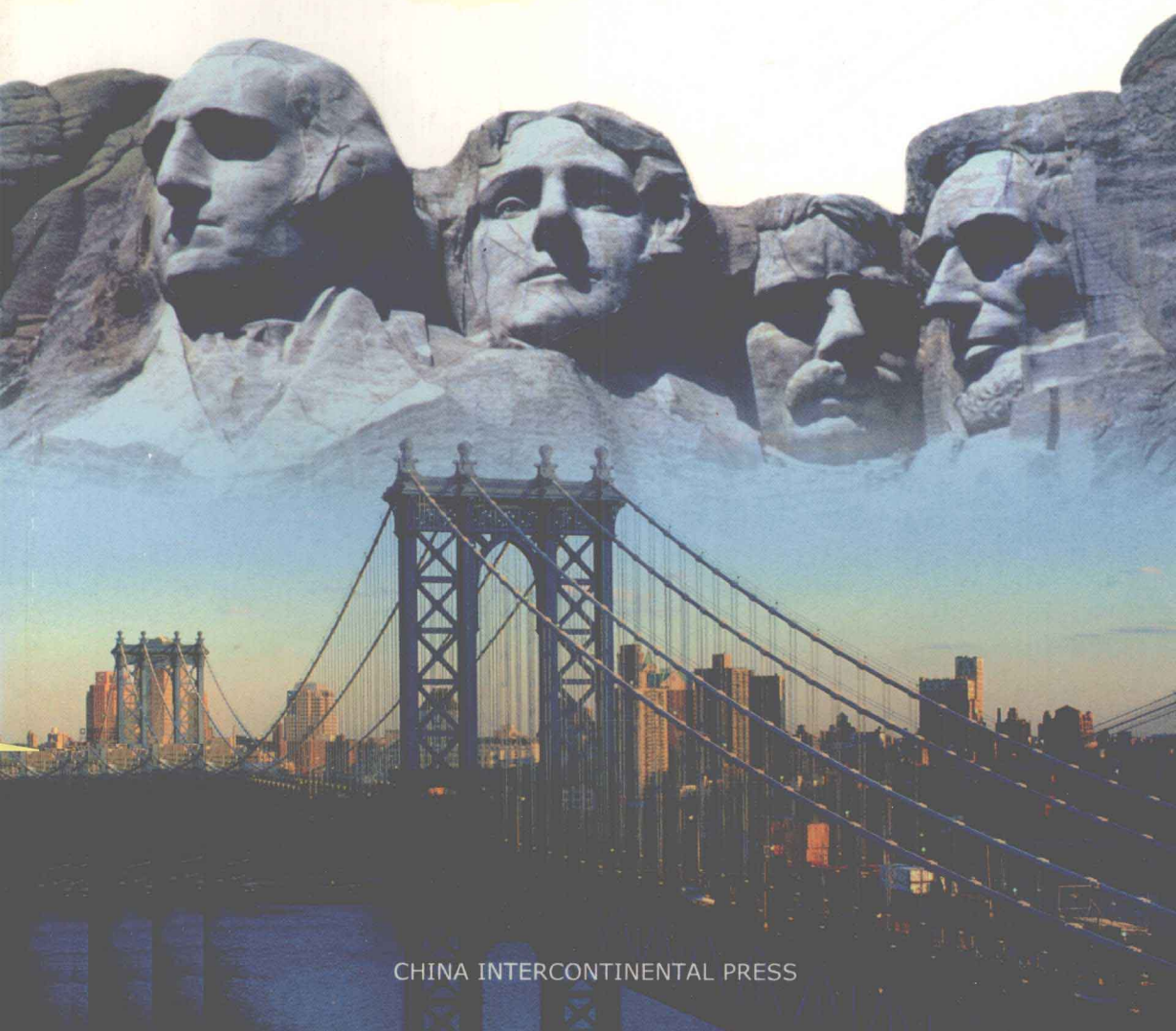


America and Americans Through Chinese Eyes

by Zhao Qizheng



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Minister of the State Council Information Office

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中华人民共和国 PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA



本图上中国国界线系按照1989年出版的1:2400万“中华人民共和国地形图”绘制

比例尺 Scale 1:30 000 000 0 300 600 900 1200m

Map of the People's Republic of China

美国 UNITED STATES



Map of the United States of America

>>>

The United States



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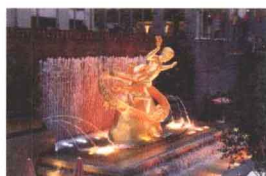


In August and September of 2000, Zhao Qizheng, Minister of China's State Council Information Office, delivered speeches on the same topic in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and San Francisco.



America and Americans Through Chinese Eyes

Speech at the National Press Club in Washington,
D.C. on August 30, 2000





Brooklyn Bridge in New York

Americans beginning to learn the Chinese language are invariably astonished to discover that literally, the Chinese translation of the United States, *Meiguo*, means a beautiful country. However, the Chinese people initially had dozens of names for the country facing them on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. We've finally settled on *Meiguo*, the best choice that not only sounds Chinese but also has the added benefit of inspiring good feelings among the Chinese.



beautiful
fine
pretty
nice
perfect
splendid
wonderful

beautiful



country

country

The exchanges among our two peoples can be traced back to August 28, 1784, when the US merchant ship “Empress of China”, originating from New York, arrived at Huangpu Harbour in Guangzhou after sailing across the Atlantic Ocean and the Cape of Good Hope. Such exchanges gained substantial momentum in the middle of the 19th century, starting the long voyage to an enhanced understanding between the Chinese and American peoples.





"Empress of China" (oil painting)





Portrait of Lin Zexu (1785-1850)

Lin Zexu, a politician of the Qing Dynasty known for his harsh crackdown on opium, had given the Chinese people the first detailed description of the US in *Sizhouzhi*, a book he compiled about the history and geography of the world. However, generally speaking, towards the end of the 19th century, the Chinese people's knowledge about the country on the other side of the planet still remained largely sketchy. No wonder the first group of children sent by the Chinese government to study in the US in 1872 felt both excited and surprised, for the Native Americans were dressed like figures in a Peking Opera.



The first group of children sent by the Chinese Qing government to study in the US in 1872.



A Native American in the United States



A character of Peking Opera



Portrait of Confucius (551-479 BC)

Starting from the 19th century, traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism, in particular, had found their way to the US, exerting a remarkable influence on American literature, especially the school of transcendentalism represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Walt Whitman, the founding father of modern American literature, twice mentioned Confucius in his *Notes and Fragments*. The image of idling old Chinese men also appeared frequently in the poems of Wallace Stevens. Meticulous with detail, he observed in his poem *The Six Significant Landscapes*, how an old man in China sits in the shadow of pines, watching blue and white beard quivering at the edge of the tree's shadow, as his beard swaying together with the pines in the breeze. For Wallace Stevens, as shown by his poem *Le Monocle De Mon Uncle*, it had never been easy to understand why those Chinese elders are always checking their clothes by a mountainside pond or examining their beard by the Yangtse River.