

--by Cindy Hsueh

Ang Lee

Very few Asian directors can become famous in Hollywood, but Ang Lee is one of them. In fact, he is well-known not only in the United States but also all over the world.

Ang Lee was born in 1954. His student life was full of stress because his father was the principal of the school. His father hoped that Ang Lee could become a professor in the future but Ang Lee liked arts. His father was disappointed at him. After graduating from high school, Ang Lee entered a three-year college, National Arts School (now known as National Taiwan University of Arts) and graduated in 1975. Then he went to the U.S. to study.

Life was not good after Ang Lee finished his master's degree in the U.S. He was jobless and played the role of a househusband, cooking and taking care of two children for years. Luckily, his wife, a Taiwanese who also studied in the U.S., supported him very much. She became the breadwinner of the family and encouraged him to pursue his dream. Therefore, Ang Lee always mentions how thankful he is for his wife.

Ang Lee directed some Chinese movies such as *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was a surprising success worldwide. The film was nominated in ten categories at the Academy Awards and won the Best Foreign Language Film and three technical awards.

Ang Lee also directed some English movies. He won the Academy Award for the Best Director twice, first for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and then for *Life of Pi* (2012). *Life of Pi*, a 3D movie, is about how an Indian boy, Pi, survived in the ocean after an accident. He was on a lifeboat with some animals including a tiger. During his journey, young Pi questioned the meaning of life and finally found his answer in God.

Ang Lee is still living in the U.S. now, doing his favorite directing job, but he often comes back to Taiwan to visit his family and friends. Ang Lee is polite, modest and nice. He always encourages young people to be brave for their own dreams and tells them that working hard is very important. He thinks that people must love their jobs so that they can do the jobs well. Ang Lee also cares about many things in Taiwan. Every time he wins an award and appears on TV, he would say in Mandarin, "Hello, all the people in Taiwan. Thank you very much. Thank you for your support."

Comic Strips Can Be Deeper Than You Might Think

I think the best comics (like the best novels, paintings, etc.) are personal, idiosyncratic works that reflect a unique and honest sensibility. To attract and keep an audience, art must entertain, but the significance of any art lies in its ability to express truth—to reveal and help us understand our world. Comic strips, in their own humble way, are capable of doing this.

The best comic strips expose human nature and help us laugh at our own stupidity and hypocrisy. They indulge in exaggeration and absurdity, helping us to see the world with fresh eyes and reminding us how important it is to play and be silly. Comics depict the ordinary, mundane events of our lives and help us remember the importance of tiny moments. They cleverly sum up our unexpressed thoughts and emotions. Sometimes they show the world from the perspective of children and animals, encouraging us to be innocent for a moment.

Surprise is the essence of humor, and nothing is more surprising than truth. When cartoons dig beyond punch lines to deeper, truthful experiences, they can really touch people and connect us all.

Disagreement Can Be a Good Thing in Decision Making Process

A decision is a judgment. It is a choice between alternatives. Therefore, the first rule in decision making is that one does not make a decision unless there is disagreement.

There are three main reasons for the insistence on disagreement.

1. Disagreement alone can provide alternatives to a decision. And a decision without an alternative is a desperate gambler's throw, no matter how carefully thought through it might be. There is always a high possibility that the decision will prove wrong—either because it is wrong to begin with or a change in circumstances makes it wrong. If one has thought through alternatives during the decision making process, one has something to fall back on, something that has been thought through, that has been studied, that is understood.

2. Disagreement is the only safeguard against the decision-maker's becoming the prisoner of the organization. Everybody always wants something from the decision-maker. Everybody is a special pleader, trying to obtain the decision he favors. The only way to break out of the prison of special pleading and preconceived notions is to make sure of argued, documented, thought-through disagreements.

3. Above all, disagreement is needed to stimulate the imagination.

The executive deals with true uncertainty. He needs creative solutions which create a new situation. And this means one needs imagination—a new and different way of perceiving and understanding. Disagreement is the most effective stimulus we know to generate imagination.

In a nutshell, effective executives welcome dissenting opinions, rather than resenting them.

Food & Mood

We often eat to calm down or cheer up when we are feeling stressed or depressed. Now new research suggests there is a reason: food changes our brain chemistry. These changes powerfully influence our moods. But can certain foods really make us feel better? Nutrition experts say yes. But what should we eat and what should we avoid? Here are the foods that work the best, as well as those that can make a bad day worse.

