



Planned by Zhuang Zhixiang Edited by Pan Wenguo

READINGS OF CHINESE CULTURE SERIES

ESSAY I

Translated by Zhang Peiji



中国经典文化走向世界丛书

散文卷 ①

庄智象 总策划 潘文国 总主编

张培基 译





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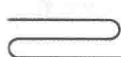
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“Cherish one’s own beauty, respect other’s beauty, and when both beauties are respected and cherished, the world will become one”, said Fei Xiaotong, a famous Chinese sociologist at a celebration party in honor of his eightieth birthday about thirty years ago. In a time of growing interest in intercultural communication today, these words sound especially wise and far-sighted. Translation, as one of the most important means for cultural communication, is usually done into one’s mother tongue from other languages by native translators. This largely guarantees the quality of translated text, so far as the linguistic readability is concerned. However, this method implies a one-sidedness in correspondence, as only the translator’s “respect for other’s beauty” is concerned, regardless, though not completely, of how the local people look upon and cherish their own beauty. It should be compensated by translations on the other way, that is, works selected, interpreted, and translated by the local people themselves into languages other than their own. This approach may go directly against the prevalent views in modern translation theories but, in my opinion, is worthy of practicing. It is perhaps an even more effective way to bring about successful communication in cultures, and the beauties of the world can really be shared by the world’s people. It is with such understanding that the Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press is organizing a new series of books, entitled *Readings of Chinese Culture*, to introduce Chinese culture, past and present, to the world, with works selected and translated by the Chinese scholars and translators.

The series will cover a wide range of writings including but not restricted to works of different literary genres. For the first batch, we are glad to provide three books of essays and one book of short stories, all written by authors of the 20th century. They will be continued by a batch of serious academic writings on premodern Chinese classics in philosophy, literature, and historiography, written by influential scholars of our time.

Later, we will offer more books on classical Chinese drama, classical Chinese poetry, etc.

Some of the books in the series have been published before, but they have been revised and rearranged for the new purpose to meet the current needs of broader readers. We are looking forward to hearing comments and suggestions on the series for future improvement.

Pan Wenguo

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The Crab

© Lu Xun^①

An old crab grew restless. Finding himself stiff all over, he knew it was time for him to moult his shell.

He dashed here and there in search of a cave to hide. He was going to block up the mouth of the cave so that he could moult in secret. He knew it would be very dangerous to shed his shell in the open because, with his new shell still being soft, he might be eaten up by other crabs. This fear was not groundless for he himself had really seen it happen to other moulting crabs.

The old crab kept moving about in a hurry.

A nearby crab asked, "Hey, brother, what's the rush?"

"I am going to moult," answered the old crab.

"Wouldn't it be all right to moult right here? I could help you out with it."

"How horrible that would be!"

"You mean while you're not scared of other things in the cave you're scared of your own kind?"

"No, I'm not scared of my own kind."

"Then what are you scared of?"

"Nothing but being eaten up by you."

① Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936), the most famous and influential of modern Chinese writers. He was best known for his short stories and topical essays.

The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave

© Lu Xun

What a slave did was just to look for someone to listen to his own grievances. That was the only thing he wanted to do and also the only thing he could do. One day he came across a wise man.

“Sir!” said he sadly, tears trickling down from the corners of his eyes. “As you can see, I lead a subhuman life. I’m not even assured of a single meal a day. If I have one, it’s only a small bowl of *kaoliang* husks, which even a pig or dog would disdain to eat...”

“What a wretched life you lead!” the wise man replied with pity.

“Isn’t it?” the slave followed up with exaltation. “And I toil day and night without rest. I carry water at dawn and cook dinner at dusk. I run errands all morning and grind wheat at night. I wash the clothes when it’s fine and hold an umbrella for my master when it’s rainy. I take care of the heating stove in winter and keep cooling my master with a fan in summer. I boil white fungus for him late at night. I wait on him at his gambling table without ever getting a tip. Instead I sometimes get a good thrashing...”

“Oh, dear!” the wise man said with a sigh, the rims of his eyes looking somewhat red as if he were about to shed tears.

“Sir! I can’t put up with it any more. I’ve got to find a way out. But what can I do?...”

“I’m sure you’ll pull through sooner or later...”

