

竹叶青

Bamboo Green

LI LIENFUNG 李廉凤

Contents

Bamboo Green	1
A Teacher who Acted	5
Not to be Taken During Vacation	9
The Host	15
To Translate a Poem	21
<i>Cheng Yu</i>	27
Confucius in a Dream	32
A Red Scholar	36
An Uncompleted Mansion	40
The Best Dialect	45
The History of Hua Yu	51
The Extinct Tone in Mandarin	57
Taro and Jade	62
What's in a Name?	68
Drinking Vinegar	74
A Burial	80
In Memoriam	87
A Few Commas	93
A Proletarian Newspaper	97
Colloquial Sayings 1	102
Colloquial Sayings 2	106
Colloquial Sayings 3	110

目 录

竹叶青	3
演戏的老师	7
不宜于假期	12
是谁请客?	18
译诗之难	24
成语	30
孔子来入梦	34
红学家	38
高鹗的贡献	43
方言之争	48
华语从何来	54
人声去矣	60
玉与芋	65
姓什么?	71
喝醋	77
葬	84
十年生死	90
落雨天	95
中国报纸	100
俗谚-1	104
俗谚-2	108
俗谚-3	113

Foreword

Sometime in August, 1979, two men who were both named Eddie came to call on me. The Eddie with a moustache introduced the Eddie without a moustache who asked me earnestly whether I would like to write a column for *The Straits Times*.

Would I! For someone who had been a working chemist for more than thirty years, this question stirred one of my secret passions which had been tucked away under the pillows since childhood.

If I had been a genius, either as a writer or as a scientist, life might have been simpler for me as a child for I would have known how to choose and plan my career. As it was, I was one of those students who did equally mediocre in both arts and science. However, thinking science might be more useful to me and possibly to the world, I turned to science, and in science I was stuck.

I might have started to write earlier, or at least tried to do so more earnestly, had I hated my work as a chemist, but as it turned out, I rather enjoyed it. But putting words to paper and allowing them to tell a yarn has always fascinated me. With my full-time job, three insufferably demanding children and a heavily-scheduled social life, I did not always find it easy to have the time and mood for writing. I did manage to produce enough articles and short stories to please the editor of a Hong Kong based magazine, but just as the first volume of my early writings came out in print, my father passed away. His death was followed closely by that of my mother.

Life must go on, so my life did. Work must not stop, so my work did not stop. But writing called for more than a will to live and a capacity to think. I had lost the two people whom I could rely on to appreciate my efforts no matter how puny, insignificant and crude they were. I suppose it had been their approval all along that had urged me to scribble deep into the night with nothing to show for it the next morning but tired eyes. Without them, writing seemed meaningless to me. Who else cared for a few hundreds words from me, one way or other?

Because I wanted to feel close to my parents even though they were dead, or especially because they were dead, I began writing Chinese poems of the classical style, not realizing how inadequate I was to cope with the rigid technical requirements of this form of poetry. A bachelor's degree in chemistry did not include any working knowledge of the Chinese classics, and a master's degree in English literature did not provide any information on Chinese poetry. Nor was my secondary education in China any more profitable in these respects since we were taught reading and writing mostly

in modern Chinese.

It was then that I began to read books on the techniques of Chinese poetry. To my surprise, I found that subjects even as dull as classifications of rhymes could be great fun so long as they were not studied under the shadow of worrying about meeting a certain standard. My only regret is that eventually I had to admit to myself that I was not the stuff poets are made of.

After a few years of floundering in the sea of Chinese poems, I grew impatient with the melancholy of poets and started to look around for subjects more relevant to the world I lived in. I was persuaded by friends to translate *The Naked Ape* from English into Chinese and, inspired by my European trips, to write travelogues, and some other articles which appeared in the newspapers of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. I was particularly gratified when my first and only play in English was staged in Singapore in 1977. In that same year, for a bet, I entered the play-writing competition held by the Ministry of Culture with my first and only Chinese play. To my amazement, it won the first prize, luring me into hoping that I might yet become a playwright at my age.

However, I was soon to learn the limitations of play writing. Without a theatrical group game enough to perform a new play, it cannot exist. Without the skilful interpretation of the director and actors, the characters cannot breathe life. Therefore, in spite of the excitement of planning and putting words into the mouths of the characters, the writing of a play is lonely and frustrating, because once it is completed, one has to wait for it to be used. I felt I was getting too old to wait.

That was why in August, 1979, I was at a loose end. When the two Eddies appeared and one of them asked if I wanted to write, my momentary hesitation was not because I did not want to, but because I did not think I could.

What could I write about? Surely not the chemical formulae of starch derivatives! Nor could I possibly squeeze a novel into a space calling only for a thousand words or so, assuming I even knew how to write a novel.

“Well,” explained one of the Eddies, “I thought...maybe...something little, something cute, something easy to read for the bilingual page ...to help those whose Chinese is not as good as their English or those whose English is not as good as their Chinese...”

I was immediately excited. Yes, I thought, I understood the problem since I had seen how some of our people forgetting what they had been taught in their secondary schools, relapsing sooner or later into using only one of the two languages as their means of communication. Was it possible that I could revive their interest? I knew I

was not a scholar of Chinese or English, but perhaps my not being a scholar and my inability to write anything pedantic might just be what was needed to calm readers into not being intimidated by their second languages.

Also, I had always felt that the pressures of our school system, with its emphasis on examinations, killed the joy of learning and the pleasure of exploration, and robbed our children of their natural curiosity, reducing them into little monsters who knew the answers but did not know how to ask questions. Remembering how I had enjoyed searching and finding answers to the questions I had posed to myself, I thought my experiences might be helpful to those who had found Chinese or English dreary by introducing readings which might excite them to probe on their own.

That was how “Bamboo Green” was launched. Looking at this first volume, I wonder if, in its two years of existence in *The Straits Times*, “Bamboo Green” has really helped anyone or not. Whatever the answer, I have enjoyed putting my thoughts forward, sometimes seriously and sometimes frivolously. I wish to thank the two Eddies for having made it possible for me to write at all.

It is now up to my readers, if I have any, to buy this book and give my publishers a big surprise!

Li Lienfung

前言

一九七九年八月初，两个名字都叫艾迪的大男人来看我。那个脸上挂了一撇横须的艾迪，做了一番介绍之后，那个不以胡子为荣的艾迪，便盛情可掬地问我：愿不愿意为《海峡时报》写一个专栏。

这还有什么愿意或不愿意的呢？这句话啊，在我这个为化学而工作了近三十年的人听来，实在问到我心坎里去了。我自幼就有写作的梦想，不过平日不敢放在口边，只能埋在枕头下面，有空时取出来看看。

若是我生下来便有一份才智，无论是对于科学，或是对于文学，我的童年生涯就可能简单得多了，因为我便可以凭此而计划如何选择职业，大做其白日梦呀。可惜我读书的时候，两者的成绩，都只是平平而已。在这样的情况之下，我终于选了科学之道，因为我听信一般人的想法：以为科学不论对自己和对世界，都比较实际，有用。就这样，我做了一个化学师。

如果我十分讨厌化学师的工作，也许我早就开始搞搞写作了；至少，我也会比较一心一意地去尝试一下吧。偏偏我又蛮喜欢我的职业。不过在白纸上写黑字，而让这些字来讲述一个故事，对我却一直有很大的诱力。好不辛苦地写了几篇散文与短篇小说，得到某香港杂志主编慧眼相看，不幸在我的作品刚刚集印成书的时候，我的父亲突然去世了；不久，母亲也与世长辞。悲痛之余，我不忘父母的遗训，生活继续正常，工作也不曾停顿。可是写作却是情感的发泄，不能全靠生命的意志和思考的能力。

于是我便开始转向作诗填词，只因为父母都爱唐诗宋词，使我觉得可以通过诗词，和他们亲近些。可是我没料到诗词还这么难哪。我没有丝毫关于诗词写作的基本常识，根本不知如何人手。

我只好大买《诗词入门》一类的浅近书本，自己钻牛角尖，什么一东二冬，平平仄仄，本来是相当枯燥的事，却出乎意外地觉得还很有意思哪，想来是因为读着玩儿的，不用担心成败，所以才会有优游自得之乐。只可惜写出来的东西，连自己看了也不顺眼。

这样在诗海词洋中忽浮忽沉地泡了几年，愈来愈不耐烦诗词中的肠断心碎了。我想总该有些别的题目，跟我的实际生活有关吧。朋友们劝我翻译了《裸猿》，此外也写些欧洲游记和其他散文，陆续刊登在香港，台湾和新加坡的报纸上。一

九七七年，我所写的英文话剧，竟然在新加坡上演了，使我不胜兴奋。同年，为了证明给朋友们看，我也会写华文，便赶了一个华文剧本来，去参加文化部举办的征文比赛，大概是时来运济，得了个首奖，弄得我飘飘然的，以为可以做剧作家了。

可是，话剧也有话剧的限制，拘束。如果没有剧团够勇敢，够义气地把故事搬上舞台，就算写出一部话剧，也无济于事。

一九七九年八月初，我正不知何适何从，皱着眉，问自己：今后我还配做些什么呢？所以当两个艾迪之中一个问我是否愿意写文章的时候，我的犹豫不决，倒不是不愿意，而是在考虑自己是否能胜任。

叫我写些什么呢？

“是这样的，”艾迪解释着说，“我认为……也许……短短地……幽默一点地……印在双语栏内……目的在帮助华文不及英文的人，或者英文不及华文的人……。”

这么一说，我就立刻兴奋了。我也见过不少这样的现象：有些在中学时代便读过两种语文的新加坡人，由于各种理由，会把其中一种语文渐渐忘掉，而专用另一种做交谈和学习的工具，辜负了所修所学。我是不是可以使他们的兴趣死灰复燃呢？我深知自己不是学者，但是，会不会正因为我不是学者，写不出深奥的文章，反而容易讨好读者？

再说，我一向觉得现代的教育制度，偏重考试，因而减低了求知的乐趣，夺去了搜索而获的欣喜，把孩子们天赋的好奇心，完全抹煞了，使他们变成只知如何作答，而不知如何发问的小怪物。我想起当年曾经为了要满足好奇心，去摸索非我本行的知识，或有所得之时，便沾沾自喜。也许这种经验可以帮助一些见了华文或英文就头痛的人，使他们感到不受拘束的时候，语文也就不会讨厌了。

《竹叶青》便这样地开始了。现在，看着这本小册子，不禁自问在《海峡时报》已刊登了两年多的时间中，究竟有没有帮助了谁呢？无论这句话该如何答复，至少我算过了瘾，把些古怪念头写了出来。虽然态度有时还算正经，有时却絮絮叨叨，东拉西扯，不能登大雅之堂。不过能够有这么一个机会献丑，我还是应该感谢那两个艾迪啊。

Bamboo Green

I respect culture. But culture covers such a huge area, from cooking and handicrafts to ethics and religion, that I am usually intimidated by it, especially the kind of culture that deals with book learning. After having stared timidly at formidable books for forty years, I have come to the realization that, for me at least, book learning can also be boring.

I began my book learning at the age of three when my cousins used to sneak down the street to rent comic books from the corner bookstalls, and I was allowed a peep every now and then. I could not read the Chinese characters written in those balloons, but my cousins, when they were in a good mood, would point their stubby little fingers at the kings, statesmen and warriors and explain their stories to me. How exciting that was! What happened between then and now to have made me scared of and bored by learning?

Inspid teachers and the pressure of preparing for examinations killed much of the fun and joy of learning in schools. How many of us hated flowers after a course in botany? I firmly believe that the only reason I am able to develop a love for Shakespeare is that I never studied him in class. After leaving school, it is the people who sadistically give lectures at dinner tables on ethics in tiresome monotones that have spoiled book learning for me. Why must they all be so deadly serious? Some people evidently think that learning, in any form, is like the proverbial pill that can do good only if it tastes bitter.

Why cannot we all relax? Why cannot we all learn to sip our tea, our wine, or our Coca Cola, instead of having it poured down our throats until it seems to choke us? Why cannot book learning be made pleasant in the same appreciative manner instead of having it crammed into our memories until it seems to overwhelm us?

This is why I am calling this column Bamboo Green. Bamboo Green is a Chinese liqueur, very strong and mellow, possessing faint herbal aroma and a colour that resembles the tender yellow green leaves of bamboo. It is best when it is sipped.

Bamboo Green is also a drink that reminds one of Chinese poetry. It is said to have originated from Xing Hua Cun (Village of Apricots 杏花村) which was made popular by the Tang poet Du Mu (杜牧) who wrote:

清明时节	When it was time of Qing-Ming
雨纷纷，	the drizzling rain

路上行人	made travellers on the road
欲断魂。	feel as sad as if their souls had been torn
借问酒家	Asking whether a wine shop
何处有？	could be found
牧童遥指	the buffalo boy pointed to the distant
杏花村。	Village of Apricots

Since I do not think poems can ever be successfully translated, I shall only try to explain it: During Qing Ming, when one should visit the graves of one's loved ones, the drizzling rain disturbed me so much as I walked down the road that I felt my soul was being torn into pieces. How I need wine to drown my sorrow! I pulled back a boy riding home on a buffalo and asked him where I could buy some wine, and he pointed to the faraway Village of Apricots.

This poem paints a picture as well as expresses a mild but lasting sadness. There is the tree-lined road in the countryside. There are the rain drops which seem to blend into the tears of one who has just experienced, once again, the loss of his love: either he is on his way to or coming from the cemetery, or he is a traveller who suddenly realizes it is Qing Ming but he is nowhere near his home. There is the little buffalo boy who is rushing home to avoid the rain. Being young, he knows not what sorrow means, but he knows where wine can be had and points to the distance where a small flag waves above the brilliantly-tinted apricot blossoms. On the flag is written one single word: 酒(wine).

Thus, with Bamboo Green, even if we cannot qualify as poets, we can at least share the pleasure of poetry. With Bamboo Green, I hope to skirt around book learning until we are familiar enough with it not to be intimidated or bored by culture.

竹叶青

我非常尊敬文化。可是文化的范围这么广大，从烹饪与手艺，到伦理与宗教，实在使我听了就心惊肉跳，提起来就骇怕，尤其是那种需要读书的文化。

说起来，我心怀畏惧地呆瞪着那些威风凛凛的书，也有四十多年了。最近才终于让我悟出一个大道理来：读死书也好，死读书也好，若是处理得不好，读书就会很轻易的变成枯燥乏味的烦恼。

其实我从三岁起，还未认识字，便与书本有缘了。那时家中几个堂兄堂姐常常到街头的租书摊，借些连环图画回家。他们高兴的时候，也会让我挨在肩旁偷看一两眼，有时还用粗胖的小手指，指着书上的汉帝，诸葛亮，关公等等，把故事讲给我听，听得我好兴奋呀。现在回首一想，那一股热劲到那里去了。怎么我会变得对书本这样骇怕，这样烦厌的呢？

想来在学校里的时候，因为某些老师不关痛痒的讲授，以及准备考试的慌乱，许多学生们的求知乐趣，已经开始被抹煞了。我们之中，不知道有多少人，为了从前读过植物学，而到现在还厌恨花草的呢。我想我今天之能对莎士比亚仍有好感，还是因为我当初没有在学校里读过他的剧本吧。离开学校以后，最使我对于所谓书本文化起反感的，是那些在饭桌上开教训的道学先生。他们好象存心要虐待我似的，专门用单调枯燥的声音，滔滔不绝地讲述伦理学。我就不懂为什么他们一定要那么严肃呢？也许某些人认为学问必须象成语里的良药，要使人吃在口里又苦又涩，才会生效吧。

为什么我们的态度不能轻松愉快一点呢？为什么我们不能把求学当喝茶或喝咖啡一样，一口一口的慢慢品尝呢？为什么要把读书弄得象撬开了喉咙灌药那样辛苦，呛得我们连气也吐不过来呢？为什么不采用欣赏的态度来看书，而一定要硬生生的把字塞入脑中，而结果见了书本就头痛呢？

我之命名这报纸的一小角落为“竹叶青”，便是希望能够畅意的谈谈，象喝一杯竹叶青一样。竹叶青是种甜酒，其色浅黄微绿，象初萌的嫩竹叶，其味纯朴，带有一股幽幽的药物之香。最妙的是这样的酒只宜浅尝轻酌。

这种酒也最能逗人作诗意的遐想。据说竹叶青为杏花村所酿，而杏花村又早被杜牧写的诗传为家喻户晓的名称。诗见下：

清明时节雨纷纷，路上行人欲断魂，借问酒家何处有，牧童遥指杏花村。

我一向认为中国诗很难译，至少很难译得能够保持原来的气氛，所以我只解释一下吧：“清明是个应该上坟去谒望亲人的时候，我在路上走着，细雨点点滴滴地，弄得我心烦意乱，好象我的魂灵也要被扯成碎片了，我多么想喝点酒来浇浇愁啊。匆匆地，我拖住一个骑在牛背上的牧童，问他那里有酒卖，他指着远处的杏花村”。

这首诗不但描述了诗人内心的幽郁，并且画出了会一幅图。图上有一条两旁种着树的路，雨点斜斜地落在地上，似乎配合着图中行人的泪珠。也不知道这个人是刚从坟场出来呢，还是正要向坟场走去，或者他身在异乡，虽然知道那天是清明，却路途遥远，无从赶回去上坟，总之，他想起了已逝世的亲人，又重新逗起了死别的辛酸。图中还有一个赶着回家去避雨的牧童。年轻的小孩子，不懂得愁苦地，正指着远处杏花灿烂的树林，在那里的树梢上，飘摇着一面小旗，旗上写了一个“酒”字。

虽然我们不能够都写诗，但是握了一杯竹叶青在手，我们至少也可以分享一点诗人的风雅。那么，象喝竹叶青一样慢慢地浅饮，我希望渐渐地围着学问的为边缘绕圈子，也许这样会使我们对于文化不再畏惧，对书本不再烦厌吧。

A Teacher Who Acted

I remember my own childhood in Shanghai where I actually liked being taught Chinese because I happened to have a teacher who made Chinese fun to learn. He was a man about forty, with a square jaw which was usually unshaven. He had laughter in his voice, a twinkle in his eyes, and understanding in his heart.

One favourite trick of his was to act out the meaning of the lines he was teaching. He used gestures, facial expressions, voice intonation and whatever he thought was useful to illustrate his explanations. When we were taught ‘The Visit to an Ancient Battle. field’(吊古战场文), the despair he displayed brought home to us the desolation and miseries of war. Once, when ‘The Song of Righteous Courage’(正气歌) was being taught and he had come to the line in which the poet vowed that even if one's head could be cut off, one's spirit would remain uncompromised, he resolutely chopped at his own neck with the side of his palm while glaring at us furiously.

I can never forget his teaching of the famous epic ‘Pipa Xing’(琵琶行). As the poem began, he stood sadly next to his blackboard as if he was the one about to take leave of his friends at the pier. Accompanied all the time by his reading and explanations of the verses, he looked up at the ceiling and then at the floor, making us see, in our minds, the pale moonlight shimmering on the river and the maple leaves rustling on the banks. Then he stepped into the waiting boat, remembering even to sway so as to counterbalance the motion of the waves. He picked up an imaginary wine cup, lifted it to his lips and was about to drink when he stopped to cock his head as if searching for words and smiles from his friends. By then, we were so hypnotized that all we could do was to look at him with sad eyes. Satisfied that he found no cheer, he raised his right arm theatrically to his forehead, a gesture that, had he been the Tang poet, would have given him a sleeve wide enough to hide his tears.

It was all very effective. The whole performance was indeed effective until he came to the punch line.

That line took place after the poet and his friends, depressed by their parting sorrow, heard some *pipa* music from another boat berthed nearby. In their desperation to make the farewell party a gay one, they invited the music maker to join them. The two lines, consisting of fourteen words, belonging probably to the category of the most memorable in Chinese literature, described how the lady came reluctantly, after she had been called “a thousand and ten thousand times,” but was so shy that she still clutched her *pipa* to hide half of her face. One was supposed to envisage a demure young woman

walking gingerly into the midst of men, holding her *pipa* to shield her blushing, but was so curious that she peeped from behind her musical instrument.

Our teacher used his book as the *pipa* to hide half of his face and looked shyly at us from the side of his book. He, as I said, was a man about forty with a square unshaven jaw, whereas we had been so carried away by the enchantment of the poem and the magic of his play-acting that we expected to see a beautiful young woman. The last thing we were prepared to see from behind the *pipa* was his stubby jaw, even though there was only half of it.

The class broke into delirious laughter. Rubbing his chin and dropping his book, he laughed with us.

When the last giggle had died away, he resumed his teaching, not at all offended or deterred by our hilarity. I can never forget my own shock at seeing his face from behind the book, nor his surprised and amused expression when he saw us doubled up with laughter.

Nor can I ever forget that poem.

演戏的老师

童年在上海读书的时候，竟然也有一段时间喜欢上华文课，因为刚巧遇上一个老师，能够把华文教得有声有色。他是个四十岁左右的大男人，下巴方方正正的，但是很少好好的剃过胡须。他说话的声音，常含着笑意，他的眼神含着鼓励的光芒，他的性情温和，很肯谅解别人的苦衷。

他有一个很妙的教学方法，那便是用演戏的本领来解释课程。他无所不用地，既用手势，又用面部表情和声调的抑扬，来帮助表达他所教的诗文。他教我们读“吊古战场文”的时候，所表现的悲天悯人，使我们充分的领会了战争带来的凄凉与痛苦。有一次，他教我们读“正气歌”，读到严将军头，也就是文天祥誓说头可斩而正气不可灭的那一句，他用自己的手掌，狠狠地在他的脖子上斩了一刀，同时理直气壮的瞪着我们，似乎他就是视死如归的文天祥。

最令我难以忘却的，是他的教我们读琵琶行。头一句要教的是“浔阳江头夜送客”，他便含愁的站在黑板前，好象他站在码头上，正要和他的朋友们叙别一样。他一面读着诗，一面解释诗中的意思，还要抬头看看天花板，又低头看看地，使得我们都跟着他看见天上的月，也看见反映在江面上的月色，和那两岸随着秋风瑟瑟的枫叶。然后，他提脚踏上木船，甚至于故意的摇摆一下，好象在配合着船身的摇荡。他举起一只假想的酒杯，放在唇边，正要仰头喝饮，却忽然停下来，向四围观看，好象在索求朋友们的欢笑。那时候我们这些学生都象受了他催眠似的，只能伤感的呆瞧着他。他看了我们一会，把我们当作来送行的朋友，都没有笑容，他才举起右臂，象唱京戏一样的握在额际。如果他真的是唐朝的诗人，他的宽袖大概就会遮去他脸上的眼泪了。

他那些动作都很逼真。他所有的表情都逼真得使我们能够想象诗中情景，可惜到了最精彩的两句，却忽然失掉了魔力。

那两句是在诗人与朋友们正黯然销魂地叙别时，忽然听到从另一只船上所发出的琵琶声，因为他们都想减轻一点握别的悲痛，所以就邀请那弹琵琶的少妇，到他们的船上来，参加他们的宴会。跟着的两句诗，一向脍炙人口，形容那少妇如何不肯出现，但终然应允来他们的船上。原文是“千呼万唤始出来，犹抱琵琶半遮面”，也就是说她被请了无数次之后，似是勉强地走进来，但仍羞人答答的

捧着琵琶，掩了半边脸。读到这里，我们所等待出现的是一个腼腆的少妇，局局促促地走近一群男人。虽然她举起琵琶来挡了半边脸，可是仍在琵琶掩护之下，侧眼旁窥这些邀她来奏乐的男人们。

我们这位老师用他的书当琵琶，挡在脸前，同时从书后向我们秋波一送。我不早说了他是个四十多岁，方下巴，不常剃须的人吗？可是在他那逼真演这的影响之下，我们所期待在那书后出现的，是一个姿色的少妇，无论怎样，也没想到会是他那半脸须！

一看到他的脸，整个教室里的学生都不能自禁地哗然大笑。我们那位教师看见我们笑，也把书放下摸着下巴，跟着我们嘻笑。

等到最后的笑声都消没了，他才拿起书来，继续他的讲导，一点也没有因为我们的喧闹而生气，也没有因此而改变他讲学的作风，但我永远也忘不了乍见他面孔出现于书后时我所感到的震惊，更忘不了当他看见我们笑得前仰后合时，他脸上的诧异与欢悦的笑容。

那一首琵琶行，也因此而永远忘不掉了。

Not to be Taken During Vacation

I know, now, that Chinese literature is systematically divided into schools, periods, and whatnots, but before I was twelve years old, I thought there were only three categories: those I liked, those I did not care one way or another, and those I hated.

Those I liked were, of course, comics, novels, and Chinese translations of *Tarzan* and *The Three Musketeers*, etc. Those I neither liked nor disliked were the occasional titbits of poems and essays written by people of the Tang and Song Dynasties, but luckily they were not often forced on me since my elders considered them as transient as ‘wind flower snow moon’(风花雪月), thus not quite the stuff to strengthen young morals.

The category I hated, as far as I was concerned, was again divided into three: the forever righteous Kongzi(孔子, also known as Confucius), the forever argumentative Mengzi(孟子), and all the others who preached noble principles in obscure language. I had good reasons for hating them, but mainly it was because they invaded my vacations.

Vacations, my cousins and I thought, were meant for young people to rest whatever brains they had, but my uncle thought otherwise. Since our school curriculum was taught in modern Bai Hwa(白话), he believed it was his duty to supplement our education by teaching us classics during our vacations, starting with *Lun Yu*(论语), a collection of Kongzi’s sayings. To be fair, he did not mean his teaching to be a torture: it was a legacy he inherited from his father during his own school days.

There were seven of us cousins of different ages living under the same roof. When I was six years old and my vocabulary was so scanty that I could hardly make out the words in the balloons of the comic books, I was officially initiated into the group in which my various cousins had already progressed to various stages of the book, or books.

My uncle was a stern man, but he never resorted to caning in teaching us because he had a far more effective weapon: peer pressure. He decreed that if one of us could not recite his or her piece, all seven of us would not be allowed to leave the house I was

often in tears because of the nagging, scolding and even black mailing I received from my cousins who would have gladly killed me when my failure at recitation prevented them from swimming or snowballing.

But this collective punishment also brought us unity in retaliation, especially on rainy days when the world outside was not much of a temptation. Each of us would hug a book, pretending to review our current lessons, but what we did was to exchange sarcastic remarks about Kongzi or deliberately distorting the meanings of his sagacious sayings. Surprisingly, these frivolous remarks are now more vivid to me than all the lessons I used to memorize.

One of the controversial sayings which our boy cousins loved to taunt us with was ‘Only women and little people are most difficult to deal with’(唯女子与小人为难养也) ‘Little people’ does not mean dwarfs but is the antonym for ‘noble people’(君子).Kongzi’s reason for such a sexist statement was that if a man fraternized with woman (and little people), they became insolent to him; and if he evaded them, they resented him(近之则不逊，远之则怨)As a reply, the girls would shake their heads mockingly and chant: “I’ve never known anyone who loves virtue as much as he does his women”(吾未见好德如好色者也)to prove even Kongzi could not suppress the instinct of men to love women, however evil.

