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EAP II

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## A Corridor Without Windows

When many people come across articles related to culture, the first things that come to mind are art and culture, religion or various traditional cultures. But it's not like that for me. As I mentioned in my previous assignment, for me, culture is not merely a term that sounds complicated; It is more like a way of life, formed by specific geographical and cultural histories. Before sharing my own story, I'd like to first talk about two authors who have had a significant influence on me. After reading their articles, I finally understood more clearly where many of the emotions I had experienced in the past came from. In "A Meal of Solitude for Restless Hearts", the South Korean writer Jeon Sung-tae wrote that the male protagonist felt suffocated under academic pressure when he was a child and just wanted to leave his original learning environment. And in the temple, he came to understand the truths of life. Another author, Magnolia Yang Sao Yia, in What Is Hmong Dance? It is mentioned that dancing has reconnected her with culture and has also become the driving force that keeps her going. It was through reading about their experiences that I began to reorganize my emotions and realize what role culture had played in my growth and what I had learned.

## Grade 12 – Class 26

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
5:00–5:20	Morning Exercise	Flag Ceremony	Running	Running	English	English
5:20–6:00	Morning Exercise	Flag	English	Running	English	English
7:30–8:10	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	English	English	Chinese
8:15–8:55	Geography	Geography	Politics	English	English	Math
9:00–9:40	Geography	Geography	History	Chinese	Geography	Geography
10:00–10:00	Morning Exercise	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
10:00–18:30	English	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
13:30–13:50	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study
14:00–15:00	Chinese	English	English	English	English	Chinese
15:30–16:00	Afternoon Exercise	Afternoon Exercise	Afternoon Exercise	Period 8	Brining Class 1	Evening Class 3
16:00–17:30	Periods	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
17:30–18:00	Evening Class 1	Dinner	Dinner	Evening Class 1	Dinner	Dinner
18:30–20:00	Politics	Chinese	Chinese	Math	Chinese	Politics
20:10–21:40	Chinese	Chinese	History	Math	History	History
21:50–23:20	Evening Class 3	English	Geography	Math	Politics	Chinese
23:30–23:50	Self-study	English	Math	Math	English	Chinese
23:30–23:50	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study	Self-study

(This is a curriculum schedule of a Chinese high school)

In China, some farmers do not eat beef because for them, cattle are not only wild beasts but also members of the family. Some fishermen do not allow children to flip the fish on the plates at the dining table because they believe that when people are eating, the fish god is watching, so there should be no offense. A variety of cultural and historical elements have also merged together, forming a Chinese-style education that may be unique in the world. Many people ask what Chinese-style education is. In fact, the most crucial point is that the words of teachers and parents must be carried out as if they were orders. Grades are always the most important. Under

the influence of this culture, it brought a bit of pain to my junior high school life. But when I left that environment, my feelings were very complicated. Maybe it was relief, maybe it was excitement.

When it comes to my middle school life, it was like a long corridor without Windows. Every step I took was extremely cautious, fearing to fall. At all times, I was thinking about when I could reach the end of the corridor and see the sunlight. Now, it seems as if I have walked through the corridor, seen the sunlight and looked back on those days. At that time, I had to go to school at seven every morning. If the time for breakfast is included, I basically have to get up at 6 a.m., and in winter, it's still dark at this time. The only break time is a 10-minute break between classes, followed by a 1-hour and 30-minute nap and a 45-minute dinner break. We need to stay at school until 10 p.m. Since the first grade of junior high school, everyone has been preparing for the high school entrance examination. At that time, I was very sleepy every day and could always find time to sleep during class. But we have no choice. Our teachers and parents have told us over and over again, "Only learning is the most important." If you don't study hard, you won't have a bright future. Even on the blackboard of the classroom wall, the words "Race against Time" are always written, as if they were invisible shackles. Sometimes I wonder if, in a certain sense, this can be regarded as a kind of brainwashing for children.



I remember it was a certain winter. On a cold winter morning, I walked into the classroom. Before dawn, the teaching building of the school was already filled with the voices of students reading. Teachers all like to have the whole class read the text aloud together before class to wake them up. Some strict teachers even ask everyone to stand while reading the text. I was sitting in my seat. Looking up, I saw the blackboard filled with notes. Looking down, I saw the drawer piled high with exercise books. At this moment, the sky outside the window was pitch black. I lay on the table, lost in thought. I don't want to join the ranks of those reading the text aloud. Lying on the table, I was thinking about when I could graduate and leave here. At this moment, it seemed that I had the same thoughts as the protagonist in Jeon Sung-tae's essay "A Lonely Meal with an Restless Heart". In his book, he wrote: "Under the confusion of my teenage years and the pressure of the college entrance examination, I chose to board at Deshan Temple instead of going home or staying at school for extra classes." However, the protagonist in the

article eventually found a way to relax himself and also discovered the meaning of life. I also want to leave, but I have no choice. Even like most students, I attend tutorial classes on weekends, even those who are at the top of the class. I can only spend long days at school day after day. I think if I had read this article at that time, I would have envied him.

