

文訊 WORD POWER

法 定 語 文 事 務 署 通 訊 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AGENCY NEWSLETTER

路漫脩遠

上下求索

傳說文字由黃帝的史官倉頡所創。文字洩漏天機，所以倉頡造字的時候，“天雨粟，鬼夜哭”（許慎《說文解字·敘》）。天地驚變，只因為文字開了知識的大門，人類不再蒙昧無知，智慧從此可以薪火相傳。

古人求知識、做學問，獨善其身也好，兼濟天下也好，講的是儒家那套修齊治平的理想。外聖內王的桎梏，叫天下讀書人真辛苦。現代人學習進修卻也不見得舒服：入學唸書要窮於應付大大小小的測驗考試，那容得下閑隙去思量讀書識字真正所為何事；公餘進修多為稻粱謀，積學儲寶盡為增值以求變求生。浮生皆為營營役役，又何嘗可以在學海書山尋一片排悶解憂的淨土？《論語·先進》公西華侍坐章描述孔子和弟子在沂水旁率爾論學言志的片段、當代散文家陳之藩筆下劍橋師生在校園草地探研學問的情景，總教人心馳神往。

宋朝蘇軾說過：“人生識字憂患始”。因為看見了生命的限制，理性與知識原來也可以讓人不快樂，“吾生也有涯，而知也無涯”（《莊子·養生主》），真教人氣餒。

蘇軾生在今天，感嘆一定不止於此。

身處知識爆炸的年代，面對深邃的舊學，鑿起的新知，誰敢誇口什麼文理知識都了然於胸？博學於文，再淵博，學問猶有不足。

電腦時代是人類文明的一大變局。平面文字在認知的世界中不再獨尊，形形色色的電子媒體把文字以外的聲音、影像、意念結合起來，提供了嶄新的感官經驗，也開展了無遠弗屆的虛擬學習環境。網絡打破了文字的侷促，人與人、地與地之間，距離越來越近。天涯，不過咫尺。鋪天蓋地的百科資料，彈指可得，

為全觀認知的學習新天地大開方便之門。望道便驚天地寬，怕的是寸心容不下多少舊學新知。

香港是國際城市，中西文化薈萃，傳統與現代融合，善用的話，可以成就的不只是兩文三語的優勢。能夠兼擅中英，重之以為器用，弘廓之以為東西文化的載體，這是理想不過。說難，不是因為先天不足，欠缺的只是躬身力行的心志和鍥而不捨的堅毅。可不要讓前一陣子人人掛在嘴邊的“終身學習”成了空喊的口號！

眼前是滿城飄搖不已的風雨，遠方是戰爭殘餘不去的硝煙，“苟存性命”好了，“自我增值”？還是……

活到老，學到老，學習本來就是路漫脩遠的旅程。要學，總有可以學的。活在經濟不景氣的年頭，面對不可抗力的挑戰，並非事事不由自主。學與不學，學多還是學少，始終掌握在自己的手裏。“學而時習之”（《論語·學而》）“學不可以已”（《荀子·勸學》），這兩句老話說了兩千多年，今日我們還要好好體會。



Difficulties of becoming bilingual

Dr John Milton

The only language men ever speak perfectly is the one they learn in babyhood, when no one can teach them anything! ~Maria Montessori

It used to be thought that children picked up their mother tongue largely through mimicry. Noam Chomsky argued in the late 1950s against such a simple mechanism, pointing out that children acquire the ability to understand their native language very early, regardless of its complexities, and are able to speak it creatively by the time they are just a few years old. This facility cannot be completely explained by the limited exposure infants have to language, or by correction from parents. He reasoned that the only way to account for the success and speed with which children learn their mother tongue in childhood is to assume that we have an inborn ability to grasp the grammatical principles of all languages - and that all languages have a systematic set of 'parameters' designed to be easily acquired by children.



This inborn mechanism for spontaneous language acquisition seems unique to childhood and is quickly lost. If Chomsky and his followers are correct, this is because the 'mental switches' which determine how we understand and process structures and sounds are irreversibly set in childhood. Puberty is sometimes seen to mark a 'critical period' after which it becomes more difficult to acquire and speak a language in the spontaneous way that children do. This is especially true of the finer points of pronunciation, so that when we learn a language as adults we almost inescapably retain a 'foreign' accent. Infants have already lost some of their ability to discriminate foreign sounds by the age of ten months! The biological mechanism which predisposes us to acquire languages as infants extends to gender as well. Girls start talking 1 or 2 months earlier than boys, and even in the womb, female fetuses move their mouths more frequently than males. Regardless of age, women are in general more verbally adept in both their L1 and in L2*.

