



# 眼看美国

一个60后中国记者体验中美差异

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#### 从一个人出访到一家人出国

2002年,我参加了全国青联组织的为期三个月的"中国青年赴美国密苏里大学学习公共行政管理研修班"。这是我首次访问美国,其间拜访了世界上最早开设新闻专业教育的高等学府——密苏里新闻学院。百年前该学院创办人 Wolter Williams 确立的《报人信条》镶嵌在大楼的墙面上,"I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true"(我坚信记者应该只写他自己内心认为真实的东西)这条具有普世价值的从业准则深深地打动了我,我渴望有朝一日能够到这个"记者的殿堂"接受一番思想的洗礼。

此后,我和这所新闻学院的国际交流项目办公室中国合作项目主任、博士候选人章于炎先生一直保持着联系。2005年秋,我收到了密苏里新闻学院国际交流项目办主任Fritz Cropp博士发来的信函,邀请我当访问学者,并允许携家眷前往。和家人一起,在美国学习生活一段时间,是我梦寐以求的经历。

#### 从报纸专栏到父女博客

2006年1月11日,我们如期登上美利坚大陆。起初,生活按部就班,我到新闻学院听课、开讨论会,在国内已是副主任医师的太太潘云苓获准去当地的癌症中心当访问医生,女儿陈韵正在附近上小学。不久,福建最有影响力的报纸《海峡都市报》和我联系,希望我和女儿合作在该报开个专栏介绍美国生活,我欣然接受。

5月29日,"《大小眼看美国》——陈强陈韵正父女专栏"在《海峡都市报》首次亮相,该报的"编者按"是这么写的:今年初,《中国青年报》驻福建记者站站长陈强应邀前往美国当访问学者,其10岁的女儿陈韵正随同前往读书。本报约请他们父女两人轮流为本专栏撰稿,从两代人的不同视角看美国社会。

之后,每逢周一,《大小眼看美国》专栏定期和福建的读者见面。为了让更多的人有机会读到我们的文章,我和女儿选择在新浪开设了"父女博客"(http://blog. sina. com. cn/funv),把在《海峡都市报》上发表的专栏文章——搬过去,使之成为报纸专栏的电子版。

现在回过头来看,我早期写的文章大多数是个人经历,比如相机坏了找老美索赔,开车超速被告上法庭,违章停车被罚款等等。我个人角色的转化和博客的火爆,则是在2007年4月中旬美国弗吉尼亚理工大学校园枪击案发生之后。我奉命采访这一重大事件,在一周内为《中国青年报》发回了六篇独家报道,这些报道同时在博客上发表,经过新浪博客编辑的重点推荐,访问量剧增,"父女博客"一夜之间成了"名博"。如今,该博已成为国人了解海外世界的一个窗口,点击数累计接近600万。

#### 从"研究"新闻到"寻找"新闻

经过这次应急采访,我猛然发现,在美国我不仅仅是个"研究"新闻的访问学者,还可以是个"生产"新闻的记者。于是,在回国前的三个月,我有意识地走出大学校园,走出惯常的生活圈,将触角尽可能地伸到美国社会的方方面面——采访当地的市长,旁听陪审团审案,暗访美国枪支管理,了解老美的晚年生

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活,探究美国人乐于助人的秘诀,关注美国大学生就业状况,体会华人在美的真实处境,甚至加入义工参加志愿活动,切身感受美国社会对残疾人、穷人等弱势群体的特殊关照。2007年7月16日,美国最大的华文报纸《世界日报》以"另类访问学者"为题,对我在美国的"超常规"之举进行了报道。

回国后,多家出版机构希望把我们在美国期间写的东西整理成书。最终我们选定了两家出版社出版不同的版本——由北京新华出版社出版我和女儿陈韵正合著的《大小眼看美国》中文简体版;授权华东理工大学出版社分别出版我和女儿陈韵正的作品《大眼看美国》和《小眼看美国》的中英图文对照版本。本书的英文部分由美国《世界日报》驻密苏里州哥伦比亚市的记者、我的好朋友阮叔梅女士友情翻译,在此对她的大力帮助表示诚挚的谢意!

