My Last Interview with James March

Peter Ping Li

The Setting for the Last Interview

On the morning of February 20, 2016, I interviewed James March ("Jim" hereafter) at a nursing home in Northern California, not far from Stanford University, where Jim and his wife were living.

Jim and I started with a brief talk about the diversity of the staff at the nursing home, in California as compared to the Mid-Western states of Iowa and Wisconsin, and the U.S. as a whole about the effect of immigration. I also shared my experience of talking to some American tourists in Hangzhou and Shanghai. Then, Jim told me his experience in Nepal when he and his wife visited their daughter working as an anthropologist there. In both cases, foreigners were regarded as total strangers by the locals with intense curiosity.

Jim's story about Nepal reminded me of my long-term wish to visit Tibet, also Mongolia and Xinjiang, and the rest of Western regions of China. In particular, I mentioned the TV documentary about the Silk Road. Jim expressed a strong interest in watching the TV documentary, but I could only find one episode in that TV series with English subtitle, which was the version made by the Japanese crew with much more content (90 minutes) than the Chinese version (45 minutes). I also told Jim that there were two TV series about the Silk Road, one in 1980s, and one around 2000 with the title of "New Silk Road". I told Jim that the Western regions in China were more culturally diverse than the Eastern regions in China. Later, I sent the link to the episode to Jim, and he told me that he watched it with strong interest.

The Substantial Discussion

After the initial casual talk, I formally started the interview based upon the interview questions I sent to Jim earlier.

Peter: Maybe we start with some of the questions about what you consider the more important, and more interesting part related to China. In your MOR 2005 article, you referred to the peripheral position of the indigenous communities relative to the mainstream community. Do you think the Chinese community is like that?

James: I don't think we design that; they just develop. So far as possible, we would like to maintain some diversity. The ideology of research is international and sharing, but the risk is that you converge too completely and too fast. So how do you keep it from converging too rapidly and too completely? National and other communities being separate is our way to maintain diversity. It is a complicated problem because, from the point of the view of the separate community, that is not advantageous; they will be more advantageous if they converge with the dominant view; from the point of the view of the total community, there is an advantage having diversity. One of the ways to maintain that diversity in our present world situation is being national with a combination of separate cultures, separate languages, and some kind of local enthusiasm. Whether maintaining the optimum diversity is a much more complicated question, but a completely convergent is not optimum, so you need some diversity.

Peter: Is this analogous to the argument that if you don't maintain exploration, then there is a tendency that the community will convert into exploitation.

James: It can be framed as exploitation-exploration issue. And that issue arises in all places, and in all places that I know, we have no optimum solution to it. We don't know what the best mix is, but we know that is not the extremes. Diverse totally is not what you really want to be, but how much diversity you want is very complicated. Some parts are very simple. The longer you look ahead, the more you want diversity; the shorter your time perspective, the less you want diversity; that is fought over and over again. And some areas we have theorems that show that is true. The one I know best is the *two-armed bandit world*.

That is a set of problems that can be characterized as like going to a casino and confronting a whole array of slot machines. You know these slot machines have different payoffs. But you don't know which one is the best, so you start experimenting. What is your search rule? After a while, you have found one that appears to be the best. And obviously, you will do well by repeating that rule. But when you repeat that one, you don't search for any other ones. If you search for another one, you do less well in the short run, but you might do better in the long run. We don't have any real solution to that problem. We do not know how to determine the optimum outcome.

Peter: So, I think we need diversity, at least some diversity in the situation where there is a dominant culture, like the United States. We need some room for other cultures to co-exist, just for the purpose of counterbalance.

James: That is not quite yet. They co-exist as the experiment for the way you want to go, so you maintain the diversity as a short-run strategy, and you are going to converge into something. You are using the diversity to experiment to see what looks good. When you move to whatever looks good, the risk is that you will lose the diversity when you do that.

Peter: So, diversity is more related to novelty and experimentation for exploration.