Many times I wonder how I managed to persist through the three years of middle school back then? It seems I don't know either, but if there really has to be a reason, it might be the expectations of my parents. Magnolia Yang Sao Yia writes in *What is Hmong Dance?*: "All I remember is... dance. Dance was the only thing that kept me going... And the only tangible memory that allowed me to transport back into feelings" (Yang Sao Yia 00:00:18-00:00:33). Just as she said, dancing is the only thing she persists in. For me, my parents' expectations are the only thing I persist in. In my opinion, we are very similar. My parents often tell me that good grades will bring a bright future, or they talk about how difficult it is for them to make money and what they expect of me. All these words are like a heavy burden to me, pinning high hopes on me. And these heavy burdens are like heavy luggage, weighing people down and leaving them unable to escape or catch their breath. So even if my grades are not good, I can't give up. Maybe I just don't dare to. They always placed their expectations on me, and these expectations became a burden that I couldn't let go of at that time. I still remember when I was chatting with a friend, he told me, "I don't want to study." I'm so tired. I smiled at that time, but my thoughts were the same. However, we dare not say these words to our parents. At least in China, such an educational culture has been implemented for too many years. Once the majority of people believe that this kind of education is effective, it will never stop.



Of course, after three years of high school life, I graduated smoothly and came to the United States in high school. When I actually left the scene, my first reaction was: "What a free and easy life!" So relaxed, sometimes I even miss the tense life at that time. It; it's not just because I miss The Times when I could still find time to read novels and play with friends in such a tense study atmosphere, but even the days when I was caught sleeping in class by the teacher and made to stand as punishment. Besides, if I think carefully, I have really learned some very solid knowledge. This kind of strict education can shape a student like me, who has poor academic performance, into someone with a solid foundation in mathematics. Therefore, when I came to high schools and universities in the United States to study mathematics, I didn't find it very difficult. Sometimes I also think that this might be an advantage of Chinese-style education. So it seems really hard to say whether a certain culture is good or bad. Many things have two sides.

Although everything has two sides, I still feel that I have lost a lot of things that I can never make up for the rest of my life. Perhaps it's because childhood days slipped away

imunconsciously, or perhaps it's the regret of having tutorial classes every week on weekends and holidays, or maybe it's because I didn't visit an amusement park many times at the age when I most yearned for it. It seems that during these three years, I haven't truly experienced any particularly happy days that left a deep impression on me. So when I saw that the protagonist, Jeon Sung-tae, who had the same idea as me, found a place to temporarily escape from school, I was both envious and happy for him.

Classrooms in the United States are quite different from those in China. Students can completely refute their teachers' viewpoints, while in China, students never argue with their teachers. Does this also mean that education can be diverse and inclusive rather than mechanical training for students? Chinese education prefers to cultivate students through heavy practice exercises and homework as well as frequent exams. Even 99% of schools like to rank students' scores in each exam for the entire grade, claiming that only by seeing one's lagging ranking can one strive to improve. It seems that I have also realized that a student with poor grades doesn't

mean he is a bad person. Grades cannot be linked to human nature, at least not 100%.



This story basically ran through half of my childhood. It was also the influence of Chinese education and culture on me. It's hard to say that it was a completely painful period, but at least there were still some moments worth remembering. But at that time, this culture was undoubtedly a heavy burden to me, as heavy as a piece of luggage on my shoulder, crushing most of my childhood and making it impossible for me to hold my head up high. But it has also shaped my perhaps unique personality. The educational culture of China brought me a lot of pressure and tears in my childhood, but it also gave me unique strength for the future. So it is hard for us to say whether culture is high or low, thick or thin, good or bad. These are all different feelings of each person. And I realized that this was the meaning of growing up in pain. The pain of growing up is like the struggle of a butterfly breaking out of its cocoon, the confusion during transformation, and also the inevitable path of self-reconstruction.

## Work Cited

Jeon, Sungtae. *A Meal Of Solitude for a Restless Hearts.*

Yang Sao Tia, Magnolia. *What is Hmong Dance? (00:00:18-00:00:33)*