关于2022年东华大学研究生

“中国传统故事英文诵读比赛”的通知

各位同学：

为促进中华优秀传统文化进校园，鼓励同学用英文讲好中国故事，做传播中华文化的使者，外语学院将举办东华大学研究生中国传统故事英文诵读比赛。现就相关事项通知如下：

**一、诵读内容**

参赛者可以自由选择喜爱的英文版中国传统故事，也可以选择主办方提供的英文版中国传统故事（见附录）。

**二、参赛对象**

非英语专业硕士研究生和博士研究生。

**三、报名参赛**

即日起至11月30日，报名参赛者可直接提交5分钟内的诵读视频作品和诵读篇目文字稿至邮箱dhucompetition@126.com。请在2022年11月30日23:59之前上传作品到邮箱，逾期上传无效。

**四、视频要求**

视频作品至少需显示诵读者正面上半身，需采用高清录制，格式为MP4，分辨率设定为1280\*720或以上，视频作品大小不超过200M。视频作品文件名统一命名格式：姓名+学院+手机号+诵读篇目，例如，张三+外语学院+18900002527+《三顾茅庐》。

**五、线上评选**

12月1日至12月8日为线上评选时间，届时评委将根据语音语调、流利度与节奏感、感染力和整体印象三个维度进行打分。

**六、奖项设置**

本次比赛设特等奖、一等奖、二等奖、三等奖各若干名，获奖学生将获得证书和奖金。

外语学院

2022.11.1

**附录：**

1.1 Three Calls at the Thatched Cottage

In Chinese literature, there are many stories about the Three Kingdoms (220–280 AD). Among them, the story called San Gu Mao Lu or “making three calls at the thatched cottage” is one of the best.

Before becoming the ruler of the Kingdom of Shu Han, Liu Bei tried very hard to find talented people to help him for the cause of unifying the country. One day the future ruler learned that there was a highly-gifted strategist by the name of Zhuge Liang living a hermit’s life in Longzhong. Liu decided to meet him. When Liu and his two best friends arrived at Zhuge’s thatched cottage, they were told by the houseboy that his master was away for several weeks. Very disappointed, they left.

A few months later, Liu and his friends came to Zhuge’s cottage again in a heavy snowstorm. But once again, they were told Zhuge was not at home and probably would not be back for a couple of days. Feeling frustrated, Liu’s friends tried to persuade him to give up. One of them said: “Zhuge is impolite for not making a returned call. Maybe he is but another self-acclaimed sage in the countryside.” Liu replied: “At present, I very much need all kinds of talented people to support my cause. I will not give up my efforts. If you don’t want to go, I’ll go by myself. I believe Zhuge will be moved by my sincerity.” When Liu went to Longzhong for the third time, he was met by Zhuge personally at the entrance of the village. The two had a long discussion on the political and military situation at that time and made a long-term plan for unifying the country. Later, Zhuge became the top military adviser and prime minister for Liu’s regime.

Nowadays, the title of the story has become a widely-quoted idiom. It is used to refer to a potentate who repeatedly requests someone to take up a responsible post. It also implies someone’s deep sincerity in seeking the assistance and trust from another person.

三顾茅庐

在中国文学中，有很多关于三国（公元220年—公元280年）的故事，而“三顾茅庐”是其中最脍炙人口的故事之一。

在成为蜀汉皇帝之前，刘备求贤若渴，四处寻找人才来帮助他完成统一国家的大业。有一天，这位未来的皇帝得知，有一位名叫诸葛亮的天才战略家在隆中隐居，于是决定去见他。当刘备和他的两个结拜兄弟来到诸葛亮的茅庐时，诸葛亮的仆童告诉他们主人不在家，要外出数周。刘备一行惆怅不已，只得怏怏离去。

几个月后，刘备和他的兄弟们冒着暴风雪，再次来到了诸葛亮的茅庐。可这次他们还是被告知诸葛亮不在家，可能好几天都不会回来。刘备的兄弟们备感沮丧，试图说服他放弃。其中一人说：“诸葛亮不知回访我们，太过无礼，或许他只是自诩圣贤，其实不过一徒有虚名的村夫罢了。”刘备回答道：“我现在急需各类人才来辅佐大业，我是不会轻言放弃的。如果你不想去，我就自己去。我相信诸葛先生定会为我的诚意所打动。”当刘备第三次去隆中时，诸葛亮亲自在村口迎接了他。两人就当时的政治和军事形势进行了长时间的讨论，并制定了统一国家的长期计划。后来，诸葛亮成为了刘备政权的首席军师和丞相。如今，这个故事的名字已经成为一个广为引用的成语，用来指某位当权者再三邀请某人接受一个责任重大的岗位。它同时还意味着某人在寻求他人的帮助和信任时深深的诚意。后来，诸葛亮成为了刘备政权的首席军师和丞相。

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1.2 Waterfront Towers

The Chinese idiom Jin Shui Lou Tai, meaning “the waterfront towers,” refers to the importance of being in a favored position. The full phrase, Jin Shui Lou Tai Xian De Yue or “the waterfront towers get the moonlight first,” comes from a poem written by a bureaucrat several hundred years ago.

Fan Zhongyan was a famous politician and scholar in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) who had held several very important positions in the imperial court. Fan paid great attention to promotion of young and talented officials. So many young aides who had once worked under Fan were later assigned to satisfactory positions thanks to the politician’s recommendation.

Su Lin, a local official, was not happy about his job as a county inspector in the Hangzhou area, but he could not find a better job because of his lack of connections or strong recommendations. Therefore, Su was jealous of the other young bureaucrats who had been helped by influential Fan. One day, when Su was sent to submit a report to Fan, the young official was pleased to have the chance to see Fan, and decided to take advantage of this opportunity to talk to the senior politician about his desire for a new job. But Fan was away. Su had to leave the report on Fan’s desk and return to his own office.

Later, he wrote to Fan to express his desire for a more satisfying job. Enclosed was a poem with the lines, “The waterfront towers get the moonlight first; the flowers facing the sun tend to blossom earlier in spring.” Fan liked the verses very much and also understood very well their real meaning and soon he recommended the young official to a better position. Today, the phrase Jin Shui Lou Tai Xian De Yue is frequently used in talking about someone who enjoys the benefits from being in a favorable position.

近水楼台

汉语成语“近水楼台”的意思是“水边的楼阁”，意指位置越优越，获取越便捷。全句“近水楼台先得月”源自几百年前一位官员所写的一首诗。

范仲淹是北宋（960—1127）著名的政治家，也是一位大文人，他曾历任朝廷命官，职位显赫。他尤为注重提拔朝中的青年才俊和能力出众者。因此，由于范仲淹的举荐，其众多年轻下属后来都纷纷得到了满意的职位。

有一位名叫苏麟的地方官员，对自己在杭州做一名区县巡检官的差事感到不满，又苦于缺少人脉，无人举荐，升迁无门。于是，对于那些经由范仲淹帮助提拔的青年官吏，苏麟很是羡慕。一日，他被派去给范仲淹呈送文件，想到自己有机会面见范仲淹，苏麟心中喜悦，决意利用这次机会，当面向这位朝廷重臣表达自己渴望履新的愿望。但是范仲淹外出不在，他只得将文件放在范仲淹的案台上，黯然离开。

后来，他给范仲淹写信，表达了自己欲谋一良职的想法。信中有一首诗，其中两句是“近水楼台先得月，向阳花木易为春。”范仲淹很喜欢这些诗句，对其中之意也了然于心，很快，他便为这位年轻人另荐良职。今天，“近水楼台先得月”常常用来形容某人由于地处近便而优先获利。

1.3 Promote Yourself in Due Modesty

In China, modesty has been deemed a virtue for thousands of years. Sometimes Chinese modesty even seems hypocritical: a veteran master of martial art claims he is still a novice; or a Chinese host apologizes to his guests over a table of 10 dishes for not having enough to feed them. In a country where people are reluctant to admit their abilities, most don’t dare to publicly volunteer their services for fear of being called big-headed by others. So Mao Sui, who recommended himself to be an adviser to a local prince in 258 BC, is still famous today for his courage. His name appears not only in history textbooks, but also in the popular idiom Mao Sui Zi Jian or “to offer one’s service as Mao Sui did.”

His story dates back to the Warring States Period (476–221 BC). When the State of Qin laid siege to the capital of the State of Zhao, a prince of Zhao was sent to seek help from the State of Chu.The prince wanted to choose 20 advisers to go with him. But after picking 19 names, he could not find the 20th person worthy of joining his entourage. Then, Mao, one of the prince’s several hundred courtiers, came forward and recommended himself for the last vacancy.

“How long have you been with me?” the prince asked.

“Three years,” he said.

“A capable man is like an awl (a tool for piercing holes in leather),” said the prince. ”Once you put it into a cloth bag, its tip will immediately come out. So why haven’t I heard of your name in these three years?”

“Because until today, I have never been put into that cloth bag like an awl,” Mao answered.

Other courtiers laughed at Mao behind his back. But the prince decided to include him in his entourage. His decision proved right. When the prince’s negotiation with the king of Chu came to a deadlock, Mao used a long sword and sharp words to convince the Chu monarch to form a military alliance with Zhao. When he returned home, Mao became a hero and was treated by the prince as a guest of honor for many years. Today, the idiom Mao Sui Zi Jian has become a complimentary expression when it’s used to describe someone who offers himself for a position or volunteers for a bigger role. However, when it is used with the connotation of “one recommending oneself,” this phrase becomes a kind of excuse: “I’m not here being hoity-toity, I just follow what Mao did before.” An expression of Chinese modesty.

毛遂自荐

古往今来，在中国，谦逊一直被视为一种美德。有时，这种中国式的谦逊难免貌似虚伪，就像一位武林高手仍以初学者自谦，或是一位中国主人设豪宴款待来宾，却仍自称“招待不周，多有怠慢”。在一个人们不喜欢露才扬己的国家里，大多数人不敢在公开场合挺身而出，自我推荐，皆因担心被视作狂妄自大之徒。因此，那位在公元前258年，向赵国平原君自荐为谋士的毛遂，至今仍因其勇气而闻名于世。他的名字不仅出现在历史课本中，也出现在一则脍炙人口的成语中，即“毛遂自荐”。

毛遂的故事要上溯至战国时期（公元前476年—公元前221年）。当时，秦军围困了赵国都城，赵国遣王子平原君向楚国求援。平原君欲选门下食客二十人作为谋士同往，只选出十九人，尚缺一人随行。作为平原君门下数百食客之一的毛遂挺身自荐，自愿随往楚国。

平原君问道：“先生在我门下几年？”

毛遂答说：“三年了。”

平原君说：“有能力的人就像将锥子装在布袋之中，自当锋芒立现。为何我从未听见身边的人有谁称道过您呢？”

毛遂答道：“因为，时至今日，我还从未被作为锥子，被您装进布袋里呢。”

其余的随从们都窃窃私语，暗笑毛遂。然而，平原君却决定带毛遂前往楚国。事实证明，他的决定是正确的。正当平原君与楚王的谈判陷于僵局时，毛遂以犀利的言辞和手中的长剑，迫使楚王同意与赵国缔结军事联盟。返回赵国后，毛遂成为国之英雄，之后多年，平原君都以贵宾待之。今天，成语“毛遂自荐”成为一则褒义词，比喻自告奋勇或自我推荐担当重任之人。然而，当人们使用这则颇有“自荐”含义的成语时，它成为了某种托词，意思是“我不是在这里恃才扬己，我只是像毛遂一样勇于自荐”。这仍是一种中国式的谦逊表达。

1.4 Stealing a Bell

English speakers tend to describe a person who deceives himself in an attempt to stay away from danger as burying his head in the sand like an ostrich. His counterpart in China, however, invented an easier way to achieve the same goal more than 2,000 years ago — to plug his ears while stealing a bell. This invention has also generated a popular Chinese idiom Yan Er Dao Ling. The Chinese expression originates from a story that dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC).

One day, a man walked past the gate of a big house belonging to a family that used to be rich and famous. He found the house was kind of deserted, but there was a beautiful bronze bell still hanging above the gate. He believed the bell could be sold for some good money and decided to take it home. However, since the bell was so big, he found it impossible to take the bell home in whole by himself. So, he planned to smash it into small pieces and then carry the fragments home in a large bag. First, the man found a big hammer and then, with all his might, he struck the bell. The bell cracked, but its deafening sound frightened the thief. He was afraid that the sound would attract the attention of people living in the neighborhood and that he might be caught stealing the bell red-handed. After a few moments of brain racking, the man came up with an idea. He found some cotton to plug his ears and continued to destroy the bronze bell. He believed that as long as he could not hear the bell's rumbling noise, no one else could. By sheer chance or because no one cared about what's happening to that house any more, the thief was finally able to break the bell into pieces without any interruption. Today, one can not only hear this idiom still being cited in daily conservation, but also find “bell swindlers” like the thief still roving almost everywhere. Besides burying their heads in the sand, the Chinese ostriches also plug their ears.

掩耳盗铃

英语世界中，人们将那种为躲避危险而自欺欺人的行为形容成把头埋进沙子里的“鸵鸟”。然而在中国，与之相似的行为出现在2000多年前，效果异曲同工却更简便易行，即，捂上耳朵偷窃钟铃。这种行为也产生出一则脍炙人口的成语—掩耳盗铃。这则成语源自春秋时期（公元前770年—公元前476年）的一个故事。

一日，有个人从一座豪宅门口经过，这里曾经住过一户大户人家。。他发现这像是一栋人去楼空的大屋，但是大门前还悬挂着一口漂亮的青铜大钟。他觉得可以将这口钟卖个好价钱，于是决定把钟带回家。然而，这口钟实在是体量太大了，他发觉仅凭一己之力根本无法将钟完整地带回家去。于是，他打算干脆把钟打碎，再将碎片放进袋子里带回。他先是找来一把大锤子，然后使足力气砸向大钟。大钟裂开了，然而那震耳欲聋的声音吓了这个偷钟贼一大跳。他担心钟声会引起周围人家的注意，他会因偷窃被抓个现行。思前想后了好一阵，偷钟贼计上心头。他找来棉花塞进两耳，继续砸钟。他认为，只要自己听不见咣咣的砸钟声，别人也就听不见。或许纯属巧合，又或者根本没人再关心那栋大屋的动静，偷钟贼最终将大钟砸成碎片，期间未受到任何的干扰。今天，人们在日常生活中不仅还能听到“掩耳盗铃”这则成语，而且这样的“偷钟贼”还随处可见。除了以沙埋头，中国自欺欺人的“鸵鸟”们还将耳朵也捂了起来。

1.5 Hare-brained

Although almost everyone has heard of the saying “no pain, no gain,” there are always people who tend to trust chance and wait for windfalls. Chinese often describe such behavior by quoting the popular idiom Shou Zhu Dai Tu, meaning “standing by a tree stump to wait for a hare to crash into it.”The expression is derived from a story a long time ago.

One day, a farmer in the State of Song was laboring in the fields when he saw a hare running past him, dashing itself into a tree stump a few yards away. The hare passed out immediately upon the impact. The farmer walked over, picked up the godsend gift of food and was overjoyed. He decided to call it a day, though the sun was still high. He prepared a tasty dish from the hare for dinner and after a few shots of wine, he became a little tipsy. He thought aloud: “If I can pick up one hare a day, I wouldn't need to sweat in the fields any more. The stump on my plot must be the blessed place to wait for windfalls.” So, starting the next day, the farmer stopped tending his crops and did nothing but waited by the tree stump for more hares to come by and knock themselves out. Several days passed, no hare appeared. Meanwhile, the field had quickly become overgrown, and the farmer soon became a laughing stock all across the state. Even today, people still laugh at the ancient farmer for believing that a one-time windfall would turn into a regular supply. However, almost everywhere around the world, one can still find disciples of this Song farmer. And in addition to its original meaning of “waiting for windfalls,” it has also taken on a connotation of being trapped in an inflexible mindset and lacking innovation.

守株待兔

常言道：“没有付出，就没有收获”，虽说几乎人人都晓得这个说法，但还是有人乐于相信机会，擎等着收获意外之财。中国人常常以“守株待兔”这则脍炙人口的成语来形容这种行为，意思是“守在树桩边，等待兔子一头撞上来。”这则成语源自一个很久远的故事。

一日，宋国的一个农夫在田里干活，看见一只野兔从他身边跑了过去，一头撞在几米外的树桩上。这么一撞，那只兔子立刻一命呜呼了。农夫走了过去，拾起这份天赐的美味，欣喜若狂。尽管太阳还老高呢，他还是决定就此收工。他用这只兔子烹制了一道美餐，酒过三巡，他有点微醺。他自言自语道：“如果每天都能捡到一只野兔，就再也用不着在田里干活流汗了。我地里那根树桩，肯定是我固守外财的宝地。”于是，从第二天开始，农夫不再照管庄稼，无所事事地守在树桩旁，一心等着有更多的野兔跑过来，撞树而亡。几天过去了，连兔子的影子都没看见。与此同时，田地很快荒芜，杂草丛生，农夫很快就成了这个国家的笑柄。时至今日，人们依旧笑话这位古代的农夫，竟然相信一次外财，会变成“家常便饭”。然而，几乎在世界各地，人们还能发现那位宋国农夫的徒子徒孙。除了最初的“等待意外之财”的意思，这则成语现也被赋予了陷入僵化思维，缺乏创新之举的含义。

1.6 The Power of Illusions

When the Chinese say that some one is trying to satisfy his or her desires by illusion, they frequently use the phrase Wang Mei Zhi Ke.The literal meaning is to quench one’s thirst by looking at imaginary fresh plums.There is a story to this idiom.

Cao Cao was a renowned Chinese military strategist and politician in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD). One hot summer day, Cao led a large army on a rapid march to launch a surprise attack on the enemy’s rear.However, the scorching summer heat and the heavy armor the troops were wearing soon drained the soldiers of energy. Thirsty and exhausted, the troops were moving at a snail’s pace. It appeared impossible that the army would reach its destination on time.Meanwhile, scouts came back and reported to Cao that they could not find any drinking water nearby. The strategist, however, would not be deterred. He raced to the top of a nearby hill and pretended to look carefully in the direction of his destination.Then, he shouted to his soldiers: “There are many plum trees in the valley ahead and all the plums are ripe. They are both sour and sweet, so we can eat some fresh plums to quench our thirst. Come on, men.”Hearing Cao’s remarks, the soldiers quickened their pace, rushing toward the valley. But, they were very disappointed when they got to the valley and did not find one plum tree.Fortunately, the scouts had discovered a streamlet not far away and brought back some buckets of cool water.The army consequently reached its destination on time and launched a successful offensive against the enemy.With the ploy having been retold for generations, people today tend to use the phrase when they describe someone using an illusion to cheer up oneself or others.

