

**EMIGRATING FROM CHINA
TO THE UNITED STATES**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Boni Li is currently a professor of Sociology at Northern Kentucky University. She teaches classes on Sociology of Aging, Population, Medical Sociology, and Technology and Social Change. Born in China, she came to the U.S. for graduate school and obtained her Ph.D. from Iowa State University. Boni currently resides in Ohio. Her research and publications focus on issues including aging, middle-aged people's attitudes toward Social Security and Medicare reformation, and technology and social change. Due to her international background, she also studies cross-cultural comparisons on the above topics.

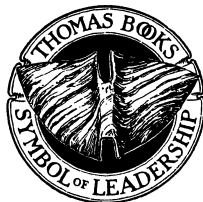
EMIGRATING FROM CHINA TO THE UNITED STATES

A Comparison of Different Social Experiences

By

YUSHI (BONI) LI, PH.D.

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



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265

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ISBN 978-0-398-07899-7 (hard)

ISBN 978-0-398-07900-0 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009025305

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*Printed in the United States of America
TS-R-3*

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Li, Yushi (Boni)

Emigrating from China to the United States : a comparison of different social
experiences / by Yushi (Boni) Li.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-398-07899-7 (hard) -- ISBN 978-0-398-07900-0 (pbk.)

1. United States--Social condition--1980- 2. China--Social condition--1976-
2000. 3. United States--Emigration and immigration. 4. China--Emigration
and immigration. I. Title.

HV59.2.L5 2010
304.873051--dc22

2009025305

PREFACE

This is a supplementary textbook. The fundamental purpose of the book is to facilitate students in associating the experiences in their individual daily lives with larger social forces. It will focus on my experiences living in the United States and China and how those events have influenced and impacted my social values, attitudes, and behavior. I will discuss how I have been and continue to be resocialized and influenced by American and Chinese societies.

I feel that the key challenge of teaching, specifically my introduction to sociology courses, involves finding methods to make the discipline relevant to students' lives and their understanding of our society. However, this is not an easy task because students, like many others, normally connect their own individual experiences with their personal understanding. Sociological issues which are considered to have close relationships with all individuals in society are sometimes thought to be unrelated or uninteresting by some students. This happens when certain examples are given. There may be different opinions among the students, they may not comprehend the whole scope of the situation, or it may be irrelevant to their lives. Therefore, encouraging each student's involvement in studying sociological perspectives is the primary goal. Throughout my years of teaching, I have found that students engage more when learning new views and ways of connecting to the world around them.

My cross-cultural international experiences have profound connections to sociological concepts and theories. I have many years of teaching experience in regards to Introduction to Sociology courses and have been drawing upon my social life experiences to engage students. 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 real lives with the 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 upon 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 necessary and important for younger American generations living in the twenty-first century and beyond.

According to Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* (1959), sociology permits individuals to see how their personal experiences and the changes within society are interrelated. Mills said that "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of the society can be understood without understanding both." The basic meaning 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 (1959:3-4) also said that people are:

seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know that this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kind 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 self and world.

Therefore, we need to understand that the time, society, and culture will always influence people's everyday lives. We also need to recognize that individuals' life experiences reflect impacts of social changes that have taken place on the macro level in any society. In addition, understanding sociological perspectives is crucial for all individuals when relating their lives with the changes in the world around them. Students will gain in-depth knowledge about the impacts of social changes not only affecting their lives but also on a larger scale, such as cultural and societal levels. The task of a sociology professor is to assist students to build a solid foundation to grow from in the future. The teaching materials included in this book will aid students to reach this objective.

In this book, the following chapters will be included:

Chapter 1: Sociological Theories

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

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter will incorporate interesting stories of my life as a researcher in both America and China. These stories will help students recognize the importance of doing a research project, collecting data, and avoiding common mistakes in research methodology.

