

網路歸鄉

——洛心訪問錄

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摘要

此篇訪問稿採訪了旅居加拿大的青年網路作家洛心。洛心自高中時期，因為鄉愁，開始在網路發表小說，至今集結出版作品包含《槓上嗔怒美人》（鮮鮮出版社，2002年）、《小雛菊》（商周出版社，2003年）、《夏飄雪》（商周出版社，2004年）、《人之初》（商周出版社，2005年）等書，另有數篇短篇作品收入商周出版社所編的幾本短篇集內。《小雛菊》被改編為電視劇《鬥魚》I&II（商周出版社，2004年），成為網路小說改編成電視劇之濫觴。訪問者就其寫作的發展過程、家庭及移民背景、電腦和網路的使用，和網路文學的功能四方面進行訪談。此訪談除了深入洛心寫作的發展及心路歷程，並探究網路文學和台灣留學生文學發展的錯綜關聯。訪問者就其寫作的發展過程、家庭及移民背景，和電腦和網路的使用三方面進行訪談。

Homecoming on the Internet:

An Interview with Luo Xin

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Lorita Yonglin Chiu (邱雍麟), who writes under the pen name of Luo Xin (洛心), is a young internet writer. She emigrated from Taiwan to Canada and she received a Master's degree from the University of British Columbia. She began publishing novels on the internet when she was in high school. To this point, she has compiled the following publications: *Gangshang chennu meiren* 槓上嗔怒美人 (The beauty on the pole spurting anger) (Xianxian Publishing Co. 鮮鮮出版社, 2002), *Xiao chuju* 小雛菊 (The small chrysanthemum) (Shangzhou Publishing Co. 商周出版社, 2003), *Xia piaoxue* 夏飄雪 (Summer's Snow) (Shangzhou Publishing Co. 商周出版社, 2004), and *Ren zhi chu* 人之初 (Youthful years) (Shangzhou Publishing Co. 商周出版社, 2005). Several of her short stories have also been collected in volumes of short fiction published by Shangzhou Publishing Co. The Small Chrysanthemum was adapted into a two-part television drama *Dou yu* 鬥魚 I and II (Rumble fish) (Shangzhou Publishing Co. 商周出版社, 2004).

By 1997 when Luo Xin arrived alone to study junior high school

in Vancouver, Canada, she had developed a strong interest in fiction. Her nostalgia for home led her to progress from a reader to a writer of the literature that was flourishing on the internet at the time. Her first internet novel *The Small Chrysanthemum* was highly sought after by publishers, but ultimately this prize fell to Shangzhou Publishing Co. As it happened the “Idol” television series programs had become very popular, leading to *The Small Chrysanthemum* being adapted for television and renamed *Rumble Fish*. In fact, this was the beginning of internet novels being adapted for television.

The Luo Xin phenomenon deserves special attention from the perspectives of diasporic literature in general, and Taiwan study-abroad literature and internet literature in particular, due to the fact that her publication template is designed for the internet. Taiwan study-abroad literature and diasporic literature in the three decades from the 1960s through the 1980s was published mainly in the literary supplements (副刊) of newspapers or in literary journals. When computer technology and the internet became available in the 1990s, the temporal, even psychological gaps between the writers of diasporic literature and their readers were narrowed much. There are now two, instead of one, channels of communication between the writer and the reader. The first is the literary works the writer produces. The communication is in one direction, from the writer to the reader. The second is in two directions: by means of the “chat room” or other e-space on the internet, the writer and the reader can participate in a dialogue. It is in this second channel that the communication between the writer and the reader becomes influential on the writing process. For instance, the writer receives encouragement from the reader; the writer may design a plot based on a reader’s opinion; even a writer’s private domain could be revealed, perhaps for the purpose of increasing his or her popularity.

Whereas Luo Xin is remarkably talented and has a distinctive writing

style, which explain well the success of her writing, the development of her writing career reflects experiences shared by many internet writers, especially young writers who appeared on the scene (or on the screen) in the late 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These experiences were very different from those experienced by the diasporic writers of previous generations.

This interview aims at revealing Luo Xin's development as an internet and diasporic writer; the role of the communication template (i.e., computer technology and internet communication) in her, as well as other internet and/or diasporic writers' development; the process of writing an internet literary work; and the process of publishing of internet literature. This interview consists of four parts: the development of Luo Xin's writing, her family and immigration background, her use of the computer and the internet, and her thoughts on internet writing. The interview was conducted in Chinese in writing, mostly between March and September, 2009. Luo Xin reviewed the text of the interview; however, any inadequacies in the content are the complete responsibility of the interviewer Shu-ning Sciban. The interview follows.

1. Writing Development

Question: When did you begin to write? Why did you want to?