At the mention of love, we would all scream together; “God shall forsake me! Oh God shall forsake me!” This quotation we delighted in was taken from Kongzi’s reply to one of his disciples who was displeased because of his meeting with Nanzi(南子),the beautiful but notorious Duchess of Wei. We had been assured that there was nothing scandalous about the meeting, that Kongzi was only suspected of seeking employment through the aid of the Duchess, and that he vowed “God shall forsake me” if the suspicions had been true. But seven rowdy youngsters who felt they had been robbed of their holiday pleasures were not in an understanding mood. We took our revenge by making up romantic conversations between Kongzi and the Duchess and roared with laughter at their expense.

Our retaliation took strange forms. One day when I was asked to explain a

paragraph about benevolent government (仁政) which was way beyond my grasp, I was so annoyed by the accusation that I had not prepared my lessons that I blurted out: “If I know exactly what I know and what I don't know, then that is knowledge.”(知之為知之，不知為不知，是知也). Lucky for me that I was the youngest of the brood.

Another time, when one of my cousins wanted to evade the persistent persuasion for him to eat, he pointed at the food on the table and quoted: “The meat is not cut in squares. I shall not eat.”(割不正不食) which was a deliberate twist of the original meaning. Even though my uncle took pains to explain this and other restrictions on food as dictated by Kongzi, such as how one should not eat ‘porridge so overcooked that it turned brown, meat and fish that smelled rotten and looked rotten’(食飴而餲，魚餒而肉敗，不食，色惡不食，臭惡不食) I still failed to appreciate the logic in refusing to eat ‘when the sauce is not correct.’(不得其醬). Singapore hawkers would all go bankrupt if we were to follow his advice of ‘not to drink purchased wine and not to eat meat cooked in the market’(沽酒市脯不食).

Now that I am much older, I can find a great deal more wisdom in *Lun Yu* than I did as a child. One of my favourite is a reply of Kongzi when he was asked to give his opinion on a man who was well liked by everyone and another who was disliked by everyone. “None is nobler” said Kongzi, than the man who is liked by all the good people and disliked by all the bad people. “This advice is still viable in our days of democracy, especially during election time.

This timeless wisdom is waiting in the *Lun Yu* for our young people to look for. But the book should be marked, like aspirin pills, with the legend “Keep away from the reach of the very young”. And if possible, another line should be added, in smaller print, “Not to be taken during vacation”.

不宜于假期

到了我今天这个年纪，我当然懂得中国文学史早就有系统的分出时代，文体，派别等等了。可是在我十二岁以前，我却认定文学只分为三种：一种我喜欢的，一种我不分爱憎的，另一种我痛恨的。

我所喜欢的那种，当然包括了连环图画，小说，和译本的人猿泰山与侠隐记之流。那些我不分爱憎的，仅是偶然遇到的几首唐诗宋词和两三篇古文观止里的短文。幸亏家中长辈觉得诗词总有点风花雪月的味儿，对于儿童的道德观念，没有促进纠正的价值，所以也很少强迫我去念它们。

我所痛恨的那种，在我说来，又分三小组：一是永远说自己如何正经的孔子，二是左辩右辩的孟子，三是一切用古文来开教训的学者。我之恨他们是有很多理由的，可是其中最大的理由是因为他们侵犯了我的假期。

假期在我和堂兄姐想来，应该是让我们休息一下我们那一点不值一提的脑力。可是我的伯父却不同意这种想法。他认为我们学校里的功课都用白话传授，那么补充我们教育的不足，便成了他的天职。于是他决定利用我们的假期，叫我们跟他读论语。凭良心说，他的选择论语作教科书，倒也不是蓄意虐待我们，不过是因为他当初启蒙时，读的也是论语。

那时我们大家庭里有七个年龄略有差别的堂兄弟姐妹。到了我六岁的时候，可怜我认识的字，还不够我看得懂连环画图里的说话，便正式送人他们的读书小组，那时他们早已各人进步到各种不同的阶段了。伯父为人很严肃，但是他教我们读书，却从来不必挥用戒尺，因为他有一个更有力量的制裁方法：如果七人中有任何一个背诵不出当日的功课，那么七个人全不许走出大门一步。那时候我常常眼泪汪汪的，被我那些堂兄堂姐埋怨责骂，甚至于威胁要杀死我，因为若是我背书背不出的话，便弄得他们夏天不能去游水，冬天不能去玩雪。

但是这样的集体受罚，也逼得我们有点同仇敌忾的合作。尤其是下雨的时候，室外生活减少了许多诱力，我们就各自抱了一本书，似乎在温习功课，其实是在挖苦孔孟，或者是故意地歪曲孔孟之言。

说来也奇怪，那时的疯言妄语，在我今日的回忆中，比我所有死读硬记的功课，还来得印象深刻些。争执得最厉害的“子曰”之一，是堂兄弟们最喜欢用来

讥笑我们的那句：唯女子与小人为难养也。所谓小人，并不是指矮子，而是对“君子”相反的称呼。孔子的原来解释是“近之则不逊，远之则怨”。也就是说如果跟女子和小人太亲密了，他们会瞧他不起，如果对他们太疏远了，他们又会发生怨恨。

给男孩子们这么一嚷，我们堂姐妹就假作叹息的叫回去：“吾不见好德如好色者也”。意思是笑男人们爱女人，比爱道德的，多而又多，所以道德气味浓厚得象孔子的人，虽然觉得女人是祸水，可也没有办法压制女人的力量。

一讲到“色”，大家都笑呼着：“天厌之，天厌之”。这句话是孔子说的，那时他一个学生叫子路的，为了他去拜访了貌美而行为不检的南子，很不高兴。虽然伯父开导我们，说孔子之见南子并没有什么桃色意味，只是子路不满意他老师的利用南子，去说服南子的丈夫卫灵公，虽然目的是传播学问，却也不应该。所以孔子辩说，他若是有这种利用别人的意思，天老爷也会厌恶他。可是七个顽皮的年轻人，正怨恨着假期的乐趣被剥削了，那里还肯原谅孔子的苦衷呢？我们的报仇，便是幻想出孔子与南子见面时的一套情话，笑得我们痛快。

我们的报仇方式多哪。有一次我被问一段关于仁政的书，根本我就没有办法理解，所以当我被责怪说我没有好好准备功课时，我气愤之下，冲口而出的辩道：

“知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也。”那是利用孔子的话，强辩我的不懂就是懂。作为一群孩子中最年轻的，居然也有它的好处。

另外有一次，一个堂兄想避免别人不停的劝他吸饭，他便指着桌上的菜，说道：“割不正不食”，他硬说孔子的意思是指肉如果切得不是四四方方，他就不吃。那当然是故意歪曲原来的意思。

伯父再三的对我们解释孔子的一套“不食”方针，如“食饴而謁，鱼馁而肉败，不食，色恶不食，臭恶不食”，我仍是想不透为什么他“不得其酱”也“不食”。如果我们都听了孔子的话，也来一个“沽酒市脯不食”，那么新加坡的小贩都该破产了。

现在我已经老大，能够比做小孩的时候，多体会出一点论语的智慧。我最喜欢的“子曰”之一，是当别人问他的意见，说一个被众人都喜欢的人贤良些呢，还是一个被众人都厌恶的人贤良些，孔子说，都不及一个被好人喜欢而被恶人厌恶的。这句话，在我们今日的民主时代，仍有很大的价值，尤其是在选举的时候。

论语里面有许多不受时间限制的智慧，等我们的年轻人去学习。不过，我希望这本书上，最好能够象阿司片灵药瓶上一样，印一行字：“藏在幼童所不能寻觅之处”。如果可能的话，下面还要印上一小行：“不宜在假期内服用”。

The Host

I have no idea how far back we can date the birth of the Chinese comic act known as Xiang Sheng (相声), but as far as my personal experience is concerned, it certainly entered my life long before I heard of Bob Hope or Albert and Costello.

Xiang Sheng is a popular folk entertainment that can take place on stage without make-up or props. It usually calls for two persons, one of them the 'straight man', asking or answering questions at the appropriate moment, and the other is the comic who draws laughter from the audience. The comic is of course the soul of the show, but the straight is no less important since it is he who enhances the humour and prevents the performance from sinking into a dull monologue.

Take the following for an example:

COMIC. I've been learning opera for the last fifty-six years, that's why they call me an expert. They...

STRAIGHT (interrupts). Wait a minute, wait a minute. How old are you now?
COMIC (nonplussed). Thirty-six. (He continues.) They follow me everywhere for my autograph and ...

STRAIGHT (frowns). Thirty-six years old? (Scratches his head.) How is it possible you've learned opera for fifty-six years if you're only thirty six?

COMIC (grins). Ha, you can't figure it out, heh?

STRAIGHT. No. Tell me how you figure that out.

COMIC. I studied seven years in Beijing, eight years in Shanghai. Seven and eight makes fifty-six...

STRAIGHT (outraged). What! You multiplied them?

COMIC (understanding dawns on him). Oh...that's why you were confused! You know only addition!

The above dialogue is not even a joke, but it brings laughter because the team cooperates with their pauses, their intonations and the expression on their faces to emphasize their folksy humour.

To write down, especially in translation, any funny story told in Xiang Sheng loses its original flavour. Nevertheless, I shall try to tell one such tale, hoping I can somehow capture its elusive spirit.

This particular tale pokes fun at impoverished scholars (穷秀才) who loved face too much to admit their poverty. The Comic told the Straight how nine of these scholars invited him out to dinner in a restaurant.

COMIC (after he has described the meal and what the scholars commented during each course). So fried rice was served. The waiter brought the bill.

STRAIGHT (anxiously). Which of you paid? Mr Li?

COMIC (slowly). Mr Li was just then looking at the moon. “What an inspiring sight!” he said and went into a poetic trance, reading aloud his latest poem.

STRAIGHT. Oh, Mr Gu paid?

COMIC. Him? Ha! Why, his stomach was so bad that he kept on going to the bathroom after each course. He hadn't come back after the fried rice.

STRAIGHT. I know, I know, Mr Song paid.

COMIC. Mr Song had discovered the goldfish in the pond. He stooped over them and lectured us on how many kinds of fins there were.

STRAIGHT (worried). Mr Wu? It must be Mr Wu!

COMIC. Mr Wu picked up a cup of tea to water the bonsai at the corner table because its leaves had turned brown. Mr Wu is very knowledgeable about tea being used as fertilizer.

STRAIGHT (timidly). Mr Liu?

COMIC (after a pause to reflect). Yes, he might've if his son did not have measles and he had to hurry off after the meal to get the doctor. After all, measles!

STRAIGHT (scratches his head). That's a calm father for you. Well, what about Mr Cai?

COMIC. Mr Cai's shoe-laces came loose, so he had to bend down to tie them. I must admit he was rather drunk because his fingers seemed to fumble a great deal and took a long time.

STRAIGHT (sighs). Mr Zhang?

COMIC. Mr Zhang insisted on paying.

STRAIGHT (relieved). I know he is the generous sort.

COMIC. Yes. (Pause.) But Mr Kong wouldn't let him. Mr Kong held on to Mr Zhang's hands, insisting he must be allowed to be the host.

STRAIGHT (heartily). Oh well. Mr Kong's money is as good as anybody's.

COMIC. But Mr Kong couldn't pay either. You see, Mr Zhang was holding Mr Kong's hands. They both insisted on paying, and neither was going to yield by letting go of his hands.

STRAIGHT (dubiously). That only left Mr Shi and you...

COMIC. Mr Shi wanted to pay. In fact, he had already grabbed the bill with his right hand, so how could his left hand reach the pocket under his gown? (A Chinese

long gown worn by a scholar usually opens at the right, and so are the pockets underneath the gown.)

STRAIGHT (in despair). You were the only one left! Did you pay?

COMIC. What could I do? My stomach did not ache; my son did not have measles; I did not know how to write or recite poems; I knew nothing about goldfish; I had never watered any plant with tea; my shoe-laces did not come loose; nobody was holding my hands; and I was not wearing a long Chinese gown because I was not a scholar.

STRAIGHT (resigned). So you did pay.

COMIC. No. (Smiles with a smug expression.) I took a good look around me and fainted.

是谁请客？

我也不知道相声是那一个朝代开始的，不过依我个人经验来说，那可比一般美国滑稽电影明星长久得多啦。

相声是民间艺术的一种，它可以在任何场合表演，不需要化妆，也不需要布景或道具。只要两个人，一个是逗引观众哗笑的主角，一个是副手，专在适合的时候，问问答答。那主角当然是相声的灵魂，但那副手也一样的重要，因为他问答的时候，要巧妙的把握时间与气氛，才能加强主角的幽默，另一方面，因为有了他音调抑扬的穿插，主角说的话，才不会长篇大论的显得单调枯燥。

拿下面这一段话作例子吧。

主：所以我学唱戏，已经有了五十六年的经验，他们都叫我专家，一看见我来了……

副：（插嘴），喂！你等一等，等一等吧。你今天多大年纪了？

主：（不在意的），三十六岁。（继续说他的故事），他们一看见我来了，就要我给他们写……

副：（皱眉），三十六岁？（搔搔头），你今年才三十六岁的话，怎么学戏倒学了五十六年啊？

主：（微笑），哈嘿，你算不出吧？

副：是啊，算不出来。我倒要瞧瞧你是怎么算来的。

主：你听着啊，我在北京学了七年，在上海八年，七八五十六……

副：（激愤地），嗨！你怎么哪？用乘法呀？

主：（恍然大悟地），哦——怪不得你搞糊涂啦！看你还用加法吗？上面这一段对话并非一个可笑的故事，但这两个人却能引得观众嘻笑，因为他们善于利用音调的高低，说话的快慢，加上手势，动作，和表情，来加强他们言语中的通俗幽默。

如果把相声里的笑话用笔写出来，那就很难保持它原来的风味了，可是，我还是想尝试一下，希望能够多少抓住一点相声的趣味。

这是一个关于穷秀才的笑话，形容他们怎么又要面子，又不肯出钱。讲相声的主角正告诉着副手，说他如何被九个秀才请去饭店吃饭。

主：（形容完了所吃的菜与主客的对话），那时候，扬州炒饭也捧上桌子啦，那伙计也把帐单送来了。

助：（急切地），那么是谁付钱呀？姓李的？

主：（慢慢地），李秀才正瞧着月亮发怔哪，他说了那么一句：“月色逗人”，就一面抬起头看月亮，一面摇头晃脑地把他写的诗都背了出来。

助：哦，那么付钱的是姓顾的啦？

主：他呀，嘿，他拉肚子呢，差不多每一次吃完一个菜，他都要上茅房一次，吃完了炒饭，他就没有回来过。

助：我猜到了，一定是姓宋的。

主：宋秀才弯着腰，看鱼池里的金鱼。他一面看，一面热心地讨论金鱼有多少种尾巴。

助：（担忧地），那姓吴的呢？大概是他吧？

主：吴秀才端了一杯茶，去浇在小桌子上放着的盆栽，因为那棵树上的叶子都枯黄了。吴秀才可真的懂得怎么样用茶做肥料呢。

助：（疑惑地），刘秀才呢？

主：（考虑了一下），是呀，刘秀才要不是他儿子出麻疹，他也许就付了钱啦，可是他急着吃完了饭，就找医生去了，到底是麻疹嘛。

助：（搔着头），这样的爸爸顶镇静的呢！姓蔡的怎么样？

主：巧得很，他的鞋带散了，他刚弯着腰，低着头，在那儿绑鞋带啦。他醉得也差不多了，手指老颤着，连鞋带都绑不上，费了好多时间呀！

助：（叹口气），姓张的呢？

主：张秀才倒坚持要付钱。

助：（放心了），是嘛，我就知道他很慷慨。

主：是呀。（停了一停），可是人家孔秀才不让他付呀，孔秀才死抓住张秀才的手，说是该孔秀才自己请客。

助：（乐意地），那就行了，谁付不都一样？

主：可是孔秀才也没办法拿钱出来付帐呀，因为他的手反过来给张秀才抓住了。他们两个人抓住四只手，谁也不肯让。

助：（忧疑地），那可只剩下施秀才跟你啦……

主：是呀，施秀才倒真的要付钱呢。他右手把帐单抢了去，左手去拿钱，可是他穿的是长袍子呀，这左手怎么弯得过来，（秀才穿的长袍都是右面开襟的，衣袋都在右襟下面）。

助：（失望的），那不只有你了吗？难道是你付的钱？

主：你叫我怎么办呢？我的肚子不痛。我的儿子又不出麻疹。我不会写诗背诗，我也不懂得金鱼，我从来就没用过茶来浇树，我的鞋带没有散，也没有人拉住我的手，我又不是秀才，穿的也不是长袍子。

助：（无可奈何地），那么你就只好出钱啦。

主：也不呀，（得意的微笑），我左右上下一看，就往地上一倒，晕过去呐。

To Translate a Poem

Long ago when I was still a student at Cornell University, I was browsing in the college bookshop and saw, among Browning, Keats, Nash and Elliot, a book of translated Tang poems. It was like spotting a plate of *satay* among pickled herring, smoked salmon and kidney pies. My heart pounded, my eyes misted and my hand trembled as I picked up the book and glanced at the first line that caught my attention. Then, suddenly, I giggled.

The line that made me giggle was: “Don’t you see, Sir, the water of the Yellow River comes from the sky”, which struck me more like a plumber discussing maintenance than the most powerful opening line of Li Bai’s(李白) ‘Jiang Jin Jiu’(将进酒).

Yet the translation is word-perfect. I cannot think of anything more fitting than what it has been translated for ‘君不见黄河之水天上来’,but somehow, the imagery, the association, and the poetic feeling of the original are gone. To begin with, ‘Sir’ for ‘君’ is accurate but just a shade too Anglo-Saxon. There is no dispute about 黄河之水 'being the water of the Yellow River, but the sound of ‘黄河’ in Chinese(Huang He in Mandarin, or even better, Huang Huo in Hunan dialect) is so broad that it projects immediately to the mind the image of a vast river running torridly from east to west. ‘Yellow River’ is merely a river that looked yellow.

The main difficulty is in the term‘天上’(tian shang) which literally means ‘sky above’, but it has a mystical implication that ‘from the sky’ does not have. Another poet, for instance, used the same term in the same context when he described a melody so beautiful that it should be heard only in heaven(此由只应天上有). Therefore, by the use of ‘天上来’,the line implies that the fast-flowing river is a part of God’s design, which is the basic philosophy that runs through the whole poem. The English version, though correct, reads like a clarification in a geography lesson.

It was there and then that I decided that translation of poetry into poetry ought to be left alone unless the translator was a poet. My capability is so limited that the most I can do is to explain, but even explanations lose much of the original feelings. Take Yue Fei(岳飞 1102-1141) ‘Man Jiang Hong’(满江红)as an example. He was the warrior-statesman who fought valiantly against the invading Northmen in the Song Dynasty.

“Angry hair(怒发)ejects my hat(冲冠)as I lean on the banister(凭栏处),the drizzling rain has just stopped(潇潇雨歇). Lifting my eyes(抬望眼)toward the sky(仰天),I let out a long roar(长啸)to vent the heroic emotion in my heart(壮怀激烈) Thirty

years of glory and valour (三十功名) have gone by, like the dust and mud (尘与土), and I have travelled eight thousand miles (八千里路) accompanied by cloud and moon (云和月). How can I wait any more (莫等闲) if my young head turns white (白了少年头) leaving me only with regret and sorrow (空悲切)?

“The shame of Jing-Kang (靖康耻) has not yet been cleansed (犹未雪). The hatred in a subject’s heart (臣子恨) knows no when to vanish (何时灭). We shall ride on our long chariots (驾长车) to crack down the cliffs of He Lan Mountain (踏破贺兰山缺), then we will satisfy our hunger (壮志饥餐) on the flesh of Hu captives (胡虏肉), and laughingly we will quench our thirst by drinking (笑谈渴饮) the blood of the Huns (匈奴血). Building anew (待从头) our broken mountain and river (收拾旧山河), we will kneel in front of the gate of the Emperor (朝天阙).”

Whoever has heard of hair so angry that it gets stiff enough to raise a hat? Yet this is the meaning of the first line. If I am to write ‘my anger is so great that it shoots off my hat’, I do not need anyone to tease me that I have stolen a line from science fiction. But when we read this line in Chinese, we do not laugh at the poet’s exaggeration. Instead, we can feel the enormity of his anger which is beginning to explode even in ourselves. These four words have already made us feel a different person, almost as heroic as Yue Fei was.

As the poet leans over the banister, he sees that the drizzling rain has stopped. The words ‘xiao xiao’ (潇潇) describe the sound of rain, suggesting the dampness that is still in the air. He turns his face upward to look at the sky, with raindrops on his eyelashes, and feels so much the frustration bursting inside him that he is compelled to let out a long ‘xiao’ (啸). This is a different word from the sound of the rain. It is not a scream, nor a chant or a roar. It is a sound that rises higher and higher, reverberating in the air and dies away only when the life force in it is spent. It wrings out the pain from a man’s soul.

The next two long lines go together. Thirty years of war efforts or ‘gong ming’ (功名) seem like dust and mud under his feet when he remembers the eight thousand miles of campaigning under the lonely moon and the changeable clouds. ‘Gong ming’ has no English equivalent. It is a term loosely used for ‘rank and fame’, or ‘efforts and success’ or simply the ‘reward’ for people in government service. Here Yue Fei tosses the word out with distaste and contempt, but by grouping it with the moon and the cloud, he cries out against the loneliness and futility of his work. However, he cannot afford to idle away his time, lest his young head turn white before he can accomplish what he sets out to do, leaving him only with the sadness of regrets which will be empty and hollow.

The second half of the verse begins by his reminding us of the shame of the nation, that is, the captivity of the two Song Emperors in the year Jing Kang,(A.D.1126) which has not yet been cleansed since they are still prisoners of war, so he asks himself, as a loyal subject to the emperor, how this animosity in his heart can ever be obliterated. That is why he wants to ride a chariot across the ridges of Mount He Lan into enemy territory where he will heroically gobble down the flesh of the Hu captives and drink thirstily the blood of the Hun slaves while laughing and talking with his comrades. At their face value, the lines are so exaggerated that they seem ludicrous, as if they are the war chants of cannibals. But in Chinese, because of their sentence structure, they are understood as bravado, and as such, there is a defiance that stirs up ruthless courage and the determination to win.

The last three lines has a sweeping grandeur that only a hero like Yue Fei is capable of writing without being laughed at as an egomaniac. He says he will pick up the broken pieces of the old mountains and rivers and rebuild the nation from the very bottom, so that he can present this new empire as he kneels in front of the Imperial Palace.

It is an extremely forceful poem. In explaining, I have already lost almost all the power behind the words; and I have not succeeded in conveying the pathetic and yet heroic frustration of the poet. How much more would I have lost if I had dared to try translation in verse form?

译诗之难

很久以前，当我还在美国康奈尔大学读书的时候，有一天我正在书店里翻书看，忽然在一堆英美诗集中，找到了一册英译本的唐诗。那时的高兴，就象是在一张放满了洋菜的桌子上，忽然看见了沙嗲一样。我的心跳得特别响，我的眼睛也差点给热泪迷雾了。我用颤抖的手把那本唐诗捡起来。才看了一句，却忽然“嘻”的一声，忍不住的笑出声来了。

那使得我突然嘻笑的一句唐诗，照英译本的写法，是“Don't you see, Sir, the water of Yellow River comes from the sky?”这句话，我看了觉得象是一个泥水匠在讨论自来水的管喉，那里还有李白写将进酒首句的气魄呢。

可是译文并没有错呀。我想不出更妥当的字眼来译出“君不见，黄河之水天上来”。但是，不知道为什么，原文里的雄浑之气，译文中却全没有了。把“君”字译成“Sir”，错是没有错，可是看上去总嫌它英国绅士的味道太浓。“黄河之水”本来就是“water of Yellow River”，没有什么可争的，但是用华语读出“黄河”二字，其声宏阔，颇有河水奔腾的气派。而“Yellow River”所带来的意味则仅是一条流着黄水的河而已。

译文中最难传达的是“天上”两个字，因为这两个字带有神化的感觉，非“from the sky”所能代表。譬如说，“此曲只应天上有”里的“天上”，便是指其曲奏之美，似乎只该神仙们才有资格听到，所以“天上来”的言外之意，是指河水自西而下，本是大自然的规律，神的安排，也就配合了李白整首诗的哲学意味。英译文虽然正确无误，却读来只象地理教科书中一句解释而已。

看了那句译文，我当时的感想便是以诗译诗的工作，只能留下给诗人做，否则最好别碰。我自己的才学有限，只能解释诗的意思。可是连解释也往往会失去原文的气氛。拿岳飞这首满江红做例子吧。岳飞是宋朝抗金英雄，他诗中充满了激昂之气。可是无论如何解释，总不能保留原文的悲壮情绪。

怒发冲冠，凭栏处，潇潇雨歇，
抬望眼，仰天长啸，壮怀激烈，
三十功名尘与土，八千里路云和月，
莫等闲，白了少年头，空悲切。

靖康耻，犹未雪，
臣子恨，何时灭。
驾长车踏破贺兰山缺，
壮志饥餐胡虏肉，笑谈渴饮匈奴血，
待从头，收拾旧山河，朝天阙。

头发可以硬得把帽子也举起来的吗？有谁听说过这样的愤怒？可是第一句的意思便是如此。如果我写出：“我恨得把帽子冲离了脑袋”，那连我自己也怀疑是抄袭了科学小说啦。可是用华文读原诗时，我们并不觉得这一句过份夸张得可笑，反而能够体会出作者的愤怒，更甚至于觉得这愤怒也快要在我们胸中爆发了。这四个字逗起的英雄气概很浓厚，使读者觉得自己从一个普通人而变得有点象岳飞了。

诗人倚着栏杆，看见细细滴滴的微雨渐渐停了。“潇潇”两个字不但是这种细雨的声音，而且带有一点雨珠仍在点滴的味道，所以当他抬起头来，看着天空的时候，我们领略到他的睫毛上有晶莹的水珠，增加一种说不出的凄凉。他胸怀间的积怨压榨得他要破裂，逼得他要引颈长啸。这“啸”不是高叫，也不是大吼，而是一种愈来愈高的呼声，其声在空中飘浮回响，到了没有生力的时候，才渐渐消失。“啸”把灵魂里的痛苦都发泄出来。

其下两句应该联在一起解释。在寂月幻云之下，岳飞曾经长征了八千里路，但这样过了三十年的奔波之后，所谓功名也者，只象地上的灰尘与泥土那样而已。“功名”两字，英文里没有相等的译字。一般来讲，它们被用来指功禄与名望，也等于是说工作与成功，或者简单一点的说，只是政府官员的报酬。岳飞在这句诗里提起功名，语气中充满了轻视与憎恶。他的把功名合并尘土云月一起，更烘托出他对于事业的惆怅与寂寞。但是他立刻纠正自己的态度，说不能消极无为的活到头发变白，因为到了那个时候，后悔也只是空虚的悲哀了。

诗的下半首提醒自己，说靖康年所受的耻辱尚未洗雪，指徽宗钦宗被金人掳去，一直没有释放，那么以忠臣自居的岳飞，自问如何可以消除心中的积恨呢？所以他接下去说，要驾驶着战车去捣破敌人的地区，然后痛痛快快的把胡人捉来，吃他们的肉，也把掳来匈奴的血，一面欢笑谈话，一面喝水一样的吞下去。这两句诗，从字面上看来，未免夸张得近乎不合理，好象是野蛮民族在吃人前所唱的

歌。但因为原诗的文字构造，使我们读了，知道是故意的夸张，也正因为是如此，这两句诗才格外的能够唤醒斗志，和坚强求胜的决心。

最后三句，只有岳飞这样的大英雄才能够写出来而不遭人讥嘲为自大狂。他说他要把已被敌人毁坏破碎了的山河，从最基本的工作开始，好好地收拾与整理一番，然后他才能跪在皇宫面前，把好消息报告皇帝。

诗是一首气魄雄壮的诗，可是我的解释却无法将字句后面的威力发挥出来，也没有表达出岳飞写诗时心中的凄凉与愤激。如果我尝试直接以诗的方式来翻译的话，那岂不是把原诗的气势毁坏得更多些吗？

Cheng Yu

I do not know how many people today still remember the Charlie Chan movies. Charlie was a Chinese detective solving cases in the western world while spewing pearls of wisdom from China by muttering all the time with “Confucius says” or “Chinese proverbs say”, I think one of the reasons he annoyed me was that most of the time I could not even identify these sayings, making me suspect that these “sayings” were not genuine but were the inventions of Hollywood scriptwriters.

