

文訊

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媒妁之言



根據中國傳統觀念，男大當婚，女大當嫁，兩情相悅，共結秦晉之好乃天經地義的事。不過，古時男女授受不親，女子三步不出閨門，要成就一段良緣往往要靠媒人穿針引線。俗語有云：“天上無雲不下雨，地上無媒不成親”，古時男女即使情投意合，也不能擅自成婚，必須假媒人之口登門說媒方能共諧連理。無媒苟合，難為社會接受。

“喜作月老巧牽線，樂當紅娘忙搭橋”。月老是民間傳說中專司男女婚姻的媒神。世間姻緣皆由月老撮合。任何男女，就算是冤家仇人，重山阻隔，一經月老以赤繩繫足，都會結為夫妻，“千里姻緣一線牽”就是這個意思。紅娘是元雜劇《西廂記》中活潑可愛、機靈過人的婢女。她幾經周折，最終巧施妙計促成崔鶯鶯與張君瑞的婚事，因此媒人又稱紅娘。

說媒殊非易事。媒人不僅要對男女雙方的家庭狀況瞭如指掌，還要伶牙俐齒，能說會道，這樣才能左右逢源，得心應手。媒人還要有一雙“媒人腿”。從問名、納吉、納徵到請期、婚禮，媒人日夜奔波，風雨兼程，傳達兩家的要求。她們“磨爛了嘴，跑斷了腿”，都是為了撮合段段良緣。



傳統上，媒人每到一家都會受到禮待，鄉間流傳的“媒百餐”之說可能略帶誇張，但點出媒人奔走撮合婚事之勤。媒人說成一頭親事，便會收到一個紅包，稱為“謝媒禮”。在成親前一天，男女兩家會把謝媒禮，連同雞、肘子、鞋襪、布匹送到媒人家。收過謝禮後，媒人還須為男家接親才算“圓媒”。

今天，男女崇尚自由戀愛，“父母之命，媒妁之言”已不合時宜。不過，媒人這個古老行業仍然存

在，現代月老依舊需求殷切，婚姻介紹所、約會網站生意不愁。其實，媒人的角色古與今同，都是充當橋樑，為有意成家的男女找對象，讓他們互相了解，締結鴛盟。

在古代，除了由父母安排婚事，年輕男女也會在燈會、廟會結識異性，遇到合意對象便託媒問親。時移世易，在朗月高掛的晚上尋尋覓覓，驀然回首，邂逅意中人的浪漫故事恐難復再。現代人事事講求效率，尋找終身伴侶的方式也直接得多，相親形式五花八門，網上交友、速配約會、電視男女求愛節目更大行其道。

現代紅娘與古代媒婆說媒的方法大異其趣。做媒已變成一門企業化的生意。顧客對媒人的要求愈來愈高，媒人單憑一張利嘴未必能順利撮合姻緣。許多媒人為了當“註冊婚配師”，會修讀專業課程，學習分析顧客的性格、職業、教育背景和興趣，利用科學方法把志趣相投的男女婚配成雙。

古人門第觀念較重，在婚姻大事上講求“門當戶對”。“門當”指院落門口的小石墩，“戶對”為門上方的小木樁、磚雕或木雕。古代媒人在說媒前都會先觀察兩家宅第的“門當”紋飾、形狀和“戶對”數量，確定雙方家勢地位相當才登門說媒，不然就是“門不當，戶不對”了。

時至今日，“門當戶對”的觀念依舊存在。媒人安排相親前會比較男女家庭背景、經濟條件。據說學歷、收入相若的男女對事物的看法較相近，會更懂得彼此欣賞，有助維繫婚姻。這說法是真是假，恐無定論。婚姻是一輩子的事，氤氳使者一旦“亂點鴛鴦譜”，便會誤人終身。俗語說：“不做中，不做保，不做媒人三代好”，為媒之難可見一斑。

有人認為幸福靠自己追尋，主動找媒人介紹對象是不錯的辦法；也有人相信緣份天賜，不可強求。其實，良緣翩至，兩心傾慕，共效鳳凰于飛，是否三媒六證已不重要，惟願姻緣永續，白頭相並。



Dr. A



This is a true story. Let's call him Dr. A. He is a child psychiatrist. All kids love his office — a nice bright room with plenty of toys, action figures and other things to play with. There is a table soccer game wedged behind his desk and board games are piled up to the ceiling. There are also dozens and dozens of puppets, with and without strings, in every kind of costume imaginable, lined up on a table, waiting — heads bent, legs dangling — for someone to create a story for them.