Answer: When I was about thirteen, I had just immigrated to Vancouver. I just scribbled but never completed anything. This hardly amounts to officially beginning to write. I truly planned my writing during about my second year of high school, when I was fifteen. At the time, internet literature had started to develop. After reading several works, I felt that I could write better work than those; that's how I started. The real reason that I continued to write was because, by writing

in Chinese, I felt as if I was back in my hometown. Although I had already been in Canada for two years, I still felt out of place; I missed home intensely. However, through writing Chinese I was able to unburden myself of homesickness and I felt as if I were a little closer to Taiwan.

Question: When did you start publishing on the internet?

Answer: About fifteen years old.

Question: Why did you choose this form of publishing, on the internet?

Answer: I was motivated by the fact that internet literature had taken shape and was the current trend. For this reason, I naturally chose to publish my writings there. I could communicate with readers and other writers in this way.

Question: Was *The Small Chrysanthemum* (2003) your maiden work and the one that brought you fame?

Answer: One can say that *The Small Chrysanthemum* was the work that brought me fame. However, my maiden works were other short stories. My first book was a love story *The Beauty on the Pole Spurring Anger*. However, it was with *The Small Chrysanthemum* that I really started to become well known.

Question: Why did you decide to write *The Small Chrysanthemum*? What did you most want to express through this novel?

Answer: In the beginning I only wanted to write a story that would move people. It wasn't until I finished writing that I realized that I had unwittingly included some of my memories from Taiwan. I was only sixteen or seventeen when I began to write this story; therefore, I wanted to express love. However, because I had left home and I placed

much importance on my family, I also wanted to describe the conflict between love and the family. I wanted to depict the temptations and difficulties that youth in junior high school face. Actually, when I first began to write, I wasn't intending to "express" a concrete idea. Rather, after continuing to write for a period of time, I produced a story. Unconsciously, the meaning that I wanted to express appeared in the story.

Question: Had you considered publishing?

Answer: Yes. From the point that I began writing I felt that I would publish.
(Maybe I was very eager to excel.)

Question: When were you discovered by publishers?

Answer: My first book, *The Beauty on the Pole Spurting Anger*, was originally presented on Xianxian Literature Website (Xianxian wenxue wang 鮮鮮文學網). Xianxian was also a publisher and they approached me about publishing the book. Nevertheless, the two best known internet publishers at the time were Hongse [Hongse wenhua 紅色文化] and Shangzhou. Writers of internet literature all competed to have these two publishers put out their work.

The Small Chrysanthemum was rejected by Hongse because the topic was excessively realistic. Nevertheless, it was because of *The Small Chrysanthemum* that Shangzhou and Hongse both contacted me. However, what they were interested in publishing was the third book that I was working on, *Summer's Snow*.

Question: How did the publishers convince you to release your work?

Answer: The editor of Shangzhou took the initiative to contact me and to indicate that they had a strong interest in *Summer's Snow*. In comparison, Hongse were more conservative; they contacted me less

frequently.

Question: Did you look for other publishers?

Answer: In the beginning I preferred Hongse; however, Shangzhou were unusually earnest in their communication. With regard to the terms of the contract, they were also offering more than Hongse. As a result, my choice turned to Shangzhou.

Question: How long after *The Small Chrysanthemum* was published in Taiwan, did the television production company invite you to revise it as a television script *Rumble Fish*?

Answer: It was exactly the opposite of what you've described. As I said earlier, because *The Small Chrysanthemum* was overly realistic and, therefore, did not conform to the early trend in internet novels, no publisher was willing to bring it out. I had already negotiated with Shangzhou to publish *Summer's Snow*, but one day out of the blue I received a letter from a television company saying that they wanted to buy the rights to *The Small Chrysanthemum* for an adaption for television. Because I had not dealt with these types of matters before, I asked for Shangzhou's assistance. In this way, *The Small Chrysanthemum* jumped the queue and pushed its way to the front of *Summer's Snow*. It was rushed out in 2003 and published at the same time as two other short stories.

Question: How did you work with the television team revising the novel to produce a script? Did they have any guiding principles for the revision?

Answer: I did not participate in adapting the novel into a script. Because I had little reputation in the beginning, and the common attitude in television was that it was an honour for a writer to have his or her

novel adapted, the writer himself or herself did not have any right to participate in the process.

Question: What was the process of publishing *Rumble Fish*?

Answer: After a television script is published, the adapted script has to be revised again to produce a novel. This is the method of marketing in Taiwan's television circles. The television company asked Shangzhou to publish a television novel soon after, and since I was the original author, Shangzhou asked me to revise the script into a television novel.

Question: The television novel from this script is in two volumes; were they both written by you? Were they both adapted from *The Small Chrysanthemum*?

