

SECOND EDITION



Emigrating from China to the United States

**A Comparison of Different
Social Experiences**

Yushi (Boni) Li

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TO THE UNITED STATES**

Second Edition

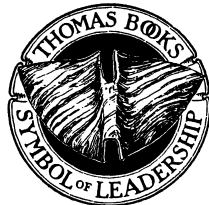
EMIGRATING FROM CHINA TO THE UNITED STATES

A Comparison of Different Social Experiences

By

YUSHI (BONI) LI, PH.D.

*Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Philosophy
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, Kentucky*



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PREFACE

This is a supplementary textbook and its fundamental purpose is to facilitate students in associating the understandings in their personal daily lives with larger social forces. It will focus on my social experiences living in the United States and China and how those experiences have impacted and changed my social values, attitudes, and behaviors. The main discussion of this book is how I was socialized in China and assimilated to and influenced by the American society.

As a professor of sociology, I feel that the real challenge of teaching, specifically my introduction to sociology courses, involves finding methods to make the discipline relevant to students' lives and aid their comprehendings of our society. However, this is not an easy task because students, like many other people, normally do not connect their own individual experiences with their learning process. A lot of sociological issues, which are considered to have close relationships with everyone in the society, however, are sometimes thought to be unrelated or uninteresting by some students. They may have different social opinions, they may not comprehend the whole scope of the situation, or they may feel that those social issues are irrelevant to their personal lives. Therefore, encouraging my students' involvement in studying sociological perspectives is always my primary goal. Throughout the years of teaching, I have found that students engage more when learning new views and ways to connect the world around them and their personal lives.

My cross-cultural international experiences have had profound connections to sociological concepts and theories. When teaching I have realized by pulling on my social life experiences, and using them in the classroom, my students become more engaged. My real life examples affect my students in such a way that the lessons behind the stories stay with them. When learning new concepts, a student who is able to connect those concepts with memorable examples can understand and retain the information more readily. It also makes the class more interesting because students are able to associate their personal lives with sociological theories and concepts. Furthermore, the

connection between the class teaching and my experiences in Chinese and American societies helps students see a world beyond the borders of the United States. Sharing my experiences based on sociological concepts and theories lays a foundation on the subject of globalization and offers a comprehensive perspective by which to view other societies. These teaching methods will give students unique information about other societies besides America, which are considered essential for younger American generations living in the twenty-first century and beyond. These teaching methods also help students connect their personal life to the changing world.

In my classes when introducing students the connections between them and their society, I also use a famous American sociologist, C. Wright Mills' work, *Sociological Imagination* (1959). He proposes the proper connections between biography and history from sociological perspectives. Mills (1959) explains that sociology permits individuals to see how their personal experiences and the changes within society are interrelated. Mills (1959:2) also points out that "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of the society can be understood without understanding both." The basic meaning of this sentence is that for one to comprehend the complexities of their personal life, they have to understand the context of our society, culture, and world. Mills (1959:2) indicates that people are:

Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary people do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of people they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Therefore, we need to understand that time, society, and culture will always influence people's everyday lives. We also need to recognize that individuals' life experiences are reflections of social changes. These have taken place on the larger level in any society. Understanding sociological perspectives is crucial for all individuals when relating their lives with the changes in the world around them. They will gain in-depth knowledge about how the impacts of social changes affect their lives. A sociology professor's task involves assisting students in building a solid foundation for their future growth. The teaching materials comprised in this book will aid students to reach this objective.

The following book chapters will be included:

Chapter 1: Sociological Theories

This chapter draws upon my personal experiences with two different social systems: The socialist system, with its rapid economic development in China, and the capitalist system, with an advanced economy in the United States. The chapter will compare the sociological theories between these two systems. The major point of this chapter will be to concentrate on how different political and economic systems influence people's ways of thinking, their everyday life, and their social interaction with others.

Chapter 2: Research Methods

This chapter will incorporate some of my personal stories as a researcher and as a participant in research conducted in both America and China. These stories will help students recognize the importance of doing research projects, collecting data, and how to avoid common mistakes when doing a research project.

