

中国第一部双语百科全书

用英语说

中国

Talk About  
China in English

民俗  
Folklore

[美] 刘飞 李凯平 主编  
Robin Harrison 审校



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# 前 言

随着我国改革开放的不断向前推进,旅游事业也越来越兴旺地发展起来。尤其是近些年来,来自世界各地的客人涌向中国,试图揭开这块辽阔土地的神秘面纱,从而了解中国悠久的历史,以满足其难以诠释的好奇和幻想。

具有悠久而又丰富历史的中国,一直为自己无数的历史遗迹和文化遗产感到自豪。几乎在中国的每一个地方,人们都能欣赏到各种神奇的景观,以及世代相传的故事和神话。

在中国人民的辛勤努力下,中国在各个方面都发生了翻天覆地的变化。从经济、文化、教育,到生活、娱乐和休闲,人们都在尽情地享受着国泰民安、和谐安睦的生活。国家的建设和发展日新月异,人们的思想、观点、生活方式也有了很大的变化。

在这种形势下,我们觉得有必要给来中国工作和旅游的外国友人——尤其是给那些来参加2008年北京奥运会的各国朋友提供一些帮助,把他们可能感兴趣的事情、人物和地方简单地作一些介绍,让他们对中国有个大致的了解。由此,我们编写了《用英语说中国》这套丛书。丛书共有10部,分别是:

- 1.《用英语说中国——历史》
- 2.《用英语说中国——民俗》
- 3.《用英语说中国——艺术》
- 4.《用英语说中国——文化》
- 5.《用英语说中国——名城》
- 6.《用英语说中国——名人》
- 7.《用英语说中国——旅游》
- 8.《用英语说中国——媒体》
- 9.《用英语说中国——体育》
- 10.《用英语说中国——名校》

《用英语说中国——民俗》,每一章分别针对一个特定的主题,即人生礼仪、日常生活民俗、中国传统节日、民间活动与艺术、社会组织民俗。每一章又从各个层面对其特定主题加以展开,以民间活动与艺术为例,本章分为传统体育活动和民间

艺术两方面,前者涵盖了传统体育运动、空中体育运动、马上运动、水上运动、陆上体育运动这几大类体育运动,同时又精选了太极拳、舞龙、舞狮这几种在海内外享有盛誉,能够代表中国民俗的著名体育运动

本书撷取了中国文化中具有自己个性特点、植根于本民族文化土壤之上的民俗文化。鉴于中国是个幅员辽阔、民族众多的大国,因此笔者在选材时以主体民族汉族的民俗为主,同时兼顾少数民族的民俗风情

针对这些具有中国特色的习俗文化,每一章重点介绍它们的起源、历史演变、具体内容、以及与之相关的文化和社会背景。本书以民俗作为一扇重要的窗口来帮助外国朋友更好地了解中国。国内外的英语学习者也可以通过阅读本书提高英语水平。本书语言平实、内容风趣,并配有大量精美的插图,使读者能够轻松地领略中国民俗的奥秘与魅力

参编这套丛书的作者都是来自高等院校的英语教授、副教授和硕士研究生,大家都为能参与此项有意义的工作而感到兴奋和激动,都乐意为宣传和振兴中华贡献自己的一份力量。

《用英语说中国》这套丛书从策划到构思,从设计到编写,都是站在较高的角度,本着较新的水准,力求创造性地把中国的上上下下、东西南北、方方面面以简洁流畅的语言加以娓娓叙述。这无疑将给广大读者一种全新的感受

《用英语说中国》这套丛书对于英语爱好者提高英语水平、激发学习英语兴趣会有所帮助的。丛书信息量庞大,涉及面广,古往今来,东南西北,犹如一部关于中国的小百科全书。丛书中的英文叙述和中文译述都严格遵循语言简练、结构明晰、形式活泼的宗旨。我们衷心希望这套丛书能够受到广大读者的喜爱和信赖。把中国介绍给世界,让世界更多的人了解中国,是每个中国人的愿望。

限于编著者的水平和第一手资料的缺乏,丛书中有些地方的内容和信息可能存在着一些出入和欠缺,恳请广大读者予以批评指正。

《用英语说中国》丛书编者

2008年8月

# Preface

With the rapid development of China's reform and opening-up, tourism is on the rise, esp. in recent years. More and more people from all over the world come to China, hoping to unveil the mystery of the vast land, to discover the origins of the long history in China and to satisfy their own curiosities and fantasies as well.