Although apparently necessary, this uniquely human gene is not sufficient to guarantee language production. Children must also be able to interact in the language (for example, hearing children of deaf parents do not learn to speak by watching TV). Assuming they have ample interaction, by the age of one, most babies start to talk, and by two, they have a vocabulary of 50-100 words. For several years after, they acquire 6-10 new words a day. This phenomenal ability is not limited to just one language. Children who are exposed to two or more languages simultaneously and consistently from an early age will naturally acquire these languages. Such exposure is rarely formal: millions of unschooled children in Africa and elsewhere are bilingual, and in many cases, multilingual. The attempt to duplicate these natural processes via immersion in programmes taught in the second language - for example in Anglophone Canada

to French - has met with mixed success.

Most linguists accept that mastery of a second language depends on sufficient and comprehensible input. What is 'sufficient' depends on one's goals. While it is possible after childhood to learn aspects of a language in a short period of time, becoming fluent in a language for most people takes many years. Also, learning the conventions of the written system of a language is different than learning to speak it. Even native speakers of a language need years of formal education to become adept in the academic use of their first language. The pressure to learn a second language for academic purposes in a short time often results in schools focusing on teaching for immediate examination purposes, and many students may barely be able to function in the second language outside the examination hall.

Academic fluency, which is the type of language facility we usually have in mind when we talk about 'language standards', depends largely on the ability to understand written texts. A text can be incomprehensible if as little as 2-5% of the vocabulary is unknown. For this reason, the vocabulary of second-language school materials is usually deliberately 'controlled'. The drawback, however, is that by the end of secondary school many students are still unable to cope with authentic second-language materials. For example, native English-speaking undergraduates have a vocabulary level of around 20 000 words. By comparison, Cantonese-speaking undergraduates in Hong Kong have English vocabulary levels of 2 000 - 5 000 words.

Motivation is generally recognised as the key to successful conscious learning of a second language by older children and adults. We learn one or more languages in childhood in order to communicate with family members or significant others in our community. As we grow older, our needs change and affective factors become more complex. Without motivation and reward - even if it is only a sense of accomplishment - learning does not take place. Low motivation and low 'language standards' are a vicious circle, and it may come as no surprise to learn that in a recent survey only 47% of Hong Kong secondary students indicated they had a 'strong' motivation to learn Chinese and English as academic subjects.

Given such constraints on the acquisition of a second language, can we realistically expect that Hong Kong can become a community of functionally bilingual or trilingual citizens? We will look at some ways this might be accomplished in the second part of this article.**

* L1 and L2 stand for first language and second language respectively.
** The second part of this article will be published in the next issue of *Word Power*.

杏壇

“香港中文大學哲學系榮休教授勞思光先生，四十年來於港台兩地，育才無數，發表之學術論著，一向稱重於杏壇。”

“淡風吹至杏壇，天主教區兩所小學宣布停課。”

兩則報道，都提到“杏壇”。“杏壇”當然不只是說植杏的園林。據《漢語大詞典》的解釋，杏壇“相傳為孔子聚徒授業講學處”。

孔子杏壇設教之說，載於《莊子·漁父》篇：“孔子遊乎淄帷之林，休坐乎杏壇之上，弟子讀書，孔子弦歌、鼓琴奏曲。”壇，澤中高處，其處多杏，謂之杏壇。相傳孔子出遊，倦了就坐在杏壇上休息，與弟子弦歌講學。後遂以“杏壇”泛指授徒講學的地方。



杏壇原址在哪裏已無從稽考。今天所見的杏壇始建於宋代。明清之際學者顧炎武的《日知錄》，把後世修築杏壇的來龍去脈說得很清楚：“宋乾興間，孔子第四十五代孫孔道輔增修祖廟，移大殿於後，因以講堂舊基，甃（音“咒”，用磚砌之意）石為壇，環植以杏，取杏壇之名之耳”。金代於孔道輔增修的杏壇上建亭，由當時著名文人党懷英篆書“杏壇”二字。今天山東曲阜孔廟大成殿前的杏壇，是在明隆慶三年（1569年）時修建的。

