**Speaking Chinese in America**

**在美国说中文**

**1 Once, at a dinner on the Monterey Peninsula, California, my mother whispered to me confidentially: "Sau-sau (brother's wife) pretends too hard to be a polite recipient! Why bother with such nominal courtesy? In the end, she always takes everything."**

**有一次，在加州蒙特雷半岛上用餐时，我母亲私下悄悄地对我说：“嫂嫂想做个彬彬有礼的客人，但是装得太厉害了！何必费劲讲究形式上的客套呢？到最后她还是什么都要。”**

**2 My mother acted like a waixiao, an emigrant, no longer patient with old taboos and courtesies. To prove her point, she reached across the table to offer my elderly aunt from Beijing the last scallop from the garlic seafood dish, along with the flank steak and the cucumber salad.**

**我母亲行事像个“外侨”，即一个移民国外的侨民，因为她已经不耐烦老一套的禁忌和礼数了。为了证明她刚才的观点，她手伸过桌子，把蒜香海鲜拼盘里的最后一个扇贝，连同牛腩排及黄瓜沙拉一起，递给我从北京来的年长舅妈。**

**3 Sau-sau frowned. "B'yao, zhen b'yao!" she cried, patting her substantial stomach. I don't want it, really I don't.**

**嫂嫂皱起了眉头，“不要，真不要！”她一边大声说一边拍着自己已经吃得很饱的肚子。我不要了，真的不要了。**

**4 "Take it! Take it!" my mother scolded in Chinese, as predictably as the lunar cycles.**

**“拿去吧！拿去吧！”我母亲用中文责备道。预料到她就会这样，就像月亮盈亏周期似的。**

**5 "Full, I'm already full," Sau-sau muttered weakly, eying the scallop.**

**“饱了，我已经饱了，”嫂嫂低声嘀咕着，眼睛却瞟着扇贝。**

**6 "Ai!" exclaimed my mother. "Nobody wants it. It will only rot!"**

**“哎！”我母亲感叹着说，“没人愿意吃，只能让它坏掉了！”**

**7 Sau-sau sighed, acting as if she were doing my mother a favor by taking the scrap off the tray and sparing us the trouble of wrapping the leftovers in foil.**

**嫂嫂叹了口气，从碟子上拿去了那个扇贝，就好像是帮了我母亲一个大忙，并省去了我们用箔纸将剩菜打包的麻烦似的。**

**8 My mother turned to her brother, an experienced Chinese magistrate, visiting us for the first time. "In America, a Chinese person could starve to death. If you don't breach the old rules of etiquette and say you want it, they won't ask you again."**

**我母亲转头看着她兄长——一位经验丰富的中国地方法官，这是他初次来看我们。她说：“在美国，一个中国人可能会饿死。要是你不打破老一套的礼数说你要吃，他们就不会再问你了。”**

**9 My uncle nodded and said he understood fully: Americans take things quickly because they have no time to be polite.**

**我舅舅点点头，说他完全理解：美国人待人接物快速迅捷，因为他们没有时间客气来客气去。**

**10 I read an article in The New York Times Magazine on changes in New York's little cultural colony of Chinatown, where the author mentioned that the interwoven configuration of Chinese language and culture renders its speech indirect and polite. Chinese people are so "discreet and modest", the article started, that there aren't even words for "yes" and "no".**

**我在《纽约时报杂志》上读到过一篇文章，描述的是纽约市内的中国城这一小块文化聚居地的变迁。作者在文章中提到，中国语言与文化错综交织，使中文十分委婉和客套。中国人是如此“谨慎和谦虚”，文章开头写道，以至于他们都没有词语来表达“是”和“不是”。**

**11 Why do people keep fabricating these rumors? I thought. They describe us as though we were a tribe of those little dolls sold in Chinatown tourist shops, heads moving up and down in contented agreement!**

**我思索着，为什么人们会不断地编造这样的谣言呢？他们把我们描述得就像是唐人街旅游品商店里出售的一批小布娃娃。那些布娃娃的头不停地上下晃动，似乎对一切都心满意足，完全赞同。**

**12 As any child of immigrant parents knows, there is a special kind of double bind attached to knowing two languages. My parents, for example, spoke to me in both Chinese and English; I spoke back to them in English.**

