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Exhibition Interpreter
2012

Two Fables from *Tales from Old China* by Isabelle C. Chang, Random House, 1969

The Artist

There was once a king who loved the graceful curves of the rooster. He asked the court artist to paint a picture of a rooster for him. For one year he waited and still this order was not fulfilled. In a rage, he stomped into the studio and demanded to see the artist.

Quickly the artist brought out paper, paint, and brush. In five minutes a perfect picture of a rooster emerged from his skillful brush. The king turned purple with anger, saying, "If you can paint a perfect picture of a rooster in five minutes, why did you keep me waiting for over a year?"

"Come with me," begged the artist. He led the king to his storage room. Paper was piled from the floor to the ceiling. On every sheet was a painting of a rooster.

"Your Majesty," explained the artist, "it took me more than one year to learn how to paint a perfect rooster in five minutes."

Moral: Life is short, art is long. Use with Scholar's Table, Forbidden City, or anytime a tour member says, "What's so great about that?" or "I could have painted that!" or similar sentiment.

Heaven and Hell

A Chinese angel visited hell. He saw many people seated around a table covered with delicious food of every description. Beside each person was a pair of yard-long chopsticks. But everyone there was wasting away with starvation, because no one was able to manipulate the clumsy chopsticks adequately to feed himself.

Then the angel went to visit heaven. There he saw another table piled with all kinds of wholesome, delicious food. Each person seated around the table was also provided with yard-long chopsticks. These people were happy and contented. They were feeding each other across the table with their yard-long chopsticks.

Moral: The difference between heaven and hell is the people. Use anytime you wish to emphasize kindness, cooperation, empathy.