

美国社会文化丛书之四

历史回眸

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内容简介

网上色情给青少年们带来的危害 ;美国‘天堂之门’成员集体自杀 ;帮助外国人打官司的法庭翻译 ;中国早期移民在澳洲的创业历程 ;一支婚礼乐队引起的民族纠纷 ;修道院一天的日程安排 ;一对情人的令人琢磨不透的分手 ;日本人婚姻发生大变革 ;漫游意大利西西里岛等 ,几十个引人入胜、闻所未闻的话题将带你步入使用英语的天国,使你感受与异国文化交流的乐趣。自然而然,你的英语水平将得到提高。

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前言

知识的获取和积累是多样化的,而阅读则是一种行之有效的手段。在程式化的英语教学中,学生要花费大量的时间背诵单词,练习语法,然后通过诸如四、六级之类的各种考试。我们为何不能选择一种较为轻松的方式来体味英语、感受异域文化,从而使学生的英语水平在某种程度上自然而然地获得提高呢?这正是我们编写此书的初衷。

我们所做的一切都与文化密不可分,语言与文化的关系也进一步被人们所认识。在已经迈入一个新世纪的时候,通过阅读反省一下我们曾经所处时代的文化特征,追寻人类的足迹,展望未来社会的发展将是一件非常有意义的事情。

科技的迅猛发展带给人们的冲击可谓迅雷不及掩耳。计算机的等级越升越高,基因技术日新月异,而因特网的出现则更加改变了人们

的思维方式和生活。网络的普及让我们感到原本觉得越来越小的世界忽然间又无限地大了起来。有关网络的种种话题也常常成为大众讨论的热点。

“多莉”诞生伊始即成为世人瞩目的焦点，并引发了关于道德观的大论战。这只洁白的小羊羔使人们感到的震撼决不亚于它在科技界所掀起的狂澜。克隆羊与克隆人之间到底有多大的距离，人们似乎还未得出最终的结论。

欧元的诞生和全球经济一体化的进展使得国际间的交流呈现出前所未有的繁荣景象。大量的移民流动，外来词的不断涌现，发达国家与发展中国家之间交流的不平等性也同时显露了出来。

在这高速运转的社会中，人们的生活一下子被推上了快车道。所有的人都在忙忙碌碌，又似乎不知道在忙什么，为什么而忙。多数的人更表现出一种稍显浮躁的心态。偶尔间，在街上匆匆行走的一瞬心头也许会泛起一丝需要宁静的想法，但这个念头也会即刻被周围的喧嚣所吞没。想起远方的爱人时不再有山长水阔长路漫漫、思君令人老的惆怅，随身的 BP、手机，甚至一个 E-mail 即可解决问题。“相约 98”的寄情方式早已取代了尺素上长长的思念。

也许这种稍许落没的情怀并不能代表大多数人的心态。在已经飞逝的 1998,1999 年，更多人心怀的是对跨世纪的期盼。2000 年在幼时的脑海中是一个平和幸福的梦幻时代，而时至今日，我们所处的世界并未显示出多少新世

界已经来临的征兆。凶杀与暴力依然存在,还有人在贫困线上挣扎。和平的家园被当作高科技武器的试验场,而和平的人们则被生不逢时地当作炮灰。在天下熙熙皆为利来,天下攘攘皆为利往的一片喧闹声中,亲情、至爱、正义与公理也还依然存在着,而且越发地显示出它们的弥足珍贵。

总之,通过本书的阅读,将会开拓您的视野,丰富您的思想,培养您的全球化意识,使您在自己的工作和生活中,能得心应手,立于不败之地。

编者

2000 年 10 月

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1

My Mother , My Teacher

吾母吾师

一个嫁到泰国的中国女子,由于完全不懂泰文,遭遇到种种不顺的事情。在她的孩子开始上学时,她也开始了艰苦的自学过程。5年之后,流畅的泰文为她打开了通向外面精彩世界的窗户,她的成功经历也给了女儿许许多多的启迪。

Look affectionately at the letter before me the oddhand-writing reminding me of the peculiar voice that goes with it. The writing could only belong to my mother ; the character, like her accent, is unmistakable. Her spoken Thai is now flawed only by a slight Cantonese accent and her writing is so tidy and perfect it betrays the foreigner hiding behind it.

My mother immigrated to Thailand over 60 years ago. Over the years she has told me so many stories of China 's sor-

row and grandeur. I almost feel like I came from there myself. She was always full of praise for her native land, just like the Chinese from thousands of years ago who thought China was the center of the world. The Chinese community in Thailand carried this heritage with them, believing themselves to be much better than Thais.

