



*Floating Willow  
Flowers*

( A Translation of the Chinese Version )

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For my extended family.



Renxin Yang is Professor of Sociology, teaching since 1996 at the Department of Sociology/Anthropology of Northern Michigan University. Her publications in recent years include the following trilogy of Chinese/English poetry collection:

I. <<The Floating Willow Flowers>>

II.<<The Native Spirit>>

III.<<Light & Shadows: Conversation of the Soul>>

As poetic languages relate sociality, reflexivity, and creativity, Volumes II & III of the above consist of largely sociological poems, using poetic language to contemplate sociological phenomena, an effort to integrate sociology and poetry in today's social environment.

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## PREFACE

Decades rushed by. All of a sudden, I seem to have just realized that over half a century had passed since the moment my mother gave birth to me. My parents had six children, five girls and one boy. We all started school at age five, earlier than most other kids of the time, as my parents believed in that particularly girls need to have a good education, so we would become independent when we grow up.

Ever since when I entered the first grade in school at age five, I have rarely been out of school. From being a student to becoming a teacher, and from China to America, books have been inseparable from my work and life. Consequently, the ability to see is the most essential in my life journey.

One summer evening in 2009, I accidentally noticed a tiny “mosquito” flying back and forth in front of my eye. I carefully centered its position between my left and right palms, then slapped hard to get rid of it. But I failed. I tried a few more times and it did not work. It was still alive and kept flying in front of my eye. So I gave up and let it be. “This mosquito is too cunning,” so I thought.

The next morning, as soon as I opened my eyes, I saw a fine dark line flashing back and forth in front of my eye. It was not the “mosquito” I noticed last night. It was my eye: something wrong with my eye! I felt a strong sense of insecurity and fear at that moment. I wasted no time and went to see the doctor. The result was that, as the eye doctor said, there were floaters in my

eye. It comes with aging, and I should not be too concerned. Even though the doctor said I should learn to just live with the biological changes in my eye, I felt difficult to accept the floaters flying back and forth in my eyes. The used-to-be-crystal-clear eyes that would not tolerate any “foreign body” now constantly saw dancing black shadows. This made me feel helpless: you are aging; you are getting old, and walking closer to darkness now! I was afraid that the floaters in my eye would grow more and more, and eventually I could become blind. What a terrible situation should one be in to lose eyesight and live in darkness!

Feeling helpless, I had to accept the reality. Gradually I have adjusted to living in peace with the floaters. “Treat them as friends,” as my eye doctor once advised.

Obviously, my life has entered a different stage. Over the past half century, I have lived through all seasons, windy, rainy, snowy cold days among sunshine days. Many memories are deposited in my life’s journey, like islands standing out in the ocean of the mind. Before “dementia” strikes, and before reaching the final destination, I figured I need to write down those memories, for the next generation, including my own kids, and it might be beneficial for some other fellow human beings who might be interested in my life stories.

The Chinese version of “Floating Willow Flowers” was first published by North Eastern University Press in China in 2011. In today’s social environment, I believe it is worthwhile to translate this book into English, to share this collection of memories and stories with those who do not read Chinese.

In translating this collection, I am grateful for the late pianist Mrs. Nancy Railey, and Dr. Constance Ann Arnold. They read

my drafts and gave good suggestions. I am also grateful for Dr. Michael Loukinen, who gave me valuable advice in the process of completing this project. Thanks to other friends as well who understood me and my writing, and were helpful in bringing this English version “Floating Willow Flowers” to its publication.

Renxin Yang

August, 2023

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## Part I



### Home. Family. Friends

### 1. The Endless Wandering

Love gives birth to love... or else?  
Hatred gives birth to hatred... or else?  
From generation to generation  
endless transmission...

Wandering rootless flows non-stopping  
in the river of haunting thoughts,  
no specific time & space.

The polluted clouds are thickening & confusing;  
the fog thickening mystifying.  
In the world of fluid quantum interaction,  
how do you tell who's who?

Will the dust settle someday?  
When that happens, you and I, grey haired,  
may get together, have a cup of (green) tea  
& talk it over.

## 2. Home

The old home, all that is about you--  
feelings & thoughts,  
painful or else...

A shadow never goes away,  
in the fabric covering my body,  
in the music soaking my brain,  
in the food nourishing my being,  
...thickening or thinning,  
melting sustainably  
in my blood stream.

Nothing can get rid of you,  
lingering day & night  
in the heart.

2009 12

## 3. Tears

Tears come with birth,  
as a spring fountain.  
They seem no longer flowing  
when life enters the fall season.

Back then, as a child,  
whenever feeling helpless, sadly wronged,  
or happily surprised...  
your tears would rush out freely, unrestrained,  
down the cheeks, completing their inherent paths.

Growing up, the adult world seems governed  
by intellect & reason.  
Do you remember how many times have they happened:  
even if outrageously wronged, hurt/wounded, trapped  
in despair...many a time tears wanted to burst,  
few times did you let yourself really cry?

