

Unit 9  
Reading B

The Chinese Language 《汉语》

*Ku Hung-Ming 辜鸿铭*

1 All foreigners who have tried to learn Chinese say that Chinese is a very difficult language. But is Chinese a difficult language? Before, however, we answer this question, let us understand what we mean by the Chinese language. There are, as everybody knows, two languages — I do not mean dialects — in China, the spoken and the written language. Now, by the way, does anybody know the reason why the Chinese insist up on having these two distinct, spoken and written languages? I will here give you the reason. In China, as it was at one time in Europe when Latin was the learned or written language, the people are properly divided into two distinct classes, the educated and the uneducated. The colloquial or spoken language is the language for the use of the uneducated, and the written language is the language for the use of the really educated. In this way half educated people do not exist in this country. That is the reason, I say, why the Chinese insist upon having two languages. Now think of the consequences of having half educated people in a country. Look at Europe and America today. In Europe and America since, from the disuse of Latin, the sharp distinction between the spoken and the written language has disappeared, there has arisen a class of half educated people who are allowed to use the same language as the really educated people, who talk of civilisation, liberty, neutrality, militarism and panslavinism without in the least understanding what these words really mean. People say that Prussian Militarism is a danger to civilisation. But to me it seems, the half educated man, the mob of half educated men in the world today, is the real danger to civilisation. But that is neither here nor there.

所有尝试学习中文的外国人都说中文是一门非常难的语言。但是中文真的是一门难学的语言吗？然而，在我们回答这个问题之前，让我们先理解一下我们所说的中文是什么意思。众所周知，在中国有两种语言——我不是指方言——即口语和书面语。现在，顺便问一下，有人知道中国人为什么坚持要有这两种截然不同的口语和书面语吗？我在这里给出原因。在中国，就像欧洲曾经有一段时间拉丁语是学术或书面语言那样，人们被恰当地分为两个截然不同的阶层，即受过教育的和未受过教育的。口语或日常语言是供未受过教育的人使用的语言，书面语是供真正受过教育的人使用的语言。这样，在这个国家就不存在半吊子受教育的人。这就是我说的中国人坚持要有两种语言的原因。现在想想一个国家有半吊子受教育的人的后果。看看当今的欧洲和美国。在欧洲和美国，由于拉丁语不再使用，口语和书面语之间的鲜明区别已经消失，出现了一类半吊子受教育的人，他们被允许使用与真正受过教育的人相同的语言，他们谈论文明、自由、中立、军国主义和泛斯拉夫主义，却丝毫不理解这些词的真正含义。人们说普鲁士军国主义是对文明的一种危险。但在我看来，半吊子受教育的人，当今世界上半吊子受教育的人群，才是对文明真正的危险。但这与此处讨论的问题关系不大。

2 Now to come to the question: is Chinese a difficult language? My answer is, yes and no. Let us first take the spoken language. The Chinese spoken language, I say, is not only not difficult, but as compared with the half dozen languages that I know, the easiest language in the world except Malay. Spoken Chinese is easy because it is an extremely simple language. It is a language without case, without tense, without regular and irregular verbs; in fact without grammar, or any rule whatever. But people have said to me that Chinese is difficult even because of its

simplicity; even because it has no rule or grammar. That, however, can not be true. Malay like Chinese, is also a simple language without grammar or rules; and yet Europeans who learn it, do not find it difficult. Thus in itself and for the Chinese, colloquial or spoken Chinese at least is not a difficult language. But for educated Europeans and especially for half educated Europeans who come to China, even colloquial or spoken Chinese is a very difficult language: and why? Because spoken or colloquial Chinese is, as I said, the language of uneducated men, of thoroughly uneducated men; in fact the language of a child. Now as a proof of this, we all know how easily European children learn colloquial or spoken Chinese, while learned philologues and sinologues insist in saying that Chinese is so difficult. Chinese, colloquial Chinese, I say again is the language of a child. My first advice therefore to my foreign friends who want to learn Chinese is "Be ye like little children, you will then not only enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but you will also be able to learn Chinese."

