



International Voices

George Fox University
English Language Institute
Fall 2008, Volume 17, "Gray Edition"

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Serve Day

By He Lifang (Lisa)



September 10 was Serve Day. I found the most meaningful thing about Serve Day was actually serving. It was the first time I took part in this kind of special day. So it was very new for me. Before, I even didn't know what Serve Day was. However, now I have a deep impression in my heart.

On Serve Day, I went to Medical Teams International in Portland. This was a quite special place. People said "The mission of Medical Teams International is to demonstrate the love of Christ to people affected by disaster, conflict and poverty around the world." I did two main things there. The first one was visiting a meaningful exhibit, and another one was volunteering.

At the beginning, I visited the "Real. Life. Exhibit." When I entered the room, I felt like I had arrived in the various disaster areas personally and could see a variety of diseases and trauma. In such an atmosphere of sadness, everyone couldn't help crying because we expressed profound sympathy for these victims and patients. In this room, I experienced what real life was. But hope was on the way. Love from throughout the world would be around them all the time. Everyone could make a difference if they volunteer or give love for other people.

Then, we gave some service to the Medical Teams International. We all worked together to help weed grass and prune the bushes. Some people removed weeds, some people cut off a lot of the branches of a tree, some people picked up garbage and threw it into wheelbarrows, and some people pushed these wheelbarrows to throw away garbage into a big truck. After working hard, we all became so tired that we looked like some balloons without gas.

Serve Day was really, really special for me to learn something about real life, real hope, real love. And I also learned how to serve other people. I believe I will become an excellent volunteer in the future.



“A Bird in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush”

By Li Yasi

When I was a little girl, I was interested in the Chinese traditional idiom story. Even though, sometimes, I couldn't understand the meaning of that idiom, I kept reading the idiom story book every day. The most impressive idiom is that “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

I remember that in my primary school's textbook, there is a story that can illustrate this proverb. One morning, a lazy monkey entered a fruit mountain, and he was so excited that he could get a lot of fruits. So he slowed down his work speed, jumping from one tree to another. After he saw an acorn, he would throw away the pear he already had, but when he saw the giant watermelon, he would throw down the acorn. He almost ran through the mountain in this way. At the end, there were just some nuts in his hand. The story tells us, it is impossible for people to hold everything in their hands at the same time. If you want to possess each new thing you see, you will lose something you already own.

Before I entered grade three in high school. I attended a lot of training classes to develop my interests. I spent one year on learning piano, one year for drawing pictures, five years for playing dulcimer, and one summer holiday for playing the guitar. But when my mum asked me to apply to an art college, I thought I didn't qualify to pass the entrance examination because there is no one thing that I can play very well. I just know a little about each thing. When I realized this problem, I felt ashamed about myself. I was a greedy monkey.

We should be satisfied with the things that we already have and learn to appreciate them. Don't envy other people's things. Hold onto the bird that is already in your hand.



My Favorite Place—Daming Palace

By Chen Mulun

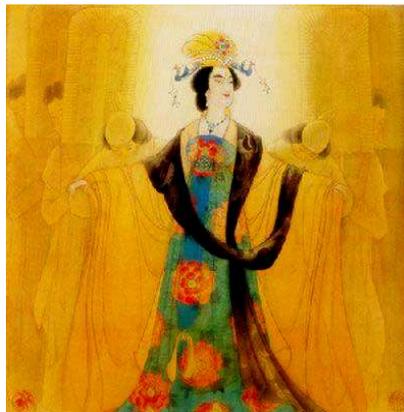


If you ask me about my favorite place, Daming Palace comes to my mind. It is a palace of the Tang Dynasty which is located in Chang'an City (the formal name of Xi'an City), the capital of China at that time. So many years have passed, we cannot see its whole structure anymore because of a fire, but no one can doubt the honor of Daming Palace. It represented the highest level of power at that time. It also represented the highest point of the world and the witness of 1300 years of Chinese history. I often wish I could visit this palace, but of course, I have had no opportunity to go there, so it appeared in my dream.

When I opened my eyes, I arrived at the Daming Palace during the Tang Dynasty. The palace city consisted of two parts. The southern part, in a rectangular shape, was the front court for government affairs. On its axis stood three grand halls, which were then surrounded by some imperial departments that were in charge of confidential and important missions. The northern part was in a trapezoid shape, and it was the rear garden for living. It had halls, terraces, pavilions and a pool in the middle. After seeing this scene, I was deeply surprised by its beauty.

