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## The Path of Education: A Stroll of the Soul Interwoven with Poetic and Rational Elements——A Review of *Wandering Awareness*

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**Abstract:** Notes on *Wandering Awareness* represents the author's deep exploration and rational inquiry into various perplexities of life encountered in middle age. The text is filled with probing questions and reflections on self, the world, humanity, and social ethics. Diverging from common lyrical or narrative essays, this work frequently employs dialectical reasoning, drawing on accessible examples with fresh and thought-provoking ideas that leave a lasting impact. The language is rich in metaphor, precise in word choice, and profound in meaning, evoking a knowing smile and lingering resonance in readers. While the themes may appear diverse and loosely structured at first glance, they are both grounded in everyday life and transcendental, offering profound insights into the relationship between self and the world. As readers progress through the concise chapters, they not only follow the author's contemplative journey but also embark on a shared exploration of philosophical and intellectual enlightenment, discovering an ideal fusion of poetry and reason in the path of education.

**Keywords:** dialectical reasoning; sincerity and candor; rationality and poetics; self and world

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**题目：**育人之道：诗性与理性交织的灵魂漫步——评林岗散文随笔集《漫识手记》

**摘要：**《漫识手记》是中大林岗教授于“不惑”之年对人生种种疑惑的深度挖掘与理性思考，书中充满了对于自我、世界、人类、社会伦理等问题的追问与反思。不同于一般常见的抒情叙事类散文随笔，此书多采用二元论证的方式，取例通俗而思想清奇，发人深省；语言设喻巧妙，用词严谨而内涵深邃，读来令人会心一笑，又回味无穷；主题看似漫杂无章，实则贴近生活而又超脱现实，蕴含着深刻的自我与世界之间的哲思。读者在阅读过程中，不仅能透过作者的文字短章，追随其思考的脚步，更能与作者一同踏上这场哲思与智慧的启迪之旅，共同探索育人之道中诗性与理性的完美融合。

**关键词：**二元辩证；真诚与坦白；理性与诗性；自我与世界

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### 1.The Sincere and Honest Journey of Writing

*Wandering Notes* (Hua Cheng Press, 2021) is a collection of “three hundred essays” by Professor Lin Gang of Sun Yat-sen University. From the moment he began writing in early 1999 to the moment he put down his pen in 2005, during this period, Professor Lin was inspired at times, reflecting deeply at others. He recorded the whispers of his soul and the sparks of his thoughts in an unrestrained manner, capturing his teaching career’s intellectual journey across diverse topics. Though the writings were scattered, they fit together seamlessly, ultimately forming 282 precious chapters. After being tucked away for more than ten years, with no thoughts of publication, he remained indifferent to the enthusiastic suggestions of friends and kept postponing the idea. It wasn’t until time had passed that this manuscript regained its allure and was reconsidered. After some hesitation and contemplation, he decided to slightly revise it and publish it, thus bringing *Wandering Notes* into the world. The writings, which he had never intended to publish, truthfully record the author’s thoughts and experiences along the way. “It is precisely because ‘he never thought about publishing’ that sincerity and honesty became the most important qualities of *Wandering Notes*.” (Liu Chen, 2021, GA09)

In the essay “Writing” the author discusses the driving force behind writing and categorizes three types of writing: as a ladder for life’s career, as a fortress for self-protection, and as a landscape in the eyes of a traveler. As the author notes in the paper “The Influence of Anxiety” (Lin Gang, 2016, p.29), “Writing is more of the writer’s digestion of their life experiences and an exploration of linguistic expression.” *Wandering Notes* also reveals his consistent pursuit of writing: “Life’s insights and experiences are always the primary purpose of writing.” “Life is a journey, with no place to stop. Writing, like life’s wanderings, moves from one place to

another, from one theme to another” (Lin Gang, 2021, p.374). The author views writing as an adventure where both the soul and the body participate, treating writing as a colorful peach blossom land where creativity flows freely, inspired by real experiences. Thoughts scatter, and words flow naturally from the heart, letting the soul find its resting place. The words that carry the author’s life experiences and the language that encapsulates his life insights are filled with sincerity, beauty, and elegance, resonating deeply with readers and stirring their hearts.