望梅止渴

**国人常用“望梅止渴”一词来形容如何以幻想满足欲望。该词的字面意思是，想象青梅在望，渴即止焉。这个成语有如下故事。**

**曹操是中国东汉（公元25年—公元220年）末年著名的军事家、政治家。一日，正当盛夏，曹操率部众一路急行，欲奇袭敌军后方。怎奈酷暑难当，人马不堪淄重，很快便体力不支。焦渴与疲惫令曹军行进迟缓，看起来，要想按时抵达目的地几近无望。彼时，又有探马来报，查明附近并无可饮用的水源。曹操不愧一代名相，文韬武略，自不会陷困于此。他快速登上一处坡顶，面向目的地，佯装打望。稍后，他冲着士兵高声喊道：“前面山谷中有成片的杨梅林，果子均已熟透，酸甜可口，我们可以鲜果解渴，随我向前。”听了曹操的话，士兵们加快脚步，冲向山谷。然而，行至山谷，却未见一棵梅树，众人皆大失所望。所幸探报已在附近寻到一处溪涧，打回了几桶清凉的溪水。曹军因而得以准时到达，并成功地发起了对敌进攻。此后，曹操此计被世代相传，时至今日，每当人们形容那种凭借想象自我提振或提振他人时，还是会使用“望梅止渴”一词。**

1.7 Eyes of the Dragon

The literal translation of the Chinese idiom Hua Long Dian Jing is “to dot the eyeballs in painting a dragon.” The saying is now widely quoted to refer to adding the crucial touch to a work of art that brings it to life, or putting in a word or two to clinch the point.The expression is based on a legend about a famous painter, Zhang Sengyao.

Zhang was once an officer serving in the court of Emperor Liang Wu (464–549 AD). But he was best known for his outstanding artwork.It was said that whenever the emperor missed his sons who were away on official duties, he would ask Zhang to visit him and paint portraits of them.The pictures were so vivid that when the ruler saw them, he felt he were actually seeing the boys in person.

There also was a story about Zhang painting an eagle on the wall of a big temple in what is now Zhenjiang city in eastern China's Jiangsu Province.Legend has it that the life-like eagle scared all the small birds away from the temple, leaving behind their empty nests there.One day, Zhang was painting four dragons on the wall of the Anle Temple in Jinling (now Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province).The scene drew a large crowd.In less than half a day, the artist had finished the painting.The onlookers all loudly praised the fine work, but they were puzzled to find that none of the four dragons had eyeballs.”Why don't you add eyeballs to the dragons?” asked one onlooker.The artist answered: “If I do, they might fly away into the sky.”Few were convinced by that explanation, and some of them challenged the artist to prove just how a dragon in a painting could fly.To prove the truth of his words, the artist went ahead and added eyeballs to two dragons on the wall and instantly, a thunderstorm began and the two dragons took off from the wall and soared into the dark cloudy sky.When the storm abated and the crowd recovered from their awe, they found only two dragons left on the wall and they were the ones with no eyeballs.

画龙点睛

中文成语“画龙点睛”的字面意思是“为所画的巨龙点染眼睛。” 现在，这个说法被广泛引用，意指为一件艺术品添加至关重要的一笔，使其栩栩如生，或指加入一两个关键词，切中要害。这个成语源自一则关于著名画家张僧繇的传说。

张僧繇曾在梁武帝（公元464年—公元549年）朝中为官。而他却是因画技高超而享有盛名。据说，每当梁武帝思念其因公事离家在外的儿子们时，就会召张僧繇前来，绘制几幅儿子们的肖像。画像如此惟妙惟肖，令武帝感觉如见真人一般。

另有一则传说，讲的是张僧繇在一所古刹墙壁上画鹰的故事，这座古刹位于今天中国东部的江苏省镇江市。相传那只老鹰画得栩栩如生，竟然将寺中鸟雀悉数吓跑，徒留空巢。一日，张僧繇在金陵（今江苏省的省会城市南京）安乐寺的墙壁上绘四条飞龙。这一场景引得众人纷纷前来观看。不到半日，画家便绘制完毕。围观者无不高声赞叹，然而，当他们发现四条巨龙都没有眼球时，深感不解。 “你为何不给那些龙画上眼球呢？”一位观者问道。画家答道：“我若画了，龙即破壁飞走。”没人信服这个解释，还有人发出质疑，要求画家证明，画壁上的龙如何能够破壁飞走。为了证实自己所言不虚，画家走上前去，给墙上的两条龙添绘上了眼球，顿时，电闪雷鸣，二龙破壁腾起，咆哮着飞入乌云滚滚的天空。当风暴渐息，骤雨初歇，众人才从惊愕中回过神来，他们发现，墙壁上只剩下两条巨龙，那是未被“点睛”的巨龙。

1.8 Wasted Warnings

A cicada, a praying mantis, an oriole and a young man. Can you guess what’s special about the four? If not, your Chinese friends will tell you that this peculiar group is responsible for a famous and also thought-provoking expression in the Chinese language.

The story concerning this idiom, Tang Lang Bu Chan, or a praying mantis stalks a cicada, dates back to the late Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). After defeating the State of Yue, the king of the State of Wu became arrogant and indulged himself in creature comforts.He was not aware that the king of the State of Yue was undergoing great self-imposed hardship in order to strengthen his resolve to wipe out the humiliation of his defeat. Wu Zixu, an upright official in the court of the State of Wu, repeatedly warned the king about the potential danger. But the king turned a deaf ear to the warnings and finally, fed up with Wu’s nagging, ordered the official to commit suicide.Meanwhile, the king of Yue was preparing to launch attacks against the State of Wu. Seeing the pending danger, Crown Prince You of the State of Wu decided to use a ploy to convince the king that something must be done to fend off the coming attacks. One day, the crown prince, with a slingshot in his hand and wet like a drenched chicken, went to see the king of Wu.

“What happened to you?” the king asked.

The crown prince then told the king the following story:”When I went into the garden early this morning, I saw a cicada chirping on a tree and a praying mantis sneakily approaching the insect from behind.”

“As the praying mantis was about to strike, it didn’t notice an oriole waiting for an opportunity for a quick meal.”

“I thought the bird did not notice that I was standing under the tree with a slingshot in my hand, so I decided to step backward and shoot the bird.”

“However, I failed to see there was a small pond behind me and when I stepped back, I fell in.”

After listening to You’s story, the king of Wu burst into laughter.

“You are stupid. You care too much about the gains ahead without being aware of the danger behind,” the king said, “You must take a lesson from this.”

“Yes,” the crown prince answered, “But, others should also draw a lesson from my miserable experience.”

“What do you mean?” the king asked.

The crown prince elaborated that for no reason, the State of Qi invaded the State of Lu, but it did not expect that the State of Wu would attack it from the rear. And now, the State of Wu had become complacent after its victory over the State of Yue, but did not suspect that the latter was preparing to mount an offensive.

The king of Wu angrily interrupted You, saying: “You are playing the same old tune as Wu Zixu did before. I do not want to hear about this any more.”

A few years later, the State of Yue’s troops launched a mass invasion of the State of Wu and soon seized the whole kingdom. The king of Wu killed himself.

So, when one is so eager to lay his hands on the gains ahead, he should think about this Chinese idiom of a cicada, a praying mantis, an oriole and a young man.

螳螂捕蝉

一蝉、一螳螂、一黄雀，以及一位年轻人。你能否猜出，将这四样并置，有什么特别的意义吗？如果猜不出，那你的中国朋友会告诉你，这个特殊的组合与汉语中一则家喻户晓、引人思考的成语密切相关。

这则成语故事“螳螂捕蝉”可以追溯至春秋（公元前770年—公元前476年）末年。打败了越国的吴王变得傲慢自负，对锦衣玉食的舒适生活贪恋无度。他哪里知道，越王正痛下决心，不惜“卧薪尝胆”，发奋自强，只为一雪前耻。吴国的廷臣伍子胥为人正直，他曾数次警示吴王，国家正危机四伏。然而，吴王对此置若罔闻，终于受够了伍子胥的喋喋不休，命其自裁。彼时，越王正秣兵历马，准备对吴国发动攻击。眼见危机四伏，吴国的太子友决定策略说服吴王，务必采取措施，以御敌犯。一日，太子手持弹弓来见吴王，只见他周身湿透，活像一只淋了水的小鸡。

“你这是怎么了？”吴王问。

于是，太子将下面的故事讲给吴王： “我今天一早去了花园，看见树上有一只鸣蝉，啁啾不停，而一只螳螂正偷偷地从后面爬了过来。”

“就在螳螂正要发起袭击之时，它却没有发现，有只黄雀也正为自己的一顿美餐伺机而动。

“我认为那只黄雀没有发现我正手持弹弓，立于树后，于是决定退后几步，拉弓射击。”

“但是，我也没有发现自己身后有一个小水潭，当我后退时，一下子就掉了进去。”

听罢太子友的故事，吴王哈哈大笑。

“你真愚笨，一心只顾眼前利益，全然不知身后的险境，”吴王说道，“你得好好地接受教训。”

“是的，”太子答道，“但是，其他人也应该从我的遭遇中吸取教训啊。”

“你的意思是？”吴王问道。

太子阐释道，齐国无端进攻鲁国，却丝毫不料吴国会从它的后面发起攻击。现在，吴国因战胜越国而自满，却全然不察越国正备兵来犯。

吴王怒而喝断太子友，言道：“你这是效伍子胥，一派陈词滥调，我断然不想再听。”

几年后，越国军队长驱而入，大举来犯，很快就占领了吴国全境。吴王自尽。

所以，如果你只盯着眼前那点好处时，你应该想想这则中国成语，一只蝉、一只螳螂、一只黄雀，以及一位年轻人的故事。

2.1 Song Lyric Poetry：Still Waxing Lyrical After 1,000 Years

During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Ci poems (or lyric poems) were in vogue among the literati. Some believe that Ci arose as words to older melodies transmitted from Central Asia. Each Ci poem is written to a certain tune which determines the number of Chinese characters in each line. Ci poems were also written under particular titles, called Cipai, which were originally the titles of set patterns or tunes. Ci poems can be divided into categories according to their lengths, including Xiaoling (58 characters or less), Zhongdiao (59-90 characters) and Changdiao (91 characters or more, with the longest 240 characters). According to styles, Ci poems can also be roughly classified into two schools: the Graceful Ci School and the Unconstrained Ci School. The Song Dynasty is widely regarded as the peak period of Chinese Ci poetry. During this time China produced thousands of great lyrical poetry writers. The “Complete Song Lyric Poetry,” published in 2009, contains nearly 20,000 Ci poems written by more than 1,330 Song poets. Among those are poets still popular today.

Su Shi (1037-1101), also known by his pseudonym Su Dongpo, played a crucial role in creating the style of expressive Ci poetry, combining descriptions of natural phenomena with deep emotions and political ideas. Many of Su's more than 2,300 Ci poems remain so well known today that nearly every school student in the country can recite a few lines. These include the first two lines of his poem “Battle of Red Cliff.”“The Great River flows to the east,Washing into oblivion all gallant heroes of bygone years.”His lines describing the beautiful West Lake in the scenic city Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province in eastern China are also still famous: ”People tend to liken the West Lake to the Lady of the West,Plainly dressed or gorgeously adorned,She always looks the best.”The Lady of the West refers to one of the most famous beauties in ancient China.

Among other Song Ci poets who remain very popular are Liu Yong, Ouyang Xiu, Huang Tingjian, Xin Qiji and Li Qingzhao.

Xin Qiji (1140-1207) is widely considered one of the greatest writers of Ci poetry during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), with many saying he was as talented as Su. Xin was also the chief representative of the unconstrained style, the first to introduce both colloquial and classical terms that rendered verse more like prose. Today, more than 600 poems by Xin have been preserved. Many are about his experience as a military leader fighting tribal invaders and others about his personal life and feelings.One of Xin's notable Ci poems is “The Lantern Festival to the Tune of Qingyu'an,” with its last three lines being the most famous: ”In the crowd, I have looked for her more than a thousand times,Then, suddenly, as I turn my head, I spot her,Over there, where lights are few and dim.”

Li Qingzhao (1084-1151) is known as the finest female writer of Ci poetry in the history of Chinese literature. Li developed a distinctive graceful style of lyrical poetry which features plain language, a delicate restraint, the blending of intense passion and literary images, and beautiful melodious rhythms. Li's poems are very easy to recite. One of her most famous lyrical poems is the “Double Ninth Festival,” to the tune of “Intoxicated Under the Shadow of Flowers.” And most critics agree the last three lines of this poem are the most appealing: ”Oh, no one will say that it's not endearing,When the west wind unfurls the curtain,I feel that I have become more emaciated than the yellow flower.”

Today, many Chinese people still love Ci poems. For instance, late Chinese leader Chairman Mao was known as a lover and writer of the genre, who has also left behind a number of very popular Ci poems.

宋词：情抒千年，余韵不绝

宋代（960—1279）文人尚词，欣然命笔，填词做句是他们的一大雅好。有人认为，“词”这种体式是从中亚传来的古老旋律中产生的。每一首词都是按照某一种曲式写成的，而曲式决定了“词”中文字的多少和句子的长短。同样，词是以特别的乐曲名称写成，即“词牌”，其名称都源自固定的格式与声律。根据长度，词可分为三种，即小令（58个字，或者更短），中调（59-90个字），以及长调（91个字，或者更长，最长可达240个字）。根据风格，词可大致分为“婉约派”和“豪放派”两种。人们普遍认为，宋代是词的鼎盛时期。这一时期，中国出现了数以千计的抒情诗人。2009年出版的《全宋词》中收录了1,330位宋代诗人的近20,000余首词篇。时至今日，这些诗人依旧热度不减。

苏轼（1037—1101），字东坡，就是一位举足轻重的大家，他开创了词的豪放一派，托情于景，将深切的个人情感和政治诉求寄寓于自然景观的描绘之中。他填的词篇超过2,300首，很多至今依然脍炙人口，中国学子几乎人人都能背诵几句。其中就有他的《念奴娇•赤壁怀古》中的两句。“大江东去，浪淘尽，千古风流人物。”西湖位于今天中国东部浙江省省会城市杭州，东坡描绘西湖美景的词句同样赫赫有名，朗朗上口：“欲把西湖比西子，淡妆浓抹总相宜。”词中的西子姑娘是指西施，是中国古代最有名的美女之一。

其他深受人们喜爱的宋代词人还有柳永、欧阳修、黄庭坚、辛弃疾和李清照。

辛弃疾（1140—1207）被广泛认为是与苏东坡齐名的南宋（1127—1279）最伟大的词人之一，“苏辛”并称，双峰并置。辛弃疾亦是“豪放派”词家的代表人物，首创“以文为词”，用典自如，遣词稚朴。今天，辛词存世600余首，其中以他率部抗击北方来犯之敌的题材为多，另有一部分则记写个人生活，抒发个人情感。他的名篇《青玉案·元夕》末尾三句最为脍炙人口：“众里寻他千百度，蓦然回首，那人却在，灯火阑珊处。”

在中国文学的历史长河中，李清照（1084—1151）是公认的词界“第一才女”。她将独具一格的婉约词派做了进一步的发展，婉约派要眇宜修，形式大都婉丽柔美，含蓄蕴藉，情景交融，声调和谐。李清照的词尤为易记，朗朗上口。她以《醉花阴》为牌，填写的重阳节那首堪称其佳作之一。词评人大多认为，末尾三句最为动人： “莫道不销魂，帘卷西风，人比黄花瘦。”

今天，很多国人依旧雅爱词章。比如，众所周知，已故的中国领导人毛泽东主席不仅是一位诗词的爱好者，也是一位填词大家，为世人留下了一大批脍炙人口的名篇。

2.2 Tang Poetry: Beautiful Words Stand the Test of Time

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) was one of the most prosperous times in China's history and it also produced the “golden age” of classic Chinese poetry. During the nearly 300-year dynasty, China brought forth thousands of poets. Even today, about 2,300 of them still enjoy different degrees of popularity among Chinese speakers all around the world. Of those, Li Bai, Du Fu and Bai Juyi remain widely regarded as the best.

Li (701-762 AD), who produced more than 1,000 poems during his lifetime, has been revered ever since he was christened an ”immortal” and the “God of Poetry.”Many of Li's poems involve the moon and wine, one of his passions. And, according to a legend, he died because of his love of wine and the moon. ”On a Quiet Night” is one of Li's most famous moon poems: “Moonlight paints the floor white in front of my bed, I wonder whether it's the hoarfrost instead? Looking up, I see the bright moon, Looking down, I suddenly miss my hometown.” Li died of illness in 762 although some say he died from excessive drinking. But according to a legend, the “God of Poetry”drowned when, half drunk, he fell off a boat drifting along the Yangtze River while trying to scoop the moon out of the water.

Du (712-770 AD), another preeminent poet of the Tang Dynasty, is called the “Saint of Poetry” by many critics. But unlike Li, who enjoyed a reputation as a star poet during his lifetime, Du was not recognized as an outstanding poet until nearly 130 years after his death. Du is now widely admired for his creativity, rich imagination, deep compassion, unfailing wit and humor.He is also sometimes called the “Poet of History” since he recorded the turbulent times in his poems. Du often revealed his profound compassion for his fellow countrymen. In one of his most famous poems, “My Cottage Unroofed by Autumn Gales,” the poet writes: “How could I get thousands of capacious houses, So I could provide shelter for all the poor under heaven. And let them beam with smiles, In wind and rain, these mansions would stand unshaken like mountains! Alas, when such houses would appear in front of my eyes, I'd be content if only my cottage collapses. And I myself am frozen to death.”

Bai (772-846 AD) wrote more than 2,800 poems during his lifetime, many of which were extremely popular at the time not only because they were so well written, but also because of their accessibility. It was said that Bai tended to copy and distribute his poems among friends and colleagues. He was also known for his long narrative poems, such as the 60-line, 840-character “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow,” which tells the story of a famous beauty and beloved consort of a Tang emperor. Another well-known poem written by Bai is “The Song of the Pipa Player,” which contains 616 characters.

Most Tang poems were written with either five or seven characters per line. And millions of Tang poems were compiled into books. The two most popular editions are the “Complete Poetry of Tang” and ”Three Hundred Tang Poems.” The former contains 42,863 poems and the latter about 300 poems.

One saying still popular today encourages people to read the Tang poems by claiming that “memorizing 300 Tang poems will turn you into a poet.”Another popular practice in China today is that many parents will teach their young children to recite Tang poems as soon as they can speak complete sentences.