To outsmart stress

What is good? Recent research suggests that foods that are high in carbohydrates, such as bread, rice, and pasta, can help you calm down. Researchers say that carbohydrates cause the brain to release a chemical called serotonin. Serotonin makes you feel better.

What is bad? Many people drink coffee when they feel stress. The heat is soothing and the caffeine in coffee might help you think more clearly. But if you drink too much, you may become even more anxious and irritable.

To soothe the blues

What is good? Introduce more lean meat, chicken, seafood, and whole grains into your diet. These foods have a lot of selenium. Selenium is a mineral that helps people feel more relaxed and happy. You can also try eating Brazil nut every day. One Brazil nut contains a lot of selenium.

What is bad? When they are feeling low, many people turn to comfort foods-- or foods that make them feel happy or secure. These often include things like sweet desserts. A chocolate bar may make you feel better at first, but within an hour you may feel worse than you did before.

Jason Wu

Barack Obama, the first black American president, danced with his wife Michelle in the 2009 inauguration party. Michelle was wearing a single-shouldered white gown. She looked very elegant. People in front of TV were saying, "The dress is so beautiful." At the same time, all the people in the fashion business were asking, "Who designed it?" To everybody's surprise, the designer is a very young man, only 26 years old. Besides, he is Asian, and he is from Taiwan. His name is Jason Wu. He became famous overnight.

So, how did Jason respond? Beforehand, nobody told Jason that Michelle would wear that gown in the party. In fact, just like other people, Jason learned it from the TV. On that day, he was about to eat some pizza for dinner. He turned on the TV, saw the party, and noticed that gown. First, he was talking to himself, "That gown looked quite familiar." Then, suddenly he figured it out, "Oh, I designed it!" He could not believe his eyes. He picked up the phone, and called his parents in Taiwan immediately. However, he could not talk; he cried. He cried because of happiness, pride and comfort. After a while, he told his mother on the phone, "Mom, nobody will laugh at us anymore." Jason Wu would not be successful without his mother.

Jason Wu was born in 1982. He was different from other boys. Most boys like to play toy cars and airplanes but Jason enjoyed playing dolls when he was young. He also asked his mother to take him to see wedding dresses in the shops. He was very interested in fashion design. Many people around him thought he was weird. Only his mother knew very well that her boy had talents in design. In order for this talented boy to learn things in a better environment, his mother moved to Canada with Jason from Taipei when Jason was 9 years old. Jason learned how to sew and design clothes for dolls. His mother prepared a workshop in the house basement for Jason to work.

That is why Jason cried on the phone; he finally proved to the world that he is not weird at all but a very talented designer.

Jason is now living and working in New York but comes back to Taiwan sometimes. He said in one interview to the audience in Taiwan, "Please encourage and respect your children when you find that they have special talents."

Laughter is the best medicine.

There is an old saying in English: “Laughter is the best medicine.” Until recently, few people took the saying very seriously. Now, however, doctors have begun to investigate laughter and the effects it has on the human body. They have found evidence that laughter really can improve people’s health.

Tests were carried out to study the effects of laughter on the body. People watched funny film, while doctors check their heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscles. It was found that laughter has similar effects to physical exercise. It increases blood pressure, the heart rate and the rate of breathing; it also works several groups of muscles in the face, the stomach, and even the feet. If laughter exercises the body, it must be beneficial.

Other tests have shown that laughter appears to be capable of reducing the effect of pain on the body. In one experiment doctors produced pain in groups of students who listened to different radio programs. The group which tolerated the pain for the longest time was the group which listened to a funny program. The reason why laughter can reduce pain seems to be that it helps to produce endorphins in the brain. These are natural chemicals which diminish both stress and pain.

There is also some evidence to suggest that laughter helps the body’s immune system, this is, the system which fights against infection. In an experiment, one group of students watched a funny video while another group served as the control group — in other words, a group with which to compare the first group. Doctors checked the blood of the students in both groups and found that the people in the group that watched the video had an increase in the activity of their white blood cells, that is, the cells which fight infection.

As a result of these discoveries, some doctors and psychiatrists in the United States now hold laughter clinics, in which they try to improve their patients’ condition by encouraging them to laugh. They have found that even if their patients do not really feel like laughing, making them smile is enough to produce beneficial effects similar to those caused by laughter.