Answer: Yes. *Rumble Fish*, volumes one and two, were both revised and written by me. Nevertheless, there is no connection whatsoever between volume two of *Rumble Fish* and *The Small Chrysanthemum*. Apart from using the same characters, the plot was created by the script team.

Question: Were both *The Small Chrysanthemum* and *Rumble Fish* (the television show and the television novel) exported to mainland China? What about the length of time it took, the procedure, and the order of events?

Answer: Both works were sold to mainland China. First came a simplified character version of *The Small Chrysanthemum*; next the first part of *Rumble Fish* followed by the second were broadcast in mainland China. The second volume of the television novel *Rumble Fish* also landed there.

Question: Was the process of publishing your other works similar to that of

The Small Chrysanthemum; for example, *Summer's Snow* (2004), *Youthful Years* (2005), and your other short stories?

Answer: There was no difference, except for the “mid-route ambush” by *The Small Chrysanthemum*, which allowed its publication to be pushed ahead of *Summer's Snow*. I became a regular collaborator with Shangzhou. Internet novel publishers in Taiwan do not sign contracts binding people; all decisions are made by mutual agreement. Basically, wherever one's first book is published, you will continue to work with that publisher. If someone jumps to another employer, it is because another publisher has offered better terms.

Question: What was the difference in the time it took to write *Summer's Snow* and *The Small Chrysanthemum*?

Answer: I finished writing *The Small Chrysanthemum* around my second year of high school. Then I took intermittently to writing *Summer's Snow*. It took me about a year and a half to write *Summer's Snow*. My way of writing is not very consistent. Sometimes I will write to the midpoint of a story, then put it aside. After a few months I will return to it. After I finished a draft of *Summer's Snow*, I put it aside for a few months after which I returned to revise it.

Question: *The Small Chrysanthemum* and *Summer's Snow* were both about young people. In your mind, what are the main differences between these two books?

Answer: One can say that *The Small Chrysanthemum* was a harkening back to my time in Taiwan. It was some of my random memories of Taiwan. In comparison, *Summer's Snow* was a story that evolved out of my life in Calgary. I used the setting of Calgary, even the people and my own lifestyle to narrate this story. One can say that *The Small Chrysanthemum*

was reminiscence and *Summer's Snow* was documentation.

Question: From *The Small Chrysanthemum* to *Summer's Snow* and then to *Youthful Years*, the settings for your stories are Taiwan, then a transition to Calgary, Canada, then a return to Taiwan. Is there any special reason for this?

Answer: As I said earlier, my motivation for writing originates in my longing for Taiwan. When I reached the midpoint of *Summer's Snow*, I started putting the pen to *Youthful Years*. However, I only wrote about thirty thousand characters of *Youthful Years*, and then I put it aside. When I returned to Taiwan in 2004 to promote *Summer's Snow*, I returned to my *alma mater* and met with my former classmates. I think the passage of time and the changes in human affairs moved me deeply at the time. It was specifically for the purpose of commemorating those days I spent in Taiwan that I returned to *Youthful Years* and finished it.

When I first began to write, I thought of myself as jar full of water; I had so many stories to tell and feelings to express. Therefore, whenever I started to write, I would simultaneously begin different stories. However, I wouldn't develop them all at the same time. Rather, once I had a beginning, I would leave them and return once I had time to write. After I finished writing *Summer's Snow*, I figured that I had already written everything there was to write about Calgary. Therefore, I returned to search the memories of what I had left behind in Taiwan. This is why the setting for my stories jumped out of Canada and returned to Taiwan.

Question: With regard to sales of your works, where are they highest?

Answer: I think that they are highest in Taiwan. This is because the number of internet writers has suddenly expanded in mainland China. They

have their own unique type of readers. It has always been the case that my market was slightly better in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Only *The Small Chrysanthemum*, *Summer's Snow*, and the first and second volumes of *Rumble Fish* were released in mainland China. I don't think that *Youthful Years* was published there.

Question: Do readers or fans contact you? Where are they all from: Taiwan, Hong Kong, the mainland, or overseas Chinese?

Answer: In the beginning, most of my readers were from Taiwan. Those from Hong Kong are in a minority. Unexpectedly, there are a lot from the mainland and overseas Chinese. The mainland readers are usually living abroad; there are relatively few mainland readers actually living in China.

Question: What are the common questions that readers ask?

Answer: At the start, many readers asked if my stories were true or not. Gradually, many readers shared their impressions of my books with me. *Summer's Snow* resonated particularly well among overseas Chinese. Because the readers were usually younger than me, in one way they saw me like an older sister. They felt that my stories gave them some positive revelation and encouragement. There were also some mothers who, after reading *Summer's Snow*, wrote to ask me about immigrating and adapting to a new environment. There was a period of time when I felt like a counseling centre for youth.

