

LIBERAL STUDIES 通識天下



ISSUE NO. 375

EDITORIAL

大公社評

Hard for a weak US government to stimulate economy

Days ago, some Americans started the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, flooding the financial centre with thousands of protesters. This movement of "US Spring" or "US Day of Rage" shows the American people's growing discontent and impatience with the financial industry that has caused a financial tsunami and economic recession in its wake.

Such events arouse concern over America's political and economic situation, with its potential for further worsening. No doubt the US economy is going from bad to worse. Economic growth is slowing down while the unemployment rate remains high, prompting analysts to lower their growth forecasts. To date, all major economies in the world have yet to fully recover their losses in gross domestic product (GDP) caused by the financial tsunami. The US economy has performed a little better, but its GDP is still slightly below the level before the financial tsunami. What deserves greater attention, however, is the long-term trend of the economy: more worrying than a double dip recession is the possible arrival of a Japanese-type of persistent stagnation (some call it the Japanese Disease or Japanese Sickness). With liabilities shooting up while prices of assets tending to go down, the economy inevitably lacks strength for recovery. "Balance Sheet Recession" caused by over-leveraging will result in long-lasting economic stagnation. The United Kingdom has already issued an early warning that its economy may remain depressed for a decade.

With economic prospects remaining gloomy, the market is more concerned with the inability of people in power to take timely and effective measures. Thus the market has lost confidence in face of economic recession and political incompetence. Globally, governments in all major advanced countries are in an unprecedentedly weak position, so they can hardly act decisively to turn the tide. Due to domestic political resistance, it is difficult for countries of the European Union (EU) to reach consensus on dealing with euro-denominated debt crises. Germany is a leading country of the EU, but its ruling party will be impeded in policy making after suffering losses in local elections. The Italian and French presidents have lost their popularity, having either made mistakes or plagued by scandals. Differences have become increasingly noticeable in Britain's ruling alliance over how to deal with the crisis. With its musical chair changes of prime ministers, Japan is even less hopeful.

The situation in the US is also not good and is becoming increasingly complex. With his support rate diving, President Barack Obama has already become a weak leader. To restore his prestige, he recently launched a new economic stimulus plan with fiscal measures totalling US\$400 billion, called the American Jobs Act with the aim of creating jobs. Obviously, this is a project for his re-election campaign. The Federal Reserve (Fed) has lent its support. It has committed to keeping interest rates low till 2013 and has spread the word that it is studying the feasibility of a new round of quantitative easing (QE) including Operation Twist (OT) to sell short-term bonds and buy in long-term ones. However, things do not turn out as they wish. All such painstaking efforts have not borne fruitful results. Shortly after the American Jobs Act was unveiled, the Democratic Party lost an electoral prize in New York in local elections. This is a heavy blow against Obama. Polls also show that 51% of American people do not believe the American Jobs Act can effectively improve the labour market.

At the same time, people are becoming even more pessimistic about the economic outlook: some surveys show 72% of them think the country has taken the wrong path; only 20% think the country is on the right track and only less than 10% believe the economy won't run into recession again. Pessimistic sentiments can easily materialise: people would cut spending and investing to make the economic situation even worse. The net result would be a vicious circle of interaction between sentiments and reality.

In face of such circumstances, Obama cannot spend more on economic stimulus but instead proposes a long-term plan to reduce fiscal deficits by increasing tax revenues by US\$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years. In particular, rich people will have to pay more taxes. This move seems to run against the tide: people are expecting the government to increase public expenditure and expand its economic input so as to improve people's livelihood and create jobs. On the other hand, without fiscal tightening, market confidence cannot be restored and boosted and US will remain deeply and helplessly trapped in a debt crisis. It is much more difficult for a weak government to deal with such a fiercely contradictory situation; it has no choice but to press ahead in spite of the difficulties.

