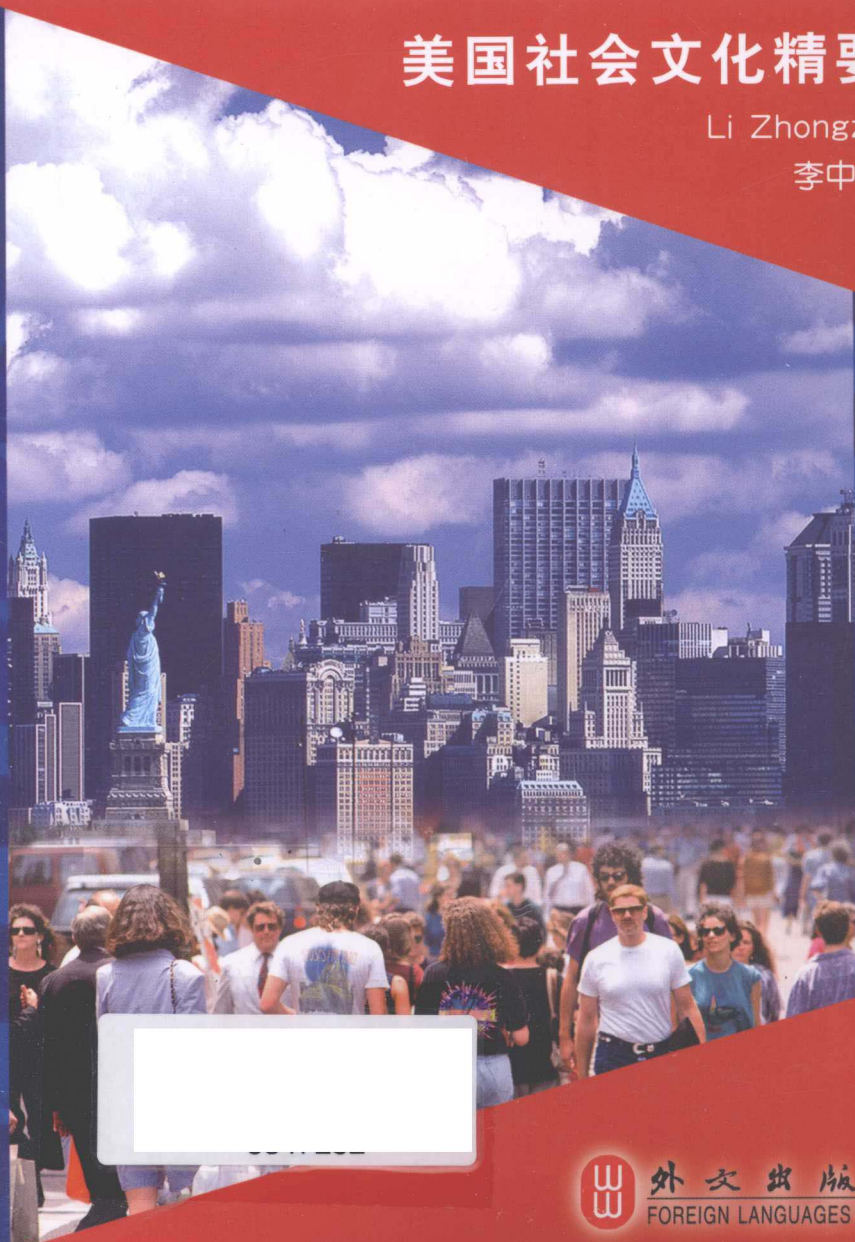


Some Highlights of American Society and Culture

美国社会文化精要

Li Zhongze

李中泽



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Preface

It is upon the completion of this compiled version that a gush of relief came out of my heart. This special feeling was virtually derived from the stress and tension experienced during the entire process of the scheme formulating, material selecting, brain-storming for the guidelines of each part, and actual compiling itself as a whole.

The teaching of Chinese graduates in American studies for about a decade has eventually aroused my academic interest to develop a reading project concerning the essentials of American culture and society. This attempt is basically inspired by my knowledge and pursuit in the domain of sociology. My preceding book entitled *Fundamentals of Sociology* serves as a sudden flash of insight for me to step further in the domain of American studies. In fact what I have done before in this regard makes things much easier for me to review the western societies, especially American society, more closely through the kaleidoscope of social structures and cultures. Yet, there arise some more special questions and puzzles in the postgraduate seminars I conduct these academic years. They all reveal the fact that most of the graduates in China are by and large overwhelmed in the whirlpool of Chinese social transformation, the nature of capitalist society, and the real characteristics of American culture and society, etc. This being true, I personally have a feeling of being responsible for exposing the students to the authentic sources about American society and culture. In order to let facts talk by themselves, my mind is intermingled with a great amount of materials and schemes for a compiled version involving the major events and happenings in the American history.