The book's discussion on the relationship between language and thought aligns with the process of writing itself. In the chapter “*Words*” the author writes, “If words cannot grasp thought, thought will float away like a wisp of smoke, disappearing into the vast emptiness of the mind” (Lin Gang, 2021, p.56). The afterword reveals that the author, in his forties while teaching at Shenzhen University, would often wander around the lake during his leisure time, lost in thought. Some thoughts were forgotten, while others, which could not be dispelled, were eventually written down. “Thoughts are like pearls hidden within an oyster shell, and the mind is the diligent pearl hunter. Words are the thread that eventually strings the pearls together. After the labor of the mind, the pearls strung together by words are the thoughts truly captured by language” (Lin Gang, 2021, p.57). This is undoubtedly the most vivid explanation of the origins of the entire text in *Wandering Notes*.

The book consists of short chapters that record the author’s rational reflections, making the language highly speculative. Despite the poetic dearth of a busy life, the author’s spiritual world is rich and full. The words flow directly from the heart, and the phrases are imbued with poetic color. This kind of intellectual contemplation, drawn from self-awareness, is free from any utilitarian writing motives. It does not cater to the writing preferences of the masses nor become a mechanical assembly of words. This gives *Wandering Notes* its unique literary style and honest, sincere quality that sets it apart.

## 2. Textual Language of Coexisting Poetic and Rational Qualities

Looking at the entire book, *Wandering Notes* is divided into three sections: ethical beliefs, social history, and the years of human life. The contents of each section are not entirely distinct but are interrelated. Each text is filled with rational thought and poetic expression, whether long or short, sincerely writing about the insights gained from reading, curious questions, moments of hesitation, and hard-earned conclusions. The author excels at using metaphors, with a unique thought process. Common words in daily life are given new forms under his pen, presenting a thoughtful and rational state to the reader. Through the author’s interpretation and analysis, intellectual light is revived, and fascinating aspects are revealed. The book repeatedly touches upon topics such as “desire” “passion” “reason” “knowledge” “experience” and “life” exploring and deepening these concepts. The language is highly metaphorical and artistic, as seen in essays such as “Desire” “Departure” “Reason” “Five Senses” “Tug of War” and “Groundhog”. The author enjoys thinking, is good at asking questions, and excels in argumentation. He often uses opposing metaphors to describe complex contradictions, giving a comprehensive, concrete, and vivid description that is both appropriate and interesting. His logical reasoning is clear, full of speculation, and highly persuasive. The language is concise and to the point, never sluggish, and leaves a strong impression that prompts reflection.

Regarding desire and reason, the author views desire as “an intention carried by the body. It pursues endless creation, just like lava wrapped in the earth's crust, eager to erupt” (from *Departure*). He asserts, “The five senses are the windows through which desire spies on the outside world” (from *Five Senses*). “If desire is the eye, then reason is the telescope. To what extent is desire willing to compromise with reason? Generally, the longer the time process extends, the more desire tends to say no” (from *Desire*). The author is skilled at personifying words or creating metaphorical images to reveal the nature of desire and its opposition to reason, yet he does not neglect their unity, stating that “Reason and desire are not sharply divided; reason is just another face of desire” (from *Reason*). In different chapters, the same words are repeatedly mentioned, reflecting on the same thing from different dimensions. The author deepens his thoughts in different contexts, leading to a layered and insightful understanding that eventually breaks through the fog of problems and unveils the truth.

