

生活的艺术

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING

林语堂 著

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出版说明

我们现在将英语作为一种“世界英语”(WORLD ENGLISH)来看待;于是,英语不再只是单纯的一门异族语言,它同时融合着不同民族的表达形式并折射其多姿的文化。一个世纪以来,有过这样的一位位中国人,他们以各自令人惊叹的完美英语,对世界解说着中国,对祖国表达着赤忱。如今,我们相信,还有更多的中国人胸怀一样的向往,因为,跨越世纪的开放中国需要引进,也需要输出。

我们出版中国人的英语著述,正是为有志于此的英语学习者树一个榜样,为下个世纪的中国再添一份自信,还为世界英语的推广呐一声喊。

选择林语堂的作品重印出版,首先是因为林氏在向西方介绍中国文化方面杰出的成绩。他用英语创作的一系列作品曾经轰动欧美文坛,并且影响深远,其中有的被美国大学选为教材,有的被政府高层倚为了解中国之必读,一直被视作阐述东方文化的权威著述。其次还因为林氏高超的艺术造诣和非凡的文化修养。作为国际笔会的副会长,并获诺贝尔文学奖的提名,他的创作无疑为他赢得了国际文坛的巨匠地位,同时也为中国人赢得骄傲。再者,应是惊叹于林氏那“极其美妙,令以英文为母语的人既羡慕敬佩又深感惭愧”的精纯娴熟的英语;当然我们也终于让林语堂先生不再遗憾“……三十年著作全用英文,应是文字精华所在,惜未能与中国读者相见……”

《生活的艺术》是林语堂旅美专事创作后的第一部书,也是继《吾国与吾民》之后再获成功的又一英文作品。该书于1937年在美国出版,次年便居美国畅销书排行榜榜首达52周,且接连再版四十余次,并为十余种文字所翻译。林语堂在该书中将旷怀达观,陶情遣兴的中国人的生活方式,和浪漫高雅的东方情调予以充分的传达,向西方人娓娓道出了一个可供仿效的“生活最高典型”的模式,以致有书评家(Peter Precott)称:“读完这书后,我真想跑到唐人街,一遇见中国人,便向他行个鞠躬礼。”应该承认,本书无论从

内容上还是语言上来说,都是我国英语爱好者难得的一本读物。但尤需指出的是,林氏的某些观点是与马克思主义相违背的,这绝不代表我们作为出版者的观点,希读者以科学的世界观和方法论为指导,慎审明辨。同样的原因,我们对个别地方的删节也请读者理解。

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Chapter One

THE AWAKENING

I. APPROACH TO LIFE

IN what follows I am presenting the Chinese point of view, because I cannot help myself. I am interested only in presenting a view of life and of things as the best and wisest Chinese minds have seen it and expressed it in their folk wisdom and their literature. It is an idle philosophy born of an idle life, evolved in a different age, I am quite aware. But I cannot help feeling that this view of life is essentially true, and since we are alike under the skin, what touches the human heart in one country touches all. I shall have to present a view of life as Chinese poets and scholars evaluated it with their common sense, their realism and their sense of poetry. I shall attempt to reveal some of the beauty of the pagan world, a sense of the pathos and beauty and terror and comedy of life, viewed by a people who have a strong feeling of the limitations of our existence, and yet somehow retain a sense of the dignity of human life.

The Chinese philosopher is one who dreams with one eye open, who views life with love and sweet irony, who mixes his cynicism with a kindly tolerance, and who alternately wakes up from life's dream and then nods again, feeling more alive when he is dreaming than when he is awake, thereby investing his waking life with a dream-world quality. He sees with one eye closed and with one eye opened the futility of much that goes on around him and of his own endeavors, but barely retains enough sense of reality to determine to go through with it. He is seldom disillusioned because he has no illusions, and seldom disappointed because he never had extravagant hopes. In this way his spirit is emancipated.