China, with a long and rich history, is always proud of her countless historical sites and cultural relics. Almost everywhere people encounter amazing miracles or natural beauties together with their everlasting legends and myths.

Furthermore, with the strenuous work of the whole nation, China has witnessed fundamental changes in every field. From national economy, culture and education to people's living standard, recreation and entertainments, everywhere and every soul is enjoying a peaceful and comfortable life in a friendly and harmonious atmosphere. The nation's construction and development are changing with each passing day while people's views and points are also keeping pace with the times.

Under such circumstances, we feel obliged to offer some help to those foreign visitors, esp. those who are coming to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, by giving them a brief introduction of the things, the people and the places they might be interested in. The series "*Talk About China in English*", therefore, come into being. The series consist of 10 books in all. They are:

1. **Talk About China in English—History**
2. **Talk About China in English—Folklore**
3. **Talk About China in English—Arts**
4. **Talk About China in English—Culture**
5. **Talk About China in English—Famous Cities**
6. **Talk About China in English—Celebrities**
7. **Talk About China in English—Tourism**
8. **Talk About China in English—Media**
9. **Talk About China in English—Sports**
10. **Talk About China in English—Famous Colleges and Universities**

In *Talk About China in English—Folklore*, rites of passage, customs in daily life, festivals, folk activities and arts, customs of social organization in each chapter as independent subjects, which are discussed from several aspects. Take the example of folk activities and arts, this chapter is divided into two sections, i. e. the traditional sports and activities and the folk arts. The former section covers such general forms of sports and activities as traditional sports and activities, aerial sports, equestrian sports, aquatic sports, land based sports and activities and representative Chinese folk activities prestigious overseas, namely Taiji Quan, Dragon Dance and Lion Dancing.

The material selection conforms to the principle of selecting folklore ubiquitous in Chinese culture with its unique features. Meanwhile, the folklore of Han nationality, the majority of Chinese nation, occupies large portion of this book, complemented by that of

the minority nationalities, taking into consideration the fact that China is a large country consisting of a great number of nationalities.

Each chapter places priority on the origin, historical development, details and the applicable cultural and social background of customs and cultures with Chinese features. Folklore elaborated in this book functions as an essential window enabling foreign friends to achieve a better understanding of China. We have performed selection and categorization of various Chinese and English materials and provide them with the corresponding English or Chinese translations. In order to enable readers to know every aspect of Chinese folklore as far as possible, we attach great importance to the representability of materials in the selection on the one hand and widen the perspectives of this part to a great extent on the other hand. Moreover, the majority of this part discusses folklore of the Han group while the minorities are also explored in some detail. Despite the fact that a great number of works have been published on Chinese folklore culture in both China and foreign countries, few of them are developed in both English and Chinese versions. Even so, they are not detailed and don't cover wider subjects. This book is characterized as simple language and interesting contents with a large number of fine illustrations and will thus enable the readers to understand the mysteries and charms of Chinese folklore in an easy and delighted manner.

All the writers of the series are professors, associate professors and graduate-students of English from colleges and universities. We all feel happy and proud to have the chance to do our bit for the publicity of our motherland as well as her promotion.

From making plans to hatching plots, from working out schemes to carrying out the writings, the authors have been diligent and conscientious. Through our work, we want to provide readers with a rich and colorful introduction of an encyclopedic manner. The series are new and creative, and sure enough, they will bring fresh feelings and experiences to all readers.

The series are also helpful for all English lovers, including secondary school students and teachers, college students, office clerks and public servants.

Both the English and Chinese versions in the series are written in simple language, clear structure and lively style. We hope they will find popularity upon publication.

We are extremely grateful to the authors and publishers of all the materials we have chosen here in the series. We apologize for the insufficient information in some cases due to lack of resources. We intend to show every respect for intellectual property rights, but we hope our pleading of the permission to use these materials for the purpose of letting more foreign friends know China better will receive kind and generous consideration.

**Authors**  
**August 2008**





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# C 人生礼仪

## Chapter 1 Rites of Passage

It should be admitted, in the first place, that this term “rite of passage” is largely one of folklore studies and that here in this booklet, it is not used in its academic sense. We’d like to adopt a simpler definition.