Regarding knowledge and experience, in the chapter “*Pursuit of Knowledge*”, the author uses two metaphors—“the bear blindfolding itself while breaking corn” and “building the Great Wall”—to explore the relationship between knowledge and individuals. The author asks, “Is knowledge something that individuals pursue in isolation for the truth or is it part of a great collective endeavor?” and answers, “It seems there is no absolute either-or conclusion. But it is certain that the first metaphor is more real.” “For individuals, it is a solitary search for the truth, and the cumulative results of their pursuit of knowledge form the common wealth of society.” Experience, for an individual, can sometimes be helpful, but other times destructive. The author compares experience to a groundhog, illustrating the negative impact of experience on an individual's life: “The more experience accumulates, the deeper that groundhog burrows into the endless depths of the underworld.” “Through those unknown dark tunnels, the groundhog peeks around, weighing its relationship with the surrounding environment and its own interests. In fact, isn't that groundhog the grave of life? With its claws of experience, it keeps digging deeper, burying its life with every effort” (from *Groundhog*). Beyond philosophical musings, there is also poetry. The author's language is refined, not vulgar or coarse, and one can sense his pursuit of quality language. “The state of poetry and the absence of poetry are fundamentally different, just like a life with joy and one without joy, or a life with beauty and one without beauty. This difference is caused by the presence or absence of poetry.” (Lin Gang, 2017, A22). The author applies this sense of poetry to his writing, blending rational philosophical thought with poetic characteristics, offering both intellectual enlightenment and aesthetic enjoyment.

Regarding the self and life, in *Tug of War*, the author writes, “The tug of war between desire and ability is like a turtle: desire pushes it to extend its head, but low ability makes it pull its head back. That turtle is the self, and what it does in the world is repeatedly extending and retracting.” This vividly depicts the self's courage and hesitation in an engaging and interesting manner. In *Polar Opposites*, the author states, “Reason makes life comfortable, while passion makes life meaningful. A comfortable life without meaning is boredom, while passion without reason is obsession. Boredom and obsession are the two extremes of our existence, and life is a journey between them.” He presents the normal state of life in a rational but unfamiliar way, inviting deep reflection. In *The Prisoner*, he writes, “Life is a prison like a castle, and the self is the prisoner within.

Language, like a crack in the prison, allows glimpses of the light of existence.” The author is skilled at using language to present the process and results of self-reflection. His unique thoughts are not groundless but are the result of extensive reading.

A profound knowledge base and rich life experience are the foundational conditions for the author's creation. When alone, sparks of thought emerge, collide, and intertwine in his mind. Language captures them in due course, recorded in short chapters and essays, written spontaneously from thought. The author is not only skilled at observing life and identifying problems, but he can also escape reality and let his thoughts wander freely. He excels in recording his inner journey, allowing his soul to rest in the process. His wisdom, philosophical demeanor, and literary talent are evident in this.

### 3. Soul-Searching of the Individual and the World

*Wandering Notes* is an honest and sincere expression of the author's thoughts, a fusion of rationality and poetry, and a work that reflects his soul-searching journey regarding the individual and society, the self and the world. The author records the fruits of his reflections during his teaching breaks, while readers can leisurely read his words of wisdom, ponder their meaning, and gain many insights. The book frequently touches on topics such as “fear” “loneliness” “home” “the world” “departure” “return” “existence” and “death” which represent the author's spiritual wanderings during times of self-reflection.

Professor Lin has mentioned in his writings the reason why he writes about “fear”, speculating that it relates to his early experiences. Born in 1957, the author went through turmoil around the age of ten, when various movements disrupted the existing order, causing normal life to veer off its course. The world he was familiar with became incomprehensible, and everything was thrown into chaos. In an era where political ideologies dominated, the air was filled with oppression and fear, and moral and value systems were overturned. During this period, the author's personal moral understanding was transitioning from heteronomous morality to autonomous morality. Witnessing the chaos of the times and the collapse of conscience during this critical period of childhood, he experienced the reconstruction of order and the reformation of cognition. His early experiences planted the seeds of curiosity and reflective thinking. As he grew older, he widely read books from various fields and became perplexed by the interpretations of the external world's rationality. His curiosity, doubts, and constant learning led him to a deeper understanding of ethical beliefs, social history, and the passage of life, making his thoughts and reflections both broad and profound.