The fiscal policy proposal has become a focus of the current political struggle. The two parties will spare no pains to gain ground. They had fought each other in early August over the increase of the debt ceiling, which not only shocked the world but also upset American people as polls in the aftermath showed. But even as the economy remains depressed, the political struggle between the two parties will continue. As such, it is hard to be optimistic about the political and economic situation in the United States as it is likely to remain troubled. 20 September 2011

WORDS AND USAGE :

① Go from bad to worse (idiom) - (Of an already bad situation) becoming even worse. (每況愈下, 越來越糟)

Examples: 1. My eyesight has gone from bad to worse since I began to use contact lenses. 2. Things went from bad to worse in a matter of days.

② To Date (idiom) - Until now; (迄今為止, 至今)

Examples: 1. To date, we have no news of him. 2. To date, only half of those invited have responded.

③ Shoot up (phrasal verb) - To rise or increase very quickly. (陡增, 猛漲)

Examples: 1. The inflation rate has shot up to over 7% in the past month. 2. With new technology, productivity has shot up.

④ Turn the tide (idiom) - Cause a complete reversal of circumstances. (力挽狂瀾, 扭轉形勢)

Examples: 1. Small investors can hardly turn the tide of markets. 2. NATO-led airstrikes certainly has turned the tide in Libya.

⑤ Spread the word (idiom) - To tell others about something. (散布, 傳播(消息))

Examples: 1. The meeting will be held on Thursday, so if you see anyone who should be there, spread the word. 2. We need to start spreading the word that recycling is important.

美弱勢政府刺激經濟捉襟見肘

日前有美國人發起「佔領華爾街」運動, 引致千人集會示威抗議。這個「美國之春」或「美國版的憤怒日」行動, 顯示民衆對引發金融海嘯的金融業界, 和隨後的經濟不景氣正日益不滿且漸失耐性。

這類事件令人關注美國的政經狀態, 及其出現嚴重惡化的潛在風險。經濟無疑正急速轉差, 增長放緩而失業率居高不下, 令各方分析紛紛下調增長預測。至今為止, 全球主要經濟體的GDP均未能回復海嘯前水平, 表現較好的美國亦只靠近而已。但更值得關注的是經濟的長期走勢: 比二次探底更為令人擔心者是日本式持久停滯的來臨(有人稱之為「日本病」)。在負債過重而資產價格趨軟下, 經濟自必無力重振, 橫桿引發的「資產負債表」衰退, 將令經濟長期陷於呆滯中。日前英國當局已發出預警, 指該國經濟或將經歷十年的長時間低迷。

在嚴峻的前景下, 尤令市場關注者是執政者的無能, 未能及時有效採取措施應對。因此, 在經濟不景政治不濟下, 市場已信心大失。環顧全球, 各主要發達國的政府均處於空前弱勢中, 實難以果敢行事力挽狂瀾。歐洲各國受國內政治阻力影響, 對處理歐債危機難達共識。龍頭的德國執政黨在連番輸掉地方選舉後決策備受掣肘。意、法總統則因失誤或醜聞纏身而民望低落。英國的執政聯盟在應對危機上內部分歧漸顯。日本首相的走馬燈式輪任, 更令人難寄厚望。

美國的情況同樣欠佳且日益複雜。總統奧巴馬民望插水早成弱勢領導, 最近為重振聲威決定推出四千餘億美元的次輪財政刺激經濟



奧巴馬推出四千餘億美元的次輪財政刺激經濟計劃, 為競選連任鋪路

濟計劃, 乃主攻創造就業的美國就業法案。這明顯是一項「競選工程」。聯儲局亦積極從旁協助, 先是承諾至二〇一三年前保持低息, 繼而放風說正研究新的寬鬆措施, 包括以短債換長債的「扭曲行動」。然而事與願違, 雖花盡心思卻未能討好, 就業法案提出不久, 民主黨便在紐約地方選舉中失掉票倉, 對奧巴馬實是當頭棒喝。民意調查亦顯示五成一大多數人民, 不相信就業法案能真正有效地改善勞工市場狀況。同時, 民衆對經濟前景更趨悲觀: 有民調指七成二的民衆認為國家走上了錯誤道路, 只有兩成人認為走對了路, 更只有不足一成認爲經濟不會再陷衰退。悲觀情緒本身易做成事實: 人們因此節減消費及投資而令經濟狀況更差, 還可形成現實與情緒互動的惡性循環。