现在回到这个问题：中文是一门难学的语言吗？我的答案是，既是又不是。让我们先来看口语。我说，中文口语不仅不难，而且与我所知道的几种语言相比，它是世界上除了马来语之外最容易的语言。中文口语容易是因为它是一种极其简单的语言。它没有格、没有时态、没有规则和不规则动词；实际上没有语法，也没有任何规则。但是有人跟我说，中文正因为它的简单而很难；正因为它没有规则或语法。然而，这不可能是真的。马来语和中文一样，也是一种没有语法或规则的简单语言；然而学习它的欧洲人并不觉得它难。所以，就其本身而言，至少对于中国人来说，口语或日常中文不是一门难学的语言。但是对于受过教育的欧洲人，尤其是来到中国的半吊子受教育的欧洲人来说，即使是口语或日常中文也是一门非常难的语言：为什么呢？因为正如我所说，口语或日常中文是未受教育的人的语言，是完全没受过教育的人的语言；实际上是孩子的语言。现在作为这一点的证明，我们都知道欧洲孩子学习口语或日常中文是多么容易，而博学的语言学家和汉学家却坚持说中文非常难。我再说一次，中文口语是孩子的语言。所以我给想要学习中文的外国朋友的第一个建议是“你们要像小孩子一样，这样你们不仅能进入天国，还能学会中文。”

3 We now come to the written or book language, written Chinese. But here before I go further, let me say there are also different kinds of written Chinese. The Missionaries class these under two categories and call them easy wen li and difficult wen li. But that, in my opinion, is not a satisfactory classification. The proper classification, I think, should be, plain dress written Chinese; official uniform Chinese; and full court dress Chinese. If you like to use Latin, call them: *litera communis* or *litera officinalis* (common or business Chinese); *litera classica minor* (lesser classical Chinese); and *litera classica major* (higher classical Chinese).

现在我们来谈谈书面语或书面中文。但在我进一步阐述之前，让我先说一下书面中文也有不同的种类。传教士们将其分为两类，并称之为简易文言文和艰深文言文。但在我看来，这并不是一个令人满意的分类。我认为恰当的分类应该是：便装书面中文；官服书面中文；以及朝服书面中文。如果你喜欢用拉丁语来表述，可以称之为：通用文体或公文文体（普通或商务中文）；小经典文体（次经典中文）；以及大经典文体（高经典中文）。

4 Now many foreigners have called themselves or have been called Chinese scholars. Writing an article on Chinese scholarship, some thirty years ago for the N. C. Daily News, —ah me! those old Shanghai days, *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*, I then said: "Among Europeans in China, the publication of a few dialogues in some provincial patois or the collection of a hundred Chinese proverbs at once entitles a man to call himself a Chinese scholar." "There is," I said, "of

course no harm in a name, and with the extraterritoriality clause in the treaty, an Englishman in China may with impunity call himself Confucius, if so it pleases him. "Now what I want to say here is this: how many foreigners who call themselves Chinese scholars, have any idea of what an asset of civilisation is stored up in that portion of Chinese literature which I have called the *Classica majora*, the literature in full court dress Chinese? I say an asset of civilisation, because I believe that this *Classica majora* in the Chinese literature is something which can, as Matthew Arnold says of Homer's poetry, "refine the raw natural man: they can transmute him." In fact, I believe this *Classica majora* in Chinese literature will be able to transform one day even the raw natural men who are now fighting in Europe as patriots, but with the fighting instincts of wild animals; transform them into peaceful, gentle and civil persons. Now the object of civilisation, as Ruskin says, is to make mankind into civil persons who will do away with coarseness, violence, brutality and fighting.