唐诗：绝句传千年

唐朝（公元618年—公元907年）作为中国历史上最为鼎盛繁荣的时期之一，它孕育了古典诗词的“黄金时代”。在王朝近300年的岁月中，神州大地上的诗人们浩若烟海，繁若星辰。时至今日，仍有2300多名唐代诗人在世界各地的华语圈内享有不同程度的声誉。其中，广为人知且最为杰出的仍要数李白、杜甫与白居易三位。

李白（公元701年—公元762年），一生作诗上千首，自他获誉“谪仙”、“诗仙”等名之后，于历代为人所敬仰。在他的多部作品总要提到自己的最爱—当有美酒在侧，好与明月相伴。据传，就算是黑白无常现前，也无法阻挡他对酒与月的迷恋和追求。《静夜思》是李白最知名的关于月亮的诗作之一：“床前明月光，疑是地上霜。举头望明月，低头思故乡。”李白病逝于762年。尽管有些说法是死于饮酒过量，但根据传说，酒至半酣的“诗仙”乘兴尝试往水中捞月，他自漂泊在岸边的一尾扁舟落入滚滚长江，遇水而没。

杜甫（公元712年—公元770年）是另一位卓越的唐朝诗人，他被众多名家所崇为“诗圣”。但与闻名遐迩的李白所不同的是，杜甫的诗作才情直到他身故将近130年后才为世人所知。如今，杜甫因他的文思泉涌、悲天悯人以及取之不竭的才智与诙谐而备受赞誉。他（的诗）有时也被称为“诗史”，归因于其诗中所记载的疮痍世态。杜甫往往表露出对同胞的深切同情。在他最为著名的作品《茅屋为秋风所破歌》中，诗人写道：“安得广厦千万间，大庇天下寒士俱欢颜！风雨不动安如山。呜呼！何时眼前突兀见此屋，吾庐独破受冻死亦足！”

白居易（公元772年—公元846年）一生作诗达2800多首，他的许多作品广为世人所传诵，在于其不仅文辞精美，且通俗易懂，便于朗朗上口。据说，白居易习惯在诗友圈内转发传抄自己的大作。他也以长篇叙事诗而闻名，譬如长达60行、840字的《长恨歌》，讲述了一位绝代佳丽成为唐朝皇帝爱妃后所发生的故事。白居易的另一篇名作《琵琶行》，则有616字之长。

绝大多数唐诗每行以五或七个字所写就。同时，数以百万计的唐诗被编纂成书。最为通行的两个版本是《全唐诗》与《唐诗三百首》。前者收录了42863首诗，后者则是顾名思义的300首。

有句鼓励人们诵读唐诗的谚语，至今历久弥新，有道是：“熟读《唐诗三百首》，不会吟诗也会吟。”另一种风靡于当下中国的做法是，一旦孩子能开口说完整的话，家长们就趁热打铁，教习他们背诵唐诗。

2.3 Jiu Jing：The Classic of Wine and Spirits ,Cheers to Classic Text on Alcohol

It goes without saying that wine and spirits, just like tea, are an integral part of Chinese people's daily life and culture. Since days of yore, these alcoholic drinks have been deemed an essential element in rituals involving sacrificial offerings to Heaven, Earth and ancestors, and also in celebrations and family gatherings. Wine and spirits are also closely associated with Chinese literature and other arts, particularly, ancient works. Not only were they frequently extolled in novels, poems, paintings and other arts, but alcohol was also said to assist the creative process, helping writers, artists and calligraphers produce their finest works. However, this relationship was not always beneficial. According to a legend, Li Bai (701-762 AD), one of China's finest poets, drowned one night when, half drunk, he fell off a boat drifting along the Yangtze River while trying to scoop the moon out of the water.

Ancient China mainly produced two types of alcoholic drinks, huangjiu or yellow wine made from rice, millet or wheat, and baijiu or white liquor made from glutinous rice, sorghum, wheat, barley or millet. Huangjiu, the milder of the two, usually contains 14 to 20 percent alcohol, while baijiu, the hard stuff, raises the volume to 40 to more than 65 percent.

Some scholars believe that the Chinese developed wine and liquor-making techniques in the Xia Dynasty (circa 2100-1600 BC). People usually credit Yi Di and Du Kang, two semi-legendary historical figures, as the inventors of wine and liquor. Yi Di, a woman in charge of wine making during the early Xia Dynasty, is reputed to have invented the method of making rice wine from fermented rice, presenting it as a gift to Da Yu or Yu the Great, a legendary hero who tamed the frequently flooding rivers in central and east China. Du Kang, however, is said to have discovered the techniques of making baijiu by sheer luck. One day in summer, Du Kang, a herdsman, forgot to eat his lunch of cooked sorghum which he had hung from a tree. Later, he noticed that the now-fermenting sorghum was giving off a special aroma and had produced exotically tasty juice. Intrigued by this phenomenon, Du Kang conducted repeated experiments, refining the method of producing a white spirit from sorghum. Today, Du Kang’s name has become synonymous with exceptionally good alcoholic drinks.

However, for hundreds of years, all this information about wine and liquor making could only be found in bits and pieces in any ancient Chinese books until Zhu Gong (1050-1125), a renowned scholar-official in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), produced the “Classic of Wine and Spirits,” China's first monograph on alcoholic drinks. Zhu was born into a scholar-official family and passed the imperial palace examination and obtained the title of Jinshi or ”Presented Scholar” when he was 33. He was assigned to a number of government posts, but as an upright man who disdained fawning, his career in officialdom was doomed. After some ups and downs, Zhu retired to the scenic city of Hangzhou, in today's Zhejiang Province in eastern China, to write books about Chinese medicine and wine making. His interest in wine and liquor could be attributed to his hometown, today's Huzhou, also in Zhejiang Province, known in ancient China as the Capital of Wine. Zhu's monograph is comprised of three volumes. The first volume tells the long history of wine-making in China and the different characteristics of different wines and spirits. Zhu wrote that moderate consumption of alcoholic drinks would benefit people's health, but excessive drinking was harmful. The second volume introduces a total of 13 wine yeasts and the steps of production, while the third focuses on theory and production. Probably due to his rich knowledge of Chinese medicine, Zhu proposed many recipes adding herbs to wines and liquors to improve not only their taste, but also their salutary effect.

酒经：知麴蘗（qū niè）之力，亦知稻米之功

毋庸置疑，“葡萄美酒夜光杯”，琼浆玉液一般的中国酒也如茶一样，是中国人日常生活的组成部分。曾几何时，在人们参天拜地，祭祀先人的典仪之上，或是举家欢聚一堂之时，酒都扮演着至关重要的角色。这些琼浆玉液也与中国文学、艺术，特别是古代经典作品息息相关。它们不仅频频在小说、诗歌、绘画，以及其他艺术形式中深受赞美，据说还有助于激发文艺创作，令作家、艺术家和书法家得神思妙笔，创作出杰出的作品来。然而，酒与人的关系并非总是和谐有益的。李白（公元701年—公元762年）是中国最杰出的诗人之一。传说，在一个风清月朗之夜，半醉半醒的诗人乘舟游江，以手掬水月时，坠江身亡。

中国古代主产两类酒精饮品，即黄酒和白酒，前者以水稻、粟黍或者小麦为原料，后者以糯米、高粱、小麦、大麦或者粟黍为原料。两者中，黄酒酒性绵柔，酒精含量通常为14%—20%，白酒则性烈似火，酒精含量高达40%，甚至超过65%。

有学者认为，中国酒的酿造始自夏朝（约公元前2100年—公元前1600年）。人们通常将酒的发明归于两位半传说式的历史人物—仪狄和杜康。仪狄，是夏朝初年专责酿酒的女官，被誉为发明酒醪第一人，她将酿好的米酒礼献给大禹，就是那位成功治理了华中和华东地区屡屡泛滥的洪水的传奇英雄。而据说，杜康发现酿造白酒的方法，则纯属巧合。夏日的一天，牧羊人杜康将自己的午餐—高粱米饭挂在了树上，却忘记吃掉。后来，他发现正在发酵的高粱米散发出一种特别的芳香，还产生出一种奇异的浆液。着迷于此的杜康开始反复实验，不断改善这种以高粱制酒的酿造方法。今天，杜康的名字已经成为了极品白酒的代名词。

然而，数百年里，所有关于酿酒的资料只是东鳞西爪地出现在中国古代文献中，直到北宋（960—1127）的文官朱肱（1050—1125）写出了《酒经》，这部中国第一本酒精饮品的专著。朱肱出生于士大夫之家，33岁时通过朝廷的科举考试，得中进士。他曾经在一些朝廷机构任职，但是其刚正不阿的性格，注定了他官场生涯的挫败。几度沉浮后，朱肱退隐到位于今天华东的浙江杭州，著写中药和酿酒方面的书籍。他在酿酒方面的兴趣可能要归功于他的家乡，今天浙江湖州市，那里是古代中国著名的果酒之都。朱肱的专著共计三卷。上卷讲述中国漫长的酿酒史，以及不同酒类各自的特点。他写道，斟酌自如，适度饮酒，则利身心，而过度滥饮，酣放恣肆，应有百害。中卷介绍了全部13种酒曲，以及酿酒的步骤，下卷集中探讨理论和生产。或许，由于他本人丰富广博的中药学识，朱肱的酿酒配方中加入了诸多药材，不仅可以改善酒品的口感，还能增强健体功效。

2.4 Tiangong Kaiwu Encyclopedia：Exam Failure Leads to a First-Class Book

Published in 1637, Tiangong Kaiwu or “The Exploitation of the Works of Nature” is widely regarded as the world’s first comprehensive book on agriculture and numerous industries, and an important encyclopedia of science and technology in China. Written by Song Yingxing (1587-1661), a renowned scientist and encyclopedist in the late years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the book emphasizes the importance of collaboration between human beings and nature in farming and crafts.Song also devoted many pages to descriptions of the development of industries, reflecting the progress of productivity during the fledging stage of capitalism in 17th century China.

Born in today’s Jiangxi Province in eastern China to a scholar’s family, Song passed the imperial civil examinations at provincial level and obtained the degree of Juren or “Recommended Man” at the age of 28. In the 16 years that followed, Song took the metropolitan examination five times in the capital, but failed on each occasion. However, this disappointment had a positive side. The repeated journeys from his home village to the capital in northern China to take the exam provided Song with the opportunity to accumulate abundant knowledge in a wide range of fields. Later, he was appointed as a low-ranking government official to several counties, mostly in eastern and southeastern China. In 1634, Song was appointed the education official in Fenyi County in Jiangxi Province and began to write Tiangong Kaiwu. When the great work was completed three years later, Song sent the encyclopedia to press, with financial help from friends.

Tiangong Kaiwu contains 18 volumes in three parts. Featuring more than 120 detailed illustrations, the book describes the components and working procedures of more than 130 types of technology and tools used in agriculture and industry. In its first part, the book records the planting and processing methods for grains, beans and hemp.It also describes textile and dyeing technologies for cotton and silk, and for producing salt and sugar. The second part focuses on the production of ceramics, bronze metallurgy, transportation, such as ships and carts, iron metallurgy, mining and production of coal, vitriol, sulfur and arsenic, oil technology and papermaking.The third part is devoted to metallurgy of silver, lead, copper, tin and zinc; the manufacture and use of weapons - including those using gunpowder; the production of mercury and ink; the production of fermented beverages and the gathering and processing of pearls and jade. The detailed and accurate illustrations contained in the book have proved extremely useful for people in subsequent centuries to better understand many production technologies and tools used in China. For instance, drawings of a Chinese drawloom demonstrate not only the parts of the specialized loom, but also depict in detail the mechanics of its operation. Another two illustrations explain ancient Chinese hydraulic-powered chain pumps, with one showing a horizontal waterwheel acting upon a vertical wheel and axle that rotates a square-pallet chain to bring up water from a stream for irrigation. Song also introduced a number of new technologies and discoveries into his encyclopedia. For example, he was the first scientist in the world to explain the metal zinc and the pinchbeck alloy (yellow brass). And after studying how sound is generated and transmitted, he concluded that sound is generated by a sequence of waves of pressure through air. Tiangong Kaiwu was translated into a number of foreign languages, such as Japanese, Korean, French, German and English, helping to secure its author a reputation as a world-famous encyclopedist.

天工开物：科举落败，成就一流百科全书

出版于1637年的《天工开物》被公认为世界上首部有关农业和多种产业的综合著作，也是一部中国科学与技术重要的百科全书。此书作者宋应星（1587—1661）是明代（1368—1644）末年著名的科学家和百科全书编纂者，书中强调人与自然的协调共生在农业和手工业中的重要作用。作者亦不惜篇幅描述工业的发展，反映出17世纪中国资本主义萌芽时期生产力的进步。

宋应星出生于今天中国东部江西省的一个书香世家，28岁时，他通过了科举考试中的乡试，获封举人。在随后的16年中，他曾五度赴京参加会试，但均告失败。然而，这种失落也有其积极的一面。正是那些从家乡前往中国北部京城赴试往复不断的旅行，为他提供了积累各个领域丰富知识的机会。后来，他几度为官，大多是在中国东部和东南部的县府任低阶官职。1634年，他获任江西省分宜县教学谕，并开始撰写《天工开物》一书。三年后，皇皇巨著宣告完成，在友人的经济援助下，宋应星遂将这部百科全书付梓出版。

《天工开物》全书分为上中下三卷，共18篇。书中附有120余幅插图，描绘了130多项工农业生产技术和工具的组件和工序。书的上卷记载了谷物豆麻的栽培和加工方法。它还描述了棉苎和蚕丝的纺织和染色技术，以及制盐、制糖的工艺。中卷着重于陶瓷制作，青铜铁矿冶炼，车船的建造，以及煤炭、硫酸盐、硫黄、砷化物的开采和烧制，以及榨油、造纸的方法等。下卷记述铅银铜锡锌等金属矿物的开采和冶炼；包括火药兵器在内的武器的制造和使用；水银和颜料的生产；酒曲的发酵，以及珠玉的采集加工等。在后来的数百年中，书中那些详细、精准的插图对于人们更好地理解诸多中国的生产技术和工具使用提供了极大的帮助。比如，中国织布机的图纸，不仅展示了专业织机的部件，也详细描述了其使用操作的机械原理。另外两幅插图解释了中国古代的水力链泵原理，其中一幅展示了一架水平方向的水轮如何作用于一个垂直轮子和轮轴，带动方形托盘链条转动，从而实现自溪流中引水灌溉农田。他在这部百科全书中还介绍了许多新兴技术与发现。比如，他是世界上首位解释金属锌和黄铜的科学家。此外，在研究了声音的产生和传播后，他得出的结论是，声音是由于空气压力的波荡而产生的。《天工开物》被译介成日文、韩文、法文、德文和英文等多种语言，为作者赢得了世界知名百科全书编纂者的声誉。

2.5 The Book of Songs：Poetry from 3,000 Years ago that Still Speaks to Us Today

Widely regarded as the beginning of Chinese literature, Shi Jing or the “Book of Songs” is the earliest collection of Chinese poetry. It includes more than 300 poems, songs, odes and hymns, some written 3,000 years ago.Most of the book, however, was written and collected over a period of more than 500 years, from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046-771 BC) to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC).Some scholars believe that during the Western Zhou, every year the ruler would send out envoys known as “poetry collectors” to gather folk songs, hymns and ballads from around the country during the slack farming season. These would then be presented to the ruler as a way for him to gauge public feelings and sentiments.According to historical records, the original book contained more than 3,000 ancient poems, songs and odes. Later, great Chinese thinker Confucius (551-479 BC) bowdlerized this text, keeping only 311 poems he considered canonical to Confucianism. As several of these poems are no more than a title — and also for convenience — the collection became known as “300 Poems.” It was not until during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 25) that the book was officially named the “Book of Songs” and listed as one of the “Five Classics.”  The other texts in this canon are: “Shu Jing” (“Classic of History”); “Li Ji” (“Classic of Rites”); “I Ching” (“Book of Changes”); and “Chun Qiu” (“Spring and Autumn Annals”). All are said to have been compiled and edited by Confucius.

“Book of Songs” is divided into three parts according to the different music: Feng (folk songs); Ya (Odes); and Song (hymns). Feng includes 160 folk songs of the states, such as the Odes of Zhou and South, Odes of Wei and Odes of Tang. The Ya part is further divided into Xiao Ya (Minor Odes) and Da Ya (Major Odes).  The former includes 74 minor songs for court events, while the latter contains 31 major songs, mostly written by nobles, for major and solemn court ceremonies. The Song part contains 40 hymns and eulogies performed during singing and dancing ceremonies at temples or altars. There are also six Sheng Shi, poems only with titles but no text, creating a total of 311 titles in the “Book of Songs.” These works are written in three different styles, namely, Fu (straightforward narrative), Bi (explicitly metaphorical) and Xing (subtle and illusive). Since works were collected from different parts of the country, its contents vividly reflect the daily life, feelings, customs and aspirations of people across the classes. Subject matter covers everything from beautiful descriptions of the romances of young lovers at a time when people were quite open about relationships to criticisms of the decadence of the ruling class and the indifference of the rich toward the poor. Thanks to the exceptionally well-written four-character lines in most of the poems, many are still popular among Chinese speakers today, quoted both in literature and daily conversation. Here are three examples:

1.   ”A pair of chattering ospreys,Dwelling on a sandbar in the middle of the river; A fair lady, A fine match for a gentleman.”

2.  “Seeing the blue collar of your robe, Always makes my heart leap. Being apart for one day, nonetheless, Seems as long as three seasons.”

3.  “Stone from the other hill, May serve to polish jadeware here.”

The third example implies that the advice provided by other people can probably help you amend your own behavior.