杏壇芬芳，千古流傳，也因着萬世師表在杏壇傳道授業的故事，“杏壇”成了教育界的借代詞。

智者千慮，必有一失

《史記·淮陰侯列傳》記載，漢初韓信領兵攻打趙王和成安君，廣武君李左車向成安君獻敗韓信之策，但成安君以“義兵不用詐謀奇計”，棄其策不用。後趙軍大敗，韓信知廣武君精於謀略，傳令漢軍要把他活捉。漢軍縛廣武君到韓信面前，韓信親解其縛，以老師之禮相待，向廣武君討教攻陷齊國和燕國之計。

廣武君初以“敗軍之將，不可以言勇”辭謝。但韓信以甘詞力勸，“委心歸計”，廣武君終於答允：“臣聞智者千慮，必有一失；愚者千慮，必有一得。故曰：‘狂夫之言，聖人擇焉’。願恐計未必足用。願效愚忠。”卒為韓信所用。

千慮，就是多次考慮的意思；失，失誤也。“智者千慮，必有一失”，就是說聰明人心思再縝密，千百次謀略中也難免有失誤。

自恃聰明，機關算盡，也不一定萬無一失。魯迅《且介亭雜文二集·名人和名言》：“我很自歉這回時時涉及了太炎先生。但‘智者千慮，必有一失’，這大約也無傷於先生的‘日月之明’的。至於我的所說，可是我想，‘愚者千慮，必有一得’，蓋亦‘懸諸日月而不刊’之論也。”論者每說魯迅雜文下筆辛辣，語言犀利，於此可見一斑。



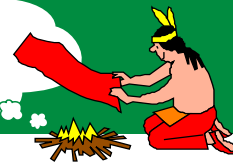
含英咀華

Homer sometimes nods

Horace (65-8 BC), a Roman lyric poet whose works are masterpieces of Latin literature of the Golden Age, once wrote of Homer, ‘sometimes even the noble Homer nods’ (*Ars Poetica*).

Homer, the blind Greek bard of the 8th century BC, was the reputed author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two major epics of Greek antiquity. Horace’s remark, rather than an implicit criticism, suggests that accomplished as Homer was, he sometimes erred in his account of facts of the incidents he mentioned. Horace excused Homer’s occasional drowsiness in view of the great length of his work.

Nobody can be at his best all the time. The phrase ‘Homer sometimes nods’ or ‘even Homer sometimes nods’ points out the fact that even the best of us are liable to make mistakes. For example: ‘Scientific reason, like Homer, sometimes nods’. (T.H. Huxley)



Interview with Shakespeare

Oliver Wong
Chinese Language Officer II
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

R = Reporter S = Shakespeare

R: Mr Shakespeare, thank you for being interviewed on All Souls' Day.

S: Thou art most welcome, my lad. This is the once-a-year occasion on which I have every right to come back to life, although personally I prefer its end, 'for in that sleep of death what dreams may come/When we have shuffled off this mortal coil/Must give us pause...'

R: Okay, okay, we all know that this is from your most acclaimed work, *Hamlet*. Since we're on the subject of this play, I can't wait to ask you my first question: how did you come to have such a clear concept of the Oedipus complex, almost 400 years before Freud fully established the theory?

S: Well, a son's attachment to his mother has never been anything new. And don't forget the story of Oedipus can be traced back to an ancient Greek legend. In short, the history of literature, as well as that of human beings, is inspired and dictated by influential, albeit obscure, women. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

R: Speaking of women, I can't hold back my curiosity: it seems that your views on the fair sex are confusing and inconsistent. For example, although Gertrude in *Hamlet* is accused of sexual indulgence, Isabella in *Measure for Measure* is reprimanded by her brother for not yielding to Angelo's sexual advances. Can you explain this?

S: Well, there's really nothing to explain. All I can say of my attitude is that I've never been particularly sympathetic towards women. If they're shrews, they're destined to be tamed; if they appear to be virtuous, then they must be disabused of their innocence. If they dare to manifest their sexuality, like Gertrude, then they must meet with a brutal end.

