

# THE BOOK OF CHINESE WISDOM BOOK II

TIMELESS TALES  
OF WIT  
AND HUMOR

Michael C. Tang

唐庆华 著

中國智慧故事

二 机智幽默篇

上海人民出版社



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Book of Chinese Wisdom* was originally published by the Foreign Language Press of Beijing in 1996 under the title of *A Treasury of China's Wisdom*. It was published in the U.S. by Prentice Hall Press in 2000 under the title of *A Victor's Reflections and Other Tales of China's Timeless Wisdom*. Subsequently it was translated into other foreign languages and published in Europe and Asia.

I have completely revised and substantially expanded the book for the bilingual version. The book is now in four volumes, each with a distinct theme.

*The Book of Chinese Wisdom* is the result of years of studying hundreds of Chinese classics in history, literature and philosophy, ranging from *The Book of Changes to Tao Te Ching*, from *The Intrigues of the Warring States* to *The Records of the Historian*, from *Remarks of Monarchs* to *The Comprehensive Mirror to Rulers*, from *The Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms* to *The History of the Ming Dynasty*, traversing the vast panoply of China's history.

In recent years, there is a surge of interest in China. But most newly published books outside China deal with modern China. Few focused on China's classical wisdom. This book is meant to fill that gap. I approach the subject of Chinese classical wisdom with a view of applying it in our present-day life. No prior knowledge of China is needed as I take the reader on a tour through the treasure land of Chinese wisdom and call their attention to the gems in the treasure trove. I hope they will discover the practical value of Chinese wisdom while learning something about Chinese culture.

I am deeply grateful to Wang Meng, former Minister of Culture of China and well-known author, Nicholas Kristof, author and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist of *The New York Times*, Zhu Yinghuang, editor-in-chief emeritus of *China Daily*, and Ross Terrill, well-known author and China scholar at Harvard University, for their generous praise.

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## 致 谢

《中国智慧故事》原用英文撰就，由中国外文出版社于1996年出版。2000年该书由美国最大的出版公司之一普伦蒂斯·霍尔公司在美国出版，随后被译成多种语言在各国出版。

作者在撰写英汉对照本的过程中，对原著内容作了全面修订和大幅度的扩充，并拓展为四册。每册有一个主题。

《中国智慧故事》是作者根据多年来所研读的数百种中国书籍，包括《老子》、《庄子》、《易经》、《论语》、《左传》、《国策》、《国语》、《史记》、《三国志》、《资治通鉴》等等，选取其中最能代表中国智慧的精华故事，以现代英语重新撰写而成，旨在使不具备中国历史知识的普通英语读者也能了解渊源博大的中国智慧。

近年来，世界各国对中国的兴趣日趋浓厚。但是，目前国外出版的多为现代中国的题材，而以普通读者为对象，介绍中国古代智慧的书却极少。其实，中国古典智慧是很有现实意义和实用价值的。作者相信，通过此书，读者既可以受到中国智慧的启迪，又能够增进对中国传统文化的了解。

本书渥蒙前文化部长、著名作家王蒙，美国《纽约时报》专栏作家、普利策奖获得者纪思道，英文《中国日报》名誉主编朱英璜，美国著名作家、哈佛大学费正清中心研究员谭若思等撰写赞语，作者深感荣幸。

作者十分感谢上海人民出版社对本书的热情支持，特别是范蔚文先生和潘丹榕女士的悉心关怀和指导，以及张玲雅小姐卓有成效的工作。

阮式云教授细阅全稿，给我良多助益，我特别感激她。我也感谢张帆小姐和钱华小姐的耐心协助。

本书封面之美归功于著名书籍设计师袁银昌先生匠心独运。李静女士的创意也为本书增色无限。本书书名由家父唐清安题写。

The cover is the creation of Mr. Yuan Yinchang, renowned Chinese artist whose works have won domestic and international prizes. Ms. Li Jing has graced the page layout with her ingenuity. The calligraphy was elegantly written by my father with virtuoso brush strokes.

I owe the biggest debt of all to my grandfathers and grandmothers who taught me to love the Chinese classics and cherish their wisdom.

I shall be happy to hear comments and suggestions from my readers.

祖父母和外祖父母从小教我要热爱中国古典精华，珍惜中国智慧。他们是最应该感谢的人。

作者衷心欢迎读者来信交流心得，并馈赠宝贵意见和建议。



## INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is the most precious asset our ancestors have left behind. But it is something that cannot be genetically inherited. Unless we make an effort to learn and practice it, wisdom will not be ours to keep.

*The Book of Chinese Wisdom* brings together a host of thought-provoking stories that are among the most famous in Chinese classics. They are the gems in the treasure trove of Chinese wisdom. You do not need prior knowledge of Chinese history to appreciate these stories whose morals transcend time and space.

Wisdom is not one-dimensional or singly focused; wisdom is rich in variety and kaleidoscopic in manifestation. *The Book of Chinese Wisdom* is in four volumes. *Book I* is about the art of management; *Book II*'s theme is wit and humor; *Book III* focuses on virtues and values; and *Book IV* contains famous stories of dynastic changes in Chinese history.

Wisdom is hard to define. It manifests itself in many ways. As the stories in this book show, it can mean the enlightenment of the mind, a sound philosophy of living, a stratagem, or the effective management of a difficult situation.

Many fables in the book were devised by philosophers, scholars and court ministers to make a meaningful point when they talked to their rulers. A fable was an artful tool for supporting their argument. It was also a safe means to express their views when the rulers could be offended by direct disagreement or criticism. The moral of these fables has since become an integral part of Chinese wisdom.

