



Learning 300 Chinese Proverbs: Talk the Wisdom

Susan Zhi Chang

Peter T. Treadway

Trafford (Nov 22, 2011)

Softcover \$29.95 (356pp)

978-1-4269-6303-2

Learning 300 Chinese Proverbs: Talk the Wisdom teaches Mandarin Chinese using Chinese proverbs as the vehicle to learn words and characters. Because of the bilingual layout of the book, Mandarin speakers could use it to learn English vocabulary.

Authors Susan Zhi Chang and Peter T. Treadway teach Mandarin Chinese by immersing the reader in the language, rather than presenting a standard system of basic conversation and everyday vocabulary. Though they do provide a more unique system, the authors do not explain how to pronounce the sounds of Pinyin or its four tones, thereby either requiring readers to have an existing basic knowledge of the sounds, or that they download the book's companion MP3 audio recordings to use as a pronunciation guide.

The content is organized by a series of boxes. Each box encloses a proverb written in pinyin (a Romanization system) with the corresponding Chinese characters beneath it. Beneath the box, the proverb appears in English, and the translation is followed by a comment—an explanation of the proverb or information about its origin or cultural significance. Beneath the translation and comment, each word from the proverb is listed in pinyin, accompanied by the Chinese character and the English definition. An explanation of the proverb in Chinese is at the bottom of the page.

Aside from being a language tool, *Learning 300 Chinese Proverbs: Talk the Wisdom* provides a glimpse into Chinese culture and history. As the proverbs and explanations in the book reveal, there is a literal translation of the quotations that might often seem humorous, but often there is also a double meaning, one that guides actions and prevents careless behavior that could lead to a negative consequence. Examples include:

“Proverb: When you drink water, don’t forget about the people who dug the well.

Comment: The younger generation should not forget what their parents did for them.”

“Proverb: Swat a fly on a tiger’s head.

Comment: You cannot offend evil people unless you want to die.”

The MP3 file contains sixty tracks. Each track includes approximately four proverbs, so to repeat a single proverb one must also start with the first proverb on the track. Each proverb is divided into individual words spoken at a slow pace before the whole phrase is spoken at a normal pace. While the organization of the MP3 is good in terms of indicating which track corresponds to which group of proverbs, as listed in the back of the book, the lack of control in being able to repeat the same proverb is somewhat inconvenient.

The large white borders around both the text and illustrations detract from the appearance of the content, making it look more like a standard language textbook than a combination language and cultural reference book.

Learning 300 Chinese Proverbs: Talk the Wisdom is suitable for those who already possess a very basic understanding of Mandarin, Pinyin, and the four tones. It may also be helpful to Mandarin-speaking individuals hoping to learn some English vocabulary. The overall concept and content is entertaining and illuminating.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (November 28, 2012)

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