Dr. A believes that the simple joy of playing is a mirror of a happy childhood, and his job is to create more opportunities for children to play. The puppets inside his room have the magic power to touch, soothe and heal the young minds. They silently remind everyone who enters the room that Dr. A — older, wiser, and with some silly tricks — is more like a friend than a psychiatrist who knows how they feel, and is capable of getting them out of their troubles and leading them into a happier future.



"It was fun. We made films together," said a young man who had a number of therapy sessions with Dr. A when he was only a boy of ten. In their first encounter, the melancholy boy was reeling from the divorce of his parents, the abandonment by his father, who moved away and rarely contacted him, and the feelings of rejection that followed. Dr. A pierced his patient's bubble of silence by staging weekly "shoots" of videos with action figures standing in for real events and genuine feelings. In the process, Dr. A slowly eased the boy's pain into the light of a miniature video sound stage, and finally set him free.

"Many hurt children are silent," explains Dr. A, "and my grab bag of playthings would help them open up. I use games, puppets and videos to help them articulate if not let out what gives them such pain." As a trained puppeteer, he draws on puppetry's rich repertoire of clowns and sages, and cloaks therapeutic insights in laughter, reminding children burdened with sadness of the sheer joy of doing something really silly.



Dr. A's clinic is actually a therapeutic playground. One minute he narrates a fable to the children, the next he takes a walk with them in the rain, singing and laughing. Sometimes he crafts his therapy plans in

advance. Other times he just improvises. He recalled one time he could not get a boy to talk after exhausting all his tricks. He suddenly remembered a puppet show he had seen and launched into an operatic falsetto: "Talk, talk, talk. Who needs to talk? I will sing to you until your head is completely shrunk..." To his surprise, the boy began to sing. The hour-long session of therapy turned into an operatic singing class.

No child can resist Dr. A, which is a good thing given the huge number of children with traumatic experiences. His patients are referred to him by paediatricians, school counsellors, or for the heartbreaking few, by hospital staff for patients with acute mental illnesses. Some of the children come to him because they are drowning in confusion triggered by their parents' divorce. Some are victims of bullying because they are intellectually or physically different from others. A few have been suicidal or self-destructive. Dr. A calls these poor souls stoop-shouldered kids, as they have been weighed down by their problems and pain. He is there to lighten their lives.

There was a little girl whose drug-addled mother never came to see her. Dr. A told the girl that she could build the car of her dreams, and drive up to visit her mother anytime she liked, relieving much of the girl's pain in her endless wait. He concocts put-downs for bullies and refers to them as gorillas. He convinced a brainy boy who dreamt of becoming a palaeontologist that he would triumph over those who teased him for having such a bold idea. He told the boy to say to himself, "Yeah, I'm different. I am really different." Eventually, the boy banished the "gorillas" from his mind.

Whatever method he uses, Dr. A is like a magician who can morph tragedies into jokes and heal psychological wounds with the light touch of laughter. A big kid himself, Dr. A knows how to make little kids laugh, no matter what has happened to them. He once made a special helmet with an attached marionette for a boy with cerebral palsy in hospital, so that the boy would be able to make the puppet dance with slight movements of his head. Later in the hospital's lift, Dr. A, standing next to the boy, heard the disembodied sound of a computerised voice synthesiser: "Dok-ter A, I love you."



The very first step towards success in any occupation is to become interested in it.

William Osler





漢語老師

“娘”

“象”

當老師不易，當外國人的漢語老師就更難了。漢語變化萬千，無論讀音、詞彙、語法都難於掌握，要外國學生說漢語說得流利順暢，寫中文寫得頭頭是道，雖非“難於上青天”，但與登蜀道一樣，絕不可能一蹴而就。

先說語音，單是要外國學生學好普通話的捲舌輔音，老師就得費盡心思。捲舌的竅門不易拿捏，學生不是舌頭捲得太高，就是不到位。凡事熟能生巧，老師帶着學生重複練習，發現錯誤即時糾正。好不容易說得有點像樣，同學又要練習不捲舌的輔音，不停的唸“十是十，四是四，十四是十四，四十是四十，十四不是四十，四十不是十四”，舌頭都快要打結了。

