

邓炎昌 编

AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE



Volume 1



现代美国社会与文化

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American Society and Culture

Volume 1

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(第一卷)

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邓炎昌 主编

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前 言

近年来,越来越多的人渴望了解美国。美国在国际政治,国际经济,以及军事方面举足轻重的地位是一致公认的。但对这个国家的政治结构、经济生活、文化传统和民族特性,则众说纷纭,各执一词。有人说美国是“人间天堂”,但“天堂”里却不乏贫困与失业;有人把美国称为“自由之地”,但又有多少人在这里梦幻破灭;还有人把美国誉为“民主之楷模”,但美国的政治现实又使不少人对这种制度产生怀疑。这类反差强烈的社会现象在美国社会中不胜枚举。美国社会的复杂性和多元性要求我们对美国的历史、现状和发展趋势有个较为全面的了解。《现代美国社会与文化》正是根据读者的这一需要编写的。

《现代美国社会与文化》分为两卷共 25 个单元,每个单元由 3~5 篇文章组成。全书共选用 90 多篇文章。

本书具有以下特点:

一、题材广泛。本书所选文章涉及美国社会与文化的各方面,分为美国史地、人口概况、社会价值观、青年与老年人问题、种族问题、政党的作用和政府官员的选举、法律制度、科学技术与社会发展,社会福利等 25 个专题。

二、全书除个别篇章由英国人所写外,均由美国人撰写。这些文章是美国人对自己国家的感受和看法,而非其他对这个国家作出的评价。可以说是一本美国人谈美国的专集。

三、具有一定深度。本书多数文章选自美国出版的社会学、人类学、经济学、历史学等专著。作者大多是从事这些领域研究的专家、学者。因此本书除了给读者提供大量有关美国的一般情况和信息外,同时具有学术研究价值。

四、语言地道,浅显易懂。本书所选文章虽是原文,但考虑到读者英文水平不一,以及阅读中可能出现的困难,在每个单元之前有汉语简介;对文章中某些专有名词和难点作了汉语注释;并对个别过难过长的段落或句子,在尽量忠实原文的前提下,略作修改和删节。每个单元之后附有英文思考题,以利读者参考。

另外,本书还为读者提供了不少图片资料,以加深读者对内容的了解。

本书可以用作高等院校英语专业高年级美国概况教材,同时也适合具有大专程度英文水平的广大读者自学之用。

除主编邓炎昌教授外,参加本书编撰工作的还有北京外国语学院美国学研究中心的梅仁毅教授,吴青、林克美、朱炳和、朱永涛副教授,丁一江、何进、董彩霞、周迎智等教师。此外,研究生俞涓、夏玉和、贾秀东、黄少波、李怡岚、奚卫林也参加了此书的部分工作。

由于编者的水平和掌握的材料有限,本书难免有不足之处,望读者指正。

编 者

1987 年 12 月



Land of Opportunity, Land of Paradox

INTRODUCTION

The United States — a country which generally arouses curiosity and interest, a country about which people have varied opinions and which sometimes evokes strong emotions.

Land of promise and opportunity,
Land of miracles and achievements,
Land of paradox and contradiction,
Land of oddities and absurdities,
Land of inequality and injustice.

These are some of the images that come to people's minds when the United States is mentioned.

Which of the above images is true? Which is an accurate description of the country?

Land of promise and opportunity? No one can deny the attraction of this country to those in need, to those denied the means to show themselves and get ahead, to those deprived of basic rights and to those oppressed. Since the days of the early settlers, thousands, and later millions, were drawn to America with the hopes that they would find land, food, jobs. Many were attracted to the land that seemed to open up possibilities for those with ability and initiative to get ahead. Still others went there seeking a place where they would be free to pursue their own beliefs, without fear of religious persecution or political oppression.

Land of miracles and achievements? No one can belittle the tremendous progress and changes that Americans have achieved. On land that only two hundred years ago was virtually uninhabited and undeveloped, one now finds thriving cities, bustling factories, elaborate transportation and communication networks, vast stretches of highly productive fields, immense herds of cattle and sheep — all contributing to a standard of living that is among the highest in the world.

Or one could mention such things as the telephone, electric light, automobile, combine harvester, computer, spaceship — just a few of the many important inventions produced or perfected by Americans.

And what other country can claim such a large number of Nobel prize winners — approximately 40% of the world's total since World War II?

Land of paradox and contradiction? One cannot help recalling the words of a great American humorist: "The United States is the only country that drove to the poorhouse in a car." — a reference to the Depression of the early 1930's, when millions of hungry Americans were driving around in their own cars looking for jobs and food, while mountains of potatoes and oranges were burnt and hundreds of thousands of gallons of milk were dumped into the ocean.

