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Why Are the Flowers So Red: A Review of Dai Jianye's Essay Collection *"Mantra Trilogy"*

Ma Lili

Abstract: The reason Dai Jianye's "Catchphrase Trilogy" has become a phenomenal bestseller lies in the interplay of three types of "power": 1. The Power of Substance: The prose collections draw on a wide range of sources, showcasing the author's extensive knowledge of classics from both ancient and modern times, as well as his profound expertise in the study of classical Chinese literature. By blending academic depth with literary creation, the works present unique and profound insights, demonstrating exceptional writing skills. This contributes to the promotion of general education and the popularization of traditional Chinese culture. 2. The Power of Warmth: The author respects women and holds bold and progressive views on gender relations and love. His reflections on family education and parent-child relationships serve as a solid reference for parents and offer valuable guidance for the growth of young people. The prose collections are imbued with the author's nostalgia for his hometown, familial affection, friendships, romantic love, teacher-student bonds, and humor, as well as his sense of responsibility, commitment, and love for society. 3. The Power of Ideological Appeal: The author advocates for pursuing the vitality and passion of life while criticizing the mediocrity and apathy prevalent in contemporary society. He demonstrates remarkable foresight and sound judgment regarding the issues inherent in the online world. His reflections on higher education are

profound and forward-thinking. The problems he critiques, the ideas he champions, and the warnings he issues carry significant and enduring relevance, exerting a strong attraction and guiding force on readers.

Keywords: Dai Jianye; “Catchphrase Trilogy”; Bestseller

Author Biography: Ma Lili, Professor of the School of Literature and Media, Xingyi Normal University for Nationalities. Research direction: Ancient Chinese Literature. Email: 412653316@qq.com.

标题: 花儿为什么这样红——评戴建业散文集“口头禅三部曲”

摘要: 戴建业“口头禅三部曲”成为现象级畅销书的原因在于三种“力”的作用：一、内容的实力：散文集旁征博引，体现了作者对古今中外经典的广泛了解，以及在中国古典文学研究方面的深厚造诣，将学术底蕴与文学创作相融合，见解独到而深刻，写作技巧高超，有助于推进通识教育与国学知识的普及。二、情感的热力：作者尊重女性，其两性观、恋爱观大胆而进步；其对家庭教育和亲子关系的反思，是父母育儿的硬核参考，也是青少年成长的有益指引；散文集融入了作者的乡情、亲情、友情、爱情、师生情和幽默风趣，以及作者对社会的责任、担当与热爱。三、思想的引力：作者倡导追求生命的活力与激情，批评现实社会中的平庸与消沉；对网络社会存在的问题具有极强的前瞻性和准确的判断力；对高校教育的反思深刻而富于预见性。作者所针砭的问题、所主张的观念，所发出的警醒，都具有重要而持久的现实意义，对读者具有强大的吸引力与指引力。

关键词: 戴建业；口头禅三部曲；畅销书

作者简介: 马黎丽，兴义民族师范学院文学与传媒学院教授，研究方向：中国古代文学。电邮：412653316@qq.com。

Introduction

Professor Dai Jianye’s essay collection, the “Catchphrase Trilogy”, consisting of *Ni ting dong le mei you* (Did You Understand?), *Wo de ge tian* (Oh My Heavens), and *Lang man de yao ming* (Romantic to Death), has sold over 600,000 copies to date since its successive publication in 2019, 2021, and 2025, becoming a phenomenal bestseller and a marvel at a time when the print media era is in decline.

Why are the flowers so red? Why are Professor Dai’s essays so popular? This is a question worth pondering.