最后想说明一点,美国和中国一样,都是幅员辽阔的国家,东、西海岸和中部地区存在明显的差异。我们生活在美国中部密苏里州一个叫哥伦比亚的大学城,这座人口只有 10 万的小城曾经被评为"全美最适合人居的地方",生活在这里感觉确实会比其他城市好。我记录的只是自己亲历的"微观美国",充其量是美国的一角而已,不可能代表美国的全貌。但是我可以负责任地说,本书展现的正是作者"自己内心认为真实的东西"。

陈 强 2009 年 6 月于福州

## 译者序

陈强先生邀我将他的著作译成英文,我当仁不让答应了。

他书中文字生动有趣,翻译时,我有时会心一笑,有时哈哈大笑。 不过,最吸引我的还是一个又一个活生生的人物:在家中教育小孩的 父母、不领任何工资的市长、在中国待了十年出了好几本书的中国通、 向不同国家派发免费轮椅的老先生、躺在浴缸里上课的学生等等。

我在美国住了也近二十年了,看了这些人物,却仍觉得新鲜,也想起了自己认识的一些美国人。

就说我的邻居贝蒂。

76岁的贝蒂有两位住在外地的女儿,几年前先生过世,她就一人一狗住在大大的房子里。虽然只一个人,她却永远穿戴整齐,家里也永远一尘不染。无论是冬天拿着大铲子铲雪,或是夏天推着笨重的除草机割草,贝蒂全部自己来,绝不假手他人。

每回我们出远门,无论院子里的花草、屋里的植物、邮箱里的信件,只要跟贝蒂说一声,一切都搞定了。等我们回来,所有的植物一定都还活得好好的,所有的报纸和信件也一定已经分类,静静躺在厨房案上。

我在想,部分中文读者对美国人的印象可能还局限于诸如麦当娜、迈克·杰克逊、飞人乔丹这样的知名人士,殊不知,许多美国人其实更像我的邻居贝蒂;他们是为了三餐奔波的约翰,为了小孩成长不断付出的玛丽,为了高涨油价减少在外就餐次数的彼得。

这些勤勤恳恳的美国人才是真正值得了解的美国人,这些勤勤恳 恳的美国人正是陈强书中描绘的美国人。

陈强以他的笔,为读者介绍了一个又一个或正直、或诚实、或勤劳、或朴实的美国人;他以筛子,筛掉沙土,留下一粒粒黄澄澄的金子。

这书像扇窗,透过窗子,读者不妨看看别人,想想自己。

"它山之石,可以攻错",大概就是这个意思吧。

阮叔梅 于密苏里州

### 

Mr. Chen Qiang asked me to translate his book, from Chinese to English, and I gladly obliged.

As Chen's description is vivid and humorous, while translating, I sometimes smiled and sometimes had a good laugh. However, for me, the most distinctive feature, in the book, is the many colorful people from many different walks of life: parents who home school their children; a mayor who does not get paid; a Chinese expert who has published a couple of books about the country, after living there for more than 10 years; an old man who distributes wheelchairs, free of charge, to people in different countries; a student who lies in a bath tub while listening to the lecture...

After having been in the States for nearly 20 years, I still find these people refreshing, though, somehow, they remind me of some of my Americans friends.

Take my neighbor Betty as an example.

76-year-old Betty has two daughters, both living out of state. After her husband passed away a few years ago, Betty stays, with an old dog, in a big house all by herself. Betty is always neatly dressed, and her house is always spotlessly clean. In the winter, she shovels the snow, and in the summer, she mows the grass, never asking help from anybody else.