Or, if one wishes to talk about the present, one finds it hard to understand how the country with the world's highest GNP (gross national product) is at the same time also the country with the world's highest national debt. The amount of this debt staggers the imagination.

Land of oddities and absurdities? How else can one describe contests to see who can spit the farthest — yes, spit — in a highly civilized country? Or how can one explain contests to see who can eat the most hot dogs at one sitting, with the winner often ending up in severe discomfort and sometimes having to be taken to the hospital after winning the "honor."

Land of inequality and injustice? No one can ignore the plight of the Indians — Native Americans — who at one point virtually became extinct on the land that they originally inhabited. Yet it was the Indians who had earlier befriended the white settlers and had offered them their hospitality.

Nor can one forget the harsh treatment of the Chinese laborers after they had built the railroads to the west in the late 19th century. The contribution of these Chinese can be seen from this well-known statement made at the time: "Under every sleeper (of the railroad) lies the body of a Chinaman." Yet these same Chinese were cheated, robbed, humiliated and later excluded from this land to which they had given so much.

From this, then, it seems that all the images mentioned above are true, or at least partly true. It is not surprising then, that the United States has been at the same time praised and envied, ridiculed and scorned, denounced and condemned.

Such a complex nation, such a diverse and unusual one, obviously deserves our interest and attention. And when one considers that this country today is one of the most powerful on earth and is still considered dominant in the western world economically, politically, militarily, and technologically, then there is all the more reason for doing some serious study of the country.

The study of another nation, its society and culture, not only can be fascinating but also beneficial. Exposure to the ways and means of other societies and an understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, beliefs and values of other peoples often help us to see those of our own more clearly. Following this, comparison of the two cultures is inevitable. People naturally tend to reflect on the differences as well as note the similarities. What aspects of the other culture seem to be superior to ours? What aspects of our culture seem superior to the other's?

Such comparison often helps to promote social change. People become inclined to discard or modify things in their own culture which no longer seem valid or useful and to adopt those that appear better from other cultures.

Or comparison of different cultures may lead people to realize the need for certain changes, but with nothing that appears satisfactory, people may be forced to come up with new creations of their own.

Or, such comparison may lead to deeper appreciation of the positive aspects of one's own culture. This will often strengthen people's resolve to hold on to such things and perhaps even to spread them to other cultures.

The study of other cultures may be beneficial in still other ways.

For developing countries such as ours, the experiences and changes of the industrialized countries may help us—

to foresee problems brought about by modernization which have not yet emerged in our own society;

to provide us with options for dealing with such problems when they do emerge;

to avoid solutions that have proven unsuccessful or questionable;

to make better overall preparations to meet other new developments.

Obviously, when we consider our tasks of modernization and reform, when technological and social changes are bound to have impacts of tremendous importance, then it is of particular significance for us to know how a country like the U. S. has developed in the past few decades, what problems it has faced, what ways were used to deal with them, what changes the culture has undergone, and how the people have reacted to such changes.

This book is an attempt to introduce the reader to the United States. It intends to give a concise but fairly well rounded overview of present day American society; not only a picture of surface phenomena, but insights into American culture and insights about the American people.

Various aspects of American life are presented through articles written mainly by Americans themselves, or by westerners familiar with the United States. Most were written by scholars or specialists on the topic or field. A number of articles were written by sociologists. This gives a perspective that goes beyond the common articles written for the average tourist, for the person with passing curiosity, or for the ordinary man-in-the-street. A number of articles were also selected with the idea of presenting different, sometimes conflicting, points of view about the same topic. This, it is hoped, will help the reader to gain better understanding and to help him draw his own conclusions.

It should be stressed that the viewpoints of the various authors are not necessarily those of the compilers of this book. We may agree with all of some articles, only partially with others, and possibly disagree considerably with a few of the selections. To allow the reader to use his own judgment, we have generally kept the articles in their original form. If changes were made, they were to make the language easier or to make the articles more manageable for the reader.

Most of the articles in this book were used on a trial basis for the course "American Society and Culture" at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. Through selection and rejection based mainly on student opinion, the articles in this book were finally chosen. Our criteria for selecting an article were as follows:

1. Its suitability for giving accurate information about a topic or some aspect of the topic; it should help present a well-rounded picture of the whole; in this respect, we have some-

times given preference to an earlier article rather than a later one if the former gives a more insightful or more comprehensive treatment of the subject;

2. Its appeal to the ordinary reader; it should be authoritative and reliable, yet not too elementary; the contents should be of interest to most readers.

3. Its linguistic quality and degree of difficulty; the level for which it is intended is college students of English, other college students with a fairly good command of English, and the general reader interested in the U. S. and with fairly good comprehension of the language;

4. Its general relevance to Chinese readers or Chinese Society; it should have some general significance to China, either present or future, and not be totally irrelevant.