James: Right, within the theorem, that is diversity all about. In that sense, not permanent diversity. Permanent diversity does not permit any imitation.

Peter: So, this is just like a swinging pendulum. Once you find an effective solution, you converge to that; but you have to keep room for diversity, so you can try other alternatives; if you find a better alternative, you still have room for other experiments, so you can have continued progress and advance.

James: That's the genius of the American culture. New cultures are coming in and they provide diversity, but they merge. The Irish culture has now almost entirely merged into the standard American culture; you don't really have Irish communities anymore. And when they first came, the Irish communities were everywhere.

Peter: So, in this sense, there is always this kind of open policy towards immigration, so the new immigrants always bring cultural diversity. No other country can afford to have this kind of policy, for example, Japan. They are way too crowded. Even if they want to, probably they don't want to open too much. So they will have very few new bloods.

James: They exercise exploitation, which is the standard description of the Japanese. The Japanese industry is very strong in improving things, but not very strong in bringing novelties.

Peter: If they want to have more novelty, they probably have to work with countries like the United States. What about Europe now? Some people worry about the European community in the sense that they have passive immigration policies, no longer well-managed. Many European countries worry about that, such as Sweden, Denmark, and Germany. They all worry about this new flood of immigrants.

James: Yes, they worry a lot. I have not really thought about the European situation. Europe has a long history of antagonism. You know French and German have lived together and certainly mingled on the borders, but they have kept fighting the wars regularly. Europe is a history of wars, a little like China. That makes it harder for the kind of immigration that you need for the positive role of diversity.

Peter: Right. My experience in Denmark shows that Danes have a strong community, just like a tribe. They cannot integrate the Arab immigration community who came in 1960s as immigrant workers. So, Danes always have some reservation about the immigrants from the Arab countries, different from the Swedish who remain more open to the Arab immigrants. However, foreign students and Danish students can mix rather well.

James: The American strategy is to integrate, but with open borders, so you have a continuous flow of immigrants who provide diversity for one or two generations, and then it is lost, but by that time somebody else is immigrating. That's sort of the American history, not because it was planned that way or everybody was in its favor, but just the way it happened.

Peter: Interesting! There are two patterns: the European pattern and the American pattern. It seems to me that the American pattern fits more with your argument whenever they need to converge, they converge. There is always some room for diversity because they open the border. In the European pattern, they have immigrants, but they don't get integrated, so the convergence is limited, and so the diversity is still there, but there is no benefit over that diversity.

James: I think that is a good story, and maybe a very sensible story, as always too simple for a complicated story; it would be much more to it with many different things going on. So, I am always nervous. I like the exploration-exploitation framework, and I think it is a very good one. I think it gives you first approach to what's happening. When you get closer to it, it turns out that it is not as nearly as it appears. Some groups do not integrate as well as others, and the border opens and closes. The American story is to generally open the border to people who don't provide diversity, but to close the border for people who would provide diversity. From the exploitation-exploration lens, it's an approach of exploitation, but it reduces exploration.

Peter: In California, the interesting thing is that the Asians here in California quickly converge into the mainstream, but, on the sideline, they maintain some of their own heritages, so it is something not totally converged, but partly converged in some places.

James: You should tease into that the story in the overall American community, which has not integrated very well. How does that affect the story?

Peter: It is interesting to look at the immigration as the background to check out this core-peripheral

relationship, also diversity-unity, divergence-convergence, and exploration-exploitation links. That's fascinating.

James: Yes, most current Africa Americans in this country have families that have been here longer than most non-England based communities. They are old families, going back to 16th and 17th centuries. They are still outcasts.

Peter: So, what shall we learn from that? It's kind of interesting. Let's get into this more interdisciplinary kind of research agenda. Would the interdisciplinary approach also apply to this diversity-unity issue?