For, after surveying the field of Chinese literature and philosophy, I come to the conclusion that the highest ideal of Chinese culture has

always been a man with a sense of *detachment* (*takuan*) toward life based on a sense of wise disenchantment. From this detachment comes *high-mindedness* (*k'uanghuai*), a high-mindedness which enables one to go through life with tolerant irony and escape the temptations of fame and wealth and achievement, and eventually makes him take what comes. And from this detachment arise also his sense of freedom, his love of vagabondage and his pride and nonchalance. It is only with this sense of freedom and nonchalance that one eventually arrives at the keen and intense joy of living.

It is useless for me to say whether my philosophy is valid or not for the Westerner. To understand Western life, one would have to look at it as a Westerner born, with his own temperament, his bodily attitudes and his own set of nerves. I have no doubt that American nerves can stand a good many things that Chinese nerves cannot stand, and *vice versa*. It is good that it should be so —that we should all be born different. And yet it is all a question of relativity. I am quite sure that amidst the hustle and bustle of American life, there is a great deal of wistfulness, of the divine desire to lie on a plot of grass under tall beautiful trees of an idle afternoon and *just do nothing*. The necessity for such common cries as “Wake up and live” is to me a good sign that a wise portion of American humanity prefer to dream the hours away. The American is after all not as bad as all that. It is only a question whether he will have more or less of that sort of thing, and how he will arrange to make it possible. Perhaps the American is merely ashamed of the word “loafing” in a world where everybody is doing something, but somehow, as sure as I know he is also an animal, he likes sometimes to have his muscles relaxed, to stretch on the sand, or to lie still with one leg comfortably curled up and one arm placed below his head as his pillow. If so, he cannot be very different from Yen Hwei, who had exactly that virtue and whom Confucius desperately admired among all his disciples. The only thing I desire to see is that he be honest about it, and that he proclaim to the world that he likes it when he likes it, that it is not when he is working in the office but when he is lying idly on the

sand that his soul utters, "Life is beautiful."

We are, therefore, about to see a philosophy and art of living as the mind of the Chinese people as a whole has understood it. I am inclined to think that, in a good or bad sense, there is nothing like it in the world. For here we come to an entirely new way of looking at life by an entirely different type of mind. It is a truism to say that the culture of any nation is the product of its mind. Consequently, where there is a national mind so racially different and historically isolated from the Western cultural world, we have the right to expect new answers to the problems of life, or what is better, new methods of approach, or, still better, a new posing of the problems themselves. We know some of the virtues and deficiencies of that mind, at least as revealed to us in the historical past. It has a glorious art and a contemptible science, a magnificent common sense and an infantile logic, a fine womanish chatter about life and no scholastic philosophy. It is generally known that the Chinese mind is an intensely practical, hard-headed one, and it is also known to some lovers of Chinese art that it is a profoundly sensitive mind; by a still smaller proportion of people, it is accepted as also a profoundly poetic and philosophical mind. At least the Chinese are noted for taking things philosophically, which is saying more than the statement that the Chinese have a great philosophy or have a few great philosophers. For a nation to have a few philosophers is not so unusual, but for a nation to take things philosophically is terrific. It is evident anyway that the Chinese as a nation are more philosophic than efficient, and that if it were otherwise, no nation could have survived the high blood pressure of an efficient life for four thousand years. Four thousand years of efficient living would ruin any nation. An important consequence is that, while in the West, the insane are so many that they are put in an asylum, in China the insane are so unusual that we worship them, as anybody who has a knowledge of Chinese literature will testify. And that, after all, is what I am driving at. Yes, the Chinese have a light, an almost gay, philosophy, and the best proof of their philosophic temper is to be found in this wise and merry

philosophy of living.

II. A PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC FORMULA

Let us begin with an examination of the Chinese mental make-up which produced this philosophy of living: great realism, inadequate idealism, a high sense of humor, and a high poetic sensitivity to life and nature.