The Chinese-speaking people do have a great many sayings. It is not altogether correct to group them all under the heading of proverbs. To my mind, a proverb is a home-spun truth which has gained popularity by numerous repetitions. We have countless proverbs of this kind, but we have also what is known as *cheng yu* (成语) which is usually a literary quotation that has been distilled into four simple words. They are different from proverbs because they have literary worth in themselves as well as having originated from literature. Hardly can a Chinese write a decent paper or carry on a lengthy discourse without using one or two *cheng yu*. In fact, the fitness and the frequency of the *cheng yu* employed are often used as yardsticks to estimate the educational level of the speaker or writer. *Cheng yu* do enrich our language and writing because they can condense a situation into a few words as well as add emphasis to a feeling or flavour to an event.

Roughly speaking, there are two types of *cheng yu*: one kind is easily understood at its face value, the other kind cannot be understood at all unless the source of the quotation is known and the background of the quotation is explained.

One example of the first category is 燃眉之急. The English counterparts for these four words are ‘burning eyebrow’s urgency which, to make it sound a little more like English, should be ‘an urgency as perilous as having one’s eyebrow singed’. This expression is self-explanatory. If the fire is so close that it sings one’s eyebrow, naturally the urgency of either smothering the fire or running for dear life is apparent.

The first time this phrase was used was in the late Han Dynasty (ca A.D. 220) when one city after another had fallen to the enemy and the situation was described as needing assistance as urgent as getting eyebrows singed. But one does not need to know the origin to understand or use the phrase. In fact, through centuries of diluting the phrase, this *cheng yu* has come to mean mainly that one is very deeply in debt and therefore in urgent need of a loan. However, I will not advise using this *cheng yu* to a Singaporean fresh from Chinese Secondary School for it is more likely that he will

souse the speaker with water than to offer any money.

For the second category, let us use 塞翁失马 as an example. In Chinese, word for word, the phrase reads ‘Border old-man lost horse’. Its meaning seems plain: ‘An old man who lives near the border lost his horse.’ But what does it imply? Why is this *cheng yu* always used when people want to console others who has suffered misfortunes? Is losing a horse such a happy event?

The real meaning is buried in the story ‘Huai Nan Zi’(淮南子) written by Liu An (刘安, 179-122 B.C.). Sai(塞) is the border area of the Northwest of China where nomads roamed. The old man in the story lived around there and thus was referred to as Sai old-man. One of his horses ran away to the wilderness and disappeared. When his friends from the village came to comfort him, the old man replied, “Perhaps it is a blessing.” He was proven right when later the stallion returned from the wilderness, bringing with him a herd of wild horses. When the villagers congratulated him for his good fortune, he equivocally replied, “How can anyone be sure that it will not bring misfortune?”

He was again proven right when his only son fell off one of the wild horses and broke a leg. “Bad luck,” his friends lamented, but the old man merely said, “Perhaps it is good luck, who knows?”

Then war was declared and all able-bodied young men were conscripted except the old man’s son who had been crippled by the horse. At the news that all the soldiers from the village had been killed, the old man became the only father in the village who was lucky enough to have a son, who had been unlucky enough to be lamed by a horse, which luckily had come to them by following a horse that the old man had unluckily lost. By now, the meaning of the story as well as the meaning of the *cheng yu* is clear: Events are not necessarily what they seem to be.

Therefore, one should not be depressed when misfortune strikes for who knows it will not bring blessings? On the other hand, one should not be overjoyed by good fortune for who knows it will not turn into a disaster? In English, one says, ‘it’s a blessing in disguise’. This Chinese *cheng yu* goes just one step further by suggesting it can also be a disaster in disguise.

How often have we seen it happen in real life? Mr X has a toothache and has to break a dinner date with Miss Singapore, but when he goes to the dental clinic next morning, he falls in love with the nurse. Mrs Y picks up a diamond brooch on the lawn in Botanic Gardens, but is stabbed as she returns home because the gangsters have seen the diamonds glittering on her blouse.

Cheng yu is so much a part of our life that even illiterate people can use it without realizing its literary history. One morning I heard a fishmonger say to another, “He is as happy with her as fish in the water”(如鱼得水).I was so impressed that I did not even bargain with him about the price of his fish.

成语

不知道现在还有多少人，记得一串以姓陈名查理为主角的电影呢？他是一个由白人演出的中国侦探，在欧美各地一面破案，一面不停地，左一句“子曰”，右一句“俗语”，似乎在散播来自中国的智慧之珠。我想我讨厌他的主要理由，是因为他所说的话，一点也不象我们习惯地的成语或俗谚，而象是好莱坞编剧者的得意创作。

其实，华人的确喜欢应用许多成语，格言，俗谚等等，把它们总括而称之为 Proverb，似乎不甚妥当，因为我总觉得 Proverb 是经过无数次的口头转述，才终于成为民间通用的俗谚。但成语却源自诗文或经史，被后人精炼成为简洁的四字一句。它们不但出自文学作品，而且本身也有文学的价值，所以我们一般人在讨论或作文的时候，都会引用几句成语。往往也可以从成语的应用是否恰当，与应用成语次数的多寡，来估量别人的教育程度。成语的确可以增加言语文字的风趣，因为它们可以减缩一个复杂的局面，也可以添强一种悲欢的情绪。

成语又可以简单的分成两类：一种是看了字面就可以明白的，另一种则必须明了它的典故，才能了解。

第一类可用“燃眉之急”做例子。如果每个字译成白话，便是“燃烧了眉毛的急”，通顺一点的说，便是急得象眉毛被烧。这句话再容易明白也没有了。若是火已经烧到了眉毛，当然很明显的已急得要不是快快逃命，便该立刻浇水灭火了。

这句话还是汉朝末年，张昭讥笑诸葛亮时所说的话，意思是指诸葛亮帮刘备打仗，愈打愈糟糕，情况急得象火烧到眉毛一样。但我们并不需要知道这个典故，才能懂得这句成语的意思。事实上这句成语经过时间的冲淡，已多少变了质，而被用来表示欠了债，需要货款，如燃眉之急。不过，我想这句成语最好不要对一个刚出中学的年轻人说，否则钱还没有借到，却反而被这年轻人迎头泼上一大盆冷水哪。

第二类的例子，我用“塞翁失马”吧。照字面上看来，“塞上老头儿丢了一匹马”，又算是什么呢？为什么总是在安慰别人不幸时才用这一句话？难道一个人失去了马，也是件乐事吗？

这句成语的真意藏在原来的故事里，这故事见于汉初刘安所撰的淮南子。“塞”是国家边境，尤其指中国西北部的塞外草原，塞翁是住在边境的老翁，他的一匹马忽然离开他的牧场而跑回去了草原。当他的朋友都来安慰他的时候，他回答说：“也许是福吧”。后来那匹离开了的马，又忽然跑回来，并且还带来了一群野马哪。于是村民又向塞翁庆贺，他却不置可否的答说：“谁敢保证这不会带来恶运呢”？

不久，他的儿子去训练一匹跟着跑回来的野马，每反而被马掀落地上，把只脚跌断了。塞翁的朋友们头叹息说：“真是倒霉”。可是塞翁却答道：“也许是好运气呐，谁知道呢”。

果然，消息传来，国家发生战事，所有村里年轻力壮的小伙子，都被征去服兵役，只有塞翁的儿子，因为被马弄跛了脚，不能去当兵。后来全村的青年都在战场上死亡了，只有塞翁幸运的成为村里唯一有儿子的父亲，因为他的儿子曾不幸地被马掀落而跌断了脚，而使他跌断脚的，却是那匹被认为幸运才得到的野马，但那匹野马的来归，却是因为跟随着另一匹不幸而失踪的马。于是，这句成语的意思也就很明显了：任何事情都可以变好，也可以变坏，难以预测。

所以，当一个人逢到不幸的时候，他不应该沮丧，因为不幸的事也可能带来幸福。另一方面，当一个人逢到快乐的事情，也不该过份的欢喜，因为幸运也可以变成灾祸。英语里常说：“这是一种化了装的祝福”。但塞翁失马这句成语的意思却更进一层，因为它说乐事也可以是化了装的灾祸。

我们生活中不是常见到这一类的事吗？甲先生为了牙痛而不得不取消与新加坡小姐的约会，但次晨他去找牙医时，却爱上了看护。乙太太在植物园的草地上捡到一只钻石佩针，却在回家的途上，被暴徒刺伤，因为他们看了在她身上闪闪发光的钻石，而蓄意抢劫。

成语是我们生活中的常常应用的话，有些人虽不知道成语的文学典故，却会因为听惯了而捡起来应用一下。有一天早晨，我听见一个鱼贩和另一个鱼贩说话，他说：“他娶了她，就象如鱼得水一样”。我佩服之余，竟忘记跟他讨价还价了。

Confucius in a Dream

I was told that the Caucasian wife of a Caucasian man rushed to her doctor to demand an abortion after she had read her morning newspaper.

“But why?” asked the bewildered doctor.

“This is my fourth child!” wailed the woman.

“Well,” answered the doctor, “we are not living in Singapore...”

“No,” said the woman, “it’s not that. I’m afraid my husband will never believe it is his.”

The doctor looked embarrassed.

“No, doctor, it’s not what you think! I’ve always been faithful. But haven’t you read the newspaper? They say statistics show that every fourth child born is a Chinese! How do I convince my husband it is his baby?”

“That’s easy,” replied the doctor with a smug smile. “Just show him the statistics.”

This intelligent woman is, at least, luckier than a Chinese mother who can be easily led by statistics to believe that she must give birth to three Caucasian babies before she can hit on a Chinese one.

The population in China has always been overwhelming. In spite of all the civil wars, the droughts, the floods, the famines, the earthquakes and all other natural disasters, the number of Chinese is still increasing. It causes housing shortages everywhere, especially in towns and cities. This reminds me of a joke dating probably as far back as the Ming Dynasty.

A scholar of modest means (let us call him Mr Li) lived in a small town which was suffering from a housing shortage. Because he was not rich, he had to start his tutoring school on a street lined with houses not unlike our shops on North Bridge Road. He liked his humble abode well enough since he was a dedicated Confucian scholar and believed one should be content with poverty. However, there was one drawback about the location of his school: it was so noisy that he could hardly hear his pupils read aloud, because on his right lived a blacksmith who hit the hot iron every day, and on his left lived a stone cutter who laboriously clanged away from day break to dusk. The pupils were choked by the powder dust from the stone cutter and singed by the iron sparks from the blacksmith.

One day, after the pupils had gone and he had finally swept the place clean of stone chips, charcoal cinders, and broken pieces of iron, he looked at the portrait of Confucius which every school room in those days must have and said: “O Teacher of all teachers,

I do realize that contentment is happiness(知足则常乐),and I do try to live up to your advice about never getting wearied of teaching others(诲人应不倦)".Then in his agitation, he forgot to use classical terms and spoke on recklessly in the vernacular, "How can I go on like this? I know there is a housing shortage, but can't you tell them to move? I don't care where they move to, just so long as they move!"

He was a little ashamed of his outburst and went to sleep sheepishly. When he rose the next morning, he visited his neighbour on his right. To his surprise, the blacksmith was packing away his anvil, bellows, etc. "What happened?" asked the scholar.

"Well," said the blacksmith, "I had a crazy dream last night. A funny-looking old man told me to move. So I'm moving."

Mr Li did not dare to stay long for fear his joy would betray him. So he went to see his neighbour at his left. It turned out that the stone cutter also had a dream and he too was told to move. Mr Li knew it was Confucius who had taken the trouble to appear in the two dreams. He was so grateful that he impulsively invited both the blacksmith and the stone cutter to his house that night for a simple dinner.

For dinner, he served his two neighbours with the only hen his wife had been raising to give them eggs. He opened the only bottle of wine that his wife had saved for the birth of a son. They drank and dined and felt happy and mellow.

Finally, Mr Li asked the blacksmith where he was moving to. "Not too far away, I hope," he said.

The blacksmith and the stone cutter exchanged looks. "Didn't we tell you?" replied the blacksmith.

"Tell me what?"

"You know what the funny old man said in our dreams. He said he didn't care where we moved to, so long as we moved."

"Yes, yes," Mr Li urged the blacksmith to continue while stealing a grateful look at the portrait of Confucius. The very thought that the great Teacher of all teachers had remembered his very words made him shiver with pleasure.

"So we decided to exchange," concluded the blacksmith.

"Yes," agreed the stone cutter. "So I'll be living at your right and he'll be living at your left. Isn't that nice?"

What the scholar said or did after this announcement is not known. I think Confucius, in his infinitive wisdom, has solved the problem of housing shortage rather neatly.

孔子来入梦

听说一个白种男人的白种妻子，在早餐时看了报纸之后，便匆匆地去找她的医生，要医生把她的胎儿打掉。

“可是……”医生疑惑地问道，“为什么呢？”

“因为这是我的第四胎呀！”那女人焦急地说。

“也没有什么关系啦，”医生说，“我们并不居在新加坡……”

“不关那些事呀，”女人说道，“我怕我的丈夫不肯相信这孩子是他的。”

医生很窘地不敢看她。

“不哪，医生，并不是你想象的那样，我对丈夫一向很忠实。但是你没有看见报上的人口统计吗？他们说所有诞生的婴孩中，每到第四个便是华人。那我怎么向我的丈夫交待呢？”

“那还不容易吗”，医生理直气壮地说，“把那统计给他看好了。”

这个聪敏的女人至少比一个华裔母亲幸运些，因为这样来应用统计学的话，华裔母亲一定以为要生足了三个白种婴儿，才能碰上一个黄种的。

中国的人口确实多得惊人。虽然过去有无数次的内战，旱灾，洪水，饥荒，地震和其他的天灾人祸，但中国的人口字数却不停地上升，产生各种问题，其一是各城市乡镇里房屋的缺乏。这使我想起一个明朝就有了记载的笑话。

有一个姓李的教书匠，居在一个缺乏房屋的小城里。因为他手头不宽裕，所以只能在一条店铺拥挤的街上，设了一个学馆。那条街有点象我国的大马路，家家都是紧紧相邻的。他倒不嫌房屋窄陋，因为他一向是个忠诚于孔子的儒生，所以不畏贫苦。不过他对他学馆的地点却感到不满，因为实在太吵闹了，简直吵得连学生们读的书也听不清楚。他的右邻是一个打铁匠，每天不停的敲敲打打，他的左邻是一个石匠，从早到晚都砰砰砸砸。每天学生的喉咙被石匠的碎屑所呛，头发也被铁匠的火星所炙。

某晚，学生都回家了，李先生好不容易地将所有的石屑，炭灰和铁片都扫干净之后，他站在孔子象前，（那时的学馆墙上都要挂的），忍不住地说道：“圣师乎，知足则常乐，诲人应不倦”，说到这里，他烦躁得忘了用文言，而不自禁的用白话讲了出来，“可是要我怎么样教下去呢？我知道现在房屋缺乏，难找地方，

可是你就不叫教他们搬出去吗？我不管他们搬去什么地方，只要他们肯搬就行了。”

这样爆发之后，他有点惭愧，怔怔地上床去睡了。次日醒来，便去看住在右邻的铁匠。出乎意外的看见铁匠在收拾铁砧风炉等等。“怎么一回事呀？”李先生问道。

“唉”，铁匠回答着说：“我昨晚做了一个怪梦，梦见一个古古怪怪的老头子，叫我一定要搬家，没办法啦，只好搬吧。”

李先生不敢久留，怕脸上露出笑容来。于是他又走去左面看石匠。石匠也有一个同样的梦，所以他也收拾着要搬。李先生心中知道这是孔夫子不嫌麻烦地托梦，叫他的邻居搬走，他感动得立刻邀了铁匠和石匠来他家吃晚饭，替他们钱行。

为了请客，他杀了他妻子养来生蛋的鸡，也开了一瓶他妻子留了预备生儿子用的酒。宾主欢饮畅食之后，大家都觉得很轻松愉快。

最后，李先生才问铁匠搬去那里，“我希望不会离开这里太远吧？”他说。

铁匠和石匠互相看了一眼，“我们没有跟你说吗？”铁匠说。

“跟我说什么？”

“你知道我们梦中那个古怪老头儿吧，他说他不管我们搬去什么地方，只要我们肯搬就行了。”

“是啊，是啊。”李先生催着铁匠说下去，一面偷偷地看了一眼孔子的象。想到先圣大师竟然会记得他说过的话，已经感动得他一身发颤了。

“所以我们决定交换呀，”铁匠把话说完了。“是啊，”石匠点头赞同地说，“所以从今之后，我居你家右面，他居你家左面，你看多好呀！”

教书匠听了这消息之后，说了什么话，做了什么事，我们都不知道，也不敢想象。不过我的确很佩服孔子的智慧，把房荒的问题解决得恰到好处。

A Red Scholar

When I say a person is a Red Scholar, do I mean a young fanatic in Mao jacket who waves his little red book so intimidatingly that all the revisionists must kneel down to beg for mercy?

No. Nothing that terrifying.

'Red Scholars'(红学家)are what some people in China have been calling themselves for the last hundred years or so, just because they make a hobby out of playing games with the book *Hong Lou Meng*(红楼梦),known in English as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

To some Singaporeans, *Hong Lou Meng* is the title of a film, - in fact, two films, one made in China and the other in Hong Kong, which, for some strange reasons, were shown in Singapore in 1978 about the same time. Except for the fact that the Hong Kong one was more artful in the use of cosmetics and the China one was more poetic in its lyrics, the two were almost identical, and I have no quarrels with them.

What I do feel sad about is that many of our young people think they know everything there is to know about the book just because they have seen the film. "It's a love story, isn't it?" they say. "The girl died from a broken heart and the young man went into a monastery. Very sad, but you know how it was in the old days."

True. Very true. In essence, the book is a love story with a tragic ending. This in itself is enough to make many a handkerchief wet. Edgar Allan Poe once said that nothing could be more poetical in fiction than allowing a young and beautiful girl to slowly expire from a non-messy illness. If Poe were fortunate enough to read Chinese, he would have keeled over in admiration for the poetic death of Lin Daiyu. (林黛玉).

But the love story is certainly not all the book is about, No Red Scholar can possibly put in so much enthusiasm into researches, arguments and debates if it is only a love story, no matter how poetic. To say *Hong Lou Meng* is only a tragic love story is like saying King Lear is just a silly old man who dotes on his daughters. To admire it only for its love story is like praising the riches of a bank after all its money has been stolen. To sum it up as a mere love story is like telling the final score to a football fan who arrives when the game is over.

Hong Lou Meng is the history of a family and their relatives and friends, all of them reflecting the world they live in. One Red Scholar once estimated that he had counted at least four hundred names in the book. To verify his findings, I took a pencil and jotted down seventy names from memory in ten minutes flat. That seventy

characters have personalities vivid enough for me to remember them so well proves the scope of the book.

If anyone is interested in human psychology, he or she will find the book magnificent in its kaleidoscopic revelation of family relationships, of society's swift changes in attitudes towards the rich and the poor, of avarice and greed, of suspicions and jealousies, of love and lust, of hate and revenge, of humour and pathos, and all other emotions.

What gives the book depth is the undercurrent of decay behind the rich and prosperous facade of the Jia family(贾府). Unfortunately for us readers but fortunately for the Red Scholars, this undercurrent remains an undercurrent because the book was left unfinished by the author who died most unpoetically: male, not at all handsome, middle aged, and unforgivably penniless.

Lin Daiyu is still alive when the author stopped writing. Neither has Jia Baoyu(贾宝玉) become a monk. Of the four hundred names counted, only a handful are lucky enough to be put to an end by the author's pen. The rest of them are still merrymaking in luxury while the odour of decadence permeates throughout their landscaped garden. The author tantalizes us with hints of their tragic endings, but no one knows exactly in what form these endings will be.

This is why the Red Scholars are having great fun in guessing. The 'Red Study' has become a special branch of literary research. The scholars not only speculate on the outcomes of the various characters, but they also do detective work by delving into the author's own background. They have so far dug up all sorts of relevant and irrelevant documents concerning his grandparents, parents, uncles, friends and mere contemporaries. They have been doing this for the last hundred years and they are still doing it. Even Jiang Qing(江青) of the Gang of Four fame played this game and came up with her own ideas, which, naturally enough, are now condemned by one and all as stupid and ignorant.

But such is the charm of the book that few can leave it alone. In China, writers are still busy finding new materials which are discussed and criticized even in Taiwan. Hong Kong publishers have come out with a magazine specially devoted to the 'Red Study', and offer its pages for anyone to compare the words in the original footnotes. The fever has long ago spread to Japan where libraries are hoarding some of the early editions. The search for answers will go on when all the Red Guards have grown old and their little red books have been burned.

For all we know, this may just be the very thing that will break political barriers.

红学家

如果我称呼一个人红学家，我是不是指一个穿了列宁装的青年人，疯狂地挥着一本毛语录，认为所有的修正主义者都该跪下来求饶呢？

一点也没有那么可怕。

红学家这个名称，在近百年来，有不少人用来戴在头上，只因为他们喜欢把研究红楼梦当娱乐而已。

有些新加坡人只知道红楼梦是部电影，应该说是两部电影，一部来自中国，另一摄于香港，但去年两者奇妙地同时在新加坡戏院上演。其实除了香港摄的化妆较为艳丽，中国拍的唱辞较为雅致之外，两部片子差不多完全相同，我也无毁无誉。

但使我感到伤心的是青年人看了电影之后，以为他们把书也完全懂透了。“是个爱情故事，是不是？”他们说，“女的心碎而死，男的出家了，好悲惨，古时候的事总是这样的”。

没错，一点也没错。书的主题的确是一个悲惨的爱情故事。单单凭这一点爱情，也够观众哭湿许多手帕了。美国诗人兼侦探小说作家亚伦坡曾说过，世上最有诗意的事，莫过于一个美丽的少女慢慢地死去。若是亚伦坡幸而能看华文，他一定五体投地的佩服林黛玉之死。

但是红楼梦却并不限于爱情故事。红学家也绝对不会为了一点儿女之恋，而花费如许光阴与精力去考证或争论书上的眉批了。若是说红楼梦只是一个爱情故事，那就象轻视李尔王只是个痴爱女儿的傻老头子。若是只为了欣赏其爱情故事而赞美红楼梦，那就象银行的钱已被抢劫后，还在羡慕其富有。若是总括红楼梦只是一个爱情故事，那就象对一个在球赛完毕后才赶到球场的球迷，仅仅报告最后的分数而已。

红楼梦讲述的是一个大家庭与其亲友的境遇，从他们的生活中反映出当时的社会状况。某红学家曾数过红楼梦里人物，他说有四百多名字。我为了想看看他的计算是否正确，也拿了笔纸，凭靠记忆地在短短十分钟内，写出了七十个名字来。那么至少有七十个人的个性，能够生动得令我立刻想得出他们的名字，这部书的气象之大，也可想象而知了。

凡是喜好人类心理学的人，一定会觉得书内的家庭关系象万花筒一样变化万千。它写出社会的世态炎凉，写出贪婪，疑忌，爱欲，恨怨，喜憎，以及一切我们胸中都有的感情。而写得最深刻地是堂堂贾府内所潜藏的丑恶与腐败。可惜这部书没有写完，那些潜藏的也只好永远潜藏下去了，因为作者曹雪芹穷病交迫的死去，而且死得一点也不诗意，四十岁的男人，既不美，又没钱。这是红楼梦读者的遗憾，可是却赐予红学者许多考证的机缘。

作者停笔的时候，林黛玉还没有死，贾宝玉还没有做和尚。上面说过的四百多人中，只有十几个在作者笔下得到归宿，其他的人还在醉生梦死的享受荣华富贵，不过一股腐朽之臭，已经隐隐约约地出现在大观园了。虽然作者曾暗示他们的悲哀下场，可是没有人能够确定他们的命运究竟如何悲苦。

所以红学家才会有猜谜的兴趣，所以红学才会成为研究中国文学的一派。他们不但把书中人物的结果来猜索，而且象做侦探一样地考证作者的背景，查出各种有关与无关的文件，从作者的曾祖一直寻搜到亲友们，甚致于只是同一个时代的笔记，也都加以探求。连四人帮的江青，也参加了这种研究，提供过一些意见，当然，到了今天，没有人不骂她的话说得又幼稚，又愚蠢。

可见得红楼梦的魅力之强，使得凡是看过此书的人，都不能将它弃之一边。中国仍有学者在做考证工作，他们的发现连台湾的学者也不敢轻视。香港还出了一本杂志，专供研究红学的人发表意见，或是争论书中脂批。这种红学的癖好早就发展到了日本，那里的图书馆便珍藏了好几种古版本。我想这种寻求红楼梦答案的精神，等红卫兵都老朽了，毛语录都被烧毁了，还会继续下去的。

谁敢说将来打破政治僵局的，不就是红学的研究呢。

An Uncompleted Mansion

Hong Lou Meng(红楼梦),to many fiction lovers, is the best novel ever written in the Chinese language. Equally famous are the popular *San Gao Zhi Yan Yi*(三国志演义)and *Shiu Hu*(水浒),known in English as *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margin* respectively, but in spite of the vividness of their descriptions and the excitement of their narratives, both books lack the structural perfection of *Hong Lou Meng*.

In the same way that water is pulled by gravity to cascade downwards, incidents and people in *San Gao Zhi Yan Yi* are pushed by time to parade through the pages, each episode affecting the one that is to follow, but they do not add up to one emotional climax. *The Water Margin* is like a glorious necklace of beautiful pearls. Although each pearl shines with its own lustre, its sheen does not rub off onto the ones next to it. Strictly speaking, they are not novels but collections of short stories contained within a loosely constructed framework.

