



● [美] Susan Simerly / 著

美国生活 百事无忧 手册

Making It in
America

A Practical Guide
for American Life

今日中国出版社



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Thanks to all of my Chinese friends, both here and abroad, every person I met taught me a little more about a country and a people which are dear to me. I have tried to remember everyone here, but over a period of five years and three cities, it is possible I may have inadvertently forgotten someone. If I have, I apologize and I thank you.

I wish everyone good health and safe journeys.

*Susan Simerly
Dongguan, China
November 1999*

序 言

你想去美国吗？

你想知道如何获得赴美签证吗？

你知道如何向国外的大学递交申请吗？

赴美后怎样着装才能被美国人接受？

怎样与美国人打交道才比较合适呢？

她——Susan 会告诉你！

Susan 是一位在中国教书的美国人，强烈的好奇心，使她来到了中国。出于对中国人民的无限热爱她又第二次回到了这里。待人随和、热心助人的她逐渐地融入到了中国人之中，并受到了大家的尊敬和喜爱。两年多来她深入生活，细心观察，得到了许多第一手材料。丰富的生活阅历和对中美文化冲击的深刻体会促使她开始了这本书的编写工作。经过长时间的酝酿与整理，这本充满爱心的书——《MAKING IT IN AMERICA: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR AMERICAN LIFE》终于同大家见面了！

全书共分十章，涵盖了衣、食、住、行、医疗、保险、求学、经商等日常生活中平凡而必需的知识。对那些想了解中美文化差异的朋友及在校的大学生来说拥有此书会使你觉得拥有了一位良师益友；对那些即将出国求学、经商的朋友来说这本书无疑会给你上一堂生动、形象的出国前的“培训课”。

作者相信这本快捷、浅显易懂、实用的书会让各位朋友在将来的学习、工作和生活中得心应手，做到有备无患。

祝君好运！

编者

Introduction

On a rainy night in August 1994, I landed at Capital Airport in Beijing. It was after midnight when I finally collected my luggage and walked through the Customs gate. Feeling nervous, I was extremely relieved when I saw the smiling face of a man who was holding a paper with my name on it. The man behind the smile was Wang Hong, Director of Foreign Affairs at the Liaoning Institute of Technology in Jinzhou. My job as a teacher of English was about to begin. Wang Hong patiently and kindly guided me through my first days in China.

In September, I was taking photos of one of my classes. When we walked back to the classroom, I did not notice that a beautiful lady had followed us. During the break, she introduced herself to me. Her name was Wang Huiyan, and she was a teacher in the Chemical Engineering Department of our school. The following week she also joined my class. When the class was over, she walked with me for a while and invited me to her home the following Sunday. I accepted the invitation to my first Chinese home with great joy and anticipation.

The Sunday afternoon that I spent with Wang Huiyan and her husband, Liu Gexin, was very special. Not only was the food delicious, but the friendship that blossomed will stay with me forever. This friendship has also provided me with important lessons in Chinese culture.

The students I have had the honor to meet and teach in China have, on many occasions, become my teachers. Through reading their journals in my writing classes, through discussions in oral classes and having numerous meaningful visits, we have come to know and understand each other. We have had many opportunities to discuss the cultural differences between us. These students have truly inspired me.

Having been born and raised in the United States, I am very fortunate to have lived on the island of Guam for two years, in

England for over three years, and in South Africa for six years. I have also traveled through more than 25 countries. So you see, being in a foreign country is not anything new to me. However, my experiences in China have been quite different from anything I have experienced in any other country.

In China I cannot read the signs. I cannot speak to everyone freely. Often I must depend on others to help and guide me. This has made me more aware of the cultural differences between Americans and Chinese, and of the need to bridge the gap.

Before I came to China, I read as many books as I could about Chinese culture. This helped me to feel comfortable in most situations. At least when something strange happened to me, I could recall what I had read. Even though an event or custom may have seemed strange, I felt better knowing this particular thing was normal in China.

Because my time in China has been extremely rewarding, I wanted to give something back to the wonderful Chinese people. After thinking about this for a long time, I finally came up with the idea of sharing my culture with you, especially those who would be traveling to the United States to study or work — I have found a number of guide books in China about my country, but none written by an American.

In writing this book, I have tried to think about what will seem odd and strange to you on your first visit to the United States. I have focused on things that are different between the two cultures, and tried to explain them based on my understanding of Chinese culture. The material covered in this book is meant to be practical as well as educational.

I hope and trust that you will find the information in this book helpful as you prepare for your own adventure in the United States, and that you will keep an open mind and use what you learn to help to bring American and Chinese people closer together.

It is also important for me to make it very clear that it is not my intention to be seen as encouraging you to go to the United States and stay there permanently. I feel that anyone going to my country, especially those going to further their education, has a responsibility to return to China and share what they have learned with their fellow countrymen.

At the end of the book, you will find a form to fill in and mail to me should you have any comments or suggestions about the material covered. I would like to know whether you find the information in this book helpful.

I wish you the very best as you travel to the United States and beyond. May all your dreams come true. May you learn all you need to know to help China continue to develop and to reach her full capacity. May your troubles be little ones. May you find happy memories that will stay with you forever.

*Susan Simerly
Dongguan, China
November 1999*

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Chapter 1 Cultural Differences

第一章 文化差异

The history of the United States began with the early settlers about 500 years ago. The history of China goes back about 5,000 years; it is the history of a country that develops the character and culture of its people. China's amazing tales of the rise and fall of the great dynasties are an interesting contrast to the American history that centers on the attitude of "Manifest Destiny"¹ which led to the expansion of the United States from east to west. China and the United States have different culture backgrounds. This chapter mainly explores Sino-American ways of association.