R: Wait, wait—isn't that a sexist attitude towards women? Don't you worry about being boycotted by the modern reader?

S: To thy question shall I render my response in two parts. First, I hold no worry in connexion with any modern reader's boycott because I won't receive royalty in any event, thanks to modern international copyright laws. Second, being sexist is a privilege not limited to me or other men. Listen to any flock of women talking about men; all you hear is: 'selfish', 'uncaring', 'unfaithful', 'sex maniacs', 'couch potatoes', 'pigs'...



R: Wow, this is the strangest opinion I've ever heard about Shakespeare's works; no wonder, it's from Shakespeare himself. But sir, how do you know about modern attitudes towards the opposite sex and copyright laws? Aren't your ideas unique to your own time?

S: Eternity belongs to my time, so long as I exist, in flesh or in spirit. Haven't you read *Macbeth*? Spirits are omniscient, anywhere, at anytime!

R: I thought that this was only *Macbeth*'s schizophrenic hallucinations ...

S: What a stupid modern interpretation of my great work thy idea is. Surely thou needst the enlightenment by a woman as clever as Portia to revitalise thy ailing career of a journalist.

R: (embarrassed)...Yes, yes, Portia appears to be an exception to your sexist views on women. Why is this so?

S: How hopeless thou art! Do you think her talents would have been recognised had she not attempted to pass as a man? And do you think Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* would have found her redress if she hadn't posed as a dummy in the final scene? Every actress in my time complained about how tiring it was. They'd prefer to shout and yell on stage like Ophelia! All in all, no woman in my works can achieve the status of a heroine without compromising certain feminine qualities.

R: (baffled) Well, well...Sir, one last question. What would you like to say about the numerous film versions of your plays?

S: Well, methinks the aging Julie Christie did a good job in portraying Gertrude in Kenneth Branagh's version of *Hamlet*, although I'd rather have seen her play Ophelia in the earlier part of her career. She was rosily tempting in *Doctor Zhivago* and *Darling*. And Branagh looked obese as a Danish prince; one good thing about his version, however, was that it was much more serious than the other one, starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet. Judi Dench has played various roles in my plays in stage, film and television versions. She is superb by both Elizabethan and modern standards, but personally I wish she were more light-hearted. And let me say, of the many journalists who have interviewed me, thou appearest to be the most inadequate, alas! To have an in-depth understanding of Shakespeare's works, I suggest thou re-read the complete *Arden Shakespeare*.

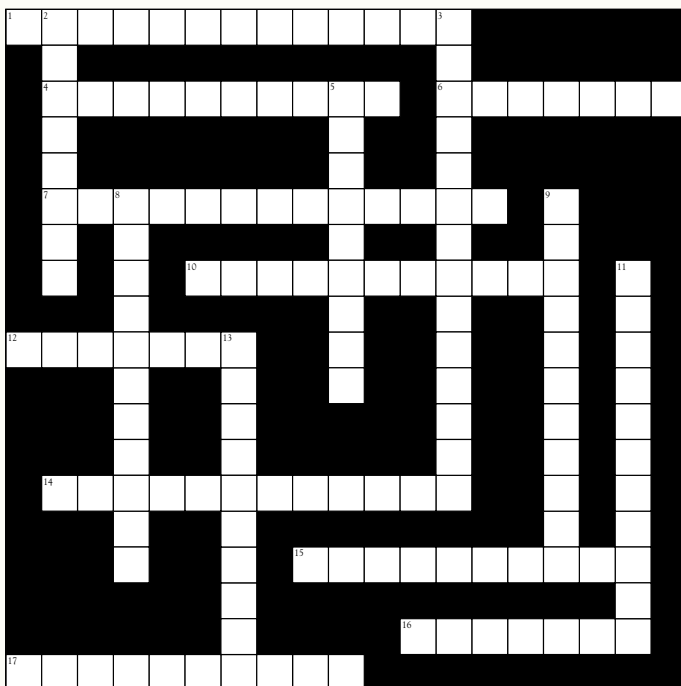


Across

1. Inevitable and beyond cognitive control, given sufficient causes
4. The Greek root of this word meant 'to appear', but it is often used to mean 'unbelievably great'
6. Imitative behaviour
7. Novel
10. Arising without apparent external cause
12. In this context, an inescapable circuit
14. In this context, a positive ability to distinguish, but often used to mean to treat badly because of perceived differences
15. In spite of ...
16. More widely known in some circles for his political views than for his scientific research
17. The basis for action

