In a world that is increasingly becoming a global village, education and research face growing international competition. As NTU aims to become a world-class university, as an academic, I am dedicated to learning from colleagues, students and the international academic research community. It is obvious that local publicity alone is insufficient, as good standing in the international research community is becoming increasingly important.

In this article, I would like to share my educational journey with you. Nelson Mandela’s statement that for many people there is, “A Long Way to Freedom” was very true for me. When I finished primary school in 1966, the Cultural Revolution began in China. During that time students were kept out of school. Thus during my teenage years, I lost the opportunity of both a high school and a junior college education. In May 1969 at the age of 15, I voluntarily went to a very remote village as a herdsman on the Hu-Lun-Bei-Er Grassland in Inner Mongolia. From December 1972, I spent five years in the Da-Qing Oil Field in the He-Long-Jiang province as a forger, construction worker, and human resource officer. Later I worked as an oil exploration team worker, and a computer programmer. However, being self-taught I persisted with my study, even at minus 25°C in vast open snowfields under the twilight of a self-made oil-lamp in a crowded moveable cabin! I took the first national university enrolment examination at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977, and was enrolled in Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

I have never regretted those nine years of my life, despite the loss of the golden study period from the ages of 15 – 24, but feel that experiencing the difficult life with ordinary people - peasants, minority headsman, and oil workers – was an irreplaceable treasure that strengthened my personal character. The extreme hardship I encountered, including several near death experiences, has greatly enriched my life. It was a social education, “My university” (a novel by a very famous Russian writer) and an invaluable learning experience.

To be promoted to a full professor represents for me more recognition than reward. My happiness lasted a few days, and then I quickly returned to normal life under the constant call from my daughter, Daisy, who warned, “Do not over-pride yourself”. I have to keep love at heart, as colleagues, research staff and students who have worked with me have substantially contributed to what has been accredited to me. More importantly, without the school and the university's support, it would not have been possible to achieve what we have.

A full professorship depends on the definition, from my understanding, it represents the university's good standing in the global research community, by international recognition of an individual staff member in their respective academic research area. I fully understand that there are a number of colleagues in our school who are qualified or potentially qualified and I will cheer them on when their time comes, as it surely will!