**生于移民家庭的孩子都清楚，有一种特殊的两难境地与说两种语言的生活联系在一起。比如我父母，他们和我说话时中文和英文都用，但我和他们说话时只用英文。**

**13 "Amy-ah!" they'd scold me.**

**“艾米啊！”他们会这样责备我。**

**14 "What?" I'd answer back.**

**“怎么啦？”我会回问道。**

**15 "Do not question us when we call," they'd scold in Chinese. "It's not respectful."**

**“我们叫你时，不要对我们反问，”他们会用中文训斥道“这是不礼貌的！”**

**16 "What do you mean?"**

**“你们什么意思？”**

**17 "Ai! Didn't we just tell you not to question?"**

**“哎！我们不是刚刚说过，叫你不要反问吗？”**

**18 If I consider my upbringing carefully, I find there was nothing discreet about the Chinese language I grew up with, no censorship for the sake of politeness. My parents made everything abundantly clear in their consecutive demands: "Of course you will become a famous aerospace engineer," they prodded. "And yes, a concert pianist on the side."**

**仔细想想自己的成长过程，我发现，我从小到大所接触到的中文并不是什么特别谨慎的语言，也不存在出于客气而对所说的话进行仔细检查的现象。我父母向我提一连串的要求时，总是把一切都表述得清清楚楚：“你当然会成为著名的航空工程师，”他们会鼓励我说，“对了，你业余时间还要做音乐会的钢琴师。”**

**19 It seems that the more forceful proceedings always spilled over into Chinese: "Not that way! You must wash rice so not a single grain is lost."**

**似乎更加强硬的事情总是通过中文倾泻出来：“不能那样！你淘米的时候，必须一粒都不漏。”**

**20 Having listened to both Chinese and English, I'm suspicious of comparisons between the two languages, as I notice the reciprocal challenges they each present. English speakers say Chinese is extremely difficult because different words can be denoted by very subtle variations in tone. English is often bracketed with the label of inconsistency, a language of too many broken rules.**

**由于一直同时听着中英文两种语言，故而我对它们之间的任何对比总是心存怀疑，因为我注意到它们各自都有对方所没有的难点。说英文的人会认为中文极其难，因为中文用非常微妙的声调变化就可以表示不同的词语。而英文则常常被认为缺乏一致性，因为英文具有太多不合规则的用法。**

**21 Even more dangerous, in my view, is the temptation to view the gulf between different languages and behavior in translation. To listen to my mother speak English, an outside spectator might make the deduction that she has no concept of the temporal differences of past and future or that she is gender blind because she refers to my husband as "she". If one were not careful, one might also generalize that all Chinese people take an indirect route to get to the point. It is, rather, my mother's individual tendency to ornament her language and wander around a bit.**

**在我看来，更危险的做法是，人们往往倾向于通过翻译来理解不同语言和行为之间的差异。如果一个旁观的外人听我母亲说英语，可能会得出结论，说她对过去和将来这样的时间区别没有概念，或者认为她对人的性别不加区分，因为她提到我丈夫时总是说“她”。如果一个人对此类现象不假思虑，他也许还会概括说，所有中国人都是通过委婉迂回的方式才能说到话题重点的。而实际上喜欢修饰和绕弯子只是我母亲个人的说话风格。**

**22 I worry that the dominant society may see Chinese people from a limited perspective, hedging us in with the stereotype. I worry that the seemingly innocent stereotype may lead to actual intolerance and be part of the reason why there are few Chinese in top management positions, or in the main judiciary or political sectors. I worry about the power of language: If one says anything enough times, it might become true, with or without malicious intent.**

**我担心主流社会可能会从一个狭隘的角度、以一种成见看待中国人。我担心这种看似无害的成见实际会导致人们对中国人难以容忍，并成为中国人在高层管理职位或主要的司法及政府部门寥寥无几的部分原因。我担心语言的力量，即如果一个人将一件事说了很多遍，无论其是否有恶意，这件事都会变成事实。**

**23 Could this be why the Chinese friends of my parents' generation are willing to accept the generalization?**

**这会不会就是我父母辈的中国朋友愿意接受那些对中国人的简单概括的原因呢？**

**24 "Why are you complaining?" one of them said to me. "If people think we are modest and polite, let them think that. Wouldn't Americans appreciate such an honorary description?"**