漢字不是拼音文字，要掌握每個方塊字的讀音，就得牢記字形。比方老師教“馬”字，會用圖片解釋這個象形字看似一匹馬，有馬鬃，還有四條腿。不過，聽懂解釋和辨識字形是兩碼子事，字形相近就更易混淆，例如



有些外國學生會把“銀”字誤以為是“很”字，結果弄出笑話，比方把“陳氏銀行”寫成“陳氏很行”。很多老師於是設計一些遊戲，幫助學生認字，寓學習於娛樂。

談到字詞運用，就更難上加難。有位漢語老師要考考學生配詞和運用成語的能力，出了“結婚對()”和“絞盡()汁”這兩道題。第一題的答案是“象”字，第二題是“腦”字。學生的答案五花八門，有“結婚對手”、“結婚對家”、“絞盡墨汁”，連“絞盡果汁”也有，真的讓老師啼笑皆非。

聽說有個外國學生寫了一封中文信給心儀的中國女孩，但信很快給退回來。學生莫名其妙，於是跑去請教漢語老師。老師看到信的上款，一邊大笑，一邊搖頭，原來學生一知半解，以為“媽”和“娘”字在任何語境中意義都相同，在上款寫了“親愛的姑媽”，而不是“親愛的姑娘”，結果碰了一鼻子灰。

看來外國人要學好漢語絕不簡單，漢語老師少花點心思也不行。



THE KING OF COMEDY

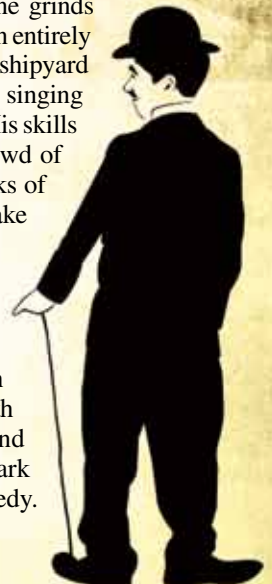
Twenty-fourteen marks the centenary of Charlie Chaplin's first appearance as The Little Tramp, a bumbling but warm-hearted fellow, often unlucky, always plucky, who holds the power to make the audience laugh and cry. Hailed as a comic genius, Chaplin proved that it was possible to “mix humanity with humour”, and that a comedian, even without saying a word, could evoke a response other than laughter.

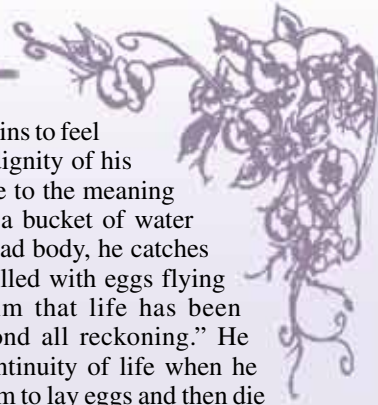
Chaplin's slapstick acrobatics made him famous, but the subtleties of his acting made him great. Unlike television shows dominated by boisterous veterans of vaudeville, Chaplin's comedy demands silence, demands that you watch his facial gestures and body movements. His jokes are executed with such exquisite timing and grace that a fall or a kick seems as carefully choreographed as a ballet.

In *City Lights*, a story about the misadventures of the lovable Tramp, who falls in love with a blind girl, Chaplin achieved a bittersweet quality rarely found in comedies. Thanks to the Tramp's persistence, the girl recovers her eyesight and works in a flower shop. In the poetic closing episode, the Tramp gazes at the girl through the window of the shop. The girl does not recognise him and falls for a well-groomed man as she presumes that he is her benefactor. A touch of the hand, however, reveals that the humble, little chap with torn trousers and a drooping moustache is her real hero. The emotional weight of this scene moves many viewers to tears.

Chaplin communicated his feelings to his audience with crystal clarity. Five years after the release of *City Lights*, the master of pantomime returned in *Modern Times* with the same antics, the same frock coat, the same little cane, and most importantly the same comic brilliance that had captured the world's imagination. The story begins when the Tramp works on an assembly line in a huge factory. He is forced to eat by an experimental feeding machine which goes berserk. Bowls of soup are tossed in his face, and the machine grinds corn into his face and wipes his mouth with an entirely ineffectual wiper. As he shifts jobs from a shipyard worker, a department store watchman, to a singing waiter, he makes one blunder after another. His skills of juggling a tray full of food among a crowd of dancing patrons in a restaurant, and his tricks of dodging nimbly from the cops effortlessly make many viewers split their sides.