The book often discusses “loneliness”, not as a monstrous thing, but as something that “is not an isolation devoid of human warmth” and that “loneliness is the secret of the individual soul, ever-present, omnipresent.” It suggests that “loneliness is a passport to the path of salvation” (from *Loneliness*). The author praises loneliness, seeing it as a normal state of being, indispensable, and a nourishment for the soul. While loneliness is beneficial, the author acknowledges that no one can live as an island, and thus, he repeatedly explores the relationship between the individual and society. In *Principles*, the author outlines two unchangeable principles of life: “The first is that we, as individuals, live in this world; the second is that the

individual lives in this world with others.” The consideration of the individual and the group remains a central theme in the author’s reflections, appearing throughout various chapters. In *The Classic*, the author uses the concept of “the classic” to analogize the human state of existence, dividing it into the “classic” and the “non-classic”, corresponding to the individual’s existence in the world: departing from the home in the morning to wander the world, doing things and earning a living; then returning to the home in the evening, leaving the chaos of the world behind, finding solace in quiet solitude. In *Metaphor*, the author compares domestic animals to wild beasts, symbolizing two states of existence. “The former represents the safety gained by renouncing, while the latter represents the freedom sought, which inevitably carries risk.” Is life about choosing to be a domesticated animal or a wild beast? “The choice between domestic animals and wild beasts is fluid, for survival is an ongoing search for one’s own answers.” As poet Gu Cheng said, “The Chinese have only created two ideals: one is the Peach Blossom Spring in the mountains, and the other is the Grand View Garden inside the walls” (Gu Cheng, 2015, p.43). The Peach Blossom Spring is refreshing, and the Grand View Garden is dazzling. While everyone must live in the world and survive within the Grand View Garden, we are also independent individuals who need to return to the Peach Blossom Spring to feel the existence of individual life. In the solitude of our own world, we can also witness the falling petals and the beauty of fragrant grass. We do not seek illusory pleasures, nor let the mundane affairs of the world obscure the poetic beauty of the soul, thus extinguishing the pursuit of the good. When body and mind are in harmony, only then can one achieve true balance.

In addition to balancing the relationship between the individual and others, home and the world, one must still search for the way to exist as an individual, the meaning and value of life. Discussions of the self are eternal. The true difficulty of life does not always lie in how one interacts with the outside world but rather in how one interacts with oneself. So, how should the individual exist? What is the meaning of life? In the chapter *Meaning*, the author writes, “Events themselves have no isolated meaning; meaning is assigned by later generations based on their own feelings about the present environment.” In his co-authored book *Crime and Literature* with Liu Zaifu, the author notes, “The meaning of life lies in the perception of one’s own existence, and we should strive to delve into this existence and question it. Doubt and questioning are the value” (Liu Zaifu, Lin Gang, 2011, p.437). It is clear that the author possesses a strong self-awareness. He has confessed that his persistent search for the self, which has not yielded results, may be due to the mid-life crisis he is experiencing—facing new life challenges at a new stage, inevitably bringing about a certain unspoken anxiety, leading to numerous soul-searching questions. He has also warned against self-anxiety, just as he once faced his own dilemma: when searching desperately for the self and the meaning of life, one could not find either. The answer lies in letting go. Only when one truly engages in what they are meant to do, feeling life with intention and gaining certain abilities, does the self emerge and the sought-after meaning follow. Perhaps it is only when one can truly enjoy solitude and find joy in it that they have truly found the self. Therefore, we need to enrich our souls, fill our spiritual world, and provide a resting place for the soul.