James: Well, it is a different situation and a different part of this colored world. You take the way or place where I work, which is most about decision-making, change and so on. It's in essence interdisciplinary as it is not very well contained in any one discipline, so it turns up to be interdisciplinary not because anyone thinks and calls it interdisciplinary, but just because the way we organize our disciplines is not parallel with the way a particular phenomenon is. So, I used to say, and I still say that I work in a very narrow area--a focused, limited, narrow area, but it happens to be an area that cuts across disciplines. It is intrinsically interdisciplinary not because I have chosen it to be interdisciplinary, but because it is. And others remain much more contained within one discipline. So, I don't think there is anything inherently good about interdisciplinary or not. I think it is likely to be true that the scholarly community finds things that cut cross harder to deal with than the things that stay within one discipline.

Peter: What will be some topics or phenomena that you think intrinsically or inherently interdisciplinary, such as leadership?

James: I'm not sure that leadership is the topic for scholarly work. Everybody likes to talk about that, but we don't exactly know what it is; we do not know how to observe it, and we know very little about the way to systematically think about it. Whenever I am involved, I have resisted hiring researchers on leadership. Because I don't see the research, and I don't see other researchers can help us learn anything.

I can also think other areas like that. Most areas started out that way. They started out with practical problems, and practical observations. At the moment, the main thing is innovation. That is not because scholars think this is interesting, but because the society is caught up with the wave of innovation, like computer revolution. So, innovation has become a very important topic. What do we do in universities? Universities are fairly adaptive institutions, actually. You know innovation is a very important thing out there, as everyone is talking about it; everyone wants to consult on it, and everybody is complaining about it. So, the first we do is to hire some innovators and meet with professors to talk about their own experience in innovation.

We don't want to leave it to that, and we want to capture that field. So, we get some younger people to do research on innovation. They try to carve out some field as something to do with innovation. Gradually they take over the courses and gain some experience as professors. So, professors who have never done innovation become scholars of innovation. That's the natural dynamics of scholarship in university. Well, sometimes it doesn't work very well because scholarship doesn't get anywhere. I think leadership is one of these areas that scholarship has rarely got very far. There are special fields or some sub-fields of leadership where scholarship has done pretty well. You know, people know something about personality, characteristics or traits of successful leaders. I think we know fair about interpersonal relations between leaders and others. So, we can teach courses about those things, but those tough topics, like who are the

leaders, and where do they come from, or how to get better leaders, are harder to teach. So, I don't think they become good research areas.

Peter: In China, the most fascinating topic is personal success or success in life. There were tons of books devoted to that, but nobody knows exactly. It's such an open-ended issue that everybody has his own kind of story about one out of many possibilities with diverse and multi-dimensional life trajectories.

James: I used to tell my class that it is very important decisions that you make very early that have more to do with whether you are successful than anything else. First, who your parents are is very important. Second, what your sex is, also very important. Once you make those kinds of decisions, everything else is only minor. What we know about leadership is that people become leaders because their parents were leaders, and they become leaders because they are men. These points are pretty good, but those are not very helpful for most people. We don't know a lot of other things. If you go to Harvard, you're more likely to become a leader than if you go to San Francisco State University.

Peter: What about your birth order?

James: You know you have a system, as we understand it, that is very much dependent on prior attributes, and luck, but that's not a message that is very happily received. Those people who are successful are much more likely to attribute success to what they did than their attributes.

Peter: You mean they exaggerate success, but the main reason is just good luck, such as being in the right place and at the right moment. What about entrepreneurship? Would that be similar? Like leadership and innovation? Now it's also a very hot topic. Everybody wants to be an entrepreneur.

James: Yes, yes, maybe.

Peter: But how can we predict who would be successful entrepreneur? They study Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and others.

James: I think they try to find common attributes. This is not entirely fruitless, but almost fruitless. Entrepreneurship, I suppose I will refer to leadership in general, you have to have culture and society to be organized in a way so that entrepreneur would have some roles, and also get into those roles. We don't have a lot of multiple successful entrepreneurs who is successful in a lot of things. This suggests that it may not very much be the person for the success.