**“你为什么要抱怨呢？”他们中有人问我。“如果人们认为我们谦虚礼让，就让他们那样想好了。难道美国人不喜欢这种赞誉性的话吗？”**

**25 And I do believe that anyone would take the description as a compliment — at first. But after a while, it annoys, as if the only things that people heard one say were what had been filtered through the sieve of social niceties: I'm so pleased to meet you. I've heard many wonderful things about you.**

**我当然相信每个人在一开始都会把这种描述的话当成称赞。但过了一段时间，这种话就会让人恼怒，就好像所听到的只是些经过细微的社交区别过滤后的言辞，诸如“很高兴认识你，我听到许多人都夸奖你”之类的话。**

**26 These remarks are not representative of new ideas, honest emotions, or considered thought. Like a piece of bread, they are only the crust of the interaction, or what is said from the polite distance of social contexts: greetings, farewells, convenient excuses, and the like. This generalization, therefore, is not a true composite of Chinese culture but only a stereotype of our exterior behavior.**

**这些话不能表达什么新观点，也不能传达什么真实的情感或深思熟虑的想法。它们就像一片面包，只是人们交往中最表层的东西，或社交场合下出于礼貌而说的一些话：问候、道别、顺口的托词，诸如此类。由此看来，那些对中国人的概括性评价并非是对中国文化成分的真实描述，而仅仅是对我们外在行为的一种成见而已。**

**27 "So how does one say 'yes' and 'no' in Chinese?" my friends may ask carefully.**

**“那么中文究竟怎么表达‘是’和‘不是’呢？”我的朋友也许会小心翼翼地问。**

**28 At this junction, I do agree in part with The New York Times Magazine article. There is no one word for "yes" or "no", but not out of necessity to be discreet. If anything, I would say the Chinese equivalent of answering "yes" or "no" is specific to what is asked.**

**在这一点上，我的确在某种程度上同意《纽约时报杂志》的那篇文章。在中文里，没有哪一个字专门用于表达“是”或“不是”，但这并非是因为需要保持谨慎。若的确有什么不同的话，那我会说中文里对应的“是”或“不是”的表达通常是针对所问的具体内容而定的。**

**29 Ask a Chinese person if he or she has eaten, and he or she might say chrle (eaten already) or meiyou (have not).**

**如果你问一个中国人是否吃饭了，他（或她）会说“吃了”（已经吃过）或“没有”（没有吃过）。**

**30 Ask, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" and the answer refers directly to the proposition being asserted or denied: stopped already, still have not, never beat, have no wife.**

**你若问：“你停止打老婆了吗？”他会直接就所断定或所否认的假设进行回答：已经停止了，还没有，从来不打，没有老婆。**

**31 What could be clearer?**

**还有什么能比这更明了的呢？﻿**

**Culture makes the business world go round**

**文化推动商业世界的运转**

**1 Edward Hall, a leader in the field of intercultural studies, famously said: "The single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture." Can cultural differences have as big an impact on international business ventures as financial planning and visionary leadership? The surprising answer is: Yes!**

**爱德华·霍尔是跨文化研究领域的著名学者。他曾说过一句名言：“商业成功的最大障碍是由文化竖立的障碍。”对国际企业来说，文化差异难道真的和财务规划及前瞻性领导有着同样大的影响吗？答案是出人意料的：的确如此！**

**2 A good example is the role of relationships in business dealings. While relationships play only a minor role in US business culture, they play a major role in Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries. In these cultures, in varying degrees, relationship building is like a torch that lights and guides the way for business to occur.**

**一个很好的例子，人际关系在生意往来中所起的作用。尽管人际关系在美国商业文化中作用不大，但在亚洲、非洲及中东国家却十分重要。在这些文化中，人际关系的经营在不同程度上就好像是照亮和引导生意征程的火炬。**

**3 Let's take the example of Kevin Johnston, a senior vice-president of a US company specializing in hospitality management. Kevin was put in charge of finalizing a merger with a company in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Virtually all of the complicated negotiations had been completed. What remained was a 3-day trip to the UAE for face-to-face meetings between the partners to sign the paperwork and close the deal.**

**让我们以美国一家酒店管理公司高级副总裁凯文·约翰斯顿的故事为例说明。凯文被指派负责敲定与阿拉伯联合酋长国（阿联酋）一家公司的合并事宜。几乎所有复杂的谈判均已完成，剩下的就是花三天时间前往阿联酋与对方面谈，以签署协议文件并完成整个交易。**