诗经：3,000年前的诗歌至今仍与我们说话

《诗经》被公认为是中国文学的开端，是中国最早的诗歌集。它包括了300多首诗、曲、颂和赞美诗，多创作于3000年前。但是，这本书的大部分内容都是自西周（公元前1046年-公元前771年）到春秋战国中期（公元前770年-公元前476年）500多年的时间里编写和收集的。一些学者认为，西周时期，统治者每年都会在农闲季节派遣称为“采诗官”的使者到各地采风，收集民歌、赞美诗和民谣。然后将其呈现给统治者，作为他了解民情以作施政参考的途径。根据历史记载，原书包含3000多首古诗，歌曲和颂歌。后来，伟大的中国思想家孔子（公元前551年-公元前479年）对文本进行了精简，只保留了他认为符合儒家思想的311首诗。因为这些诗中有几首只有标题，也是为了方便起见，因此该合集被称为《诗三百》。直到西汉时期（公元前206年-公元25年），这本书才正式被命名为《诗经》，并被列为“五经之一”。五经中的另外四部经典是《尚书》、《礼记》、《周易》和《春秋》。据说五经都是由孔子编纂的。

《诗经》根据音乐的不同类别为三部分：风（民歌）、雅（颂歌）、颂（赞美诗）。《风》收录了160首地方民歌，例如《周南》、《召南》、《卫风》和《唐风》等。《雅》这部分进一步分为小雅和大雅。前者包含用于朝事活动的74首小调，而后者则含有31种正乐，多由贵族谱写，用于威仪典重的朝廷仪式。《颂》的部分包含用于宗庙或祭祀的歌舞典礼的40篇赞美诗和乐歌。还有六首《笙诗》，它们只有标题但没有内容，算上这些，一起创编成311篇的《诗经》。这些作品以三种不同的风格写作，分别是“赋”（铺陈直叙）、“比”（比喻隐喻）和“兴”（触物抒情）。由于作品是从全国收集而来的，其内容生动地反映了社会各阶层人民的日常生活、情感、风俗和愿望。其主题内容很广，既有在当时人际交往开放的背景下对年轻恋人之间浪漫行为的美好描述，也有对统治阶级的堕落，对富人漠视穷人痛苦的批评。大多数诗歌采用了构思巧妙的四言体，因此，直到今天，很多诗句在文学作品和日常对话中仍然被汉语使用者广泛引用。这是三个例子：

1.  关关雎鸠，在河之洲；窈窕淑女，君子好逑。

2.  青青子衿，悠悠我心。一日不见，如隔三秋。

3.  他山之石，可以攻玉。

第三首比喻他人的建议可以帮助您改进自己的行为举止。

2.6 A Dream of Red Mansions：Classic 'written in blood and tears'

“Honglou Meng” or “A Dream of Red Mansions” is one of the Four Great Classic Chinese Novels. The other three are “Water Margin” “Journey to the West” and “Romance of the Three Kingdoms.” Also known as “The Story of the Stone,” the novel was written by Cao Xueqin (circa 1715-1764), a great writer of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The book was first published in the middle of 18th century in the form of hand-written copies and only the first 80 chapters of the original novel have survived. The remaining 40 chapters of the current popular 120 chapter edition are usually attributed to fellow writer Gao E (circa 1738-1815).Many Chinese literature scholars believe “A Dream of Red Mansions” is a semi-autobiographical work.

Cao's great-grandfather, grandfather and father were appointed in succession by the Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty as Commissioner of Imperial Textiles in Jiangning, today's Nanjing, capital of eastern China's Jiangsu Province. The position was a very lucrative one and the family became so rich that they played host on four occasions to the emperor during his well-recorded trips to the Yangtze River Delta areas in the south. But the good fortune of the Cao family came to an end when a new emperor came to the throne. In 1727, their properties were confiscated in a politically motivated purge and the whole family was forced to move to today's Beijing. Cao was a very talented boy who had received a very good education during his childhood and as a teenager he was already an excellent poet and painter. However, after the downfall of his family, Cao lived in poverty for the rest of his life in the western suburbs of Beijing. In his later years, Cao could barely eke out a living through selling his paintings, but declined recommendations offered by friends to become a painter in the imperial court. Instead, he spent more than 10 years writing “A Dream of Red Mansions,” a work today widely regarded as the pinnacle of Chinese classical novels. Some of his friends said that every word written by Cao in the novel was soaked with “blood and tears” and that the decade of hardship he endured writing this novel was simply “unimaginable.”

The novel tells the stories of four rich and prominent feudal families, from their peak to their decline. At its heart is the tragic love story of Jia Baoyu, the chief protagonist of the novel, and his younger cousin, Lin Daiyu. But the novel also portrays a galaxy of vivid, distinctive characters; describes the debauched lives of the noble class; offers many original and beautifully written poems; and reveals the corruption, political struggles and inhumanity of the feudal system. As a result, some scholars say the novel was a prophecy of the demise of the nearly 2,000 years of feudalism in China. Because of its sharp criticism of feudal society, descriptions of incest among noble families and generous praise of the rebellious thought and behavior of young heroes, the novel was banned as “pornography” for a time during the Qing Dynasty. But “A Dream of Red Mansions” was so popular that many Chinese scholars devoted their lives to studying Cao's work and later developing a so-called “Redology” school. However, there have long been criticisms of the last 40 chapters of the present edition written by Gao E. Gao is often criticized for twisting Cao's original intentions, particularly, for adding a happy ending to a tragic love story as a ridiculous anticlimax. As a result, even today, there are still some writers who are trying to rewrite the last 40 chapters of this great novel.

红楼梦：血泪写就，终成经典

《红楼梦》位列中国四部伟大的古典小说之一，另外三部分别是《水浒传》、《西游记》和《三国演义》。这部小说也称《石头记》，作者是清代（公元1644年—公元1911年）大作家曹雪芹（约公元1715年—公元1764年）。小说最早以手抄本形式出版于18世纪中期，且原著仅有前80回留存于世。目前市面流行的120回版本中的后40回，通常被归于同是文学家的高鹗（约公元1738年—公元1815年）名下。很多中国文学的学者都认为《红楼梦》是一部半自传体小说。

曹雪芹的曾祖父、祖父和父亲都是清康熙朝指定世袭的皇家织造督办，位设江宁，今中国东部的江苏省省会城市南京。这个职务获利颇丰，为整个家族蓄积了大量财富，成为钟鸣鼎食的富贵之家，还得以四度主持接待了皆被详录在册的清帝的江南之巡。然而当新皇继位，曹家的好运也走到了尽头。在1727年的一场政治整肃中，其财产被尽数收没，不得已举家迁至今天的北京。曹家诗礼簪缨，家学渊厚，曹雪芹自小浸淫其中，又天赋才情，俨然一位诗画少年。由于家道中落，曹雪芹余年生计窘迫地寄身北京西郊。晚年的曹雪芹勉强卖画过活，但他还是拒绝了朋友诸君荐其成为一名宫廷画师的建议。相反，他笔耕十余年，写下这部为当今世人所广泛认定的、中国古典文学的巅峰之作——《红楼梦》。曹雪芹的友人们说，这部小说字字血泪，而十年里，作者为完成它所忍受的种种困厄，简直难以想象。

小说讲述了四大封建家族盛极而衰的故事，内容核心围绕着主人公贾宝玉和其表妹林黛玉的爱情悲剧展开。小说同时刻画了一群鲜活生动、各具特色的人物形象，描绘了贵族世家的锦衣玉食、富贵风流的生活场景，提供了许多原创优美的诗词佳句，也揭示了封建制度下官场的腐败，政治的倾轧和人性的沦丧。因此，有学者认为这部小说预言了中国两千余年的封建制度的终结。由于小说对封建社会的尖锐批评，对世家大族放荡不伦生活的如实描述，以及对青年英雄叛逆思想和行为的不吝赞许，《红楼梦》一度被清廷视为色情读物而列为禁书。然而，这部小说是如此大受欢迎，使得众多中国学者倾其一生致力于《红楼梦》的研究，最终发展出一门“红学”的学派。但是，由高鹗续写的、现行版本的后40回，一直以来都饱受批评。对高鹗最常见的批评是认为他扭曲背离了曹氏的初衷，特别是他为原本的悲剧故事平添了一个荒谬可笑的、“皆大欢喜”式的结局。因此，时至今日，试图为这部伟大的小说重写后40回的作家仍大有人在。

2.7 Book of Changes：Text That Defines Yin and Yang

“Zhouyi,” also known as “I Ching” or “the Book of Changes,” is undisputedly the true root of Chinese culture. Created more than 5,000 years ago, the classic text contains not only a sophisticated divination system, but also the key philosophical concept of yin and yang.Therefore, in the past five millennia, Chinese people have frequently used the book as an aid to make decisions, predict the future and as a popular source of wisdom and inspiration. Many people believe that the principles of the book were created by Fuxi, a figure in Chinese mythology who was the elder brother of Nuwa, who created humans and mended the sky at the dawn of history. It was said that one day, Fuxi saw a chimera with the head of a dragon and the body of a horse emerging from a large cave. He was fascinated by the unusual arrangement of markings on its body. Inspired by the chimerical pattern, he created the famous Eight Trigrams. A number of historians and scholars are convinced that the book was first named just “Yi,” a word derived from a type of lizard in China. Ancient Chinese believed it was a kind of chameleon which changed its color quickly according to its background, impling “easy to change” or “changeable.” It was not until the King Wen of Zhou (1152-1056 BC) rewrote the original “Yi” and later Confucius (551-479 BC) added commentaries to it that the book became commonly known as “Zhouyi.”And some scholars say that Confucius' commentaries helped to transform “Yi” from a divination text into a philosophical masterpiece.

What King Wen of Zhou did was defining the fundamental concept of the divination system, namely, yin and yang, and he also pointed out that the two elements should always be valued in terms of their nature and status. To illustrate the basic concept and the interaction and interchange of the two aspects of all things, the book used the Eight Trigrams and 64 sets of six-line hexagrams to represent and interpret the “changes.” Each hexagram is comprised of six stacked horizontal lines, with a solid line representing yang and a broken line or a line with a gap in the middle representing yin. By taking into consideration the four main aspects of yin and yang relationship, the 64 hexagrams can then be arranged into as many as 4,096 different combinations. When yang is at the top, yin can be rising at the bottom and eventually yin goes to the top as yang slides to the bottom. And the process will never stop, therefore Chinese believe that nothing is permanent in the world except change.

At the beginning, Chinese scholars and politicians used “Zhouyi” for divination, but later it was applied in almost all fields, including astronomy, geography, military, sciences, literature, music, agriculture and business. The concepts of yin and yang and constant changes are closely associated with religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism in China. Both Buddhist expressions of life and death and reincarnation and the Taoist symbol of Taijitu, a diagram of the Supreme Ultimate, reflect the omnipresent duality of all things in the universe. Even late Chinese leader Mao Zedong, a Marxist and revolutionary, expressed many ideas and concepts in his theory of dialectical materialism similar to the principles of “Zhouyi.” Mao said in “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957), one of his most important philosophical essays, that under certain conditions, bad things may lead to good results and good things may lead to bad results. Today, many scholars and historians across the world are still trying to understand the profound and unparalleled role “Zhouyi” has played and, very likely, will continue to play in the development of the Chinese civilization in the coming millennia.

周易：阴阳之道

《周易》，也称《易经》，毋庸置疑，它是中国文化之根、之本、之源。这部诞生于5000余年前的经典文献，不仅是一本系统复杂的卜筮之书，更是一部奥义浑然、阴阳思辨的哲学之书。因此，在华夏文明不绝如缕，绵延5000年之间，国人都视其为智慧和灵感的源泉，无论是面临决策或是预卜未来，屡屡辅以《周易》。人们普遍认为，《周易》一书的基本理念创自中国神话传说中的人物伏羲，他也是那位万世伊始之时，炼石补天的女娲的哥哥。传说某日，伏羲发现有一龙首马身的怪物从一岩洞现身，并被怪物身上那些不同寻常的图案所深深吸引。宛如灵光一现，他依此创立了赫赫有名的八卦。许多历史学家和研究者确信，起初这部书的名字就叫作《易》，“易”字衍自中国的一种“蜥蜴”。中国先民认为，这种变色龙的体色依背景而迅速改换，寓意着“易变”或者“多变”。直至周文王（公元前1152年—公元前1056年）时又重写并发展了《易》，之后，孔子（公元前551年—公元前479年）也为其添加笺注，这才被广称《周易》。有学者认为，由于孔子的笺注，才使得《易》从一本卜筮之书，变为一部杰出的哲学的经典。

周文王对占卜体系的基本理念——阴和阳，进行了界定，并指出，人们应该始终重视两者的属性和状态。为了阐明一切事物的一体两面性，阐明其相生相克，共生转化的理念，《周易》采用了八卦和六爻六十四卦排列组合法，来代表和解释万物之变。每一个六爻卦中，都包含六条堆叠的水平线段，实线表阳，虚线表阴。若将阴阳四象的消长变化考虑在内，六十四卦即有多达4096种不同的排列组合。阳极阴生，阴极阳生，此消彼长，相互转化。这个过程循环往复，生生不息，因此国人认为，世间只有变化是永恒的，别无他例。

起初，中国的文人政客以《周易》行占问卜，但之后，它被应用于包括天文、地理、军事、科技、文学、音乐、农业和商务在内的几乎各个领域之中。阴阳永动之变的理念也与佛教和中国的道教等宗教密切相关。佛教表达的生死轮回和道教的太极图象，都反映出宇宙万物无所不在的二元属性。甚至是已故的中国领导人毛泽东，身为马克思主义者和革命家，在他诸多的辩证唯物主义理论观点的表述中，同样有类似《周易》的理念。《关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题》（1957年）是毛泽东最为重要的思想理论文章之一，他在文中说道，在一定的条件下，坏的东西可以引出好的结果，好的东西也可以引出坏的结果。时至今日，世界各地诸多学者和历史学家依旧试图理解《周易》业已发挥的、且在中华文明发展的新千年中，极有可能持续发挥的种种深刻作用，以及它所扮演的无与伦比的重要角色。

2.8 Three Character Classic：Making Characters as Easy as 1-2-3

“Three Character Classic” was one of the most popular texts for elementary education in China for more than 700 years until the middle of last century. Almost all children at school used to be required to recite the text of 1,248 Chinese characters in three-character verses for easy memorization. Many historians have attributed this text to Wang Yinglin (1223-1296), a famous scholar of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). But they say that the version we see today was revised by later scholars because it contains content about history after the Southern Song Dynasty. As a writer and scholar of Chinese classics and history, Wang obtained the title of “Presented Scholar,” a graduate of the Imperial Palace examination, at the age of 18.

Three years later, he was appointed as an official of today's Quzhou City in his home province of Zhejiang in eastern China. The highest office Wang ever held was the Director of the Board of Rites in the Imperial Court. It was said that Wang authored “Three Character Classic” in order to spread Confucian classics and knowledge of Chinese history among children. Therefore, he wrote the text both short and simple and arranged it all into three-character verses, very suitable for reading and reciting. As a result, even today, more than 60 years after it stopped being used as a text for primary schools, many people in China can still recite some of its most readable verses.

“Three Character Classic” is divided into six parts, each focusing on a specific topic. The text begins with four verses about the core belief of Confucianism:“People at birth, All innately kind. Natures are alike, But habits different.” Then, it goes on to preach traditional values, such as to follow filial piety, to observe the proprieties, to respect teachers and to be diligent and to study hard. It even mentions an ancient episode concerning Kong Rong (153-208 AD), a Han Dynasty writer and descendant of Confucius. As a boy of 10, Kong was asked to share two pears with his younger brother. Kong immediately gave the bigger one to his brother while keeping the smaller one for himself. The story has been told for centuries in the country to encourage young students to take after Kong's humbleness and generosity.

In addition to teaching children the basics of math, Chinese language, music and science, the text also lists titles of important Chinese classics in Confucianism and works of other ancient philosophers. The text tells students that before one begins to study Chinese history, he or she must first become versed in those classic master works. After expounding all kinds of knowledge and principles, the classic text tells students in conclusion that people studying and working hard will be eventually rewarded, while those who waste their time on play will regret of it one day.

Because of its rich content, beautiful verses and simple style, it was translated into Mongolian and Manchu languages during the Yuan and Qing dynasties. In the early years of Meiji Reign (1868-1912), it was widely used as a text in private schools in Japan. Later, it was also translated into English, French and Italian. Now, it has been listed by UNESCO as one of its recommended children's readings worldwide. Later, people also tried to imitate the writing style of “Three Character Classic” to spread knowledge of specific subjects and religions. So, for many hundreds of years, a good number of books have been published in China in the “three-character” style. Titles include: “Three Character Classic for Females,” “Three Character Classic of Geology,” “Three Character Classic of Medicine,” “Three Character Classic of Military,” “Three Character Classic of Buddhism” and “Three Character Classic of Taoism.”

三字经：让文字和“1-2-3”一样简单

直至上个世纪中期，《三字经》作为中国启蒙教育阶段最受欢迎的教材之一已有700多年的历史了。当时，为了方便记忆，几乎所有的孩子都被要求以“三字一句”的方式背诵篇幅为1248个汉字的课文。很多历史学家将这本读物归功于南宋（1127-1279）的一位著名学者王应麟 （1223-1296）。但他们同时也表示，现如今我们看到的版本是经由后来的学者们修订过的，因其内容包含了南宋之后的历史。作为一名中国古典文学的作家和历史学者，王应麟在年仅18岁的时候就参与了朝廷的科举考试，并且考取了“进士”。

3年后，他被任命为家乡衢州（现今中国东部浙江省的一个城市）的一位官员。王应麟曾任的最高官职为朝廷的礼部尚书。相传王应麟撰写《三字经》旨在向孩子们传播儒家文化经典以及中国历史文化知识。因此，他将这段文本写得短小精悍并且将它们排成三字一句的韵文，以使其朗朗上口，便于记忆。于是，即使到了今天，尽管它不再作为小学的启蒙教材使用已有60多年之久，很多中国人依然能够背诵出其中最为顺口的几句韵文。

《三字经》被分为六个部分，每个部分聚焦一个特定的主题。书的最开头的四句诗表达了儒家的核心思想：“人之初，性本善,性相近，习相远。“接着，它继续弘扬传统思想和价值观，例如孝敬长辈、恪守礼法、尊敬师长，以及勤奋学习。它进而提到了古代关于孔融（公元153年-公元208年）的一个典故，孔融是一位汉代作家，也是孔子的二十世孙。作为一个10岁的小男孩，孔融被要求和自己的弟弟分享两只梨。他当即决定把大的那只梨让给自己的弟弟，而把更小的那只梨留给自己。这个故事在中国流传千古，以鼓励青少年学生像孔融那样谦逊和慷慨。

除了给孩子们传授基本的数学知识、汉语言、音乐以及科学，《三字经》还枚举了在中国历史上占有举足轻重之地的儒学经典和其他诸子百家的典籍。它告诫学子们“若欲习中国历史，必先熟读那些经典的大师著作”。在阐述了各类知识和原理后，《三字经》在最后告诉学生们“刻苦读书、认真工作的人终会得到应有的回报，而那些只顾贪玩享乐、虚度光阴之人终有一天会悔不当初。”

《三字经》因其丰富的内容，优美的韵律以及简练的形式而在元朝和清朝被翻译成蒙古文和满文。在明治时代（1868-1912）早期，它还曾在日本的私塾里广为流传。后来，还被翻译成英语、法语和意大利语。如今，《三字经》已经被联合国教科文组织列为世界范围推荐的孩童读物之一。后来，人们还试图模仿《三字经》的写作风格，来传播推广特定学科领域和宗教的知识。所以，在此后的数百年里，许多模仿《三字经》“体”的书籍在中国层出不穷并被出版。这些书包括《女三字经》、《地理三字经》、《医学三字经》、《兵法三字经》、《佛教三字经》以及《道教三字经》。

3.1 Empress Dowager Cixi：Mysterious 'Queen without a Crown'

Known as an “Uncrowned Queen,” Empress Dowager Cixi has been widely perceived as an extremely powerful, ruthless and mysterious woman who actually controlled the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) for as long as 48 years. She is often portrayed by historians, writers and dramatists as a villainous, greedy and hedonistic woman who suppressed reform, deprived emperors of their true loves, and embezzled public funds. Also, she was widely deemed responsible for China’s repeated defeats in battles with invading world powers and the final collapse of the country’s last feudal dynasty.