The iconic Little Tramp is an enduring figure. A century later, he is still instantly recognisable by his silhouette. A flick of his cane, a quirk of his brows, or an impish lift of his toe is enough to make us laugh. With a sharp comic touch, Chaplin defined and redefined humour, leaving an indelible mark on cinema history. He was the King of Comedy.





Nokanfu, one who washes and prepares dead bodies for burial, is a job shunned by many in the Japanese society. This was definitely not the dream job of Shinmon Aoki, the author of *Coffinman*, but he became one by a twist of fate. Aoki dropped out of college, opened a coffee shop, and, with the encouragement of a novelist, wrote his first story for a classy magazine. He soon found himself deeply in debt, and was forced to file for bankruptcy as his wife was giving birth. He did not even have enough money to feed his baby. So when he saw an employment advertisement — “For ceremonies to start a new life: Help wanted” — he jumped at the job. Only when he started work did he see the stack of coffins.

The book begins on Aoki’s first day as a *nokanfu*. The debutant learns that “there’s more to washing corpses than meets the eye. It’s not just bathing them. You’ve got to wipe them down with alcohol, put them in their white ‘Buddha-robos’, fix their hair and faces.” In the death ritual, the body of the deceased is displayed on a mat in front of the mourners, who kneel together and watch the process of preparation. Finally the body is placed in a simple wooden coffin. Every procedure is done with exquisite attention to detail.

In subsequent chapters, Aoki reveals that he loathes this “filthy” job at first. “I worked frantically, frenzied, fighting off waves of nausea,” confesses he. After winning the respect from

the families of the deceased, he begins to feel better about himself through the dignity of his work, and becomes more sensitive to the meaning of life. One day while emptying a bucket of water which has been used to wash a dead body, he catches sight of a translucent dragonfly filled with eggs flying into the sunset. It dawns on him that life has been perpetuated “from the past beyond all reckoning.” He marvels at the unbroken continuity of life when he sees salmon travel upstream to lay eggs and then die in autumn. He even finds the maggots infesting a rotting corpse shining with life.

Over time, Aoki begins to see a glow around people, the joy in the world, and most of all, the insignificance of death. With deep affection and poetic sensibility, he accepts death as a natural process, a reality we all have to face. In his eyes, life and death is a single entity, just like sleet which is neither rain nor snow, but possesses the characteristics of both.

As a memoir, *Coffinman* is captivating. As a book on spiritual journey, it is inspiring. Aoki, with “eyes like the clear blue sky and transparent like the wind”, brings the reader into a world of boundless compassion and conveys a refreshing view of life and death.



In Search of a Lost Voice



If you think that the contestants of today’s talent shows make great sacrifices to become famous, you may think again when you hear the story of the castrati, the operatic stars of the 18th century. The castrati were male singers, picked out when they were boys and castrated between the ages of seven and ten to preserve their soaring and angelic voices.

The castrated boys were sent to conservatories to receive intensive training. These schools resembled religious institutions, with strict rules and curfew. Young castrati had to take long hours of study and musical training specifically designed to exploit vocal dexterity and breath capacity.



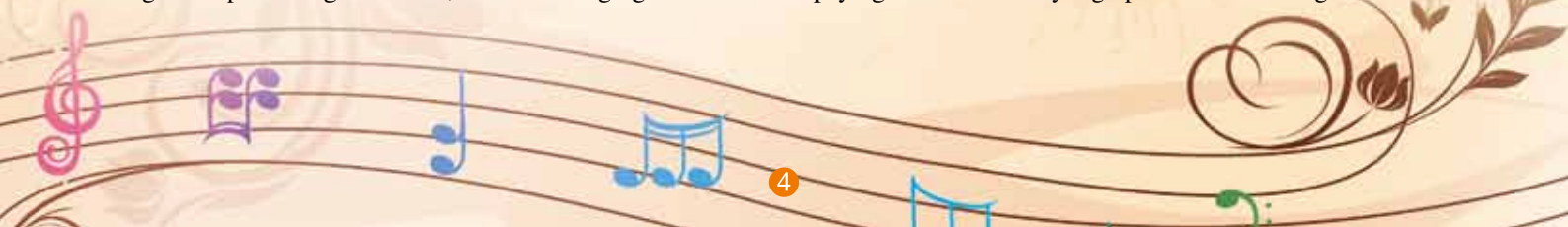
A mature castrato’s voice was famous for its high pitch and power — “with the unbroken voice able to reach the highest notes, but delivered by the powerful lungs of an adult male.” Hailed “as clear and penetrating as that of choirboys”, the castrati’s voices had a tremendous emotional impact on the audiences of the day. The singers travelled around the courts and capitals of Europe, pulling the crowds wherever they performed.