现在很多外国人自称或被称为汉学家。大约三十年前，我为《北华捷报》写了一篇关于汉学的文章——啊，那些昔日的上海时光，“时代在变，我们也随着时代而改变”。那时我说：“在中国的欧洲人中，出版一些用某地方言写的对话，或者收集一百条中国谚语，就立刻能让人自称为汉学家。”“当然，”我说，“一个名号并无害处，而且凭借条约中的治外法权条款，如果一个英国人乐意的话，他在中国可以毫无顾忌地自称孔子。”现在我想说的是：有多少自称汉学家的外国人，对我所说的中国文学中的那部分大经典文体，即朝服书面中文的文学中所蕴含的文明财富有任何概念呢？我说这是文明的财富，因为我相信中国文学中的这部分大经典文体就如马修·阿诺德评价荷马诗歌那样，“能提炼未开化的自然人：它能使他转变”。事实上，我相信中国文学中的这部分大经典文体有一天甚至能将那些如今在欧洲作为爱国者而战斗，但却带着野生动物战斗本能的未开化的自然人转变为平和、温和且文明的人。正如罗斯金所说，文明的目标就是要将人类变成文明的人，摒弃粗俗、暴力、残忍和争斗。

5 But revenons a nos moutons. Is then written Chinese a difficult language? My answer again is, yes and no. I say, written Chinese, even what I have called the full court dress Chinese, the *classica majora* Chinese, is not difficult, because, like the spoken or colloquial Chinese, it is extremely simple. Allow me to show you by an average specimen taken at random how extremely simple, written Chinese even when dressed in full court dress uniform, is. The specimen I take is a poem of four lines from the poetry of the Tang Dynasty describing what sacrifices the Chinese people had to make in order to protect their civilisation against the wild half civilised fierce Huns from the North. The words of the poem in Chinese are:

誓扫匈奴不顾身  
五千貂锦丧胡尘  
可怜无定河边骨  
犹是春闺梦里人

which translated into English word for word mean:

Swear sweep the Huns not care self,  
Five thousand embroidery sable perish desert dust;  
Alas! Wuting riverside bones,  
Still are Spring chambers dream inside men!

A free English version of the poem is something like this:

They vowed to sweep the heathen hordes  
From off their native soil or die:

Five thousand tasseled knights, sable clad,  
All dead now on the desert lie.  
Alas! the white bones that bleach cold  
Far off along the Wuting stream,  
Still come and go as living men  
Home somewhere in the loved one's dream.

但是言归正传。那么书面中文是一门难学的语言吗？我的答案依旧是，既是又不是。我说，书面中文，即使是我所说的朝服书面中文，即大经典文体的中文，也并不难，因为它和口语或日常中文一样，极其简单。请允许我通过一个随机选取的普通范例向你们展示，即使是穿着朝服的书面中文是多么的极其简单。我选取的范例是一首来自唐朝诗歌的四行诗，描述了中国人民为了保护他们的文明免受来自北方的野蛮半开化的凶猛匈奴的侵害而不得不做出的牺牲。这首诗的中文内容是：

逐字翻译成英文的意思是：

发誓扫灭匈奴不顾自身，  
五千绣貂皮之人葬于沙漠尘。  
唉！乌亭河边白骨，  
仍是春闺梦里人！

这首诗的英文自由译文大致如下：

他们发誓要把异教部落  
从他们的故土上扫除或战死：  
五千个饰有缨穗的骑士，身着黑貂皮，  
现在都死在了沙漠中。  
唉！在乌亭河边漂白的白骨，  
仍在爱人的梦中如活人般来来去去。

6 Now, if you will compare it with my poor clumsy English version, you will see how plain in words and style, how simple in ideas, the original Chinese is. How plain and simple in words, style and ideas: and yet how deep in thought, how deep in feeling it is.

现在，如果你将它与我蹩脚的英文译文相比较，你就会看到原中文是多么用词平实、风格质朴、观念简单。用词、风格和观念是多么平实简单，然而又是多么思想深刻、感情深沉。