**Door closer, are you?**

**“关门者”，你是吗？**

**1 The next time you're deciding between rival options, one which is primary and the other which is secondary, ask yourself this question: What would Xiang Yu do?**

**下次你要在两个难于取舍的、主要的和次要的选择之间做决定时，不妨问自己这样一个问题：项羽会怎么做？**

**2 Xiang Yu was a Chinese imperial general in the third century BC who took his troops across the Zhang River on a raid into enemy territory. To his troops' astonishment, he ordered their cooking pots crushed and their sailing ships burned.**

**项羽是公元前三世纪中国古代王朝的一位将军。他带领他的部队横渡漳河，突袭进入了敌方的领地。他下令砸锅烧船，令他的部队大为震惊。**

**3 He explained that he was imposing on them a necessity for attaining victory over their opponents. What he said was surely motivating, but it wasn't really appreciated by many of his loyal soldiers as they watched their vessels go up in flames. But the genius of General Xiang Yu's conviction would be validated both on the battlefield and in modern social science research. General Xiang Yu was a rare exception to the norm, a veteran leader who was highly respected for his many conquests and who achieved the summit of success.**

**他解释道，他强加给他们的是战胜对手的必要举措。他所说的无疑十分鼓舞士气，但当他那许多忠诚的士兵眼睁睁地看着他们的船只在火焰中被焚毁时，他们并不赞成他的做法。不过项羽将军的这种砸锅焚船的做法所显示出的天赋，在战场上和现代社会科学研究中都将得到肯定。项羽将军是一个罕见的不墨守成规的人，他是一位经验丰富的领袖，由于他征战无数并达到了成功的顶峰，他深受尊敬。**

**4 He is featured in Dan Ariely's enlightening new publication, Predictably Irrational, a fascinating investigation of seemingly irrational human behavior, such as the tendency for keeping multiple options open. Most people can't marshal the will for painful choices, not even students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where Dr. Ariely teaches behavioral economics. In an experiment that investigated decision-making, hundreds of students couldn't bear to let their options vanish, even though it was clear they would profit from doing so.**

**丹·阿雷利极富启迪性的新书《可预见的非理性》对项羽作了专题介绍。这本书对看似非理性的人类行为，譬如人类总想留住多项选择机会的倾向，进行了引人入胜的调查。大多数人都不能整理自己的思路来做痛苦的选择，麻省理工学院上阿雷利博士行为经济学这门课的学生也不例外。在调查作决策的一项实验中，几百名学生都不能忍受眼睁睁看着他们的选择机会消失，即使他们很清楚这样做对他们有利。**

**5 The experiment revolved around a game that eliminated the excuses we usually have for refusing to let go. In the real world, we can always say, "It's good to preserve our options." Want a good example? A teenager is exhausted from soccer, ballet, piano, and Chinese lessons, but her parents won't stop any one of them because they might come in handy some day!**

**实验是围绕着一个游戏展开的，这个游戏排除了我们通常不肯放手的借口。在现实世界里，我们总会说：“保留我们的选择机会是对的。”想要一个好的例子吗？一个十多岁的女孩被足球、芭蕾舞、钢琴、中文课给累得筋疲力尽，但她的父母不会让她停止任何一项活动，理由是它们有一天可能会派上用场！**

**6 In the experiment sessions, students played a computer game that provided cash behind three doors appearing on the screen. The rule was the more money you earned, the better player you were, given a total of 100 clicks. Every time the students opened a door by clicking on it, they would use up one click but wouldn't get any money. However, each subsequent click on that door would earn a fluctuating sum of money, with one door always revealing more money than the others. The important part of the rule was each door switch, though having no cash value, would also use up one of the 100 clicks. Therefore, the winning strategy was to quickly check all the doors and keep clicking on the one with the seemingly highest rewards.**

**在这个实验里，学生要玩一个电脑游戏:在电脑屏幕上会显示三扇门，每扇门后都会提供一些现金。该游戏的规则是每个人都只能点击100次，你点击获取的钱越多，你就玩得越好。学生每点击一次打开一扇门，他们会用掉一个点击数，但却不会得到任何钱。然而，随后接着在那扇门上的每次点击都会挣得数额不等的钱，三扇门显示的钱总有一扇比另外两扇多。这个游戏规则的重点是虽然每次换门没有金钱回报，可还是会用掉一次点击数。所以，制胜战略是要迅速查看所有的门，然后只点击那扇似乎是钱最多的门。**