The castrati were vocal acrobats. They were pioneering singers in promoting *bel canto*, beautiful singing. Some of

them had a range of four octaves, up to ‘a’ or even ‘c’ above ‘high c’ in full voice. The audiences marvelled at the vocal power and range of the castrati who could invent as many ornamentations as they liked. Sometimes, the conductor of the orchestra could “take a pinch of snuff” during the long interludes “before picking up the melody of the original song again.”

Farinelli was the most celebrated castrato of all. He first sang in Rome in *Porpora’s Flavio Anicio Olibrio*, and took the female lead in *Sofonisba* by Luca Antonio Predieri. These appearances won him plaudits from the public. His voice was so magical that he was hired to cure the depression of King Philip V of Spain. Legend has it that Farinelli performed an aria with trumpet *obbligato*, which evolved into a contest between the singer and the trumpeter. Farinelli surpassed the trumpet player so much in technique and ornamentation that he “was at last silenced only by the acclamations of the audience.”

Two hundred years on from the rapid decline of this virtuoso voice type on the operatic stage, the story of the castrati still thrills us. Nevertheless, no matter how perfect, how powerful, how sonorous the voices of these gelded stars were, for us, modern lovers of music, the question lingers: Is it worth paying such a ruinously high price for such a high voice?



帶月荷鋤歸

阿漢在石屋旁的農田上揮動鐮刀，吃力地刈除雜草。歹毒的陽光照射下來，他白晰的臉龐曬得通紅，豆大的汗珠順着額頭流到臉頰，眉毛都濕了。引水道反射過來的強光，刺得阿漢兩眼昏花，睜都睜不開來。他走到屋前的榕樹下，不住喘氣，輕輕地揉着快挺不直的腰板。



榕樹的葉子密密層層，向下垂着，在風中輕輕晃動。阿漢看着雜草蔓生的耕地，不禁泄氣：“都兩天多的功夫了，才清理好這一小片，真是沒用！當農夫不容易呀。”可是，想到在城裏當行政人員這十年來，每晚在牀上輾轉反側的滋味，還是覺得回到島上老家生活是對的。

忽然，不遠處傳來幾陣狗吠聲。阿漢回頭一看，原來是三表叔和他的老狗阿旺。三表叔身材魁梧，方方的臉曬得炭黑，手指粗大，指甲縫裏夾着黑泥巴。他挑着擔子，步伐又大又快，向着阿漢這邊走來。

“阿漢，快過來吃飯。沒力氣什麼都做不成。”三表叔在屋前的小桌子上放好飯菜，便跑到田裏去。阿漢看到六十開外的三表叔使勁的刈草，動作利落，感到十分慚愧，於是匆匆吃過飯便去幫忙。阿漢用起鐮刀來笨手笨腳，三表叔跟他說：“要斜着刀，用力把草的根部割掉才行。”

太陽快要下山了，宛如一盞通紅的大燈籠，懸在淡紫色的山尖上。阿漢感到全身乏力，連提起雙臂也不行，但看到整理好的農田，仍按不住興奮心情。三表叔從田裏抓起一把泥土，捏一捏後說：“泥土有點硬。沒空閑着，明天就要犁田了。”



阿漢送走三表叔後，便躺在涼棚下休息。綴滿星星的天空好像用金粉繪成的天花板，美得讓人屏住呼吸。阿漢看得入神，不知不覺就昏昏沉沉的睡着了。

第二天，太陽還沒出來，山後透出淺紅色的霞彩。叔侄二人已在田裏拿着耙子翻起泥土。阿漢不停舞動耙子，泥塊四散飛濺開來。三表叔皺起眉頭跟阿漢說：“不要操之過急。我們會先種菜心和白菜，泥土不用挖得太深。等所有泥土翻過後才把泥塊打碎。”