#### 4. The Soulful Beacon of Teaching and Learning

Professor Lin comes from a prestigious background and has experienced both the tumult of national upheaval and the brilliance and destruction of life. His life experiences have led him to profound reflections on the self, life, and the world. In the quiet moments of teaching, he returns to his inner world, reflects on the past, examines the present, and looks toward the future. His thoughts, like fleeting sparks, shine in his mind and converge into a sea of wisdom, crystallized in *Wandering Notes*. As a new teacher just entering the field of education, I deeply feel that this book is not only a philosophical work worth reading carefully, but also an educational bible that has had a profound impact on me. Between the lines of *Wandering Notes*, it feels as if we transcend time and space, engaging in a soulful conversation with Professor Lin. His life trajectory, profound thoughts, and life insights are like a clear spring, nourishing my heart as I take my first steps into the world of teaching.

“Professor Lin always finds wisdom in the creases of life and lets the capillaries of knowledge stretch out in everyday life. His casual words are like an awakening for us.” (Shen Xiayan, 2024) Indeed, this is true! Many of the ideas in the book have prompted me to deeply reflect on the essence of education. Education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, but also about touching and nourishing the soul. It is the art of guiding students to learn how to think and grow. In the process of reading and educating, I, too, am constantly improving and growing. The seeds of thinking and in-depth research that *Wandering Notes* planted in my heart have quietly sprouted and grown, motivating me to explore how to better communicate with students, how to ignite their enthusiasm for learning more effectively, and how to understand the profound meaning of education more deeply. Professor Lin’s rare honesty and sincerity also serve as a mirror, reflecting the proper attitude I should have in teacher-student relationships—being close to students, earning their trust with sincerity, listening patiently to their inner whispers, and using wisdom and tolerance as a boat to lead them toward a shore filled with thought, emotion, and responsibility. The words of German philosopher Karl Jaspers, “The essence of education means one tree shaking another, one cloud pushing another, one soul awakening another soul” (Zhang Ke, 2016, p.291), resonate deeply within me, making me feel the beauty and harmony of mutual growth and progress between teacher and student.

*Wandering Notes* has not only illuminated a beacon for my soul but also pointed me in the direction of my educational journey. When I face teaching challenges, it guides me to transcend the limitations of time and space, to examine myself and my students from an objective and broad perspective, to embrace innovation and change with an open heart, to learn to find inner peace amidst complexity, and to create an oasis of thought amidst the busy and noisy world, achieving a free-spirited existence for the soul. I am gradually learning to adopt a calm and detached attitude of “neither joy from external things nor sorrow from self” when facing the disturbances of the outside world. With calmness and reason, I examine social phenomena, analyze teaching results, and reflect on my own growth, finding a poetic refuge in the hustle and bustle of the world. “Today I walk alone, tomorrow I will transform into a butterfly and return,” is not only a poetic description of personal growth but also a vivid interpretation of the educational process. In this long and profound journey of education, we must approach it with humility and reverence, both as transmitters of knowledge and as guides

to students' souls, accompanying them on the transformative path from naivety to maturity, from confusion to conviction. We must nurture the new generation to be capable of rational thought, filled with compassion, and diligent in learning and thinking, enabling them to shine with their own light on the future stage.

Therefore, I am sincerely grateful for the inspiration and strength *Wandering Notes* has given me. It has made me realize that as a young teacher, the road ahead is long, and there is much knowledge I need to learn and many skills I need to improve. I also believe that every child is a unique flower, and as long as we nurture them with care, they will surely bloom with their own brilliance. As long as I carry a love for education and a deep care for my students, I am certain that I will go further on this sunlit path of education and become a good teacher and friend in the growth journey of my students. For this reason, I will stay true to my original intentions, hold onto my passion, strive to overcome my shortcomings, look toward the distant mountains, and continue to learn, explore, reflect, and patiently wait for the day when all the flowers bloom!

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