Question: How do you gather your material for writing? For example, *The Small Chrysanthemum* and *Youthful Years* both had Taiwan as their settings. How did you gather the needed materials given that you were living in Canada?

Answer: When I write, I usually take things that I have heard or experienced

in my daily life, or a small piece of a memory, and I expand on it. It is like a ripple effect. I take some event that has happened in my life and I throw it into the water. This small event expands like a ripple and flows right through a large story.

I usually rely on my memories of Taiwan when I write a story about Taiwan. Also, I often returned to Taiwan before. I would go back every summer to see my family. The one or two months that I was there were my opportunity to collect materials. As I said, the unbearability of my homesickness and the pain of leaving one's home became my strongest motivators for writing. I always felt lost in Canada. It was only by writing novels in Chinese, writing about my memories of Taiwan, that allowed me to feel like myself. My finding of material was usually the "finding of myself." All the sorrow and partings in my repeated trips back and forth between Canada and Taiwan, these were the feelings from which I drew my material.

Question: You immigrated to Canada when you were thirteen years old. Of the thirteen years that you spent in Taiwan, what was the biggest influence on your writing?

Answer: My time in Taiwan influenced everything about me. Memories are the primary motivation for my writing. Those thirteen years in Taiwan became everything about my writing. Because I was homesick, I was sorrowful; furthermore, because I was sorrowful, it forced me to write non-stop. If it weren't for those thirteen years in Taiwan entangling me, I don't think that I would have been capable of writing.

Question: Did you return often to visit your family and friends after you were thirteen years old?

Answer: I went home once nearly every year. However, there were also a few

years when I went home once every two years.

Question: What kind of feelings and impression do you have of Taiwan now?

Answer: My feelings for Taiwan have changed again. I feel that it is my homeland, but it also seems as if it isn't. Since I finished writing *Youthful Years*, I have felt that this jar of water is empty. I have already said everything that I want to. For this reason, after I finished *Youthful Years*, I stopped writing for nearly four years. During these four years I returned to Taiwan many times to search for inspiration and material. However, I have had no motivation. Therefore, I have been thinking, maybe I have already exhausted the thirteen years of entanglement and from this point on I have to search for my inspiration in some other place.

Taiwan, for me, is a sorrowful place. This is because I always feel that I have left my father there. I also feel, in some ways, that I have also left myself there. For this reason I am continually returning to search for traces.

Question: Are you thinking about switching over to English in order to write? Why or why not?

Answer: I wouldn't want to write in English. My inspiration for writing originates from my painful experiences as an immigrant who lives in a foreign place but intensely misses his or her homeland. Only by writing in Chinese can one describe this kind of shock. For me, English has always been a tool, something that I could use. However, there was no way that I could have affection for it.

Question: Would you consider having your Chinese works translated into English and published? Why or why not?

Answer: Someone suggested this idea before; however, I have not considered it.

Maybe I think that my writings are highly rooted in Taiwan. They are a kind of reflection of the growth of Taiwan youth. Therefore, readers abroad, who lack this kind of background, maybe won't be able to relate to my works.

Question: Describe your writing practices.

Answer: I usually write at midnight. I remember during my craziest time I started to write at 10 in the evening and I would write until three or four in the morning. Then I would get up at eight the next day in order to go to work. I tried to write during the day; however, I was unable to concentrate. I like to write at midnight while listening to some music. When I am writing, I have to pick one or two songs that match my mood; then I play them over and over again. I do not like to be disturbed by others when I am writing. I usually shut myself up in a room. Moreover, my disposition becomes unstable during my periods of writing. In general, I become a strange person.

Question: You will soon be studying in graduate school and your life will become busier. Will you continue to write?

Answer: I still want to continue writing. For me, writing is a kind of record of one's life. I am presently very busy; it is unclear to me how I will find time in my busy life for writing. However, I believe that I will still be writing.

Question: Is the significance of writing different from when you were thirteen years old?

Answer: When I wrote before, my attitude was somewhat unconstrained and of being empowered. After four years of settling, my enthusiasm for writing still has not diminished. Nevertheless, as for the present significance of writing, I am still slowly searching for it. Maybe after

I begin my next work, I will be able to find myself. In my opinion, writing for me is somewhat like searching for myself. The “me” of the previous stage has already been found in *Youthful Years*. And by what means will “me” of the present stage and my writings manifest themselves? I think that I still need to spend some time and only then will I be able slowly to understand.

2. Family and Immigrant Background

Question: Can you talk about why your family decided to leave Taiwan and why you chose to immigrate to Canada?