Now the world is in an age of globalization largely influenced by a dozen of developed countries. Among these countries the United States still remains a special focus of public attention due to her dramatic role and performance in the arena of international politics. Thus it appeals to many peoples across the globe

including a considerable number of Chinese university students. When the topic about the United States is mentioned in the classroom, for instance, it is often flooded with a chain of definitions, discussions, comments, criticisms and images for sure. An off-handed list that is far from being complete covers some leading responses as follows:

The United States is a land of promise and opportunity.

The United States is a land of paradox and contradictions.

The United States is a land of inequality and injustice...

The expressions as such virtually denote certain aspects pointed to the essence and nature of American society and culture in general. Meanwhile, they provide part of the basic orientation with respect to my compiling task about the historical spans, social progressions and cultural literacy in the United States.

In this compiled version, the reader can gradually savor the real meaning and significance contained in the land of promise and opportunity through the first three parts, namely, the early European venture and settlement, the British Colonization and Puritan Settlement, and the formation of the New Nation.

The reader can also gain an easy access to the historically important events and happenings in the land of paradox and contradictions as one reads through the next four sections: the first critical period in the United States—the Independent War period, some main happenings in the years between the Dual Wars, the most influential literary happenings in Antebellum America, and the Civil War — its cause, progression and consequence.

As is discerned in the modern times, the American society that once stood up as a new and powerful one has so far surprised the whole world with many new looks and tremendous changes after the crucial dual wars in particular. The reader will ultimately figure out the particular meanings rooted in the land of inequality and injustice basically through the last three chapters: the reconstruc-

tion till the First World War, the two World Wars and the years in between, and the leading events in the second half of the 20th century.

Incidentally, Alexis de Tocqueville managed his actual survey toward almost all walks of life in the American society in 1830s. He took the lead in this field and his study triggered off a later boom of American Studies worldwide. What strikes us as remarkable is that many of the traits of American society and culture he observed and described nearly 200 years ago are still relevant and meaningful in the 21st century. It for this reason deserves our re-reading and rethinking as well.

Since most of the Chinese university students are relatively more familiar with the historical happenings after the turn of the 20th century, this compiled version is intended to put more emphasis on the initial occurrences, hard struggles, social formation and constructions of this new nation before that time. It is often the case that it can be more fascinating and rewarding to study the early stages of a society and its culture. In accord with this, any exposure to the factual information related to all the facets of life along with the systems of beliefs and values tend to help the reader attain a better understanding of the object of study provided it stirs up reflection and elicits pros and cons accordingly.

What should be done to offer the Chinese students the factual information has inevitably constituted the motto of this compiling work. In line with this motto, most of the materials in the version are selected from the original sources and re-arranged in the light of the compiler's outlines deliberately designed to facilitate a more fruitful learning experience. The guideline, which is introduced at the beginning of each part, indicates the key point of the segment concerned. With the help of the notes supplied wherever in need, one can easily trace back to the source books for further studies.

Here I would like to acknowledge my sincere thanks to all the writers of the

sources books referred to in this version for their inspiring ideas and interesting findings. Their scholarship will give rise to the enlightenment and inspiration shared by the Chinese university students who are interested in this field. Moreover, their thoughtful observations, ideological sparkles and convincing remarks so demonstrated via the selected readings will work together to encourage the students to rediscover a real and holistic picture of American society and culture in existence. On this occasion I would also like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Hua Mingda for his support on behalf of the English Department of Beijing International Studies University. My appreciation also goes to the editors from the Beijing Foreign Languages Press. Without their endeavors this course book may have not been able to come out in print in such a fine shape.

Li Zhongze
Beijing
March, 2008

写在前面

在本书即将付梓之际,不由得深感欣喜与释怀。虽然此书属编选连缀之作,但所付出的时间与精力并不亚于撰写或翻译工作。其中主要原因有三:一是有关美国社会文化的出版物频频出版面市;二是本书服务的对象主要是具有较强英文阅读能力的读者群;三是要尽快满足本校英美社会文化方向的教学需求。故此,如何体现本书的特质?如何在追踪美国社会文化脉络的同时,选用更为精彩的英文片段?如何涵盖美国历史上的主要发展阶段和事件?……思考和应答这些问题,委实是一个冥思苦索的过程。也就是这一过程,使我构想出编写的主题,凝结出全书的梗概。

在大量收集、阅读相关英文原著的基础上,编者从西方社会学的基础理论出发,用社会学的眼光审视着美国社会文化演变、发展的种种过程与现象,同时本着用事实和数据说话的宗旨,逐步精选和编写(每章前后分别写有导读和思考题)出十章的内容:

