



## The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution

The book, spanning the years 1895 to 1980, is a splendid study of some prominent Chinese intellectuals during a turbulent period in modern China. Ennobled by literature and philosophy, it presents a century of change through portraits of such historical characters as Kang Youwei (康有為), Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀), Lu Xun (魯迅), Shen Congwen (沈從文), Ding Ling (丁玲) and Lao She (老舍).



their stories through quotations of their own words as much as possible. Instead of telling the stories of each character one by one, he alternates segments of each biography in a way more of fiction than of history, while at the same time he demonstrates how they crossed in their lives and how their diverse personalities responded to the same challenges.

Professor Jonathan D. Spence makes a highly literate guide to the Chinese Revolution, approached via the lives and written testimony of its intelligentsia, chiefly men and women of letters.

*The Gate of Heavenly Peace* employs a method of delicate interweaving and transition. A well-plotted, accurately annotated history, with insightful details and extensive quotations, gives readers the sights, sounds and emotions of the time. Regarded as a “felt history”, the book has a sense of urgency, due to the closeness of the subject to us, morally and in time.

As befits a narrative in which writers are the principal characters, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* takes a shape that owes much to the novel. The central figures include Lu Xun, arguably the most brilliant essayist in modern China, and Ding Ling, one of China’s best-known literary women. From their interaction with the secondary characters, we come to know other poets, novelists, scholars, political activists and even a few foreign visitors to China. Professor Spence sets forth

A world-renowned sinologist, Professor Spence is Sterling Professor of History at Yale University. Born in England in 1936, he was educated at Winchester College and Cambridge University. In 1965, he was awarded Ph.D. in history by Yale, which appointed him to a professorship subsequently, and in that esteemed position he has been guiding generations and generations of students of Chinese history.



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### 畫蛇添足

戰國時，昭陽為楚伐魏，在勝利後欲出兵攻齊，陳軫音“診”為齊王出使，游說昭陽既已得楚，那就別再攻齊。陳軫引用了“畫蛇添足”的比喻。話說楚人祭祀後賞給門客一壺酒，門客人數多而酒不足，於是相約畫蛇，誰先畫成，誰便可以飲酒。其中一人先畫完，卻因仍有時間，所以提筆給已畫成的蛇添上蛇腳。這時，另一人畫完，伸手搶去酒壺，說：“蛇固無足，子安能為之足。”（“蛇本來是沒有腳的，你怎能為牠加上腳呢？”）《戰國策 齊二》後以“畫蛇添足”比喻多此一舉，不僅無益，反而壞事。

歷代詩文也多次引用“畫蛇添足”這個典故，例如韓愈《感春》詩云：“畫蛇著足無處用，兩鬢雪白趨埃塵。”羅貫中《三國演義》：“將軍功績已成，聲威大震，可以止矣；今若前進，倘不如意，正如畫蛇添足也。”

“畫蛇添足”一語也衍生出多個同義詞語，包括“畫蛇足”、“添足畫蛇”、“蛇足”、“安蛇足”等等，含意不變。



### Paint the Lily

Lily, in particular white lily, has always been regarded as a symbol of purity, beauty and delicacy.

The Christian *Bible* likens the magnificence of Solomon, the Israelite king renowned for so much his wealth as his wisdom, to a lily and finds it pale in comparison. For it says in the scripture “...see how the lilies of the field grow...I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.” (*Matthew 6 : 28-29*)

In William Shakespeare's *King John*, the Earl of Salisbury tried to persuade King John that there was no need for him to be crowned again. He argued that:

*To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,  
To throw a perfume on the violet,  
To smooth the ice, or add another hue  
Onto the rainbow, or with taper-light  
To seek the beautiful eye of heaven to garnish,  
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.*

(Act 4, scene 2)

Hence we have the phrase “to paint the lily” or “to gild the lily” to describe any effort to make perfection more perfect and end up spoiling the effect. For example:  
*To dress an elegant and understated beauty in loud colours is like gilding the lily, and all it does is turn her into a common pretty girl like many others.*