Answer: Actually, at the start, my family’s goal in immigration was only to give me the opportunity to receive a better education. Although they said that they were using immigration as a means to an end, in the beginning my mother and father planned to let me come by myself. None of them, including my younger sister, planned to leave Taiwan. For this reason, when I first came to Canada, I entered my aunt’s house in Vancouver and stayed with them for one year. Possibly it was there that I slowly developed a sense of loneliness. Of course, a thirteen year old who had floated across the sea and landed in a setting where the language and popular customs were completely different would experience a big shock. After the year passed, my parents felt that it wasn’t good to leave me abroad by myself; therefore, my mother decided to come to Canada together with my sister. Because there were too many Chinese in Vancouver, which would be detrimental to my learning to speak English, we moved to Calgary. The Chinese population of Calgary was relatively small in 1998. From that point on, our family was separated in two locations.

Question: Which of your family members immigrated to Canada to live with you?

Answer: Only my mother and sister. Father would come to visit us once in awhile. However, after 2001, when my father and mother divorced, he has not been back to Canada once. It is only us who return to Taiwan once a year.

Question: Were you willing to emigrate in the beginning?

Answer: I was neither “willing” nor “unwilling” in the beginning. I only felt muddled and it seemed that everybody was saying how great it was to be able to study abroad; so with this impression I accepted my parent’s arrangement and went abroad.

Question: What did you miss most about Taiwan?

Answer: My family. For me, I had such strong feelings for the people of Taiwan, especially my family, as if I couldn’t be apart from them. I felt as if I had left everything important about myself there.

Question: You said that the unbearability of your homesickness and the pain of leaving your home became your strongest motivator for writing. Are you willing to talk about what caused the unbearability and the pain?

Answer: Immigration is a difficult path to follow. I think that there are too many things [about it] that can be described as unbearable; there is no way to describe them all in two or three sentences. However, in my opinion, the thing that affected me the most was my family situation. My parents divorced in 2001. I am clear that this was not the fault of my immigration, and it wasn’t because of me. However, there is no way to dismiss this. In my mind, I cannot stop from thinking that, if my family had not split apart in order for me to immigrate,

my parents would not have divorced. My mother would not have had to give up everything at the peak of her career and, for my sake, move to Canada to accompany me. Because my father's health is not good, I always think that I am very unfilial; there is no way for me to accompany him. These troubles have continually distressed me for many years. Furthermore, because I like to persist in pursuing dead ends, at no time was I able to dismiss them.

As for factors particular to me; I continued to miss Taiwan terribly, so from the point that I arrived in Canada, I always felt that nothing was right. Add to this the language barrier, and the fact that for the longest time I was almost all alone, without friends. The result of not having friends to mix with was that my English did not improve. Being in the midst of this vicious circle led me to develop a strong repulsion for learning English. I always felt that if this place did not exist, my family would today perhaps be united. Under these circumstances, I missed Taiwan even more. In short, I never had any sense of belonging to this place; it was like being a stranger, with no roots.

Question: How is it that writing can soothe the pain of your homesickness?

Answer: Besides allowing me to shift my thoughts and emotions from the problems of my family, writing also gives me a sense of belonging, because I can get close to the Chinese language that I love. I can also make use of writing to reminisce, to experience everything about my homeland. With the addition of the internet later on as a medium for presenting my writing, and for interacting with readers and fellow admirers of my writing, I felt that I had made some more friends that I could converse with. Moreover, from their affirmation of my works, I found a means to affirm myself. Writing made me feel that I was no

longer wandering alone, and for the time being I had an opportunity to affirm myself. Indeed, I think that I was always searching for myself. I couldn't find myself in Canada; however, through writing in Chinese, I could.

Question: Can you talk about your life after you arrived in Canada, both the happy and the troubling times?

Answer: I think that the most troubling thing that happened after I came to Canada was that I was separated from my family. As I described above, because I continued to believe that I was responsible for the split up of my family, I was very unhappy. Not only that, I felt that I had destroyed the life and career that my mother originally had in Taiwan. My mother also had a very long period in Canada during which she could not adapt. For this reason, we often quarreled; our lives as immigrants were completely bitter. Our family problems led to us never being able to like this land and, for this reason, there was nothing good about it and we were unwilling to accept it. Therefore, for nearly ten years, I always wanted to leave Canada quickly. I always thought that I had no roots here, that I did not belong.

Gradually, I came to like, or, one could say, became accustomed to this land. Maybe it was when I was about twenty-one or twenty-two. One could say after so many years, I became used to it. Afterwards my life became more settled, and once I grasped what was important in my life, slowly I was more able to adapt to it here. It is perhaps laughable to say this, but in 2006, after I raised a Shiba, I slowly came to think that I had a companion in this place. Add to this that I later used English to communicate with all the friends that I met. For this reason, my English communication skills have grown by leaps and bounds in the last two or three years. These factors have

allowed me slowly to become accustomed to this land. As well, my enthusiasm for teaching Chinese gave me a reason for remaining here.