When I was a child, my mother's grasp of Thai was poor. I hated it when neighbors and the local shopkeepers made fun of the way she spoke. People often called us "Chinks," which made me angry. But my mother was never ashamed of her accent. The truth is she had no choice ; if she was to live in Thai society, she had to speak Thai.

It wasn't always easy. Like two currents flowing against each other, native Thais and my mother tried unsuccessfully to communicate with each other. While Thais spoke in torrents, she trickled. Thais spurted while she sprinkled. Thais enthusiastically bubbled ; she incoherently babbled.

Even my father, a Thai man, looked down on my mother's unnatural Thai. He was a learned man, educated in England, and I never fully understood why he chose a woman such as my mother for his wife. An educated woman would have been more appropriate for him, but at that time in Thailand, it was difficult to find a woman with both beauty and brains. Women, both Thai and Chinese, had much less education than men, if any at all. As a result, my father could choose only one quality in his wife, and for him it was beauty. But this quality fades with time and he was soon left with a middle-aged woman whom he could hardly understand.

My parents were unable to laugh at the same jokes or dis-

cuss the latest political and economic news. When my mother's relatives came to visit, only she and I could chat with them. My father, unable to speak Chinese, felt like the odd one out. The tables were turned, of course, when my father would tell her, in Thai, to do something for him. Her poor grasp of the language meant that she often completed the task incorrectly.

This was a miserable time for the little girl who had to live in the gap that existed between her parents. But the miseries for that little girl — me — were about to increase.

IT HAD NEVER made any difference to me that my mother could not read or write Thai. But once I began learning to read and write, she was quick to take advantage of my new knowledge, and I was quick to tire of her continual demands. She often had me read the newspaper to her. She wanted me to explain what each picture in my textbooks was about. I had to read our mail aloud for her.

My misery doubled whenever an official letter came. I could read it, but, being just in third grade. I did not understand any of it. Our neighbors could not help us because, back then, many Thais were no more literate than my mother.

The worst times, however, happened when we watched a foreign movie. I was forever answering her questions: “What did she say?” “What are they talking about?” Of course, she could not read the Thai subtitles.

One day, when I was still in primary school, she began to learn how to read Thai using my old notebooks and readers. Rather than feeling proud of her, I became more bitter. I was forced to be her teacher. She was 36 years old; I was not even ten. She always had so many questions about the alphabet,

pronunciation, exceptions to the rules and the meaning of various words.

She studied after dinner as I did my homework. Together we sat at the dining table, the noxious smoke from the mosquito repellent making our heads spin. My mother read my old books, spelling aloud for me any words she did not understand. Sometimes she spelled the word incorrectly and I had to get up from my work and look for myself. I gave the pronunciation and meaning of the word and she wrote them down quickly. Soon, my old textbooks were full of her notes.

Now, when I look back on those study days, I see it was a highly productive way to learn. Teaching her Thai gave her a tool she would be able to use the rest of her life. In return, I learned more about the Chinese language (I had to explain Thai 's finer points in her mother tongue) and my Chinese heritage than I ever expected.

There were other advantages too. As we worked through a Thai translation of *Aesop 's Fables*, she would relate similar Chinese tales to me. I also was introduced to many other Chinese proverbs and teachings. Indeed, she went out of her way to find new stories about her homeland, making sure I did not grow up ignorant of Chinese culture.

Now, I realize how much I gained from those evenings at the dining table. But back then, all I could see was wasted time. The Christian school I attended believed in lots of homework, and so I had my fill in math, Thai and English. Helping my mother took away from my own work. Her interruptions were annoying. But she never became upset with me, or perhaps, at that time in my life, I just never cared to notice. I do

remember her sitting unmoved as her only daughter griped and grumbled, and then continuing on with her questions, as determined as ever.

If it were me, I probably would have quit, but not my mother. Her progress was unbelievable. Within five years, she could read anything in Thai, from novels and history books to newspapers. Once she had mastered Thai, she moved on to English.

DEEP INSIDE, I had never believed that she would be able to read and write effectively. Thus, I now consider every letter I receive from her to be a miracle. Like most women of her generation, she worked at home all day, rarely going out. Life consisted of doing household chores and listening to soap operas on the radio. A woman's world was made up of work and waiting for her children and husband to come home. And sometimes, her husband would not show up until late at night.

Before she studied Thai with me, she would spend long hours sitting silently by herself, her brow furrowed. The strain on her face made her look old beyond her years. I can still remember once as a child seeing her sitting, brooding. "What are you doing?" I asked her. Her face turned fierce and she yelled at me to leave the room. I could not understand why she was angry at me.