第一章:早期欧洲人的冒险与定居

第二章:英国殖民化与清教徒定居

第三章:一个新兴国家的形成

第四章:美国的第一个严峻时期:独立战争时期

第五章:美国独立战争与南北战争之间发生的主要事件

第六章:美国南北战争之前最具影响的文学创作

第七章:南北战争:起因、过程与结果

第八章:直至第一次世界大战前的美国重建

第九章:两次世界大战之间的岁月

第十章:20世纪后半叶美国发生的主要事件

作为高等教育中的英语教材,本书首先侧重于与美国紧密相连的英国早期历史,这样可使读者更为清晰地了解这两个同源国家的历史关联性;随后,基于针对美国这一新兴国家所发生的两次主要战争的历史描述,本书筛选出相关材料,着力分析和展示了这两次决定美国命运的战争的起因、过程以及影响,以便使读者能够较为细致地了解美国为其崛起所进行的种种准备与积蓄;最后,本书从美国国内和重大国际事件两方面出发,旨在说明美国在20世纪国际事物中的特殊作

用,以及作为后来唯一的超级大国和西方国家的典型代表所展示的力量和所面临的诸多问题。

任何一个社会不论社会制度如何,都不过是一种历史或者现实的存在。然而,美国这样一个在许多方面让世人惊异的国度,总是具有特殊的研究价值与意义。难怪著名的法国政治思想家夏尔·托克维尔(Charles Alexis de Tocqueville)筚路蓝缕,早在19世纪30年代便开启了美国研究的新潮,在其对于美国社会、政治、民主等多方面的成功研究中,向世人展示了这一新型社会的多重侧面。在此后约200年的新世纪里,我们又该如何了解、看待、研究美国社会与文化,这似乎是新时期向人们提出的一个新的挑战。编者在追随先贤脚步的历程中,试图兼容并蓄,提供一些客观认知美国社会的参照性视角。如果本书在一定程度上有助于广大中国读者更加清晰、全面地审视与研究这一西方人憧憬的“丘阜之城”(the city upon the hill),编者也就可以聊以自慰了。

值此机会,特向曾经籍予本人帮助的家人、学生、编辑等各方人士表示衷心的感谢。同时,要特别感谢滑明达教授和外文出版社诸位编辑同志在出版方面的大力支持与帮助。没有他们的支持与帮助,本书的完成与面市便实难想象。

李中泽

2008年3月于北京

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Ever since the discovery of America—or sometimes it is called Columbus's first voyage to the New World—the America or the United States afterwards, especially after the War

INTRODUCTION

of Independence, has been an object of increasing appeal and perpetual fascination to outside observers. In the long course of history, 3-5 centuries as a time span could be relatively short. Although the year of 1492 did arouse great interest in the West, the land at first presented itself to the Renaissance European gaze only as a geographical wilderness, totally untouched by civilization though inhabited by the aboriginals or native settlers. Yet as a mere coincidence in the social progression happened in Europe, this new found land was also stirred by the new comers instilled with new thoughts and rebellion spirits. The new nation's massive territorial expansion, burgeoning ideas of democracy and individualism, the scientific and technological boom all resulted in the image of wonderland and the world superpower in just more than two centuries. It is hardly surprising that these images, developments and fascinations would stimulate the imaginations, inquiries, or even the questions, not just of those who have settled in America, but of those who observed it from elsewhere in the whole world.

When the United States is mentioned especially nowadays, the topic can be flooded with a chain of words, definitions, images, comments and even criticisms for sure. The general conclusion will refer to the sayings as follows:

The United States is a land of promise and opportunity.

The United States is a land of paradox and contradictions.

The United States is a land of inequality and injustice.

At the first glance, one can be easily confused with so many aspects concerned though they have been already well-selected. There are surely no doubts that any conclusion or definition of the United States can trigger off ambiguity and

diversity, simply because this nation or country has, for quite a long time, represented itself to the world as a “melting pot” and a “salad bowl”. In the course of history, no such a person can deny the attraction of this massive land to those in different needs, material or spiritual, to those denied the means to improve themselves, to those deprived of basic human rights and even cruelly oppressed. After the years of early settlers, thousands and millions of different people were drawn to this wonder land which seemed to open up new opportunities for them as a severe promise. The endless events and cases of success and celebrities developed from rags to riches prove to be convincing.