“Really? I hope so. But, sir, I already feel much better now as you’ve given me sympathy and encouragement after listening to my grievances. It’s thus clear that Heaven always upholds justice...”

A few days later, however, he again began to grumble and look for somebody to listen to his complaints.

“Sir!” he cried out tearfully. “You know, I live in a place even lousier than a pigsty. My master treats me like dirt. He treats his Pekinese ten thousand times better...”

“Damn it!” the listener swore in such a loud voice as to make the slave start. This man was a fool.

“Sir, I live in a run-down small hut which is wet, dingy, stinking and full of bedbugs. They bite me all over when I lie down to sleep. And the place doesn’t even have a single window...”

“Why not ask your master to have a window made?”

“How can I do that?...”

“OK, you show me around!”

As soon as they came to the slave’s dwelling, the fool started to pound its mud wall.

“What the hell are you doing, sir?” the slave yelled with alarm.

“I’m trying to knock a hole to make a window for you.”

“No, you can’t do that! The master will be mad at me!”

“To hell with your master!” The fool continued pounding away.

“Help! A robber is breaking down our house! Hurry up, or he’ll knock a big hole in the wall!...” Sobbing and shouting at the top of his voice, the slave rolled round and round on the ground.

Thereupon, a whole troop of slaves arrived on the scene and drove away the fool.

The last one that came out unhurriedly on hearing the commotion was the master.

“A robber came to smash up our house,” the slave spoke respectfully and smugly. “I was the first to shout the alarm. We together drove him away.”

“You did well,” the master praised him.

A great many people came that day to express their solicitude, among them the wise man.

“Sir, I’ve just been praised by my master for my meritorious service,”

the slave said to the wise man very happily and hopefully. “I remember you said the other day that I would pull through sooner or later. So you’re really a man of foresight...”

“Oh, yeah...” replied the wise man as if he, too, were happy for the sake of the slave.

On Presenting a View

© *Lu Xun*

I dreamed that while preparing to write a composition in a primary school classroom I asked the teacher how to present a view.

“That’s a hard nut,” said the teacher, giving me a sidelong glance over his glasses. “Let me tell you this story —”

“When a baby boy is born to a family, there is immense joy in the whole household. When he is one month old, they invite some people over for taking a look at him — customarily, of course, in expectation of some good wishes.

“One of the guests receives hearty thanks for saying, ‘The child is destined to be rich.’

“Another is paid some compliments in return for saying, ‘The child is destined to be an official.’

“Still another, however, is given a sound beating by the whole family for saying, ‘The child will eventually die.’

“To call the child mortal is to state the inevitable while to say that the child will become very rich or a high official is probably a lie. Yet the former gets a thrashing while the latter is rewarded. You...”

“I don’t want to tell a lie, and neither do I want to be beaten. Then what should I do, sir?”

“Well, just say, ‘Ai-ya, this child! Just look! Oh, my! Hah! Hehe! He, hehehehe!’”

First Love

© Zhou Zuoren^①

I was then 14, and she about 13. I was living with grandpa's concubine Song in our temporary home in Hua-Pai-Lou, Hangzhou. The little girl was our next-door neighbour Yao's daughter. She had originally been the daughter of a Yang family in Qing-Bo-Men-Tou. As she was the third child of the family, people often called her San-Gu-Niang^②. The old Yaos had no children of their own, so they took her as their goddaughter. Hence she put up with the Yaos for more than 20 days per month. Though Concubine Song was very friendly with the daughter-in-law of a distant neighbour named Shi, who owned a mutton shop, she was not on speaking terms with old Mrs. Yao next-door. San-Gu-Niang, however, didn't care about all that. She would push our door open and enter to have fun. She would first go upstairs to have a little chat with Concubine Song, and then, after coming downstairs, stand beside the wooden table, which I used to share with our servant Ruan Sheng, to watch me practising handwriting after a wood-cut copybook for calligraphy by Lu Runxiang^③, carrying in her arms a big cat named San Hua.

I didn't get into any conversation with her, and nor did I ever dwell my eyes on her face and bearing — perhaps due to my myopia. But there was another reason for it. Though unconsciously attracted by her, I felt meanwhile so overshadowed by her brilliance that I just couldn't lift my eyes to take a close look at her. As far as I can now remember, she seemed

① Zhou Zuoren (1885-1968), brother of Lu Xun, writer, editor, translator, one of the most important essayists of the 20th century, was also an advocator of folklore studies in China.

