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The Awakening Age 《覺醒時代》

Introduction:

This video clip is from the seventh episode of the Chinese historical drama The Awakening Age 《覺醒時代》, which aired on China Central TV-1 in 2021. Across 43 episodes, the drama depicts the turbulent period between 1915 to 1921, during which time pivotal events in modern Chinese history took place, including the New Culture Movement (新文化運動), the May Fourth Movement (五四運動), and the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (中國共產黨建黨).

Although they are not featured in this video clip, the main characters in the drama include Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) and Hu Shih (胡適), who were both pre-eminent figures promoting changes and reforms (白話文運動) in China's cultural sphere in the late 1910s. They advocated to replace classical Chinese with a vernacular style of writing so as to create literature that was 'lively, substantial and accessible to the masses'. Naturally this was met with strong protests from Chinese classicists, who argued that the scholarly and traditional writing style must be defended for the value of its elegance and esotericism.

In this particular scene of the video clip, a fascinating opinion clash is staged in a classroom at Beijing University in 1917, echoing wider debates and conflicts in the academic echelon in China at the time. Professor Huang (黃侃) is a staunch supporter of the classical language and traditional writing style, whereas some of his students (i.e., Deng 鄧中夏 and Guo 郭心剛) are more progressive in their endeavours for language reform. The debate between the teacher and students is played out in such an amusing way: the teacher, with his highly cultured speech and intention to defend it, bursts into using a foul word; the students, bound by an ingrained tradition of subservience to their teachers, accuse the teacher of being irrational. At the end of the scene, the teacher expels the two students from his class in a fit of rage. What is interesting here is despite the tension and emotions, the teacher and students all observe the etiquette to bow to one another when they part at the end of the scene.

Translation of selected words:

<i>to 03'48''</i>		<i>from 03'48''</i>	
黃毛小子	lit. still having toddler hairs; boys, young lads (often condescendingly means someone too young and immature). Also 乳臭未乾 (lit. breastfeeding smell not dried) means wet behind the ears.	並行不悖	to co-exist without contradiction
鼎鼎大名	well-known, renowned	朗誦會	poetry or book recital

獲得一片叫好	to receive cheering support	陳獨秀	Chen Duxiu, a leading figure in China's revolutionary effort in the Late Qing and the Republican time, who established the New Youth journal and co-founded the Chinese Community Party in 1921.
濟濟牛糞	lit. a scene of much cow dung; bullshit	錢玄同	Qian Xuanton, a renowned linguist and literatus, who made a strong impact on the reform of the Chinese language in early Modern China.
食不下嚥	to be unable to swallow food (due to physical illness or emotional distress)	沈尹默	Shen Yinmo, a poet, calligrapher and scholar who wrote one of the earliest popular poems in the vernacular style.
茅棚虻蠅	flies and insects in a scruffy shed	黃侃	Huang Kan, an established classical Chinese phonologist who opposed the New Culture Movement, including the vernacular style.
寢不安眠	unable to have a restful sleep	孝子賢孫	filial son and virtuous grandson
狗屁	lit. dog fart; nonsense, bullshit	師道尊嚴	the nobility and authority of teachers' ways (requiring the ultimate respect)
包圓兒	to do it all, to complete everything	強詞奪理	lit. to force in words and snatch the reasons; to argue irrationally
言歸正傳	to return to the topic, without further ado	嘟囔	to mumble

癡人說夢	absurd nonsense, (like) sleep talking to idiots	糞土之牆，不可圻也	a wall built with dirt and dung is impossible to whitewash
雅俗共賞	to appreciate or demonstrate both a refined taste and a popular one	《文心雕龍》	The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon, an influential book on literary theories and aesthetics criticism, written by Liu Xie around 500 CE.

Script:

The words highlighted in blue are listed in the above Translations of Selected Words and the sentences highlighted in green are explained in the section Some Points below.

學生甲：別動，別動

學生乙：上課了都！

學生甲：別動別動別動

學生乙：哎呀，上課呢，都

學生甲：快好，快好了，快好了

學生乙：哎呀

學生丙：你能挺多久？

學生丁：先生來了！

學生乙：先生，先生！

學生戊：起！禮！

學生們：先生好！

先生：同學們好，坐！

各位同學，咱們今天哪，**奇文共賞之**。近日在美國，有一個叫胡適的**黃毛小子**，用白話寫了幾首詩，居然在**鼎鼎大名**的《新青年》雜誌上刊登了，居然還**獲得了一片叫好**，真可笑之極。

我見此文，真是如見**濟濟牛糞**，令人**食不下嚥**。思之如**茅棚虻蠅**，惹人**寢不安眠**。**故，從即日起，我便要立一個規矩，那便是，每日上課之前，我要用二十分鐘的時間，痛批這白話文、白話詩，直到把它批倒批臭為止。**