**7 While playing the game, students noticed a modified visual element: Any door left unclicked for a short while would shrink in size and vanish. Since they already understood the game, they should have ignored the vanishing doors. Nevertheless, they hurried to click on the lesser doors before they vanished, trying to keep them open. As a result, they wasted so many clicks rushing back to the vanishing doors that they lost money in the end. Why were the students so attached to the lesser doors? They would probably protest that they were clinging to the doors to keep future options open, but, according to Dr. Ariely, that isn't the true factor.**

**在玩游戏时，学生们注意到了一个视觉上的变化：如果有片刻没点击某扇门，那扇门就会慢慢缩小并消失。由于他们已了解了游戏规则，他们本应对要消失的门不予理睬。然而，在它们消失以前，他们却迫不及待地去点击那些变小的门，试图让它们开启着。结果是，他们在匆忙回去点击那些快消失的门时浪费了很多点击数以至于最后输了钱。为什么学生对那些变小的门如此依恋呢？他们可能会争辩说，他们紧抓住这些门是为将来多留一些机会。但是，据阿雷利博士说，这不是真正的原因。**

**8 Instead of the excuse to maintain future options open, underneath it all the students' desire was to avoid the immediate, though temporary, pain of watching options close. "Closing a door on an option is experienced as a loss, and people are willing to pay a big price to avoid the emotion of loss," Dr. Ariely says. In the experiment, the price was easily measured in lost cash. In life, the corresponding costs are often less obvious such as wasted time or missed opportunities.**

**在他们为将来多留一些机会的借口背后反映出的是所有的学生都不堪目睹眼前的选择机会被剥夺，尽管这种痛苦是临时的。阿雷利博士说：“每闭上一扇选择之门就如同经受了一次损失，人们宁愿付出很大的代价，也要避免情感的失落。”在实验中，损失很容易用丢失的现金来衡量。在生活中，相应的损失就往往没那么明显，如浪费时间，错过机会。**

**9 "Sometimes these doors are closing too slowly for us to see them vanishing," Dr. Ariely writes. "We may work more hours at our jobs without realizing that the childhood of our sons and daughters is slipping away."**

**“有时候，这些门是慢慢关闭的，我们没有看到它们在悄然消失，”阿雷利博士写道：“我们可能花很多时间在工作上，却没有意识到我们子女的童年正在悄悄溜走。”**

**10 So, what can be done to restore balance in our lives? One answer, Dr. Ariely says, is to implement more prohibitions on overbooking. We can work to reduce options on our own, delegating tasks to others and even giving away ideas for others to pursue. He points to marriage as an example, "In marriage, we create a situation where we promise ourselves not to keep options open. We close doors and announce to others we've closed doors."**

**那么，我们可以做些什么让我们的生活恢复平衡呢？阿雷利博士说，一个办法是制止更多的超额预约。我们可以自己减少选择，将任务委派给其他人，甚至放弃一些点子，让其他人去做。他用婚姻作为例子：“在婚姻中，我们承诺不保留选择机会，我们就创造了获得最佳选择的有利局面。我们关上可选择的门，并告诉别人我们已作出选择。”**

**11 Since conducting the door experiment, Dr. Ariely says he has made a conscious effort to lessen his load. He urges the rest of us to resign from committees, prune holiday card lists, rethink hobbies and remember the lessons of door closers like Xiang Yu.**

**阿雷利博士说，自从进行了这个点击门的实验，他已经有意识地努力减轻自己的负担。他敦促我们辞去委员会的工作，删减送节日贺卡的名单，重新思考兴趣爱好，并记住像项羽那样的关门者给我们的启示。**

**12 In other words, Dr. Ariely is encouraging us to discard those things that seem to have outward merit in favor of those things that actually enrich our lives. We are naturally prejudiced to believe that more is better, but Dr. Ariely's research provides a dose of reality that strongly suggests otherwise.**

**换言之，他是鼓励我们放弃那些似乎只有表面价值的东西，而去追求那些能真正丰富我们生活的东西。我们很自然、很偏执地相信选择越多越好，但阿雷利博士的研究却强有力地告诉我们事实并非如此。**

**13 What price do we pay for trying to have more and more in life? What pleasure and satisfaction can be derived from focusing our energy and attention in a more concentrated fashion? Surely, we will have our respective answers.**