Obviously no one book can give a completely comprehensive picture or description of such a vast and complex nation. Many readers may disagree with our choice of topics; most likely a number will say we have left out important ones. Many may feel we did not use our best judgment in selecting the articles; we must admit that we did not always agree among ourselves. We were furthermore restricted by the limited amount of materials to choose from. Needless to say, we welcome suggestions and criticisms from our readers. And in spite of all its shortcomings, if the book has helped the reader to gain some insight and understanding about the United States and its people and has stimulated the reader to go further, and to study more, then in a modest way this book will have accomplished much of what it was intended to do.



Irish Americans March in St. Patrick's Day Parade

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On Culture

— Basic Concepts for the Study of Societies

论文化——社会研究的一些基本概念

研究美国社会,或研究任何一个社会,仅对一些社会现象有感性认识是不够的,还应挖掘这些现象的内在联系和深层结构。这种研究不仅需要广度,也需要深度。因此,我们就必然要触及一个民族的本质特征,也就是它的文化。

什么是文化?文化是怎样形成的?文化的作用是什么?对这些问题有一个清晰的认识,我们就能更准确地找出某种文化的特征,更深入、更全面地了解它的本质。

Basic Concepts of Culture(对文化的基本看法)触及到文化的定义,文化与人性的关系,语言的作用,并着重论述了文化的共性和多样性问题,以及考察不同文化的正确方法。

在文化研究中,人们常常用本民族文化的价值标准去看待和衡量其它民族的文化。这实际是一种种族中心主义。用这种方法看问题常常使人产生民族优越感,认为其它民族的文化是低劣的。这种观点在各国都有,中国和美国也不例外。为了防止这种倾向,不少学者主张采取相对主义的观点,即只能用本民族文化的标准去衡量本民族文化。但这种观点也有弊病,因此一部分学者又倾向于用一种共同的标准。

Culture(文化)一文介绍了人类学和社会学给文化下的定义。文化是一个社会中人们共同具有的传统、信仰、价值观、知识和技能的总和。文章以生动的例子阐述了文化的三大要素,即价值观、规范和符号,以及它们对于文化研究的重要意义。

1. BASIC CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

Much of the complex behavior of human beings cannot be explained on the basis of innate tendencies, but only on the basis of culture. Culture can be most simply defined as a set of shared ideas, or the customs, beliefs, and knowledge that characterize a way of life. The nineteenth-century British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor first defined culture as everything human beings made and taught to future generations. "Culture," he wrote, "is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Stonehenge¹ is thus above all a cultural mystery. Its unknown creators left no word about whether the idea behind it was scientific, religious, artistic, or something else entirely.

Tylor's definition was the first to clarify the distinction between two basic sociological concepts: society and culture. Following his lead, modern sociologists used the term "culture" to refer to all the aspects of behavior that are learned from others, rather than from individual experience. Every baby, for example, learns to grasp objects through trial and error, but the "proper" way to hold a fork or a friend's hand is culturally defined. Society, on the other hand, refers to any organized collection of people with a distinct identity, a territorial area, and a distinctive way of life (a culture). A society is not a culture — it is a people *with* a common culture. And a culture is not a society — it is the transmissible way of life of a society. Culture can exist apart from their societies: the Roman Empire disappeared, for example, but much of its culture was preserved and handed down through manuscripts and works of art.

Culture and Human Nature

A nineteenth-century French dramatist remarked that the only difference between animals and human beings is that people drink when they are not thirsty and make love in any season. The sociologist's definition of the difference is less fanciful and more scientific: only human beings have the capacity for creating and transmitting culture. More than any other species, human animals are able to surpass their biological limitations by sharing ideas and passing on what they learn to future generations.

All animals, including human beings, have certain problems in common. In order to survive as species, they must find a home, acquire food, and provide for their young. Animals are guided by instincts, or innate biological mechanisms that enable them to cope with these problems of existence. They respond to their environment in a fixed, predictable manner: beavers build dams as homes, lions hunt antelopes for food, and birds build nests to protect their fledglings. Should these solutions turn out to be inadequate, animals for the most part will still go on making the same responses to the same problems. It is true that much of the behavior of higher animals, especially chimpanzees and other primates, is learned through direct experience. As everyone knows, dogs can be taught to overcome their instinctive dislike of cats, and parrots often learn new calls through imitation of other voices. In some cases animals have also been known to teach their offspring what they themselves

have learned. Nevertheless, human beings are unique in their far greater ability to learn from experience, to create new solutions to old problems, and — most important — to use language to transmit what they have learned to future generations. While animal societies must rely primarily on biologically inherited methods of dealing with their environment, human societies have the far greater advantage of a socially inherited culture.