When the terms of paradox and contradictions are mentioned, some visual scenes could be still vivid. In the time of the Great Depression happened around the early 1930s, countless hungry Americans drove here and there in their own cars hunting for food and jobs while mountains of fruits and gallons of milk had been destroyed. At the same time, the unique contradiction there involves the real fact that the country with the world’s highest GNP is also the same country with the world’s highest national debt. Since no such a country can be immune from social problems, social ills, contradictions and conflicts, people trapped inside often turn to the very words like inequality and injustice for resolution or help. The United States indeed serves as a land of inequality and injustice. The history witnessed the plight of Indians, the sufferings of black people, the killings of Chinese railroad builders and the ill-treatment towards other ethnic groups although they had earlier befriended the white settlers, worked extremely hard and given so much to this land. Endowed with such complex, diverse and unusual characteristics, the United States has been at the same time praised, admired, denounced, scorned, and even severely condemned.

To study a society and its culture can be both fascinating and rewarding. Any exposure to the factual information related with all facets of life in the society, people’s beliefs and values often help the observers to understand their own much more clearly, provided they offer their own pros and cons. Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous observer of the American scene in the first half of 19th

century stood up as the first influential practitioner in American Studies. The lines here give the descriptions like this:

De Tocqueville came to the United States as a young Frenchman in 1831 to study the American form of democracy and what it might mean to the rest of the world. After a visit of only nine months, he wrote a remarkable book called Democracy in America, which is a "classic study of the American way of life." De Tocqueville had unusual powers of observation. He described not only the democratic system of government and how it operated but also its effect on how Americans think, feel, and act. Many scholars believe that he had a deeper understanding of traditional American beliefs and values than anyone else who has written about the United States. What is so remarkable is that many of these traits of the American character, which he observed nearly 200 years ago, are still visible and meaningful today. ^[1]

The time for Tocqueville to do the observation could stand for another reason why his discovery then is still in existence in the contemporary American society and the character traits described by him are still the same ones that many American people take pride in today. By the time when he went there in the 1830s, it was the era before America was industrialized. With the start of small business and the settlement of western pioneers, the traditional value of a new country was gradually established. In some 50 years since the Independence and the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, the new government based on legislation had created a society of different races with unique but conformed values. It seems that Tocqueville played a kind of role of neutral observer with more objective views seeing and commenting both the positive and negative sides of those qualities demonstrated by the American forerunners.

In contrast with Tocqueville's most of favorable descriptions and remarks on the American scene, it might be correct to say that the famous British writer Charles Dickens launched a campaign against the dark sides in the States after

his visit in 1842. The part to be quoted here can explain something in itself:

In 1842 Charles Dickens visited the United States, and he subsequently published accounts of his visit in the books American Notes and Martin Chuzzlewit. Both works were understood by Americans as deeply hostile in their ruthless denunciation of slavery, of the pervasive violence and hypocrisy of American life, and of the shallow and sensational media, among much else. To understand Dickens' critique, it is important to recognize him as merely one of countless European observers who traveled to America expecting to find a larger and improved version of Great Britain, and was shocked to find instead a radically different society with its own characteristic flaws and virtues. It is exactly that mix of familiarity and alien strangeness that Europeans have so often found confusing, and occasionally horrifying, but the flaws lay as much in their expectations as in the reality they have encountered.

For various reasons — size, ethnic and racial diversity, religiosity — the United States has from its earliest days evolved a culture radically different from that of its European roots, and any attempt to fit American society into an European mold ultimately results in distortion. Though not immune to wider economic and political trends, the history of the United States has to be viewed in the context of a separate continent no less than merely another nation. ^[2]

This remark gave readers a seemingly different aspect or angle to study American society. Also in the same historical period, just 11 years after Tocqueville's visit in the same country, Dickens probed deeply into the American society with his sharp and critical eyes. He differed from the ways conducted by Tocqueville who was mostly astonished by the unexpectedly new system mainly in the domains of social, political and democratic perspectives which intended to be radically different from those of European roots. Although it is not adequate to distinguish the versions conducted by these two giant

figures only by the distinctions of “positive” or “negative” (since Tocqueville gave more praise to the new system while Dickens demonstrated more resentment and denunciation towards slavery and other negative happenings there), readers, especially people engaged in the American studies can easily figure out the differed opinions, affections and even emotions revealed between the lines in their works. Yet only when the case is endowed with pros and cons, could people really understand the meaning of the mixture of characteristic flaws and virtues gradually formed and developed in the United States, in this new nation, new country that emerged in the new continent once discovered by Christopher Columbus. Such being the case, the highlights in American studies should commit themselves to the basic coverage of this meaningful mixture of flaws and virtues exhibited in different eras and time spans through the entire historical, cultural and social movements that kept undergoing over two hundred years in the United States.

Notes

[1] Maryanne Kearny Datesman, JoAnn Crandall, Edward N. Kearny. *The American Ways: an introduction to American culture* (Beijing: Pearson Education Group 2000), pp. 7-8.

[2] Philip Jenkins. *A History of the United States* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

PART ONE

● The

Early European ●

Venture and Settlement ●

第一章

早期欧洲人的冒险与定居 ● ● ●