Peter: Nowadays, the most successful person still alive is the founder of Tesla, Elon Mask. He has had multiple successful entrepreneurial projects.

James: There are some examples, but are there any more than what you would expect by chance? If it is chance, you may still see multiple successes, not very common, but some. Steve Jobs had a company called NeXT. It's not really successful. He made it successful by forcing Apple to buy it, but that's a different thing.

Peter: Yes, but I attribute three successful projects to Steve, the original Apple, Pixar, and then the renewed Apple. NeXT was not successful.

Let's turn to the Chinese scholarly community. A small group inside that community wants to maintain some diversity as indigenous, but I think the majority still want to convert. They write and publish in English journals by applying the prevailing Western theories and perspectives on the Chinese phenomena. I used to think it as a wrong balance, but now I feel it maybe a good balance. Majority of scholars in China would devote to this converging trend, but we still need to some room carved out for people who want to engage in indigenous research. They should be taken as legitimate; they should be fostered and tolerated at least at the early stage since they might be not be as good as the mainstream. It will take time, just like early entrepreneurs. You have to give them kind of supporting climate for them to grow, just like a newly born baby; you cannot just throw them in the jungle and let them survive alone. They really need a parenting environment. I'm advocating that the Chinese community should recognize the legitimacy of indigenous research and give them some room for them to grow, and even give them some space for publications, even if they are not as mature as the dominant ones. What would you say about that?

James: Sure. Well, it's really an exploration-exploitation question, as always. I think it's indeterminate because we have a lot of things we have not specified. But my instinct says you are right. Both the Chinese scholarly community and the international scholarly community would be better off with most Chinese scholars seeking to become internationally recognized scholars, and that is what the system does and means at the moment, thus English rather than Chinese. But I think it's clear that we hope that there remains a kind of Chinese differentiation, even within the most people who are seeking international reputation. This can be done in different ways. There could be diversity within their own community, but people outside that community who are seeing to join the community are also useful. It's very difficult, even if it is useful for them. They'll suffer their development and suffer their success.

For those kinds of thing you are interested, for example, the Chinese traditions, will probably be heavily developed by Chinese scholars. Other people can read their literature and translation, but that's not going to be the dominant thing. I personally would hope that there would be a Chinese group, and they'll continually have a problem because of translation and so on. But you'll maintain a diverse set of ideas. For me, the Scandinavian community is not a bad model. They try very hard to be both international and local. I think they are fairly successful. I think the discipline itself is better serviced by that kind of a variety. It is very delicate because you have different group developing separately and cut off so that no one knows about what's going on. So, you need some ways linking these funny folks into the mainstream. But if we can do that, then I think we are in a pretty good shape.

Peter: This is probably related to the two logics that you mentioned in your research: the logic of consequence and the logic of appropriateness. Some people probably would pursue the logic of appropriateness. They just want this identity as they want to be more Chinese than other Chinese. So they want to pursue some research where consequentially they pay the price in their career, their promotion, the number of their publications, and where they publish papers. At least, we should tolerate the two logics because both are valid and legitimate.

James: I think so. However, you may dislike the fact that individual scholars are often intolerant. Once individual scholars want to make scholarship international, want to get the right ideas, limit the wrong ideas, they don't need to have very much tolerance for diversity. But you want a system that somehow would tolerate diversity. It is not easy to think what the design is. A national system is not a bad design because it keeps national loyalty and so on, and at the same time also international community. I'm not sure it's the best design.

Peter: I think the Chinese government and also scientific community particularly funding agencies are torn by the two kinds of criteria: they want to be recognized internationally, but at same time they want to maintain so-called Chinese characteristics about the Chinese phenomena and the Chinese agenda. For example, for the issues of pension, insurance and medical service, the Chinese cannot copy what happens in foreign countries, but they often take foreign countries as role models. Here the competing logics kick in. For the funding agencies, they want to fund those research proposals that can be published in English journals. In contrast, the government really need contextualized local policy papers, but they only want the scholars to justify and rubber-stamp the governmental positions, rather than independent research. So, there is a major conflict between international and local studies, and the contextualized and independent research is largely missing in China.