面對如斯形勢, 奧巴馬不單不能再加碼刺激經濟, 反要提出長期的財政削減計劃, 十年加稅達一點五萬億美元, 特別要加重對富戶的徵收。這乃逆勢而行者: 人民正期望增加政府開支, 擴大對經濟的投入以改善民生創造就業。另一方面, 若不收緊財政則難保市場信心, 並令美國深陷債務危機中而不能自拔。但以弱勢政府來處理上述尖銳矛盾將更為困難, 但亦只好知難而進。

有關財政的方案乃當前政爭焦點, 兩黨必全力奮戰寸土必爭。八月初在提升發債上限時便大拚了一場, 不單令舉世震驚, 事後調查顯示美國民衆對此亦感不滿。但即使經濟難興, 兩黨的政爭仍會繼續, 美國的政經前景也將如陷泥沼而難以樂觀。

2011/09/20 大公報社評

中文基本功

識字該讀誌爲人師表不知 适字當作適執教者仍不免

七月卅一日和八月十四日, 香港電台《解構經典》主持人都有讀錯字音, 前一次是把清人陸以活所著《冷廬雜識》的識, 誤讀成常識的識, 後一次把南宋學者洪适的适字誤爲適的簡化字, 因而誤讀。

先談識字誤讀。識字一般都有兩音, 除了讀常識的識, 也讀標誌的誌。《冷廬雜識》的識, 以讀誌爲正確。假如這部書不是清朝出版, 而在今天出版, 就寫成「冷廬雜誌」了。因爲, 這個「識」字就是「誌」的意思。二千五百年前, 孔子教學生, 每說「小子識之」這句話, 那是「孩子們記住」的意思。古無誌字, 誌寫成識; 到清代仍然如此。不但雜誌寫成雜識, 就是自序或替人寫序, 落款用識字就是誌的意思, 也就是誌字。「五四」運動後, 才棄「識」用「誌」或用「記」。但甲寅派如章士釗等, 學衡派如胡先驌等, 到二十年代仍不用誌而用識。

甚至香港學者賴際熙、廣州學者江孔殷, 到三十年代爲人寫序, 其落款仍不用「誌」「記」, 而仍用「識」, 讀作誌。不要怪他們, 他們都是前清進士, 入翰林院、被人尊稱翰林或太史, 當然用傳統寫法了。這一點也該是通識吧!

再說适字, 本讀誌, 與包括、括弧的括同音, 與適合、舒適的適字絕無關係。不知何故, 一九五六年漢字簡化, 适字被當成適的簡化字, 而把適字廢除, 於是內地的人, 只見适字, 以爲就是適字, 影響到香港, 使那些不識适字的人, 就誤會适就是適字。可惜自稱教大學的《解構經典》主持人也不免此弊。我懷疑香港的教授, 不識适字的可能還有其人, 不能獨怪主持人也!

中華文化被糟蹋到這個地步, 伊誰過也? 吾不欲言之!

