

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 361)

Elderly people in the city also have organized cultural and entertainment activities, for example singing groups, dance exercise, T'ai Chi, Chinese chess, painting classes, computer classes etc., sometimes even going on group trips to see natural scenery. In addition, modern medical instruments allow physicians to diagnose illnesses earlier, and pharmaceuticals are getting more and more advanced; illnesses that were impossible to treat in the past are now curable. The elderly are able to live longer in retirement and so are becoming a quickly growing demographic.

Twenty-nine: Chinese people study English assiduously, thinking that the United States is place of incredible wealth and prosperity, but that is not the case.

In the nineties, the head of Shanghai's Emigrant Affairs was a Chinese person from Southeast Asia who had returned to his native country, China. He understood the social circumstances of the Chinese Diaspora, and took care of his fellow Chinese emigrants, aiding them to his fullest abilities. Therefore he was on very good terms with the other members of his community. He was an outstanding official who received everyone's respect.

His greatest achievement was not that he simply provided excellent service to Chinese emigrants, but was instead how he was able to bring about the construction of the magnificent Shanghai Overseas Chinese building through his own effort. The main purpose of the building was to provide space to handle official business to do with overseas Chinese, so the original building was a foreign low-rise building. The economic reforms created the need for more space, so the head of Shanghai's immigrant affairs went to Hong Kong, the United States, and Canada to pitch a proposal to overseas Chinese communities for what would eventually become the Shanghai Overseas Chinese building. Today there are Overseas Chinese centers in every major Chinese city, but none are as large as the one in Shanghai, and Shanghai is still the only one that was planned by Emigrant Affairs.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 362)

The majority of overseas Chinese emigrants in the past were from Guangdong and Fujian. The rest are mostly from Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang and other areas. The earliest Chinese immigrants to the United States came by sea from Southeast Asia after travelling there from Mainland China. Their purpose in immigrating to the United States was to make a living and improve their lives.

Since China's economy was so backward thirty years ago, emigrating was a way to struggle for a perfect live. Currently the number of immigrants has increased since then, and besides the most common type of immigrant, there are also exchange students, visiting observers, cultural exchange participants, skilled workers, and illegal immigrants. Most of the immigrants from China that come nowadays are young and able to work hard. They are not afraid of hardship, living in narrow spaces and working difficult jobs. Chinese immigrants from Fuzhou and Wenzhou are increasing in recent years, and in fact have even surpassed immigrants from Guangdong in number. The current generation of immigrants from China is definitely not coming just to gain access to the basic necessities of life; the circumstances in China have changed since the past and it is now basically possible to meet all such needs living within the country. Most of the new immigrants go abroad to work in the hopes of creating a career for themselves.

The standard of public education in China is being raised every year. Generally speaking, people are only able to find better jobs and improve their living conditions if they become more cultured and educated. Add to this the fact that Chinese people have always paid particular attention to their children's educations. Increased economic activity since the economic reforms began has resulted in more taxes collected, which have been invested heavily into public education. Great effort has been put into making primary, secondary, and tertiary education available to the masses. Today there are also many families who send their children to Europe and North America to be educated. Chinese people studying abroad in the past used to rely on scholarships. Most families then were unable to afford the high cost of living in the West. After improved economic conditions in China, many families pay the cost of studying abroad for their children by themselves.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 363)

Currently it is popular all over China to study foreign languages. Chinese people's interest in American life is indirectly reflected in their study of the English language. But in the United States how is China perceived, not matter whether it is officials, businesspeople, or commoners? First of all, few are interested in visiting China. Industry in China is now very developed, and businesspeople try to sell their goods in the United States. The United States puts restrictions on imported Chinese goods, but the government does not insist on trying to raise the value of other countries' currencies. The United States uses any means possible to raise the value of the Renminbi. Even though Taiwan is a part of China, Taiwanese people all support the status quo, despite maintaining friendly relations with China on the surface. On flights between the United States and China, ninety-five percent of the passengers are Chinese, with just five percent being Americans. Exchanges between the two countries are very one-sided.

The common people living in China have experienced rising living standards since the enactment of economic reforms. The first consequence of this was that it solved basically all problems of satisfying the basic necessities of life. Every single household's situation has improved since the start of the reforms.

Chinese people are very image conscious. Many people want to immigrate to the United States by any means possible, but in reality you must continue to work hard even after you arrive here. Most immigrants often have to live frugally, and even after several decades of hard work will never have eaten in a restaurant at a five-star hotel. However if they then go back to China and stay in a five-star hotel while visiting, their relatives will see this and mistakenly believe that all immigrants to the United States live impressive lives like this. But immigrants will never let others know that abroad they work very hard to make a living. Others see them and think that everyone who goes abroad will get rich, but that is not the case at all.