James: It seems to me that the Chinese philosophy you know and love is rather consistent with that because the Chinese philosophy is much more tolerant of contradiction than other philosophies. In such a world, it is simultaneously believed that I am wholeheartedly international, and I must be one-hundred present Chinese. Of course, it's contradictory, but you believe in both and you try to execute both. Understanding how we act in situations in which we have deep beliefs that are clearly contradictory is one of the things that I think our field needs, and the Chinese scholars may be able to help.

Peter: I think the Chinese community is more sensitive to that issue. They want both, but you know it's very difficult. I feel that the Chinese scholars, either overseas or in China, are more sensitive about their own cultural heritage than Indians, at least the overseas Indians who don't care much about the indigenous perspective in India. So far as I know the most Indians want to convert, and they want to succeed in the mainstream. I don't know much more about the Indian scholars in India. For example, Anne Tsui always say that we must have some unique Chinese contributions to the mainstream. The Chinese communities in the United States often have double identities. They want to convert as far as they can, but at the same time they want to maintain some kind of uniqueness.

James: I want to say something slightly different. They want to convert "entirely", but they want to be separate. You know, to me that sounds contradictory. But perhaps it is a mindset that permits you to do interesting things. And I expect that possibility that when a manager says "we are going to do something and there is absolutely only one way to go, but I'm not sure if I would go about it". That's a different mindset and a different way; somehow you wholeheartedly commit to something, but you are open to other possibilities.

Peter: Do you think the Jewish community in the United States also has the similar kind of attitude? They want to convert fully, and they want to be exactly at the mainstream, but same time they want to maintain their unique heritage. I spent two years with a Jewish family, and it seems to me that they really want to balance this.

James: Yes, that conflict was of course helped by the dominant community's attitudes, which tend to say you are different, so here you are. I want to integrate, and I come and different; all right, I want to be different, but I want to integrate.

Peter: So, this is not by design, but by default. Do you think the Chinese community in the United States would suffer more? Because they are legally identified as non-white.

James: Yes, but one of the wonders of genetics is that once you immigrate, you are an American, so the

differentiation becomes harder and harder.

Peter: Right, interracial marriage can change this a lot, even in Denmark. Many Danish girls do not want to marry and have kids, so the Danish boys who want to marry and have kids have to marry non-Danes, and some of them are the Chinese. Some Danes worry about the national identity because there are only five-millions Danes. Due to interracial marriage and after several generations, language could be lost since everybody can speak English. How is this related to your reference to "genre" in terms of different styles with different criteria? In a sense, we can allow indigenous community to be judged differently because they have separate genre.

James: I have never heard that you could use the term to refer to something other than artwork, but it could be, clearly. Yes, one of the issues in the intellectual history is how a genre develops its standards, so it can be recognized as a separate form.

Peter: So, they must be internal convergence for each genre to be different, only recognized in its own community.

James: Each genre establishes its own standards, so some people are excluded because they really don't belong.

Peter: Right, so each culture almost like genre? As an analogy.

James: Maybe.

Peter: Can we then argue we have different forms of rationality like genre, so artistic rationality could be different from scientific rationality, so they should not be judged and conform to one kind of formal rationality? I think this is deeply related to your approach to management issues.

James: Well, I think most scientists will agree with that, and why should I disagree? I know some scientists who believe that the rules of science apply to all things, including theology and arts, but they are the minority. There is a sort of "live-and-let-live" attitude: within my domain I want to enforce standards, but I do not try to enforce my standards outside my domain.

That struggle went on and is still going on to some extent, but it is pretty much over. In the social sciences when putting forth a new movement, there were people in the dominant group who said that was a separate genre and they would develop their standards of its own, so we did not pay much attention to it. There were other people who said that's a corrupt version of science and had to be weeded out. The third group would say that maybe they had something we ought to integrate into us. And I think that's fairly common. I can put it into the exploration-exploitation frame because it's about how much deviance you are going to allow, but you cannot allow everybody to go everywhere, so there must be some standards and understanding. But what about something on the edge?