Fortunately, I was able to witness the history that happened in this palace in this dream. I saw the only female king of China, Wu Zetian, step up to the highest place and control the whole country. She wore the beautiful Tang suit, (like the picture shows) and overlooked her people. Some years later the god of poetry, Li Bai, passed out from drinking in the palace, and then, he directed the most unforgettable drama and wrote the most beautiful poem from his dreams. Suddenly, I heard the song "Rainbow and Plumage." Was it Tang Minghuang (a king) and Lady Yang who were creating the song together? I kept my hand on the ancient wall and kept going. The peony in the garden was blossoming glamorously; I lowered my head to smell the flowers, and then, I closed my eyes. From the fragrant flowers, I caught the vision of the flourishing Tang Dynasty.

I could not control myself from being intoxicated by this place; I lingered there and forgot to leave. Suddenly, the "Rainbow and Plumage" song was interrupted by a loud noise. I shook my head and turned off my alarm clock. I opened my eyes again; and this time, I returned to the real world. With sorrow and excitement, I think I will remember the dream of Daming Palace forever.



Spring Festival

By Jiang Xingxing



In the first lunar New Year is Spring Festival. It is the most important festival for Chinese people. All family members get together, like Christmas in America. This is the reason why I like Spring Festival.

I like Spring Festival because I can wear new clothes for it. Spring Festival is like the American New Year. People prepare for the coming New Year, which is called “seeing the New Year.” Then people begin decorating their clean rooms. All door panels will be pasted with Spring Festival couplets, highlighting Chinese calligraphy with black characters on red paper. This Chinese custom means a new start. Everywhere everything is red. Red stands for luck in China. So many families buy red paper and red lights to put on the wall. Many students like Spring Festival because of the long holiday.

My mother prepares more food when Spring Festival comes. Dishes such as chicken, fish, and bean curd cannot be excluded because the meaning of these words in Chinese is *rich*. Everyone must come back to eat dinner and watch Spring Festival TV shows. Children get more money from their parents and grandparents. This is called “age money,” and it means “grow up quickly.” Last year I got a lot of money from my parents. At night many children play with firecrackers. It is a lot of fun.

China has many festivals, but Spring Festival is the most important in China. All families need to get together to eat dinner and play games. China has a lot of ethnic groups. Minorities celebrate their Spring Festival at almost the same time. So this is an important thing in China.



Culture Shock

By Liu Duan



I have been in America for nine months. When I arrived at the Portland Airport, I found everything was different. Everyone spoke English. I felt everything for me was strange. The people had yellow hair and blue eyes and were American. The sky was very blue and bright. Everything was new and strange to me.

I remember talking to an American the first time. At that time, I was shy to talk with the American because English is my second language and I couldn't speak English very well. This environment was new for me, and I couldn't adjust to anything.

In addition to this, I didn't like American food because most of the food is sweet. I like the spicy food in my hometown. I could not eat something sweet, so it was difficult for me to eat American food when I came here, but I began to try the American food.

Thirdly, I could not use Chinese learning ways to study in America. It was totally different because the theory of education was different. For example, Chinese teachers always ask some students to answer questions; even if these students don't want to answer questions. It means forcing people to do something; but it is different in America. If the teachers want someone to answer some questions, they will wait for somebody to stand up and answer.

These are my experiences about culture shock. I think that living abroad has given me a lot of feelings about America. It has helped me realize the differences between China and America. Though everything is new and strange, I am adjusting!

Gongfu Tea

By Jin Bo



I think everybody knows tea, because almost every country has tea. But gongfu tea is not a kind of tea. It is a *skill*.

At first, I had the same opinion as most people. I thought it was a kind of tea called gongfu, so it must be a kind of great tea. But after I learned from my father that it's not a kind of tea but a skill, I was surprised. Then my father told me the details.

One day, my father took me to the second floor of my house. There was a beautiful table. The table was made of wood, and a dragon was carved into it. There were two teapots and lots of small teacups, and all of them were made of ceramic.

At first, he put lots of tea leaves into the two teapots. Then he poured a little hot water into the two teapots. He said, "Gongfu tea is famous for its high concentration." After a few minutes, he poured all the tea out. He said, "The first time, the tea tastes bad." So he poured a little hot water into the teapots again, and he also poured hot water outside the teapots. The second time he poured the tea into my teacup I tried to taste it, but he stopped me and said, "You must sip from the cup of tea three times, and leave a little in the teacup." I thought, such a small cup, I must sip it three times and still leave a little in it. It's really hard to drink tea this way.