Down

2. Often negative, but something to be desired when learning a language
3. Readily understood
5. Something (often behaviour) influenced by emotion
8. Makes susceptible
9. When something can be kept up
11. In a similar or fitting way; correspondingly
13. Enough



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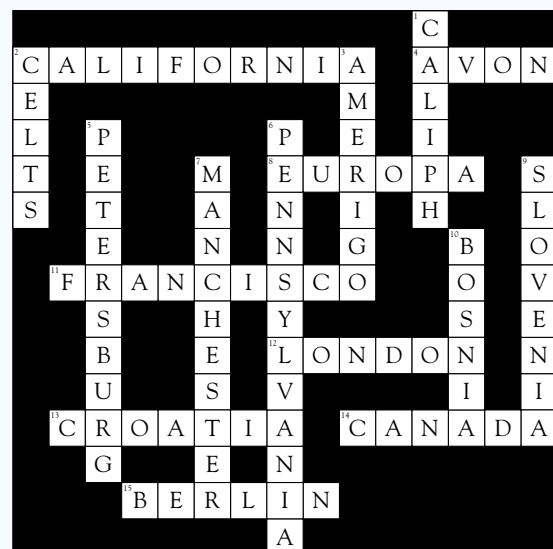
Enter the quiz and you could win a prize! Simply send the completed puzzle to the Word Power Editorial Board, Official Languages Agency, 23/F, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong by 31 July 2003. Five winners will be drawn. Results will be announced in the next issue of *Word Power*.

**Issue No.11
 "Places and Names"
 Answers :**

The winners are:

Name	Department
CHEUNG Chi-kit	Labour Department
LAU Yiu-yan	Highways Department
SETO Ka-wai	Department of Justice
SUEN Chin-pang	Civil Engineering Department
SUM SY	Customs & Excise Department

They will be notified individually by post.



銀杏緣 參加北京師範大學課程有感

康樂及文化事務署
一級中文主任伍妍臻



去年十月，得到法定語文事務署的安排，我們一行二十一人，浩浩蕩蕩的前往北京師範大學參加培訓課程。抵京首天，住進友誼賓館。住房外有一陽台，陽台外草地上種了一棵銀杏樹。在這金秋時節，銀杏早該一樹怒黃，迎風而立，但眼前的枝頭仍帶翠綠，只是稍着牙色，掐指一算，留京三星期，想該可看到銀杏的英姿，心中不禁有所企盼。

不是首次到北京，但心情跟以前大不相同。此行目的不是觀光，而是學習。在京受訓期間，我們個個精神抖擻(儘管夜夜“笙歌”，踏遍北京城的大街小巷、圖書中心、百貨大樓)，儼如小學生般，不敢懈怠。這種當學生的日子，實在久違了。老師好像比我們還要興奮，侃侃而談，恨不得在短短兩三小時的課內，把所學傾囊相授。他們學識之淵博，直教我們由衷佩服，也讓我們真真正正感受到何謂如沐春風。

這次修讀的課程涵蓋範圍甚廣，且大多與語文有關，例如內地的新詞語、內地公文的寫作技巧、香港與內地書面語的比較等，讓我們認識到更多規範的用語和公文格式。介紹當代作家的課程，還以為會悶得打瞌睡，誰知老師說得興致勃勃，學員也聽得如痴如醉，猶如在聽他細說老朋友的故事。我因而對近代作家有了新的看法，課後即急不及待跑到北師大附近的書店，尋找有關這些作家的資料和著作。

課程除了包括與語文有關的課題外，還有一些涉及政治、經濟、時事等知識的專題，也安排學員到當地官方機構參觀。其中一課是講解北京的風俗文化，想不到在短短的三個多小時內，竟像讀了一本詳盡的北京風俗文化史和建築史。如果要自己查找，相信多花十倍時間也未必能夠找到有關資料。最使人大開眼界的，要數參觀當地法院的審訊過程、旁聽外交部的新聞發布會，以及與外交部翻譯室人員交流，這些經驗絕對不是可以從書本中獲得的。