One of the advantages of nation states and culture is their natural boundaries as the standards that everybody has to meet as basic requirements. Everybody understands there is a special French version of physics, which is part of overall international physics, but it has different emphasis and different thrust. As everybody understands that, that's ok.

Peter: Right, in Denmark, Niels Bohr, for the Copenhagen school of quantum physics, has a flavor of something different. I'm so grateful that he borrowed the yin-yang symbol to explain the wave-particle duality.

James: But Bohr was recognized as a first-class international physicist. He has some funny ideas, but that's ok. And there are Austrian philosophers. They are recognized as first-class international philosophers, but with different tilt.

Peter: Right, I think that's the strength. Almost in every discipline, even within natural sciences, that they always have different versions, and this may have a lot to do with the notion of duality. We should allow diverse interpretations of the same phenomenon. One is probably the dominant, but there are others as well. Convergence maybe eighty percent, but the rest is for divergence.

James: There is always tension.

Peter: Right. There may be some diversities maintained within the dominant view of physics. They have new views which are not totally consistent, they could be revolutionary and then they could be wrong after a while, but you never know. Like marketplace, you never know which one is the best until you try it, so new things can emerge at the edge of chaos, something between the order and chaos. Some people now talk about competing institutional logics with strong tensions; sometimes the new logic could even substitute the old logics. If you do not allow any room for exploration, the old logic will persist, which may not be the best choice.

James: Yes, you know that we have that tradition. In our intellectual history, we talked about the Vienna school of such and such. The Vienna school is recognized as the deviant school, but still respected school. Historically, they could become the dominant school. That is sort of a typical picture. In our scholarship, some subgroups have got two positions that they are recognized as someone deviant and still respectable.

Peter: I think these are two key words. One is deviant or distinctive, but still respectable or respected at the same time. If one is only deviant, but not respectable, there is low or very little chance to integrate.

James: Of course, respect is always relative. If you take something you know well, such as the Carnegie School, I think you can say it is deviant but respected, at least ultimately; when it started, it was visible. Gradually, people started talking about it as a recognizable, deviant group, but acceptable. You might say, they were wrong, and they just didn't understand something, but you still treated it as part of the community.

Peter: I would have thought you were the dominant.

James: Well, it came at a time probably in the organization domain, but not initially.

Peter: Not in the domain of economics. I think you mentioned several times that economics did not accept your group nicely.

James: As I once wrote a paper which you may not have seen: The War is over and the victors have lost? It's just a kind of caricature. It argues that economics had resisted all sort of limited rationality, but taken it all over, so now almost everybody has accepted it. But they insisted that they all had come out of the

original fundamental economic axioms. In that sense, the victors have lost.

Peter: That's OK. In my case of indigenous research, you don't have to mention yin-yang; you don't have to mention "*wu*" (intuitive imagination for sight via metaphor), and you don't have to mention anything Chinese. If you take my views into your research, never mention me and never cite me, I'm still happy, because I want my views accepted and respected with some kind of impact. I think I'm a kind of a victor.

James: I think we have done a wonderful job of interviewing you.

Peter: Oh, no, no, no, I am interviewing you.

James: That's exactly what we should do. What's more is to hear what you have to say and what I have to say in an exchange.

Peter: Could I ask you one or two more questions? Foolishness. Is that related to the logic of appropriateness? Exploration? Playfulness?

James: Well, it is certainly related to playfulness and exploration. Underlining it is a notion that rationality is a theory, and when we enforce it on people we in fact enforce a theorem. Foolishness is a claim that in this plural world, there is something other than rationality, but it does not have a clear structure like rationality; it has to be admitted like a kind of arbitrary mediums, which is supposed to be foolishness. This is sort of the ability to leave out of normal rational thinking. And at least play has a special property. We are allowed to leave out of normal rational thinking. But we acknowledge this is a strange thing to do; as we acknowledge that in a normal life, we don't play, but play is a special activity and has special rules, sort of freedom from rationality. Freedom from rationality, while we acknowledge rationality, is like the "Mother Church", so to speak.