Empress Dowager Cixi was born Yehenara, a daughter of a minor official of a Manchu clan. Her father died when she was young and her childhood was not a happy one. She later said that she felt mistreated, neglected and unloved by her family. So she was happy when she was chosen as a candidate for a concubine by the imperial court when just 14 years old. In the four years that followed, Cixi was promoted several times to become the Imperial Concubine of Emperor Xianfeng. The hardships of her childhood had always been a driving force behind Cixi’s great ambition to excel among her peers and her insatiable desire for power. A golden opportunity eventually came when she gave birth to the emperor’s only son and heir, Zaichun, who later became Emperor Tongzhi. Cixi actually began to wield political power even before her son ascended to the throne. Due to the fact that Emperor Xianfeng was never in good health in his later years and that Cixi was good at writing and calligraphy, the emperor often entrusted Cixi to read and make comments on official documents on his behalf.

After the Emperor Xianfeng died in 1861 and her son became emperor, Cixi was officially given the title of Empress Dowager. She immediately dismissed the regents appointed by the old emperor and herself became regent to her young son. Around that time, China faced constant invasions by Western powers and widespread domestic uprisings. Cixi relied on the armed forces of the Han landlords to suppress the peasant rebellions and backed the so-called “Westernization Movement” to revitalize the country by introducing Western learning and technology. However, because of her ignorance of Western science, many of Cixi’s decisions actually hindered the progress of the modernization movement. Her son, Emperor Tongzhi, was never really given the power to run the country and died of smallpox when he was only 20 years old. After the death of her son, Empress Dowager Cixi ignored the dynasty’s traditional rules and procedures of succession and installed her nephew as Emperor Guangxu. In the beginning, the new emperor was nothing more than a puppet ruler of the dynasty.

However, witnessing the worsening political, social, economic and military situation in the country, the emperor and his reform-minded supporters eventually launched the so-called “Hundred Days' Reform” in 1898, aiming at making fundamental changes to the country’s social system and government institutions. But the 103-day reform movement was opposed by imperial conservatives, headed by Cixi, who staged a coup to end the movement and placed the emperor under house arrest. Cixi also forced Emperor Guangxu’s favorite concubine to commit suicide. To meet her insatiable desire for an extravagant lifestyle and luxuries, Cixi embezzled huge amounts of state funds originally allocated for the Chinese navy to build grandiose palaces for herself. This was partly blamed for China’s humiliating defeat in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War.

After Emperor Guangxu died of illness on November 14, 1908, Empress Dowager Cixi herself passed away the next day, some three years before the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. Following her original orders, a three-year-old boy was installed as the new Emperor Xuantong, China’s last emperor.

慈禧太后：幕帘后的无冕之皇

慈禧太后素有“无冕之皇”之称，在众人眼中，她大权在握、冷酷无情，同时又神秘莫测，执掌大清（1644—1911）朝堂长达48年之久。在历史学家、作家和剧作家笔下，慈禧常常被描绘成一个邪恶贪婪、耽于享乐的女人，她压制变法图强，剥夺皇帝的挚爱真情，挪用朝款，使中国在与列强入侵的数度交锋中屡战屡败，也导致了中国最后一个封建王朝的最终覆亡。

慈禧太后生于满族叶赫那拉氏族人家，是一位低阶官员的女儿。她年幼丧父，儿时生活并不快乐。慈禧后来曾说，那时自己倍感亲情寡淡，缺恩少爱。因此，当14岁的她被朝廷选秀入宫时，内心十分欢喜。在接下来的4年中，慈禧历经数次册封，步步走高，成为咸丰皇帝的妃子。童年的艰辛一直是慈禧决意要从同辈中脱颖而出，以及她对权力无限贪恋的内在动力。这个机遇终于到来了。她生下了咸丰皇帝唯一的皇子和继承人—载淳，也就是后来的同治皇帝。事实上，早在儿子继位前，慈禧就开始了政治权力的操弄。由于咸丰皇帝执政后期一直身体虚弱，而慈禧又长于书写行文，于是皇帝常常令其代替自己批阅奏章。

1861年，咸丰皇帝崩逝，皇子继承大统，慈禧遂正式获封为皇太后。她立即撤销了先帝委派的顾命大臣，改由自己为年幼的儿子摄政。彼时，中国正面临内忧外患，即西方强权的不断入侵，以及国内四起的叛乱。慈禧一面依靠汉官武装镇压农民起义，一面大力支持“洋务运动”，以期通过引进西方的知识和技术达到振兴大清帝国的目的。然而，由于慈禧对西方科学的无知，事实上，她的诸多决策都阻碍了这场现代化运动的进程。她的儿子同治皇帝也从未取得过治理国家的实际权力，20岁时便因天花崩逝。儿子死后，慈禧太后无视王朝继承的祖制和程序，令其外甥继位，成为光绪皇帝。

最初，新帝只是清朝统治的傀儡，然而，眼见帝国政治、社会、经济和军事形势的不断恶化，1898年，光绪皇帝和他锐意改革的支持者最终发动了“百日维新”运动，旨在针对国家的社会制度和政府机构进行一场根本性的变革。然而，这场历时103天的改革运动遭到了以慈禧为首的皇室保守派的反对，他们发动政变结束了维新变法，并将皇帝软禁了起来。慈禧还逼迫光绪皇帝最爱的妃子自尽。为了满足自己对奢侈享乐生活的无尽欲望，慈禧不惜挪用朝廷原本划拨给海军的巨额经费，修建宫殿庭园，这在一定程度上导致了1894—1895年中日甲午战争的惨败。

1908年11月14日，光绪皇帝因病驾崩，次日，慈禧太后也遂即薨逝，此时，距清朝灭亡只剩三年。遵照她的生前懿旨，一个三岁的男孩子继位，成为了中国的末代皇帝—宣统皇帝。

3.2 Hua Tuo：A Pioneering Chinese Surgeon

Hua Tuo was a famous legendary doctor in the later years of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD). He is widely known as the first doctor in traditional Chinese medicine to invent some anesthetic herbal formulas and the first surgeon in the country to conduct abdominal operations. Hua also created a set of therapeutic qigong exercises called Wuqinxi or Five-Animal Frolics, which imitate the movement of tiger, deer, bear, ape and bird, and are still popular today. As a result, there are numerous temples across the country where people continue to worship this legendary doctor, and his name and image adorn all types of medical and health products.

Hua was born in today's Bo County in eastern China's Anhui Province. His father died when Hua was only seven. He lived afterward with his mother in abject poverty. In order to survive and enable her son to have a career, the mother sent young Hua to study medicine from a folk doctor surnamed Cai. The master first asked the boy to learn filling the prescriptions with other elder apprentices. But, the boy was frequently bullied by his fellow apprentices because of his young age. He was even denied the use of Chinese scales, so making his job almost impossible. However, through diligent practice, the boy later learned to accurately measure the weight of herbal and other pharmaceutical ingredients using only his hands. The master was very much impressed by the boy's diligence and ingenuity, so he decided to teach him all the skills he knew. Soon, Hua became an expert in fields such as acupuncture, physiotherapy, gynecology, pediatrics and surgery. Particularly, he later mastered expertise in surgery and anesthesia. He even invented mafeisan, an anesthetic herbal powder. Before Hua's time, Chinese doctors were helpless when treating patients with internal illness that could not be reached by acupuncture needles or herbal medicines. Using his innovative anesthetic powder, Hua could make an incision on a patient's abdomen and remove the bad tissues or diseased parts of organs. Then, he would stitch up the abdomen and apply some ointment to it. In four to five days, the pain would go and within a month, the patient would fully recover.

Hua later appeared in many legendary stories. One of them is about how Hua did surgery on Guan Yu, a famous general of the Kingdom of Shu, without using any anesthesia. According to the story, after Guan's right arm was wounded in a battle by a poisonous arrow, he invited Hua to help treat the wound. First, Hua wanted the general to take his anesthetic. The general laughed and said that it was not necessary since he was not afraid of pain. So, without applying any anesthetic, Hua used a scalpel to cut off the poisoned flesh from Guan's arm and then scraped the affected bones while the general calmly played chess. Listening to the sound of bone scratching, the onlookers' faces turned pale but the general never uttered a single sound of discomfort throughout the operation. This story extols both the doctor's exceptional skill and the rare bravery of the general.

华佗：中医外科的鼻祖

在中国的东汉末年（公元25年-公元220年），有一位闻名遐迩的神医—华佗。众所周知，他是发明麻醉药的传统中医第一人，同时也是中国历史上首位执行开腹手术的外科医生。他还独创了名为“五禽戏”的气功保健操，其原理模仿了虎、鹿、熊、猿和鸟这五种动物的动作，此疗法时至今日仍长盛不衰。因此，这位神医的庙宇遍布全国，香火不绝，而他的名字与形象则被印在各类医药和保健产品上。

华佗出生于今天的安徽省亳（bó）州。父亲在他七岁时就过世了。自此，他与母亲相依为命，艰难度日。为了生存，并使儿子能有一技傍身，母亲将小华佗送入民间医生蔡大夫的门下学习医术。师傅首先让他与其他弟子一起学习按方抓药。但是，由于年纪尚小，小华佗时常遭受师兄们的欺凌。师兄们甚至不让小华佗拿秤杆，使得他几乎无法完成自己的活计。然而，经过孜孜不倦的努力，小华佗练就了一门绝技,只靠自己的手就能精确掂量出药料的重量。师傅为他的勤奋与机敏所深深触动，决定将毕生所学倾囊相授。很快，华佗就成为了针灸、理疗、妇科、儿科和外科等领域的专家。特别值得一提的是其在外科手术与麻醉方面的精湛造诣，他甚至开发了一种名为“麻沸散”的麻药粉。在华佗之前，中国的大夫们对针灸与汤药无法触及的内科疾病显得束手无策。华佗利用自己发明的麻药粉，从而得以在病人的腹部切开一个口子，取出坏死的组织或器官病变的部分。 然后，他将腹部刀口缝合，敷上药膏。开刀后的痛感将在四至五日内消除，一个月内患者就能完全康复。

此后出现了不少关于华佗的传说。其中一例就是讲他如何在不施麻药的情况下为蜀汉名将关羽做手术的故事。根据传说，关羽在一次战斗中右臂中毒箭而受伤，于是他请华佗来帮助治疗伤口。手术开始前，华佗提议先打麻药。关羽笑称，此等疼痛何所惧，为将者不以麻药为必需。于是，在没有任何麻醉剂作用的情况下，华佗用刀割去了他手臂上的毒肉，再将骨头中毒的部分刮了下来，与此同时，关羽却在平静地下棋。听着刀锋在骨头上刮擦所发出的响声，在场旁观的人们一个个脸色发白，倒是将军从头至尾却不发一声。华佗高超的医术与关羽的神勇在此刻得以珠联璧合，成就一出千古佳话。

3.3 Wu Zetian：The Only Empress Regnant in China's History

As the only empress regnant in China's history, Wu Zetian is a controversial historical figure for her political achievements and her oppressive, iron-fist rule. She served as a de facto ruler of the country for nearly half a century.

Wu was born into a rich family in today's Guangyuan City in southwestern China's Sichuan Province. Because her father, as a successful timber trader, once supported the rebel forces led by Li Yuan, who later became the first emperor of the prosperous Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), he was appointed a Tang imperial court official and held a number of high-ranking posts. Unlike other girls of her age, Wu was not interested in needlework or house chores, instead she loved to read all kinds of classic and political books. She also got the opportunity to travel around the country with her parents. These experiences helped to prepare Wu for her future career in politics. When Wu was only 12, her father died. Almost immediately, Wu and her mother began to suffer from bullying from Wu's uncles and other relatives and their lives became miserable. But after learning that Wu was a peerless beauty, the then Emperor Taizong summoned her to the imperial court and named her one of his concubines. That year, Wu was 13. Wu was a very bright, but extremely strong-willed person. She was also known for her combination of sagaciousness and cunning. As a result, she never had any official titles conferred upon her by Emperor Taizong, despite serving him for 12 years. The emperor believed that Wu was an extraordinary and ambitious woman, so he was always wary of her and tried hard to restrain her status and influence in the imperial court. One day, the emperor consulted an imperial astronomer about a widely spread rumor that after the third emperor of Tang an empress would take over the throne. The emperor asked if he should kill all the females at court he was suspicious of. The astronomer said: “If it happens, it's Heaven's decree, man shouldn't interfere.”

Not long after Emperor Taizong died in 649 AD, Wu became the empress of his son, the new Emperor Gaozong. In the following years, Empress Wu began to gain more and more influence in the imperial court and she was actually making many important decisions in state affairs in the later years of Emperor Gaozong. After Emperor Gaozong died, Wu became the Empress Dowager and she first deposed the next new emperor and then installed her youngest son as a puppet emperor. She herself began to preside over all important imperial court gatherings. Wu, as the de facto ruler, resorted to ruthless and oppressive means to consolidate her power. She killed almost all her opponents and recruited the cruelest officials in the country to help maintain social order. However, despite her bad reputation as a ruler, Wu also knew how to use talented people to help her rule the country. She followed the advice of her aides to reduce corvee and taxes and promote agriculture and the economy. As a result, the country flourished under her reign and the population nearly doubled. According to the traditional Chinese order of succession, a woman could never ascend the throne.

In order to achieve her ambition of becoming the first empress regnant of the country, Wu founded her own dynasty in 690 AD. Wu's dynasty, called Zhou, lasted for 15 years until 705 AD, the year Wu fell sick and died. Wu was not only a great politician, but also a renowned poet. She herself was frequently cited in poems written by great ancient Chinese poets. In modern times, Wu's stories have been adapted into numerous novels, stage plays and television dramas.

武则天：一代女皇，从看朱成碧，到日月当空

作为中国历史上唯一正统的女皇帝，武则天是一位充满争议的历史人物，既英才远略，鸿业大勋，又权谋深冷，残酷铁腕。实权在握的她，统治国家长达近半个世纪。

武则天出生在位于今中国西南的四川广元，家道殷实。其父经营木材生意，因商致富，曾资助日后成为唐朝（公元618年—公元907年）开国皇帝的叛将李渊起兵，因扶助有功而被唐廷封官，位至高阶。与其他同龄女孩不同，武则天对于针线女红、家务琐事兴趣甚微，而喜埋首典籍，意在治国安邦之道。她亦有机会同父母一道行游四方，凡此经历无不有助于她日后的政治生涯。12岁时，父亲去世，武则天和母亲始遭叔父和其他武氏一族的欺凌，生活随即变得艰困。然而，当闻听武氏貌美出众，唐太宗遂召其入宫，封为才人。那一年，武则天仅13岁。武氏明察聪慧，却又意志极坚，以兼具机智和狡黠而闻名。因此，尽管侍奉唐太宗12年，她并未被授赐任何正式的名分。皇帝认为，武氏野心勃勃，非同常人，所以，他总是有所防范，力图约束其地位，及其在朝中的影响力。一日，皇帝就广传坊间的一则流言咨询钦天监，即“唐过三代，女皇继位，武代李兴”。皇帝询问是否应该将自己怀疑的所有宫中女子处死，钦天监说：“真发生这样的事，亦是上天的裁定，常人不应干涉。”

公元649年，唐太宗晏驾。不久，武则天即成为太宗之子、新皇高宗的皇后。随后的几年中，武后在朝廷中赢得了越来越多的影响力，实际上，在高宗在位的最后几年里，她是许多重大国事的实际决策者。高宗晏驾后，成为皇太后的武则天先是废黜了新帝，之后，又让她的小儿子做了傀儡皇帝。而她本人开始主持朝政，大权独揽。武氏实权在握，冷酷无情，压制异己，以巩固自身权力。她将政敌几近杀绝，并举国招揽酷吏，助其维稳社会秩序。尽管作为统治者声名狼藉，武氏却深谙用人安邦之道。她听从谏言，薄赋税，轻徭役，发展农业和经济。因而，在她的治理下，国力昌盛，人口几近翻倍。按照中国传统的皇位继承规则，女性不可承袭帝位。

公元690年，为了实现成为第一位女皇的野心，武则天建立了属于自己的王朝。武氏王朝称作“周”，到公元705年武则天病笃崩逝，国祚仅延续了15年。武则天不仅是一位伟大的政治家，还是一位著名的诗人。她的名字也经常出现在中国古代大诗人的诗句中。时至今日，武则天的故事已被多次改编为小说、舞台剧和电视剧。

3.4 Qin Shi Huang：The 'First Emperor' of China

Qin Shi Huang, which literally means the First Emperor of Qin, was a foundational figure in China's history. He not only united the country, but also introduced an imperial rule that lasted for more than 2,000 years.

Qin's personal name was Ying Zheng. His father was once sent to the State of Zhao by  the ruler of the State of Qin as a hostage. Later, with the help of a merchant called Lyu Buwei, Qin's father managed to return to the State of Qin and later became the King of Qin. However, the king died three years after he ascended to the throne and his son, Ying Zheng, succeeded to power when he was only 13 years old. The boy king appointed Lu as prime minister to help him administer the state while he focused on Chinese classics, philosophy, history and military theories.

He did not assume administrative power and rule by himself until he was 22 years old. Then, he immediately hired highly talented politicians, advisers, scholars and military leaders to help him. Among them was Li Si, an influential prime minister of the State of  Qin and later the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC). During that time, the country was divided by seven warring states, namely, Qin, Han, Zhao, Wei, Yan, Qi and Chu. Following Prime Minister Li's advice, the young king of Qin launched a campaign to destroy the other six states and united the country for the first time.

To that end, Li schemed first to sow discord among the other states and then he routed them one by one. It took 15 years of relentless efforts, numerous battles and many plots for the King of Qin to conquer the other six states and establish the Qin Dynasty in a united country.The King of Qin then proclaimed himself the “First Emperor.” Prime Minister Li told the newly crowned emperor that to consolidate his power and build up centralized authority, a series of social, economical, political, cultural and government reforms must be carried out. Following his advice, the emperor introduced new laws and divided the country into prefectures and counties. He standardized weights, measures, currency and written language to facilitate economic development and trade and create a uniform cultural identity. He ordered construction and connecting of various sections of defense walls to form the Great Wall in northern China in an attempt to fend off nomadic invaders. He ordered a vast road system built.

But there was resistance to wide-ranging reforms and to stamp out opposition, the emperor and prime minister launched the notorious campaign of “Burning Books and Burying Confucianists.” A huge number of books, particularly political texts, were burned and hundreds of scholars buried alive. It is said that the emperor buried 460 people alive, mostly scholars who had accused him of being obsessed with unlimited power and enjoying indiscriminately killing innocent people. The First Emperor also built some magnificent palaces, none of which survived. However, his city-sized mausoleum and thousands of life-sized terracotta warriors still stand 30 km east of Xi'an, the ancient capital in northwest China, attracting millions of visitors every year.

