

Attention!!

Should one be proud of oneself for any reason besides one's efforts?

Whenever or wherever I go, whoever starts the conversation would most likely ask me the same question: "How do you like America?"

What should I say? Every country has its own pride; every place does. But this does not mean that the individuals living there are all great persons and all the "traditions" are worth continuing. People are people, regardless of what color they are, what language they speak and what faith they hold. There are always common roles that can apply to everyone. As for the laws, we all know them; for civil attitudes, however, most of us forget who we are.

I usually have my dinners at Skaggs. The reasons are simple. There is only one

supermarket near the University, and the stuff is cheaper compared to restaurants. If you are lucky enough to own a car, you can get around; however, most foreign students do not have a car, some not even a bicycle! Where can they go? I believe that most foreign students are relying on Skaggs and some of them, like myself, have to take the mistreatments, because of language problems.

One day, as I usually do, I got a small can of ice-cream and two honeybuns for a simple supper. There was a long line at the express cash desk. One foreign student in front of me had a little trouble understanding what the pretty cashier girl said. Obviously, he was embarrassed and,

therefore, smiling foolishly. For some reasons, maybe because of the long line, she was not able to be patient with him. She made a face (imagine!) to an American guy behind me. My first reaction was to be insulted; even I was annoyed by waiting longer. When she handed my stuff to me, I could not help myself and said to her: "Sometimes, people do not understand you, so please be . . ."

"Thank you!" She interrupted me immediately.

I could not remember how I left, but I knew my face was burning. I had to shut up and have my "great" dinner quietly at their snack bar that evening.

I came from an oriental town where people had a lot of differences from the people

here. The major problem comes from our deep-rooted cultural traditions. My grandmother is a typical example. When I was young, she always taught me her life philosophy, to which she owes her great reputation:

"Whoever you play with or whatever you are going to do, first things first is always comparing you heart with the other's!" As I grew up, I "learned" a lot of those traditions (I admit that a lot of them were forced on me, but I do appreciate my grandmother in many ways). I have benefited a lot from them in my life, especially in high school and college. I am more and more "convinced" that they are great traditions. Most of them have formed my personality! However, some people here may not agree; even some in our country do not agree. One writer even wrote a book to criticize many of our traditions and felt "pity" for us as "the victim of our culture." They said these traditions are great ideally, but not practically. In such a modern world, these made us so vulnerable that others always take advantage of us and even neglect us because of our "cultural traditions" (i.e. humble and modest). They think our politeness and friendship are because of their greatness! I really hate this!

When I first came here, my personality helped me to build up my reputation. However, I also had to suffer some neglect blindly just because others thought they were great! I could not recall when I stopped saying "hello" to the people passing by, and would not pay any attention to them if they did not nod or smile to me. Why? You know it.

From then on, I still went there for my dinner, not

because I had nowhere to go, but, since I had been there many times, I believe most of the clerks there do not act like her. Another reason was that I wonder if she treated others the same way just because of the long line. I started to pay attention to her performance as well as others', and talked with other clerks when they got a short rest at the snack bar. Most conversations were friendly and enjoyable.

When I told my roommate about this incident, he, an American college student, was mad, too. He felt sorry for me and tried to change my feelings by telling me the mistreatments he got.

Now, several weeks have passed and I cannot stop thinking why this happened. Is it because our culture made us "cheaper?" Is it because the English language made her so "superior?" Why must some people, no matter where you are, treat you so unequally and unfairly? And sometimes you just have to take it! You are proud of your nationality as we are, but this does not mean that you can be proud of yourself.

Do you not know that not all the people living in Vienna can play violin and not all the native Chinese know the martial arts? Remember that several years before, your ancestors may not have been American either. Americans are proud of their country, like we are proud of our country, our history and our traditions; but we cannot be proud of ourselves except for our own efforts to reach for our ideals. Does this point make us so much "cheaper?" If that is true, this day should be my last!

This week's Attention!! story was written by Victor K. Ke, a graduate student in genetics.



John Del Tatto, a junior journalism major, took this week's Attention!! photo.

Editor's Note: This Attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

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