Chapter 5

Discovering the Life Stories of Modern Hakka Mothers in a Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the life stories of Hakka mothers by a systematic approach in a classroom. In order to grasp a vivid portrait of the so-called “Hakka Mother”, a series of courses that allow every student to revisit the life stories of mothers are proposed. This investigation explores the life stories in two different scopes: the food habit and dressing style. Throughout the dialogues among children and mothers, the life stories embedded in those two scopes have been discovered and the parent-child relationship of each family has been revealed. The results are archived on a social network platform called Ning which enables the Web 2.0 interactions and sharing processes among different users at different platforms such as Facebook and Youtube. This feature enhances the understanding of the cultural aspect of Hakka mothers and invites more people to care about the life story and to contribute their own stories in a similar manner on the social networks.

INTRODUCTION

Telling the stories of our lives has drawn much attention in many academic circles in recent years. Life stories told from generation to generation carried invaluable legends and transmitted virtues of personality. Psychologists evaluate the importance of personal narratives for the life-story model of identity (McAdams, 1993). Anthropologists also capture the cultural similarities and variations by every individual case study of life history (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Sociologists explore life stories to understand social relationships, group interactions and associated memberships (Linde, 1993). Historians also find that using the life story approach, the narrative materials can provide a convincing
source of local history (Allen & Montell, 1981). A life story is the story that a person (interviewee) wants to tell about the life he or she has lived and is usually extracted from a guided interview by another (interviewer). The basic elements of a life story contain some important events, highlighted experiences and emotional impacts or feelings of a lifetime. Through a proper arrangement of the life story interview, it always helps to realize the past and the present of the interviewee more subjectively and possibly to find a way to setup a personal legacy for the future.

McAdams (2008) proposes six common principles for the personal narratives of life stories as follows. (1) The self is storied. This means the self is both the storyteller and the stories that are told. The self encompasses a subjective storytelling “I” whose stories about personal experience become part and parcel of a storied “me” (2) The stories integrate lives. Psychologically speaking, life stories may provide synchronic and diachronic ways of integration of lives. The stories show how the individual person encompasses so many things at the same time (synchronic way) and encounters things step by step, for example, from an impoverished childhood to his or her current state of affluence (diachronic way). (3) The stories are told in social relationship. It is a simple but profound truth that any life storytelling may vary from who their audiences are and what their audiences want to hear. That is, people narrate personal events in different ways for different listeners, and they may switch back and forth between different modes of telling. (4) The stories change over time. This principle is an interesting consequence of the change of people’s motivations, goals, concerns and social positions. (5) The stories are cultural texts. Every life story shares and represents a considerable degree of cultural knowledge about the life course. (6) Some stories are better than others. This can be evaluated as relatively good or bad from a psychological viewpoint through a process of story reformulation and repair.

Basing upon McAdams’s six principles for the personal narratives of life stories, in the present study, we would like to investigate the life stories of Hakka mothers in order to enrich our understanding of Hakka culture or so-called Hakka image. There’re numerous studies focusing on the essence or characters of Hakka people and associate interracial/intercultural behaviors in Taiwan. One of the most challenging topics is how to construct or reconstruct a common image or identity of Hakka people from different viewpoints. Wang (2005a) has investigated some popular Hakka images from respondents of different ages and ethnic groups in fifteen Hakka villages in Hsinchu County and Miaoli County. The results showed that the majority of Hakka images such as their virtues and food habits are coincident among those respondents. However, from the analysis results, it also reveals some subtle changes of Hakka image from different ages and backgrounds. Basing upon the detailed ethnic text analysis of several Hakka broadcasting shows, Lin (2003) explored the image of Hakka according to the hypertexts extracting from the call-in programs. The total duration of the shows is about eighty hours and that accumulates a great amount of information. His analysis results show that there is a significant ethnic group boundary of Hakka people from a global point of view. The results also reveal a cultural representation of Hakka in a convincing way. More importantly, in those two-way call-in processes for every broadcasting show, the image of Hakka is not totally stationary, but some interesting part of it such as the scope of “Taiwan Hakka” evolves in a dynamical manner.

One the other hand, the significance of Hakka female on shaping the image of Hakka has drawn much attention in the recent years. Wang (2005b) discussed the variations of the ethnic group boundary on those intermarriage Hakka mothers between Hakka and Min-nan. The results showed that the collective memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998) and ethnic identity (Lim & Hsiao, 2009) of Hakka
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