Chapter 3: Culture

This chapter will emphasize the comparison between the Chinese and American cultures. I will describe the cultural shock I had upon arrival to the United States and when traveling to other states within America. I will also discuss my efforts to "fit in" with the American culture. The emphasis in this chapter will be how I have assimilated into the American traditions as well as how immigrants' cultures have impacted American society.

Chapter 4: Socialization

This chapter will emphasize how new immigrants assimilate themselves into American society and how they have to recall or resocialize, once again, when going back to visit the country in which they were born and emigrated from. I will use personal experiences from my visits to China to describe the changes of values and norms in the Chinese society and how I had to readjust to unfamiliar situations in my home country. Socialization is not automatic; it is a lifelong process.

Chapter 5: Social Interaction

Learning a new culture involves interaction with other people. Most of the time, the interactions are different from society to society. This chapter will include why Chinese immigrants in America expect their children, while learning English as the language to survive, to also learn Chinese, and to

keep their Chinese culture. This chapter will also include information on how Chinese immigrants interact with their children to teach them about American and Chinese cultures.

Chapter 6: Deviant Behavior

Some deviant or abnormal behaviors can be considered universal, but some directly connect with each culture in different societies. Some cultures may identify certain behaviors as deviant. However, some other societies may feel that these behaviors are acceptable. This chapter will concentrate on the relative and universal nature of deviance.

Chapter 7: Social Stratification

Since I have experienced living in both socialist and capitalist societies, I am in a good position to compare the two systems. In this chapter, the social stratification systems in China and the United States are discussed. China's current social classes—the rich and poor—will be illustrated. I will also discuss my experiences with the structure of an equal pay system in China in the past. The comparison between the two countries will also display how the political and social stratification systems work for capitalism in the American society.

Chapter 8: Racial Group

This chapter will delve into how I came to learn about American racial issues in China before I came to America. I will also discuss how I view myself as part of a minority group in America as well as describe my personal experiences and thoughts about racial issues after years of residing in America.

Chapter 9: Sex and Gender

Different cultures as well as individuals have various degrees of understanding regarding the behavior of sex and gender, especially on the roles of males and females in their family and within society. This chapter will mainly discuss how sex and gender are viewed similarly and differently in both American and Chinese cultures.

Chapter 10: Family

Family is the basic unit of society. This chapter will emphasize the different viewpoints on the importance of family according to Chinese and

American values. I will share the findings from a comparison study I did, which focused on the attitudes of American and Chinese college students toward family care and living arrangements for their elderly parents in the future. A comparison of different family's socialization processes and expectations on younger generations will also be discussed.

Chapter 11: Religion

I will discuss the differences between Chinese and American societies, regarding the religious beliefs as well as the influence of Confucius and Christianity. Also, this chapter will document my experiences in learning religious beliefs within American society as well as my understanding of religious beliefs.

Chapter 12: Population

This chapter will discuss how the one-child policy in the past and the new policy of one family with two children influence Chinese families. This chapter will discuss how these policies impacted the sex ratio and the increase in the number of elderly people in China, and how the traditional family care values have been abandoned because of the difficulties of offering care, as a result of having only one child in the family. I will also explain the different social values on abortion in American and Chinese societies as well as my personal viewpoint on the topic.

Chapter 13: Social Change and Urbanization

This chapter will discuss social changes in both American and Chinese societies. Examples include my state of confusion upon arriving in the United States and when I first returned to China in 1992. It will also include how social changes have impacted my life. This chapter will also discuss some key points of modernization, such as urbanization.

PROLOGUE

When I was a little girl, sometimes in order to burn my energy, my mother would give me a small shovel and told me that I could dig a hole at the backyard. “So, what will happen if I dug a very deep hole in the ground?” This was usually my question. My mother always answered, “You would reach a beautiful country on the other side. This country is called the United States of America.” At that time, China and America were enemies. When I was young, I was always taught that the United States represented American imperialism. I never dreamed that in my life I would be able to step foot on this land. After the former President Nixon visited China in February of 1972, many Chinese people’s curiosity about America flourished at an unprecedented rate. Soon after that, many American tourists began to come to China to visit the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and other world famous tourist attractions.