郭心剛：嗯，季剛先生，您扔在地上那本《新青年》不要了吧？那我撿起來行嗎？**您就當便宜我了。**

（郭心剛捡起地上的书。）

先生：等等。把它放回來。

（先生再次把书扔在地上。）

郭心剛：不是不要了嗎？

先生：撿哪！

郭心剛：先生可以不同意書上說的觀念，但是不至於扔書哇。

先生：什麼觀念？說的都是狗屁。我還要再扔它一百次一千次。撿哪，撿哪。

學生甲：先生，我來幫您撿。。。先生，以後您扔多少次，我就幫您撿多少次。這活兒，我包圓兒了。

（學生們哄笑）

先生：回去吧。

學生甲：得嘞

學生乙：先生，您要是再扔，我也幫您撿。同學們，撿不撿？

學生們：撿！

先生：安靜，坐下！……同學們，咱們言歸正傳，用白話寫詩，笑話，那就是癡人說夢，是白癡行徑。詩是什麼？詩的要義，詩的精髓又是什麼？用一字而概之，那就是雅。白話又是什麼？也可以一字而蔽之，那就是俗。一個雅，一個俗，一個在天上，一個在地上，豈可同日而語啊？豈可魚目混珠？

鄧中夏：先生，我以為文學應該是雅俗共賞，舊體詩和白話詩並行不悖，自由發展，豈不是更好？

先生：糊塗啊！這詩是詩，文是文，話是話，要用白話代表一切，那還要詩文做什麼？還要北大做什麼？你還用得着千里迢迢地從湖南來到北京上學嗎？

郭心剛：先生，現在白話詩真的特別受歡迎。女高師的學生每天都適之先生的詩不離手。而且她們組織了白話詩朗誦會呢。

學生們：就是。對啊。

鄧中夏：我們北大學生會啊，也正在籌備詩歌朗誦會。很多教授都來參加呢，比如陳獨秀教授、錢玄同教授，還有沈尹默教授，都來參加呢。

學生們：對呀。這要去呀。

先生：安靜！鄧中夏，我來問你。你到底是誰的學生？是我黃侃的門生啊，還是那陳獨秀的孝子賢孫？

鄧中夏：先生，吾愛吾師，吾更愛真理。

先生：好，既然你說到真理，那我就告訴你什麼是真理。老師講的就是真理。師道尊嚴就是真理。

郭心剛：您那是強詞奪理。

先生：郭心剛，你在那兒嘟囔什麼？

學生甲：他說您強詞奪理。

（學生們哄笑）

先生：安靜！郭心剛，鄧中夏，你二人無視紀律、聚眾鬧事、辱罵老師，豈有此理？你二人給我消失。

學生們：消失啊，消失，消失！消失！消失！

先生：安靜！…… 糞土之牆，不可朽也。

鄧中夏：走吧，消失。

先生：好，同學們，咱們繼續上課。今天講《文心雕龍》。打開課本！

Some points:

1. 學生甲

Student A

The characters used to identify the unnamed students in this scene are the ten Heavenly Stems (天干): 甲、乙、丙、丁、戊、己、庚、辛、壬、癸. They were used together with the twelve Earthly Branches to form a cycle for marking the years in ancient times. Their modern usage is varied; sometimes they are used to indicate sequences, as on this occasion (e.g., 學生甲, 學生乙), similar to how the alphabet is used in English (e.g., *Student A, Student B*).

2. 奇文共賞之

Lit. Strange writing together appreciate it/Let's marvel at this peculiar text then.

奇 has a number of meanings: strange, mystical, unusual, fantastic, or even miraculous. 賞 usually indicates a positive feeling, but given the context it is used quite sarcastically here.

之 here is in an object position after the verb 賞, as a reflexive pronoun (i.e., *it*) of the subject 奇文.

之 is used in several sentences by the teacher in this scene. For instance, in the sentence 可笑之極 *ridiculous to the extreme*, 之 means *to*; in 思之如茅棚虻蠅 (*when I am thinking of it, it is like (being surrounded by) flies in a scruffy shed*), 之 means *it*; while in 每日上課之前 *before classes every day* and 糞土之牆 *a wall made of dung and dirt*, 之 acts like a 的.

3. 故，從即日起，我便要立一個規矩，那便是，每日上課之前，我要用二十分鐘的時間，痛批這白話文、白話詩，直到把它批倒批臭為止。

Lit. Hence, from immediate day starting, I then will set a rule, that is then, everyday before classes, I will use twenty minutes time, achingly criticise plain language text, plain language poem, until taking it criticise to fall and stink till stop./Hence, from this very day, I will set up a new routine, that is,

every day before our class, I will allocate twenty minutes to severely condemn essays and poems in the vernacular style, until it is completely discredited and disgraced.