In this book, a rite of passage is a ceremony or ritual that may take place when a person changes social status and social identity. In all societies, major events in the life cycle are subject to ritualized forms of recognition. Such events are celebrated in diverse ways, with different cultures singling out different stages of life for attention. The Chinese’s celebration of rites of passage bears a peculiar mark or imprint of Confucianism.

As it is known to all, Confucianism has exerted extensive and profound influences upon Chinese society and culture and shaped the Chinese’s behaviours as a social and moral being. Confucianism does not contain all of the elements of some other religions, like Christianity and Islamism. It is primarily an ethical system. Since the time of the Han dynasty, four life passages have been recognized and regulated by the Confucian tradition.

Hence, the topics to be discussed in this first chapter are formulated in accordance with the Confucian tradition as follows:

Birth

Rite of Passage into Adulthood

Marriage

Funeral Customs

首先,应该承认,“人生礼仪”主要是一个民俗研究方面的术语,在这本小册子中,这个术语的使用并不是从学术意义上说的。我们想要采用的一个相对简单的定义。

所谓人生礼仪,是指人在改变其社会地位和社会身份时举行的仪式。无论在哪个社会,人们对生命中的主要事件通过礼仪的形式表示认同。不同的文化对庆祝事件的选择和庆祝方式各有不同。中国人的人生礼仪就被打上了儒家思想的



烙印。

众所周知,儒教对中国的社会和文化造成了广泛深刻的影响,在社会和道德层面塑造了中国人的行为方式。儒教主要是一种道德体系,并不具有基督教、伊斯兰教等其他宗教作为宗教的所有要素。从汉朝开始,儒教传统就规定了四个重要的人生礼仪。

根据儒家的这一传统,本章讨论的主要话题如下:

出生

成人礼

婚礼

葬礼



## 出生 Birth

Chinese people value their family very much because they regard it as a means to keep the family blood stream continuously running. And the running family blood stream maintains the life of the whole nation. That is why children production and breeding in China becomes a focus of all members of families. It is even accepted by them as an essential moral duty. There is a Chinese saying that of all who lack filial piety, the worst is who has no children.

The fact that Chinese people pay great attention to children production and breeding can be supported by many customary practices. Many traditional customs about production of children are all based on the idea of children protection.

### Pregnancy

When a wife is found to be pregnant, people will say she “has happiness” and all her family members will feel overjoyed over it. Throughout the whole period of pregnancy, both she and the fetus are well attended, so that the fetus is not hurt in any way and the new generation is born both physically and mentally healthy. To keep the fetus in a good condition, the would-be mother is offered sufficient nutritious foods and some traditional Chinese medicines believed to be help-



ful to the fetus.

## After Birth

When a Chinese baby is born, he/she is already considered to be one year old: age is calculated from the date of conception not the date of birth.

Praise should never be given to or applied to a new-born Chinese baby as this is believed to invite the attention of demons and ghosts: the baby, instead, should be referred to with unfavourable terms and words!

A concave navel is considered a sign of a prosperous life for the baby, while an extruding one is less auspicious. If a baby has more than one hair crown it is thought he/she will be mischievous and disobedient, but if he/she has wide and thick ears, he/she will live in prosperity. A baby's head should be stroked often so that it becomes nicely rounded.

Babies who continuously cry are thought to have been disturbed by evil spirits and to ward these off, a single pomelo leaf is placed beneath his/her mattress.

Care is also taken to ensure that the baby's spirit does not leave his/her body permanently: a baby's face should not be powdered with white talcum powder when he/she is sleeping as his/her wandering spirit will not recognise his/her face and not be reunited with the body. When a little older, the baby may be fitted with a black bracelet, talisman or image of the Buddha which is thought to ensure his/her well being.

## Confinement

After birth, the mother is expected to observe a 40-day period of confinement, which is called "zuoyuezi", and to stay in bed for a month in order to recover from the fatigue. During this period, she is not allowed to eat food considered "cold" or have cold baths: keeping warm, by the wearing of thick clothes for example, is considered of paramount importance. If it can be afforded, a special helper-responsible for both mother and child- is hired to tend to the new mother for at least two weeks.