幾天後，三表叔到城裏去看孫子，留下阿漢獨個兒在田裏幹活。阿漢穿着塑膠雨靴，踩着畦隴小心翼翼地吧用花生麩粉做成的肥料撒在田上。忙完後坐在田邊，拿着平板電腦查看下種的竅門，心裏很是踏實。阿漢從沒想過當農夫，最初請三表叔教他有機耕種法都是鬧着玩的，只是不想奶奶留給他的農地一直荒廢。



不知不覺，阿漢回到島上一個多月了。親手種的菜苗都長高了不少，菜田一片翠綠，像鋪了一塊綠油油的絨毯。每天，他在田間走來走去，忙得不可開交。天氣漸漸轉涼，曬得黝黑的他一大清早穿上風衣，蹲在田裏除蟲澆水，看到菜葉上胖乎乎的菜蟲，抓起蟲子放在手心把玩，活像個大男孩。

農曆八月十二，天空的烏雲像波濤般翻滾，四面刮起狂風，老榕樹在搖搖晃晃。三表叔神色凝重地說：“阿漢，手腳要快一點，秋天刮的颱風可不得了。”話剛說完，雨點就像子彈般噼噼啪啪射了下來。兩人全身濕透，在積滿了水的田裏急忙收割青菜，甚是狼狽。突然，長空一閃，頭上響起幾聲震耳欲聾的霹靂，一道道電光像利劍從天頂直插田隴。三表叔丟下手上一捆白菜，用力把阿漢按下來，喊着說：“快蹲下，別動。”

颱風過後，阿漢楞楞的在泥濘滿布的田埂上站着，看到只有半列菜田給淹掉，心才安定了一些。他把收割了的菜心和白菜放入箱子，再拿到菜場去賣。適值中秋，菜場擠滿了人，不消一會兒，幾箱青菜已賣清。他看着手裏的鈔票，心裏突然感到熱呼呼的，眼角都紅了。

秋天的田野飄散着野草混雜泥土的芬芳，一陣陣沁人心脾。圓月當空，銀光灑滿大地。菜田裏的昆蟲唧唧鳴叫，打破黑夜的寧靜。高掛在屋檐的淡黃色小燈籠隨風擺動。阿漢坐在小桌前呷茶，欣賞清朗的月色，看得倦了，打了幾個呵欠，然後跟自己說：“該有點睡了，明天要忙的事情還多着呢。”

立志欲堅不欲銳，成功在久不在速。

張孝祥《論治體筍子·甲申二月九日》

The Man Who Owns the Sky



“Today is 14 March 1915. The nippy spring weather of San Francisco does little to dampen the ardour of the 50,000 gathering at the fairgrounds of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. In one voice, they chant for Lincoln Beachey, the man of the hour, who is going to try his daring stunts in a brand-new monoplane that is faster and flashier than his trusted biplane. We can’t wait to....” Before the excited radio broadcaster finished his words, a plane glided across the sky and the crowd broke into loud cheers. And here begins the story.

Born in 1887, Beachey developed a taste for danger at a young age. When he was nine, he raced down the steep Fillmore Hill in San Francisco on a brakeless bike. He soon graduated to riding motorcycles and tinkering with their engines. His ambition grew along every death-defying stunt he pulled off. When he was 17, he moved on to his next conquest: the skies.

Years before Beachey’s time, Victor Hugo observed: “What do you see above you? You see clouds and you see birds...the two fundamental systems of aviation in operation.” Beachey had the same in mind. He first took to the air in a dirigible balloon, which allowed him to drift like clouds. But it was far from soaring like birds. The Wright Brothers’ success in achieving winged flight finally gave Beachey what he desired.

In a few short years, Beachey skimmed Niagara Falls, flew under the steel arch of Honeymoon Bridge, circled the Capitol, and became the first to fly upside-down and indoors. He was famous for his “Dip of Death”, a vertical dive from way up high with the plane’s engine turned off and his arms outstretched before straightening out at the last second. Heart-stopping dives aside, he was capable of making the figure eight in the air without touching the controls. The Congress adjourned twice just to see him fly. He also discovered how to recover from a deadly spin and dabbled in plane design. Known as The Man Who Owns the Sky, he was a superstar. Fancy being a legend?