Chapter 3: Culture

A comparison between Chinese and American cultures will be emphasized in this chapter. For instance, I will describe the cultural shock I felt upon arrival to the U.S. and when traveling to other states within the country. I will also discuss my efforts to "fit" into the American culture. The emphasis in this chapter will be on how I have assimilated into the American culture and how immigrants' cultures have impacted American culture.

Chapter 4: Socialization

Socialization is not automatic, but a lifelong process. This chapter will emphasize how new immigrants experienced the process of resocialization in American society, and how they have to resocialize again when going back to visit the country in which they were born and emigrated from. I will use personal experiences from nine visits to China to describe the changes of values and norms in Chinese society and how I had to adjust to unfamiliar situations in my home country.

Chapter 5: Society and 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 expect their children, while learning English, to learn Chinese as well. This chapter will also include information on how Chinese immigrants interact with their children to teach them about American and Chinese cultures.

Chapter 6: Deviance and Deviant Behavior

Some deviant behaviors can be considered universal, but some directly connect with the culture in different societies. Most immigrants have difficulty identifying certain behaviors as deviant. For example, in the country in which they were born, a behavior may not be considered deviant, but it is a deviant behavior in America and vice versa. 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 will be discussed. China's current social classes between the rich and poor, which I witnessed first hand, will be illustrated. I will also discuss my experiences with the structure of an equal pay system in China. The comparison between the two countries will also display how the political and social stratification systems work for capitalism in American society.

Chapter 8: Race and Ethnicity

This chapter will delve into how I came to learn about American racial issues in China before I came to America. I will describe how I view myself as part of a minority group and discuss my experience and considerations of racial issues after years of residing in the U.S.

Chapter 9: Sex and Gender

Different cultures have varying degrees of understandings regarding the behavior of sex and gender, especially on the roles of males and females in the family and within society. This chapter will mainly discuss how sex and gender are viewed similarly and differently in both American and Chinese cultures. This can be seen in the mass media, among ordinary people, and in the social values and norms on individuals' behavior based upon their sex.

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 focusing on the attitudes of 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 and the influence of Confucius versus Christianity. Also, this chapter will document my experiences learning religious beliefs in American society. I had no religious beliefs due to the way I was raised in a specific historical context in China.

Chapter 12: Population

This chapter will discuss how the Family Planning Policy influences Chinese families, the sex ratio, and the increase in the number of elderly people in China. This chapter will discuss how the traditional family care values have been abandoned due to the difficulties of offering care by having only one child in the family. I will also explain the different social values on abortion in American and Chinese societies and my changing personal viewpoint on abortion.

Chapter 13: Social Change and Urbanization

This chapter will discuss social change in both the American and Chinese societies. One example includes my state of confusion upon arriving in the U.S. and when I first returned to China in 1992. It will also include how social change has impacted my life. This chapter will discuss some key points of modernization, such as urbanization and education.

Y.L.

PROLOGUE

When I was a little girl, my mom told me that if I dug a very deep hole, on the other side I would reach a beautiful country. 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 U.S.A. stood for American imperialism. I never dreamt that in my life I would be able to step foot on this land. After the former President Richard Nixon visited China in February 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. It was a coincidence that an American gentleman 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 told me that they had heard the same story from their moms about how to dig a hole to China. 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 dig 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 confidence and joy. The day I came to the United States was May 31, 1986. I will never forget

that day because that is when I began a new and different life. I can still remember the night before I left home; my mom 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. degree. 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 mom 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 twenty-three years now, and throughout this time I have experienced culture shock, culture conflict, socialization, and many learning processes. During my twenty-three 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 in America. Recalling the experiences I have had in this country has allowed me to accumulate many different aspects 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.

Y.L.