Peter: So, we always follow the track, but from time to time, you can deviate from the main track for a moment and try to explore, but still come back to the main route.

James: Yes, exactly, when you deviate from it, you are not denying what you are deviating from.

Peter: You acknowledge it, and you know there is always a danger.

James: That's like some people using drink for, you know. When I'm drunk, I'm allowed to do things I would not normally do, like this is me, but also not me. The idea about foolishness is it needs to be given a more positive flavor because you need to escape from, not irrationality because it is a term too narrow. You need to escape from the established ways of thinking. If the established ways of thinking are not tolerant, you need escape from them. You want to be Confucius for a while.

Peter: You use the term temporary to describe playfulness as the temporary relaxation of the rules, like a temporary deviation from your normal track, but you know this is just temporary. You know it's risky.

James: Yes, right. And you are certified by others that you know and you will return. I'm not always drunk. You may convict me of being drunk and get me in jail, but you can't convict me of being anti-Catholic or something else, because that's not what I really mean.

Peter: In that sense, what do you think about the Chinese notion of "wu"?

James: That's your notion!

Peter: Right, my notion. "Wu" is just using imagination to seek for new insights, which requires you to deviate from the traditional ways of thinking. In order to get radical insights, people need to be relaxed.

James: I cannot say much about that certainly because almost all I know about "wu" has come from you. That has left out of my Chinese education.

Peter: Right. What about yin-yang?

James: There I have read something. For me, the strongest sense of yin-yang, which is not nearly as detailed as yours, is it's one of the examples of the simultaneity of contradictory things. In the culture I grew up, that was not allowed. You have to get away from that. To think I should experience life by recognizing the contradictions that I have to sustain and endure is a relatively new idea for me. And I certainly think it's very fruitful for thinking about management and organization.

Peter: You mention healthy tension. Do you think healthy tension is related to yin-yang?

James: It's a very healthy tension. I think that's right. The healthiness of it is that, although you experience a very strong tension, that experience is not a motivation to eliminate the tension.

Peter: So, the possible positive side of tension?

James: I once tried to explain this to one of my friends. I say you have two children. And you love both of your children. And that means one child is not loved more than the other or less than the other. What you are going to do when they both want the same thing, so on and so forth. You maintain a love of two children as absolute, and you know this is contradictory. That's like yin-yang.

Peter: OK, that will make me think. I only have one child, so I don't have the experience. I think parents struggle sometimes if they have multiple kids.

James: That's very complicated. Because in my religion and culture, you are strongly trained toward monogamy that you can love only one woman, but you can love multiple children. How could that be?

Peter: That's a protection of woman because they need protection. That's just my interpretation. I don't know. Do you think sometimes you do feel that you love one more than other in the sense that they are more like you?

James: No. Never. Unconditionally equal.

Peter: Why is that the case?

James: That's one of my puzzlements.

Peter: That's in the genes? Do all human beings have that kind of genes?

James: No, I am sure it's part of my child upbringing. You know parents and children always argue that you love Jenny more than you love me. My parents always denied it and I believe they really believed they were right, and I certainly deny it whenever my children suggest any such thing.

Peter: Maybe you love them all the same, but in different forms or different ways?

James: Actually them all. Each of them is rich with complication in detail, but there is no way in which one is more important than the other. No matter what, you love them all the same. There is no way in which you will really choose between them. I argue that making a choice is worse because choosing between your absolute values is the worst thing you can do.

Peter: In that sense, this is an example of the logic of appropriateness. As a father, you love your children, regardless any consequences.

James: Yes, absolutely.

Peter: If I follow the rational thinking, I should invest in the more promising kids because they can have the higher returns.