As is well known, before his essay collections became bestsellers, Professor Dai was already a nationally known “internet celebrity professor.” In October 2018, clips from his lectures on Tang poetry, uploaded to Douyin (TikTok) by the Chaoxing Master Teacher Forum, garnered over 20 million views and over 1 million likes for a single video on the day of upload, thanks to his humorous expressions and uniquely fresh insights, with his followers increasing by over 100,000 per day. In August 2019, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing

House published *Did You Understand?*, and by the end of that year, sales had exceeded 100,000 copies. The online popularity brought by new media dissemination was undoubtedly the initial catalyst for the warm reception of Professor Dai's works.

However, in the internet age, the heat of fame often comes and goes quickly; popularity may bring fleeting hot sales but cannot sustain continuous bestseller status. What fundamentally attracts the readership as consumers and creates the marvel of sustained print book sales in the digital era?

Sartre once said, "Between the signposts set up by the author lies a void that the reader must fill themselves." That is, the value and meaning of a text can only exist through the reader's act of reading. The "guidance" different readers gain from the signposts in Professor Dai's books will certainly vary, as everyone has their own understanding and insights. Yet the sense of "arrival" that everyone ultimately attains must share common ground, because only shared recognition and anticipation would create the marvel of the trilogy's consecutive bestseller status.

Overall, Professor Dai's "Catchphrase Trilogy" possesses three kinds of "forces" that sufficiently satisfy readers with a sense of "arrival."

1. The Power of Substance

The content of the trilogy is very substantial, reflecting the author's extensive familiarity with classics from ancient and modern times, China and abroad, as well as his profound expertise in classical Chinese literature. This allows readers to gain practical knowledge, intellectual inspiration, and aesthetic pleasure.

Citing extensively from various sources is a major manifestation of the strength of Professor Dai's essays. In his articles, whether classics from ancient or modern times, China or abroad, spanning literature, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and political science, he always draws upon them effortlessly. This not only broadens readers' horizons but also greatly enhances the readability of his essays. For example, the essay "Men" (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.2) opens with quotations from psychologist Erich Fromm's exposition on "freedom," the great poet Tao Yuanming's lament "Life is truly hard" from his *Self-Elegy*, and philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's view that life is a recurring cycle of desire, suffering, and satisfaction. Within a short span of about three hundred characters, the quoted content spans ancient and modern times, China and abroad, and the fields of psychology, literature, and philosophy. Due to the close logical connections among them, the reading experience is neither pedantic nor obstructed by dense allusions.

In the internet age, citing extensively has become easy. However, it is still easy to distinguish between forced quotations used to "show off" and naturally occurring, apt, and appropriate allusions. Beyond examining the logic of the writing and the transitions and turns of the rhetorical style, understanding the author and his times remains a very useful method. From Professor Dai's essays, we learn about his educational journey and reading preferences. For example, because he enjoyed English essays, he directly translated them himself. His proficiency in English even allowed him to read some original English philosophical works. With

this kind of diligent and persevering scholarly spirit, the famous authors and works that Professor Dai writes about are not merely quoted but become natural expressions of the landscapes in his mind and the light from his pen.

For this reason, Professor Dai's extensive citations are truly adept; no matter what literature he quotes, it blends seamlessly with the article's purpose, like salt in water or nectar in flowers, greatly broadening readers' horizons, making them feel as if they have entered a treasure mountain, lingering with delight.

Integrating scholarly depth into literary creation is another manifestation of the strength of Professor Dai's essays. Fan Jun's "A Brief Discussion on Dai Jianye's 'Catchphrase Trilogy'" (Fan Jun, 2026) praises Professor Dai's essays for possessing "two pens"—the seamless integration of the scholar's pen and the writer's pen. In Professor Dai's writing, scholarship is by no means obscure or dull; instead, it has a lightness that can move mountains.