After I drank several cups, I gave up. I thought, it's really a kind of gongfu!



The Differences in Education Between America and China

By Kuang Xuan



One day in class, my teacher told us: “If you have any suggestion or opinion about my class, you can tell me, and if you don’t like my teaching style, also you can tell me about your ideas, and I will consider them. And if you have some questions in class you can ask me in class. When you ask me the question, you needn’t wait for me to call on you or stand up.” When I heard that, I was so surprised because in China we never do this. Although you have some questions you want to ask or suggestions you want to talk about with the teacher, you can’t do this in her class. Three aspects of education that are different between China and the US, are grading, asking questions, and teacher attitudes toward students.

Firstly, China and Americans have very different ideas about grades; the way daily work contributes to the final grade in a course is different. In China, we always have many exams when we study at school, and also we have many tests to do. In America, we also have some quizzes to do in our class. But there are different ideas regarding grades. For example, Chinese students should do an exam every week and month, but it doesn’t affect their final grade. In America, students take quizzes very often and the quizzes are also very important because they have a strong influence in their final grade.

Secondly, in class Chinese teachers always teach students some knowledge from their book or notes; they don’t teach extracurricular knowledge in their class time. For example, when someone asks some questions about other things besides the teacher’s book or notes, the teacher will say: “Um, you can ask this question to me after class, we should finish our class at this time.” But American teachers always teach students a lot of extracurricular knowledge and encourage many learning experiences. For example, if you have some question in class, you can tell the teacher, and she will answer you right away. American teachers enjoy students asking many questions in their class, although sometimes the question may not be related to the class.

Thirdly, teachers in different countries have different views about their teaching ways. It’s not very important to Chinese teachers to listen to students’ ideas about their classes. A lot of Chinese teachers think they are always right. For example, if a student says that he doesn’t agree with the teacher in the class time, the teacher will be very angry at the student, and maybe the teacher will say: “I’m your teacher, and I think my knowledge is more than yours.” But American teachers think the students’ ideas may be very important to improve teaching quality.

Finally, all of this is my opinion about the difference between America and China in education. I think that we can learn much about civilization with the differences between America and China. I can’t tell which education style is better, but since I’m in America now, I think I will let myself adapt to the style in America.

Different Styles of Self-Expression

By Wu Xiangying



As soon as we arrived in America, my friend and I went to our host family's home. You know, traveling from China to America is a long trip. We were really tired and hungry. When we arrived at our host family's home, all of them were very kindly and friendly to us. Both of us were really hungry and wanted to eat something and then go to bed and have a good rest. When they asked us, "Would you like to have dinner with us?" immediately we replied, "Oh no, thank you!" As a result, we were very hungry until we went to bed. The next morning, when we ate breakfast with them, we were very shy and didn't dare take seconds. After finishing the breakfast, we were still hungry. So silly we were. It really was a funny and useful experience for me. We can see that Chinese people are indirect and shyer than Americans. The style of self-expression is so different between Chinese and Americans. In this essay, I will show the differences in directness between Chinese and Americans, and I will explain the cultural and historical reasons behind these differences.

Look at the students on campus. We can find that American students are more creative and more open than Chinese. Most of them are more relaxed and easy going than Chinese. Compared with the American students, Chinese students are shyer and more modest, while American students are more relaxed and active than Chinese students. For example, at each kind of party we can see American students can be very courageous and enthusiastic. Also we can see in the dormitory, when Chinese and Americans live together, all of the Chinese are quieter than their roommates. Another example is the different way to respond to others' praise. In China, if somebody praises you, you will be modest and say, "You are better than me." However, in the U.S. if someone praises a person, he or she will say, "Thank you" without shyness.

Let's see the cultural and historical reasons behind these differences. The philosophy of Confucianism has greatly influenced the communication and self-expression style of the Chinese. We know China is a country with 5000 years of history and a large population for a long time. We can date back to the earliest history the theories of Confucianism; the most important idea of Confucianism is "humility." It controlled the whole Chinese nation and affected people deeply. Confucianism is feudal and traditional theories required wives to give their sons and husbands the feeling that they were in heaven. Females were quite low-down then; and as men, you could marry with many women, but women just married one time in their lives even though their husbands died. If not, she would be regarded as a sinful woman. Compared with men, women were just like attendants. Men were expected to put parents and family first not their wives. The most important theory was that old people always were right and should be respected by the young even in situations where young people knew the elderly were wrong. Finally, the royal people always were considered to be right. Whatever they did to the common people was legal. The ancestors' and the traditional ways always were sacred and unchangeable. These old and laggard philosophies snuffed out so

many creations. What's more, there were several irresponsible kings. Meanwhile, in Western countries at that time some new ideas of Revival of Learning came out and a technological revolution was taking off in America.