On the other hand, *Hong Lou Meng* not only has a structural blueprint which is revealed at the very beginning of the book, but the book resembles a complex edifice built with interlocking blocks.

The author, Cao Xueqin(曹雪芹),informed the readers of the final outcome of his characters at a very early stage of his book. Many tricks were employed for this purpose, but one of the major ones was the dream Jia Baoyu(贾宝玉)had in which he was taken to a “Palace” where many books of records were displayed in cabinets. Baoyu picked out a few from the cabinet marked his home town and idly leafed through them. He found on each page a poem accompanied with a drawing, but he knew not what they meant. The reader finds them equally puzzling at his first reading, but when he reads it for the second time, the way most readers do with *Hong Lou Meng*, he will have little difficulty in identifying the person for whom each of these prophecies is made, but he will have trouble in guessing the exact meaning of the predictions because most of the poems are either veiled by their poetic vagueness or by the anagrammatic play of words.

However, the main device used by the author to prepare the readers for the tragedies that are to come is in his art of narrative. All the people in the book are entwined to complement one another in the fate they are destined to share. As one Red Scholar said: “Cao Xueqin hardly ever writes a scene that does not become a revelation later.” This technique of writing is known as ‘fu-bi’ (伏笔)in Chinese, literally ‘hidden pen’. But to be more provocative, ambush is so placed as to give surprise, a scene or a

line in a dialogue is so written as to give more impact to a later passage.

Ironically, this perfectly planned book was never finished, and many of the ambushes are still waiting behind the pages to pounce. There can be no doubt that if the book were finished, we would have found the poems and drawings in Baoyu's dream truly prophetic and all the hidden ambushes poignant and powerful in the eighty chapters he did write. But Cao Xueqin died around 1764 when he was about forty years old, leaving us an unfinished book as his legacy. For thirty years after his death, his book remained incomplete.

Perhaps the Red Scholars are right in saying that a masterpiece such as *Hong Lou Meng* should never be completed by anyone other than the original author. But one man, by the name of Gao E(高鹗), did complete the book by 1791 and published the forty chapters he wrote along with the original, passing off his fraud as a discovery of 'the lost manuscript of Cao Xueqin.' He picked up the thread of the narration where the original broke off and went on to give an account of what he thought should have happened to everyone in the book, based on the prophecies given in the dream and the other 'ambush writings'. It was he who gave us the faked wedding, the death of Lin Daiyu, the monkhood of Jia Baoyu, as well as the suicides, kidnappings, and murders of many others. One Red Scholar was so pained that he grumbled: "Those who died in the first eighty chapters were the lucky ones." I agree. Gao E was no genius. His perception of the characters was shallow, his descriptions crude and his dialogue extremely dull. Worst of all, he did not share the same moral and ethical standard of the original author and thus he simply could not appreciate the philosophy on which the book is based. The Red Scholars are right in hating him.

Nevertheless, I personally think Gao E had done us a service. I feel that though he was an incompetent doctor who tried to mend a broken leg and did a devastatingly bad job because he knew nothing about bone structure or the nervous system, he did set the leg, misshapen though it was. Not being a Red Scholar myself, I appreciate Gao E because he at least furnished me with some kind of answers which I know not how to speculate on my own.

I even doubt whether *Hong Lou Meng* could have survived in its unfinished form as one of the most read books in the Chinese language if Gao E had not completed it. Unlike a cascade which at any point is a scenic view, or a necklace which, even if it is broken, will still leave us with a handful of pearls, *Hong Lou Meng* is an intricately designed mansion with an extremely strong foundation, but its master builder died before the ceiling was in place. What would have happened if it was left to the mercy

of the sun and the rain and other elements of nature? Before long, walls would fall, beams would rot, and wild grass would grow so tall around it that no one could find it anymore.

Even though Gao E could not write one thousandth as well as Cao Xueqin, he had kept the tragic theme as faithfully as he knew how, and in so doing, helped to preserve the structural perfection of *Hong Lou Meng*. It is a testimony to his effort that practically all editions of *Hong Lou Meng* sold in the market today still include the forty chapters he faked as the original, much to the distaste of the Red Scholars.

I tremble to think what film makers would do to *Hong Lou Meng* if Gao E did not kill off Lin Daiyu and sent Jia Baoyu packing to a monastery.

高鹗的贡献

许多爱好文艺的读者。都认为红楼梦是中国小说中写得最完美的。虽然三国志演义和水浒传都同样的出名，但比较起来，它们的人物描写虽生动，情节虽紧凑，在结构方面，却都不及红楼梦的精密。

象溪水往下流一样，三国志演义的人物与故事都随着时间的程序，而在书上排队似的出现，虽然前一段故事影响下一段，但所有的故事加起来，却不能产生一个全面性的高潮。水浒则象一串华贵的珍珠颈练，虽然每一粒都圆滢晶洁，但它的光泽却并不能够转移到它左右的珍珠上。严格地说来，这两本书都不能算是长篇小说，而只是收罗成一辑的短篇故事集。

可是红楼梦却象是一座复杂的大厦，它不但一开始就让读者参观了建筑的蓝图，而且将人物与故事安排得象互相钩连的砖石一样，一层层有连系的砌堆上去。

作者曹雪芹在书的前几回内，便将他书中人物的命运，作了交代。整本书上都有这类的影射文笔，但他最主要的暗示方法是描写贾宝玉的一个梦。宝玉在梦中去了薄命司，那里有很多书册，他随手在注明他家乡的书册中翻了一翻，所看见的都是每页一幅画，画上还有一首诗，宝玉看了懵然不懂，读者初次看红楼梦时，也和宝玉一样不能明白这些诗画的意思。但如果他看第二次的时候，他就会很容易的猜到某一幅诗画是指某一个书中人物，可是因为诗句的蓄意暧昧，有时还带上拆字的奥妙，他往往猜不出这些人物究竟如何结局。比这个梦中预言更重要的，是作者的写作艺术，使读者隐约的等待悲剧的发展，预感书中人物都互相牵连，他们的命运都有因果的关系。某红学家曾说过，曹雪芹从来不写一句没有影射下文的话。这种技巧一向呼之为伏笔，也就是说埋伏了某一椿事或某一段话，准备跳出来捉获后来情节发展的戏剧性。

可怜这么一部构造完美的书，却未曾写完，那些伏笔也仍埋伏在书页后面，等着跳出来。如果这部书由曹雪芹写完的话，我们一定会发现梦中的预言灵验，也会觉得埋在前八十回的伏笔精采生动，与后来的情节前后呼唤。可是曹雪芹在一七六四年去世，死时才四十岁，（红学家尚在考证作者卒年，不过争论也只是相差一二年的事），把未完的红楼梦留下给我们。他死后三十年中，红楼梦仍是以未完的面目和读者见面。

也许红学家是对的，因为他们坚持一部象红楼梦的杰作，除了原作家有资格把它写完之外，别人都不该碰它。可是有一个叫高鹗的人却在一七九一年出版了一百二十回的红楼梦，诳说后四十回是他找到原作者的遗著，其实是他自己的续书。（是否高鹗所续，红学家也仍有异议）。他从原书讲到一半的地方接下去，把所有的人物都流水账似的告一结束。他续写的情节多少依循原作里的伏笔和梦中预言，譬如骗宝玉的婚礼，黛玉的死，宝玉的出家，鸳鸯的自杀，妙玉的被拐，金桂的谋杀等等，都出诸高鹗之笔。某红学家看了这些低劣的文笔，曾忿忿地说：在前四十回死去的人物还算是好命的呢。我也同意。高鹗对书中人物的认识肤浅，他所描写的事情粗滥，他的对话枯燥乏味。最糟的是他不能了解原作者的人生哲学。怪不得红学家恨死了他。

可是在我个人说来，我仍是觉得高鹗有他的贡献。他象是个医道不佳的外科郎中，一点也不懂得骨节的构造或神经的组织，却冒失的把一只跌断了脚去用石膏接了起来，虽然脚给他弄得歪歪扭扭的不象脚，但他总算是把脚保留了。我之肯这样感谢他，是因为我非红学家也。要不是有高鹗续完红楼梦，我就没有办法猜出这些人物的下场。

若是高鹗没有把书续完，我甚至于怀疑红楼梦是否保存到今天。红楼梦不是一条溪水，可以在任何一个角度都成美景。红楼梦也不是一条项链，纵使扯断了也还剩下散落一地的珍珠。它是一座极精致而又地基坚固的大厦，可是在屋顶还没有造好的时候，主持的大建筑师却死了。如果不将它简陋的造完，而任它受暴日烈雨的侵袭，它会不会不久便墙壁也倒了下来，屋梁也腐烂，然后野草围着它生长，终于被埋藏到人们找不到原来的地基呢？

虽然高鹗的文笔不及原作者的千分之一，但他至少尽他所能地对原作者忠实，保留了悲剧的主题。也因为如此，我们才能欣赏原书构造的完美。虽然红学家对他的续书很反感，但今日市面上所售的红楼梦，差不多都是包括他所续的后四十回。这也算是承认他的功劳吧。

如果没有高鹗把林黛玉病死，没有把贾宝玉迫得出家，不知道电影商会如何处置红楼梦呢？我一想到这一点，就全身冷汗了。

The Best Dialect

Word came to me that a world conference on the Cultural Development of Mankind was planned in Tokyo and every language group was invited to attend.

The Chinese-speaking group, like all other such groups, be it French or Greek, was also preparing frantically to send a delegation. Politicians, scholars, engineers, doctors, tradesmen, and people from all walks of life assembled under one roof to decide whom they thought most appropriate to represent them. The noise they made was so loud that the organizer had to shout into the microphone.

“Silence, please,” pleaded the organizer.

“Something must be wrong with the mike,” complained a systems engineer. “It’s impossible for me to understand him.”

“That’s not surprising,” smiled the professor of literature who happened to sit next to him, “since he’s speaking in Fukien and you’re Cantonese.”

“Nonsense,” interrupted a man behind them, “I too came from the province of Fukien, but I can’t make him out either.”

“Ha!” sneered a woman who sold eggs at the food stall. “Of course you can’t. You’re Amoy and he’s from Foochow.”

“And what makes you so knowledgeable?” retorted the man from Fukien, inching himself away from the smell of rotten eggs.

“Because everybody buys eggs from me, that’s why,” smirked the woman, “besides, I’m a Teochew.”

“But this is ridiculous!” snapped the systems engineer. “How can we conduct a meeting in a language I don’t understand!” He stood up, waved his arm and attracted the attention of the assembly. “Mr Chairman,” he shouted, “it stands to reason that it’ll be more efficient and time-saving if we all speak Cantonese.”

His exclamation was met by wild approval and equally wild disapproval.

“Go home, Cantonese!” shouted one group, stamping their feet.

“Long live Cantonese!” Another group raised their fists.

Some other group sitting in the middle chanted: “Fukien, Fukien! Fukien! Fukien is the soul dialect of all dialects!”

The systems engineer refused to be shouted down. He cried aloud: “Cantonese is the embodiment of the noble spirit of the Chinese Revolution. Let us honour the dialect of Dr Sun...”

Before he could finish, a sailor rose and shouted back. “No! The revolution was

completed only through the efforts of our late President, who, as you all know, came from Nienpo, where,” he bowed,” all seamen came from, such as my humble self.”

“Quiet, everybody!” screamed a middle-aged farmer with his hands cupped around his mouth. “The social struggle was accomplished by our hero from Hunan. Mr Chairman, I move that we use the dialect of Mao...”

A wave of boos and jeers swept over the assembly. Nobody could find the chairman who was weeping behind the curtains.

A serious young man in overalls climbed up the dais where he stared at the people fiercely. “I believe it is beyond dispute that we should honour the Hakka dialect in honour of the greatest statesman of our century...”

But a heart surgeon who believed in majority rule grabbed hold of the microphone. “With due respect, your great leader will be the first one to realize that the Hakka dialect belongs to the minority of...”

But he could not finish because a restaurant owner from San Francisco pulled out the wire and the microphone went dead. “Who cares about majority or minority, honour or revolution!” he chuckled. “What can be more important than food, huh? Just wait until you find yourself hankering after Chinese food somewhere in Europe, and you’ll find out soon enough how necessary the TaiShan dialect is.”

“Food!” sniffed a slender young girl, rising from her seat and dazzling everyone with her beauty. “Is that all you can think of? We must choose the most beautiful, the most gentle and the most aesthetic dialect to be our common language. I come from Suchow, and you know...”

A burst of laughter came from a miner with magnificent muscles and sinews. “Suchow dialect! It may sound beautiful coming from you, but can you fancy me talking like that? We want a masculine dialect, and we people from Heilungkiang are...”

A series of tinkling bells identified the fortune-teller. “Language is but the expression of thought,” he lectured, “so it follows that we should choose the dialect of philosophers, not musclemen. I myself come from Sichuan where every man and woman can carry on a philosophical discourse on any subject...”

“You call yourselves philosophers?” An elderly scholar with a white beard pointed at the fortune-teller with a quivering finger. “Don’t make me laugh! We all know that the wisest man ever born was Confucius and he came from my home province, Shantung, so I think...”

At this point, a plumb old lady who used to be a primary school teacher took out a cane from her big handbag and banged thrice on the desk. It worked like magic. All

faces turned toward her in stunned silence as if they were back, as children, in their classroom.

“Do you know you’re quarrelling?” The school teacher frowned. All heads were lowered in shame.

“And do you realize you can understand one another at least enough to have a quarrel?” As if mesmerized, they nodded.

“And do you know why?” the school teacher pursued the subject relentlessly. Looking at one another, they shook their heads.

“Because you’re all speaking in Mandarin, that’s why,” she continued. “Not very good Mandarin, I must admit, but still Mandarin of a kind. And do you know why all of you can speak and understand some Mandarin?”

They shook their heads.

“I’ll tell you why in your next lesson,” announced the old lady, in the best tradition of classroom suspense. She packed away her cane. “Now, use your Mandarin as your common language and get on with the business.”

And so they did with no further fuss.

方言之争

消息传来，说东京将举行世界性会议，讨论人类文化的发展，并邀请各言语支流参加。

华裔子弟，和那些说法语，说希腊话的人一样，也忙着商量派代表团去开会，于是众人拥挤一堂，其中有政客，学者，工程师，商人，医生，和各种职业的工作人员，话声喧哗，使得负责人不得不抓起播音机来，大声请求着：“各位，请肃静一点。”

“那播音机一定有毛病，”一个系统工程师埋怨着：“不然，我怎么会听不懂呢？”

“那也不稀奇呀，”坐在他旁边的文学教授微笑地答道：“他说的是福建话，你却是广东人。”

“胡说，”坐在他们后面的人插嘴说，“我也是福建人呀，可是连我也听不懂。”

“哈！”一个食摊上卖鸡蛋的女贩嗤笑了一声。“当然你听不懂哪，你是厦门人，可是他说的是福州话。”

“你倒说得头头是道！”那福州人反唇相讥，一面将身体挪移几寸，躲开臭蛋的气味。

“是嘛，人人都得向我买蛋，”女贩得意的笑了，“再说呢，我是潮州人呀。”

“这简直是胡闹！怎么可以用我听不懂的话来开会呢？”系统工程师不耐烦的说。他站起来，挥舞着双臂来引人注目：“主席！为了省事省时间，大家说广东话吧！”

他的提议虽有人热烈的赞许，却也有人同样热烈的反对。

“你自己回家去吧，广东人！”一批人跺着脚斥骂。

“广东话万岁！”另一批人举起拳头，表示拥护。

另外一批坐在大厅中央的，却齐声唱道：“福建话！福建话！福建话才是方言的灵魂。”

那系统工程师不甘屈服的大声嚷道：“广东话代表中华民族的革命精神，我们应该尊敬孙中山先生的方言……”

他的话还没有说完，一个水手站了起来，也大声嚷着：“不，革命是我们已

故蒋总统完成的，而他来自宁波，那是所有海员的出生地，正象小弟一样。”他鞠了个躬。

一个中年农夫用手合拢在嘴前，叫道：“各位请听，社会斗争的成功是我们湖南英雄的功劳，主席，我提议我们采用毛泽……”

他的话被沸荡的锐叫声与笑怒声压埋了。至于大会主席，谁也找不到他，他正在幕后哭啦。

一个穿了工人装的青年跳上讲台，用严肃的眼光，注视着听众。“我认为无需辩论地应该用客家话，对我们这一百年来最伟大的政治家，表示敬意……”

一个心脏专家却觉得应该服从多数，他用手抢了播音机，说道：“虽然我们尊敬你们的领袖，可是连他也不会否认客家人究竟属于少数……”

没有人能够听见他的下文，因为来自旧金山的一个饭店老板把播音机的电线拖了出来。他笑着说：“什么多数和少数，荣誉和革命！其实还有什么比吃更要紧呢？等你们在欧美想吃一顿中国饭的时候，你们就会发现台山话的重要了！”

“吃！”一个修长身材的少女啐了一声。她站起来，使各人惊羨她的美雅。“难道你们想的就只是吃吗？不，我们应该选择一种最美，最柔和，最有诗意的方言来做我们的交谈言语。我是苏州人，你们都知道……”

一个粗壮的矿工听了大笑：“苏州话，象你这么个小姑娘说来也许好听，要是我也这样说，那还象话吗？我们要的话该雄壮，象我们黑龙江来的人……”

一串摇铃在手，一个算命先生开口了：“言语只是思想的表现而已，我们应该采用哲学家的方言，我们四川人最会摆龙门阵……”

“你当你们是哲学家吗？”一个白须的学者指着算命先生说，“哼！谁都知道世界上最智慧的孔夫子是我们山东人，所以……”

正在这闹得不可收拾的时候，一个做过小学教员的胖胖老太太，从她的手袋里抽出一条戒尺来，重重地在桌上敲了三下。功效奇妙，各人都静静地瞧着她发怔，好象都回到教室里做小学生了。

“你们知道你们在吵架吗？”老师皱着眉问道。大家羞惭地低了头。

“你们有没有想到，既然能够吵架，就表示你们多多少少懂得彼此的言语？”大家被催眠术操纵似地点着头。

“你们知道那是为什么吗？”老师不留情的逼着问。众人交换着目光，摇着

头。

“那是因为你们都说着华语呀！”老师说。“虽然说得不太好，但至少也算是华语。你们可知道为什么你们都会说也会听一点华语呢？”众人又摇着头。

“我留着等下一堂课告诉你们吧，”老太太说，一面收起戒尺，“现在乖乖地用华语做交谈言语，办你们的正经事吧。”

众人不敢罗唆地正经开会了。

The History of Hua Yu

It was time for the next lesson. The old lady sat down and searched her handbag. Some of those assembled trembled apprehensive thinking she might take out the same cane that made them behave last week, but she merely fished out a piece of paper.

“I’ll read out this passage I wrote in English and see how much sense you can make out of it,” she announced. “Here we go: A Mandarin kept a pair of mandarins whose feathers sparkled with specks of mandarin. They might not know how to speak Mandarin, but they certainly know how to peck at the mandarin skin that was thrown into the pond by the workers whose hands had been stained by mandarin.”

She looked up and was confronted by a sea of blank faces. “Well, what did I say?” she asked.

The systems engineer scratched his head. “I understood that part about not speaking Mandarin, but I haven’t the faintest idea what kind of people they were.”

“They weren’t people,” answered the school teacher, “they were a pair of ducks.”

“Ducks!” exploded the chicken-egg seller. “What have ducks got to do with Mandarin?”

“For that matter,” said the old lady, “what has Mandarin got to do with Hua Yu(华语)?”

“Mandarin and Hua Yu, they’re the same,” commented the sailor impatiently. “Everybody knows that.”

“Really?” smiled the school teacher. “Let me read you the meanings of the word ‘Mandarin’ from my *Webster Dictionary*.” She took out a thick book from her handbag and flipped the pages. “Ah, here we are. Mandarin:(1) a high ranking official in China,(2) a kind of Asiatic duck,(3) a language in China,(4) a kind of Chinese orange,(5) a reddish-yellow colour (6) a reddish-yellow dye.” She looked up. “Now, do you understand what I just read to you?”

Enlightenment dawned on the faces of the people as they thought over what they had heard. Some even giggled.

“It makes sense now, doesn’t it?” teased the old lady. “And if the words are exactly the same, then it should also make sense if we substitute the word ‘Hua Yu’ each time the word ‘Mandarin’ appeared, shouldn’t it? But does it make sense?”

Her audience mentally fitted the words. Many of them shook their heads. A few laughed.

“So you see the word ‘Hua Yu’ is the same as Mandarin only when it is applied to

a language. But how can this little piece of information help us?"

"She is really treating us like kids," whispered the professor, but the farmer who sat next to him only shrugged.

"I'm no linguist," continued the school teacher with faint pretense at modesty, "but I can make guesses. Like the word 'pagoda', which is an English word adapted from the Portuguese, the word 'Mandarin' also came from the Portuguese who were among the earliest tourists to visit China." She paused, and suddenly asked, "Does anyone here know that there is a street in Singapore called Tai Gin Road?"

"My God," groaned the professor, "she's digressing."

"Don't keep interrupting," said the farmer, "I'm interested even if you aren't."

"Tai Gin Road in Chinese is 大人路, which in Hanyu Pinyin, is Da Ren Road, meaning Big Man Road. But Tai Gin Road didn't get its name from gaints but got it because it was on that road where the Chinese Secretary of the Colonial days(华人政务司司长)used to live. Tai Gin, or more correctly, Da Ren, was what the people of any Chinese dialect called their superior officers.

"So when the early Portuguese came to China, they were told to address the Chinese officials as 'Da Ren', later, in Manchu Dynasty, as 'Man Da Ren'(满大人), which in time, became 'Mandarin'. The rest is easy. The ducks(鸳鸯)which the Mandarins kept, the oranges they ate, the colour of their buildings, especially that on the doors and columns - all of which were unknown or unfamiliar to Europeans - were called 'mandarin'.

"But how did Mandarin come to be the same as Hua Yu? Well, in the old days, all officials-to-be had to go Beijing, first to pass the Imperial Examinations, and then to receive their appointments. While they were there, they found they must learn some Beijing dialect, no matter how atrocious their pronunciation.

"If they were posted in the capital, they became more fluent in the Beijing dialect. And if they were posted out to the provinces, they were usually sent to places where the dialect was different from their own. Instead of learning a new dialect, they simply clung on to their newly-acquired Beijing dialect. After all, when their term of service was over, they would be posted to another province to face another dialect. Why should they learn a different dialect every few years?

"Besides, among the officials themselves, they found they could communicate better in the Beijing dialect since they, regardless of their birth places, had all learned the same Beijing dialect through the same process. This is why the Beijing dialect was known as Guan Hua(官话), meaning the language of the officials, or Mandarin.

“At the same time, it was necessary for their subordinates to learn Guan Hua so that they could report or take orders, even if they had never been to Beijing. In due course, Guan Hua became a status symbol; the use of it spread to merchants, scholars, craftsmen and what have you. By then, it was known as Pu Tong Hua(普通话), which was probably a contraction of 普遍通用话, or commonly applicable language.

“When western progress in science and technology shook up China and reforms were called for, the populace found the need to unite as one people. To do so, they must break down the barriers of dialects and one common tongue was to be chosen. Pu Tong Hua, because of its widespread influence, was chosen. This Pu Tong Hua is now called Hua Yu in Singapore, meaning the language of the Chinese-speaking people.

“Now you can see how it was history which made the decision. There is no turning back. You can all understand or speak some Hua Yu because it is part of your past and because you have been influenced either in your reading or in your hearing.

“Whether you are already fluent or are still mouthing it with difficulty and fumbling with words, it doesn’t matter, you must push on to learn more, with love and respect, because it is your heritage.”

The old lady pushed her book into her handbag, stood up, and marched out of the hall without a backward glance.

“These old people know a thing or two, huh?” asked a young student, looking down at the electronic calculator in his hand.

华语从何来

是下一堂课的时候了，胖胖的老师坐下，在她的手袋里摸索着，许多人怕她拿出来的又是上次使他们服从的戒尺，可是她只取出一张薄纸。

“我准备把我用英语写出来的一段话，读给你们听，看你们懂得多少？”她说道：“好啦。有一个 Mandarin 养了一对羽毛有鲜艳 Mandarin 的 Mandarin，它们虽然不会说 Mandarin，却会啄吃被 Mandarin 染了手指的工人所掷在池上的 Mandarin 皮。”

她抬起头来，端详着一群茫然的面孔。“怎么哪？我说了什么？”

那系统工程师搔着头皮，答道：“我听懂了那不会讲 Mandarin 那一句，可是我一点也不知道你指的是那些人。”

“不是人，是鸭子。”老师说。

“鸭子！”那卖鸡蛋不卖鸭蛋的女贩叫了起来。“鸭子跟 Mandarin 有什么关系呀？”

“那我问你，Mandarin 和华语又有什么关系？”老师回答说。

“谁都知道 Mandarin 就是华语。”那水手不耐烦的说。

“是吗？”老师微笑着。“让我先把字典里解释 Mandarin 的意义读给你们听吧。”她从手袋里拖出一本厚厚的书来，翻着书页。“哦，有了。(1)高级中国官员，(2)某种亚洲鸭，(3)某种中国方言，(4)某种中国橘子，(5)橘黄颜色，(6)橘红染料”。她抬起头来，“现在你们明白我刚刚读了些什么吧？”

听众回忆着刚才听到的话，开始明白了，有些人甚至于想笑。

“是不是有点意思了？”老师嘲笑着问，“如果 Mandarin 就是华语，那么要是我们把刚才那一段话里所有的 Mandarin 字，都换成华语两字，意思应该仍是一样，对吗？”

众人在脑中把华语填入，结果多数都摇着头，也有几个笑出声来的。

“是不是？只有 Mandarin 是指方言的时候，才可以和华语对换。可是这对于我们又有什么益处呢？”

“她真的把我们当孩子呢！”教授轻声的说，那农夫不置可否的耸耸肩。

“我虽然不是语言专家，”老师略做谦虚的说，“可是我可以猜出这个字的来

源。就象英语里的 Pagoda 袭自葡萄牙文，Mandarin 也是取自葡萄牙语，因为葡萄牙人是最早去中国的游客。”她停顿了一下，忽然抬头问道：“你们知道新加坡有条路叫做大人路吗？”

“我的天！”教授呻吟着，“她又讲歪到那里去了！”

“别老插嘴！”农夫说，“你不要听就别听，我可有兴趣呢。”

“大人路用汉音拼音说来，应该是 Da Ren 路，但大人路并非有了巨人而名，却是因为殖民时代的华人政务司司长从前居在那里。可见得 Da Ren 或大人，是任何方言对于长官的通称。

“所以当葡萄牙人初来中国的时候，他们跟着叫长官做 Da Ren，后来到了清朝，因为是满州人做皇帝，所以叫满大人，或 Man Da Ren，也就变成了 Mandarin，其他的意义就容易解释了。这些满大人养的鸳鸯，吃的橘子，建筑上门柱的颜色，都是欧洲人所未曾见过的，也就被混称为 Mandarin 了，满大人说的话，当然也被呼为 Mandarin。

“可是 Mandarin 又怎么变成华语的呢？那是因为古时候所有想做官的人，都必需先上京应试，又要在北京等候职位，那么居在北京的时候，虽然他们的发音糟透了，总不能不说北京话吧？后来，如果是留职京城，那么北京话当然会愈说愈好。如果不是，照例总是被派去方言与自己不同的外省。你们都知道学别人的方言多么困难，所以这些官员索性抓紧了新学的北京话不放，免得每隔两三年，又要学一种新方言，因为他们的任期一满，往往又会被派去别处，况且，官员与官员之间，用北京话交谈也比较方便，因为各人的籍贯虽不同，但因为都经过了同样的经历，所以都会说几句北京话。自然而然的，这种官员间应用的北京方言，便被呼为官话，也就是英语里的 Mandarin 了。

“同时，那些在官府当差的职员，若是不学一点官话，又如何能够报告事件或听从命令呢？所以他们虽然没有去过北京，却也不能不学学北京话。慢慢地，说官话成了一种风气，似乎说了官话，便是提高自己身价，于是其他的人，如学者，商人，技工等等，也都学着说官话了，到了这个时候，官话又被改称为普通话，大概是指其普遍通用的意思。

“当西方科学的发展，把中国民众呼醒了的时候，他们提出改良，而且认为必须团结一致。要达到这个目的，必须首先击破方言所造成的阻碍，所以必须采

取一个可以交谈的共同言语。因为普通话早已在民间有了最广布的影响，所以就选了普通话。这便是新加坡叫华语的前身。华语的意思是所有中华人民的言语。

“现在你们明白华语的被采用，是历史性的决定，我们再也不能向后退了。你们之所以都会说，也会听一点华语，是因为华语已成为你们历史的一部分，你们在读与听方面，都早已受了华文和华语的影响”

“这是你们祖宗所传下来的遗产，无论你们之中，有些人已经说得很流利，有些人还嗫嗫不惯开口，你们都应该有爱惜它，尊敬它的精神，去继续学习它。”

老太太把字典塞入手袋，站起来，昂首不旁顾的踱出大会。

一个年轻的学生，低头瞧着手上握着的电子计算机，喃喃自语地说道：“嘿，这些老一辈的还真有一套哪。”

The Extinct Tone in Mandarin

If Yue Fei(岳飞, 1102-1141) could be recalled from his grave to sit through a recitation of his famous poem ‘Man Jiang Hong’ (满江红), by one of our Singapore youths, he would most probably hang down his head and groan: “Oh, what have they done to my beautiful poem?”