So how do immigrants in the United States (which Chinese people in the past called "the gold mountain") live? Those who enter the country legally and obtain a permanent resident card can apply for citizenship after five years. After receiving citizenship, you can apply for your family members to come to the United States, which usually takes about ten years to be approved. If you are applying for your spouse or sibling, it can be much quicker.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 364)

Among the Chinese people who immigrate to the United States, there are some who are right in doing so, and others for which it is not a suitable decision. If in China you are a farmer, construction worker, factory worker, or an unemployed worker, then by coming to the United States you will be able to do the same work, but will make significantly more money. So for these types of people, immigrating is a good choice. For whom is it a bad choice to immigrate to the United States then? If in China you are a businessperson, office worker, teacher, doctor, artist, or another type of skilled worker, then it is not a good idea to start from scratch again in the United States. Even if you are a cadre leader, if your knowledge of English is insufficient, you will not be able to find a similar type of employment in the United States. Such people need to work difficult jobs just to survive. However if you are able to endure arduous work and a difficult life, then you too will be able to create a new life for yourself from nothing. Chinese and American societies make different demands of people. In China it is preferable to do clerical work over physical labor. However in the United States you can only succeed with hard work.

Thirty: Life abroad is difficult officials, businesspeople, lawyers, and doctors from China.

In China there are many government agency leaders and businesspeople that revere Western countries. Of course they are very open minded, and do everything they can to send their children abroad to study. Generally speaking, these high-ranking officials' children do well in school, getting good grades and then finding jobs abroad. If they stay abroad and work, then their employer can usually submit an application for permanent residency on their behalf. Nevertheless, no matter how open and free such Western countries claim to be, there is always discrimination against Chinese people. Chinese people wishing to be promoted will encounter a glass ceiling at some point that will prevent them from rising above low and mid-level jobs.

These foreign students who end up living in the United States are relatively filial towards their parents because of their Chinese upbringing. Once their living situation has become stable, they will generally help their parents to come to the United States too to live with them. However, these families often live in the suburbs where it is necessary to drive a car to get a round. Furthermore, the children's parents most often do not know any English, and so they rely on their children even for buying daily necessities. For these reasons, many Chinese parents make plans to return to China after they have lived here for a while.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 365)

Imagine an immigrant whose previous job was well paid, for example a high level office worker or government official. After arriving in the United States, he or she will not be able to find the same sort of high-level work, and will be unwilling to accept the low-level jobs that are available. If the wife finds a job, but the husband stays at home unemployed there will be conflict with the traditional Chinese practice of women living in the inner quarters and only men leaving the home. It will be very easy for some sort of crisis to occur under such circumstances. Since staying home and taking care of domestic affairs is usually the domain of women, tradition is upended when the man stays home and the wife supports the household economically. This sort of situation will lead to domestic problems.

A man in China with higher-degree education and leadership ability will perhaps have a good job or a position in a government agency, as well as the opportunity to go into business for himself. If he is a government official, then he will have all expenses paid for by the government, and will eat and drink well when out on public service. Life would be free and unfettered for such a person. A person in that position would be able to go to karaoke often to amuse himself in his free time. His life would be comfortable, but if he was to immigrate to the United States and start a business, life would not be so easy.

Most service-oriented jobs such as in restaurants or renovating are very labor-intensive and difficult. If someone who is a government official or specialist such as a lawyer, doctor, or teacher comes to the United States, life will be very difficult because credentials from China will not be recognized. One reason is that the systems are different, and another is that the United States wants to protect its workers. Getting certified here in the United States is not at all a simple task for such immigrants. First of all they must study all of the specialized material again, and then pass a state examination. Therefore Chinese emigrants with high salaries and good jobs who go abroad in the hopes of finding better jobs and getting rich usually end up disappointed.

There are many government laws and regulations for those who start and run businesses in China to deal with. However, people always find loopholes to exploit to avoid such restrictions. One such method is keeping close relationships with government officials and getting official approval from them. This method can bring great wealth in just a short period of time.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 366)

Looking at the past hundred years as a whole, Chinese people have primarily immigrated to Southeast Asia. However, after Deng Xiaoping visited the United States in the seventies and the Chinese authorities relaxed emigration policy, the number of Chinese immigrants to North America and Europe increased rapidly. This fact in addition to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States led to friendlier relations between the two countries.

Thirty-one: Remaining staunch and unyielding in the face of hardship tempers one into a strong person.