James: If I think family as a cooperation with various assets, yes, but that's different.

Peter: That means, in social life, social value, social identity, sense of responsibility, and love cannot be explained by the logic of consequence.

James: I brough up the issue of children as an analogy because I thought the person I was talking to would have no resonance with yin-yang, but might have resonance with the love of children. The love of children raises a lot of things that are not normally dealt with yin-yang. But it's what you do with simultaneous contradictory impulses or others.

Peter: I think there is analogy with the wave-particular duality in the case of Niels Bohr. According to Newton, it's possible for one phenomenon to exist with two contradictory elements, you have to choose one over the other. Bohr disagreed and he argued that you cannot choose because contradictory things are also complementary. So, he debated with Einstein for decades about the nature of quantum physics. More and recent evidence has confirmed that Bohr was right. Let us go back to the children analogy because this is more interesting, and I need to think more about it. Do you have unconditional love for your wife?

James: Yes, absolutely. But also because of monogamy, at least in our culture. If I love another woman, that's going to be a problem. And we usually have to resolve that issue somehow. As for my children, I do not feel that I have to resolve that issue.

Peter: It is all natural. What about your love for science and art? Do you see any tension?

James: No, not really. I have written poetry with a lot about fantasy. One of the solutions to conflict is to consign some to fantasy. The idea is that our desires and what we think is appropriate are quite often in conflict, so we move our desires into fantasy and enjoy them there. That's all.

Peter: In the future, once we have the new virtual technology, that's more easily resolved. For marriage, I

had no chance to experiment with multiple girlfriends because my first girlfriend became my wife.

James: In my generation, the emphasis is choosing one and then making it through the best one. Not only making it work, but making it preeminent.

Peter: But nowadays many choose not to marry, such as in Denmark. What do you think about this kind of modern love?

James: That's probably wrong.

Peter: Marriage as an institution is also a fascinating research topic. I try to explain it through the logic of consequence in terms of protecting women.

James: But that is not quite necessary anymore.

Peter: Once I read an interesting report. In a hospital, a very old lady is very sick and looks terrible, but her husband often looks at the old lady with a tender smile. The nurses cannot not understand why the old man looks at the sick lady with smile. The old man says that you don't know what I am actually looking at. That is not what you can see. I see the lady as what she looked when she was young, when she was pretty, so all good memories come back to me. So, I was very much moved by the report. I see the same thing when I look at my wife. I do not see her as others see her because I remember when we first met, when she was young, and how she looked like at that time. I do not know how this is related to logics.

James: I think that should be the last standing of Peter Ping Li interview. I am serious. I think one of the nice things about this conversation is that I learn more about you and we ought to somehow put it in this interview.

Peter: I think that your love for children and also my reading about why love can last for a long time cannot be only about the logic of consequence. Why do we love for life? Because we have another logic, which I would argue it's more beautiful, and more powerful than the logic of consequence. I argue that the logic of consequence is actually only short-term in nature, but the logic of appropriateness could be the one for long-term consequence.

James: You can write about marriage. How long have you been married?

Peter: Thirty-one years since 1985.

James: You can point out that good marriage is exploitation only. You develop your relationship with one woman. Obviously, you are giving up something, but you also gain awfully a lot, and for most people in their lifetimes, exploitation is a better strategy.

Peter: According to some studies they find out that married men will live longer than non-married men, as long as the marriage is working.

James: Marriage is Samsung of life.

Peter: Why Samsung?

James: I pick a company that is known for its exploitation. You may also choose a Chinese company for that.

Peter: Perhaps Foxconn who makes phones for Apple. It never does R&D, but only OEM. Again, marriage should be explained by a different logic other than the logic of consequence.

James: That's certainly. You can certainly pick up rational reason.

Peter: That's a good idea. Then, the phenomenon of marriage cannot be solely explained by the logic of consequences. At least, more than logics can apply.

James: You've got it.

Peter: Ok, thank you very much. Appreciate it. Thank you.