His disappointment would have been even greater if the poem had been read aloud by someone from Taiwan or from China, because it would not have been our celebrated Singaporean accent that jarred Yue Fei’s ears but rather the Mandarin dialect itself. After all, Mandarin is not a dialect that Yue Fei was familiar with.

It is generally accepted that Mandarin is based on the Beijing dialect which, more than any other dialect in China, was the most “mutilated” by foreign tones because it was the frequent invasions and consequently the migration of the nomadic people of non-Han race that affected the Beijing dialect. These people brought their own native tongue into Chinese when they tried to learn the Beijing dialect.

As a result, after centuries of mixing, the Beijing dialect lost one of the five tones originally present in the old Chinese language. The old language, as Yue Fei and his contemporaries spoke it, had these five tones: the *ying* and *yang* ‘levels’(阴平, 阳平), and three kinds of ‘unlevels’ - the rising(上声), the falling(去声) and the entering(入声) tones. Mandarin has wiped out completely the entering tone. Unfortunately for Yue Fei whom we had ‘resurrected’ to attend the recitation of his ‘Man Jiang Hong’, his poem was written to rhyme in this now extinct entering tone.

By traditional standards of versification, words of level tones(平声) cannot rhyme with words of unlevel tones(仄声), even if they have the same vowel or the same sound. The nine rhyming words in ‘Man Jiang Hong’, according to Hanyu Pinyin which has no entering tone, have the same sound: xie(歇), lie(烈), yue(月), qie(切), xue(雪), mie(灭), que(缺), xue(血), and que(阙). But they are in different tones. Four of them are in level(歇, 切, 缺, 阙), four others in falling,(烈, 月, 天, 血) and one(雪) in rising. How can they be said to rhyme if they are read in Mandarin? Naturally it would have surprised, even exasperated, Yue Fei and offended his keen sense of rhyming, because, in the spoken language of his days, his poem was technically so perfect that all nine words had the same vowel and the same entering tone.

Actually, it would have been a cruel joke to play on Yue Fei if we did make him listen to his poem being chanted in a language so much influenced by the non-Han invaders. Yue Fei was twenty-four years old when the Jin people took all the land north

of the Yellow River, captured the two Song Emperors, and were pushing further south in A.D. 1126. The new Emperor who replaced his captured father and brother retreated to Hangzhou to enjoy himself, leaving the land south of the Yellow River a battleground between the invading Jin and defending Han armies.

Yue Fei was one of the army commanders. His life-long ambition was to regain all the territories occupied by the enemy. His war cry was “Return me my river and mountain!” (还我河山). However, when his army had won enough battles to reach the Yellow River and was about to cross it, he was recalled by imperial order to the capital where he was put to death on a trumped-up charge of treason. He was but thirty-nine years old. The Song Dynasty never won back its lost land even to the day it was finally vanquished by the Monguls in 1279.

How would Yue Fei feel on hearing his poem recited in a dialect which came into being mainly due to his failure at war? I can just imagine him tearing his hair and moaning, “I know we’ve lost the war, but must we lose our entering tone as well?”

This disappearance of entering tone, from the viewpoint of poetic appreciation, is to be lamented, because this tone is particularly suitable for expressions of melancholy, sorrow, and frustration. It is a low tone that starts normally but gradually drops, like a sigh, deep and sad. Appropriately, many Chinese words which had poetic associations belong to this tone, such as 哭(weep), 独(loneliness), 曲(songs), 烛(candles), 绿(green), 恤(compassion), 鬱(sorrow), 月(moon), 雪(snow), 绝(vanish), 血(blood), 别(parting), and 裂(asunder), to mention only a few. These words are still a part of our vocabulary. We have not lost them. But when they are spoken in Mandarin, they no longer retain the entering tone which makes a classical poem musical as well as poetical.

It is interesting to note that when ‘Man Jiang Hong’ was put into music, the melody is such that all the nine rhyming words drop down to a lower key. Perhaps it has never occurred to our young singers to question why it is so; they just assume this is how the composer chooses to capture the emotions of the poet. What they do not realize is that the song is an exaggerated version of oral recitation as it would have been read in the days of Yue Fei.

Beijing Opera, so called because the lyrics and dialogue are performed in the Beijing dialect, is one area in which the entering tone is still occasionally being used. Anyone who listens carefully will find a strong contrast between the lines read by a clown - which will be in pure Beijing - and those spoken by an actor or actress - which will have some words in the entering tone. The use of the entering tone, I was told by a fan of the Beijing opera, is for the purpose of dramatic emphasis. It does give a cadence

which the pure Beijing dialect does not possess.

However, the entering tone is still prominent in practically all existing Chinese dialects of today, especially those of the Southern regions. In a way, we can say that these dialects are comparatively more dramatic than Mandarin; they are certainly of older lineage. It is always a pleasure to read aloud any classical poetry in one's own dialect. Not only will the rhymes be technically perfect, but the feelings of the poems are often heightened by the resemblances of so many sighs.

But public recitation must be done in Mandarin if we want ourselves to be understood. We have made Mandarin the communicative tool among us, so we will have to live with our choice. It is just as well that Yue Fei died eight hundred years ago so he can remain deaf to our reading aloud of his 'Man Jiang Hong' in Mandarin.

人声去矣

如果岳飞可以从他的坟墓里被拖出来，让他静听新加坡青年朗诵他的“满江红”，我想他恐怕会垂头丧气的呻吟说道：“啊呀！怎么把我的词搅得这个样子了。”

若是朗诵的人不是新加坡公民，而是来自台湾或中国的，那么岳飞可能更伤心失望呢，因为他听了觉得刺耳的并不是新加坡口音，而是所谓标准的华语。华语也者，根本不是岳飞听惯的言语。

华语源自北京方言，可是在北京所说的话，却是汉语中受胡音影响最大的，因为从金人入关到元朝定基北京，中国东北的游牧民族开始向关内移居，可是他们原来讲的话，却非汉语，所以在学汉语时，渗入了多少他们土语的口音。

经过了长时期的演化，北京话也变了质，把汉音里原有的五音，改得只剩下了四音。岳飞和他同时代的人说的话有五音，即阴平，阳平，上声，去声和入声。今日的华语却把一个人声硬生生的抹煞了。可怜岳飞写的满江红，却偏偏用了入声韵，怎么不使还魂回来的岳飞，听了朗诵而不伤心呢。

依照传统的诗词韵学，纵使两字同音或同字母，但若是其平仄不同，就决不能算押韵。岳飞的满江红有九个押韵的字，即歇，烈，月，切，雪，灭，缺，血，阙。如果照今日通用的汉语拼音作准，则其中四个字是平音，（歇切缺阙），四个字是去声，（烈月灭血），一个是上声，（雪），那么用标准的华语来朗诵的话，怎么能算是押韵呢？当然岳飞听了会烦恼而觉得不顺耳了，因为照宋代的发音来读，他这首词用的韵十分工整，九个韵不但音母相同，而且都属于人声。

其实，真要是叫岳飞来听满江红的朗诵，而用的言语是受了敌人影响的北京话，也未免有点残苛。岳飞廿四岁的那年，（一一二六年），金人入侵，霸占了黄河之北的土地，虏劫了两个宋朝皇帝，还继续南下。代替父兄而立的新皇帝躲在杭州享福，不去理会黄河之南一带的被卷入战祸。

岳飞是宋军的领袖。他生命中唯一的志愿是夺回所有失去的国土，他的口号是：“还我河山”。可是当他胜利地打到黄河边，正要渡河的前夕，却被宋帝用十二道金牌，召他回京，在狱内以“莫须有”的叛逆罪名而杀害了他，他还只是卅九岁而已。南宋偏安地又拖延了一百余年，一直到一二七九年被蒙古灭亡，始终未曾克服国土。

试问岳飞若是听了他的“收拾旧山河”，用华语朗诵，而又知道他之听不惯华语，是因为他没有抗战成功，才使得北京话变质，他会有怎么样的感想呢？我似乎看见他在拉扯着自己的头发，痛苦地问道：“打仗嘛，我知道我们是打输了，可是我们却连人声也输掉了么？”

从诗词的欣赏来说，入声的被消灭，是相当可惜的，因为入声最宜于表达悲苦凄怨的情绪。它的发音始自平声，而后渐渐下坠，很象深沉的叹息。许多富于诗意的字，便属于入声韵，如哭，独，曲，烛，绿，恤，郁，月，雪，绝，血，别，裂等。虽然这些字眼。在中文内仍常用，我们并没有遗失了它们。不过用华语来读这些字的时候，它们却缺乏那使得唐诗宋词读来优美而动听的叹息之音了。

当满江红编成歌曲的时候，它的调子使每一个押韵的字略为下降。一般青年歌手也许没有问过：“为什么作曲者如此谱乐？”他们大概以为作曲者选择这种音乐来表达词人的情感，而不曾体会出他们所唱出来的“满江红”，实际上很象是用岳飞所说汉语所读出来的词，略加夸张而已。

京戏之称为京戏，是因为戏中的唱白全用北京话。可是只有在京戏里，北京话仍有人声。任何人仔细的听，便会发觉凡是小丑说的话，都是纯正的京片子，但是男女演员的道白，却常有入声出现。我曾问过一个戏迷，他说入声能够加强言语的戏剧性。我也觉得入声的确产生一种音调的规律，那是纯粹的北京话所没有的。

但是各种方言的发音中，却仍保留了入声，尤其是南方的方言。也许我们可以说，方言比华语更具有戏剧性，至少，方言的历史比北京话悠久些。我发现用方言来读旧诗，的确另有一种乐趣，不但韵用得十全十美，而且诗词中有了叹息一样的入声，更能发泄怨愁忧郁。

可是朗诵时却不能不用华语，否则就没有人听得懂了，华语既被公认为交流工具，我们便该继续支持它。幸亏岳飞已死了有八百多年，可以在我们用华语朗诵满江红的时候，闭耳不闻。

Taro and Jade

Attending my first-year English class, I once answered a question with a pun which was greeted by my friends with giggles, but my lecturer only threw me an icy glance and caustically commented: “Shakespeare is great in spite of his puns, not because of them.”

His words still ring loud and clear in my ears, but nothing can cure me of my love for a good pun, especially puns in the Chinese language which, being monosyllabic, is full of them. There is one pun in the voluminous book *Hong Lou Meng* (红楼梦) that always amused me not only because it was charming but because it illustrated how dialects can be helpful in the study of Chinese classics.

This particular pun takes place in the book when Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉) came to visit his cousin Lin Daiyu (林黛玉) in her chamber after lunch. He sniffed around and inquired if the faint fragrance in the air was due to something she wore, but Daiyu denied the use of any perfume. She was drowsy and did not wish to talk, but Baoyu thought a nap so soon after a meal might harm her delicate digestive system, so to divert her, he told her he had just heard of “a most interesting piece of news”.

There lived a pack of mice, he said, in the cave of Lin on the mountain of Dai. On the night of December eighth, the leader of the mice called for a meeting. “Tomorrow is December eighth. We ought to follow the example of human beings and cook us some La Ba Zhou (腊八粥, ‘La’ means the month of December, ‘Ba’ is number eight, ‘Zhou’ is porridge. The eighth of December is traditionally believed to be the anniversary of Buddha’s Enlightenment, and in his honour, people offer him this special kind of vegetarian porridge called La Ba Zhou.) But since we have very little grain, fruit and nuts, we must think of some way to steal them.”

One mouse reported that there was a large hoard of all the necessary ingredients in the temple near by. “What kind of grain, fruit and nuts do they have?” asked the leader.

“They have plenty of rice and beans, but of vegetables, they have only red plums (红枣), chestnuts (栗子), lotus seeds (莲子), peanuts (花生), and fragrant taro (香芋).”

Encouraged by the report, the leader immediately asked for volunteers for the thefts. One by one, each required item was assigned for until the last, the fragrant taro.

“I’ll go,” said a little mouse, who looked so small and delicate that the other mice would not allow him to take the risk. “But I can do it,” protested the little mouse. “I may seem to you young and small, but I have the magic power to transform myself and

to transport articles. Instead of stealing the taro by physical force the way the others do, I will transform myself into a taro so realistically that no one can tell me from the other taros. Then I will magically transport the taros one by one until they are all here.”(The logic and magic in this story are of the least importance and never explained.)

“No,” said the other mice. “We don’t believe you can do it. Show us how you can change into a taro.”

The little mouse shook himself and became a beautiful young lady. The other mice roared with laughter. “No, no!” they exclaimed, “you’re supposed to be a taro, not a young girl.”

The little mouse changed himself back to his animal form and retorted, “What a bunch of ignoramuses you are! Don’t you know that the most valuable fragrant taro(xiang yu 香芋)is Miss Lin, who is the real perfumed Jade(xiang yu 香玉)?”

The first two simple puns about the cave of Lin and the mountain of Dai are merely introductory. The real pun, at the end of the story, is three pronged. The word for ‘jade’(玉)has the same sound “yu” as in ‘taro’ although they are written differently. By linking both ‘yu’ with ‘xiang’(fragrant, 香), Baoyu is poking fun at the perfume he thought he smelt just before he made up the story, as well as excluding himself from the joke since he too has the word ‘jade’(玉)in his own name but he is not fragrant(香).

When I first read this passage, I thought the pun poorly done since in the dialects I spoke at that time, Shanghai and Hunan, ‘jade’ and ‘taro’ did not even have the same sound, not to mention tones. It was only later when I learned Mandarin that I realized that the pun was indeed a good one because the two words sounded exactly alike. I blamed my own dialects for my failure in appreciation of the pun and thought nothing more of it.

However, after I came to live in Southeast Asia, I found to my great satisfaction that in none of the dialects spoken in this region, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Hainan, Hakka and Cantonese, can ‘jade’ ever be made to pun with ‘taro’. Jade sounds either like ‘gek’, or ‘nok’, or ‘yourk’,(give or take a few consonants or vowels in my punitive attempt at linguistics) and all of them in the entering tone, whereas it is in the falling tone if spoken in Mandarin.

For further clarification, I turned to my *Rhyming Dictionary for Verses*(诗韵大辞典)which was compiled long before Mandarin became dominant. This kind of dictionary is perhaps one of the best sources to trace the sound of words as they were spoken in the old days since it categorizes almost all Chinese words according to their vowels and tones. I found that ‘jade’ is supposed to sound, more or less, as ‘yourk’ of

the entering tone, but definitely not ‘yu’ of the falling tone, as it is in Mandarin. The word ‘taro’, however, is in the same classification of 遇(yu)of the falling tone.

I was gratified by my little discovery. It led me to respect dialects a great deal more than I used to, because it brought me closer to my cultural heritage. Although Mandarin is chosen to be our communicative language, dialects help me to realize that the nature and meanings of Chinese words have not been altered or lost even if the enunciation of these words is drastically different. Furthermore, dialects make it possible for me to feel the original rhythm of classical essays as well as enjoy the rhymes of classical poems. Now, I feel I can ape my lecturer by saying, “Chinese language is great in spite of its having been splintered into numerous dialects, not because of it.”

玉与芋

大学一年级上英文课，我回答教授一句问话的时候，用了一个双关字，倒也博来同学们的一些嘻嘻笑声。可是教授只冷冷的瞧了我一眼，尖酸的说：“莎士比亚的伟大并不是因为他词章中有双关语，而是因为他虽然有了双关语，却仍未曾妨碍他的伟大。”

他这几句话，到今天还清清楚楚地在我耳边作响，可是我那喜欢双关语的毛病，却怎么样也没有被他治好。尤其是华文里的双关语，因为汉语是单音字，所以同音而不同意的字也特别多。红楼梦里面便有一个用双关语的笑话，我觉得不但风雅有趣，而且可以用来解释方言的如何有助于汉语的研究。

这一个双关笑话是贾宝玉说的。那时他正来到林黛玉的卧房，嗅到一股香味，问黛玉烧了什么香，用了什么香水，黛玉说没有。可是她刚吃完了午饭，沉沉欲眠，宝玉怕她吃完饭就睡，会阻碍消化，便骗着她说刚听来一个奇怪的新闻。

他说在黛山的林子洞内，居了一群耗子。那晚刚巧是十二月七日，耗子领袖便召集会议，他说：“各位，明天是十二月八日，我们也要学学人间风俗：煮一锅腊八粥吧。（相传佛祖在十二月八号悟道，所以年年这个时候，一般人煮各种素果五谷庆贺，谓之腊八粥）。可是我们粮食不够，总要想办法去偷一点来才行。”

有一只耗子就报告，说附近庙里便藏有许多腊八粥的配料。老耗子便问他：“有那几种米谷和水果呢？”

“他们米和豆类都很多，可是果子只有五种，便是红枣，栗子，莲仁，花生和香芋。”

老耗子听了很高兴，就问那个耗子去偷那一种米食果类，结果样样都有一只耗子自愿负责去办了，只剩了最后的香芋，还没有耗子愿意去偷。

一个很娇很弱的小耗子说道：“我愿意去偷香芋”。别的耗子看了他那娇嫩的样子，都不许他去冒险，可是他辩说道：“我有本领呢，你们别看我年轻弱小，就以为我不能偷东西，其实我也不用去硬偷，因为我学会了魔术，只要我把自已变成香芋，谁也看不出我是耗子，那么到了香芋堆里，施用搬运法，就一只一只的香芋给我搬回洞里了。”（究竟魔术如何应用，无关紧要，所以从来也没有人加以解释。）

“我们不相信你有这样的本领，”别的耗子说，“你先变成个香芋给我们瞧瞧吧。”

小耗子果然摇身一变，变成个年轻美丽的小姑娘。耗子们哄然大笑，说道：“变错了，要你变香芋呀，没人叫你变成个小姑娘。”

那小耗子又变回原来面目，埋怨着别的耗子：“我就知道你们都没见过世面呢！你们不知道，真正又香又美的香玉，就是林家大小姐黛玉呀。”

这故事里起先讲的黛山林洞，已是双关了，但真正的双关语，则在故事结尾，其实是三方面的。“玉”和“芋”同音，但将“香”放“玉”和“芋”上面，宝玉却在嘲笑林黛玉身上发出的香味呢。而且宝玉本人也是“玉”，可是他指名“香玉”，便只指黛玉而不包括他自己了。

我第一次看这一段故事时，却觉得这个双关语，并不怎么高明，因为在我说的上海与长沙方言中，玉和芋根本不同声不同音。到了后来，学会了华语，才知道这两个字的声音完全相同。我只道是我的方言比不上人家北京话，也就把这事忘怀了。

可是，搬来东南亚居留之后，却惊喜地发现这一地区的方言，如福建话，潮州话，海南话，客家话，广东话等等，也没有一种话可以将玉和芋说得相同的。在这些方言中，若玉不是发音象 Gee，便是象 Yourk 或 Ngok，都是入声，而非华语里的属于去声。

为了想更懂得多一点这些字的发音，我去搬了诗韵大字典出来。这诗韵编撰的年代早过北京话的被胡音所侵，它可能是查阅古音的最好书籍了，因为它的分类是以字的音与声作标准，所以可以在某一个字的同类字中，多少找出一点昔日的音声来。我找出来“玉”是类似 Yourk，属入声，而非今日华语内与芋同是去声的 yu。

得了这小小发现，我有点沾沾自喜，因为这发现使我对于方言多了三分认识，不是吗，方言使我对于古音，多增了一层认识。虽然华语已经被选为我们的交谈工具，但方言却使我明白中国文字并没有因为发音的不相同，而失去了或歪曲了原字的意义，何况方言还能够帮助我们研究古文的节律，和欣赏古诗的音韵呢。现在我觉得我也可以学我那教授一样，酸溜溜来一句：“华文的伟大，并不是因为各种方言读出来的音不同，而是因为发音虽然不同，却未曾阻碍华文的发展，

而妨碍其伟大。”

What's in a Name?

I am grateful to my father for giving me a simple surname. The worst anyone can do to my name is to Anglicize it by spelling it as Lee, making me an instant relative to Robert E. Lee and the famous strip-tease dancer Gypsy Rose Lee.

Of course, I too had my moments of trials and tribulations, for instance, it was never easy for me to make an airline booking in New York by phone.

“Yes, we’ve a seat for you,” chirped the gentle voice on the other side of the line. “May I have your name?”

“The name is Li,” I replied, adding hastily, “L-i.”

“O, I see, Lie.”

“No, no,” I said. “It’s Li, not Lie.”

“Very well, L-e-e, Lee.”

“No,” I said in desperation, “it is not L-e-e, It’s Li”

“Then its Lie...”

This could go on for five irritating minutes. I always thought during those moments, that these girls should have a Hanyu Pinyin dictionary next to their elbows.

But Hanyu Pinyin can also get people into trouble. Look at what happened to Mr Goh, Mrs Wei, and Miss Tan.

Mr Goh was introduced at a cocktail party to a stranger who spoke excellent Mandarin. “Goh?” mused the stranger, “is that the same Guo(郭)in Guo Ziyi(郭子仪)?”

“I’ve never met that gentleman,” answered Mr Goh whose knowledge of Chinese history was left behind in the classroom when he was promoted to Secondary Two.

“I see,” cried the stranger, “it must be the same Ge(葛) as in Zhu-ge Kung Ming!(诸葛孔明)A rather uncommon surname, but my cousin recently married a Ge.”

“I...I don’t know him either, or your cousin,” Mr Goh fumbled for or words. “My name is G-o-h, Goh.”

The stranger whipped out a pocket edition of a Hanyu Pinyin dictionary and looked for “Goh”. No such word. He looked crestfallen, but immediately his face brightened up. “Ah,” he exclaimed, “You...Japanese, no?”

Mrs Wei fared no better. She spoke fairly good Mandarin but nevertheless she had a difficult time in Beijing finding her husband.

“Please ask Mr Wei to step out from the conference,” she pleaded to the soldier standing guard outside the room. “Tell him I have something urgent to ask him.”

The soldier checked his list. “There’s no Mr Wei(魏)at this conference,” he said,

having been properly brought up in Hanyu Pinyin.

“Oh, I forgot!” Mrs Wei remembered in time she was in China. “His name should really be Mr Huang.”

“What do you mean?” asked the soldier, tightening his grip on his pistol. “Don’t you know your own husband’s name?”

“Of course I do,” answered an indignant Mrs Wei. “His name is Wei Kwong Lan. Now, young man, just pop inside and tell him to come out.”

“I’ll do no such thing until I’m sure who you are,” said the faithful guard. “Let’s see your passport.” The little red book was grudgingly handed over. The soldier looked at the front page. “It says you are Lucy Wei.

“You’re so right,” replied Mrs Wei, holding her head high.

“But I’ve just told you there is no Mr Wei in this conference.” Just at this time, a lieutenant walked over. The soldier came to attention.

“What’s the trouble, soldier?” asked the lieutenant.

“This woman claims to be Mrs Huang, but her passport says she is a Mrs Wei.”

The lieutenant also looked at the passport. “I see,” he said, but he did not see at all. “Better take her to the guard room where I can interrogate her.” They interrogated her for two hours until her husband emerged from the conference and found her weeping.

“They refuse to believe I can be Mrs Wei and still be Mrs Huang,” sobbed Mrs Wei to her husband.

Mr Wei already had a tough time negotiating whatever he was supposed to be negotiating and his patience was wearing thin. He glared at the two Chinese and fumed: “For your information, young men, from where I come, she can be also Mrs Wee, Mrs Oei, Mrs Wei, Mrs Ong, Mrs Wong, as well as Mrs Huang.”

The soldier gaped. He stared at Mrs Wei and exclaimed, “Lord, I didn’t know you were that popular!”

Miss Tan’s case was somewhat different. She was discussing her boyfriends with her father one fine afternoon when the Singapore rain was making the trees green. “I think I’ll marry Robert,” she speculated.

“Robert Chan?” asked her father idly, “but you can’t, you know. He has the same last name as ours.”

“But he doesn’t!” protested Miss Tan.

“Of course he does. Tan is 陈, and Chan is also 陈.”

“No!” exclaimed Miss Tan, picking out her Hanyu Pinyin from the shelf. “I’ll show you. Tan is 谭, and Chan is 单.”

“Don’t be absurd,” said her father, annoyed. “Don’t I know my own surname?”

“Well, look for yourself,” retorted Miss Tan, tossing the book into her father’s lap. “I say, Pop, you’re behind times.” Judging from her tone anyone could deduce she was English-educated.

Her father threw away the book. “I don’t need any book to tell me what my surname is. I tell you, it is 陈.” This time, he said it in Mandarin.

Miss Tan picked up the book from the floor and turned to the page she wanted. “I’ll show you. 陈 is Chen. See for yourself.”

