

The Importance of Yan Yu

Rachel Zheng

—Essay Competition

锄禾日当午, *Hoeing crops at high noon,*
汗滴禾下土, *Sweat drops down on the soil under the hoe.*
谁知盘中餐, *Everybody should know that in the plate,*
粒粒皆辛苦. *Every grain of food is gained with hardship.*

The first time I heard the poem above was in third grade. I was at the dinner table, and dinner, as usual, was rice and vegetables. That evening, I could not finish the bowl of rice I had scooped out for myself. I was about to throw it away, but my mom stopped me and recited the poem. She gave me a stern look, and I, reluctant, gobbled up the rest, tossed the bowl into the sink, and raced to my room to continue the last episode of “Hannah Montana.” For most meals with rice, I often overestimate how much food my stomach can take. When this happens, my mom repeats the poem to me and asks me to recite it back and finish every grain of rice on the plate. I remember I used to complain, believing that I would be overeating and gaining unnecessary weight. My mom then proceeds to tell me that it’s my fault that my eyes are bigger than my stomach, which is another one of her sayings (眼睛大肚子小). Through her constant reminders and drilling of the poem, I have learned not to grab everything in sight when I’m hungry and portion it out instead, remembering that every grain of rice is valuable.

少壮不努力老大徒伤悲 (Shàozhuàng bù nǚlǐ
lǎodà tú shāng bēi)

“And the little red hen ate the bread all by herself,” my mom said as she closed the book and tucked me into bed. “Poor little red hen; the dog, cat, and chicken should have helped it gather the wheat and bake the bread,” I protested. She tells me, “少壮不努力老大徒伤悲.” My mom read this story to me frequently when I

was younger, and each time, she would tell me how the little red hen had to work tirelessly for the bread; then she related it to a life lesson: if I ever wanted to achieve anything, I should not depend on anyone else. The Chinese proverb that was read earlier states that “if one does not exert oneself in youth, one will regret it in old age.” I never understood any of the proverbs when I was younger, but as I grew, this was one of the phrases that stuck with me. I learned that I must work hard now, like the red hen, in order to reap the rewards, or eat the bread, later.

机不可失, 时不再来 (Jī bùkě shī, shí bù zàilái)

In seventh grade, we had a geography bee. In order to advance, you had to win a class bee, which would lead you to participate in the school bee. That year, I remember being the last one in the bee, specifically answering the last question with “the Arctic Ocean.” After the class bee, my teacher, Ms. Davis, approached me and asked if I wanted to compete in the school bee. I told her I was nervous, that I didn’t wish to compete because I thought I was going to lose. She attempted to encourage me, but I rejected the offer. On the day of the bee, the principal called for all qualifying students to come to the library. I didn’t go. Later that day, I told my mom about it. She, like always, pulled out a proverb: “机不可失, 时不再来,” and proceeded with a lecture, telling me that opportunities only come once. I regretted it after. I regretted not participating, not trying at the very least to see how I would do. From that experience and that proverb, I learned to take advantage of all

**“If I ever wanted to
achieve anything, I
should not depend on
anyone else.”**

opportunities that are given to me to grow because only through growth will I truly learn.

Chinese proverbs were one of those things that my parents said to me, but at a young age, I never listened. To this day, there are still instances in which I pick out too much to eat and waste the rest. I procrastinate

and half-heartedly complete homework in classes that I don't enjoy, and I still, at times, don't catch chances that are thrown to me out of fear. But I remember; I remember what they've said, what my past experiences are. Through them, I learned to not undermine the importance of Yan Yu. △

Weeds

Linda Arnoldus

The sun sets below the trees
Now dark silhouettes
Backlit in orange sunlight

The thin crescent moon
Already hangs in the sky
Twinkling in the firmament

My mother bends over
The stone pathway that
Runs in front of my house

The pathway is overrun
with persistent weeds
Eager to undo slabs of stone

With a stone hatchet she hacks
At the stubborn weeds
That block the path

Her gray hair starkly contrasts
Her dewy and youthful skin
And her resilient smile

Ever since I was born
She has cleared the path for me.



Huangshan Mountain, China

Linda Arnoldus

Photography



White Trees

Karlene Deng

Photography