Another influence on the Chinese style of expression is our long history of suffering and struggles. Through history we can know that Chinese had to face the suffering of the old China and many serious social problems. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, about 1000 years ago, China began its decline. And the society was the gloomiest in its history. Then lots of foreign countries invaded. Then the war between China and Japan started in 1937 until the end of the Second World War. We witnessed the suffering and changes of China. Our ancestors suffered more, experienced more, faced more, and bore many burdens. Because of the old time, long history, and traditional culture, most Chinese more conservative and steady going than westerners. Compared with the old China, America is a young and fashionable country. We know that America was established a little more than 200 years ago. Also it is a lucky country. It had fewer wars and has been more peaceful than China.

Some American students' answers as to why the cultures are different between China and America are quite similar. These days, I interviewed seven American students on my floor; I asked them "why the style of self-expression is different between Chinese and Americans." Four of them said, "because of the different culture and different language"; two said, "everything differences, especially the traditions"; the last one, Aubrey, my best friend, said: "I think because the development of each country is different, so the self-expression is different." I agree with her very much. This is a big factor.

In a word, a different country gives birth to a different culture, different culture and language backgrounds produce different styles of self-expression. Even though the philosophy of Confucianism influenced Chinese people greatly, we are always trying to advance with the times and to take the essence and discard the dregs. There are so many differences between Chinese and Americans, yet both of them have their adventures and something good to communicate. I like both the styles of the self-expression. They are beneficial for us to improve our cross-cultural communication skills.





Sweet or Spicy?



Zou Xuan (Zou)

On a weekend in October I was invited to a dinner party for the Harvest Dinner. In that dinner, I was tasting many kinds of American traditional foods, and of course it was pretty delicious. I had taken out my chili sauce to let people who were around me have a taste, and the result was easy to see: most American people prefer sweet food to spicy food, but Chinese students would rather eat food with chili sauce. The culture of food and drink differs between America and China, and the biggest distinction involves sweet food and spicy food.

People in America like to eat sweet food for some reason. Well, I have to say American people really like sweet food. No matter whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner, most of the foods are sweet. For example, there are desserts like pies, chocolate tarts, cinnamon ice cream, and mini lemon and cream tarts. Even some pork, beef and chicken dishes are sweet, like Sweet Sour Chicken and Cheese Beef. I asked about 20 American students whether they like to sweet food and, if so, why? Ninety percent of them said they like to eat sweet food and the others like to eat spicy food or something that tastes strange. Most of them told me they have no idea why they like to eat sweet food and that they just do what their parents do. So I think an important reason that Americans like sweet food is family influence.

Usually, the older people in one family often make choices about what they should eat, which food is nutritive, and which foods only offer calories. So the young are learning from their elders unconsciously, and from generation to generation most American people develop a habit of eating the food that their elders eat.

In China, most people like to eat spicy food except very few people in south of China. Most Chinese like to eat food that is very salty or spicy so that they can eat rice with it. That tastes more delicious because rice is the main food in our meal. As I know, people like to eat spicy food because this taste could make people more excited, especially the people who live in the north of China, because the place there is very cold. When people eat spicy food, it stimulates their digestion, and they will feel hotter than before, so maybe that is a way to warm themselves. I think some of the reasons the Chinese like spicy foods are similar to why American people like eating sweet foods. Because we are growing in this surrounding, and people around us like to eat spicy food, we just follow them, so when we grow up, we have found we already like spicy food.

If we think it deeper, we will find many things about people's background affect what they like to eat, for example, where are they growing up, because of the geography element, the north people would rather eat spicy food. Also, according to my interview, it seems American teenagers would rather eat food which isn't too sweet or too spicy, but they still want to try some food that they have never eaten.

In conclusion, family atmosphere and cultural tradition are the main factors that affect our food and drink choices. I think there is no accounting for taste. Finally, whether people like to eat sweet or spicy food is decided by themselves, according to what flavors they favor.