Her father was so exasperated that he walked towards the door. “Why don’t you marry someone else?” he complained. “Why not Edward? Why not Peter? Albert is a fine boy too.”

“What?” cried Miss Tan. “You prefer your grandchildren to be known as Ng, Sng, or Tng?”

Her father turned at the door and looked at her with concern. “Do you have a cold? Your sound as if you’ve got a stuffed nose.”

That is why, as a Singaporean Chinese, I distrust Shakespeare when he made Juliet say, “What’s in a name?” Just imagine Juliet leaning over the balcony and whisper, “Oh Lao Miou, Lao Miou, wherefore art thou, Lao Miou? Deny thy father and refuse thy name!” Someone in the audience would gladly stand up and call back, “He already has!”

姓什么？

我应该谢谢我父亲，因为他留给我的姓是这么干脆简单。顶了不起的麻烦也不过是把我的李字用英语拼成 lee，一下子就送了我些亲戚，如美国内战时的大将 Robert E Lee 和出名的脱衣舞红星 Gypsy Rose Lee 等等。

当然，为了这个姓，我也有烦恼的时候，譬如说吧，在纽约用电话向飞机公司订票：

“我们有一个空位子给你，”电话里清脆的声音说：“请告诉我怎么样拼你的姓名，好吗？”

“我姓李，”我说，但又急急地加一句：“L-i。”

“哦，那么是姓赖吧。”

“不，不，”我说，“是李，不是赖。”

“好的，是 L-e-e，李。”

“不！”我发急了，“不是 L-e-e，是 L-i。”

“那不就是赖吗？”

这样拉锯战的谈话可以维持五分钟之久。我一直在想，这些人该有一本汉音拼音字典在手边。

可是汉音拼音也会搞出麻烦来，吴先生，黄太太和陈小姐便都因此而庸人自扰。

吴先生在鸡尾酒会遇到一个华语说得极好的陌生人。“Goh？”他想了一想，“那是郭子仪的郭吧？”

“我没见过那位郭先生，”吴先生说，在升高二那年，他便把中国历史遗忘在课室里了。

“啊，”那陌生人想了起来，“一定是诸葛孔明里的葛了，这个姓很少有，不过，我有个堂妹就嫁了个姓葛的。”

“我，我也不认识他们，”吴先生相当窘促地说，“我姓 Goh，是 G-o-h。”

那陌生人从袋里抽出一本袖珍汉语拼音，找 G-o-h。糟糕，没有这个字！他沮丧的犹疑了一下，但立刻恍然大悟的指着吴先生说：“哦——你是日本人，是吗？”

黄太太的经验更惨。她说得一口流利而不十分标准的华语，但偏偏就是在北京，她被人阻止和她的丈夫相会。

“请你进去会议室，”她对门外守卫的兵说，“把黄(Wei)先生找出来，我有重要的事和他商量。”

那卫兵仔细的审查了名单，“可是没有魏(Wei)先生在开会呀。”他的汉音拼音倒顶熟哪。

“哦，我忘了，”黄太太这才想起她在中国，“他其实是姓黄。”

“这是怎么回事？”那卫兵把手抓紧了枪，“难道你连自己丈夫的姓也不知道吗？”

“当然我知道，”黄太太很不高兴的说，“他叫做黄光兰，现在你可以跑进去叫他出来了吧！”

“我才不哪。你究竟是什么人，我还不知道呢！”那忠于职守的守卫说，“拿你的护照来给我看。”于是那本小红本子在炊燥中交了给他。卫兵看了第一页。

“你叫 Lucy Wei 呀。”

“我不是跟你说了吗？”黄太太理直气壮的说。

“可是我不也早告诉你，开会的没有姓魏(Wei)的人吗！”

正在那时候，一个下尉走过。卫兵立正敬礼。下尉问：“有什么麻烦吗？”

“这个女人说她是黄太太，可是她的护照说她是魏太太。”

那下尉也翻了翻护照。“我懂得了，”他说，其实他什么也没懂。“把她带到卫兵室去，我来审问她。”他们审问了她两小时，一直到黄先生从会议室出来，发现一个哭哭啼啼的太太在等着他。

“他们怎么样也不肯相信，”黄太太哽咽着说，“我这个黄(Wei)太太，也就是黄(Huang)太太。”

黄先生开了一天的会议，已经瘪了一肚子的闷气了，实在再也忍不住的怒瞪着两个守卫，大声说道：“你们懂什么？在我来的地方，她不但是黄(Huang)太太，还可以是 Wee 太太，Oei 太太，Wei 太太，Ong 太太，Wong 太太哪。”

那卫兵骇得嘴也合不拢了。他盯着黄太太说道：“天啊，我还真想不到你这么讨人欢喜哪！”

陈小姐的情形又不一样。在一个半晴的下午，微雨正淋得新加坡的树更绿的

时候，她懒散的和她的父亲讨论她的男朋友。“我想我就嫁了给罗柏吧，”她说。

“陈罗柏？”她父亲随口回答，“那不行呀，你知道他的姓和我们的相同，照例是不该通婚的。”

“他的姓并不和我们的相同！”陈小姐反对着说。

“当然相同啰！Tan 是陈，Chan 也是陈。”

“不！”陈小姐大声嚷道，从书架上取出汉音拼音字典出来。“我找给你看吧，Tan 是姓谭，Chan 是姓单。”

“别胡闹！”她爸爸恼火地说：“难道我还不知道我自己姓什么吗？”

“那你就拿去看吧，”陈小姐把书扔在她爸爸膝上，“我说呀，爸爸，你没追上新时代呢！“任何人一听这口气，便可以猜出陈小姐是受英文教育的。

她爸爸气狠狠地把书扔开。“我不用什么鬼书来告诉我姓什么！我对你说，我姓陈。”这一次他用华语说了“陈”字。

陈小姐从地上把书捡起来，翻到她要的那一页：“呐，我给你看啦，Chen 才是陈呢。”

她的父亲怒冲冲地走出房间，一面走一面嘀咕着说，“不如另外选个人嫁吧？亚华如何？彼德如何？艾柏也是个好孩子呀。”

“那怎么行？”陈小姐嘟着嘴说，“你想你的外孙儿女姓 Ng, Sng 或 Tng 吗？”

她父亲在门边回过头来，皱着眉，关怀地问道：“你伤风了吗？怎么鼻子好象塞住了似的？”

所以，身为新加坡华人，我对于莎士比亚说的：“名字有什么关系？”不很乐意接受。如果朱丽叶在那阳台上，轻轻的念道：“哦，老秘呕，老秘呕，为什么你的名字是老秘呕？否认你的父亲，拒绝你的名字吧！”观众中一定会有人站起来嚷道：“这他不早改了吗？”

Drinking Vinegar

Since I never had much chance eating shark's fin, so naturally when I did have the opportunity, I poured a great deal of vinegar into my bowl to enjoy the full flavour.

"Hey, you're drinking too much vinegar!" said Mr Chan, who always thought himself witty.

Mr Lau joined in the fun. "Anyone paying attention to your spouse to make you so jealous?" They made ha-ha-ha noises.

Mrs Lau was more kind. She advised me, "Drinking vinegar doesn't help a marriage, as I suppose you know."

Everyone at the table laughed as if it was a funny joke. "Come on," I said, "it is such an old and stale joke. I'm sick and tired of hearing it every time I show a preference for vinegar."

"It is an old joke," conceded Mrs Teo. "Funny how it means the same thing in all the dialects." She turned to Mr Lau, "Don't you agree?"

"Come to think of it," reflected Mr Lau, "yes."

"Of course, it does," I said, wearily. "I understand it dates way back before we even had dialects."

"I wonder why," mused Mr Lau. "Do you suppose it is because jealousy leaves a sour taste in one's mouth and thus being jealous is known as 'drinking vinegar'?"

"Could be," said Mrs Teo, wrinkling her nose. "The English say 'she is green with envy', don't they? I suppose it is the same thing, since green is the colour of lime and lime tastes sour."

"But," objected Mrs Lau, "lemon is yellow."

"It has nothing to do with colour or lime or lemon," I said, chewing my shark's fin.

"Then I'm right," Mr Lau congratulated himself. "It is because jealousy tastes sour."

"You should know," teased Mrs Teo.

"Maybe," I said slowly. "But I think, if I'm right, it's from an old bit of Chinese history."

"Really?" "You don't say!" "No!" echoed a few voices. "Do tell us."

"Mind you," I replied cautiously, "I'm not sure of my source. I just know I read it somewhere."

"Tell us anyway," urged Mr Chan, who disliked books anyway. "Who ever cares about research at the dinner table?"

"Well, it took place in the Warring States, I think." I tilted my head, trying to

remember.

“That would be three thousand years ago,” said Mr Chan, doing some rapid calculations.

“I guess so.” I spooned up the last of my shark’s fin. “There was a high ranking official, let’s call him Mr A, who was deadly afraid of his wife. In fact, a real hen-pecked husband.”

Mr Teo laughed. His wife gave him a stern look. “What’s so funny about that?” she demanded. “If there are women who are afraid of their husbands, naturally there are men who are afraid of their wives.”

“I get it,” nodded Mr Chan. “He was afraid of his wife because she was the jealous type.”

I glanced at Mrs Chan before I replied. “Let’s say she loved him so much that she couldn’t bear the thought of his being with another woman. Before long, this bit of news reached the king’s ear.”

“Trust people to gossip about things like that,” cried Mrs Teo. “Men can never leave alone a hen-pecked husband. They must taunt him until he behaves just like the other men.” Everyone laughed.

“I’m not hen-pecked,” said Mr Teo, making a face.

“How did the king feel about it?” said Mr Chan, coming to Mr Teo’s rescue.

“The king, with his thousands of royal concubines, of course thought it was against human nature for a man to have only one woman,” I said.

“The one bee and many flowers theory,” sneered Mrs Lau.

“That’s right. So he told Mr A, in the presence of all his courtiers, to choose one of the royal serving maids to be his concubine.”

“A royal gift,” remarked Mr Teo with envy.

“But Mr A refused,” I said. All the women’s faces cleared up. “The king was annoyed. He said, ‘I order you to pick one.’ Still, Mr A refused, Mr A refused. ‘If you’re too scared to choose, then I’ll choose one for you,’ said the king.”

“The busybody!” said Mrs Teo, pouting.

“I agree with you,” I said, diplomatically. “But Mr A still refused, so a beautiful young girl was chosen by the king, who thought one look at the girl and Mr A’s blood would boil and therefore be courageous enough to defy his wife.”

“I bet he did,” smirked Mr Teo. His wife threw him an icy look that was not lost on the friends.

“No, he didn’t. So the king thought he must strike the problem at its root. He sent

for Mrs A.”

“The poor woman!” moaned Mrs Lau.

“The king said to Mrs A, ‘Here I have a beautiful young girl picked to be your husband’s concubine. If you allow him to take her home, I shall reward you with pearls, diamonds and gold!’”

“That did it,” laughed Mr Chan. “No woman can resist that much wealth.”

“You’re wrong,” I said. “Mrs A still refused. The king was, by then, furious. ‘Do you know that disobedience to your king is punishable by death?’ he screamed at her. ‘If you really do not want your husband to have another woman, then die for your decision. Here is a bowl of poison. If you drink it, I personally will see to it that your husband will never get another woman even after your death.’ What would you ladies have done under the same circumstances?”

Mrs Teo shrugged. “I’d let him have his woman, I guess. But I’d sure fix her after we left the king’s presence!”

Mrs Chan said nothing, but Mrs Lau answered quickly: “I would throw the poison at the king’s face! That would teach him not to meddle in someone else’s affairs.”

“What did she do?” said Mr Teo, thinking it best to keep everything on an impersonal level.

“Without one word, without even a glance at her husband, Mrs A picked up the bowl and drank it in one gulp.”

“Silly woman!” said Mrs Chan, “to die for a thing like that.”

“But she didn’t die! You see, that’s exactly the point. The so-called poison was actually a bowl of vinegar. This is why, in all Chinese dialects, ‘drinking vinegar’ means to be jealous.”

“How possessive this woman was!” groaned Mr Chan.

“But how much she loved her husband!” said Mrs Chan.

I pushed the bottle toward her. “Have some vinegar, Mrs Chan. It helps digestion.”

吃醋

吃鱼翅的机会不多，所以每逢到有这样的好运气，我一定不客气的大洒其醋，准备尽量享受。

“喂，你醋喝得太多了！”陈先生说，他一向以为他很幽默呢。

刘先生也跟着笑：“怎么哪？是谁弄得你这样吃醋呀。”

刘太太比较心地善良些，她告诉我：“你总知道吧，吃醋对于婚姻，不会带来幸福。”

在桌上的几个人都笑了，似乎话说得很滑稽。我不耐烦地说：“算了吧，这种笑话已经够老够臭了。每次我喝点醋就听见人家这么说，我听都听得烦了。”

“那倒也是，”张太太说，“奇怪的是无论在那一种方言，吃醋都是同一个意思。她回首对刘先生说：“你说是吗？”

“给你这么一说，”刘先生想了一想，“没错呀。”

“当然嘛，”我懒懒地说：“在没有发展到有方言的时候，已经有这种说法了。”

“为什么呢？”刘先生疑惑地问：“是不是因为心怀嫉意的时候，口中便有点酸味，好象是吃了醋一样呢？”

张太太皱着眉头说：“也许是的吧，英语里不常说：‘妒嫉得变了绿色吗？’大概是同样的理由，因为酸柑不是绿色的吗？而且也酸。”

“不见得吧，柠檬便是黄颜色的。”

我吞下一口鱼翅：“跟颜色，酸柑，柠檬，都没有关系。”

“那还是我对，”刘先生得意地说，“因为妒嫉有一股酸味。”

“你的经验很多吧，”张太太指着他说。

“可能你是对的，”我慢吞吞地说：“可是我记得历史上有过这么一个小故事。”

“真的吗？”“说给我们听吧！”几个声音一起说着。

“老实说，”我谨慎地答道：“连我也记不得是那里看见过的了，我只是依稀地有点印象。”

“管它呢，”陈先生说，他一向不爱看书的，“吃饭桌上！还有谁逼着你做学术研究哪！”

“好吧，”我歪着头说，“大概是战国的时候。”

“那不是三千年前的事吗？”陈先生算得很快。

“差不多吧，”我说，一面吞下最后一羹鱼翅，“那时候，有一个大官，我们叫他做甲先生吧，他怕老婆怕得要死。”

张先生听了便笑起来，张太太狠狠地盯了他一眼，“这有什么好笑？世界上有怕丈夫的女人，当然也会有怕老婆的男人。”

“我明白了，”陈先生说，“这个人的妻子常常妒嫉别的女人，所以他才怕她。”

我瞧了陈先生一眼，然后说道：“还不如说是她爱她的丈夫，爱得不想他和别的女人在一起吧。总之，没有多久，连做国王的也知道有这么一回事了。”

张太太狠狠地说：“说闲话的人最喜欢说这一类的事。男人们就看不惯一个所谓怕老婆的人，他们总要把他也弄得和人一样才高兴。”

“我可并不怕老婆呀，”张先生说，一面做一个鬼脸。

“那么那国王怎么办呢？”陈先生立刻替张先生解围。

“国王自己有上千的妃子”，我说道：“他当然认为只有一个女人是不合情理的事。”

“哼！”刘太太说：“又是那一只蜜蜂应该采许多花的理论吧！”

“是呀。所以他在众人面前，吩咐甲先生从他的宫女之中，选一个出来做姨太太。”

“皇上赐的礼物呀！”张先生羡慕的说。

“可是甲先生不肯呢，”我说道，桌上的几个太太们的面色和缓了一点。“国王生气了，他说，‘我命令你选一个’，那甲先生仍是不肯。国王说：‘好吧，你自己不敢选，我就替你选一个吧。’”

“就是爱管别人闲事！”张太太噘着嘴说。

“我和你一样想法，”我说，用尽了我的外交手段，“可是那甲先生仍是不肯。于是国王选了一个宫女，把她送到甲先生面前，他以为甲先生一看了美女，血都会沸荡了，也就会有勇气反抗妻子了。”

“我敢打赌他会！”张先生歪着嘴笑，张太太冷冷地瞧着他的神情，大家都看见了。

“可是他并没有改变主意，国王一想，解铃还需系铃人，所以他使人去叫甲太太来。”

“可怜！”刘太太叹一口气说。

“国王对甲太太说：‘我这里已经选了一个年轻的美女给你的丈夫做姨太太，如果你许他纳妾的话，我一定赐你珍珠，钻石，黄金’。”

“这一下行了，”陈先生哈哈大笑，“没有一个女人能够拒绝这么多财富。”

“你猜错了，”我说道：“甲太太仍是不肯，到了那时候，国王可真恼火啦，他嚷了起来：‘不从君命，是可以判死罪的，你知道吗？如果你真的不肯让你的丈夫娶小老婆，那么你就得死。这里有一碗毒药，如果你把毒药喝下去，那么我就服了你，我保证你死后，不让你的丈夫娶纳任何女人！’太太们，如果你们处于甲太太的地位，你们会怎样决定？”

张太太耸耸肩，“我就让他娶个姨太太算了，可是等国王瞧不见的时候，我可会给点颜色给她看哪。”

陈太太没有说什么，但刘太太却急急呼道：“我啊？我会把那碗毒药掷在那国王脸上，教训教训他别再管别人的事。”

“你说甲太太怎么样吧。”张先生提醒着我，他大概认为谈话最好不要涉及私人。

“她吗？她一句话也没有说，也不看她丈夫一眼，伸出手来，一口气把碗毒药都喝光了。

“傻瓜！”陈太太说：“为了这样的事而死！”

“但是她并没有死啊！故事的焦点就在这里，原来那碗毒药只不过是碗醋！所以从此以后，什么方言里说人吃醋，就是说人妒嫉。”

“这个女人的占有欲也太强了！”陈先生惋惜地摇摇头。

“可是她多么爱她的丈夫啊！”陈太太赞赏地叹了一口气。

我把瓶子推到她面前：“陈太太，喝点醋吧，它帮助消化呢。”

A Burial

My children's grandmother died. She was a woman I had learned to understand, respect, love and admire after thirty years of knowing her in our best and worst moments.

Grandma, as we all called her, who died at the age of eighty-four, was born before this century began. She was one Singaporean who was never tainted by western influences, and yet, almost illiterate, she was wise in her gracious acceptance of our social changes because her intelligence, coupled with her long years of experiences of life, enabled her to sieve through the moralities of the old world so as to retain what was virtuous and abandon what was irrelevant. This is the legacy she left us.

She was married at the age of eighteen to a man who was a complete stranger to her. It just so happened that the man was kind and gentle, but it would not have made any difference to her had he been cruel and rough, because she was brought up to believe it was her destined duty to obey and serve him and the family that was his. But from this traditional obedience to male domination, she went further and developed a selfless spirit that transferred her love for the family to those not even related to her.

All who had come into contact with her, from fishmongers and vegetable peddlers to drivers and servants, received her concern and care. But she particularly loved the three grandchildren who were orphaned, before the oldest of them was six, when their father suddenly died. There were others who were younger, stronger and healthier who should have taken over the responsibility of raising these children, but Grandma, without ever having heard of child psychology, knew instinctively that no one else could have given them the kind of undivided love and attention she was able to give, although she was, at that time, already sixty-six years old - an age when most people are supposed to reap the fruits of their labours.

How does one mourn a grand old lady of such courage, tenacity and selflessness? Some said there should be no grief she had lived to a ripe old age. Some felt, as I did, that because we all since had grown so accustomed, for so long, to glory in her love, the void resulting from her absence was so enormous that we did not know how to grasp the reality of her death.

The old and young generations disagreed over the funeral arrangements so compromises and more compromises were repeatedly made. No Taoist priests, no mumbo jumbo of monks, and no grotesque wooden coffin. Nevertheless, a canvas tent was erected, and red chairs and rickety tables dotted the lawn, while her casket of shining bronze lay in the living room where she used to sit and wait for the return of

her children and grandchildren. Two tall red candles and an urn for joss sticks were placed in front of her photograph. I quietly laid a small china plate, bought sometime ago by her granddaughter, bearing the words “I love you, Grandma” beneath the urn. After a while, I noticed someone had put a small twig of orchids in the little vase that went with the plate. At the same time, her daughters and other middle-aged relatives, looking like crows in their black clothes, were busy wrapping coins in red and white paper, explaining that these were necessary for our guests to ward off “bad luck”. Did they truly believe that death was a matter of luck?

For some reason, the ground was not allowed to be swept and the room tidied, so peanut shells and candy wrappers were strewn all over the place while iced bottles of carbonated drinks left their stained rings on the cheap table cloth. Curry and bread were served, like a picnic. I wondered who would be hungry.

People came, lit their joss sticks, bowed, received their coins, and retired to the tent to talk. They either asked about last moments of her life, probing into the painful memories of the family, or they discussed among themselves their children, their fortunes, and their real or imaginary illnesses, while the family members walked amidst them, restless and unconsolated, dazed and numbed, as if they knew not what they were searching for.

I sat apart from the crowd and thought my own thoughts. Why could we not have quiet and dignified funeral parlours where the carpets could at least absorb some of the noises and prevent them from disturbing the peace of her everlasting rest, where no peanut shells or candy wrappers could desecrate the dignity of death, and where the bereaved family could comfort one another without the curious watching eyes of acquaintances?

Finally the day of the funeral arrived. We found we had no precedent to follow. To have a minister in black saying “dust unto dust” at Grandma’s graveside was unthinkable since she was never a Christian. To be led by psuedo-Taoist priests to burn paper money and hang paper lanterns would be repulsive and not what Grandma would have wanted. Then, how were we to say farewell to someone who had loved us and whom we had all loved?

After eight of her grandsons had been assigned to serve as pallbearers, we walked aimlessly around, frustrated at our inability to express how we felt. Impulsively, my niece suggested that we plucked flowers from all the wreaths which had been tokens of condolences. Suddenly this gathering of flowers became the only meaningful gesture for all of us. We collected only the flowers, discarding the bamboo sticks, the palm

leaves, the ferns or anything that was hard and prickly. In the hours we waited, we had collected enough roses, orchids, carnations and chrysanthemums to fill up many boxes and plastic bags.

Our procession quietly arrived at the cemetery. Another family had not yet ended their burying of the dead. I saw a yellow-robed priest, chanting incomprehensible words, while swinging a rooster in the air, which he threw to one of his assistants who threw it to another, until it came back to the first man, who took out a knife and slit its throat. Blood spurted and dribbled onto the coffin laid inside the grave. I turned my face away. When I looked again, the widow and her two small children were following the orders of the priests to dab blood on themselves, burn paper money, kowtow and remove their mourning cloth made of rough jute. The expression on their faces - stunned, desolated, bewildered and intimidated - made my heart ache. I turned my face away again. Why? Why do some Singaporeans allow themselves to be dictated by such superstitious “traditions” which even peasants in China have ceased to believe in?

When our turn came to bury Grandma, we did our best to ignore the ugly mound of mud around the gaping hole. Flowers we had gathered were thrown in to make a floral carpet to receive the casket which was laid on it in silence. More colourful flowers were strewn in to wrap around the casket snugly. Finally, one by one, we stepped forward to say our goodbyes with our flowers: some with a single stalk of yellow chrysanthemums, some with bouquets of red carnations, some with a kiss lingering on the petals of an orchid before giving it up, and some with tears running down into the heart of the roses, reluctant to let them drop. In our own way, we told her that we would always love her and miss her.

As we were leaving, another burial party arrived with blaring tin horns and deafening drums. Yellow-robed priests wearing ridiculous hats jumped from the trucks, presumably to kill more roosters and to sprinkle more blood in their magical attempt to ward off bad luck.

I took one last look at Grandma’s grave, covered now with our flowers and wreaths, and I wondered if any of us could live up to the challenge she had given us in her legacy. While she lived, she could break away from the tradition of preferring male descendants to respect the roles of her granddaughters, and she could turn from the traditional prejudice of distrusting strangers to care for, even to trust, butchers and servicemen. If a woman born of the last century could have the wisdom and courage to discard the superstitions and ugliness of the old world without losing her own integrity and dignity in the face of the changing world, then why cannot those of us Singaporeans who are

not Christians, Buddhists or Taoists, and who are culturally half Western and half Oriental, do what Grandma did? - to cut us off from the inapplicable and irrelevant part of our "tradition" so that we could be free to experiment and search for a ceremony in the burial of our loved ones - a ceremony of our own that could bring peace and serenity to the living members of the family who must need tranquility and comfort - not punishment - to go on with life.