Question: In the author's preface to *Summer's Snow*, you thanked your parents for their support. I would like to ask how they encouraged and supported you in your writing.

Answer: Actually, my parents' attitude toward my writing has always been half opposed and half supportive. The reason for their opposition was that they thought that while I was in Canada that I should focus my energies on my studies. I shouldn't have been neglecting my proper vocation by running off to write novels. Add to this the fact that writing novels had a very harmful effect on my physical and emotional health. Therefore, my mother continually worried that I would immerse myself in writing to the point of losing touch with reality. This was her reason for objecting. Their support was silent, a kind of tacit support. Although they would go on about how writing novels was bad, I knew that they would introduce my books to acquaintances that they bumped into and they would exaggerate my accomplishments to others. Maybe it was because I never excelled in my studies, so my record in writing allowed me to believe that, at least, I could let my parents have some pride in me.

Question: You mentioned that when your mother abandoned her development at the peak of her career when she came to Canada to accompany you. What did your mother do before she immigrated? Did she regret allowing you to immigrate, or regret immigrating herself? Has she ever discussed her feelings with you?

Answer: My mother is a traditional Chinese doctor. She started to teach herself Chinese medicine when she was twenty-six years old. After

four year of effort, she passed a special exam earning a Chinese doctor and acupuncture license. The special exam for Chinese doctors in Taiwan is more difficult than for a lawyer. For this reason, she spent a lot of time and energy in order to attain this license. Furthermore, our family's clinic had just produced its best results the year that my mother decided to leave Taiwan. My mother has never expressed any regret; however, I can always sense it in her. I and my mother cherish our memories and love our family deeply. Speaking of my mother, she simply gave up the whole world in order to come to Canada. She gave up her career, she gave up the opportunity to see her brothers and sisters, she gave up the land where she had grown for more than forty years. If one says that it took me ten years of time before I adapted to this land, I simply cannot imagine how difficult it has been for her to move to Canada. I once asked her if she regretted it. She said that she did not; however, it is impossible for me to dismiss this from my mind.

Question: At the time, why did your parents decide to send you abroad and not your younger sister, or your whole family? How has your younger sister adapted?

Answer: My parents have always thought that my personality wasn't suited to study in Taiwan. Maybe it was because I was incapable of competing. Perhaps it was because I studied in an advanced class during elementary school; however, my grades were never much good. For these reasons my parents believed that it would be more suited to me abroad. Add to this the persuasion of my uncle and aunt and the globalization of English then. All these reasons made my parents think that it would be better for me to go abroad to study. My parents both grew up in the countryside. They both taught themselves and

passed the license exam to become doctors of Chinese medicine. Therefore, they always regretted not having the proper opportunity and background to pursue their education. With regard to my younger sister, she was only in kindergarten at the time, so they didn't consider sending her abroad. My parents placed a lot of importance on me. They spent much energy and money in order that a single person [I] could immigrate, and solely for the sake of pursuing a good education. Most people upon hearing this cannot understand it. Because of this, I blame myself even more for not studying hard at the beginning when I was in Vancouver, and instead embroiling the whole family in going abroad.

3. The Use of Computers and the Internet

Question: How did you start using a computer?

Answer: In 1997, when I had just immigrated to Vancouver, there was a computer in my aunt's home. I recall that the operating system had just become NT or 95. It was then that I began to learn computers. My aunt let me and my cousin attend computer classes to study how to use Windows. However, the internet was not yet popular. Therefore, the computer was only used to play games, and there was no other use for it.

Question: How old were you when you began to use computers? What did you do on the internet at that time?

Answer: When I moved to Calgary in 1998, the internet had slowly begun to spread. One could only connect on a telephone line then. My parents bought a computer for me and connected it to the internet. I had just started grade nine (third year of middle school) and the