**我们想在生活中得到越来越多选择的代价是什么？我们能从更集中的精力和注意力中获得什么样的喜悦和满足？当然，我们每个人都会有自己的答案。**

**14 Consider these important questions: Will we have more by always increasing options or will we have more with fewer, carefully chosen options? What doors should we close in order to allow the right windows of opportunity and happiness to open?**

**试想一下这些重要的问题：怎么做会使我们获得更多，是不断增加选择，还是只保持少数精心挑选的选择？我们应关闭什么门，以便让机会和幸福之窗打开？**

**﻿**

**When enough is enough**

**知足常乐**

**1 Recently, I rushed into a Gap store to buy a pair of jeans. A salesperson asked if she could help. "I want a pair of jeans — 32-28," I said in haste.**

**不久前，我冲进一家Gap店去买一条牛仔裤。店员问我是否要她帮忙。“我想要一条牛仔裤，32-28码的，”我匆匆地说。**

**2 "Do you want slim fit, easy fit, relaxed fit, baggy, or extra baggy?" she ventured. "Do you want stone-washed, acid-washed, button-fly or regular-fly, faded or regular?"**

**“您想要紧身的，合身的，休闲的，宽松的，还是特大宽松的？”她试探地问道。“您想要石磨的还是漂染的？纽扣门襟还是拉链门襟？褪色的还是普通的？”**

**3 I stopped. I didn't have a hint, not the remotest idea of what she had asked, so I said, "I just want regular jeans. You know – the kind that used to be the only kind."**

**我停了下来。我在她所问的问题中没得到任何暗示，也对这些问题毫无所知，所以我说：“我只想买一条普通的牛仔裤。你知道的，曾经是唯一的那种。”**

**4 She pointed in the right direction. The trouble was, with all those options distributed in front of me, I wasn't sure what I wanted. So, I tried on pair after pair of jeans for almost two hours — trying to decide. It wasn't a big decision, little depended on my choice, but I was convinced that one pair had to be just right for me.**

**她指了指右边。麻烦的是，看着所有摆在我面前的牛仔裤，我不知该选哪一条。于是，为了作出选择，我就一条一条地试穿，足足试了将近两个小时。这并不是一项重大的决定，因这不取决于我的选择，但我确信，有一条牛仔裤必定适合我。**

**5 The jeans I chose were fine, but this simple transaction provoked a strong reaction in me. Buying a new pair of pants shouldn't render someone a wreck! Purchasing jeans was once an easy choice; now it's become a complex decision.**

**我选择的牛仔裤还不错，但这桩简单的买卖却引起了我强烈的反应。买一条新裤子不应该让人感到疲惫不堪的！购买牛仔裤曾经是一件很容易的事，现在它却变成了一个复杂的决策过程。**

**6 Choices in modern life have increased tremendously. A typical store in 1900 had only a few dozen categories with one or two options per category. Modern supermarkets have 50,000 to 60,000 items in thousands of categories. Looking for hair-care products? There are more than 350 types of shampoo and conditioners. Need a painkiller? There are almost 100 options. Toothpaste, anyone? You have 40+ types to choose from!**

**现代生活中的选择已大幅增加。1900年的时候，一个商店一般只有几十种类别，每种类别只有一到两种选择。现代的超市在几千种类别里，有50,000至60,000件物品。寻找护发产品吗？有超过350种的洗发水和护发素。需要止痛药吗？有近100个选项。有人要牙膏吗？你有40 多种可选择！**

**7 It's true that enforced restrictions with very limited or no choices make life unbearable, and having options does increase our sense of liberation and control. However, my jeans purchase highlights a different problem. As options increase out of control, people often begin to feel their life is crashing down on them. They are overloaded, overwhelmed and feel their life growing vacant without meaning.**

**确实，在强行限制的生活中，非常有限的选择或毫无选择让人难以忍受，而有选择无疑可增加我们的自由感和控制感。然而，我购买牛仔裤的经历却突显了一个不同的问题。随着选择失控般地增加，人们常常开始感到他们的生活正在崩溃。他们不堪重负，不知所措，觉得他们的生活在变得空虚而没有意义。**

**8 We all rely on common sense to guide us, and the implication is that increasing choice should always increase happiness. Surprisingly, the opposite is true. Scientists verify that an overabundance of choice tends to bring a subtraction in well-being and happiness.**