葬

孩子们的祖母死了。和她相处了三十多年，共同体会过无数甜蜜与辛酸的经历，我对她由认识而增加了解，而进入尊敬，而最后从心的深处，发出爱慕。

人人都叫她阿婆，她活了八十四岁，算来该诞生于廿世纪尚未开始之前，她的确是一个未被西洋文化所染污的新加坡人。但是，虽然她认识的字寥寥无几，她却能聪敏而理智的接受社会的改革，因为她天生的智力加上悠久的人生经验，使她能够自动地从旧时代的道德观念中，选出贤良的，屏弃了恶劣的，而基本上不动摇的迎接新社会。这是她留下给我们的遗训。

在她十八岁的时候，她被父亲嫁配了一个她从未晤面的陌生人。阿婆的运气好，因为碰巧这个陌生人的性格仁慈温和，不过，就算是他的脾气粗暴冷酷，阿婆还是会同样的服从他，伺候他，为他和他的儿孙服务。因为这是她幼年所受的教诲。可是由这三从四德的观念中，阿婆进一步地养成了忘我无私的精神。她能够将丈夫和儿女的爱，扩大了而带给许多家庭之外的人。

凡是跟阿婆接近过的人，从鱼贩菜贩以及车夫佣人，都受过她的关心与怜爱。可是她后半生所最痛惜的是三个从小便没有父母的孙儿孙女。当他们的父亲逝世时，他们之中最长的仅六岁。那时，有些比阿婆更年轻力壮的人，应该负起教养他们的责任。可是从未听过儿童心理学这名词的阿婆，虽然自己已是六十六岁，在别人应该是闲坐享福不理事的年纪了，却直觉地知道没有任何人，能够象她一样，给予这三个脆弱的孤儿，她那种不分心的关怀与慰藉。风烛残年的阿婆将三个孩子养育了十八个艰苦辛难的年头。

一个如此有勇气，有毅力，而又爱护备至的老太太逝世了，我们应该怎样悼念她呢？有些人说她长寿，所以我们不该为她悲哀。另外有些象我的人，却正是因为她长寿，使我们过于习惯了她对我们的爱护，所以面对了她死后所产生的空虚，反而更不知如何把握死亡的现实。

为了丧事的安排，老一辈的和小一辈的有不同的意见，只好不停地互相妥协，道士是不雇用的了，也没有和尚的念经和敲木鱼。而且决定不采用那种看了恐怖的旧式木棺。但是花园里仍是搭起帆布的篷帐，帐下安置了红得刺目的椅子与摇摇欲坠的木桌。阿婆永眠在色泽鲜明的紫铜灵柩里，但却停放在她平日坐着等候

儿孙们回家的客厅中。两支红烛，一顶香炉，摆设在她的照片之前。我将她孙女买的一只小磁盘，上面写着“阿婆我爱你”的，轻轻地放在香炉的下面，过了一会，不知是谁插了一支三寸长的小兰花在磁盘边的小花瓶内。可是她那些穿了黑衣的女儿和亲戚，却闲聊着的忙着包裹钱币在红色与白色的纸包内。据说这是可以为吊丧的人们消除厄运的。难道她们真的相信死亡是一种运气吗？

因为不许扫地，所以地上到处是剥出来的花生壳与撕出来的包糖纸衣。粗陋的白桌布上尽是三天内留下来冷饮杯瓶的水渍。竟然还有咖喱和面包做宵夜，好象是野餐。我问着自己，是谁会饿呢？

来吊丧的人们来了，烧了香，鞠了躬，收了红白纸包着的钱币，便退下去坐在帐篷的椅桌旁。他们若不是讨论阿婆的病，不厌其烦的询问着她最后几分钟的生命，逗引起家人埋在心头的沉痛，便是互相聊天的谈着她们的儿女，钱财，和他们各自的病痛。在这种时候，阿婆的儿孙们彷徨地在他们之间走来走去，没有休息，没有宁静的痛定思痛，只是迷茫而迟钝的，似乎在寻觅而又不知道在搜求什么。

我坐在我的角落里思索着，为什么新加坡没有一间静穆的殡仪馆呢？至少那里会有地毯吸收去各种的喧哗，让死者的安息不被吵扰，也不会有乱扔的花生壳与包糖纸衣来破坏死亡的庄严，更可以让死者的亲人互相安慰，而不受好奇者所注视。为什么我们没有殡仪馆呢？

出殡的那一天终于到了，我们才想起还没有规定的仪式可袭用。让一个黑衣的牧师在阿婆的坟头念圣经，是无庸考虑的，因为阿婆不是基督徒，叫一批混饭吃的道士来烧纸钱，挂起低灯笼，是恶心的，也不是阿婆所愿意的。那么我们如何向一个爱过我们，也被我们所爱的阿婆，表示最后告别的情意呢？

我们茫茫地，漫无目标的等候着出殡。阿婆的八个孙子分配了将灵柩提出家门的职事，但是还有什么可做的呢？我的一个侄女忽然提议把送来花圈上的鲜花摘下来，于是这摘花成为我们中唯有有意义的行动。我们只摘柔和的花朵，屏弃了任何刺硬的如竹枝和椰叶。在等候出殡的一小时内，无数的玫瑰，康乃馨，菊花；和各种色味的剑兰与胡姬，被满满地塞在许多临时收集的纸匣与胶袋内。

默然地到了坟地时，另一批人还没有结束他们的葬礼。一个黄色短衣的道士正举起一只雄鸡，在空中挥动着，他喃喃有词的将雄鸡掷向另一个道士。掷来掷

去之后，第一个道士用刀将雄鸡的喉管切断，鲜血涌出，流入穴中，我不忍观看地转开了头。等我回过头来时，只见寡妇与孤儿麻木地听从着道士的命令，蘸血在脸上，烧纸钱，磕头，除去麻衣等等，她们那悲痛而不知所措，听人摆布的表情，使我心酸的不忍再看，同时我心中呼着，为什么？为什么新加坡人要服从迷信的传统，一个连中国农民也已经不相信的所谓传统呢？

我们安放阿婆的时间到了。尽量的忽视那张开了口的空穴，和洞旁乱堆着的烂泥，我们将摘来的鲜花铺了一些下去，砌成了一层花瓣的地毡，静默地落下棺材，又将五颜六色的花朵散布在棺材的上面，使阿婆的四周都围绕了柔软的鲜花，最后，轮流的，我们每一个人走前用花向她告别。有的人掷入一枝瘦长的黄菊花，有的人送她一束深红的康乃馨，有的人轻吻了手中的剑兰，然后掷入穴中，有的人把泪洗着玫瑰花心，舍不得将花放下。我们个别地对阿婆说，我们将永远爱她，怀念她。

在我们未离去之前，另一批下葬的人打着锣鼓，吹着号角地来了，黄衣道士，戴了奇妙的道冠从货车上跳下来，想来也带着雄鸡，准备用血来念咒吧。

我回首呆望着阿婆的坟，一坯黄土被花圈所遮盖了，我问着自己。我们能不能够挑起阿婆所留给我们遗训中的责任呢？阿婆在世的时候，她能打破重男轻女的传统，而保卫她孙女们的权利，她能够击碎歧视他乡人士的恶习，而关怀任何屠夫走卒。如果一个生于十九世纪的妇人能够在适应日新月异的大环境之中，有智慧和勇气去拒绝迷信与封建，但仍然保存了她的尊严与人格，那么，为什么我们这些非释非道，半中半西的新加坡人，就不能做得和阿婆一样呢？为什么我们不也屏弃传统中所不合我们采用的，而大胆地去搜求一种适合我们的仪式，一种能够给予死者家属平静与安宁的仪式？因为在“死者死矣，生者何堪”的情况下，葬礼对生者不应该是责罚，而是应该带来安慰，才能帮助他们继续生活在世上。

In Memoriam

Chinese poets, like poets everywhere, love to indulge in their own miseries. It is more difficult to find a Chinese poem that is good but not sad than finding one that is sad but not good.

Thus, it is ironical that one of the most poignant poem I know in Chinese literature should be written by a man whose fame in poetry does not rest upon his demonstration of grief. In fact, this poet, Su Shi, (苏轼) or better known as Su Dong Po (苏东坡), was given the title of ‘The Gay Genius’ by Lin Yutang who wrote his biography, using the word ‘gay’ in its traditional sense and not referring to that manly quality that made San Francisco such a popular city among certain people.

Perhaps it is because Su Dong Po did not work hard at being melancholy that his following poem, in memory of his wife, arouses in us genuine sorrow. To illustrate the terseness and subtlety of the original, which appears in its own glory under the Chinese section, I shall give first a word by word ‘translation’, to be followed by a more readable line by line explanation. One should notice that I have used, by necessity, the words ‘you’ and ‘I’ in my explanation while there is no pronoun at all in the ‘translation’. This is possibly one of the keys to understanding the beauty of Chinese poetry.

Ten years life death, both not knowing,
Never thought measured,
Just difficult forget,
Thousand miles, lonely grave,
No-where talk, sadness, loneliness.
Even if meet, ought not recognize,
Dust over face,
Hair like frost.

Last night, quietly dreamt, suddenly return home
Small lattice window
While combing hair
Facing, looking, no speech, Only have tears, thousand rows.
Expect have year-year heart ache place,
Moon lit night,
Short pine shrubs.

Explanation: Ten years, during which I lived and you died, we had no knowledge of each other. Never did I think deliberately of you, it just so happened that I could not forget. Your lonely grave is thousands of miles away, so where can I go to tell you, or you to me, the sorrows in our hearts? And even if we should meet, how would you recognize me, with my face carved deep by the dust of travel, and my hair frosted by years? Last night I dreamt I had suddenly and quietly returned to our home. There you were, sitting next to the small window, combing your hair. We gazed at each other, not knowing what to say. Between us, there were only those thousand drops of tears. I expect this pang will come again, year after year, whenever there is a moon lit night and I think of the shrubs of low pine behind which you are buried.

Because Chinese poems concentrate on word imageries, a reader must feel the hidden meaning. The opening line is made most beautiful by the use of the word ‘both’(两)in front of ‘not knowing’(茫茫),which immediately makes one feel that he is not writing about his wife, which is more commonly done in verses of this kind, but rather writing to her, as if she is not dead but is still existing somewhere. And that although he knows nothing of her and she knows nothing of him, he has no doubt that she must want to know of him as much as he wants to know of her. We see in these seven words his refusal to accept her death as the end of her existence or the termination of their trusting and mutually reliant relationship. The poet is defiant, but we find his defiance so pitifully sad because we, as well as the poet, do understand with our minds the finality of death but we cannot accept it emotionally.

The second and third line sound as if the poet is repeating to his wife his belligerent answer to some of his well-meaning friends who must have said to him: “It’s been ten years already! Why do you persist in grieving over her? Forget her!” With an exasperated shrug and a bewildered lift of eyebrow, he tells her that he does not dwell on thoughts of her merely to punish himself or for the sake of writing a poem, but because he fails to shake off his memories.

Then he goes on to complain that he is too far away from her grave to talk to her, that he has aged so much that she will not recognize him even if she could see him now. This gentle complaint verges on self-pity, which, if it is poured out to a friend, may seem superfluous, but reads here not only naturally but intimately because to whom else can a man go to be sorry for himself? The feeling of a man speaking to his wife grows stronger. He is saying “I’ve changed, how about you?” and expects to be answered. The more real he makes her, the more painful it will be, for him as well as

for us, when he remembers she is actually dead.

The mood changes in the second half of the verse. He is still talking earnestly to her, the same way anyone who wakes up from a dream will naturally turn to the head resting next to him, but it is in his dream that the reality of death presses upon his subconscious mind, so that even though he is yearning to tell her all that has happened in the last ten years, the knowledge of her death and the pain caused by her death make him speechless. Only with looks and tears can they express their grief in finding and losing each other. He accepts in his dream the meaning of death which he denies in his waking moments.

Reality has won, for the time being, but the poet, who seems now a calmer person, is so much sadder because he has lost his illusion. For the first time in his poem, he is not speaking directly to her. Looking up at the moon, he tells himself, almost mockingly, that the same heartache will come again, year after year, whenever his thoughts fly toward that lonely spot behind the pine shrubs.

Never once is the word 'love' mentioned, nor has the poet given any description of her beauty or any praise of her virtues. This poem is the baring of one soul to another. There is no room for a third person. However, as readers, we do not feel we are the excluded third party because the emotions expressed are applicable to all of us. I weep over these lines because this is how I feel about my sister.

十年生死

咏愁是全世界诗人通有的癖好。在中国诗词中要找一首优而不愁的，还比找一首愁而不优的难些哪。

可是一首常令我鼻酸的词，却偏偏出自一个诗誉非以咏愁为本的人。这首词是苏轼，又名苏东坡所写。他的传记曾被林语堂以“*The Gay Genius*”（快乐的天才）为题，可见得苏东坡的乐观是驰名的。

也许就是因为苏东坡(1036—1101)不是“为赋新词强说愁”，所以他这首悼亡诗反而格外的真挚动人。

十年生死两茫茫，
不思量，
自难忘，
千里孤坟，
无处话凄凉，
纵使相逢应不识，
尘满面，
鬓如霜。

夜来幽梦忽还乡，
小轩窗，
正梳妆，
相顾无言，
唯有泪千行。
料得年年肠断处，
明月夜，
短松岗。

（调寄山坡羊。）

这首词的第一句是我认为最凄哀的。作者将一个“两”字放在“茫茫”之前，便轻易地使我们感到词人把死者也哭活了。“两茫茫”者，不但写出他自己对死者的关怀，而且也写出他之从不怀疑死者对他也同样的关怀。这种以心比心的境

界，使人觉得他的词不是追念死者，而是写给死去了的妻子看。似乎她仍在冥冥之中生存着。虽然他对于她的一切茫然不知，她也不明白他的情况，但他却似乎觉得她之想知道他的心境，一定也像他的想懂得她别后的状况一样。这七个字统括了词人的不相信死亡可以抹煞他妻子的存在，或结束他们夫妻间的敬爱与互相依赖。正因为词人是如此痴情，读者才更觉得文字的凄凉，因为我们不是和他一样，都理智上明白而情感上不能接受死亡是永别吗？

第二三句似乎是词人在转述他对某些朋友的答覆。想来有不少人曾安慰他说：“啊，已经十年了，你还想念她做什么呢？忘了她吧！”所以苏东坡无可奈何地耸耸肩，举起眉毛，告诉他的妻子说，并非为了要写首好词，或是故意惩罚自己，他才专诚地去想念她，而实在是他无法忘怀呀。

然后他带了三分埋怨地告诉妻子，说他离开她的坟太远，使他无从对她谈说满腹的凄凉，又进一步的说，纵使她能见到他，她也不会认得他，因为无情的境遇已经使得他头发尽白，满面风霜了。如果把这种自怜的诉苦对朋友发泄的话，也许会使人烦厌，但在夫妻之间，却读来自然而亲切，因为除了是对妻子发牢骚，一个男人还能找谁呢？他直接和妻子道家常的味道愈来愈浓，他似乎在问：“我变了，你呢？”而且他好象还在等候她答覆哪。词人愈是把死者写得象活人一样，我们就愈能体会他的悲哀：因为我们已料到若是他如此痴念，那么等到他醒悟她已死去的时候，其痛苦该是如何愁肠寸断呀。

从下半阙开始，词人的情绪改变了。虽然他仍是喃喃地把他的梦境告诉她，就象任何丈夫夜半梦醒而诉之于枕边人一样，可是在朦胧的梦中，他却潜意识地感着到死亡的真实性的，因为他虽然想把十年来的经历告诉她，但过去生离死别的滋味，却涌上心头，反而使他一个字也说不出来了。在相对无言中，“唯有泪千行”而已。也就是说，在白昼生活中他所拒绝的死亡，却在梦中被他接受了。

现实终然战胜了。词人似乎冷穆了一点，但在他失去了幻觉之后，他的忧怨却更增强了。他不再对她说话，而只是抬头看着月亮，自嘲地苦笑着：明年？后年，也许年年都会有同样的凄凉吧？只要有明月，他的思念仍会飞去那短松后面的孤坟。

这首词无庸提及爱情，也不必赞扬他妻子的美貌或贤德。它成为一种灵魂与灵魂之间赤裸裸的情感泄露。这种境界是不能被第三者所侵人的，可是读者并不

觉得打扰了他们，因为词内的感情，都可以转移在我们每一个人的身心中。我也正流着泪，因为这首词说出了我对姐姐的悼念。

A Few Commas

It has been raining so incessantly for the last few weeks that I am reminded of a very old Chinese joke.

A man, let us call him Mr Wu, had a visitor whom we shall name Mr Lee. Mr Lee was a witty man, but even a witty man becomes tiresome if he keeps on talking and talking. Lunch was about to be served and Mr Lee talked on. Mr Wu was forced to invite him for lunch but he was finding his guest very irritating. He wanted to take a nap after lunch for he was an elderly man, but he was too polite to excuse himself. Unfortunately, elderly men are usually tied down by their good manners.

Mr Lee talked throughout the whole afternoon. Around six o'clock, the rain came. Looking at the sky, Mr Lee said he did not know what to do, as it was impossible for him to walk home. Mr Wu would not be polite if he did not invite Mr Lee for dinner. Besides, he was hungry himself and needed to eat. So Mr Lee stayed for dinner during which a sleepy Mr Wu was speechless with fury. But the rain would not stop even after dinner.

It was apparent that Mr Lee intended to spend the night in the house of Mr Wu. So Mr Wu prepared the spare guest room in a murderous mood. The only reason he did not kill Mr Lee right there and then was the hope that the rain would stop the next morning. After all, he was too polite a man to kill.

But the rain, as in Singapore, did not stop when Mr Wu rose the next morning. He suffered throughout his breakfast which he shared with the talkative Mr Lee whose wit was about to kill *him*. Mr Lee, the witty man proud of his reputation, babbled on until lunch was announced. Mr Wu looked at the sky. No, the rain had not stopped. They ate their lunch together. Mr Lee laughed at his own jokes and sent the food in his mouth spinning all over the dining table. Mr Wu suppressed his mad instinct to kill.

He had slept little the night before, worrying about the rain and Mr Lee's company, so he was yawning after lunch. Even though it was considered impolite to excuse himself, he did so as a protest and went to take his nap.

As he walked by the guest room, an idea came to him. He could write out the impolite words which he was too polite to speak. Relieved by his ingenuity, he fetched a brush and some ink and wrote the following two five-word lines on the wall:

落雨天留客

Falling rain sky invites guest

天留我不留
sky invites I don't invite.

What he meant was crystal clear: When it is a rainy day, it is the sky that invites the guest to stay on. But even though the sky invites the guest, I certainly do not. Of course there were no punctuation marks. Chinese scholars never punctuated their works; only a lesser man who might not understand the lines would punctuate. He rubbed his hands gleefully, congratulated himself for having made his message loud and clear, and tottered off to his own room for his nap, trusting to find Mr Lee gone when he woke up. He said to himself, "Well, I'll have to whitewash the wall, but it's worth it."

However, when he did get up, he saw Mr Lee sitting leisurely in the sitting room, looking up at the sky with a smile. The rain poured on.

"Aha!" exclaimed Mr Lee, rising to grab Mr Wu's arm. "There you are! I've been waiting for you to see how well I have understood your message. Honestly, I didn't think you could be so witty, so clever! Come, let's go to my room and see how I've showed my appreciation by punctuating your words."

Mr Wu looked at the wall and his heart sank. Indeed his lines had been punctuated with commas. I have added the question mark and exclamation mark to make the sentences more lucid:

落雨天，
Falling rain day,
留客天，
Inviting guest day,
留我不？
Invite me not?
留！
Invite!

The meaning is also crystal clear: "A day that rains is an ideal day to invite a guest to stay. Do you invite me or not? Of course you invite me!"

Mr Lee clapped his hands in appreciation. Mr Wu had to smile to pretend he had meant his words this way, for he was a polite man. All he could do was to look out the window and hope it would clear up soon.

I too look out the window and hope it will clear up soon

落雨天

这几个星期来，天天下雨，下得人人愁眉愁眼，倒叫我想起一个传闻已久的笑话来了。

有一个姓吴的人，家里来了一个叫李先生的客人。这个李先生说话很幽默，可是无论怎样幽默滑稽的人，老那么滔滔不绝的讲话，也叫人厌烦得很，所以到了该吃饭的时候了，吴先生心里一百个不愿意地留了李先生吃饭。一直到吃完了午饭，李先生仍长篇大论的说着话，搞得吴先生连午觉也不能睡，因为他不好意思只顾自己地走开。吴先生是个有相当年纪的人了，虽然想睡午觉，却也仍礼貌周到。年纪大的人，就是这么为礼貌所绊。

李先生海阔天空地又谈了一个下午。六点钟左右，下起雨来了。李先生抬眼看看天，埋怨雨下得这么大，叫他如何走回家去呢？吴先生既然要做得有礼貌，当然不能不留李先生吃晚餐，何况他自己肚子也饿了，不能再拖延开饭的时间，于是李先生又在吴家吃了顿晚饭。吃饭的时候，吴先生是又眼困，又积了一肚子的气，所以一句话也没有说。吃完了饭再看看天，还下着雨哪。

看样子李先生是打算在吴家留宿的了，吴先生无可奈何的收拾了客房，让李先生去住，可是他恨得牙齿痒痒地，只想一下子把李先生斩掉。他之所以不挥刀杀人，还是因为次日可能天晴，再说呢，杀人也不是有礼貌的事。

不幸得很，次晨仍是落着雨，就象近来我们新加坡的雨一样，总是不肯停止。吴先生只好受罪一样的和李先生一起吃早饭。听着那李先生怡然自得的论今说古，吴先生更想杀人了，可惜李先生浑然不觉，仍是自以为很风趣地又讲又笑，一直磨到吃中饭了。吴先生看看天，糟糕，雨仍不停呢，只好又一起吃午饭，李先生则自说自笑的，把嘴里的碎食溅满了一桌，而吴先生呢？他勉强地压捺了心中那股杀气。

他一晚没有好好的睡，因为一直在想着雨呀，李先生呀，所以他吃完了午饭，便打起哈欠来了。虽然主人不招待客人地走开，是没有礼貌的事，可是吴先生也顾不了这么多了。反正去睡午觉，也是一种默声的抗议。

当他走过客房的时候，他忽然想出了一个好主意。有些话当面说出来，会觉得没有礼貌，可是用笔写出示意给客人看，却总可以吧。他一身轻松地去拿了笔

墨来，在墙上写了两句五言：一

落雨天留客

天留我不留

他的意思是最明白也没有了：“一落雨的时候，是天在留客人不走，可是天虽然在留客人，我却没有留客人呀。”古时候的人，写字是不用标点符号地，尤其是学者们，只有那些肚子里没有多少墨水的人，才用圆圈来断句，帮助文意。于是他兴致勃勃地，擦着双手，自庆找到了个法子，使李先生没有办法不明白他的逐客之意，于是眼睛困倦地去睡中觉了，满以为他醒来的时候，李先生一定已经离此远去。他对自己喃喃地说道：“虽然那面墙要再新粉刷一次才行，可是倒也值得。”

等到他午睡醒来一看，李先生还悠闲地坐在客厅里，含笑的端详着从天上掉下来的雨。

“啊哈，”李先生看见了吴先生，高兴的叫着，走来抓了吴先生的手臂，“你来得正好，我一直在等着你呢。来，来看我如何欣赏你的盛意吧。真的，我没有想到你也如此幽默，如此聪敏啦。来，到我房间去，看看我的点句有否表达了你字句的优美。”

吴先生看了看墙，心早就冷了。他的两句五言可不是真的给人点了句？那时的人只会用圆圈，下面所注的问号与惊叹号是我为了使文意更清楚而加添的：

落雨天，留客

天，留我不？留！

他这个意思也是最明白也没有了：“落雨的时候，正是留客聚谈的好时候，你留不留我呀？当然你会简单明了的回说：留呀！”

李先生在一旁看着拍掌，吴先生也只好苦笑地承认他正是这意思，因为他是个礼貌周到的人呀。他只好看看窗外的天，希望快点天晴吧。

我也看看窗外的天，希望快点天晴吧。

A Proletarian Newspaper

One morning in China, after eating a bowl of noodles for breakfast while reading the *Ren Min Ri Bao*(人民日报),which was the only newspaper I had the good fortune to encounter in my three-week sojourn, I sat there musing on how appreciative I was beginning to feel toward that particular newspaper. Compared to the ones we read in Singapore, it had so many virtues that I felt obliged to sing its praises.

The Chinese newspaper, consisting of one large sheet folded into four pages, was definitely an improvement in quantity and bulk. Why? Because it was so light that I could hold it at eye level, over my bowl of noodles, thus exerting little pressure on my arm muscle. Besides, I could finish scanning the headlines in five seconds and reading the whole four pages in fifteen minutes, so it not only saved me precious time but also imposed no strain on my eyes. If that was not an improvement, I did not know what was.

With the precious time I succeeded in saving, I thought of the other advantages of the Chinese newspaper while staring at my empty bowl. Since four pages were thinner than thirty six pages, I said to myself, it stood to reason that Chinese households had none of our headaches in the disposal of old newspapers. It would take, I estimated, nine months to one year for a Chinese housewife, or whoever whose duty it was to stack away old newspapers behind doors, to pile up to the same height *The Straits Times* would reach in thirty days. That would mean she needed to beg her garbage collector or junkman to cart away the newspapers only once a year instead of the monthly hassle we go through in Singapore. What a carefree life these Chinese women must lead, I mused enviously, not having to worry about that!

As I toyed with the idea, it slowly dawned on me that very few Chinese households actually had such problems to worry about. I had noticed that newspapers in China served many purposes other than providing information: they were used for wrapping up chicken, for kindling fire with charcoal, and for stuffing cracks in the wall when the northeast wind was blowing. Wait a minute, I looked up with a start. What could I be thinking? Who in China subscribed to newspapers? At least, none of my relatives did. They would buy one or two occasionally, but on the whole, they seemed to prefer going to the street corners where the papers were pinned up on wooden panels. Perhaps it was their idea of togetherness.

And to think of all the magnificent trees they had saved...But I jerked my mind back from my wandering thoughts. Oh yes, the quality of the Chinese newspaper was

also superb. Reading *Ren Min Ri Bao* was such a joyous experience! It was all so positive and so optimistic!

Chairman Hua was just then touring Europe where everyone loved him, and he sent back his love to Deng Xiaoping who loved the people of China, who, in turn, loved both Chairman Hua and Deng Xiaoping. It was like reading a huge valentine card.

Rape? Murder? Kidnapping? Inflation? Trials? Or any such news that used to upset me in Singapore over my cup of coffee? Nonsense. Those were the ills of a capitalistic society, and since China was not capitalistic, these crimes by definition could not happen in China. Poverty? Famine? Starvation? Bah! These were nasty words left over from the Guomindang regime, therefore not fit for publication.

Furthermore, I thought on happily, the Chinese newspaper had the decency of minding their own business. Unlike our busybody Singaporean papers which pried into the embarrassing situations in Belfast, in Teheran, or in the United States where people were making fools of themselves in their election campaigns, the Chinese papers were honourable in leaving these poor nations alone in their own misfortunes.

I rolled the newspaper into a tube and tapped it lightly on the breakfast table. Something was wrong. If the newspaper in China was as superior as I had expounded, then why did I feel dissatisfied? I thought and thought, oblivious of the waitress who gave me a disdainful look as she passed by. I suddenly realized what was bothering me.

Of all things, I was missing the advertisements! Chinese newspapers had no advertisement at all, not even the classified ads which lured people to apply for jobs, buy cars, rent flats, and look for missing persons.

I could understand why there was no need for the classified ads in China, since jobs were assigned, not applied for, and cars were for looking at, not for using. There was no surplus flat to be rented, in fact, there was no market for flats because everyone was neatly housed together under one roof. As for missing persons, nobody could roam the countryside, without official permission, so how could anyone get lost and be missed? And if a family did miss a member, it was best not to ask where and why. No, there was no need for classified ads.

But I was ashamed to admit that I missed even the commercial ads - the ugly boxes that marred the symmetry and artistic uniformity of the printed lines, the grotesque drawings that showed the vulgarity of digital watches, deluxe refrigerators and frozen steaks. As I stood up, shamed-faced, to leave the canteen, I knew why I missed the advertisements. I was, at that point, just beginning to fear that I might never see these things again. I guessed, as I heaved a sigh, I was the hopeless product of a consumer

society. So I laid my paper down on the table and left the room.