Mankind seems to be divided into idealists and realists, and idealism and realism are the two great forces molding human progress. The clay of humanity is made soft and pliable by the water of idealism, but the stuff that holds it together is after all the clay itself, or we might all evaporate into Ariels. The forces of idealism and realism tug at each other in all human activities, personal, social and national, and real progress is made possible by the proper mixture of these two ingredients, so that the clay is kept in the ideal pliable, plastic condition, half moist and half dry, not hardened and unmanageable, nor dissolving into mud. The soundest nations, like the English, have realism and idealism mixed in proper proportions, like the clay which neither hardens and so gets past the stage for the artist's molding, nor is so wishy-washy that it cannot retain its form....

A vague, uncritical idealism always lends itself to ridicule and too much of it might be a danger to mankind, leading it round in a futile wild-goose chase for imaginary ideals. If there were too many of these visionary idealists in any society or people, revolutions would be the order of the day. Human society would be like an idealistic couple forever getting tired of one place and changing their residence regularly once every three months, for the simple reason that no one place is ideal and the place where one is not seems always better because one is not there. Very fortunately, man is also gifted with a sense of humor, whose function, as I conceive it, is to exercise criticism of man's dreams, and bring them in touch with the world of reality. It is important that man dreams, but it is perhaps equally important that he can laugh at his own dreams. That is a great gift, and the

Chinese have plenty of it.

The sense of humor, which I shall discuss at more length in a later chapter, seems to be very closely related to the sense of reality, or realism. If the joker is often cruel in disillusioning the idealist, he nevertheless performs a very important function right there by not letting the idealist bump his head against the stone wall of reality and receive a ruder shock. He also gently eases the tension of the hot-headed enthusiast and makes him live longer. By preparing him for disillusion, there is probably less pain in the final impact, for a humorist is always like a man charged with the duty of breaking a sad news gently to a dying patient. Sometimes the gentle warning from a humorist saves the dying patient's life. If idealism and disillusion must necessarily go together in this world, we must say that life is cruel, rather than the joker who reminds us of life's cruelty.

I have often thought of formulas by which the mechanism of human progress and historical change can be expressed. They seem to be as follows:

Reality - Dreams = Animal Being

Reality + Dreams = A Heartache (usually called Idealism)

Reality + Humor = Realism (also called Conservatism)

Dreams - Humor = Fanaticism

Dreams + Humor = Fantasy

Reality + Dreams + Humor = Wisdom

So then, wisdom, or the highest type of thinking, consists in toning down our dreams or idealism with a good sense of humor, supported by reality itself.

As pure ventures in pseudoscientific formulations, we may proceed to analyze national characters in the following manner. I say "pseudoscientific" because I distrust all dead and mechanical formulas for expressing anything connected with human affairs or human personalities. Putting human affairs in exact formulas shows in itself a lack of the sense of humor and therefore a lack of wisdom. I do not mean

that these things are not being done: they are. That is why we get so much pseudoscience today. When a psychologist can measure a man's I. Q. or P. Q.,^① it is a pretty poor world, and specialists have risen to usurp humanized scholarship. But if we recognize that these formulas are no more than handy, graphic ways of expressing certain opinions, and so long as we don't drag in the sacred name of science to help advertise our goods, no harm is done. The following are my formulas for the characters of certain nations, entirely personal and completely incapable of proof or verification. Anyone is free to dispute them and change them or add his own, if he does not claim that he can prove his private opinions by a mass of statistical facts and figures. Let "R" stand for a sense of reality (or realism), "D" for dreams (or idealism), "H" for a sense of humor, and—adding one important ingredient—"S" for sensitivity.^② And further let "4" stand for "abnormally high," "3" stand for "high," "2" for "fair," and "1" for "low," and we have the following pseudo-chemical formulas for the following national characters. Human beings and communities behave then differently according to their different compositions, as sulphates and sulphides or carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide behave differently from one another. For me, the interesting thing always is to watch how human communities or nations behave differently under identical conditions. As we cannot invent words like "humoride" and "humorate" after the fashion of chemistry, we may put it thus: "3 grains of Realism, 2 grains of Dreams, 2 grains of Humor and 1 grain of Sensitivity make an Englishman."^③

① I am not objecting to the limited utility of intelligence tests, but to their claims to mathematical accuracy or constant dependability as measures of human personality.