Mind the Gap

For more than 40 years, Oswald Laurence's voice could be heard by tens of thousands of commuters across London's Tube daily. In a gentlemanly tone, what the message said was simple—mind the gap, please. To one woman, the voice meant a lot more, and her heart broke when it was phased out after being played for decades.

Margaret McCollum is Laurence's widow, and after her husband passed away in 2007, the one place she could go and still hear her beloved's voice was Embankment station on London's Northern Line. There, she would sit on the platform bench and listen to him say, "Mind the gap!" over and over. Hearing his voice allowed her to find comfort in his absence and remain close to him even though he was gone forever. A few months ago, though, a digitized voice replaced the reassuring message from her late husband. McCollum was devastated and felt the only gap that needed minding now was the one in her life. She wrote letters to Transport for London, pleading with them to reinstate the iconic message.

Her story eventually touched the heart of one kind soul at Transport for London. Soon, she not only received a recording of her husband's voice on a CD, but her husband's recorded warning was reinstated. The computerized voice was ditched, and Laurence's voice could once again be heard at Embankment station, with plans to expand the use of his voice even further. McCollum is delighted that she can now continue to ride the train while being reminded of the love of her life. These small acts of kindness remind us that there are people out there who care.

Overweight Dogs

It's no coincidence that overweight dogs have overweight owners.

You may have noticed that pets often share some physical characteristics with their owners, but have you ever noticed that they often mirror their owners' body shapes, too? It has been reported that over 45 percent of dogs in the US are overweight or obese. There are several reasons for this. First, owners of obese pets tend to humanize their animals and cannot resist feeding table food when their pets start to beg. Second, modern dog treats are loaded with fat, sugar, and salt, which create unhealthy cravings in pets, much like the case with snacks designed for humans.

Another reason, recently found by a Dutch study, is that overweight dogs often have overweight owners. This is not a coincidence because people tend to transfer their own habits to their pets. Humans who do not conscientiously follow a healthy diet or exercise are usually lax with their pets in the same areas. Overfeeding dogs and neglecting to take them out for their daily walks translate into weight gain, like they do for humans.

This is not a matter to be taken lightly because obesity in dogs can cause serious medical problems, premature death, and an overall diminished quality of life. To prevent this, owners need to identify obesity as a serious health problem as well as make having a balanced diet and getting regular exercise high priority for both parties. When this happens, the process benefits not only the pets but their owners as well.

THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

More and more often, the term global village is used to describe the world and its people. In most villages, everyone knows everyone else and the people face the same kinds of problems. So how can the world be a village when it is home to more than six billion people? Political and technological changes in the past century have made the global village possible.

POLITICAL CHANGES The years following World War II seemed to promise peace. In fact, in 1945, the United Nations was founded to help countries resolve disputes peacefully. However, this promise was soon broken by the Cold War-distrust and tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. These two superpowers engaged in an arms race, spending huge amounts of money on weapons. The other nations of the world were divided into two “sides,” and the world was frozen in a state of hostility.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES Technologically, the greatest contributor to the global village is the microchip – an electronic circuit on a tiny chip. The evolution of the microchip has made modern satellites and supercomputers possible. Through the Internet, we can get information from computers and carry on electronic conversations with people everywhere. Through television program transmitted by satellite, we are exposed to many cultures. The development of the global village will almost certainly continue into the future. Not only is this probable, but the challenges that the world faces – for example, conflicts among peoples, pollution, and population growth – will make it necessary.

The Threat to KIRIBATI

Kiribati consists of 33 islands scattered across 3,860 kilometers of the Pacific Ocean near the equator. They are particularly threatened by high tides because none of the islands of Kiribati rises more than 2 meters above sea level.

What is causing these mysterious tides? The answer may be global warming. When fuels like oil and coal are burned, they release pollutants that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere. Rising temperatures create more water by melting glaciers and polar ice caps.

Scientists say that if the trend continues, many countries will suffer. Bangladesh, for example, might lose one-fifth of its land. However, the coral island nations of the Pacific, like Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, would face an even worse fate – they would be swallowed by the sea. This would be everyone's loss: Coral formations are home to more species than any other place on earth.

The people of these nations feel frustrated. The ocean, on which their economies have always been based, is suddenly threatening their existence. There are no easy answers. These nations don't have a lot of money, so they can't afford expensive solutions, like sea walls. And they have no control over pollutants, which are being released mainly by large industrialized countries. All they can do is to hope that these countries will take steps to reduce pollution, and therefore, global warming.