

FOREWORD

If I were asked to summarize this memoir, my reply would consist of two words: soft power. Embodied in its author, soft power comes across on every page of this book in her soft-spoken voice with the humility of someone who has excelled in public service, as in her academic career, without ever forgetting that neither is a goal in itself, nor should it serve self-aggrandizement. Soft power speaks with a low voice but knows the direction in which to head. It can summon consensus where many different perspectives are brought together, interests diverge, and prejudice persists. One of the prerequisites for exerting it is the ability to listen before speaking, to include all concerned before an agreement can emerge, while simultaneously never losing sight of what one wants to achieve. It helps to remain focused, even when meeting adversity and not to become distracted by the perks that a stellar career inevitably brings with it.

Professor Fanny Cheung used the COVID-19 lockdowns and the unexpected free time to order personal photographs and family souvenirs, but soon turned her attention to a more systematic journey through her life and career. She takes us through her upbringing in the protected space of a privileged extended family who had settled in Hong Kong in the early days. Her father was an astute businessman who died young, when Fanny was nine years old. With an accomplished anthropological balance of empathy and distance, she describes what life as a child and adolescent was like with the mothers working in the family business and nannies and other domestic staff taking care of the children and daily life. We learn about the complex nomenclature and kinship relations where she was Sister Eleven, meaning she was number eleven out of her father's thirteen children. We get insights into dining rituals, Buddhist prayers and Confucian values, immersed in the quiet and slow pace inside a home that shielded the children from knowledge of the lives outside.

Already at an early age her feminist instincts were awakened through a series of incidents that made her stand up against perceived injustices that disadvantaged or discriminated against girls. As a pragmatist, she brushes aside theoretical discussions about feminism and conveys that the foundations of her life-long advocacy for women's rights and her pioneering work for bringing awareness about gender into Chinese society were laid early in life. She observes astutely that the respect and authority commanded by her grandmother was not real power, but rather the symbol for transmitting filial piety across the generations.

We then follow young Fanny as a foreign student to the USA and her doctoral studies in psychology at the University of Minnesota, from where she returned to Hong Kong after graduation. Unlike the younger generation of today, the location of her workplace remained the same for forty years, directing her drive and professional knowledge to changing society. After a series of stints in community service, she came to know of life outside her protected upbringing as a young girl. She encountered many instances of violence against women, the poor handling by the police if they were reported, and the imposed silence or indifference by the women's families and wider community. This led her to find her voice and break the silence, becoming a campaigner for the "war on rape" and addressing one of the gravest social injustices at the core.

Her scientific background made her realize that the most adequate instrument to bring awareness of the experience of women to society and policymakers was to gather evidence and render women's situation visible. Professor Fanny Cheung pioneered women and gender studies in Hong Kong and was influential in expanding them to other parts of Asia. Her strong advocacy of gender equality and equity took her directly to where action was needed, from combatting sexual harassment to gender blindness in statistics. When she became the first Vice-President for Research at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), she brought gender consciousness to the administration and her colleagues, promoted women leadership and improved the working environment for women in academia.

She fought successfully for the disaggregation of statistical data, engaging in the development of indices for gender inequality and analyzing the situation of women in the labor market. Yet, numbers alone are not sufficient to capture

the experience of women. Together with an American colleague, she launched an international research project based on interviews with women in leadership positions in different cultural settings. The study revealed the many similarities of being a woman—regardless of the cultural gender settings in which they worked—and resulted in a major publication against cultural stereotypes.

The peak of her engagement for women's rights came when she was appointed chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission. This implied stepping down as Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty of CUHK, hiring a management team and becoming fully involved in breaking new ground, from anti-discrimination laws to redesigning pedagogic methods and trying to meet the expectations from women's groups. It took her out of the academic comfort zone into a highly politicized environment. There, the air becomes thinner the higher the function. Dealing with the media proved to be especially challenging, as she had to deal with media distortions and hostile reactions. The legacy she left by tilling the soil and sowing the seed proved long-lasting and impressive.

Among Professor Fanny Cheung's many academic achievements, bringing a Chinese voice to psychology stands out. She questioned the assumed universality of the MMPI, a standardized and widely used personality test. Thanks to her efforts and those by Chinese colleagues, a standardized and validated translation of the MMPI into Chinese was accomplished for the first time, followed by significant changes to accommodate indigenous Chinese Personality Assessment Inventories. In a global world in which cultural differences persist, the dogma of a standardized universal structure of personality gave way for culture and multicultural perspectives to enter the psychological mainstream.

The book ends with a moving tribute to her husband Japhet, reminding the reader how important emotional support is not only for the individual, but for public achievements of women. It is based on mutual respect and the firm belief in gender equality, which still need to be firmly anchored in society. Her recent experience of retirement marks a new phase in her life, but as this memoir shows, there are novel ways of continuing to be active.

Soft power can be wielded by men and by women alike, and even by a country. When Professor Fanny Cheung started her impressive career, no role model existed for her. She created one that will encourage younger women in

different phases of their lives and wherever they are to continue along the path opened by her: to become self-assured leaders in serving their communities.

Thank you, Fanny.

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PREFACE

QUILTED MONTAGE

COVID-19 Lockdown

The outbreak of a novel coronavirus pandemic across the world in early 2020 was a major global disruption that wreaked havoc in every aspect of human life. Governments, local communities, health and school systems, businesses, families and individuals were unprepared for the risks and chaos that ensued. Difficult decisions had to be made on how to safeguard people's lives and protect their livelihoods, where to allocate scarce resources, and how to mitigate the economic, social, health and mental health impact at the collective and individual levels.