北師大除編訂正規的課堂外，還為我們安排與校內學生會談和共進晚膳，讓我們可以較深入認識校內學生的生活，了解他們的抱負。有些學員更相約到學生宿舍探訪，還與他們飯聚哩。

周末，北師大安排我們遊覽長城慕田峪和天津。以往也曾到過長城的八達嶺做“好漢”，因此對慕田峪無甚期望。想不到這次登上長城後，卻另有一番感受。城仍是那座長城，但這次登臨，心底卻格外舒暢，也許關口位於偏僻之地，遊人不多，沒有那種摩肩接踵的壓迫感。

平日課餘，最常到的地方要數北京大大小小的書店。西單的圖書大廈、王府井的圖書中心和外文書店，以至北師大校外的幾家小書店都教我們流連忘返。每次大有收穫後，大家都會互通消息，好讓其他同學不會錯過任何一本好書。

我們此行也遊覽過一些著名景點，例如香山、故宮、天安門等，有同學更甘冒上課打瞌睡的“危險”，天未亮便跑到天安門觀看升旗儀式，還說經驗難得。市中心有一處文化人必到的地方——琉璃廠。那兒的文房四寶，古香四溢，目不暇給。我們也到

過長安大戲院附庸風雅一番，欣賞崑劇和中國曲藝節目，其中相聲一項，尤其叫人絕倒。表演的藝人寓時事於笑談中，插科打諢，令人捧腹不已。至於北京的地道美食，如烤鴨、仿膳、涮羊肉，以至路邊的烤山芋、烤肉串，我們也不曾錯過。

離開賓館前，我再到陽台看看那棵銀杏樹轉了顏色沒有。樹葉雖沒黃透，但我未感失望。能夠參加這個課程，讓我在那垂楊處處、花木扶疏的校園，再嘗當學生的滋味，跟多位同事一起學習，親身感受祖國高等學府的研習氣氛和首都的文化氣息，已是幸事。相信日後憶起這段日子，也會回味无穷。



課後留影



學員在課堂上向導師請益

時哩沙啦=嘩啦啦？



法定語文事務署
署理一級中文主任李敏輝

每種語言都有象聲詞，摹擬各種聲音。普通話與粵語的象聲詞同樣是以摹擬某種聲音為基礎，兩者有的大同小異，有的卻南轅北轍。普通話的象聲詞跟粵語的最大不同之處，在於用字方面較為固定，甚少隨意組合。

以笑聲為例，粵語可以用“騎騎笑”、“咕咕(“結”陰入聲)笑”、“哈哈笑”、“嘻嘻笑”，甚或其他根據笑聲聯想出來的擬聲字來表達；普通話中除了“哈哈(hāhā)笑”跟粵語相同外，其他的如“嗤嗤(chīchī)笑”、“咯咯(gēgē)笑”、“呵呵(hēhē)笑”等，都不是只諳粵語者所能想像。

又如下大雨的聲音，粵語說“時哩沙啦”，普通話則說“嘩嘩(huāhuā)”或“嘩啦啦(huālālā)”；形容重物掉落的聲音，粵語說“劈叭”，普通話則說“巴唧(bājī)”等，也教粵方言區的同胞摸不頭腦。

下表是一些常見的普通話象聲詞固定組合，大家看看懂得多少？

流水聲	潺潺(chánchán)；淙淙(cóngcóng)；嘩嘩(huāhuā)；嘩啦啦(huālālā)
風聲	呼呼(hūhū)；颼颼(sōusōu)
金屬撞擊聲	噹啷(dānglāng)；叮噹(dīngdāng)；叮叮噹噹(dīngdīng-dāngdāng)
哭聲	嗚嗚(wūwū)；哇哇(wāwā)
雷聲	轟隆隆(hōnglōnglōng)；隆隆(lónglóng)
小雨	淅淅瀝瀝(xīxīlìlì)
說笑聲	噤噤嘎嘎(jī-jīgāgā)
聽不清楚或聽不明白的說話聲	噤 咕嚕(jī-ligūlū)；嘀嘀咕咕(dí-dīgūgū)
關門聲	砰(pēng)
很多人一起急速走路聲	刷刷(shuāshuā)
肚子餓的響聲	咕嚕(gūlū)
喘氣聲	吁吁(xūxū)；呼哧(hūchī)
公雞叫聲	喔喔(wōwō)
鴨叫聲	嘎嘎(gāgā)