即日 means *as soon as today, on the very day.*

便 as an adverb carries the same senses as the ubiquitous adverb 就, which is used to indicate emphasis, show results, and connect actions. 便 is more likely to be used in literature or in refined speech.

批倒批臭 is formed by a repeated verb + resultative complement construction, which literally means to *criticise 批 (to the result that it) falls 倒 and stinks 臭*. 批倒批臭 is a catchphrase from the Cultural Revolution when it was frequently used in slogans and denunciation rallies (批鬥會). The use here is likely to be an anachronism if one believes the term was coined during the Cultural Revolution. However, 批倒批臭 was used in the Cultural Revolution to denounce intellectuals, Confucian values, or anything of the 'old world' from pre-Communism China, whereas in this video clip, Professor Huang uses the phrase 批倒批臭 to reproach new revolutionary ideas in order to defend classical academia and traditional beliefs.

4. 您就當便宜我了。

Lit. You just take as cheap me/Consider it a freebie to your student.

當 is 當作 for *regard as, treat as.*

The most common meaning of 便宜 is *cheap*. In colloquial Chinese, 便宜 can be a noun, meaning *bargain, freebie, advantage*, as in phrases such as 得了便宜/撿了便宜 *got a bargain, gained something extra*, or 占便宜 *to steal a bargain, to take advantage of, to freeload*. Here 便宜 is a transitive verb with 我 as the object, lit. *cheap me/let me gain something cheaper*, similar in its causative sense to a verbal compound like 氣壞我了, lit. *anger badly me/made me so angry*.

5. 詩的要義，詩的精髓又是什麼？用一字而概之，那就是雅。白話又是什麼？也可以一字而蔽之，那就是俗。一個雅，一個俗，一個在天上，一個在地上，豈可同日而語啊？豈可魚目混珠？

Lit. What are again poems' meaning, poem's essence? Using one character to summarise it, that is exactly elegance. What is again vernacular style? Also (it) can (use) one character then covered it, that is vulgarness. One is elegance, one is vulgarness, one is above the sky, one is on the ground, how can (they) be on the same day then talked about? How can fish eyes been taken as pearls?/Then, what are the gist and essence of poems? If we summarise the answer with one word, that would be elegance. What is vernacular style then? We can also cover it with one word, that is vulgarness. Classical poems are elegant, but modern poems are vulgar. One is heavenly and the other is mundane. How could they possibly be compared? How dare one put vernacular style on a par with classical poems?

而 is used to connect verb phrases, translated here as *so to or then*. Another example is 取而代之 *to take it and then replace it*. 而 can also mean *but*, as in 敬而遠之 *to maintain some respect but keep a distance*.

豈 is a literary term used to lead a rhetorical question, highlighting a strong sense of scepticism and opposition.

6. 你還用得着千里迢迢地從湖南來到北京上學嗎？

Lit. Do you still need (to be) capable to the extent in a way thousands of miles far from Hunan come to Beijing to go to school?/What is the need then for you to travel thousands of miles from Hunan to study in Beijing University?

用得着 is a form of verb + potential complement construction which is often used as an idiomatic expression and in questions. 用得着.....嗎? means *does one need to---* which carries an invalidating connotation for a rhetorical argument, meaning *why would one---*, *surely no need*.

7. 你二人無視紀律、聚眾鬧事、辱罵老師，豈有此理？你二人給我消失。

Lit. You two persons do not see discipline, gather mass and noise things, insult and scold teachers, how is there this reason? You two persons for me disappear./The two of you ignore class rules, deliberately cause trouble, and disrespect your teacher, this is outrageous! Get out now!

聚眾鬧事 *gather together to cause trouble* is a common phrase for accusations of group public order offences. The formal charges are 聚眾擾亂社會秩序罪 *crime of gathering a crowd to disturb public order* and 尋釁滋事罪 *crime of picking quarrels and provoking trouble*.

豈有此理 *how is there such a reason? Completely unreasonable! Preposterous!* This phrase first appeared in 《南齊書·虞恭傳》 *Story of Yu Cong in Book of South Qi* which was written between 510 and 526 CE.

給我消失 This phrase would not make good sense if we understand 給 as the coverb *for*, though it is in the right position for this common usage. It is better to treat 給我 as an idiomatic expression meaning *as I demand, do as I say*, often used to announce demands and orders, or to make threats. Other examples: 給我認真一點 (*I order you to*) *be more serious now (otherwise there will be consequences)*, 給我打他 *Beat him now (as I say)!*