Culture allows human beings to adapt much more easily to different living conditions. It took thousands of generations of evolution for seals to develop the fur that enables them to survive arctic weather, for example, but hardly any time at all for human beings to think of wearing coats made of seal skins. Instead of developing gills people invented breathing devices for swimming underwater; instead of growing wings, they devised the airplane and the parachute. Although these inventions represent the contributions of ingenious individuals, they would have been impossible without the shared body of knowledge that other clever men and women had already accumulated. Without the benefit of the learning passed down from our ancestors, each new generation would have had to reinvent the wheel, not to mention such other cultural innovations as agriculture, religion, and the family. Even when a civilization dies out, its knowledge can survive by being handed on orally or in writing. Contemporary American culture, for example, has incorporated elements of cultures long since vanished from the earth — the monotheism² of the ancient Hebrews, the democracy of the ancient Greeks, the alphabet of the Romans, and the numerical system of the medieval Arabs. Our almost complete reliance on learned behavior, as opposed to instinctive behavior, is what makes human beings different from — and vastly superior to — other animals.

Language

Human beings are the “culture-bearing animals” because they have the capacity for symbolic communication, or language. As the eminent anthropologist A. L. Kroeber³ put it:

Man is an essentially unique animal in that he possesses speech faculty and the faculty of symbolizing, abstracting, or generalizing. Through these two associated faculties he is able to communicate his acquired learning, his knowledge and accomplishments, to his fellows and his descendants. . . . This is something that no other animal can do, at least not to any significant degree.

Compared to human beings, other animals can communicate only in crude and limited ways. Dogs bark and growl in warning, birds sing to attract prospective mates, and horses whinny to their foals if they stray too far away. More intelligent animals can also learn to respond to verbal signals, including human words like “sit,” “whoa,”⁴ and “supertime” but humankind has the unique ability to assign meanings to those sounds. Only people can invent words like “rain,” “God,” and “next week,” and agree that they are symbols for certain thoughts.

Until very recently, there was no evidence that even the most intelligent animals had the brain capacity for language. Attempts to teach primates to speak had always failed; after three years of intensive training by two psychologists, one bright chimpanzee could pronounce only three words recognizably. During the 1970s, however, other investigators had better results from teaching

chimpanzees to communicate through hand signs instead of spoken words. Their success has led some to question whether the human capacity for language is indeed unique.

Human culture could not exist without a means of symbolic communication. Language gives human beings access to what was thought and experienced in the past, as well as a way of passing new information on to future generations. When this language link is broken, then a culture is lost to us forever.

Language is also essential to human life because it gives meaning to otherwise random experiences. Language makes rational thought possible. It enables us to reason, to draw logical conclusions from the evidence of our senses, to generalize from one event to another, and to predict, create, and understand. Language, as the expression of culture, separates us from other animals and makes us human.

.....

Since language is part of culture, it also shapes and colors our experiences of the world around us. Some years ago, linguist Edward Sapir went so far as to say that people “construct” reality through their particular choice of terms and the grammar of their language. “The fact of the matter is,” he wrote, “that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. . . . The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.” Sapir’s student, Benjamin L. Whorf, claimed that speaking different languages caused people to *think* differently. Some languages, for example, have more words for certain colors or tastes than others; people equipped with a greater number of finely differentiated words are actually aware of gradations of color and taste that people without such words fail to notice. To an American, for example, rice is only rice, but a Filipino can use ninety-two different words to talk about it. Some languages have subtleties that other languages lack. The French, for example, have two words for “you.” It is almost impossible for an American to know exactly what it means when a French person shifts from the formal *vous* to the more intimate *tu* in speaking to a friend or to have precisely the same experience of arriving at a close relationship. Many languages, including English, have the concepts of past, present, and future built into their verb forms, but some, like the language of the Trobriand Islanders⁵, do not. English-speaking people accordingly see events as following each other in a linear sequence, while the Trobrianders see events as coming in clusters. Although few modern sociologists fully accept the notion that people’s view of reality is entirely constructed by the language they speak, they do generally agree there are differences in the way languages represent experience, and these differences influence how people perceive the world, and therefore how they behave.

Cultural Diversity and Cultural Universals

If different peoples perceive the world so differently, how do they perceive each other? Most of the time, unfortunately, separate cultural groups have regarded each other as inherently different, sometimes even as less than human. The ancient Romans at their games could enjoy watching men and women from far-off lands being torn apart by wild animals because they did not consider “barbarians” as human in the same sense as themselves. In this century the Nazi concentration camp guards who drove helpless Jews into the gas chambers seem to