美国的历史始于大约 500 年前的殖民时代。中国的历史则要追溯到 5000 年前。一个国家的历史造就了其民族的性格和文化。中国各大王朝神奇的起伏跌宕与兴衰和以“命定说”为中心导致美国的领土自东向西扩张的历史是一个有趣的对比。中美两国有着不同的文化背景，本章主要探讨他们在人际交往方面的一些差异。

Generally speaking, Americans give a stereotypical impression of being aggressive, outspoken and independent.

Of course, not all Americans are like this. What gives people outside of the United States this impression is the way they see Americans portrayed in movies and what they read about them in books and newspapers. Watching movies can easily give one the idea that all Americans are rich and like violence! This is not true in either case.

The United States has been called a “melting pot” because it is made up of immigrants from many countries, each bringing with them the character and culture of their motherland. A more recent description of the United States is to characterize it as a “salad bowl.” In other words, although the country is made up of diverse ethnic backgrounds, they have not mixed together to become a homogenous society, but have blended together in an attempt to create a system of unity in diversity.

Chinese culture has evolved and remained stable from the strength of common values such as family, the system of writing, the impact of Confucianism, and the constancy of the political system. The basis of all Chinese thinking begins with the importance of the family. Even the early settlements of the Banpo people of Shaanxi Province indicate the importance of family. The site shows how they lived together in single family units and how they were buried near each other. There was a sense of community even in those early days. Consequently, the Chinese character is centered on harmony and the well-being of the group, while Americans tend to be more concerned with fulfilling the needs and desires of the individual. For a Chinese person going to the United States for the first time, this major change in the focus of the individual's

attitude toward society may be quite overwhelming. Recognizing and appreciating the cultural differences between Chinese and American people are very important, especially in those first days while you are adjusting to living in a new country.

总体上看,美国人给人的印象是:积极、坦率和独立。当然,美国人并非人人如此。给人以这种印象的是那些描述美国的电影、书籍和报刊。这些电影很容易使人们认为所有的美国人既富有又喜欢暴力。而事实上,这两者都不正确。

美国曾被称为“熔炉”,因为它是由许多国家的移民组成。这些人又分别带来了各自祖国的性格和文化。近来,美国又被形容为“色拉碗”。换句话说,尽管美国拥有不同种族的文化背景,但这些背景并未被融合成一体,相反却混杂在一起试图朝一个多元化的和谐的体系发展。

由于相同价值观的力量,如家庭、汉字体系、儒家思想的影响及稳定的政治体系,使得中国的文化得以演进并保持稳定。家庭极其重要,家庭观念是所有中国人的思维基础。即使是早期的陕西“半坡人”也显示出了极重的家庭观念。遗迹表明他们是怎样以家庭为单位生活在一起,死后家庭成员也是彼此就近埋葬的。那时的人们便有着集体的意识。顺理成章,中国人的性格集中体现在和谐与互助,而美国人则更倾向于满足个人需求和实现自我的价值。对一个第一次去中国的中国人来说,个人在社会态度上的转变,可能会导致其受到很大的冲击。认识并深刻地理解中美两国民族间的文化差异十分重要,对那些初到异国处于适应阶段的人来说,这一点尤为重要。



Meeting People 交际

Probably the first difference you will notice will be the questions asked when people meet each other. In China it is common to greet a friend by asking, "Have you eaten?" or "Where are you going?" In the United States these questions will cause an unexpected reaction. If you ask an American whether they have eaten, they would assume to be an invitation to join you for a meal. If the person is considerably younger than you, they may think that you will pay for their meal. If you know the person very well, it is acceptable to ask them where they are going, otherwise this question would be considered personal. This is a good example of the attitude of individuality and privacy in American culture.

It would also be uncommon in the United States to ask, "Are you busy?" in the same way it is asked in China. You may ask this question, but if the answer you

receive is "Yes, I am," then you should be sure to keep the conversation very short, or ask if it would be more convenient for you to come back to speak with the person at a later time. If you are calling someone on the telephone, then you should ask if it is convenient to ask them a question or discuss something now or if it would be more convenient for you to call them back later.

It is also common for people to shake hands, especially when meeting a person for the first time. Sometimes friends greet each other simply by using some form of verbal expression, at other times they may also shake hands. This is more common between men, but it is also practiced by women, especially in business or professional settings.

Another form of greeting between people who are very familiar with each other is hugging. Hugging may also occur when people meet for the first time, but share a common bond.² For example, perhaps they have been corresponding for a long time, or perhaps they are introduced to each other for the first time, but they have known about each other for a long time and know they will now have a close relationship. The two mothers of a bride and groom might greet each other for the first time with a hug. In most cases in the United States, it is acceptable for women to hug men not related to them if they are close friends.

People in some big cities may seem to be less friendly than those you meet in small towns. In smaller towns, it is common for people to nod their heads as a greeting when walking down the street, whether they know each other or not. If you are waiting in a line for a movie or perhaps

in a bank, you might find that people will say something to you just to be friendly. A typical greeting in this case would simply be to say, "Hello," or "How are you?" Sometimes strangers might say something about the weather or a well-known news or sporting event as a way of making some conversation.



或许你注意到的第一个差异便是人们相遇时所提的问题。在中国,遇到朋友时普遍问一声“吃了没?”或者说“上哪儿去?”在美国,这样的问题将会引起一些误解。如果你问美国人是否吃了,这意味着你要邀请他一起吃饭。如果他比你年轻许多,这便暗示你要请客。如果你与他很熟,问他去哪儿则是可以接受的,否则这样的问题会被认为是隐私。在美国的文化中,这是一个有关私事和隐私的好例子。

在美国,用“你忙吗?”作为问候是很少见的。事实上可以问这样的问题,但如果回答是“是”,则一定要缩短谈话,或询问过一会儿再谈是否更方便。如果是在通电