school had computers and a connection to the internet. We could use the internet at school to check materials. It goes without saying that the search engines and databases were all very small scale; nor was the material on the internet complete. We would normally use encyclopedias in hard print to search for information. Outside of school, I would spend a large amount of time using the computer at home. I did nothing but play computer games and talk in chat rooms. The internet had just appeared and everywhere around the world people could chat with one another on it. I simply couldn't phantom it. Therefore, I spent most of my time chatting over the internet. I think that I was probably lonely as I had just moved to Calgary, my English was poor, and I wasn't getting along well with my family. Therefore, the internet chat rooms let me use "Chinese" to talk with others. This provided a measure of comfort to my very lonely heart. It was at that time that internet novels appeared. The "founder" of internet novels Riffraff Cai 痞子蔡 (Cai Zhiheng 蔡智恆) wrote the first internet novel *Di yi ci qin mi jie chu* 第一次親密的接觸 (The first intimate encounter) [published by Hongse wenhua 紅色文化 in 1998]. One could say that it was the rage in all Chinese circles. It was also the beginning of internet fiction. It was at that time that I began to read Chinese materials on the internet. I love to read very much; however, because of my poor English ability, I was limited to reading only Chinese books at the time. Unfortunately, there was very little Chinese reading material in Calgary; therefore, the internet provided me with another channel for reading. I should mention while on the subject that there was a time when I was crazy about online games. One can interact with players from every part of the world in online games. In looking back, I believe the reason that I was so obsessed

with the internet in the beginning was that it was a “companion” for me. I think that it didn’t matter if I were crazy about the internet or later when I was fixated on writing novels; they were all channels that I had eventually found to allow me to give vent to the emotions surrounding my homesickness.

Question: Had you read any other internet novels before you started writing them? What was your opinion of the works you read? What were your favourite writers and works?

Answer: Yes. When I was young (about from grade nine to grade twelve), I liked Taiwan romances so much. Later on I could read this type of novel on the internet. Before internet literature became the rage, what I wrote was romance. However, once internet literature became popular, the direction of my writing turned toward it. I recall that some of the earliest Taiwan internet novelists were Cai Zhiheng, Shuangzi (霜子), Qiqi(琦琦), and Mingbei(明琲). Qiqi was the first writer I liked. Her writings were extremely lifelike, and very lively and humourous. Furthermore, Qiqi was an overseas writer who had studied in the United States and her writing was easy to read. For these reasons, her writing gave me a kind of confidence. I felt that if she could do it and that if her kind of sparse writing was accepted by others, I should be able to write, even with my limited Chinese.

Once I started to write novels, my favourite novelists were non-other than Shuangzi and Mingbei. The reason that I liked these two writers was that they already had a certain degree of fame by then. Moreover, Shuangzi’s writing is relatively deep, and her depictions more beautiful than ordinary internet novelists (Later I learned that she was a graduate of the Department of Chinese Literature, Huafan University). The writing that left me with the deepest impression was

Shuangzi's *Li hun* 離魂 (The departing soul) [published by Hongse wenhua 紅色文化 in 2002]. The last few chapters of *The Departing Soul* mentions the change in the mind of a girl whose parents are getting divorced. Because my parents were just in the midst of arranging their divorce at the time, Shuangzi's writing was a big revelation and consolation to me.

Mingbei's works are stories about growing up. She writes about a youth's growth of youth in the period from high school to university. Her technique is very appropriate. I like Mingbei's writings because they include many stories of growing up in Taiwan. I think that these are things that I will never experience in my life (i.e., receiving a formal education in Taiwan); therefore, her writings filled me with admiration. Among Mingbei's works, *Bainian shuren* 百年樹人 (The hundred years of education) [published by Hongse wenhua 紅色文化 in 2002] and *Hanjia* 寒假 (Winter vacation) [published by Hongse wenhua 紅色文化 in 2002] have influenced me the most.

Question: Do you leave messages on the bulletin boards of some websites (including literary and non-literary websites) in order to discuss questions with people? If so, what questions do you discuss?

Answer: When I began writing and before I was publishing, I would release stories on some internet fiction websites. I slowly became close with some writers and readers. Shuangzi and I slowly got to know each other like this. In the beginning it was like I was being attracted to a star; I gradually got to know her later. Now we chat sometimes.

I think that writing is a very private and lonely affair. Therefore, even if one converses, we usually only discuss other people's writings, which ones are good, which ones aren't. However, I have almost never discussed with others my own mental process of writing.

At the most, friends discuss what they have gained from reading my work. Nevertheless, this does not touch on the writing process.

Question: Have the conditions on the internet changed since you began writing for it?

Answer: Once I started writing on the internet, I slowly met other internet writers. Like those I mentioned above, Cai Zhiheng, Shuangzi, and so on; I met all these people later. I am guessing that it was because I was lucky. Once *The Small Chrysanthemum* was released, I achieved a certain degree of fame. Therefore, it wasn't difficult to meet these writers who were already very famous. Once I began writing, my circle of friends slowly expanded. Like I said, I had the opportunity to meet other writers and other writers would come to meet me. Having greater interaction with readers, I became friends with some I got along well with. My way of utilizing the internet has not changed much; it is nothing more than chatting, writing, reading, and playing games.

Question: Are there any among the internet writers that have dealings with you who, like yourself, live abroad? If so, are your dealings different than those with other types of writers?