*Book II* also includes some well-known stories of Zen. Zen is a school of Buddhism that flourished in the Tang and Song dynasties. It exerted more influence on Chinese culture than other Buddhist sects and has now spread to the West. Whether you are a Buddhist or a layman, you can learn something about the art of living from Zen masters.



## 序

智慧是祖先留给我们的最宝贵的财富。但是，智慧不能靠基因遗传。如果我们不努力学习智慧，不运用智慧，我们就无法传承智慧。

《中国智慧故事》搜集了中国历史经典中最著名的故事。这些引人深思的故事是中国智慧宝库里的明珠。读者即使不熟悉中国历史，也能欣赏故事里超越时空的寓意。

智慧层面丰富，种类繁多，表现多姿多彩。《中国智慧故事》共有四册。第一册的主题是管理智慧。第二册的主题是机智与幽默。第三册的重点是教育和哲理。第四册的重点是权术和兵法。

智慧的表达方式多种多样，很难给它下一个明确的定义。正如本书里的故事所展示的，智慧可以指心灵的觉悟，可以指一种健全的人生哲学，也可以指一种智谋，或者一种应对棘手局面的方法。

书中的许多寓言原来是哲人、学者和大臣跟君主谈话时为了表达自己的看法而创造出来的。他们巧妙地运用寓言来支持自己的论点。直率的批评会触犯君主，用这种方式来表达观点就比较安全。此后，这些寓言的哲理成为中国智慧的一个重要组成部分。

本书还收了一些著名的禅宗的故事。禅宗是佛教的一个教派，在唐宋时期相当兴旺。禅宗对中国文化的影响比其他佛教教派都大，而且现在传到了西方。不管你信不信佛，你都可以从禅师那里领悟到一些生活的艺术。

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## PART I

# WISDOM IN ACTION

## 实用智慧

## JADE SCULPTURE

One day there came to Hongren Pawnshop in the city of Shaoxing a customer who wanted to pawn a jade sculpture. He said it was a relic of the Han dynasty that he had inherited from his father and his father from his grandfather. To all appearances it was an exquisite piece of work and the man asked for 1,000 ounces of silver. The pawnbroker being out of town, his assistant accepted the deal and gave him the amount he asked for.

When the pawnbroker returned, he carefully examined the piece only to find it was only an imitation worth no more than 100 ounces of silver. He was so exasperated that he wanted the shop assistant to pay for the loss if the owner did not redeem it.

Grief overwhelmed the shop assistant for he was a poor man. Not knowing what to do, he sought the help of a friend named Xu Wenchang who was a well-known artist and playwright in the Ming dynasty and also known for resourcefulness. Xu Wenchang came up with an action plan.

A few days later, the pawnbroker sent out invitations to his friends and relatives, which read, "The undersigned humbly seeks the pleasure of your company to a party at his house to share his joy of viewing a rare jade sculpture of the Han dynasty that happens to be in his temporary possession."

Guests came in a stream and food and drinks were served. Halfway through the party, the host announced that he was



## 徐文长碎玉

一天，有个人拿了一件玉器到绍兴城鸿仁当铺来典当。这件玉器看上去玲珑剔透，极其精致。来说，这是一块真正的汉玉，是传家之宝，要求当一千两银子。那天，当铺老板正好出城。当铺的伙计觉得玉器值这个价钱，就给了那人一千两银子。

老板回来后，仔细观察了这件玉器，发觉它不是古董，而是一件价值不到一百两银子的仿制品。他一气之下，要伙计把钱赔出来。

伙计十分懊丧，他哪来那么多的银子呢？于是，他就跑到徐文长那里，请他给自己出主意。徐文长是明朝著名的剧作家、散文家和书画家，而且一向足智多谋。他想了一想，就教了伙计一个办法。

几天后，当铺老板向所有的亲友发出请帖，邀请他们前来参加一个酒会。请帖上说：近日有人将汉代稀世珍玉在敝处典当，机会难得，特请大驾光临，一同观赏古董。

那一天，宾客很多。酒兴正浓之际，主人起身告诉大家，因物主不日将赎回此物，所以邀请各位前来观赏。

very pleased they accepted his invitation to come because the jadework would soon be returned to its owner. Then he went inside to fetch the treasure.

Minutes later he came back with the jade sculpture. Everyone held his breath in silent expectancy. Holding it in both hands, he passed through the crowd until he reached a table in the middle of the room. He was about to place it on the table when suddenly he tripped himself and fell. The sculpture slipped from his hand, fell to the floor, broken into pieces.

"Ah!" all those present were stunned at the disaster. The host's face turned ashen. He staggered to his feet, and then excused himself. His guests were disappointed and sorry for the host. The next day the mishap at the pawnbroker's became the talk of the town.

A few days later the man who had pawned the jade came to Hongren Pawnshop. Putting 1,000 ounces of silver on the counter, he said he would like to redeem the sculpture. The shop assistant counted the silver and then took out the jade sculpture from inside without a word. The man gazed at it for a long time. No mistake. It was his phony jade sculpture, intact, unbroken. Flabbergasted, he took it back and left.

What he did not know was that it was all the idea of Xu Wenchang. The broken sculpture was a fake. It was a fake of his original fake. Xu Wenchang knew the guests would spread the news, and the news would entice the trickster back to the pawnshop because he would likely bluff the pawnbroker into giving him more money.

**COMMENT:** Over-greediness is self-defeating.