In modern society, people only need to do more schoolwork or learn a skill in order to earn a living. Generally anyone who possesses some occupational skill can lead a stable life. If you work even harder and start your own business, you may even be able to lead a life with more than just simple comforts. However, you must have an annual income over one million dollars to be a truly wealthy American household. This is easier said than done of course. To do this you must own a business in the financial or real estate industries and have over a hundred employees. A man could start with a small sum of money and work to make it a large one through business. Generally men establish their household before they establish their business, so the hard work starts after marriage. After accumulating some capital, he can then start his business. Even if the wife does not work in the business, she can play an important role by cooking good meals, running a peaceful household, and providing encouragement. The saying that behind every great man there is a great woman is a famous one, and there is truth in it.

Men can be successful in business without a home and family, but it can be lonely and it is easier to become engrossed in vices like alcohol and gambling. Getting involved in gambling can lead to taking out debts that you cannot repay and getting involved with prostitutes, all of which can lead to serious financial losses. Even if you are making a lot of money, it is spent at an even faster rate and no matter how much you work it is to no avail. Of course there are single businessmen who have tenacious spirits and self-control, and so do not fall prey to these problems. Nevertheless they are relatively rare.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 367)

Generally when a man's wife passes away, it does not take long for him to marry. No matter whether he is in his youth, middle age, or old age and no matter whether he is rich or of common means, it usually takes no more than several months or a year. Men are less vigilant when it comes to matters of love, and will rarely think about how remarriage might affect their finances. If the marriage does not go well and ends in divorce, one half of the couple could lose as much as half of his or her property. Therefore wealthy people tend to think more before getting remarried. Even in the case of divorce, it is possible to control the situation to prevent loss of property. Another factor to consider is that as men age, their level of physical fitness and ability declines. They are unable to take care of daily matters of life by themselves anymore, and their lives can become a mess. As people age, they become more and more like children. It is best to have a partner who can help with daily life, in matters such as cooking, getting groceries, and going to the doctor. For these and many other reasons, single life is very difficult for men. Technology has advanced a great deal in modern society, but family structure has also changed in many ways. The males in households today rarely take care of the family, and familial ties are weak.

So-called successful career women are not at all like ordinary housewives. For all sorts of reasons they train and change themselves, to make for a special environment in which women can make a career for themselves without relying on anyone else, even though there are very few women who have succeeded like this. Such women require astonishing force, or must go endure numerous hardships before making it on their own. If they were to accept some help from their families, or perhaps have some money from a deceased or ex-husband, then they could use this initial amount to go into business for themselves. Another method is to go into occupations in culture or entertainment, which can also be very successful.

Thirty-two: With incredible luck and boundless joy, a hole-in-one on the golf course (See page 396)

In the fall of 1990, Beijing hosted the Asian Games. The opening ceremony was a magnificent sight to behold. Five-thousand five-hundred people with coordinated costumes spelled out "Asian Games" and also arranged themselves in the Chinese characters for Tiananmen Square. At the same time, two-thousand five-hundred Chinese and Japanese T'ai Chi performers put on a massive show.

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

(P 368)

In the Asian Games, China won more gold, silver, and bronze medals than any other competing country. This competition showed Chinese people's physical prowess, technique, and skill, dispelling the notion that East Asian athletes were inferior. China's success in sporting events grew greater and greater after this.

In the spring of 2001, I played golf with a good friend in Ningbo. Although I had barely started learning to play, I unexpectedly and very luckily happened to hit a hole-in-one that day. Golf is a type of luxury sport in China, and if four people go to play golf they will be accompanied by four caddies provided by the club to give tips and fetch the ball. Casual players are generally not accompanied by caddies in the United States.

Since hitting a hole-in-one is such a rare and lucky accomplishment, my three friends playing golf with me and the caddies all asked for my signature, and I even got a certificate for it, as well as a three thousand Renminbi prize and a free ticket from Ningbo back to Beijing. Looking at the prize for getting a hole-in-one during a tournament, I noticed that it was 770 thousand Renminbi. We finished the rest of our game in high spirits. Some of the player had played golf for over thirty years and still had never seen a hole-in-one before.

In recent years in sporting events, China has turned from a nation suffering from so-called "East Asian sickness" into an international sports superpower. At China's first Winter Olympics, which was held in New York, China did not earn even one medal. However, after this defeat, efforts were doubled and China contends in all events. In October of 2007, Shanghai hosted the Special Olympics, the scale of which was quite large. Eighty thousand people came on the opening day. Many foreign officials visited, as well as the National Chairman Hu Jintao. From this, one can see the importance placed on athletic events. Due to the better economic situation, sports are very popular all over China now. There are intramural and interscholastic sports competitions, as well as district, city, and province-wide competitions. Together the government and the people support physical exercise and sports in China. In addition to the Olympics, there are also many national and provincial competitions within China, and each year they get larger. There are also many unique events in Chinese sports competitions, such as Shaolin boxing and Xinjiang-style horseback riding.