② A Pinyin transliteration of the Chinese characters meaning Third Daughter.

③ A famous calligrapher of the late Qing dynasty.

to be a little girl with delicate features, black eyes, slender figure and small feet, and have nothing especially appealing. But she was the first person of the opposite sex that had caught my notice. The first person that had made me love somebody else as much as myself. The first person that had made me sexually aware. The first person that had aroused my adoration for the opposite sex.

Of course I knew then I was nothing but an “Ugly Duckling”, but that didn’t damp down my passion. Whenever she came to watch me practise calligraphy with the cat in her arms, I would hearten up unwittingly and go about my job with redoubled effort and inexplicable joy in my heart. I didn’t bother whether she loved me or not, and nor did I know whether I myself was in love with her or not. Nevertheless, when she was around, I felt happy and desired to do all I could for her. That was my real state of mind, and that was also something bestowed on me by her. I didn’t know how she felt, but as for me, it was just a feeling of adoration, and there was no thought of anything having to do with sexual relations at all. One evening, Concubine Song suddenly burst into another fit of abuse at the Yaos and ended it up with,

“That Goddam Ah San^①! She’s no good either. She’s sure to end up a whore some day in Gong-Chen-Qiao.^②”

I didn’t quite understand what was meant by becoming a whore. However, I said to myself, “If she should really be reduced to a whore, I’ll definitely come to her rescue.”

More than six months went by. In July or August of that year, I left Hangzhou for home to see my ailing mother. One month later, Servant Ruan Sheng incidentally paid me a visit while he was on leave. In referring to the state of affairs in Hua-Pai-Lou, he said,

“San-Gu-Niang of the Yang family died of cholera.”

I, too, felt very sad, picturing in my mind her tragic death, but, meanwhile, somehow remained very calm like a big stone weighing on my heart had been removed.

① Short for San-Gu-Niang.

② Formerly a well-known water transport center in northern Hangzhou.

Books and I

© Xia Mianzun^①

For twenty years past, books have eaten into at least 10–20 percent of my pocket. Now the only things of some value under my roof, if any, are my books.

Since I have never entertained ambition for making a profound study of any subject, the books I have acquired cover almost everything — religion, art, literature, sociology, philosophy, history, biology, etc. Most of them are Chinese translations of literary works by famous foreign writers and anthologies of Chinese poetry and prose through the ages. The rest, often called an outline or introduction, are merely on rudiments of various subjects.

I never care to borrow books from other people or a library. It seems that books bought can better satisfy my bibliomania than books borrowed. You may also attribute this to some sort of desire for personal possessions. Whenever I have some new acquisitions, it always gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to stamp my *ex-libris* on them one by one.

As soon as a new book comes to hand, I always read the preface first and then the table of contents. If it happens to be a thin one, I often finish reading it at one sitting. Otherwise, I often browse through one or two chapters or sections before putting it onto my bookshelf. I seldom read a thick book from cover to cover unless it is a novel. By dint of the first impression it made on me at the time of buying, I have a rough idea of what a book is about and what useful materials in it are available to me. But I have little idea which book is to be read or looked over again at what

① Xia Mianzun (1886–1946), writer, publisher, and language educator.

time. It is completely subject to the whims of the moment. This often prompts me to liken myself and the books on my shelves respectively to an ancient emperor and his concubines housed separately in a row of adjoining rooms.

Much as I love books, I take little care of them. In doing my reading, I often mark out what I regard as important in a book. If it is a thread-bound Chinese book, I use a writing brush to draw small circles as markings. Otherwise, I use a red pencil to draw heavy underlines. Consequently, the books I have read are rarely clean.

It is said that those who have a great liking for candies will sicken to see them when later they happen to work in a candy store. Likewise, ever since I began to work in a bookstore, my obsession with books has been very much on the decline. Nevertheless, I still cannot help slipping back into the same old rut, eager to buy this and that book. This is probably because candies are to be eaten with the mouth and not worth keeping as knickknacks while books can be bought without being read and just left on a shelf.