Answer: Of the writers that I know, only Mingbei and Qiqi live abroad. However, I do not personally know either of them, so I am not familiar with their personal circumstances. If you have the opportunity to read these two writers' works, you will discover that almost all their writing is about seeking education and growing up in Taiwan. Therefore, I surmise that, like me, they both are being driven by the impetus of homesickness.

Question: Is everyone who contacts you through the internet a young Taiwanese? Is there anybody from mainland China or from overseas?

Is there any difference in the questions that readers (or internet users) from these three places discuss with you?

Answer: I have been contacted through the internet by Chinese from all four areas, including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas. They usually range in age from middle school to university. Occasionally, school clubs have invited me to visit. I discovered that teachers in some schools pay attention to the popularity of internet fiction and include discussion of internet stories in homework for school subjects like Chinese literature and composition include homework with their discussions of internet stories. I don't think that there is any difference in the questions that they [readers or internet users from the four places] discuss with me; they are usually about their impression of my works. A small number of people ask me about how to publish, the process, and so on.

Question: Do you deliberately distinguish among the websites that you consult, whether they are from Taiwan, mainland China, or even overseas? Is there any difference between pre and post publication?

Answer: Actually, I haven't read internet novels much recently; usually I only read the works of a few writers. Almost all of them are Taiwan writers. The platforms for my activities (where I present my writings) all have Taiwan websites as their main platform. However, my works have appeared and were discussed in mainland Chinese fora. I think it was probably readers who transferred them over. Personally, I only publish on Taiwan platforms.

That is correct. I am more active on Taiwan websites pre and post publication. Nevertheless, it has been a while since I last searched for internet novels. There are a few reasons for this. The writers that I like are all semi-retired; they rarely issue new works. As well, I actually

prefer to read works that are not internet novels. The exception is if I hear of a work that is suddenly the rage; I will want to see what this work is about.

4. Summary of Thoughts on Internet Writing

Question: Can you summarize the influence of the internet on the development of your writing? If the internet did not exist, would you still be a writer?

Answer: I think that if I hadn't developed an interest in internet writing, I would still have been a writer. Earlier, before internet novels had become the rage, I had tried to write romances. However, I believe that if internet novels had not become the rage, my writing career would not have been long. First, there are definite limitations to romances; their content can only be about love, powerful and unconstrained love. In my opinion, I do not excel at writing about love. Second, because of the rise of internet fiction, the impression of "publishing" as strict and rigid has changed. In the past, most people felt that to be able to publish a book, one definitely had to be deeply accomplished in Chinese. The threshold for being called a "writer" was extremely high. Then, internet fiction softened the meaning of "publishing" and made it easier for people to approach it. Therefore, if it hadn't been for the appearance of internet fiction, I think that, given my ability in Chinese, I probably wouldn't have attained the required standards for publishing. Third, internet fiction has caused the type of "stories" to become much more intimate. The majority of content of internet fiction is about the personal development and schoolyard romance of youth and I am capable of giving full play to

these types of writings. A group of readers reflecting internet novels came into being, and because there was this group of readers, the works that I could write became acceptable.

Question: Some people say that the quality of internet novels is inconsistent.

The books that come out in hard copy have higher literary value. Do you agree? What do you think that the value of internet fiction is?

Answer: From a certain perspective, I agree with this statement. I believe that the quality of internet fiction definitely is uneven. Most of the writers embrace the intention of producing a story as a motivation to write. For this reason, most of them lack literary background. In my opinion, a good literary work requires the writer to have deep wisdom and a broad command of ancient and contemporary knowledge. However, the majority of internet fiction does not reflect these factors. This isn't to degrade the value of internet fiction; rather I believe that internet fiction has a different value than standard fiction. Many internet literary works are stories about schoolyard romance and growing up. I feel that these are exactly the factors that immensely attract elementary to university students (even graduate students). These stories write about things intimate to students. Furthermore, in some especially good internet stories, one can utilize these seemingly not too serious, non-didactic works in order to transmit some positive wisdom; thus, providing learning for our young friends. I think that these are the merits of internet fiction. They make a reader feel a closeness, an intimacy, like something that would occur every day. Moreover, one learns some different concepts in these works.

Of course, internet novels are not completely without style; the works demonstrate accomplishment in Chinese. From a certain perspective, internet stories have broadened the course of writing.

They have made the path to publication, which seems very distant and highly impossible, into one more friendly. In this way, they have encouraged indirectly some people with latent ability who, nevertheless, disbelieve that they can enter onto the course of writing, to lift the pen.

In summary, I believe that the internet has two uses: one is to provide a brand new platform and opportunity for writing; two is to create a new genre of writing and to allow this type of writing to have a category to which it can belong, namely, “internet literature.”