中国报纸

在中国游玩的某一个早晨，我一面看报，一面把碗汤面吃完。逗留中国的三个星期内，人民日报是我有幸遇到的唯一报纸，我觉得我对这报纸的欣赏，正渐渐地增高，因为比起新加坡的报纸来，它的优点真太多了，使我不得不歌颂一番。

量的方面，人民日报就先占了优势，因为它是一张大纸，摺成四页，所以看的时候，可以高举及眉，不阻碍我的吃面，而手臂上的肌肉，却一点也不辛苦，再说呢，我可以五秒钟内，看完所有的标题，十五分钟内，把四页的字读完，不但省下了许多宝贵的时光，而且眼睛也不会因为看久了而酸痛，这还不算是优点的话，我可不知道什么才能算是优点了。

我利用省了下来的宝贵时间，来揣摩其他的优点。我呆看着空碗，估量四页报纸总比三十六页的要薄些吧。那么中国的家庭里，一定不会象我们新加坡的有旧报如何处置的头痛。

我心算了一下，如果每天把旧报纸收积起来，中国主妇或任何负责把报纸堆在门后的人，可以高枕无忧地收积九个月至一年之久，其报堆之高，仅相等于我们收积三十天的海峡时报。那么，她只需要一年一次地恳求清洁员或旧货商来家取报堆，不必象我们这样每个月要烦扰一次。这些中国主妇的生活，该是多么适意呀。

我心里在羡慕的时候，慢慢地才想到中国主妇根本没有报堆的麻烦。在中国，报纸除了传播新闻之外，还有许多别的用处，如包裹肥鸡啦，点燃煤炭啦，或者是西北风吹得紧的时候，用来闭塞墙上的裂痕啦。我忽然呆了下来，不对呀，我在想些什么呢？中国有谁订阅报纸？至少我的亲戚中，就没有一个订阅的。他们偶然买个一份两份，可是多半的时候，他们似乎都爱跑去街上，看那木牌上钉出来的人民日报。也许是表现他们的团结精神吧。

省了纸张，也就是少砍了许多伟美的树木……可是我毅然地将思路抓回原来的方向。中国报纸的内容也很高超。看阅人民日报是多么愉快的经历呀，多么积极！多么乐观！

华主席正在访问欧洲，那里的人民很爱护他，他也把他对邓小平的爱意送回国，邓小平是爱护人民的，中国的人民也热爱华主席和邓小平。看着人民日报，

就象看一份爱情奔荡的甜心卡片。

什么强奸？谋杀？绑票？通货膨胀？法庭审判？或是那一类使我在新加坡食不下咽的新闻？胡说。那都是资本主义社会的毒素。中国既然不是资本主义国家，那些罪恶就顾名思义地都不会在中国发生。贫穷？饥荒？路有饿死鬼？瞎说！那些字眼都是国民党遗留下来的臭毒，根本就不配刊登于报纸。

我津津有味的继续想下去，中国的报纸还有不管闲事的美德。不象我们新加坡报纸，一味追究别人难堪的局面，如北爱尔兰的轰炸，德黑兰的示威，或是在美国使得人人变成象傻瓜的竞选。中国报纸扬善抑恶地不说别的国家坏话。

我把报纸卷起来，在桌上轻轻地敲着。总觉得有点什么不对。如果人民日报真的象我赞美得那么尽善尽美，我又为什么怏怏不乐呢。我想了又想，连女侍走过我桌前时，所赐我的白眼，也没有注意。忽然我体会出烦扰我的理由了。

原来我没有看到广告呀。中国报纸全部不登广告，连分类的广告，那些征聘职员，出卖旧车，租售房屋，或是寻人觅人的广告，都不登。

我很能了解为什么不登这些分类广告，因为在中国，职业是被政府指定的，不是自己去应征的。汽车是供大众看赏的，不是给他们驾用的。房屋根本没剩余的可出租，何况人人都乖乖地挤在一堆，大享其与民同乐之福呢。致于觅人，那更不需要了，因为没有官方的允许，在他们的管制之下，谁也别想云游四方，也就不会失路迷踪，而不回家了。

我很惭愧地对自己承认，我所念念不忘地还包括那些售货的广告哪，那些破坏印刷整齐与排字一致的丑陋方格，那些表露手表，冰箱或牛肉之粗鄙的恶劣图片！我站起来离开食堂，满面惭羞地，因为我知道我为什么会怀念那些广告了，原来在那一刻，我很怕我一生不会再见得那些广告要我买的东西了。我长叹一声，我想我已无可救药，因为我是个以消费物为经济原则的社会产物，还不如静静地把报纸放在桌上，快点离开吧。

Colloquial Sayings 1

Some people, just because they are well acquainted with the classics, despise colloquialisms to the extent of forbidding their use. But no one can deny that colloquialisms are vivid and expressive, for they will not have survived if they are not.

It is the same with Chinese proverbs. Scholars had restricted themselves to only classical quotations while they frowned upon colloquial sayings, but the latter, born of folk art and stemmed from commonly-shared experiences of the people, have outlasted the bookish proverbs.

There are, as far as I can think of, three categories of colloquial sayings: the straightforward type, the ‘withholding’ type in which the second half of the saying is unspoken but understood, and the ‘withholding’ type with a built-in pun.

Let us take the straightforward type first.

A father is warning his daughter about keeping company with a girl whom he thought immoral. The daughter, of course, objected.

“You’re only partially right, Father,” she said. “I’ll admit that Sue’s father is a smuggler, her mother a whore, her elder brothers bandits and kidnappers, and her sisters drug pushers. But she is not like them. She is decent.”

“Don’t tell me she is different from her family,” answered the father. “Two kinds of rice cannot come from the same pot.”

This expression, ‘two kinds of rice cannot come from the same pot’(一只锅子煮不出两样的饭)has been used by the Chinese people for centuries. Its allusion is easy to understand. Sue must be as immoral as her family is since she has been nurtured by the same parents, just like the rice that has been cooked in the same pot. It is not unlike the English saying that ‘birds of the same feather flock together’, but for the Chinese using rice as an illustration brings the situation closer to home.

Rice, being the staple food in China, has the honour of having two distinctive words to designate its physical states. The uncooked rice is called ‘mi’(米) while the cooked rice is called ‘fan’(饭). One harvests, reaps, thrashes, mills, washes and cooks ‘mi’, but one never eats it. One eats only ‘fan’. This is a distinction generally unknown to those who speak only English and use the word ‘rice’ indiscriminately.

The same irate father, who has warned his daughter about making friends with Sue, found out that his warning has gone unheeded. To make things worse, she has been seeing a lot of Sue and her bandit brother.

“I won’t have it,” he shouted, waving his fist, “I’ll lock her up so that she’ll never

see that blackguard again.”

“But it’s too late,” sobs the mother. “The *mi* has already been cooked into *fan*.”(生米煮了熟饭 or ‘the uncooked rice has already been cooked into cooked rice’.)

The above expression, used in this manner, will be enough for the father to believe his daughter pregnant! It is the same as saying ‘what is done is done, and nothing can undo it’, but by using ‘mi’ and ‘fan’, the Chinese can understand more fully the irreversibility of the process.

Colloquial sayings almost always reflect the way of life of the people. In the old days, before the public utilities board brought water pipes into homes, the Chinese had to buy water both for drinking and for use. There were professional water-sellers who carried water in their buckets from the river to the town. A poor man could make a meagre living from this labour since all he needed were two buckets and a bamboo pole. The river water was free and he could carry as much as his strength allowed him to. What he sold was not water but his sweat.

Thus, when a Chinese describes another as ‘selling water at the river bank’(江边上卖水), he is making a derogatory remark. It implies that the other man is both stupid and lazy: lazy because he does not carry water to where water is scarce, and stupid because he does not realize that, with plenty of water nearby in the river, why should anyone buy water from him and still carry the water all the way home? This saying can also be used to apply to a situation when a surplus of a certain commodity renders it impossible to sell, but only rarely.

There are too many colloquial sayings of this straightforward type for me to recommend them all. Unlike the classical proverbs, the colloquial sayings are folksy, and they will stay with us until our way of life is completely changed. Take the above saying of ‘selling water at a river bank’, a Singaporean youth will be puzzled to hear it. He will ask, “What’s wrong with that? River water is too polluted for drinking, so naturally Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, or any kind of drinkable water can still be sold to those who have come to enjoy the river scene. We do it all the time at food stalls along our Singapore River.”

When this boy grows up to be seventy, this particular saying may go into oblivion. But I trust a new one will spring up to take its place.

俗谚——(1)

有些熟读古书的人，往往瞧不起通俗文学，甚至禁止别人阅读，但是通俗文学的生动活泼，却是无可置辩的，否则它们也就不会流传到今天了。

华文里的成语也一样，老学究爱引用古书上的格言，可是看了俗谚就皱眉，但是俗谚也者，代表民间艺术，创自人民共同的经验，比起有些酸朽的格言来，却更影响广远些。

依我看来，俗谚可以分为三种：(一)简单明了的俚语，(二)后半截不明讲出来的歇后语，(三)含有双关的歇后语。

我们先谈谈那简单明了的第一种吧。

某人管教女儿，要她别和一个品行不端的女友往来。他的女儿当然反对。

“爸，你说得很对，但也不完全正确，”那女儿说着，“我承认苏的爸爸走私，她的妈妈卖淫，她的哥哥们都是强盗和绑票的坏蛋，她的姐姐推销毒品，可是苏本人却并不象她家里的人，她很规矩呢。”

“你别以为她和她家的人有什么不同了，”爸爸说：“反正一只锅子煮不出两样的饭来。”

这句俗谚：一只锅子煮不出两样的饭来，华人已经应用了几百年，它的意思很易明白：苏一定和她的家人一样不道德，因为她和她家人都是同一个环境磨炼出来的，正象同一个锅里煮出来的饭一样。这句俗谚很象英语里的“Birds of same feather flock together”(直译为：羽毛一样的鸟一起飞。)但是用煮饭来表达，对华人却格外的亲切。

米是华人的主要食粮，所以在华语里有“米”和“饭”的区别。尚未煮的是米，已煮熟了的是饭。我们可以打米，磨米，碾米，洗米，或是煮米，但从来不能吃米，只能吃饭。一般只会讲英语的人，将米和饭都称为Rice，不大能明白这两者的区别。

刚才那个怒气冲冲的父亲，发现他的女儿并没有采纳他的忠告，她不但继续和苏来往，还和苏的强盗哥哥做了好朋友。

“我绝对不许她这样做，”那父亲大声嚷道，一面怒挥着他的拳头，“我要把她关起来，再也不许她看见那狂徒了。”

“但是已经太迟了，”他的妻子呜咽着说，“生米已经煮了熟饭呀！”

上面这句俗谚，在这种情形而用，一定会弄得做爸爸的疑心女儿已经怀孕，英语里说“做了的已做了，没有任何办法再恢复原状，(What is done is done and nothing can undo it.)”是同样的意义，但是用米和饭来做比喻，使华人更具体地认识事情的不可挽救。

几乎所有的谚语，都是人们日常生活的表现。在没有自来水管把用水带人每一个家庭之前，华人都得买水来喝来用，所以有一种专门以卖水为业的人，从河里用木桶盛满了水，挑到市镇上来卖。贫穷的人往往以此糊口，因为他的本钱只是二只木桶和一根扁担而已。河水是免费的，只要他的气力充足，他可以取之不竭，他卖的其实不是水，而是他的汗。

所以，当一个人被形容为“江边上卖水”，那是一个相当刻薄的批评，意思是说这个人又懒又蠢。懒是因为他不肯费力把水挑到水贵的地方，蠢是因为他不想想，有谁肯辛辛苦苦地走来河边，还肯向他买水，再辛辛苦苦地自己挑回家去呢？这句俗谚也可以应用在货物过剩而所以无人购买的情况，但这样用法却很少见到。

这种简单明了的俗谚太多了，我不能把它们都推荐出来。它们不会象那些引经据典的格言一样被淘汰，因为只要人们的生活习惯不更改，它们就会流传下去。譬如上回讲的“江边上卖水”吧，年轻一点的新加坡人听了，就会感到疑惑。他会说：“有什么不对呢？江水根本太脏，不能喝呀，那么江边上当然应该可以卖水或汽水给游河的旅客喝嘛，在新加坡河畔的食摊上，不就在卖水吗？”

当这位新加坡青年活到七十岁的时候，这句俗谚可能会从我们言语中消失了，但是我想一定又有别的俗谚来代替它吧。

Colloquial Sayings 2

The second type of colloquial sayings which I have arbitrarily named the ‘withholding’ type, is known in Chinese as 歇后语(xie hou yu), or ‘pause and more will come’. With this type of saying, the first half is spoken as a sentence or a phrase, either four words or as many as ten words, but the second half is withheld and not spoken unless the listener does not understand. The withheld second half is usually short and terse, much like the answer to a riddle.

I am very fond of this ‘withholding’ type of colloquial sayings. They are more sophisticated than the straightforward ones because they allow the listener time to reflect and to guess. Whether one guesses rightly or wrongly, the withheld half almost always brings on a strong reaction - be it one of amazement, amusement or exasperation. Taken in total, the complete saying is often philosophical in spite of its colloquialism. Perhaps it is because the sayings are colloquial and mirror the life experiences of the people that make them so endearing.

If a man in debt goes to his friend for help, his friend can be very sympathetic but may answer that he is like ‘the clay buddha crossing the river’(泥菩萨过江). This is one of the most popular ‘withholding’ type of sayings. What does it mean?

A man in need of help goes to the temple to pray to the buddha. The buddha will normally, or so it is believed, grant the wish. But a buddha made of clay, without the benefit of ever being baked in a kiln, will disintegrate into mud when he crosses a river. Thus a clay buddha may look dignified and awe-inspiring in the temple (meaning when times are good) but may not be able to protect even himself when crossing a river (meaning when times are bad), so how can he be expected to help others? Thus, the withheld second half of this saying is ‘can’t help even himself’(自身难保). In other words, his friend may look affluent but actually is finding it difficult to meet his own creditors.

‘A wet nurse fondles a baby son’(奶妈抱儿子) is another example. At face value, it seems very simple: a woman, whose profession is wet nursing, caresses her charge while carrying out her duty. So what is there to imply?

The withheld second half is ‘other people’s’(别人的). How does the two connect? The connecting point is the baby. It does not belong to the wet nurse. For all the love and care she bestows on it, eventually she will have to return it to its parents. This pathetic saying can only come from the class of people a wet nurse belongs to: the parents of the baby will hardly know how it feels to be a wet nurse.

To find the answer, or the withheld second half, is as much fun as working on crossword puzzles. I have picked out one that is very easy for some people and yet extremely difficult for some others, depending how well they know Chinese colloquialisms and food habits.

Here it is: 'To eat the root of lotus with one chopstick'(一只筷子吃藕).

A lotus-root is tubular with a diameter varying from two to three inches, with five or six hollow tubes joined lengthwise. When it is sliced crosswise for food, it reveals the hollows as five or six holes each as big as a small finger. These slices of lotus-root are very difficult to pick up even with two chopsticks because they are extremely slippery, so how does one manage to do so with only one chopstick? If the listener stops at this stage of his mental process, he will think the withheld second half to be 'impossible to accomplish'. But this is the wrong answer.

One must search on. How does one manage to pick up the slices of lotus-root with one chopstick? Those who have never eaten lotus-root will never know the answer, but those who have - especially those who have learned to deal with this food since childhood - will know it is to poke the chopstick into one of the holes and lift it up. So the withheld second half is 'pick on the holes'(挑眼).

But the true implication of this answer will still escape the listener if he does not know that the colloquialism for the habit of constantly finding fault is 'picking on holes'. Therefore, the total saying means 'to eat lotus-root with one chopstick - always finding fault.

If I am encouraged, I believe I can give a hundred 'withholding' sayings. Maybe even more. I am, to borrow one of the sayings, 'looking at my own shadow in the moonlight - I alone think I am great'(月亮底下看影子——自看自大).

俗谚——(2)

第二种俗谚是歇后语，也可以说是前一截说完之后，要歇一歇，因为后面还有精彩的会来。这一类的俗谚，前半截是四个字或十多个字的一句或半句，但后半截往往不用明说，除非是听的人不懂。这后半截多半很干脆，有点象猜谜时的谜底。

我很喜好这种歇后语。它们比那简单明了的第一种俗谚复杂深奥，因为它们让听者有时间去思索猜测。无论猜得对不对，那后半截一旦说了出来，总使人或惊诧，或恍然大悟，或无可奈何的摇头。前后截并起来说的时候，虽然言词俚俗，却颇有哲学意味。也许就是因为言词俚俗，反映大众化的意趣，所以它们特别的讨人欢喜吧。

如果有一个欠了一身债的人，去找一个朋友借钱，他那朋友虽然很同情，却也许会说他自己是个“泥菩萨过江”。这也许是歇后语中最普及的一句。到底是什么意思呢？

人们有所求时，总是去庙里求菩萨帮忙，菩萨也就有求必应。但是一个泥塑的菩萨，没有经过火烤炼成磁或陶的，如果真的去“过江”，那么一定会变成一堆烂泥而消灭。所以坐在庙里的泥菩萨，指情况良好的时候，看上去很威风十足，但一到了过江，也就是说情况不佳的时候，就连自己的身体也保护不了，那他又怎么能够帮别人呢？所以这歇后语的下半截是“自身难保”。换句话说，那被人借钱的朋友看上去很有钱，其实他自己也难逃债主哪。

“奶妈抱儿子”这句歇后语，表面上看了很容易明白，它是指一个以看顾婴儿为职的女人，抱着一个应该她抱的孩子。那有什么别的意思呢？

这歇后语的下半截是“别人的”。这两截有什么关系？关系在那婴孩上面，因为它并非奶妈生的儿子。无论她怎样对婴儿爱护备至，迟早还是要把孩子交还孩子的父母亲。这句充满了辛酸的比喻，只有奶妈这类的人民才想得出来，而将儿子交给别人养的父母亲，却体会不出这种凄凉。

思索歇后语的答案，和猜谜一样有趣。我现在选出一句，相信某些人会很容易猜得出，也有某些人怎么样也想不到，全靠听者是否熟悉俚语村言和食物习惯。

就是这一句：“一只筷子吃藕”。

藕的形状圆而长，直径约二三寸，里面有直贯的空管，所以当它被横切了当食物时，成为每片内有五六个空洞，约模小指的宽度。可是藕片很黏滑，往往用一双筷子也难挟起，那么又如何能用一只筷子捡来吃呢？如果听者想到这里便停止，他就会以为下半截是“不可能”。可是他错了。

要继续努力想下去，一只筷子要怎么样才能取到藕片呢？从来没吃过藕的人，大概永远也想不出来！可是那些常吃的，尤其是从小就学会吃藕的人，便会想到把一只筷子插入空洞，然后挑起整片莲藕来。所以这下截应该是“挑眼”。

若是听的人不习惯俗语，他仍是听不懂这句歇后语的意思，因为“挑眼”是指那种常常在小地方找出别人错误的习惯，所以这句歇后语的整个意思是“一只筷子吃藕，挑眼”，也就是说这个人无论大事小事，甚致于无事，都喜欢找出错误来。

如果有人鼓励我的话，我想我会背出一百条歇后语出来，也许还不止一百哪，我这样说，也正是歇后语内说的：“月亮底下看影子，自看自大。”

Colloquial Sayings 3

Now I have come to the last and the most scintillating type of colloquial sayings, that is, the ones with puns hidden in the withheld portion. These sayings are few in number because they need quite a lot of mental agility to make them up. To understand a saying of this kind requires less imagination than making it up, but even so, it is an intriguing operation in which one has to first ponder over the meaning of the saying and then guess the implied answer. Finally enlightenment dawns when the pun is substituted.

The most popular and frequently repeated one is ‘a sister’s son lights a lantern’ (外甥打灯笼). A sister’s son is a nephew, then why did I not simply say so?

Unlike the English language in which the sons of one’s brother and sister are all nephews, the Chinese words for the son of a sister are ‘wai sheng’ (外甥), quite different from ‘zhi’ (侄), the son of a brother. There are also more words than one to describe uncles. The paternal uncle is called ‘bo’ (伯) or ‘shu’ (叔), depending on whether he is older or younger than one’s father, and the maternal uncle is called ‘jiu’ (舅). This explanation is necessary because the play of these words depends on their exact relationships. The particular bond we are now interested in is ‘wai sheng’ (nephew) versus ‘jiu’ (uncle).

Since it is a ‘wai sheng’ who lights a lantern, then he must be using it to shine on his ‘jiu’. With that established, we go one step further. The word meaning ‘to shine on’ in Chinese is ‘zhao’ (照), then ‘zhao jiu’ means ‘to shine the lantern on his maternal uncle’. By itself, it does not mean very much. To shine the light on one’s uncle, so what?

Here comes the pun. ‘Jiu’ (舅) has the same sound as the word for ‘old’ or ‘the same’ (旧). Furthermore, the word ‘zhao’, coupled with the word 旧 (old or the same) and not 舅 (uncle), no longer means ‘to shine on’, but ‘to relate’, or ‘to follow’. Now the whole saying makes sense: ‘zhao jiu’ (照旧) is the accepted and commonly used phrase for ‘following the same pattern’. An unemployed man, when being asked how life has been treating him, can shrug and say, “Oh, a sister’s son lights a lantern,” meaning he has not yet got a job.

Another cute one may take just as much effort in explaining and in understanding. The saying in Chinese is 乌龟爬门槛, or in English ‘a turtle climbs the door-sill’.

What is a ‘door-sill’ (门槛)? I made up this word because I do not know its English equivalent. In houses built in the old days, the front doors were fitted at the bottom with wooden frames which jutted above the ground by 15 cm to 25 cm even when the doors were open. Many villages in China today still have ‘door-sills’ on their doors. To enter

the doorway, one must lift up one's feet high to cross this wooden frame.

What happens when a turtle tries to climb over a 'door-sill'? Well, it tries and tries and finally makes it to the top where it finds itself balancing in midair with its legs touching nothing solid. It can neither go forward nor retreat backward, but it can improve its position by pitching over the 'door-sill'. Naturally the momentum of the fall will cause it to land on its back, or more simply, it will turn over. The Chinese word for 'turn over' is 'fan' (翻).

The turtle cannot always control the direction of its fall. It cannot be sure whether its effort in turning over will land it inside(forward) or outside (backward)of the doorway. To succeed or to fail in this endeavour depends on the direction of the turn over.

As forewarned, there is a pun. It is in the word 'fan' (翻) and another 'fan' (番) which means 'this time' or 'this occasion' or even 'this effort'. The saying suddenly changes from the efforts of the turtle to that of human beings. If a man is about to start a new venture which he has put all his hopes in, he will probably say, "A turtle climbs the door-sill", meaning "whether I make it or not depends on the outcome of this occasion"(在此一番).

It was alleged that during the Cultural Revolution in China, a visiting American journalist asked the people their impressions of the Red Guards. No one spoke. Finally an old man smiled and replied, "It is like a monk under an umbrella"(和尚打伞).The interpreter translated the words literally. It certainly sounded poetic and conjured up a picture of tranquillity - a lonely monk walking in the rain amidst the turbulent populace. The real meaning escaped the American journalist.

To those who know this saying, it means something completely different. Since it is a monk, he has no hair on his head because all Chinese monks have to have their heads shaven clean. Since the monk is under an umbrella, there is no sky above him because the umbrella has blocked it off. So the answer seems to be 'no hair and no sky.'

The puns are in the words 'fa' (发), meaning hair, and 'fa' (法) meaning law, and the word 'sky' which, in addition to its usual meaning of the atmosphere above the earth, also signifies the heaven, the gods, or in this particular case, justice. Thus, no hair(发) means no law(法) and no sky means no justice. When the old man said, "A monk under an umbrella", he had withheld the second half of the saying, which is "no law no justice"(无法无天), a well-known proverb in itself.

It might have been a short cut to understanding Chinese politics if the American journalist had known a little more of these colloquial sayings. For us, I hope these

colloquial sayings will at least pepper our daily conversation.

俗谚——(3)

哈，现在可以谈一谈俗谚中最津津有味的一种了，那便是蓄有双关的歇后语。这种歇后语的数量实在不太多，因为编造的人需要相当活泼的智力，才能凑合一个双关的歇后语出来。可是编造固然不易，聆听而明了这种歇后语却也并不简单，因为先要思索语中之意，继而猜想出适宜的答案，最后用上双关，才能恍然大悟。

最普及的一句，想是“外甥打灯笼”了，这“外甥”两字是第一个关键，因为不象英语里把所有兄弟姐妹的儿子都叫 Nephew，华语里分出兄弟之子为“侄”，姐妹之子为“外甥”。同样地，英语里将所有父母的兄弟都叫 Uncle，华语里父亲的哥哥是“伯”，父亲的弟弟是“叔”，而母亲的兄弟为“舅”。这句歇后语内的亲属关系是既然有“外甥”，便必须有“舅”。

第二个关键在“打灯笼”，打灯笼做什么？照一样东西或照一个人呀。既然外甥是照一个人，那么当然是照在舅父身上。所以这句歇后语的后半截应该是“照舅”，那又有什么意思呀？

这就该派上双关了。“舅”与“旧”同音，所以“照舅”变成了“照旧”。同时，“照”字的意思也因此而改变了，“照舅”的“照”是指用灯光照映的意思，但“照旧”的“照”是指依照或循从的意思，于是“照旧”是指“跟从前一样”。譬如一个失业的人，被亲友们询问近况时，会耸耸肩地说：“还不是外甥打灯笼！”他的意思便是说照旧，和从前一样，仍是没有找到工作。

另外有一个很妙的歇后语，恐怕解释会同样的费力，那就是“乌龟爬门槛”。

“门槛”是什么呢？现代的房屋都没有门槛了，只有中国乡下的旧宅，还有这种设备。门槛是门下面的一块横木，宽约十五至廿五公分，在门被推开之后，仍竖立于地，所以要进出大门，人们必须提起脚来，跨过木槛。

那么乌龟又怎么爬门槛呢？它辛辛苦苦地爬上了横木之上，肚子躺在门槛上面，四只脚都空空然地不能着地。它既不能向前进，又不能向后退，它只能茫茫地往下冲过去，那么跌在门槛下面时，背朝地，肚朝天，“翻”了过来。

可是乌龟没有办法控制它翻的方向，因为它的甲壳使它尽管出力，仍是不能预知它会成功地翻入门内，还是失败的翻出门外，也就是说，成功与失败，都靠它这一翻的结果。

但是还有一个双关啦，“翻”与“番”同音不同意。番的意思虽多，但“一番”的意思却很清楚，是“这一次”，或“这一下子”，或“这一件事”。所以当某人把所有的精力与金钱，都寄托在某一个机会上面的时候，他就会说，“乌龟爬门槛”，意思是“在此一翻”，也就是“在此一番”。

我听说在文化革命的时候，有一个美国新闻记者到处找人发表对红卫兵的印象，没有一个人肯回答，最后一个老头子微笑地说了一句，“这象是和尚打伞。”翻译员照这句话的表面意思翻译了，似乎顶有诗意地，一个孤独的和尚在雨中打着伞，漫步走于喧闹的群众中。其实呢，那位美国新闻记者根本就没有懂！

我们懂得这句歇后语的人，就知道完全不是那么一回事。一个人要做和尚，首先要把头发剃光，那么和尚当然没有头发了。他既然打了一把伞，那么那把伞所遮去的不止是雨水或暴日，也把天遮去了，所以他也没有了天。这句歇后语的后半截应该是“无发无天”。

但是“发”与“法”同音，“无发”不就是“无法”吗？天呢，“天”的意义最多了，又是下雨落雪的天，又是天上人间的天，也是代表公道正义的天老爷；那么“无天”的意思，是指“没有公道”。当这个老头子说象是“和尚打伞”，他其实是说“无法无天”，也就是说既不服从法律，又不顾公道。

那个美国新闻记者如果多懂得一点俗谚的话，他会多懂得一点国际时事。在我们来说，我希望这些俗谚能在我们日常交谈中，加点盐醋，岂不妙哉？

These articles first appeared between August 1979 and January 1980 in both English and Chinese in the bilingual page of *The Straits Times*. They are a lively and highly personalised account of the author's experiences and of things Chinese.

Li Lienfung, a working chemist, is the author of the play *The Sword Has Two Edges*.