**4 Kevin was determined that nothing would detain him from succeeding. He sent out a memorandum across his company, enthusiastically describing the planned merger with the UAE partners. Having compiled all the necessary documents and graphs, with every figure and decimal in place, and having prepared a thorough exposition certifying the quality of his company, he packed his briefcase and headed for the UAE.**

**凯文坚信，任何事情都不会阻碍他此行成功完成任务。他给公司上下发了一份备忘录，热情洋溢地描述了与阿联酋方面的这一合并计划。在他整理好了所有必备的文件和乃至数据及小数点都精确到位的各种图表，并准备了一份证明公司资质的详尽说明后，他就装好了公文包，奔赴阿联酋。**

**5 Kevin arrived in the UAE excited to seal the deal. He was treated with extraordinary hospitality: an elaborate hotel, blue ribbon foods, elegant convertibles with drivers to tour the city, a parade of entertainment, and beautiful gifts to commemorate the visit. He tried repeatedly to bring out his files, open the conversation and get down to business. But, surprisingly, for the three days he spent in the UAE, none of his Emirate colleagues seemed ready to hear his financial briefing. Each time Kevin tried to speak about the deal, his prospective partners seemed to "kidnap" the conversation, diverting it to other topics. They would inquire about his health, his family or his views on education and other important issues.**

**凯文到了阿联酋，对于此行来完成这项交易感到兴奋无比。他受到了超规格的殷勤接待：奢华的宾馆、一流的佳肴、配有专职司机的优雅的敞篷车带他游览全城、接连不断的娱乐活动、精美的纪念品。他多次试图取出带来的文件资料，想打开话题谈生意，但奇怪的是，在他停留的三天里，阿联酋的同仁们却好像没有一个人愿意听他准备的财务情况简介。每当凯文试图谈及交易时，有望成为合作伙伴的对方似乎总是“绑架”谈话内容，岔开话题。他们会转而询问他的健康、他的家人，或他对教育和其他重要问题的看法。**

**6 Upon leaving the UAE, Kevin felt exasperated and defeated. He hadn't been able to receive the thorough interrogation of the materials for which he had so carefully prepared. His progress toward closing the deal was exactly where it was when he left the US: nil.**

**离开阿联酋时，凯文感到既恼火又丧气。对于自己精心准备的材料，他根本就无法获得对方的详细询问。至于完成这项交易的计划，则与他离开美国时毫无二致：零进展。**

**7 The above case is a classic example of how a friction between different cultural expectations causes delay that, if not handled appropriately, will bring the deal to an abrupt end and leave both sides reeling. The substantial loss of revenue can never be refunded and can leave a struggling company falling without a parachute.**

**上述例子很经典，它说明了不同文化期望值之间的冲突会如何导致延误。这种延误若未能恰当处理的话，就会使一笔生意戛然中断，让双方都不知所措。所造成的巨大的收入损失永远无法弥补，甚至还会让一家在困境中挣扎的公司突然倒闭，就像没用降落伞从高空坠落一样，毫无缓冲。**

**8 Kevin made the mistake of assuming that the "certifications" involved in sealing the deal were in his briefcase. He charged into the meetings like a bull. For many cultures, a person's certifications are established not only by their accomplishments, their education and abilities, but also by more personal connections. In this case, the UAE partners wanted to know if Kevin was a good man, a family man, a trustworthy man. This type of rating establishes a trusting relationship for them. Had Kevin patiently taken the time to establish relationships, he would likely have been asked to share his carefully prepared documents and have closed the deal.**

**凯文错误地以为，生意成交只要靠自己公文包中的各种证明文件就行。他风风火火地去参加会谈，就像一头误打误撞的公牛。但对于很多文化来说，一个人确立自己的资质不仅要靠业绩、教育背景或个人能力，而且要靠更多的人际交往。在这一例子中，阿联酋合作伙伴很想知道的是，凯文是不是个好人，是不是个顾家和值得信赖的人。对他们而言，这种评判能够确立双方之间的信任关系。如果凯文当初能够花些时间耐心地去经营一下双方关系的话，他们也许就会让他介绍一下精心准备的材料并完成交易了。**