Hang on, hero wannabes. Wait till you hear what stunt flying is all about. On a good day, you climb to thousands of feet in the air, at which point you pitch the plane down and

let gravity take over. The plane goes into a free fall. The savage headwind batters its flimsy wings. Breathing becomes laboured. Adrenaline pumps through your veins. You steady yourself, pull the plane back up and turn it over to fall again at the top, completing a flawless loop in one fell swoop. You descend and fly by the grandstand, waving triumphantly to a rapturous crowd. On a bad day, however, you may not live to see tomorrow. Aerial somersaults make for a huge crowd-pleaser simply because they are outrageously dangerous. The stakes are high. Still want the job? Guess not.

In fact, many had died trying to match Beachey’s skills. Wives and mothers of young flyers begged Beachey to stop. And he did, partly because he was distraught by the deaths of friends and pupils, and partly out of a strong distaste for the audience’s morbid desire to see him fail. But his retirement was brief. He jumped back into the fray after a Frenchman grabbed the headline as the first to perform a loop. Never one to dodge a challenge, he outdid him with a triple loop a few months later.

Beachey was no stranger to crashes himself, locking eyes with death more times than he could remember, but he would stop at nothing to be among the clouds. “You are always in some danger,” he conceded, “just the same as when you are in love.” Poetic for a maverick treading the line of life and death for a living. Perhaps what he meant was that he knew deep down that someday his luck would run out.

That day was 14 March 1915. Beachey started by performing loops in the monoplane and felt good about his new toy. Little did he know that its wings could not sustain the strain when he pulled the plane up after flying inverted at a lower-than-expected altitude. “It’s incredible. A perfect manoeuvre!...Oh my gosh. The wings are crumpled,” shouted the radio broadcaster. The plane hit the water and sank into San Francisco Bay.

Beachey died, not on impact, but from drowning. He had broken only one leg. He could have survived the accident had he managed to free himself from the wreckage. Beachey’s name has since faded away into the annals of time, but his indomitable spirit lives on through the legacy he left to the world of aviation.



Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work,

Aristotle

是禍是福籤裏尋？

正月裏，春寒料峭，天還未亮，善信絡繹不絕來到寺廟祈福。寺廟內煙霧瀰漫，鐘聲悠悠迴盪。香客把祭品放在供案上，點上香燭，跪在小小的蒲團上，口裏唸唸有詞，輕輕搖動籤筒，直至掉出一根籤為止。從古至今，不少人時運不順，都會到寺廟求神問卜，新春伊始更希望求得上籤，全年順境。

善信求籤後大多會請寺廟的解籤人解籤。出色的解籤人不僅熟悉籤文，還懂得詩句所隱含的玄機奧妙。在狹小的攤檔中，他們手拿籤詩，一面朗讀，一面解釋籤文，彷彿求籤者只須聽從神明指示，世間的苦難均可化解。



籤詩是中國文化的一部分，深入民間，可說是寺廟文學。籤詩大多七言四句，音韻鏗鏘跌宕，每首背後都有一個典故，出自正史、民間傳奇、戲曲、章回小說等，例如“龐涓害孫臧”、“女媧煉石補天”、“紅拂女私奔”等。解籤人會由故事情節和人物遭遇推算求籤者的運程吉凶。

求籤者求問神明的事情林林總總，有求自身、健康的，也有求姻緣、學業的。同一枝籤，求問的東西不一樣，解籤的着眼點截然不同。求得“莊周夢蝶”一籤，問自身，解籤人或會說快樂無憂，與人無忤，宛如莊子在夢中化蝶逍遙穿梭花叢；問學業，解籤人或會叮囑謹記“勤有功，戲無益”。

“靈籤求得第一枝，龍虎風雲際會時，一旦凌霄揚自樂，任君來往赴瑤池。”這籤乃上上籤，典故為姜太公封相。姜子牙，又稱姜太公，為周文王、周武王修文練武，最終打敗暴君紂王，老來得志，成為周朝開國功臣，獲分封於齊國。有幸