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Chapter 1

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES: THE GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SOCIETIES

Key words: sociology; founding fathers of sociology; August Comte, 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; and dramaturgical analysis

After I finished my four-year college degree I was offered a position as a researcher at my alma mater, and began to teach in the English Department. Even though, at that time, most Chinese universities did not require a Masters degree or a Ph.D. in order to be qualified to teach college students, I strongly felt that I needed more knowledge in order to be a good professor and researcher. I began to study as an auditor in the Sociology Department at Beijing University, where I started my journey as a sociologist. The reason I decided to study the subject of sociology was 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.

Sociology has many founding fathers. One of the founding fathers of sociology is *August Comte*, who created the word "sociology" in the 1800s from the Latin and Greek words meaning companion and

knowledge. August Comte was born and raised in southern France. He experienced rapid social change in his time and became interested in studying society. August Comte is widely regarded as the “father of sociology.”

Another founding father of sociology is **Karl Marx**, who is well known in China. He is not famous because he was a sociologist, but because of his ideology of socialist and communist theories upon which China established a socialist society. The reason Karl Marx was not widely known as a sociologist was because two decades ago, sociology was not taught in many universities in China. After I entered graduate school in the United States, I was surprised to learn that Marx was categorized as a sociologist in the Western world. In China, Marx is known as a communist, and he is widely considered to be a fighter for the proletarians. Due to this fact, he is very familiar to most Chinese people. He is acknowledged as a philosopher, political economist, political theorist, and revolutionary. He is also credited as the primary founding father of socialism and communism, and his picture is found in many Chinese books. A giant portrait of him is displayed in Tiananmen Square, which is the center of Beijing and China.

Sociology, known as the study of human interactions, emphasizes broad patterns and recurring events. “Broad patterns” refers to the study of social issues and problems that happen frequently at societal levels or on 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 why sociologists study social issues is to help people see how their lives are connected to social changes in both the world and society. This will enable them to ask some new questions about things people take for granted.

In our real life, the overall suicide rate for those sixty-five and over in American society has always been the highest. It is more than 50 percent higher than young people or the nation as a whole (McIntosh, 2009). The seniors are 12.25 percent of the total American population, but account for over 18 percent of all suicides (Caruso, 2009). Comparing the suicide of older men with older women, older men have more attempts and are more often successful in their attempts than older women. (Hillier & Barrow, 1999). The above indicates a general trend of elderly people who committed suicide in contemporary American society. It does not include a variety of individual cases or reasons.

After hearing this statistic, a student might say that she knows of an older woman who committed suicide due to poor health and pain in her body. Another student may say that he knows of an older man who committed suicide because of loneliness. These are specific reasons why different people commit suicide. The general major factors in the suicides of those sixty-five and over include depression, physical pain, multiple losses, downward social mobility, alcoholism, loss of a loved one, isolation, or loneliness, along with other possible reasons.

Learning about sociology will help people see the social situation and factors that affect society as a whole, rather than understanding a particular personal situation. It means that sociologists study many individuals as a group or on a larger scale. For example, the feelings of loneliness experienced by elderly people can be categorized into two issues, social and individual. Due to rapid technological advancement, aging people are often left behind. The social interaction between them and the rest of the society is becoming less active. Therefore, matters like technological change have become a social issue, although it may become a specific seniors' problem as well. These problems not only affect the older people as a particular group, but are concerns that influence society as a whole.

Sociologists also attach themselves to the unfamiliar to show that things are not always what they seem. There are many situations that we take for granted in our everyday life, but may truly represent some serious social issues. For example, the words "policemen" or "congressmen" are normally used by people without thinking that there are many "policewomen" and "congresswomen." This happens because the United States is a patriarchal society, which means that it is male-dominated. It is true that within the American political system, most of the senators and house representatives are males.

The question can then be raised: Why are there more males than females in American political power? To answer this question certain issues need to be addressed, such as the late arrival of women's voting rights and the social values and expectations placed on females in American society. A few years ago I drove through my neighborhood and I saw an orange-colored sign that said "men working." I had to take a detour to get to work. As soon as I walked into class I told my students what I had seen on the way.