**我们都靠常识来指导我们，常识告诉我们越来越多的选择应不断增加幸福感。令人惊讶的是，事实正好相反。科学家证实，过多的选择往往会削弱我们的健康和快乐。**

**9 The measure of happiness in the US has been going downhill. The proportion of the population describing itself as "very happy" has declined by five percent, approximately 14 million Americans.**

**在美国, 人们的幸福感已经下滑。认为自己“非常高兴”的人口比例已下降5％，将近一千四百万人。**

**10 Of course, no one believes that a single factor explains this, but accumulating evidence from psychological research indicates that the explosion of choice and tremendous increases in material possessions play a primary role.**

**当然，没人相信这可以用单一因素来解释。不过，日益增多的心理学研究证据表明，选择的爆炸性增长和物质财富的大量增加是主要的原因。**

**11 Increasing expectations seem to be part of the problem. The penetrating message of modern times seems to be: "The more we control our own fate, the more we expect to control it. The more we have, the more we want to have!" We expect to be able to have a life that is fulfilling, exciting and sometimes even selfish! We transfer our high expectations to our property, our residences, and our families – expecting them to be outstanding and beautiful.**

**不断增加的期望值似乎也是问题的一部分。现代社会的精辟言论似乎是：“我们越控制我们自己的命运，我们就越希望控制它。我们拥有的越多，我们想要的就更多！”我们期望我们的生活充实、令人兴奋，有时甚至是自私的！我们把高度期望转移到了我们的财产，我们的住房和我们的家庭——希望他们都出色、漂亮。**

**12 Some people believe they should never have to settle for things that are just "good enough". Their trademark is that they expect and accept only the best. Researchers call this group "maximizers". Their thoughts are dominated by an ever-increasing desire for more and a focus on the highest quality. Studies show that maximizers are less optimistic, more dissatisfied with, and more depressed about their lives than others who are willing to settle for slightly less.**

**有些人认为，他们决不应该接受只是“足够好”。他们的特征是只要和只接受最好的。研究人员称这一组人为“最大化追求者”。他们的思想被日益膨胀的意愿所支配：希望得到更多和注重最高质量。研究表明，与那些愿意接受少一点的人相比，最大化追求者对他们的生活不那么乐观，也有更多的不满和更多的压抑。**

**13 I have a friend who makes going out to dinner a nightmare. He struggles to select a dish, going in a circular motion between one option and another, trying to find the best option. Some students behave the same way looking for jobs as they worry excessively concerning which job option to choose lest they overlook the "perfect" job!**

**我有一个朋友把出去吃晚餐变成了一场噩梦。他会为了决定挑选哪一道菜而冥思苦想，在选项之间不断绕圈子，想找到最佳选择。有些学生在寻找工作时也是一样，因为他们过分地担心该选择哪一份工作，唯恐忽视了那份“完美”的工作！**

**14 We are told we're in the "driver's seat", when it comes to organizing and planning our lives. If we fail, it's our own fault and can only accuse ourselves. It is unhealthy to combine overwhelming expectations and options, plus a tendency to blame ourselves for failures.**

**说到组织和规划我们的生活，我们被告知我们是坐在“驾驶座”上。如果我们失败了，这是我们自己的过错，只能指责自己。过多的期望和过多的选择，加上总是把失败归咎于自己，对我们是有害不利的。**

**15 The success of 21st-century life turns out to be a bitter-sweet controversy and paradox. People have what they say they want. They're floating in a vast ocean of choices and material goods but finding they're still unfulfilled. Enough is never enough.**

**二十一世纪生活的成功变成了一个苦乐参半的争议和悖论。人们有了他们自己说想要的东西。他们正漂浮在一个充满选择和物质产品的汪洋大海里，但他们仍不满足。够了永远都不够。**

**16 Let's pause and angle a bright light from the past into our modern times. Over 2,000 years ago, the famous Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, prescribed: "Be content with whatsoever you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you." And he added this precaution: He who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.**

**让我们稍作停顿，把过去的一盏明灯转照到我们现代。两千年前，中国著名的哲学家老子指出：“知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久。”他补充了这个警示：知足者常乐。**

**17 Use your college years to stir your heart and renew your life. Withstand the pressure of too many choices to acquire more than you need. Specify what truly matters to you and what does not. Learn when enough is enough, and you will trace a path of contentment throughout your life.**

**用你的大学四年激活你的心扉，更新你的生活。不要为了追求自己不需要的而去做过多的选择。明确自己真正在意和不在意的是什么。学会知足常乐，这样你的一生都会常乐久安。**