When we are out of town, we ask Betty to take care of the lawn, water the house plants and check the mail for us. When

we are back from our trip, the plants are always well and alive, and the letters and papers are always assorted into different bags, sitting on the kitchen counter top, waiting for us.

I wonder if, for some Chinese, the term "American" is synonymous with celebrities like Madonna, Michael Jackson or Michael Jordan, while, as a matter of fact, a lot of Americans are like my neighbor, Betty. They are John who works hard for the bills, Mary who spends a lot of time taking care of her children and Peter who eats out a lot less because of the high-rise energy price.

These conscientious Americans are the Americans deserved to be known. These conscientious Americans are the Americans delineated in Chen's book.

With his pen, Chen introduces to Chinese readers the Americans with the quality of integrity, honesty, diligence or sincerity; with a sieve, he sifted through the sand and carefully got to the gold.

The book is a window, through which readers can make a comparison between themselves and those from a different country.

As the saying goes, "advice from others helps one overcome one's shortcoming," this, I believe, is what the book is mainly about.

Shumei Roan in Missouri

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#### ❶ 诚信,从入境开始

2006年1月11日,对我和太太、女儿来说,是一个特别值得纪念的日子。我们一家三口从北京搭乘西北航空公司的班机经东京作短暂停留后抵达美国。在北部城市明尼阿波利斯人境时,美国海关官员就给我们上了一堂"诚信"课。

和到其他任何国家一样,乘客人境前必须填写海关申报表。美国海关要求申报的项目包括水果、肉类、蔬菜等食品,以及某些以特定动物为原料的产品,超过一万美元的现金等。人关时,我主动申报了随身携带的1.2万美元,海关官员并没有要求我把钱拿出来数数看,只是做了备案,五大箱行李连查都不查就放行了。

和我同行的一位多次出入美国的中国留学生为了图省事,选择走不用申报的"绿色通道",却不幸被抽查,大包小包一一打开,结果两袋真空包装的"麻辣鸡翅"被翻了出来。海关官员不仅没收了他爱吃的家乡食品,还罚了他 100 美元。美国人告诉他,之所以被罚款,是因为他没有如实申报。携带食品不是过错(因为你出国前可能不知道有此规定),但不申报则被认为是有意隐瞒。如果他事先申报携带有食品,即便"麻辣鸡翅"不被允许携带人境,最多也就没收了事,而不至于被罚款。这位留学生很后悔,说损失的不仅仅是钱,更重要的是影响到他未来在美国的信用记录。

在美国,人们珍视自己的信用记录。因为有良好的信用就好办事。我初到美国,暂时还没有信用记录,买手机就遇到困难。这里使用手机是消费之后按月付账,有良好信用记录的人只要签订一年使

用合同就可以领到免费的手机,而没有信用记录或记录不良者则需要缴纳 200 美元的押金。

商家是如何判断一个人的信用程度呢?以买手机为例,商家会要求用户提供社会保障号和驾驶证号码,通过电脑联网就能查到该用户的信用记录。因为这两个号码上记载了用户平时缴税、遵守交通法规、还贷款等等和信用相关的情况。我初来乍到,信用记录为零,后来还是找了一位在当地生活多年并拥有良好记录的中国朋友帮忙,以她的信用作担保才免交押金买到了手机。



○ 商家的消费承诺

美国人讲诚信尤其体现在商业规则上。在沃尔玛等许多大商场购物,三个月内可以无理由退货,购物款及税收如数返还。我们家买了口锅,使用后我太太觉得太沉,就退了;买了鱼竿,觉得不好使,也退了;有一次买了牛肉,放在冰箱里三天之后居然变色了,商家二话没说就把钱退还。最有意思的是,我们买了三大盆花木,在室内摆放了一段时间后竟然招来不少小飞虫,我准备把这些花木扔了,太太建议找出发票看看是否可以退货。一看发票,购货期还未超过三个月,于是就运到商店退了。在那里,我还看到老美拿着枯死的花木来退货呢!

