W6A - Lesson 9, Essay 5, Draft 1

Zack Chen

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The Last Emperor and His Bicycles

My name is Pu Yi. I was the last emperor of China. I ascended the throne when I was three-year-old. I grew up in the Forbidden City. In the early 19 century, China was way behind the world. Even though I was the Emperor, I did not get to see many things from other countries. I’d never forget that summer when I first saw a bicycle.

When I got married, people all over China came over to celebrate. I received thousands of precious presents, but none of it made me particularly interested. One day, my cousin came to visit me. He bought something to me as a present, something that I’ve never seen before.

“Your majesty,” He introduced proudly, “May I present you a bicycle.”

“Bicycle?” I muttered, “What is a bicycle?”

My cousin giggled with excitement: “This bicycle came from a place far away. It came from Europe!”

“Really!” I stared at it with great curiosity. It’s about one-meter-high, in black, and two circles standing on the ground.

“What’s that for?” I asked.

“Oh, this is called a bicycle. These are the wheels. These are the armrests. These are the pedals, and this is the the seat. Westerners ride bicycles to go to different places.”

“Let me show you!” He leaped on that bicycle, grasped the armrests tightly, and zoomed away. The wheels turned so fast. It looked so fascinating. I wanted to give it a try. “Your majesty!” one of my staff objected, “This is dangerous.”

“Nonsense!” I replied, sitting on the seat, holding the armrests tightly, and slowly put my feet on the pedal. Immediately, I lost balance. “Help!” I cried. My cousin held the bicycle to prevent me from falling to the ground. “Just look straight. Easy” He encouraged.

The next few days, we practiced and practiced. Soon I was able to ride bicycle by myself. I ended up buying twenty bicycles, imported from France, Germany and the US. My empress also learned how to ride a bicycle. We rode together in the Forbidden City. But there was one more problem. There were too many gates in the Forbidden City. Each gate had a threshold which was the symbol of power. We could not ride through the gates. I wanted to take them off so that we could ride from palace to palace. Of course the empress dowager did not agree. One day she was sick, I ordered to take the thresholds off immediately. When the empress dowager found out later, it was too late.