

The Profound Chinese Language (Episode 3): Turtle

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An opening poem recitation by a group of children:

Although turtles are slow walkers,
They are very gentle and not dumb at all.
Turtles walk diligently on the land or swim diligently in the sea.
They have saved people from drowning in the sea.
Turtles do not compete with others and are very tolerant.
They pass on good character and morality to their descendants.

Ms. Wang: In today's Nature class, we will observe turtles!

Children: Wow!

Ying Ying: Wow! Their skins are wrinkled like old men.

Yuan Yuan: Why do they swim so slowly?

Xiao Bei: They look kind of dumb.

An Unidentified Student: It is rather incredible that a turtle can outrun a hare.

Ms. Wang: Although turtles are slow walkers and they appear slow-witted, they know and accept their weaknesses. They always choose to tolerate problems, big or small. Normally they work hard and do everything diligently despite their lack of speed. In the event of enemy attacks, they retract their heads and limbs into their shells and are impervious to the provocation from the outside.

They know that tolerance is a good way to resolve a crisis. Lao Zi, a renowned Taoist philosopher in ancient China, said, "The weak will ultimately prevail over the strong." A slow walker is not necessarily a dimwit!

Ying Ying: What kind of food do turtles like?

Ms. Wang: Turtles are not picky eaters. They eat vegetables, fruits, small shrimp and small fish. The average lifespan of a turtle is much longer than that of a human being. According to ancient legends, some turtles lived to be a few thousand years old!

Class: Wow! They are incredible animals!

Ms. Wang: Back in the Shang Dynasty in ancient China, before they had to make any important decision, the emperor and his royal court officials would roast a turtle shell over fire and read the shapes of cracks on the shell, believing they would foretell the future. They also inscribed significant events on turtle shells or cow bones. The inscriptions are what we know as oracle-bone scriptures. They are the earliest form of Chinese language. Therefore, we have turtles to thank for the preservation of Chinese culture!

Narrator: After school

Ying Ying: Today's Nature class was a lot of fun!

Yuan Yuan: I think so too.

Ying Ying: Grandpa Brush Pen!

Grandpa Brush Pen: Would you like to hear a story about a turtle?

Xiao Bei: Yes! Please tell!

Narrator: In an ancient Chinese book titled "A Collection of Encounters with Immortals" there is a story about a turtle. During the Jin Dynasty, there was a Chinese soldier from Wuchang, Hubei Province. He saw a cute white turtle on sale in the market. He felt sad to see it had been taken from its home, so he bought the white turtle and kept it in an aquarium at his home. When the small white turtle grew bigger, the soldier decided it would be safe to release it back to water. He hoped it would reunite with its family. Several years later, the Jin Dynasty had a major battle with a neighboring state, resulting in Jin's defeat. All the surviving Jin soldiers were driven into a river. Most of them drowned because they were weighed down by the heavy armor that they were wearing. This soldier was also driven into the river. When he was about to drown, he felt that his feet had touched a giant rock. He looked down and saw that the giant rock under his feet was actually the white turtle that he had rescued and released years ago. The white turtle carried the soldier to the other side of the river. It then nodded repeatedly toward the soldier to thank him and then returned to the river. This is the famous historical story of the white turtle repaying its rescuer.

Grandpa Brush Pen: Turtles were highly valued by ancient Chinese people. In oracle-bone scriptures, there were many variations of the character for turtle. Some of them were based on the front view of a turtle. Some were based on the side view of a turtle. Some variations included one foot, two feet or four feet. Some variations included a long tail or a short tail. All the variations resembled a real turtle and looked very lovely. In

Small Seal calligraphy, the character for turtle included a head in the top portion, a turtle shell on the right, a turtle's feet on the left

and a long hook in the middle to represent a turtle's tail. It was based on a side view of a turtle; therefore, it included only two feet.

Grandpa Brush Pen: Ying Ying and Yuan Yuan, I guess you often wrote the Chinese character, "turtle" wrong in the past.

Yuan Yuan: Indeed I have!

Grandpa Brush Pen: Now that you have heard many stories about turtles, I trust you have a better understanding of this Chinese character!

Ying Ying: Yes! From now on, I will remember every stroke in this character!

Yuan Yuan: Me too!