Years later, as an English major in college, I did my co-op in the International Tourist Agency, Beijing Branch. One day, an American gentleman in a tour group, who fought in the Korean War, asked me to describe America from my perspective. I felt embarrassed because I really did not know much about the country. I remember I started my sentence with, “my mom told me that if I dug a hole . . .” and to my surprise, a lot of Americans in that tour group told me that they had heard the same story. I still remember when this group of American tourists left Beijing to go to Shanghai, many of them said, “Boni, please continue to dig as hard as you can. We will meet you on the other side of the hole.” At that moment I started to dream that someday I would visit America.

Three years later my dream came true. I became a graduate student at Iowa State University. Of course, I did not arrive through a hole; I flew to the United States instead. When I was looking down from the airplane to enjoy this beautiful land, I was full of joy. The day I came to the United States was May 31, 1986. I can still remember the night before I left home; my mother told me that after I received my Master’s degree, I should come back to China immediately. When I asked why, she said, “You are an unwed

girl, and you do not want to get a Ph.D.; it will be difficult for you to find an ideal husband with the same level of education.” I remember I raised my right hand and swore to her that I would be home after two years. Ultimately, I failed to keep my promise to my mother because I received a Ph.D., and I also decided to settle down in America permanently.

I have been living in the American society for about 30 years now and throughout this time I have experienced: culture shock, culture conflict, socialization, assimilation, and many learning processes. During my many years in this “melting pot,” I have changed my status from a graduate student to a professor and from a young girl to a wife. Furthermore, I have changed from a Chinese citizen to an American citizen and from a person in a majority group in China to a minority member in America. Recalling the experiences I have had in this country has allowed me to accumulate many different perceptions that I would like to share with everyone, including my family, friends, students, and anyone who is interested in gaining a multifaceted perspective of my two homelands.

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**EMIGRATING FROM CHINA
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Chapter 1

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES: THE GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SOCIETIES

Key words: sociology; founding fathers of sociology: August Comte, and Karl Marx; theory; theoretical perspectives; macro level; micro level; structural-functional perspective; social structure; social function; manifest functions; latent functions; social dysfunctions; social conflict perspective; symbolic interaction perspective; dramaturgical analysis

After finishing my four-year college degree, I was offered a position as a researcher at my alma mater. From this stemmed my role as a teacher in their English Department. At that time, most Chinese universities did not require a Master's degree or a Ph.D. in order to be qualified to teach college students. Regardless, I felt strongly that I needed more knowledge in order to fulfill my responsibilities as a teacher as well as a researcher. Thus, I began to study as an auditor in the Sociology Department at Beijing University, where I started my journey as a sociologist. I decided to study sociology because I wanted to learn sociological research methods for the purpose of enhancing my research ability. This was also the first time I learned the term **sociology**, which is defined as the logical study of human society and people's social activities, their interactions, and relationships with others.

The field of sociological studies started in the late nineteenth century introducing many brilliant minds that became known as the founding fathers of sociology. Widely regarded as the "father of sociology," **August Comte** (1798–1857) was the individual to coin the word "sociology" in the 1800s.

“Sociology” comes from the Latin and Greek words meaning companion and knowledge. August Comte was born and raised in southern France. He experienced rapid social changes in his time and became interested in studying society.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is considered another important founding father of sociology. After I entered graduate school in the United States, I was surprised to learn that Karl Marx was categorized as a sociologist by the Western world. I recognized the reason that Karl Marx was not widely known as a sociologist in China was because three to four decades ago, sociology was not taught in many universities. In China, Marx is known as a communist, and is widely considered to be a fighter for the proletarians. Due to this fact, he is very familiar to many Chinese people. He is acknowledged as a philosopher, political economist, political theorist, and a revolutionary. He is also credited as the primary founding father of socialism and communism. During Chinese holidays in the past, such as International Labor Day and National Day, giant portraits of him and three other people, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, would be displayed in Tiananmen Square, the center of Beijing, China. The portraits were no longer displayed there after 1989, because the Chinese government recognized that during holidays most countries in the world would only exhibit the portraits of their national heroes (see Fig. 1.1).

Sociology, known as the study of human interactions, emphasizes broad patterns and recurring events. When I say “broad patterns” I am talking about the study of social issues and problems that happen often at societal levels (a large scale). Sociology also studies small-scale patterns, such as groups with a few members, which will be discussed later in this chapter. One reason that sociologists study social issues is to help people see how their lives are connected to social changes in both their society and the world. This will open their mind to new ways of thinking and enables them to ask new questions about things people take for granted.