The First Emperor died during a tour in eastern China in 210 BC and he was succeeded by his son Qin Er Shi, who was also called the Second Emperor of Qin. But the son lacked his father's stature and only a few years after he took the throne the Qin Dynasty collapsed at a time of nationwide unrest and violent peasant uprisings.

# 秦始皇：中国的“始皇帝”

“秦始皇”的字面意思是“秦国的第一位皇帝”，他是中国历史上“奠基式”的人物。他不仅统一了中国，其大一统的皇权体制亦绵延了两千余年。

秦始皇本名“嬴政”，他的父亲曾经作为“质子”被秦王遣至赵国，之后在商人吕不韦的帮助下得以返秦，成为了后来的秦孝文王。然而，秦孝文王仅做了三年秦王就崩逝了，由其子嬴政继位，年仅13岁。小秦王羽翼未丰，遂任命吕不韦为相，辅政治国，他自己则埋头中国典籍，学习哲学、历史和军事理论。

直到他22岁时，大政得以归还，他才开始亲自理政。从那时起，他立即广招人才，延揽极具天赋的政治家、文人贤士以及军事将领。李斯就是其中一位，曾任秦国以及后来秦朝（公元前221年—公元前206年）的丞相，颇具影响力。彼时，天下正由齐、楚、燕、韩、赵、魏、秦“七雄”割据。年轻的秦王听从了丞相李斯建议，发动战争，意在吞并六国，首次一统天下。为此，李斯先是设计破坏六国之间的合纵连横，接着再个个击破。

秦国耗时15年，伐攻伐谋，征战无休，最终扫灭六国，建立起了统一的大秦帝国。秦王遂以“始皇”自称。丞相李斯告诉这位新近登基的帝王，若要巩固政权，建立起中央集权，需要实施一系列包括社会、经济、政治、文化以及政府管辖在内的改革措施。秦始皇采纳了他的建议，引入新法，并划分实行郡县制。他采用统一的度量、货币和书写标准，极大地促进了经济和贸易的发展，并创立了统一的文化认同。为了防御游牧民族的入侵，他下令在中国北方修建并连接起各处的防御之墙，形成一道长城，同时，还下令营建庞大的道路系统。

然而，如此涉及广泛的改革遇到颇多阻力，为了弹压反对之声，秦帝和丞相发动了那场恶名昭著的“焚书坑儒”运动。大量以政治内容为主的书籍被焚毁，数百名术士遭到坑杀。据说，遭到坑杀的460人多为文人学者，他们谴责秦帝沉湎于无限权力，滥杀无辜。秦始皇还营建宏伟华丽的宫殿，却无一幸存。然而，他那体量如城市般的陵墓、身材如真人般的陶俑，依旧立于今天中国西北的古都西安的东面，每年吸引着成千上万的游客前来观看。

公元前210年，秦始皇在巡游中国东部的途中崩逝，由他的儿子秦二世继位，亦称“二世皇帝”。但是，儿子却缺少父亲的政治高度和格局，继位仅仅几年，秦朝就在举国动乱和如疾风骤雨一般的农民起义中土崩瓦解了。

3.5 Confucius (551-479 BC) –The Greatest Thinker

Also known as Kong Zi or Kong Qiu in Chinese, the great thinker Confucius was born in a warrior’s family during the late Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). He lost his father when he was only three and lived in poverty with his mother who died when he was 17 years old. When he was young, Confucius was a diligent student with a strong interest in a wide range of subjects. When visiting a temple, he would try to learn the art of moderating rituals. During the day, he would learn accounting and at night, he would practice playing musical instruments.

When helping others herd sheep, he would ask to learn archery. Once, he even went to meet Lao Zi, the great philosopher, to ask for advice on conducting rituals. When he was 30, he began to set up schools and enrolled some 3,000 students. Among them, 72 were noted scholars who later helped compile ancient books and put Confucius’thinking into the book titled “The Analects.” He spent more than 10 years traveling in various states with his students and disciples to advocate his ideas on correct conduct and the best government. According to Confucius, the best government is one that rules by rites, promotes people's natural morality and fights against bribery and coercion.

He explained that if a ruler led his people by morality, he was like the North Star, which would be surrounded by countless other stars. But if he used administrative orders and severe punishment to constrain his people, he could probably force them to refrain from committing crimes, but they would not understand that it’s shameful to commit crimes. And only when they had acquired the “sense of shame” would they become good. Confucius was also thought to be the editor and author of the Five Classics, namely, Shi (诗Book of Songs), Shu ( 书 Book of History), Li (礼 Book of Rites), Yi (易 Book of Change) and Chunqiu (春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals). He also advocated familial loyalty, ancestor worship, respect of elders by their pious children and subjects’ loyalty to their ruler. As a result, Confucius’ ideology was deemed as dominating force in the feudal society that lasted for more than 2,000 years in China. His thinking also became an important guiding ideology in many other countries in East and Southeast Asia, such as Japan and Singapore.

His famous quotations include:“Study and review what you have learned every day, isn’t it joyful? With friends coming from afar, isn’t it delightful? One doesn’t frown on other’s misunderstanding, isn’t he a respectable man？”

“It is the greatest virtue to acknowledge one's fault and be willing to change it.”

“If you know, to recognize that you know; if you don’t know, to realize that you don’t know: That is knowledge.”

Once, Zi Gong, one of Confucius’ disciples, asked the philosopher: “Is there any one word that can guide one throughout his life?” Confucius answered: “Maybe it’s magnanimity! What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”That’s perhaps one of the earliest versions of the Golden Rule.

孔子，至圣先师

至圣先师孔夫子出身于春秋（公元前770年—公元前476年）末年一行伍之家，国人亦称其“孔子”或“孔丘”。他三岁丧父，困顿中与母亲相依为命，在他十七岁那年，母亲也告亡故。年少的孔子勤勉好学，兴趣广博。入庙祠则习祭祀典仪，牧群羊则练挽弓射箭，白天修学会计，夜晚抚弦操琴。

孔子向往周制，曾问礼于老子，求取礼乐之道。三十岁那年，孔子着手开设学堂，广招天下门生，纳三千弟子于门下，其中更有七十二贤人日后编纂文集，将其思想收录在《论语》之中。十余年间，孔子携弟子门生周游列国，宣扬自己关于“克己复礼”的思想，即，人们应以礼行事，国君应以礼治国，以德安邦，施仁政，倡清廉，反对苛政与贪腐。

孔子说，国君为政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而众星共之。反之，倘若对臣民施以严刑峻法，道之以政，齐之以刑，百姓守法则只为免受惩罚，而非有廉耻之心。只有当百姓有了廉耻之心，才会真正良善归服。有人认为孔子还编写了五经，即，《诗》、《书》、《礼》、《易》、《春秋》，主张忠君齐家，敬祖爱老。因此，孔子的观念不仅在中国绵延两千余年的封建社会中占据了主导地位，也成为诸如日本、新加坡等许多东亚和东南亚国家重要的指导思想。

孔子著名的言论有：“—学而时习之，不亦说乎？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎？”

“—过而能改，善莫大焉。”

“知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也。”

一次，学生子贡问孔子：“有一言而可以终身行之者乎？”子曰：“其恕乎。己所不欲，勿施于人。”这恐怕是最久远的“黄金法则”之一了。

# 3.6 SuShi (1037–1101)：A Prestigious, Versatile Scholar

Su Shi, also known by his pseudonym Dongpo, was a prestigious, versatile scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). Today, his poems, paintings, calligraphy and essays are still widely admired by millions of his fans all over the world. Su was born in Meishan in today’s Sichuan Province in southwest China. Both his father Su Xun and his younger brother Su Zhe were famous writers.

At the age of five, Su began to learn reading and writing from his mother, who was a well-educated woman. Thanks to his diligence and exceptional talent, the boy became well versed in the Chinese classics when he was only seven. Su passed the imperial civil service examinations to obtain the prestigious title of Jin shi (or“Presented Scholar”) when he was 19. As a result, he later served in a number of government ofﬁces. However, this highly talented scholar seemed to be always at odds with a political faction headed by the then prime minister, Wang Anshi. Su frequently wrote poems and essays criticizing Wang's reforms, particularly the government monopoly on the salt industry. Therefore, Su was banished several times and lived in political exile for many years in various places around the country.

But Su played a crucial role in the history of Chinese poetry. He founded a school of expressive poetry and he often combined vivid descriptions of natural scenes with deep personal emotions and political anxieties. More than 2,300 of his poems and 800 letters have survived. Among them, “Battle of Red Cliff,” “Jiang Chengzi,” “The Immortal by the River” and quite a few other poems are deemed the most notable. The ﬁrst two lines of the “Battle of Red Cliff” are so popular that nearly every school student in China can recite them: “The Great River ﬂows to the east, Washing away all great men known in history with its rolling waves.” His career as a public servant and his life in exile took Su to many parts of the country, and he left behind a rich trove of cultural heritage.

Even today, many localities have built pavilions, bridges, statues and memorial halls to exhibit Su's poems, paintings, calligraphy and lyrics. Among them, Hangzhou, the capital of today's Zhejiang Province in east China, boasts a causeway across the famous West Lake, which is named after the scholar, for he was responsible for its construction. Su also wrote many beautiful poems to praise the ethereal scenes of the city and its lake. In one poem he wrote:“People tend to liken the West Lake to the Lady of the West,Plainly dressed or gorgeously adorned, She always looks best.”Here the Lady of the west refers to Xi Shi, one of the most famous beauties in ancient China.

Su took his pen name from a rural place called Dongpo (Eastern Slope), where he lived during his first exile. Later the name was given to a famous dish, Dongpo Pork. According to legend, Su created the dish of stewed pork totally by accident. He actually overcooked the stew as he concentrated on a chess game and forgot what he was preparing. Today however, Dongpo Pork remains an essential dish in Hangzhou cuisine. Su died at 64 in Changzhou in eastern China after a long period of political exile.

苏轼：绝版东坡，也无风雨也无晴

苏轼，别号“东坡”，北宋（公元960年—公元1127年）之文人大家，其才多面，其人旷达。今时今日，他的诗文书画任为世界各地成千上万的“苏粉”们所欣赏，乃至顶礼膜拜。 苏轼出生在位于今天中国西南部的四川省眉山市，其父苏洵和弟弟苏辙也同为文学大家。

五岁起，苏轼便跟随知书达礼、熟通古今的母亲习文弄墨。天资聪颖又勤奋过人，七岁的苏轼已是经史子集，无所不通了。19岁时，年轻的苏轼科举高中，进士及第，不久便为官入仕。然而，才华横溢的文人苏轼与当时的宰相王安石及其党派，在政见上常常相左不睦。苏轼常以诗文批评王氏变法，尤其是政府在盐业上实行的垄断做法。因此，苏轼屡遭贬谪，多年来，由于政治流放，一直过着宦游不定，四处为家的动荡生涯。

然而，在中国诗词史上，苏轼留下了浓墨重彩的一笔，扮演着举足轻重的角色。他的诗词自成一家，抒情豪放 ，所谓“一切景语皆情语”，常常将深厚的个人情感和政治诉求融于对自然周遭生动的描摹绘写之中，现有超过2300首诗词，以及800封家书存世。其中，尤以《赤壁怀古》、《江城子》、《临江仙》以及不胜枚举的佳篇等最为知名。《赤壁怀古》的头两句如此脍炙人口，几乎每位中国学子都能朗朗诵之：“大江东去，浪淘尽，千古风流人物。“流放与宦游生涯，也使得苏轼的足迹遍布大江南北，留下了宝贵而丰富的文化遗存。”

即便今时今日，仍旧有许多地方纷纷修亭筑桥、塑像建所，用以展出苏轼的诗文书画。其中，中国东部浙江省的省会杭州市内的西湖上，就有一道由苏轼负责兴建，并以他的姓氏命名的“苏堤”，可谓名满天下。他还将优雅的诗句驱遣于笔端，赞美杭州以及西湖的盛景。比如有一首就写道：“欲把西湖比西子，淡妆浓抹总相宜。”诗中的西子指的是西施，中国古代最有名的美人之一。

诗人的笔名来自黄州东门外的乡野东坡，那是他首遭流放的地方。后来，那道著名的美食“东坡肉”亦源于此名。传说，苏轼独创“东坡肉”纯属机缘巧合，皆因他做饭时凝神于棋局，全然忘我，遂将肉烧过了头。然而今天，这道“东坡肉”已成杭城名菜。历经多年宦海沉浮，羁旅流放，最终，苏轼辞世于位于中国东部的常州，享年64岁。

3.7 Guan Yu：Lord Guan Revered for His Bravery

Guan Yu was a famous military general and sworn brother of Liu Bei, a warlord and later the founder of the Kingdom of Shu Han (221–263 AD) during the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD) and the Three Kingdom Period (220–280 AD). Due to his unswerving loyalty, faultless righteousness and matchless bravery, Guan later became one of the best-known Chinese historical figures not only in China, but also in many other parts of the world.

Today, people usually call him Lord Guan and his statue, with an iconic crimson red face and long black beard, can be seen in almost all Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist temples or temples solely devoted to him. Smaller statues of Guan can also be found in many traditional Chinese shops and restaurants both in and outside China. He is widely revered and deified by Chinese people as the god of war and protection. Details about the background of Guan and his family were scarce.

But according to records found in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), Guan was born in a scholar's family in today's Shanxi Province in north China. Guan's father taught him Chinese classics such as “Book of Changes” and “Spring and Autumn Annals.” Also, he began to practice martial arts when he was a young boy. Later, he grew into a giant man more than 2 meters tall. At the age of 19, Guan fled his home after killing a local squire who bullied and raped a village girl. He lived in hiding for several years. It was during the years when Guan joined the armed forces fighting peasant rebellions that he met Liu and Zhang Fei, another military general who later also served the Kingdom of Shu Han.One popular story that has been repeatedly told generation after generation is about how Liu, Guan and Zhang became sworn brothers after they took an oath of fraternity in a peach orchard. And their true brotherhood and unshakable loyalty to each other has become a legend and symbol of virtue among Chinese people.

Tons of other stories about Guan are believed today to be more fictional than real. One of the highly popular stories of Guan describes how the hero escaped from the territory of warlord Cao Cao, who later became the ruler of the powerful Kingdom of Wei. Guan escaped by charging through five passes and slaying six generals of Cao. The vivid description and mesmerizing plots in the story still attract thousands of people to ballet shows, opera houses, movie theaters and story-telling parties today.

Other favorite stories about Guan's life and accomplishments include how he helped the joint forces of the Kingdom of Shu Han and the Kingdom of Wu win the famous Battle of the Red Cliffs; how he underwent a surgery by the legendary physician Hua Tuo to remove poison from his arm without an anesthetic while playing chess and showing no sign of pain at all; and how he spared the life of Cao, the arch enemy of his kingdom, as a way to pay back the friendship and favors he received from Cao. But like most heroes in Chinese history, the end of Guan's life was tragic and heart-wrenching. In 219 AD, Guan and his troops were ambushed by an army from the Kingdom of Wu in a place called Maicheng in central China. After a fierce fight, Guan and his son were captured. Because they refused to surrender, they were beheaded under the order of the emperor of Wu. Today, “walking into Maicheng” has become a Chinese saying, equivalent to the English phrase “meeting one's Waterloo.”

关羽：武圣关公

关羽是东汉末年（公元25-220年）和三国时期（公元220-280年）的名将，是建立蜀汉王朝（公元221-263年）的大军阀刘备的盟兄弟。关羽为人忠贞不渝、大义凛然，且骁勇善战，为此他受到亚洲儒家文化圈很多人的崇拜，是全球华裔心中最著名的历史人物之一。

他在身后被尊称为“关公”。以红面黑髥为标志的关公塑像，几乎在所有的儒释道寺庙及关帝庙里都可以看到。在中国以及境外的许多华人商店、中餐馆里，也常可见供奉关公的壁龛。他被很多华人尊崇为武圣、保护神。关于关羽的家庭背景，人们了解甚少。

根据清朝（1644-1911）发现的一份记载，关羽出生于今天中国北方山西省的一个读书人家庭。关羽的父亲教他国学经典，如《周易》、《春秋》。他自幼习武，待年长时，身高竟超过2米。19岁那年，关羽见义勇为，杀死了当地一个欺辱乡下女孩的乡绅后，为了避难，他远走他乡，躲藏了好几年。时值黄巾农民起义，关羽加入了一支与黄巾打仗的军队，他遇到刘备和张飞，后来他们同为蜀汉征战。刘关张桃园三结义的故事被后世代代相传。他们如手足般的兄弟情谊和对彼此坚不可摧的忠诚，成为美好品德的象征，在民间广为流传。

不过，许多关羽的故事被认为虚构成分更多。关羽最著名的故事是过五关斩六将，突破后来成为强大魏国统治者曹操的围追堵截。这个故事的生动描述和引人入胜的情节，至今在戏院、歌剧院、电影院、说书场中再现，吸引了成千上万人去欣赏。

关羽一生中的经典故事还有：关羽曾帮助吴蜀联军打赢了赤壁之战；因其手臂中毒，名医华佗在不施麻醉的情况下为正在下棋的关羽刮骨除毒，关羽面不改色；关羽也曾义释蜀汉的死敌曹操，以此来报答曹操对他的友谊和恩惠。但与中国历史上大多数英雄一样，关羽的生命终结充满了悲剧性，令人心痛。公元219年，关羽和他的军队在中国中部一个叫麦城的地方遭到来自吴国的军队的伏击。激战之后，关羽和他的儿子被抓获。他们宁死不降，吴国君主下令将他们斩首。如今，“走麦城” 已成为中国的一句俗语，相当于英文中的“滑铁卢之战”。

3.8 XuanZang (circa 602 - 664 AD)：A Great Buddhist Monk

Xuanzang was born with his layman name Chen Yi in today's Yanshi County in central China's Henan Province. His father once served as a county magistrate, but tired of the political struggle, he later gave up his office and lived in seclusion. As a conservative Confucian, he taught his children doctrines of orthodox Confucianism. Chen Yi, the third son of the old Chen, was a highly gifted child who could recite many Confucian treatises when he was only eight. However, under the influence of one of his elder brothers, Chen Yi became strongly interested in Buddhism. So, after the death of his father, Chen followed his second elder brother to enter the Buddhist monkhood and was given his religious name Xuanzang when he was only 13. He was fully ordained at the age of 20.

After the unification of the country under the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), Xuanzang moved to the capital Chang'an (today's Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province in northwest China), to further his study of Buddhism. Xuanzang found numerous discrepancies in the Buddhist texts available in China at that time, so in order to search for the complete, original documents of Buddhism, Xuanzang began to plan a long journey to the religion's birthplace, India.