For instance, in "In Praise of Eros" (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.159), which discusses when the Nineteen Old Poems were composed, the author, relying on his clear understanding of the characteristics of Western Han and Eastern Han society, uses three arguments—differences in the practice of naming taboos, the construction of Luoyang city, and the emergence of individual self-awareness—to concisely infer that the Nineteen Old Poems were written in the late Eastern Han period. Regarding who wrote the Nineteen Old Poems, he integrates the historical context, starting from the distinction in the minds of people of that time between the refined four-character verse and the more vernacular five-character verse, explaining that the poems' anonymity is precisely because five-character verse was not yet considered elegant enough for authors to wish to attach their names. This conclusion also serves as counter-evidence that the Nineteen Old Poems were not written by Cao Zhi or the Jian'an poets, as the five-character poems surviving from the Jian'an period all bear authors' names, indicating that the era of the "prosperity of five-character verse" centered around Cao Zhi had already begun by the Jian'an period. The entire reasoning process is handled with ease, like a skilled butcher dissecting an ox, demonstrating the author's profound accumulation in history and literature as well as his sharp thinking.

The scholarly expression in Professor Dai's essays is like Bai Juyi's yuefu poetry—understandable even to an old woman. Academic research is most prone to being so specialized that it becomes inaccessible to outsiders, but Professor Dai's integration of "two pens" can move this mountain, opening a path for the general reader in the promotion of general education and the popularization of classical Chinese learning.

Unique and profound insights are yet another manifestation of the strength of Professor Dai's essays. The "Catchphrase Trilogy" contains many unique and profound insights, especially when interpreting classical poetry, where these insights burst forth like light, illuminating the reader's eyes. For example, Professor Dai's observation that the lines "The sun rises from the remaining night of the old year / Spring enters the old year before it departs" contain the vigorous and powerful spirit of the High Tang era is very impressive. Perhaps these lines are simply the poet's natural description of time and seasonal changes, but Professor Dai discovered the positive spirit and power within them, and the nurturing influence of High Tang ethos on the poet's

temperament and poetic spirit—profound and thorough. Classical literary research is Professor Dai's specialty, so his brilliance there may not be surprising. Let us then take two examples of his discussions of social issues.

For example, in "Classmate, Say It Properly" (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.105), the author defying the majority opinion, offers a fair and serious critique of the Zhejiang Province college entrance examination perfect-scored essay "Living in the Trees." He hits the nail on the head, pointing out that this essay, as obscure as a heavenly script, crammed with a host of philosophical, sociological, ethical, and literary giants, and filled with pseudo-academic stylistic expression, essentially catered to the grading preferences of the head of the Zhejiang Province essay grading panel, representing a kind of insincere and opportunistic writing. Moreover, the personal preferences of the grading panel head are harmful to society. Faced with specious issues, ordinary people find it difficult to make independent judgments and often merely submit to authority or follow the crowd. However, Professor Dai, confronting an expert on grading college entrance examination essays and a dazzling "perfect-scored" essay, maintained a clear head and independent judgment. His insight derived not only from his logical reasoning skills but also from his deep familiarity with Chinese and foreign classics—the very foundation of his independent judgment.

In "A Robust Life Needs Even More Reasons" (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.71), regarding the incident where a Liaoning Province top scorer in the college entrance examination withdrew from the University of Hong Kong to retake the exam, aspiring to be admitted to Peking University to study "pure Chinese classics," the author bluntly states that "retaking the exam is harmful to one's physical and mental health." He objectively analyzes the respective characteristics of the University of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese universities and frankly criticizes the official media for over inflating the issue. The top scorer's withdrawal and retaking of the exam might be merely a personal act, but Professor Dai observes the social impact of this incident and the potentially dangerous factors that could emerge from it. Professor Dai's insights on social issues are not only unique but also embody the intellectual's integrity and sense of responsibility, helping readers gain intellectual inspiration.

Superb writing technique is yet another manifestation of the strength of Professor Dai's essays that attracts readers. The "Catchphrase Trilogy" is written with a brilliant pen, turning everything into wit. It is not only meaningful but also interesting, bringing readers aesthetic pleasure and even a sense of deep satisfaction from reading. Professor Dai's writing techniques are seamlessly integrated between the lines, too numerous to list. Here, I will take a shortcut—using the technique of glimpsing a leopard through a single spot—and use the titles of Professor Dai's essays alone to demonstrate this conclusion.