沃尔玛作为跨国连锁商店,在美国可以无理由退货,为何在中国却不可以呢?也许有人会就此得出这样的结论:美国商家歧视中国消费者。但请理性地想一想,如果在中国的商店也和美国一样,实行"三个月内可以无理由退货",是不是还能照常开下去?

也许是受骗上当多了,中 国人往往不太信任别人,干什 么事总留点心眼,而美国人似



○ 在沃尔玛,顾客可自行操作埋单

乎不设防。我去买二手车,作了自我介绍之后,车主就直接把车钥匙交给我,让我自个儿开出去试车甚至开到修车厂作检测,压根儿就不担心别人会把他的车开跑。上公共图书馆办证借书,不用交一分钱押金,一次借多少本都可以,但必须在三周内归还。女儿在学校申请免费午餐,校方问家长的收入情况,女儿说父母在这里当访问学者,费用是国内提供的,在美国没有什么收入,仅凭"口说",无需提供任何书面证明,校方也就相信了。即便在沃尔玛购物,你也可以自行在电脑前操作埋单,而且出门时没有人会检查你的发票和物品是否吻合。

在我们中国人看来,美国人的这些做法绝对是"漏洞百出",但在美国敢钻这"空子"的人却不多。因为一旦有了不良记录,接下来可就寸步难行——没有人愿意把房子租给你,申请贷款买车、买房很可能被拒,甚至连找工作都难。

#### **Honesty Starts at Customs**

January 11, 2006 was a special day for my wife, my daughter and me. The three of us flew from Beijing to America, after a short stop in Tokyo, on Northwest Airlines. When we were passing customs in Minneapolis, a northern city in the country, American customs officers gave us a lesson on "honesty."

As in any other country, passengers have to fill out customs declaration before entering America, and the items to be declared include food — fruit, meat, vegetables and so on — products made of certain kinds of animals, cash that's more than 10,000 dollars, and others. I declared the 12,000 dollars I brought with me, but the customs officer didn't ask to see the money. After putting the information on file, he let us pass without checking any of our five big luggages.

A Chinese student who had entered the country many times took the same plane with us. To save time, he chose the "green path" which didn't require customs declaration. Unfortunately, he was picked out and every one of his luggages was opened and checked — with two bags of "spicy chicken wings" found. The customs officer not only took away his favorite home town food but asked him to pay 100 dollars. The American told him that he was fined because he didn't make the declaration honestly, and that though bringing the food was understandable (people might not know the rule before leaving their mother land) not declaring it was not acceptable. If the student had declared the spicy

chicken wings, the worst case scenario would be him turning in the wings without paying any money. Naturally, the student felt bad — for both the money and his credit score in the country.

In America, credit is important. With good credit, things become easy in many ways. I didn't have any credit when I first arrived in the country, and I even had difficulty buying cell phones. Here, people pay their cell phone bills at the end of each month, and anyone with good credit can get a free cell phone after joining a one-year plan. However, without any or with bad credit, one would have to pay a deposit of 200 dollars.

How do business units know about a person's credit? Take cell phones. Businesses would ask customers to provide them with their social security and driver's license numbers. After checking these numbers online, they could find out how a customer scores — whether taxes and mortgages have been paid or traffic rules have been violated. When I first arrived in the country, my credit score was zero. With the pledge of a Chinese friend who had lived in the country many years and had good credit, I was finally able to buy a cell phone without paying any deposit.

Honesty is vividly embodied in business practices in America. In shopping centers, such as Wal-Mart, any items can be returned within three months of purchasing time without providing any explanation. After buying a cooking pot, my wife felt that it was too heavy and returned it; I wasn't happy with the fishing pole I bought and returned it; we found the beef discolored after three days in our fridge and had our refund without being asked any questions by the cashier. What's more, I found the three big pots of house plant, after being at our home for a while, attracted a lot