Later, after I had come to understand her annoyance. I saw a Korean mother living in Japan similarly reproach her young daughter. I so much wanted to tell the woman that, if she wanted to escape her misery, she had to learn about the language and the culture of the country in which she was living.

For my mother, the ability to read Thai opened a whole new world. She was able to understand her adopted homeland and its ways. Her carefree face was evidence to everyone of her newfound happiness. She was at ease with the people around her. She could take medicine without asking others to read the label for her. She could read the newspaper whenever she wanted and watch movies without disturbing others. Most importantly, she could sign official documents without relying on someone else to tell her whether or not she was being cheated. She ceased to be a burden on others.

MY MOTHER now teaches my children, another miracle. My own work does not allow me to spend a lot of time with my children, but she has moved right in and watches over them with a sure hand. She has translated her past difficulties into indispensable lessons for her grandchildren. “The first time you try something, it will always seem difficult,” she tells them. “As you struggle to do it, you will feel that you will never be successful. But if you keep on trying, the day will come when you can do it well and with great ease.”

As if to illustrate her point, she speaks to them with a clear Thai accent. Listening to her teaching my children Thai with the voice of a Thai, I smile and reflect on the hot, moist nights we spent together, studying Thai. My mother, however, is modest about her accomplishments. She says simply that she did not want to be a grandmother who taught her grandchildren to sit up straight but who herself slouched.

Her education has greatly affected me, also. First, our nightly Thai lessons gave me the ability to grasp languages easily. With a little work, I can master anything. Second, I

know all about ignorance. Thus, when giving directions to assistants or teaching my own children, I have the patience to help them. Third, I believe there is no age limit to learning. Upon turning 36, I, like my mother, began studying subjects which I had never had the chance to study before. All I asked for was the strength and the faith that I could do it.

The fruits of knowledge go beyond you alone ; they touch all of those around you. It is never too late to pick from the tree, so long as you are willing to face the toughest struggle.

Notes

1. Cantonese 广东的 ; 广州话
2. Chink 华人 中国人
3. torrent 急流, 滔滔不绝
4. spurt 喷出 射出
5. bubble 沸腾
6. babble 咿呀学话
7. noxious 有毒的
8. mosquito repellent 蚊香
9. Aesop 's Fables 伊索寓言
10. chore 杂务, 烦琐之事
11. furrow 皱眉头 起皱纹
12. strain 拉紧
13. brood 郁闷地沉思
14. carefree 无忧无虑的 快活的
15. slouch 没精打采地坐(或站、走等)

Reading Comprehension

1. In Thailand, Chinese immigrants _____.
 - A. were respected by Thais
 - B. believed themselves to be much better than Thais
 - C. mastered Thai better than Thais
 - D. kept on speaking Chinese everywhere
2. When the author was a child, _____.
 - A. her mother liked speaking Thai
 - B. her mother hated speaking Thai
 - C. local Thais praised her mother's accent
 - D. local Thais laughed at her mother's accent
3. The author's father married her mother, because _____.
 - A. he loved her so deeply
 - B. he thought she was clever
 - C. he thought she was beautiful
 - D. he liked Chinese women
4. When the author was a child, _____.
 - A. her parents had a good relationship
 - B. her parents could not understand each other
 - C. her parents shared the same joys
 - D. her parents usually discussed the latest news together
5. Once the author began learning to read and write, her mother _____.
 - A. had her read the newspaper
 - B. asked her to read the mails to her
 - C. wanted her to translate the foreign films to her when they watched together
 - D. All of the above.
6. When her mother began to learn Thai, the author _____.

- A. felt it was wasting her time
 - B. felt proud of her mother
 - C. helped her mother patiently
 - D. asked the teacher to help her mother
7. The Christian school the author attended _____.
- A. gave students lots of homework
 - B. gave students much spare time
 - C. asked students to help their mothers
 - D. asked students to do housework at home
8. Now the author praises highly those study days with her mother because on those days _____.
- A. her mother mastered Thai, which benefited the rest of her life
 - B. the author learned much about the Chinese language
 - C. the author absorbed much of Chinese culture
 - D. All of the above.
9. In the author's opinion, if one wants to escape the loneliness in a foreign country, he/she should _____.
- A. make friends with the foreigners
 - B. not reproach children fiercely
 - C. learn about the foreign culture
 - D. go back as soon as possible
10. According to the article, we can conclude that the author's mother is a _____ woman.
- A. weak-willed
 - B. strong-willed
 - C. bad-tempered
 - D. self-centered