This can be illustrated by the following example. According to the statistics in 2014 (American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, 2014), the highest suicide rate was among those aged 85 years and older, which was 19.3 for every 100,000 people. Those between 45 and 64 years of age had the second highest suicide rate, which accounted for 19.2 out of every 100,000 people. Compared to the younger generations, especially adolescents and young adults aged 15–24, the suicide rate was 11.6 for every 100,000 people. The people who were 85 years of age maintained a much higher suicide rate. When comparing the suicides of older men with older women, we find that the number of suicides is increasing rapidly among the group of older men than it is with any other age groups (Nugent, 2012). These statistics indicate

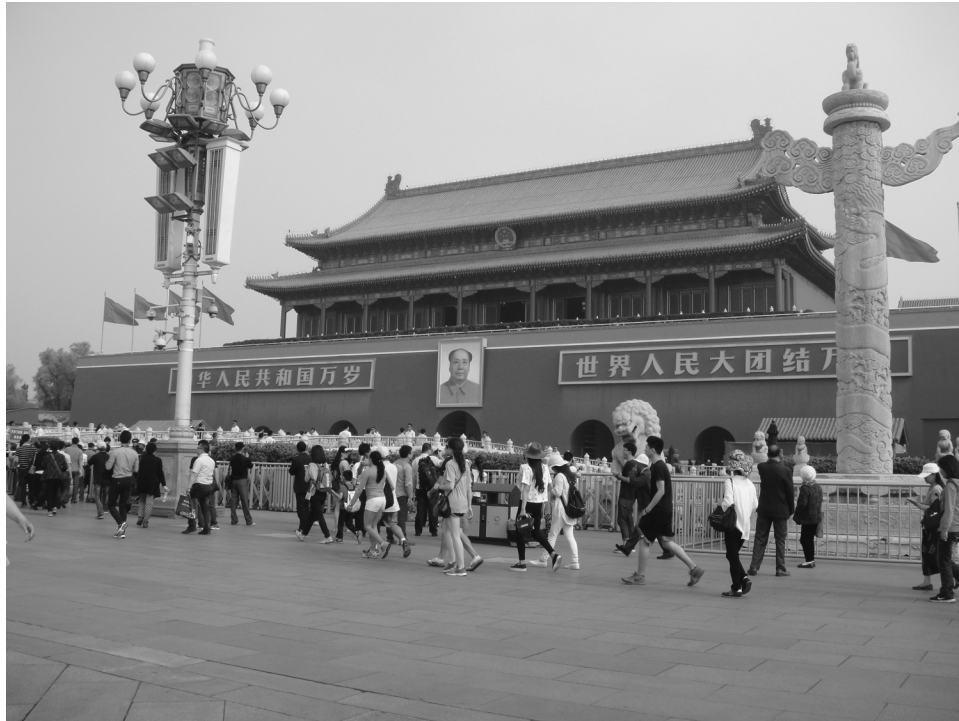


Figure 1.1. Beijing is the capital city of China, and is the 23rd largest city in the world with over 8.6 million people. Built in 1415, Tiananmen, which translates to “Gate of Heavenly Peace” is the center of Beijing as well as China. There are many special events that take place here such as the National Day parade and other political parades. The center photo above the entrance is of Mao Zedong, who is one of the founders of the People’s Republic of China. I was born and raised in Beijing, and have been to Tiananmen Square many times.

a general trend of suicide in contemporary American society, but it does not include a variety of individual cases or reasons.

The major factors in the suicides of those 65 and over include: depression, physical pain, multiple losses, downward social mobility, alcohol dependency issues, loss of a loved one, isolation, and/or loneliness, along with other possible reasons. However, learning about sociology will help people see different social situations and factors that affect society as a whole, rather than using a personal reason to explain a particular situation. It means that sociologists study many individuals as a group or on a larger scale. For instance, the older people feeling lonely can be categorized into two issues, social and individual. A social issue in this situation is the rapid technological advances; with this development older people are often left behind causing a strain on the social interaction between elderly people and the rest of