

通勝制宜

《通書》是民間常用的曆書，古代又曾稱為《黃曆》或《皇曆》。古代的通書由朝廷印製，例如清代的《通書》就由欽天監編訂，乾隆年間已開始印行。欽天監是明清兩代負責觀察天象、推算曆法的機關。由於“書”與“輸”同音，為避諱起見，遂改稱《通勝》，這或許反映了人們認為只要按《通勝》所列的宜忌行事便無往而不利的思想。《通勝》序言載道，該書“詳錄星宿運行、陰陽節氣、朔望交食、方位吉凶、日用宜忌等”。

在現今社會中，《通勝》主要是教人趨吉避凶的曆書，不少人擇日嫁娶喪葬、動土出行等，均以此為據。當中有否導人迷信的成分，則見仁見智。在昔日的農業社會，《通勝》可說是每家必備。為確保耕作收成，農民在播種與收割之前，例必查考《通勝》。《通勝》的主要內容，是按二十四節氣序列不同日子的吉凶宜忌等。二十四節氣平均分布在十二個月當中，每月均有一節一氣，但節氣日期則年年或有不同。現代人對二十四節氣已不甚注重，較為人熟悉的，大概是“立春”、“驚蟄”、“清明”、“冬至”等。

《通勝》內有一幅“春牛圖”，繪有春牛和牽牛的芒神，兩旁又有七言詩，預測未來一年的天氣和收成。該年是旱是

雨，一看芒神腳上有否穿鞋便一清二楚：芒神穿鞋，代表天氣乾旱；芒神赤足，則代表雨水較多。



《通勝》最初只是節氣的曆法依據，但由於流傳甚廣，民間也開始編製《通勝》，並因應日常生活所需，增加了不少內容。撇開當中掌相命理、占算解夢等玄說不談，《通勝》還載有其他資料，如三字經、百家姓、千字文等。隨着社會演變，《通勝》已不僅是曆書。例如，“信帖稱呼”、“應用柬帖”，講解書信柬帖中的稱謂、用語、格式等，都頗實用。“華英通語”則最為有趣，把許多常用英語單字或片語以中文的直音方式標示，例如“go inside”標作“哥煙西”，而“go outside”則標作“哥區西”，餘此類推。大家不妨猜一猜，“萬你乍”、“烏李地奧”及“勃立忌花士”所指的英文為何？*

《通勝》與昔日莊稼生活息息相關，蘊藏無窮的民間智慧，由古代一直流傳至今，其存在價值不容置疑。現時網上也可查閱《通勝》，十分方便。今天不少人為人生大事擇日，還是要先查一查《通勝》才放心。

* 指“manager”、“radio”及“breakfast”。



A or An? Tiny but Tricky!

“A” and “an” are known as indefinite articles. When you were a beginner in English learning, you might have been instructed to put “an” in front of words that begin with “a”, “e”, “i”, “o” or “u”, and to put “a” in front of those that begin with any of the remaining 21 letters. But is that really the case? In the phrase “hold _____ 1-day seminar”, which indefinite article would you use? “A” or “an”? The word that follows does not begin with a letter! What indication should we look for?

To decide which of the two should be used, we must know the governing rule first. The choice between “a” and “an” depends not on spelling but pronunciation. It takes “a” if the word that follows begins with a consonant sound, and it takes “an” if the word begins with a vowel sound.

The use of “a” or “an” is not confusing at all. However, some words may be a little bit tricky. This is because they are spelt with an initial vowel but pronounced with a consonant (for example “unique”, “useful”), or conversely spelt with an

initial consonant but pronounced with a vowel (for example “honorary”, “hourly”). Sticking to the above rule will prevent you from being caught in such little traps. We should indeed say “a unique feature”, “a useful tool”, “an honorary” and “an hourly rate”.

Once you have mastered this simple rule, you will not hesitate to add the indefinite article “a” before “1-day seminar”. So by the same token, “8-week project” takes “an” and “2-year contract” takes “a”. The same rule applies to abbreviations. We say “there is an SEO vacancy” and “we will create a CEO post”. For “SOLO”, it may take either “a” or “an”, depending on the way we pronounce it. In the first case, “SOLO” is pronounced as one word. In the second case, the letters are pronounced separately as “S” “O” “L” “O”.

Tiny as they seem, these two indefinite articles may cause troubles to many. However, if we bear in mind the above rule, we should be able to put “a” and “an” in the right places.