, lasting an entire week; whether or not one graduated from college, one could take the exam, which consisting of many subjects such as: Chinese, English (including composition), Chinese and Foreign History and Geography, German, Japanese, Mathematics—Geometry, Algebra, Trigonometry, Analytic Geometry, Calculus—Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Logic, etc. Other than Chinese and Chinese History, all the questions and answers were given in English. For example, in Biology, although I had studied it in a school for training teachers and received full top grades, I did not know much of the English terminology. So I studied it on my own to prepare for the exams. But with regular classes, there was little spare time to go into details. But I considered myself to be highly capable at reasoning and articulation, only lacking in interest in memorizing the two heavy texts of European History, because that teacher only read the text in class and stopped as soon as the bell rang.

In the spring of the 16th year of the Chinese Republic [1927], I decided to apply to Tsinghua. At that time Datung's higher level students and also graduates had tried but failed many times. So they shivered as soon as they mentioned their attempts. Even those who specialized in foreign language failed several times and were depressed and discouraged. I and another student who had graduated ahead of me and was working in the school were willing to try. Someone gossiped about the humiliation of failure by a Tsao someone (meaning me) in facing the school afterwards. It sent chills down my spine. I rushed to my uncle, who had become the president of Datung. Uncle said, "Don't worry, just be determined to attend the exams." His words fortified me, so I did not back out. That was the time of the May 30<sup>th</sup> massacre; all students throughout the country protested in strike for a month. I used the time to study wholeheartedly. I knew my knowledge in European History was weak, so I took careful notes from the two texts and reviewed the other subjects with key outlines and principle ideas. But still European History was my weakest. Nothing more could be done.

The exam took place in a large classroom of Jiaotong University in Shanghai, while in Beijing it was administered in Tsinghua. Students from all regions gathered at these two sites, and all were fine students. I had not yet graduated and felt very insignificant. I did not even dare to look at others in their eyes. It happened that my registration assignment number was 5, and 5 was also my birth order, so that must be a lucky sign. We were not allowed to turn our

heads around to look behind us, but I felt the large crowd pressed behind me, all more capable and talented. I could not compete, so just concentrated on preparing the answers. But some of the questions were unexpected and unfamiliar; I just had to let it be. The last day was an English oral exam, with Messrs. Lan and Chen. I was a good student in the English class, but never had much chance to speak the language. I only practiced it sometimes by talking to myself. I felt like an ant on a hot pan, while my classmates were well prepared, with small notebooks to review the questions and answers. My heart was pounding fast, until number 5 was called. I then calmed down, went into the room, smiled and bowed to the two teachers. Mr. Lan asked what kind of physical activities I had in school. Datong was famous for sitting and studying quietly, and never had a class in physical education nor any sports activities. But I and another classmate had a private trainer from Tianjing, who taught us special breathing and elementary boxing exercises every Sunday afternoon. We two slept late and rose early and practiced an hour each day early in the mornings and in the evenings, even in the rain and in the dark. We exercised at five to six o'clock in the morning, went to English class afterwards, and then read our book aloud in the courtyard. This was both healthy and helpful in improving our English oral presentation. That was how I replied to Mr. Lan. The two teachers were amazed, and the room atmosphere became relaxed. So, I passed that crisis. Later, when I boarded the ship to go to the United States, Mr. Chen came to see us off, and he asked me whether I still practiced every day. That must have had a deep impression on him, as my oral exam got a high score. Even now I still exercise every morning, and my health is fine.

After the week-long examination, it was time for summer recess. I was anxious to return home for a much-needed rest. Before I departed, I went to my uncle's home to bid farewell. It just happened that my uncle was out, so I told my aunt that with the exception of mathematics and few other topics for which I could conceivably receive perfect scores, I did poorly in the others. For this reason, I felt very depressed and disappointed. After returning home and meeting my mother and older brother (my father had died when I was young), I felt difficult to tell them how poorly I did on the examination. This was because the registration fee alone for the entrance examination to Tsinghua University was 20 silver dollars. In addition, there were charges for physical exams, photography and books. The total sum of expenses was not trivial. I had wasted a lot of money, yet I did so poorly. I felt terribly sorry to face my elders to the extent that I was afraid to talk

about it. My deep sorrow must have unconsciously surfaced on my face. I prayed to God for an answer but did not get a response. I was desperate for a favorable omen. I then quietly sought help from my nephew (my elder sister's son), who happened to be visiting my family at that time, to get some clues from the popular "Word-Dissection" fortune-telling. Surprisingly, I got the words "Old Sickness." Intuitively I interpreted it as a bad omen as it could be interpreted as: "I did so poorly in my entrance exams, I would fail and become quite sick." This episode made me even more worried. Shortly afterwards, my elder brother heard the story and provided a completely different interpretation. He said that around the 20<sup>th</sup> day of this month, the "Loyang paper" should become very costly, meaning that your name would show up in the newspaper and you would fulfill your wish to go to America to become a scholar. I thought he was just trying to comfort me. No one could be certain about the results before they were publicly announced. This is very much like what is happening now. How can one predict the outcome of an application for admission before it is finally decided?

Two months after the examination, it was already near the end of July. One evening, my fourth elder brother brought a newspaper home and claimed: "Sister, you have passed the examination." I could not believe it since the news appeared in a small-print announcement. The uncertainty was due to another reason: my home town was Yixing, but I resided in Jiangyin. During those years, transportation was very inefficient and there was no telephone for communication either. The daily newspaper, published in Shanghai, had to be transported to Jiangyin by a small steamboat in the evening. My name was clearly in the announcement of Tsinghua University. Even so, I still could not be fully convinced for two more reasons: first, in those early days, we had a closed society and there was no mechanism to encourage young people to advance their positions. If I happened to fail the examination, I would have become the laughing stock of all who knew me. To remain anonymous, I registered for the examination using a pseudonym taken from an old newspaper (my original name was Yushu). When I looked at the name published in the announcement, it was so unfamiliar even to myself. I thought it must not be me. Second, I understood that Tsinghua always sent a telegraph to the applicant announcing the result of the examination. After waiting for another week, there was still no confirming telegraph, which made the announcement ambivalent. However, I had to prepare to sail to America within three weeks of the announcement. I thought since I had only two weeks before departure time, I could not just wait endlessly for the confirmation. I then went to

Shanghai trying to seek confirmation from one of the examiners, Mr. Ho Hsiang-lin. Mrs. Ho showed me the telegraph and announced, “It must be you and no one else.” (It turned out that I was the only one admitted among all the applicants from Shanghai.) Now convinced that I was indeed admitted, I rushed back home to pack for the long trip. I still remember that the departure date was August 19, 1927. The name of the ship that took me to America was President Jackson.

The words from my uncle emboldened me. The interpretation of my elder brother was also right on target. My early dream finally became half-fulfilled. The reason why it was half-fulfilled was because after 40 years of teaching, research, and publishing, my dream of becoming a Madame Curie still seemed to be out of reach. I am not a genius, nor someone with unusual talent. Sooner or later, I will return to dust. The universe remains to be a huge expansion of space, and yet lifecycles still continue to move on. But one should never stop dreaming of the impossible; it may happen to any ordinary person that an impossible dream can become true through some extraordinary events and that would greatly enlighten humankind. What else can I say?

*Note: This is an abridged version of an article entitled: “The Dream of a Young Girl—The Experience of Taking the Entrance Examination for Tsinghua University 50-Years Ago,” originally published in Communications of Tsinghua University Alumni, volume 82.*

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**English interpretation (2018) by:**

Erica Yao, Mary Yu Yao, Ying Yao Wang, and Robert Yu