In 629 AD, Xuanzang left Chang'an and traveled along the Silk Road all the way to India. On his journey, the monk visited monasteries of all kinds of Buddhist schools in 110 states. Eventually, he went to study at Nalanda in Bihar, India. He spent nearly five years there reading and discussing classic Buddhism treatises with local monks. Later, he also visited and studied in many other parts of India. Xuanzang returned to China in 645 AD. He hired more than 20 horses to help him carry back 657 Sanskrit texts. He received a hero's welcome when he entered Chang'an. But he declined many offers for civil appointments and with support from the emperor, he retired to the Hongfu Monastery to concentrate on translating the Buddhism texts into Chinese. He recruited many students and scholars all across the country and East Asia to help. He himself translated 75 Buddhist works, amounting to a total of 1,335 scrolls. Later, he even created a Buddhist school of his own. Although it didn't thrive, his theories on many Buddhist concepts have greatly influenced the thinking of other Buddhist schools throughout East and Southeast Asia.

At the request of the emperor, Xuanzang wrote a book entitled “Great Tang Records on the Western Regions,” which describes his 17-year travel between Chang'an and India and contains detailed accounts of political, social as well as geological facts about more than 100 Central and South Asian states. His legendary journey has later provided the inspiration for many folk stories, operas and literature, including “Journey to the West,” one of the Four Great Classic Chinese Novels. Xuanzang died in 664 AD. He is remembered as a great Buddhist monk, master translator, legendary traveler and well-learned scholar.

高僧玄奘

玄奘生于今中国中部河南省偃师县，俗名陈祎。其父曾任职县令，却对官场的政治倾轧心生厌倦，不久便辞官退隐。身为恪守道统的儒士，玄奘的父亲将正统的儒家教义授与子嗣。其三子陈祎，天资过人，年仅八岁时便能背诵不少儒学经典。然而，陈祎深受其兄影响，对佛教的兴趣日渐浓厚。于是，父亲过世后，他便随同二哥出家为僧，13岁始获法号玄奘，20岁受具足戒。

唐代（公元618年—公元907年）国家一统后，玄奘迁赴京城长安（位于今中国西北陕西省省会城市西安），深研佛法。他发觉当时国内佛教文献中的文本差异繁多，为寻求完备的佛典原著，玄奘着手计划，远赴佛教发源地天竺国，求取真经。

公元629年，玄奘离开长安，沿丝绸之路一路赶赴印度。他沿途拜访了110个国家的各种宗派佛寺。最终，他来到位于印度比哈尔的那烂陀寺，并在那里花费近五年时间，与当地僧侣共同阅读，相互探讨佛教经典文献。之后，他还去到其他印度各地，走访研习。公元645年，玄奘回国。他租马20余匹，载回657卷梵文文献，抵达长安时，他受到了英雄般的欢迎。一个个邀约任命接踵而来，但都被他一一谢绝，玄奘隐退至洪福寺，并在皇帝的支持下，全心展开佛经的中文译介。他在全国乃至整个东亚招募文人学子，共襄盛举，仅他自己一人就翻译了75部佛典，共计1335卷。之后，他甚至自创佛教宗派。尽管这个宗派未能蓬勃兴盛，但他的佛教理论却对东亚和东南亚的其他佛教学派产生了极大的影响。

应皇帝的要求，玄奘撰写《大唐西域记》，书中描绘了他历时17年，行走于长安和天竺之间的这场旅行，详实记录了百余个中亚和南亚诸国的政治、社会以及地理风土的情况样貌。玄奘的传奇之旅后来又为包括中国四大文学经典之一的《西游记》在内的无数民间故事、戏曲和文学创作提供了灵感。公元664年，玄奘圆寂。他作为一位高僧大德、一位翻译大师、一位传奇行者，以及一位渊博学者为世人所铭记。

4.1 Ruse of the golden cicada

Like some other insects and reptiles, the cicada sheds its skin when molting. But in Chinese, the phrase “to shed the golden cicada shell” means a tactic to escape danger or flee a pursuing enemy. After molting, a cicada would leave behind its old skin and move into a new stage of life. Others might be fooled by the sight of the dead shell and mistake it as the real cicada resting on a tree twig. So, leaving behind a facade of your existence in one place could create an opportunity for you to divert your enemy's attention while you flee and regroup in another place.

Famous Chinese strategist Zhuge Liang (181-234 AD) not only knew this stratagem very well but also pulled off the ruse successfully when he was already dead. Zhuge led the troops of the Kingdom of Shu to invade central China six times but failed on each attempt. And during the last invasion, he fell ill and died on the road. Before dying, he advised his general, Jiang Wei, on how to fend off the Kingdom of Wei army's offensive and safely withdraw the troops back to their home kingdom in southwest China. By following Zhuge's advice, General Jiang concealed news of the strategist's death and ordered a craftsman to make a life-size wooden statue of his dead leader.

The next day, General Jiang ordered only part of his force to launch a noisy attack against the Wei troops, with loud shouting and drumming. Then, his guards wheeled out the statue of Zhuge to give the impression that he was still personally supervising the assault. Meanwhile, General Jiang directed other troops to quietly withdraw with the coffin carrying the dead strategist's body.The Wei troops and their commander were puzzled by the sudden show of the enemy's strength. But they all knew that Zhuge Liang was a very cunning and deceitful man. They wondered what on earth the strategist was pulling off against them this time. Before they could figure out the “new ruse” of Zhuge, the Wei commander decided to back off and avoid any direct engagement. Seeing the Wei army retreat from the battlefield, General Jiang immediately ordered his troops to move quickly and safely back to their own state. It was too late to chase the retreating Shu troops by the time the Wei commander learned that Zhuge had already passed away.

金蝉脱壳

宛如其他昆虫和爬行动物，蝉也会在蜕皮后把壳丟下。但在汉语中，“金蝉脱壳”则意指远离危险或逃脱追捕的一种策略。在完成蜕皮之后，蝉洗去铅华，焕然一新。其他人可能会被蜕下的外壳所迷惑，误以为是栖息在树枝上的蝉。进而，在战争中隐真示假，可以诱敌盲动，为自己的转移和重整创造条件。

著名的军事家诸葛亮（公元181年——公元234年）不仅生前对这个计谋运用娴熟，甚至在他死后还能巧用此计，成功拒敌。诸葛亮曾统领蜀军六出祁山，进取中原，然而他在伐魏中途出师未捷身先死，病倒在了最后一役前。弥留之际，诸葛亮向姜维传授妙计，指导这位心腹大将如何逼退魏军的进攻，保全军队然后安然撤回位于地处西南的蜀国。姜维将军遵照诸葛亮的遗愿，将死讯保密，同时请工匠制作了一个与已故统帅等身的木像。

第二天，姜维拨出部分军队，令其摇旗呐喊，鼓噪而进，使魏军不敢轻动。随后，他的护卫们将诸葛亮的坐像缓缓推出，以此表明诸葛亮风采依旧，帷幄如常。与此同时，姜维安排其余的部队带上装有统帅遗体的棺木，静静地撤离战场。蜀军突然声势高涨，对手一时陷于困惑。然而诸葛亮“诡计多端”，“神鬼莫测”，魏军上下早已领教。此番大张旗鼓的背后究竟是否另有隐情，使得他们只得按兵不动，静观其变。还没等魏军前锋搞明白诸葛亮这次葫芦里卖的什么药，魏军统帅就下达了后撤避战的命令。望着魏军的阵势开始松动，姜维也对部属们下达了同样的指令，蜀军得以安然回朝。等到魏军统帅得到诸葛亮去世的消息，蜀军已经远去，追之莫及。

4.2 When Everything Fails, Retreat

In face of an overwhelmingly powerful enemy and seeing no chance for winning the battle, to retreat is usually the best choice. Many people believe that to surrender represents a complete defeat; to compromise means a half defeat; but to retreat is no defeat. As long as you are not defeated, you still retain a chance for victory in the future. This is the so-called “retreat-in-order-to-advance” principle. This stratagem is always listed as the last of the famous “36 Stratagems,” because this scheme is deemed as the last, but usually the best, option when everything else fails.However, “retreat” sometimes is also a deceptive ploy. The purpose is to dodge the brunt of an invading force and create a fake sign of “defeat.”  When it's the right time, the retreating army could turn back and pounce upon a misled and lightheaded enemy.

One good example of implementing this stratagem happened in the early Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), when the powerful State of Chu sent out a strong army to attack the State of Jin. Led by General Zi Yu, the Chu troops comprised three contingents, namely, the Left Army, the Right Army and the Central Army. Both the Left and Right armies were made up of soldiers recruited from four small states by Chu through coercion. Only the Central Army was a well-trained force from the State of Chu itself. When the ruler of Jin learned about the invasion, he decided to withdraw his troops to a geographically advantageous location along the state's mountainous border. At the same time, he sent people out to ask for help from other states. The Chu general first ordered the Right Army to launch an attack against the Jin troops.Again, the Jin troops quickly retreated deeper into a valley. With the Right Army in hot pursuit, they met a large phalanx of battle chariots all covered with tiger skins. The horses of the Right Army were startled as they thought they were seeing real tigers and it was soon defeated. The Jin troops took the uniforms of the surrendered soldiers and disguised themselves as members of the Right Army. They rushed to see the Chu general and told him that the Right Army had already won a big battle against the Jin troops and urged the general to come forward and finish off the enemy. The general was delighted. He ordered the Left Army to advance into the valley and he himself led the Central Army to follow behind. The Jin troops played the same “retreat” trick as before to trap the Left Army which they ruthlessly wiped out and set up another trap for the general. When the Central Army reached the battlefield, the general suddenly found out that both armies had been eliminated and now he himself was ambushed by the Jin troops.

The general eventually escaped the battlefield and returned to the State of Chu but almost all his troops were killed. The weak State of Jin therefore won a big victory over the powerful State of Chu thanks to the ruler's adroit implementation of the “retreat” scheme, which has been widely deemed as the last of  the “Thirty-Six Stratagems.”

走为上计

在面对压倒性的强大敌人时，如果意识到没有机会赢得战斗，撤退通常是最好的选择。许多人认为，投降代表着完全的失败；妥协意味着输了一半；但撤退却不是失败。只要你不被彻底击溃，你就仍保留着在未来取胜的机会。这就是所谓的“以退为进”的原则。这个计策常被列为著名的“三十六计”中的最后一计，因为它被当作其他一切计策都失败时的最后但也是最好的选择。然而，“走为上”有时也是一种欺骗性的策略。其目的是为了避开敌人部队的锋芒，制造“战败”的假象。当时机成熟时，撤退的军队可以回头，扑向被误导并且已经轻敌的敌人。

春秋（公元前770年—公元前476年）早期，有一个“走为上”的成功案例。当时，强盛的楚国派出一支强军攻打晋国。在子玉将军的带领下，楚军由三支部队组成，即左军、右军和中央军。楚国通过胁迫四个小国招募的士兵，构成了左军和右军。只有中央军是一支来自楚国本身的训练有素的部队。当晋王得知楚国入侵的消息后，他决定将军队撤到地理位置较佳的晋国山地边界。于此同时，他还派人出去向其他国家寻求帮助。楚国将军首先命令右军对晋军发动攻击。晋军再次迅速撤退到山谷深处。右军紧追不舍，遇到了一个由虎皮战车组成的大型方阵。右军的马匹都受到了惊吓，它们以为看到的是真正的老虎，右军阵脚大乱，很快就被打败了。于是晋军又穿着投降士兵的军装，伪装成右军的成员。他们赶忙去见楚国将军，告诉他右军已经大胜晋军，并请求将军速派大军前进一举解决敌人。将军听后很高兴，于是他命令左翼军队向山谷推进，他自己则带领中央军跟在后面。晋军玩起了和以前一样的“撤退”把戏，困住了左军，将他们无情地歼灭了，这又给将军设下了一个陷阱。当中央军到达战场时，将军突然发现两支军队都被消灭了，而现在他自己也遭到了晋军的伏击。

最终这位将军逃离了战场，回到了楚国，但他的部队几乎全部被歼灭。由于晋王巧妙地实施了“撤退”计策，弱小的晋国赢得了对阵强大楚国的重大胜利，这就是广为人知的“三十六计”的最后一计—“走为上计”。

4.3 An Empty Fortress Strategy

When the enemy is overwhelming in numbers and there is little chance to withstand a siege, the best option is to make yourself utterly defenseless by removing all your forces. This unusual move might confuse your enemy into believing you have set up a trap and, with luck, they may back off. Zhuge Liang, a famous Chinese strategist who was prime minister of the Kingdom of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280 AD), is perhaps best known for applying this “ploy of an empty fortress.” After losing the strategic town of Jieting to the rival Kingdom of Wei in a previous battle, Zhuge withdrew to Xicheng, a city of only about 5,000 people. In order to build up his defense, he sent half of his men to find food and fodder. But the Wei troops were in hot pursuit. Learning that the enemy army of more than 150,000 men was about to attack, soldiers and civilians in Xicheng started to panic, believing they had little chance to fend off the enemy.

Zhuge, however, told them to calm down. “Don't worry,” he said. “I'll think of a way to trick the enemy into retreat.” Zhuge ordered his soldiers to remove all fighting flags from the city walls and go into hiding. Then he asked a dozen old men to open the four city gates and calmly sweep the roads outside. Zhuge himself climbed one of the gate towers with two attendants, set up a table with a lute and started burning incense. When the enemy's advance troops arrived, they were surprised to see the city gates open, some old men casually sweeping the roads and the famous strategist playing the lute calmly atop the city wall with two attendants by his side. They rushed to tell their commander Sima Yi, another famous strategist in Chinese history, about this unusual scene. Sima decided to check it out himself. When he came to the front, the commander saw Zhuge, with all smiles, playing his lute above an open gate leading to empty streets in the city. He summed up the situation, then ordered his troops to retreat. One of his sons asked: “Dad, why did you decideto retreat from an empty city? Zhuge must be putting on a show to confuse us.” “No,” Sima answered, “Zhuge is a cautious man, not a risk taker. So, I believe he has set up a trap to lure us to attack.” Zhuge later left Xicheng, leading his followers to safety.

空城计

当敌众我寡，几乎没有机会抵挡住围攻时，最好的选择是撤离所有兵力使自己完全无防御。这种反常的行为可能会使你的敌人误认为你设了个圈套，如果运气好的话，他们可能会撤退。三国时期（公元220-280年）曾任蜀国丞相的中国著名军事家诸葛亮，大概他最有名的就是运用“空城计”。在和魏国的战斗中丢了重镇街亭后，诸葛撤退到仅有5,000人口的西城。为了加强防御，他派遣了一半的人手去寻找粮草。但是魏军紧追不舍。当得知有15余万敌军即将发起进攻时，西城的士兵和百姓惊慌失措，他们认为根本没有机会抵御敌人。

诸葛却告诉他们镇定。“不用担心，”他说。“我会想出一个诱敌撤退的计策。”诸葛命令他的士兵们撤下城墙上所有的战旗，并隐藏好自己。然后，他让十二名老人将四个城门全部打开，还从容地清扫外面的道路。诸葛本人和两名随从爬上其中一个门楼，搭起桌子摆上古琴，并开始点起薰香。敌人的先头部队到达时，他们惊讶地发现那里城门大开，一些老人悠闲地扫着地，著名的军事家诸葛亮在城墙上静静地弹着古琴，身旁有两个随从。他们赶紧跑去把这匪夷所思的一幕告诉司马懿，中国历史上另一位著名的军事家。司马懿决定亲自过去查看，看到诸葛笑容满面，在通往城中空荡街道的敞开的城门上，弹奏着音乐。他分析了局面，然后命令他的部队撤退。他的一个儿子问道：“父亲，您为什么决定从一个空无一人的城撤退？诸葛一定是装模做样来迷惑我们。” “不，”司马回答， “诸葛是一个谨慎的人，不爱冒险。因此，我相信他这是设置好了埋伏来引诱我们进攻。”诸葛后来离开西城，带领众人到了安全的地方。

4.4 Zodiac Animals

In ancient times, there were no Chinese zodiac animals. So, one day, the Jade Emperor decided to call all animals on the earth to a party and he would pick 12 animals to represent 12 zodiac signs. Hearing the news, all animals were very excited and eager to attend the big party. At that time, the rat and the cat were very good friends. The cat loved to take naps, so he told the rat to wake him up in time for the party next day.

Early next morning, after the rat got up, he saw the cat still sound asleep. In order to get a bigger chance to win a spot in the zodiac cycle, the rat decided not to wake the cat. So, he sneaked out and went to the party by himself. In the nearby lake, a dragon was getting ready to go to the party. With a big nose, long whiskers and shiny scales, the dragon looked both gallant and radiant. But he loathed his bald head. He thought if he could have a pair of beautiful antlers, he would look perfect. Then, he saw a rooster going by. The rooster at that time had both a crest and a pair of very beautiful antlers. So, the dragon said, “Good morning, Rooster. Can I borrow your antlers? I'm going to attend the animal party and I can't go with a bald head.” “No,” the rooster answered. “I'm going to the party, too. I need my beautiful antlers myself.” Just then, a scorpion crawled out of a crack of rock. After hearing the conversation, the busybody said to the rooster, “Hey, don't be so mean. You look good enough with your crest and you don't need that pair of antlers. Lend them to the dragon and I'm willing to be the guarantor for the deal.” The proud rooster thought it was probably right that he already looked good enough even without his antlers. So, he agreed to lend his antlers to the dragon.

At the party, the Jade Emperor picked 12 animals for the zodiac cycle. They included ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, rat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Then, the emperor found it difficult to decide who's going to lead the 12 animals. After a heated discussion, all participants agreed to arrange the order according to the size of each animal in the zodiac cycle. Someone suggested the ox was the biggest animal among the dozen and even the majestic tiger agreed. But, the rat jumped out and said: “No, no. I have always heard people say 'such a big rat' and never heard anyone say 'such a big ox.' So, I'm the biggest in this group.”  But others disagreed. So, the emperor decided to parade the 12 animals in front of a big crowd of people on the earth to see what they would say. When the ox, tiger and others came by, people didn't make any comment. Then when the rat jumped onto the back of the ox, the crowd said almost in unison: “Oh, such a big rat.”  Afterward, rat was listed in the first place of the zodiac cycle and followed by the ox.

When the ebullient rat returned home, the cat just woke up. When he found out that he had missed the party, the cat vowed to be the enemy of the rat forever. On the lake side, the dragon was so pleased with his borrowed antlers that he refused to return them to the rooster and escaped by diving into the water. The rooster could not swim, so he vowed to revenge on the guarantor scorpion for losing his beautiful antlers. Today, the Chinese zodiac signs also represent 12 different types of personalities.