求得此籤，寓意諸事順暢，心想事成；問功名，雖經考驗，最終如願以償；問自身，人緣和睦，四季平安；問家宅，宅運興隆，丁財兩旺。

籤詩故事的情節雖包羅萬象，但未必與求籤者的經歷吻合。求得戰國說客蘇秦別家一籤，求籤者若非從事調解斡旋的談判專家，又應怎樣解說？“駟馬高車出遠途，今朝赤腳返回廬，莫非不第人還井，亦似經營乏本歸。”蘇

秦游說六國，希冀得到賞識，飛黃騰達，可惜事與願違，最終裘敝金盡，無功而還，最堪憐者，遭家人輕視，“妻不下堂、嫂不為炊、父母不與之言。”要解讀這枝籤，解籤人會先比較求籤者與蘇秦的境況，找出兩人的共通處，然後勸誡求籤者要修身積福方可走出窘局。

優秀的解籤人可說是心理治療師，說話婉轉，同時顧及求籤者的感受。比方說，求籤者犯上官非，解籤人會勸對方“要慎言慎行，否則糾紛將至”；犯血光，會說“要注意身體”；諸事不利，又會說“凡事不宜輕舉妄動”。他們常常引用籤詩中的警世名言，勸人立志立品，例如：“修身豈為名世傳，作事常思慮及人”、“知多世事胸襟闊，閱盡人情眼界寬”，讓善信感到即使求得下籤，前景未必黯淡無望，只要一心行善，便可免於災劫。

世事如棋局局新，人生變化萬千，錯綜複雜，寥寥百來首詩是否真能說盡悠悠眾生的悲與喜？不過，人總有落泊失意時，面對困惑，不少人會馨香禱祝，祈求神明指點迷津，難怪求籤這個古老習俗流傳至今，解籤這個古老行業歷久不衰。



功崇惟志，業廣惟勤。

《尚書·周官》



Do You Know What They Mean?



In the workplace, people use quite a lot of idioms, especially in conversations. They don't begin a project. They "get a project off the ground". They don't call each other to discuss progress, they "touch base". If the project is not going well, they don't end it. They "pull the plug". The following sentences contain some idioms you are likely to encounter at work. Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate words. The first letter of each word has been given to you:

1. When demand is down, we may be forced to bite the b _____ and cut jobs.
2. We'll have a very long meeting today. Those two managers never see e __ to e __ on anything. It doesn't matter what they discuss, they always argue.
3. Let's keep the b ___ rolling. It's a good start, but we've still got a lot of work to do.

4. We asked the b ___ counters to look at the figures in the new budget.
5. This company has c _____ the market on smartphones. They have a very large percentage of market share.
6. When John's performance was below standard, his boss told him to s _____ up or s _____ out.
7. We're not having a great year, but at least we're in the b _____. We don't owe anyone any money.
8. After six months, when the new employee has had a chance to settle in and learn the r _____, make a thorough and honest assessment of how well he is fulfilling the requirements.
9. There's no secret negotiation. Our dealings have always been above b _____.
10. There're many young actors waiting in the w _____ ready to show their talent.

Please send your entry to the Editorial Board of *Word Power*, Official Languages Division, Civil Service Bureau, Room 2310, High Block, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong before 9 February 2015. Watch out for our coming issue to see if you get all the answers right, and better still, if you are one of the lucky five to win a prize. The Editorial Board will have the final say on the answers.

Name: _____ Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms (delete as appropriate)
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第五十七期答案

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. 饕餮之徒 | 7. 輕車簡從、輕騎簡從 |
| 2. 惡衣粗食 | 8. 旨酒嘉肴 |
| 3. 道遠日暮 | 9. 奇裝異服 |
| 4. 晝夜兼行、倍道兼行 | 10. 杯觥交錯 |
| 5. 衣冠楚楚、衣裳楚楚 | 11. 走南闖北 |
| 6. 居無求安 | 12. 不衫不履 |

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Issue No. 59 (March 2015) : Scenic and Inspiring Landscape

二零一五年三月第五十九期主題：山水有情

Issue No. 60 (June 2015) : Legend, Poetry and Painting

二零一五年六月第六十期主題：詩畫傳奇

Contributions from colleagues are welcome. Please refer to Issue No. 42 for details.

歡迎同事投稿，細則請參閱第四十二期。

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