容若

觸景立畫

郵票畫——孫中山



主題設計採用了「馬賽克」的概念, 把顏色相同的郵票互相配合, 併出郵票畫中的孫中山先生。

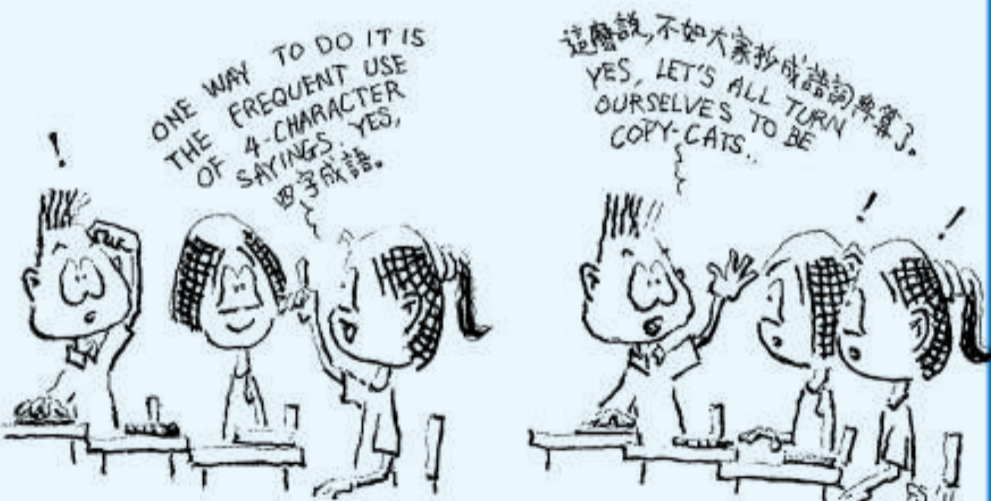
郵票畫中的首像是參照了數十款不同年代、地區、國家(包括中國大陸、香港、澳門、台灣等)的明信片、畫冊、郵票等創作。

所選用的郵票年份由1954年到2010年, 貼上的品種約30多款, 數量約為1500多枚, 整幅郵票畫約79x55厘米。

這幅孫中山郵票畫由2006年初開始構思, 至2011年8月完成。

蕭諒興

SOHO DIARY



Idiomatic English (2)

Hark Yeung (yeung@harkyeung.com)

I have been writing and publishing stories in English since I was twenty something.

Many of my friends are like the friend who sticks to idiomatic English. They tell me to put off my publication plans until I manage to write better.

One of them is an artist. I encouraged him to have exhibitions while he thought he was not good enough. After ten years, he got better and better. I might have published some bad stuff if I had friends who liked my work better. With some encouragements, I probably would have more books published by now.

I always think that younger writers have to accept themselves first and have a strong belief to move on. Whether their readers will accept them

or not can be seen later.

A good way is to pick a topic they like to work on, like eating in Hong Kong's restaurants or making friends on Facebook.

It is much better to publish a book that can attract readers than to publish ten books that cannot find any buyers. In the publishing world, there are many books that have never found their ways to the shelves in big bookshops. With e-publishing, a writer can publish a book even if the writer has no money to print it. The problem is that the writer still needs to find a way to attract the readers.

But what is a good book? Is it enough to be idiomatic? And what is idiomatic English?

通識記憶體

事件介紹

2011年9月17日, 美國金融中心紐約華爾街附近的保齡球公園有一場大規模示威, 示威者揚言要「佔領華爾街」, 有人甚至帶了帳篷, 表示要長期堅持下去。

「佔領華爾街」抗議活動共呼籲2萬人進駐華爾街, 反對美國政治的權錢交易、兩黨政爭以及社會不公正, 要求總統奧巴馬設立監管委員會, 控制企業資金對華爾街議員的影響。

「佔領華爾街」運動是自7月三藩市騷

亂爆發以來, 發生在美國最大城市的人民民主運動, 它是美國社會中的弱勢群體表達自己的意見或者抗議的方式。

事件導火線

失業率居高不下是觸發示威的主要導火線之一。

根據美國勞工部公布的最新數據, 2011年8月份全美30個州的就業人數下降, 其中紐約州就業人數下降最多, 當月紐約州僱主裁員2.2萬人, 凸顯紐約州經濟和就業形勢不容樂觀。

矛頭指向

第一, 直接地指向華爾街。美國經濟不景氣, 金融危機的後果仍然天天威脅着美國民衆, 而華爾街的人們卻仍然領着高薪、拿着高領獎金。

第二, 指向共和黨。奧巴馬當政近3年來, 共和黨處處與他作對, 徵稅問題就是一例。共和黨反對任何提高稅收的法案。

第三, 指向奧巴馬政府。奧巴馬在競選中提出了許多新理念、新見解, 但都未有實施, 有人譏之為「大隻講」。