十二生肖

古代时，还没有中国的生肖动物。于是有一天，玉帝决定召集人间的全体动物齐聚一堂，他要从中挑选出12种动物，分别代表12个生肖。甫一得悉，动物们皆兴奋不已，个个跃跃欲试想要赶赴此会。彼时，猫与鼠尚互为挚友。猫喜瞌睡，于是嘱咐老鼠第二天要及时叫醒自己，以便赴约。

第二天，老鼠一大早就起床了，他看见猫还在酣睡。为了自己在十二生肖中更有机会占一席之地，老鼠决定不去叫醒猫。于是，他独自溜了出去，参加聚会。就在附近的湖中，一条龙正准备赴约。硕鼻长须，鳞甲闪闪，龙的样子既英勇神武又光彩熠熠。但他讨厌自己的光头，心想，若是能有一对漂亮的犄角，自己的模样就堪称完美了。后来，他看到一只公鸡走过。那时候的公鸡长着一副鸡冠，还有一对漂亮的犄角。于是，龙便说道：“早安，公鸡。我可以借你的犄角一用吗？我要去参加动物聚会，总不能光着个头出席啊。” “不行啊，”公鸡答说，“我也要去这个聚会。我自己也需要这对漂亮的犄角啊。”这时，一只蝎子从岩石缝中爬了出来。这个好事者听了那番对话后，便对公鸡说：“嘿，别这么小气。你有鸡冠了，模样足够好，无需那对犄角了。你把犄角借给龙，我愿意做此交易的担保人。” 骄傲爆棚的公鸡觉得，即使没有那对犄角，自己的模样说不定已经足够好了。于是，他便同意把犄角借给龙。

聚会时，玉帝挑选出了12只动物作为生肖。他们是牛、虎、兔、龙、蛇、马、羊、鼠、猴、鸡、狗和猪。之后，玉帝发现很难决定由谁来统领12只动物。一番热议后，大家一致同意按照每种动物的个头大小，安排其在生肖中的顺序。有的说12只动物中牛的个头最大，就连威风八面的老虎也同意这个说法。可老鼠跳出来说：“不对，不对。我老是听人说'好大一只老鼠'，从没听人说过'好大一头牛'啊。所以，我才是这群里最大的动物。”然而，其他动物都不同意。于是，玉帝决定让12只动物在人间众人面前列队而行，且听众人如何评说。当牛啊、虎啊和其他动物走过时，人们都未加评论。而当老鼠跳上牛背时，众人几乎不约而同地开口：“喔，好大一只老鼠。”后来，老鼠便位列生肖之首，牛则紧随其后。

欢天喜地的老鼠回到家时，猫才刚刚睡醒。当发觉自己已然错过了那场聚会，猫宣告永与老鼠为敌。龙在湖边沾沾自喜于那对借来的犄角，拒绝将其归还公鸡，并潜入水中，逃之夭夭。公鸡不会游泳，于是发誓向那只做担保的蝎子复仇，以解痛失美丽犄角之恨。今天，中国的动物生肖还代表着12种不同的性格。

4.5 Startling the snake, or not

It’s a quite common practice that one will use a stick to beat the bush ahead when you are walking through a snake-infested wilderness. It’s an effective way to startle away snakes or fend off surprise attacks from those reptiles hidden in the bush. The same is true when you are going to fight your enemy. When your enemy is hidden and his plans are unknown, you should create some stir to trigger a response from him. This will help you detect his strategy and find out his strong and weak points. That’s a necessary reconnaissance trick to prevent you from blindly plunging into a battlefield. However, people may also use this phrase to advise others “not to startle the snake by beating the grass.” This means to avoid giving away your position or intentions before you launch an attack against your enemy.

It was a pity that this advice fell on the deaf ears of Lord Mu of the State of Qin in 627 BC when he decided to launch an attack on the State of Zheng by making use of a mole he had planted there. His advisor Jian Shu advised strongly against this expedition because the State of Zheng was a long distance away and the enemy would be alerted by the news of the movement of Qin troops way ahead of their arrival. He told Lord Mu that the enemy would have enough time to get well prepared to ward off the offensive. He predicted that not only the offensive would fail, the Qin troops could also be ambushed by troops from another state on their way back. The lord refused to follow Jian Shu’s advice and pressed ahead with his expedition plan. The result turned out to be almost exactly what the advisor had predicted. After learning about Qin’s attack, the State of Zheng ferreted out the mole and beefed up its defense.

After a long and harrowing journey, the Qin troops reached the border of the State of Zheng but could not find a way to breach the defense there. Therefore, after some time, they decided to withdraw. But on their way home, they were ambushed by troops of the State of Jin and suffered a huge loss. So, whether to startle the snake or not by beating the grass is the question here. But most people today seem to prefer the prudent act of not startling the reptile.

打草惊蛇

人们行走在可能有蛇出没的荒野时，常用棍子拍打灌木丛。这能有效吓退蛇或挡住来自灌木丛中其他爬行动物的袭扰。对敌作战，情同此理。当面对藏在暗处的敌人且不知道他将如何行动时，可以制造一些事端，诱敌作出反应，让敌人的计划，及其优势和弱点都暴露出来。这是一种很有用的侦查技巧，可以防止盲目地投入战场。但是，人们也用“不要打草惊蛇”这个短语来告诫他人。即在对敌发动进攻之前，不要主动暴露自己的位置或意图。

可惜的是，公元前627年，当秦穆公根据他在郑国埋伏的一名间谍的情报，决定对郑国发起进攻时，他对这个告诫充耳不闻。他的军师蹇叔强烈建议不要进行这次远征，因为秦、郑相距很远，敌军会在秦军抵达前就因秦军的移动而早早警觉。他告诉秦穆公，敌人将有足够的时间为抵御进攻做好充分的准备。他还预言，不仅对郑国的进攻会失败，而且秦军在返回途中也很有可能遭到另一国军队的伏击。秦穆公拒绝听从蹇叔的建议，坚持推进自己的远征计划。结果几乎和军师预言的一样：在知晓秦的进攻意图后，郑国揪出了间谍并加强了防御。

经过一段漫长而艰苦的行军，秦军到达了郑国的边境线，面对防御却找不到突破口。故而，过了一段时间，他们决定撤军。但在回国的路上，遭到了晋国的伏击并损失惨重。因此，问题的关键在于是否要去打草惊蛇。而如今，大多数人更倾向于谨慎选择，不去惊扰蛇！

4.6 Letting up on Your Pursuit

Experienced fishers all know when to “give more line” in order to prevent a hooked fish, particularly a big one, from breaking the line. You move the rod from side to side to gradually make the fish calm down and get tired, then you haul it in with little effort. This stratagem of “purposely letting up your pursuit before capturing your enemy” follows the same basic rule. Once your enemy is cornered, he will often put up a desperate fight. So, instead of pressing hard, you let up the intensity a little to give him the delusion that he still has a chance to escape. As a result, his will to fight is compromised by his desire to flee. When your enemy gets tired and relaxes his vigilance, you can capture him with much less difficulty.

Naturally, Zhuge Liang, one of the most famous strategists in Chinese history, knew very well how to apply this ploy. During the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280 AD), Zhuge, the prime minister of the Kingdom of Shu, was ordered to suppress a tribal uprising led by Meng Huo in the south. Zhuge understood very well that to fight their strong rival, the Kingdom of Wei in the north, his troops must first eliminate any danger in the backyard. But those tribesmen rarely accepted defeat. To ensure a lasting peace there, Zhuge decided to win them over. So, when his troops captured the rebel chief Meng Huo, Zhuge asked his prisoner whether he would admit defeat. Meng categorically denied it, saying he was far from being convinced of his rival's superiority. Zhuge then offered him some food and horses before setting him free. In the following battles, Meng was captured a few more times and every time he was released. When he was captured for the seventh time, Zhuge again treated him to a sumptuous dinner. But this time, the rebel leader conceded his defeat and vowed his tribe would never fight the Kingdom of Shu in the future. As a result, the recalcitrant south remained calm and peaceful for many years.

欲擒故纵

垂钓高手都知道，要想防止上钩的鱼儿，特别是大鱼脱钩跑掉，需要适时松放钓线，就是所谓的“放长线，钓大鱼”。把钓竿慢慢地从一边移到另一边，这样做既能安抚鱼儿，又能让不停游动的鱼儿倍感疲倦，这时，就能一举而获。同样，在方略计谋中，有意为之的“欲擒故纵” 也是依此理而行。一旦敌人陷入绝境，通常会作殊死一搏。因此，与其迫敌太紧，不如稍作松弛，令对方有尚可逃生的错觉。如此一来，其逃生的欲望也必多于反抗。一旦对方疲惫松懈，你便可轻而易举地将敌人擒获。

身为中国历史上最著名的军事家之一，诸葛亮自然深谙此法。三国时期（公元220年—公元280年），南方蛮王孟获率部谋反，蜀国丞相诸葛亮奉命剿灭。他非常清楚，为了与北方劲敌魏国决一死战，必先解决后顾之忧，要先平孟获。然而，这些蛮人不会轻易认输。为确保一方平安，丞相决定开展心战，争取他们。蜀军俘获蛮将孟获，丞相问他是否愿意投降，孟获断然拒绝，言称蜀军并无必胜把握。诸葛亮遂赐以酒食，还给鞍马，将其释放。在后面的战役中，孟获数次被擒，又数次被放，到了第七次时，丞相待以美食。然而这次，蛮将投降，并立誓今后绝不犯蜀。就这样，彪悍不驯的南方蛮地保持了多年的和平与祥静。

4.7 Restless Chang'e Flees

Once upon a time, there were 10 suns in the sky. Under their extreme heat, crops burned, land scorched and many people died on the earth. To save them, Houyi, the God of Archery, shot down nine suns. But the 10 suns were actually children of the God of the Eastern Heaven, so he banished Houyi and his wife Chang'e from the heaven and ordered them to live on the earth as mortals.

As common people, Houyi went out every day to hunt while Chang'e stayed at home and took care of the house chores. After a few years, Chang'e could no longer stand the harsh life they led as mortals and began to continually complain to her husband. Houyi felt extremely guilty that his wife, originally a fairy lady living in the heaven, now had to live on the earth as a mortal just because he had offended the God of the Eastern Heaven by killing nine of his 10 sons. So, he decided to travel all over the world to find the elixir of life that could transform them into immortals again. He trudged thousands of kilometers through deep forests and perilous marshlands and eventually he came to Kunlun Mountain, where the Queen Mother of the West resided.

The Queen Mother had the elixir of life but she would only give Houyi one pill, the dose for just one person to become immortal. Houyi didn't want to leave his wife behind, nor did he want to live on the earth alone. Therefore, when he returned home, he hid the pill in a wooden case. But one day Chang'e found the pill when her husband was away. She was extremely curious about the pill and wondered for a long time what to do about it. But when she heard her husband coming home, she hurriedly swallowed the pill. Immediately, she started to float toward the sky. Houyi was grieved to see Chang'e flying alone to the heaven but he didn't have the heart to use his magic arrow to shoot her down. Meanwhile, Chang'e panicked. She didn't know where to go. She didn't dare to go back to the heaven where she used to live for fear that all the gods there would reprimand her for betraying her husband. In a hurry she flew to the moon. But when she landed on the earth's only natural satellite, Chang'e found it was almost totally deserted. There was only one jade rabbit, who was making elixir all the time, and an old man who kept cutting a tree that always instantly grew back. Although Chang'e had become an immortal again, she could not leave the moon or live with her husband any more.

Looking back on the happy days she spent with Houyi, she became remorseful for what she had done. But it was too late. Back on the earth, Houyi continued to make a living by hunting. Eventually he taught a group of students about archery. One of his students was particularly talented, but he was also very ambitious. He wanted to be the best archer in the world and second to none. So, one day, he sneaked to the back of his master and shot him dead. Chang'e later became known as the lonely “Goddess of the Moon.”

嫦娥奔月

从前，天上有十个太阳。骄阳炙烤，其热难当，焦禾稼，杀草木，民无所食，饿殍遍野。为搭救黎民百姓，射神后羿张弓搭箭，射落九日。然而，那十个太阳都是东方天帝之子，震怒之下，天帝将后羿及其妻子嫦娥逐下天庭，贬至人间，降为凡人。

身为凡人，后羿每天出外打猎，嫦娥则留在家中，打理家务。时光荏苒，一晃多年，嫦娥再也无法忍受艰苦凡俗的人间生活，开始不断地向后羿抱怨起来。对此，后羿倍感内疚，只是因为自己射下了九日，冒犯了东方天帝，才使得原本贵为天庭仙女的妻子遭贬为凡人，谪至人间受苦。因此，他决心走遍天下，寻求能够再次转还成仙的灵丹妙药。他长途跋涉，穿越茂密的森林和危险的沼泽，终于来到了西王母居住的昆仑山。

王母虽有长生不老之药，但她只能送给后羿一粒，药量仅够一人还仙。后羿既不愿丢弃妻子，也不想一个人留在人间生活。所以，一回到家，他就把药丸放进了木匣里。但是有一天，后羿不在家时，嫦娥发现了那粒药丸。她好奇了很久，一心想知道药丸是做什么用的。一听见丈夫回来的声音，她便急忙把药丸吞了下去。嫦娥立刻向天空飘去，后羿眼见妻子独自一人飞走，伤心不已，但又不忍张弓放箭，将其射下。这时的嫦娥惊慌失措，不知道要去哪里。她害怕返回自己生活过的天庭，担心那里的众神会谴责她背叛了自己的夫君。情急之下，嫦娥奔向月宫，可是当她刚一踏上月亮，才发觉那里荒凉无人。只有一只玉兔，一刻不停地炼制丹药，还有一位老者，砍树不辍，而那棵被砍的树很快就又长了回来。嫦娥虽说还为仙人，却再也无法离开月球，与夫君共同生活了。

回想与后羿度过的幸福时光，嫦娥对这一切懊悔不已，但为时已晚。后羿继续在人间以打猎为生。最终，他向一群徒弟传授射箭的本领，其中一人极有天赋，又野心勃勃。他想成为天下最好的射手，不肯屈居第二。一天，他溜到师傅背后，一箭射死了后羿。后来，嫦娥成了孤独的月宫女神，广寒寂寥，怅然有丧。

4.8 The cowherd and the girl weaver

A long, long time ago, there was a smart and hard-working young man living in a remote village. Since his parents died early, he had to live with his elder brother and sister-in-law and helped to tend their cattle. But he was mistreated and the sister-in-law was especially mean. Eventually, he was kicked out of the home and was allowed only to take a very old and skinny ox with him.

Soon the young man found a piece of land on a mountain slope and began to grow crops with the help of the old, skinny ox. Thanks to his hard work, in a couple of years, the young man was able to grow enough crops to sustain himself and to build a small house for himself and shed for the ox. But the young man was very lonely.

One night, to his great surprise, the ox started to talk to him. The beast told him that early every morning, seven beautiful fairies came down from heaven to bathe in the river in the mountain valley. He urged the young man to sneak to the river, swipe and hide the clothes of one fairy while they were all bathing, and then ask the fairy to marry him. Though not sure whether he should believe it, the young man still went to the river before dawn and hide himself in a bush. Soon afterward, the seven young fairies came to the river, disrobed and jumped in the river to bathe and play. The young man was awestruck to see so many beautiful nude fairies playing in the water and almost forgot why he was here. Then, he jumped out of the bush, rushed to the bank and ran away with the clothes of one fairy. The fairies were startled by the intrusion and they quickly got dressed and flew back into the sky — except for the youngest who could not find her clothes. Then the young man came back and asked the fairy to marry him. The fairy agreed.

After they wed, the young man continued to work in the field while his fairy wife wove cloth at home. They lived a happy life and soon had a son and a daughter. The fairies were actually the granddaughters of the Queen Mother of the West. When she found out that the youngest fairy married a mortal, she was so angry that she ordered several deities to take her back into the heaven. The young man tried to chase after his wife, but he could not fly. Then, the old ox told him: “I’m dying and you can take my hide and put it on your back, then you can fly.” The ox promptly dropped to the ground and died. The young man was very sad but he followed the ox’s advice and put on its hide to fly into the sky with his son and daughter in search of the fairy. When the Queen Mother of the West found the young man was coming, she took out a hairpin and drew a line in the sky, which turned into the long Milky Way. Then, the fairy was transformed into the Girl Weaver Star (the Vega) and the young man turned into the Cowherd Star (the Altair) separated by the Milky Way. Eventually, the Queen Mother was moved by their deep love for each other and allowed them to meet on the night of the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar every year — on a bridge formed by flocks of magpies across the Milky Way. The Night of Sevens Festival has now become the Chinese Valentine’s Day.

牛郎织女

上古时候，有一位勤劳聪慧的年轻人住在地远人稀的村落中。因父母早逝，他不得不与兄嫂一起生活，帮他们看管牛群。然而，年轻人未遇善待，嫂子尤为刻薄，最终他被赶出家门，随行的只有一头瘦衰的老牛。

不久，年轻人就在山坡上寻到一片土地，幸得老牛相助，他着手耕种，遍植谷物。天道酬勤，只几年的工夫，年轻人精耕细种，不但粮食上自给自足，还建起小屋，为自己和老牛遮风挡雨。但年轻人却倍感孤独。

一天晚上，那头老牛居然开口说话了，这令年轻人大感意外。老牛告诉他，每天清晨时分，都有七位来自天庭的仙女下凡人间，沐浴山中。老牛鼓励年轻人悄然溜至河边，趁她们沐浴之际，将其中一人的衣物抱走藏起，借此向她求婚，修百年之好。尽管心存犹疑，年轻人还是赶在黎明前去到河边，藏身于灌木之中。不久，只见七位仙女飘然而至，宽衣解带，纷纷下水，沐浴嬉戏。亲眼见到众仙女水中裸浴，年轻人惊得魂不守舍，差点儿忘了自己是因何而来了。说时迟，那时快，他从灌木丛一跃而出，健步冲到河边，一把抱起一位仙女的衣物，落荒而逃。仙女们被这突如其来的一幕惊到，急忙各自穿戴，返回天庭。只有那位最年轻的仙女，发现自己的衣服已不翼而飞。刚刚跑开的年轻人又回转河边，向仙女示爱求婚，终得应允。

婚后，他们小夫妇过起了男耕女织的幸福生活，很快便有了一儿一女。那些仙女其实是西天王母娘娘的孙女。当她得知最小的孙女下嫁人间，大为震怒，派遣天神将其带返天庭。怎奈年轻人不会飞翔，欲追妻而不得。这时，老牛又开口讲话了：“我快要死了，我死后你披上我的牛皮，就能飞了！”说完，老牛就倒地而亡。年轻人虽心痛不已，但还是听从了老牛的遗言，披上牛皮，带着一儿一女，飞上天庭寻妻。王母娘娘得知年轻人正寻妻而来，拔出一根发簪，顺手一划，银河迢迢，立现天庭。即刻，那仙女化为织女星，那年轻人变为牛郎星，银河隔阻，相望两边。终于，王母娘娘也被牛郎织女那份忠贞不渝之爱所打动，动了善念，特允他们每年阴历的七月初七，盈盈一水间，喜鹊架桥，一期一会。“七夕”这一天就成为了中国的“情人节”。