這些象聲詞究竟摹擬得像不像，當然見仁見智。也許廣東人總認為廣東話的象聲詞最惟妙惟肖。不過，要學好普通話，就連象聲詞也該注意，不能掉以輕心。

淺談國畫

從南宋四家到元代的畫作特色

法定語文事務署
高級中文主任陳慧思

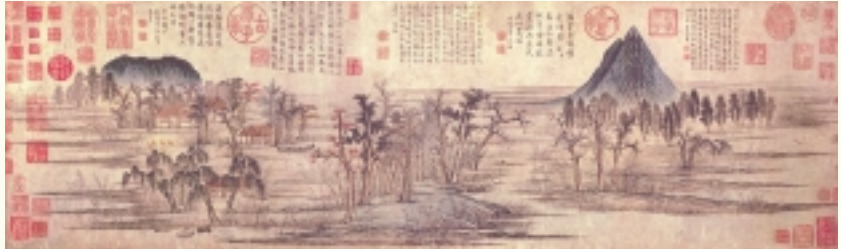
宋代山水畫家大師輩出，董源、范寬之外，還有如郭熙以及合稱南宋四家的李唐、劉松年、夏珪、馬遠等巨擘。

李唐(1066-1150)是南宋大家，山水人物俱佳。他繼承了諸家技法，加以變化，別樹一格。論者認為他對後來各朝

的畫家啓迪甚深。夏珪和馬遠都有一個特色，就是不把中心景物置於畫面中央，給畫面留白，使作品帶有畫意空間，跟前人大山大水的“全景”式風光大異其趣。“夏半邊”和“馬一角”這兩個稱號，就是源自這種以少勝多的構圖方法。

談到宋代的山水畫，不能不提有名的“米氏雲山”。“米”指米芾(音“忽”(1051-1107)和米友仁(1086-1165)兩父子。米芾能詩文，也擅書畫，得宋徽宗召為書畫學博士，官至禮部員外郎。米芾為官卻志不在此，為人狂野，故人稱“米癲”。在畫作上，米芾不囿於先勾勒後皴染的傳統山水畫技法，轉用水墨揮灑點染來表現煙雨江南的空濛景象，信筆而作，不求工細，崇尚天真意趣，自成一派。“米家山”和“米點山水”的嶄新畫格，與成熟精練的傳統技法相映成趣。

元初最有名的書畫家當數趙孟頫(音“俯”)。趙孟頫(1254-1322)，字子昂，宋宗室後裔，在元朝官至翰林學士承旨，通詩文音律，書法、繪畫成就尤



趙孟頫的代表作之一：《鵲華秋色圖》

高。他提出“復古”論，主張繪畫“貴有古意”。學者認為這套畫論背後的真義，並不是指畫面酷似前人，而是說畫作應在古人的風格上有所創新。趙又強調以書入畫，筆墨不只是描述形象的工具，本身更具有審美價值。這個“書畫同源”的概念，成就了元代文人畫和墨戲畫的興盛，“寫畫”一詞也源於此。

元畫的主流仍是山水，元四大家黃公望、倪瓚(音“贊”)、王蒙、吳鎮都是以山水畫著稱，黃公望的《富春山居圖》更有畫中蘭亭之譽。不過，元朝疏於文治，不少知識分子隱遁山林，對仕途態度消極。他們把這種感情表現在繪畫上，以筆墨寄寓自身高潔，以水墨作成的四君子畫(即寫梅、蘭、菊、竹的畫)就是這類抒懷之作。趙孟頫的夫人管道昇就是畫竹的名家。到了元末，以水墨創作的蘭竹，已自成風格，與承傳自五代、兩宋花鳥畫那種精工華麗的畫風分庭抗禮。

元以前繪畫多用絹，元代則多用紙，這個轉變使元代的畫家更多使用乾筆，乾筆也令畫面線條趨向簡潔，有別於宋畫的精密細緻。此外，元代畫作以文人畫居多，在畫上題詩、署名、蓋印，甚至述說畫作目的、畫贈何人、對畫的意見等等習尚，也比前朝流行。



黃公望晚年得意之作：《富春山居圖》(局部)

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