**9 Sociologists agree that another key aspect influencing global business is the concept of face. Cross-cultural differences in the way we save face impact our perceptions of trust and respect, which in turn impact our relationships and group cohesion.**

**社会学家一致认为，影响国际商务的另一关键因素是“面子”。在“顾面子”的方式上，跨文化差异会影响我们对信任和尊重的看法，而这种看法反过来又会影响人们之间的关系和团队凝聚力。**

**10 Take the example of Ann, a US manager who took a reactionary approach to cultural differences. Ann thought being a nominee for the leadership position with a sales team based in Singapore was a climax of her career. Ann tried to establish a working relationship with each team member. After a few weeks of working on team unification and solidarity, presenting guidelines, and offering sales advice, she carefully compartmentalized goals for each member of the sales team.**

**以一位叫安的美国经理为例。安对文化差异采取了一种保守策略。她被提名为一个设于新加坡的销售团队的领导，她将此看作自己事业的一个顶峰。安努力和每一位团队成员都建立良好的工作关系。她花了数周时间致力于建立团队的统一性与凝聚力、介绍工作原则、提出销售建议，之后她为销售团队的每位成员精心设定了分块目标。**

**11 Later, when the team convened face-to-face for their first quarterly review meeting, Ann, after praising a Chinese team member, boldly criticized and questioned a Korean, trying to extract the exact reason why he was lagging so far behind on his goals. The meeting immediately lost its groove. The entire group became solemn and, for the rest of the meeting, remained polite but largely mute.**

**过了一段时间，在团队举行的面对面的首次季度工作总结例会上，安称赞了一位中国成员，而后毫不留情地批评并质询了一位韩国成员，试图找出他比别人落后许多的确切原因。会议立刻偏离了常规程序。整个团队变得严肃沉闷，而且在会议剩下的时间里，虽然大家都谦恭有礼，但大多数时候却沉默不言。**

**12 Clearly, Ann was not familiar with the concept of saving face in other cultures. In US culture, saving face exists — but only minimally, and tactful but straightforward speech is highly valued. US managers routinely speak freely about someone else's accomplishments or failures in open, public settings, such as during meetings. This is different in Asian cultures. Singling out an individual due to praise or criticism, a daily habit amongst American managers, may cause Asians to become uncomfortable or deeply embarrassed.**

**显然，安对其他文化中“顾面子”这一概念并不熟悉。在美国文化中，的确也存在着“顾面子”一说，但其影响微乎其微。更受推崇的是机智老练而又直截了当的谈话。美国经理人惯常于在公共场合，如在会议上，自由谈论其他人的成就或败绩。这和亚洲文化有所不同。对美国经理人来说，把某人单独挑出来予以夸奖或批评是日常性的做法，但对亚洲人来说，这样做会使他们觉得不自在或甚为尴尬。**

**13 Ann needs to consider more culturally appropriate ways to support and motivate her team. Providing feedback, especially negative feedback, in more private settings will be helpful. Most of all, she should work on giving more courteous and supportive praise and encouragement, which will help move toward the unification and cohesion that high functioning teams need in order to be successful.**

**安需要考虑的是，要采取在文化上更加恰当的方式来支持和激发她的团队。如果要给成员提反馈意见，尤其是负面意见的话，那么在私人场合进行会更有帮助。最为重要的是，她应该努力给出一些更加客气、更具支持性的赞扬和鼓励，这样才能使团队更加团结，更加具有凝聚力，而这也是一个高效运作的团队取得成功所必需的。**

**14 Around the world, deeper structures such as relationship building and face saving are embedded in the values, beliefs and behavior of a culture. They are much harder to understand than the glossary of terms in any culture's language phrase book. The advice is: Always ask for clarification and seek new insights. For business success, it is essential to learn to mediate these deeper cultural differences. Though it may be a little complicated to incorporate them into your way of thinking and communicating, it is well worth the effort!**

**在世界各地，人际关系经营及颜面顾及这类更深层次的文化结构都是根植于该文化所具有的价值观、信仰和行为之中的。它们比任何一种文化的词语汇编里所列出的术语都更难理解。我的建议是：随时向对方询问，以得到一个明晰的解释和新的理解。为了取得商业成功，学会协调这些更深层次的文化差异是极其重要的。尽管将它们融入自己的思维方式和人际交往有点复杂，但这样的努力是非常值得的！**