Squeezed by age, after years of exhaustion,  
your tears have evaporated through reason, & mutated.

Now, in the autumn season of your life,  
what's left flowing is no longer tears,  
but thick blood.

2009 11 28



#### 4. Oh Mother!

Mother's health was rapidly declining in her last days. I went back to visit family in winter 2004, stayed with Mother for over three weeks, then had to come back to school. Not long after Winter 2005 semester started, Mother passed away. I couldn't be at the funeral, not until school ended in May to fly back...

I've been trying to avoid this topic, too heavy,  
too heavy, & just too heavy for me  
to lift the pen.

But today is Mother's Day again!  
A special day, a tribute for all mothers in the world.

On this special day, Mother, I could  
no longer hold it in any longer...

Five years ago, that winter,  
it was January in that winter, &  
it was in the middle of that January, I was told that  
Mother was gravely ill.

Putting down everything here, immediately  
I booked a ticket & flew back home.  
Before I could help with Mother, however,  
flu struck me down, a combination of extreme anxiety,  
stress, fatigue, plus jet lag.

Around midnight, high fever, dazing

on the temporary bed in the living room,  
suddenly an icy cold hand on my forehead—  
it was Mother's hand,  
her old, bony wrinkled hand gently  
stroking my forehead.

Oh Mother!  
You had been ill for so long,  
couldn't eat as you used to,  
hematopoietic function impaired, severe ischemia...  
unable to maintain normal body temperature.

You were too weak to stand or sit by yourself,  
& dependent on Father & Sister's help  
to get on & off the bed.

But this time, Mother, how could you manage  
to get up, even without turning on the light  
(so as not to wake up Father & Sister), &  
how long did you grope & struggle in the dark  
& finally got off the bed!  
Holding by the edge of the furniture,  
little by little one step at a time,  
you moved out of the bedroom, came to my bedside,  
& put your hand--the hand toiled for a lifetime  
raising six children--  
on your daughter's hot forehead.

Impulsively, I wanted to flip up to hold you &  
help you to get back to bed & rest.  
But I didn't. Not sure why. Perhaps,  
I didn't want to interrupt this moment.

Crying inside, I kept my eyes closed tightly,  
holding back the tears.

Motionless, as if fast asleep,  
I just let your old hand gently stroking  
the face, the hair, the forehead of your daughter,  
who just flew back to you  
from the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

With your cold fingers, your deep love slowly,  
slowly, injected into  
your daughter's heart...

Oh Mother!  
Today is Mother's Day! Also it was  
Father's anniversary of departure.  
Your daughter is kneeling on the floor,  
bowing to you: we're all right.  
Please do not worry about your children.  
May you and Father rest in peace  
in Heaven!

2010 5

## 5. Oh Mother! (II)

Just a few days after Mother left us, Father, broken-hearted and in extreme pain and sorrow, found in the bedside drawer, a sewing box Mother had prepared for him, inside there were seven threaded needles.

On a small piece of dark colored fabric,  
tied in a row seven needles, threaded, of different colors;  
together with scissors, thread roll, button bag,  
lying ordered in the sewing box.  
The sewing box was in the drawer by the bedside,  
within an arm's reach.

Oh Mother!  
In your last days, concerned that  
no one was left there to take care of Father!  
You threaded the seven needles, in case  
a button got loose, or lost from his shirts,  
Father could by himself easily fix it.

But, Mother,  
your eyesight had become blurry in the earlier years,  
& you often asked the kids for help  
when you had trouble threading needles.

How come in your last days,  
physically so extremely weak, & with blurred eyesight,  
you could complete threading the needles;

it must have been an insurmountable job!

It is hard to imagine, Mother,  
when you threaded through those tiny needle holes,  
how much time passed, with clinging pain,  
& profound love.

...

Over the years, Father's clothing had been mostly  
made by yourself, as he was tall & big, often  
difficult to find the right size on the market.

Oh Mother!

In the 1940s, you were a young student, so pure, beautiful,  
intelligent, & kindred-spirited;  
& Father, an idealistic handsome young man,  
multitalented, & a virtuous character known in the local area.  
You found in each other the One!

From the endless wars in the Republic era, to  
the never-stopping "movements" in the People's Republic...

Weathered sixty years of rugged rains & storms,  
you stuck with Father,  
shared one soul & heart.

Mother, do you know what happened after you left?  
Ninety-year old Father,  
broken-hearted, seemed to have lost his soul!

Once a strong & courageous man, who had bravely

fought many battles in life, now soaked in tears of sorrow,  
deep in the sea of sadness.

Soon after, less than a year after your departure,  
Father left us forever:  
he chose to join you.

Also, Mother,  
the seven threaded needles you prepared for Father,  
were never touched.

Today is May 20, Mother's Day,  
& the anniversary of Father's Departure.  
I'm missing you again, so  
I wrote down these words,  
for you, & for Father.

2010 5