## Month-Old Celebration

The first important event for the newly born baby is the one-month celebration. In Buddhist or Taoist families, on the morning of the baby's 30th day, sacrifices are offered to the gods so that the gods will protect the baby in his subsequent life. Ancestors are also virtually informed of the arrival of the new member in the family. According to the customs, relatives and friends receive gifts from the child's parents. Types of gifts vary from place to place, but eggs dyed red are usually a must



both in town and the countryside. Red eggs are chosen as gifts probably because they are the symbol of changing process of life and their round shape is the symbol of harmonious and happy life. They are made red because red color is a sign of happiness in Chinese culture. Besides eggs, food like cakes, chicken and hams are often used as gifts. As people do in the Spring Festival, gifts given are always in even number.

During the celebration, relatives and friends of the family will also return some presents. The presents include those which the child may use, like foods, daily materials, gold or silver wares. But the commonest are some money wrapped in a piece of red paper. Grandparents usually give their grandchild a gold or silver ware to show their deep love for the child. In the evening, the child's parents give a grand feast at home or in a restaurant to the guests at the celebration.

The day after the feast, the baby's hair is shaved off; the baby's hair is regarded as "interim" hair and its removal facilitates the growth of "permanent" hair.

### **Naming a child**

In Chinese culture, a person's name has an important role to play in determining his/her destiny. Because of this, Chinese parents will often spend a long time choosing their child's name and all possible factors must be taken into account when they are naming their children.

A typical Chinese name has three characters, in principle these are the family name, a name indicating the child's generation and a personal name, though often the second "principle" is not followed. The generation indicating characters in the names are usually given by the forefathers, who chose them from a line of a poem or found their own and put them in the genealogy for their descendents to use. For this reason, it is possible to know the relationships between the family relatives by just looking at their names.

Naming a child must take into consideration five principles: the name must have a favourable meaning (particularly favoured are meanings reflecting wealth or well-being) and names with negative possibilities should be avoided, the name must sound pleasant when spoken, the name must reflect favourable mathematical calculations, it must be harmonious with regard to yin and yang, and it must possess one of the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

It is a common practice to find the newborn baby's Eight Characters (in four pairs, indicating the year, month, day and hour of a person's birth, each pair consisting of one Heavenly Stem and one Earthly Branch, formerly used in fortune-tell-





ing) and the element in the Eight Characters. It is traditionally believed in China that the world is made up of five principal elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. A person's name is to include an element that he lacks in his Eight Characters. If he lacks water, for example, then his name is supposed to contain a word like river, lake, tide, sea, stream, rain, or any word associated with water. If he lacks metal, then he is to be given a word like gold, silver, iron, or steel.

Some people even believe that the number of strokes of a name has a lot to do with the owner's fate. So when they name a child, the number of strokes of the name is taken into account. When written, each Chinese name has a certain number of strokes, and the number of brush strokes of each character corresponds to a certain element. A two-stroke character is associated with wood, three and four strokes fire, five and six strokes earth and nine and ten strokes water. The total number of strokes in a name can determine a person's fortune: for example twelve strokes bespeaks a life of illness and failure, while 81 strokes presages prosperity and a happy future.

Some parents prefer to use a character from an eminent person's name, hoping that their child inherits that person's nobility and greatness. Characters with noble and encouraging connotations are also among the first choices. Some parents inject their own wishes into their children's names. When they want to have a boy, they may name their girl Zhaodi meaning "expecting a brother".

## One-Hundred-Day Celebration

It is another important occasion to mark when the child is one hundred days old. In ancient times there used to be a grand ceremony, which was called "baisui", or "one hundred years old". By this name, the Chinese are in fact expressing their wish that their beloved child will enjoy a life of longevity. This celebration is not so common now, so we will not go to details.

## One-Year-Old Birthday

When the child is one year old, there is an interesting custom called "zhua-zhou". Zhuazhou is regarded as one of the most important customs on a child's first birthday.

The earliest written record of this custom can be traced back to the Song Dynasty (960 ~ 1279). In the late Qing Dynasty (1644 ~ 1911), this custom prevailed in Beijing. Zhuazhou is not an occasion for grand feasts and elaborate gifts: the hosts do not even send out invitations. The idea is that relatives will show up spontaneously to celebrate the child's first birthday. Gifts from relatives on this day are