To reduce the spread of the virus that caused what is now called the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) before pharmaceutical interventions became available, about half of the world's population was under some form of lockdown. By early 2020, an unprecedented scale of over 3.9 billion people in more than ninety countries or territories had been asked or ordered to stay at home by their governments.

People across the world reacted differently to these restrictions. In many Western countries, there was resistance to the imposition of restrictions on their personal freedom. Protests in opposition to lockdowns were held in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand. Overall, most people complied with them, whether out

of self-interest to protect oneself or out of legal or moral duty to support the authorities. Nevertheless, these lockdowns subsequently impacted food security, supply chains, the global economy, education, tourism, sports and leisure, domestic violence, and mental health. They also introduced new modes in our ways of living, such as online shopping, working from home, Zoom teaching, or staycations instead of overseas travelling.

Having just retired by that time was a saving grace, in that I did not have to manage a working life. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the multiple travel plans that my husband had painstakingly prepared (and then cancelled) for my retirement from full-time appointment, stealing three years from our post-retirement itinerary, it afforded me the time to slow down and reflect on different aspects of my life.

During the lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021, when I could not go anywhere other than to take walks around my home estate compound, I spent time at home going through my stacks of photo albums, starting with the first album of black-and-white photos given to me by Sister Three when I was ten. I digitalized all the photos I wanted to keep and compiled them into a folder with over 12,000 items in classified subfiles. These photos reminded me of my family as well as different stages of my life—as a student, a professional, and an advocate. I felt fortunate to have lived a meaningful life, being able to contribute to the advancement of gender equality and bringing a Chinese voice to academic psychology, as well as witnessing with pride major historical epochs in my lifetime, including the reunification of Hong Kong with our motherland, and the rise of China on the world stage.

During these three years of border control when we could not travel overseas, I received several international psychology awards and invitations to present keynote addresses at virtual conferences, for which I had to prepare video recordings. These presentations gave me the opportunity to summarize key aspects of my career development and share my experiences with the younger generation. The reverberating feedback I received from the online talks was that I should write up these experiences as inspirational legacies. I agreed that when I was promoting public education on mental health or gender equality, using lived experiences of real people touched people's hearts and was effective in communicating empathic messages.

I was humbled by these accolades, but in the mentality of a typical Chinese woman, I was always hesitant about tooting my own horn. Few people knew about my family background, much less about my relationship to a statue standing in the building bearing my grandfather's name in the university I served for forty years. I was known for what I had done and not where I came from. Many successful professionals in Hong Kong recall their childhood in poverty, as that was the era when their families escaped from war-torn China and started new lives in Hong Kong. They grew up in wooden squatters and the rudimentary public housing estates while their parents worked hard to make a living, and made it through their educational achievements. I was among the privileged minority who had access to overseas education. In those days, girls in families with limited resources had to quit school to work in factories in order to support their brothers' education. The minority of Chinese women educated overseas usually came from more affluent families.

All along, I had kept my personal life private and shielded from my professional persona. In this modern age of information and communications technology, I still refused to open a Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter (X) account. I preferred to be known for my work untainted by the lens of my background. However, my friends and colleagues persuaded me to share my life story, not only to record various aspects of my work, but more importantly, as a testimony to the historical contexts of the social progress of our times. Without knowing where we came from, the next generation often took what we now enjoyed for granted and only complained about not having all that they wanted.

Why Write My Life Story?

Having written objective academic papers throughout my professional life, I found it a new challenge to venture into writing narratives about myself. I didn't think I was a good storyteller. Yet, when I recounted tidbits from different episodes in my life, others told me those stories were interesting. Quilting these fleeting tidbits into a coherent montage was another matter. Quilting is

a traditional folk practice in different parts of the world done by sewing blocks of at least three layers of cut fabric together with different patterns, which can tell a story or convey a message. I did not intend to analyze my psychological development in the way that I wrote psychological reports of my patients. Nor did I delve into the archives to produce a scholarly historical record, even though the backdrop of the historical periods that contextualize my story can illustrate the interconnected societal vicissitudes over the past decades. I just wanted to recount through my lens the events and engagements that underlined my passion and compassion and that had enriched my life paths. Resembling a participant observer in anthropology and sociology, I recorded those episodes in my life history to inform the sociocultural landscape in which I played a role. Like the multiple layers of padding of a quilt that creates a three-dimensional surface, the historical and social contexts illustrated the nuanced complexities underlying my stories.

This retrospection has deepened my understanding of my historical and cultural heritage, as well as illuminated more seasoned insights on the geopolitical landscape around us. Instead of a chronological autobiography, I have painted a kaleidoscope of my life, as I reminisce about episodes interspersed with flashbacks and diversions around the themes, together with related historical facts. From the patchworks in this saga, one may find the interplay of traditionalism and modernity: patriarchal family systems, old-fashioned customs, Buddhist and folk rituals, Confucian values, and collectivism on the one hand; Anglican and Catholic schooling, overseas studies, global outreach, feminism, and autonomy on the other hand. These patchworks reflect the cultural dynamics and social progress in Hong Kong in the context of global development. There are glimpses of my life in Hong Kong from its colonial rule to post-reunification transitions, interspersed with my sojourn in the United States during the 1960's tumultuous era of protests, followed by the meteoric rise of China on the world stage in the background. Snapshots of my life engagements provide traces of the advancement of gender equality, social activism, and higher education, as well as contentions in academic globalization, hegemony, and multiculturalism in the past fifty years. They also illustrate how one can shape one's work to serve the wider community and create meaning in life, which starts from nothing.

To me, this blissful voice from my life serves less as an indulgence in nostalgia but, more importantly, as a reminder of where we came from, how we got there, and how far we have gone. We can learn to appreciate that what we enjoy now is not a matter to be taken for granted and aspire to what still needs to be done.

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