

A View of American Values

When I saw some American friends admiring the long history of China for the first time, I felt somewhat uneasy although I was used to taking pride in this. The United States is quite young just like a new born baby compared with China, but who can deny the fact that it has been leading the whole world more than half of a century! I can't help wondering what happened to this magic land that made it grow into a super power within just three hundred years. After staying here for three months, I have been able to see America in a whole new light and the reason is not as mysterious as before. **I found some remarkable American values including individual freedom, self-reliance, and hard work.** I believe there must be something else, but at least we can get some flavor from these.

As conveyed by the Statue of Liberty, individual freedom is taken as the symbol of the United States. Since it was written into the First Amendment, freedom has been lying in the hearts of Americans with almost the highest honor. Many typical even dramatic examples can show us how Americans insist on freedom everywhere. First, people can express their opinions on anything and at any time even the person being talked about is President. In a victory for students' free speech rights, a federal judge has ruled that a teenager who was prohibited from wearing a t-shirt with a picture of President Bush that reads "International Terrorist" must be allowed to wear the shirt to school. Second, people can choose any kind of life styles as they like, even if the decision may be opposite to the most accepted lifestyle by the society. Recently, Massachusetts' highest court has issued a landmark decision striking a blow against discrimination and making Massachusetts the first American state to no longer to deny couples

the right to marry solely because of the same sex. It is difficult to say whether or not these free rights are healthy for the whole society, but as far as an individual is concerned, the free atmosphere magnifies personalities, abilities, desires and ideals. Thus, an individual can develop him- or herself in any way. This may be why most of them are so enthusiastic about their work, studies and lives. However, in China, it seems that every person is urged to do something that has been accepted by society or needed by someone except him- or herself. It is no wonder that many Chinese people are somewhat cold and detached from what they are doing. I believe that America is not heaven or hell; it is definitely a land where freedom is most protected and respected.

Self-reliance, as the necessary condition for freedom, is also crucial to Americans.

The simplest example may be the fact that most Americans choose to live by themselves as soon as possible in order to manage their own lives. In contrast, youths in China tend to live with their parents till marriage at the cost of losing some freedom. In America, many students pay their tuition by working in the library or the lab. When facing difficulties, they seldom complain, or pour out their unhappiness to friends or parents; most of them choose some way, such as sports or music, to relax and then be more energetic as well as optimistic to counter the difficulties. Because of the appreciation of self-reliance, Americans tend to support successful persons who began with nothing and relied solely on personal efforts, such as the new governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, who grew up in a small, isolated village in Austria and started from being a bodybuilder. Without this kind of inclination, America would not often be in the control of wise and capable people, nor would it be so prosperous. So, I would like to say that self-reliance is the lifeline of the United States.

In many countries, hard work is a tradition or habit. But in America, the more striking thing is their high spirits while working. During my first days at MIT, most people I contacted were administrative staff. Whether the work was trivial or simple and the position high or low, they all showed great enthusiasm, patience, and helpfulness. I was deeply impressed by their attitudes toward work and the resulting high efficiency. Obviously, they all love their work and enjoy the delight of working. I have to admit that this condition is not common in China, where many people work in low spirits or even depression. How can we expect to get the same results out of work since we have paid so little? I like American-style hard work; it makes the whole country and all people appear vigorous.

If you like, you can imagine America as an eagle. **Freedom enables its wings, light and soft; self-reliance makes bones strong enough to support the wings. It is so ambitious and devoted to flying, what can prevent it from flying high in the sky?** You can love it or you can hate it, but you can't look down on it. This is the first thing I have learned from it.