② In the sense of the French word *sensibilité*.

③ Some might with good reason suggest the including of an "L" standing for logic or the rational faculty, as an important element in shaping human progress. This "L" will then often function or weigh against sensitivity, a direct perception of things. Such a formula might be attempted. For me personally, the role of the rational faculty in human affairs is rather low.

$R_3D_2H_2S_1$ = The English
 $R_2D_3H_3S_3$ = The French
 $R_3D_3H_2S_2$ = The Americans
 $R_3D_4H_1S_2$ = The Germans

$R_2D_4H_1S_1$ = The Russians
 $R_2D_3H_1S_1$ = The Japanese
 $R_4D_1H_3S_3$ = The Chinese

I do not know the Italians, the Spanish, the Hindus and others well enough even to essay a formula on the subject, realizing that the above are shaky enough as they are, and in any case are enough to bring down a storm of criticism upon my head. Probably these formulas are more provocative than authoritative. I promise to modify them gradually for my own use as new facts are brought to my knowledge, or new impressions are formed. That is all they are worth today—a record of the progress of my knowledge and the gaps of my ignorance.

Some observations may be necessary. It is easy to see that I regard the Chinese as most closely allied to the French in their sense of humor and sensitivity, as is quite evident from the way the French write their books and eat their food, while the more volatile character of the French comes from their greater idealism, which takes the form of love of abstract ideas (recall the manifestoes of their literary, artistic and political movements). " R_4 " for Chinese realism makes the Chinese the most realistic people; " D_1 " accounts for something of a drag in the changes in their pattern or ideal of life. The high figures for Chinese humor and sensitivity, as well as for their realism, are perhaps due to my too close association and the vividness of my impressions. For Chinese sensitivity, little justification is needed; the whole story of Chinese prose, poetry and painting proclaims it. . . . The Japanese and Germans are very much alike in their comparative lack of humor (such is the general impression of people), yet it is re-

ally impossible to give a "zero" for any one characteristic in any one nation, not even for idealism in the Chinese people. It is all a question of degree; such statements as a complete lack of this or that quality are not based on an intimate knowledge of the peoples. For this reason, I give the Japanese and the Germans " H_1 ," instead of " H_0 ," and I intuitively feel that I am right. But I do believe that the Japanese and the Germans suffer politically at present, and have suffered in the past, for lacking a better sense of humor. How a Prussian *Geheimrat* loves to be called a *Geheimrat*, and how he loves his buttons and metal pins! A certain belief in "logical necessity" (often "holy" or "sacred"), a tendency to fly too straight at a goal instead of circling around it, often carries one too far. It is not so much what you believe in that matters, as the way in which you believe it and proceed to translate that belief into action. By " D_3 " for the Japanese I am referring to their fanatic loyalty to their emperor and to the state, made possible by a low mixture of humor. For idealism must stand for different things in different countries, as the so-called sense of humor really comprises a very wide variety of things. . . . There is an interesting tug between idealism and realism in America, both given high figures, and that produces the energy characteristic of the Americans. What American idealism is, I had better leave it to the Americans to find out; but they are always enthusiastic about something or other. A great deal of this idealism is noble, in the sense that the Americans are easily appealed to by noble ideals or noble words; but some of it is mere gullibility. The American sense of humor again means a different thing from the Continental sense of humor, but really I think that, such as it is (the love of fun and an innate, broad common sense), it is the greatest asset of the American nation. In the coming years of critical change, they will have great need of that broad common sense referred to by James Bryce, which I hope will tide them over these critical times. I give American sensitivity a low figure because of my impression that they can stand so many things. There is no use quarreling about this, because we will be quarreling about words. . . . The English seem to be on the whole