For instance, opening *Romantic to Death*, one is immediately struck by a title like "Life May Have No 'Meaning,' But It Cannot Lack 'Interest'" (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.12). How can life lack meaning? This is almost a subversion of the worldview and outlook on life that people have long held. After reading the essay, the reader suddenly understands: lofty "meanings" of life often lead people into difficulty and disappointment; life goals tailored to oneself allow one to truly experience the beauty of life. For those troubled by life, at a low point in their career, or pessimistic about society, living with "interest" is a warm way station on a long journey, and can even be a destination.

The book *Romantic to Death* contains many such “click bait” titles, such as “Su Dongpo the Foodie” (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.37). This is an elegant essay under a vulgar title. It quotes extensively from Su Shi’s poems, essays, and other writings, as well as original passages from poetry critiques, notes, historical records, Buddhist scriptures, and includes some textual research on names and objects. Much of this content would normally be daunting to the average reader, but through Professor Dai’s inspired pen, it becomes a pathway for readers to understand Su Shi’s life experiences and personal integrity. Other examples include “Rap Master and Life Expert,” reviewing Bai Juyi’s poetry, and “Studying Art Like Studying Plants and Animals,” reviewing Taine’s *Philosophy of Art*—all captivating titles. The titles mentioned earlier, such as “Classmate, Say It Properly” and “A Robust Life Needs More Reasons,” adopt film titles and internet slang, creating a playful psychological interaction with readers that they will readily appreciate.

2. The Power of Warmth

The “Catchphrase Trilogy” is a work with warmth. The enthusiasm, candor, vividness, and humor nurtured by the author’s true nature are like a spring breeze on the face, giving readers spiritual warmth and humanistic care, and inspiring them to pursue the beauty of life.

Respect for women, along with a bold and progressive view of gender, love, and marriage, is the warmth and strength that the “Trilogy” gives to all women, and men as well. Professor Dai’s advocacy for gender equality is far more radical than that of ordinary people. His views strike directly at the taboos of traditional Chinese norms. In “What Is the Most Precious Betrothal Gift a Son-in-Law Can Give to His Mother-in-Law’s Family?” (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.51), the author makes the resounding point that without equality between the sexes, any morality concerning the sexes is merely discrimination and prejudice, with “chastity” being a typical manifestation of such discrimination and prejudice. The author then startlingly points out that a girl without a hymen can still be a chaste woman. Even if she has had premarital sexual relations with a partner, when she finds that partner unsuitable for her, she should bravely break up; such a woman is truly a contemporary woman capable of loving and hating and possessing her own mind. The author further advises all young women to know how to protect themselves physiologically and psychologically during premarital sexual activity, especially reminding more traditional girls not to develop feelings of guilt or anxiety.

Professor Dai opposes the suppression and constraint of women by the concept of chastity. This view is based not only on the idea of gender equality but also on the affirmation of human nature. In “Facing Oneself: On ‘Sex’” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.61), written in 2012, the author points out that the sexual instinct is inherent in our human nature; accepting and affirming sex means accepting and affirming ourselves. If we only know how to view sex as ugly, people cannot affirm themselves, cannot appreciate the opposite sex, and patriarchal societies are particularly prone to demeaning women. His exaltation of human nature, his recognition and affirmation of female desire, and especially his advocacy for “sexual equality” between men and women, are still highly pertinent to the entrenched problems of current social issues even 14 years later. They remain bold, progressive ideas, and are advocacy and appeals that society should still cherish and value.

The “Trilogy’s” writings about parents and children are not only deeply moving songs of familial love but also reflections on family education and parent-child relationships, candid acknowledgments of personal trauma, sincere exchanges with parents, essential reading for parenting, and beneficial guidance for the growth of young people. From “I Am Dai Jianye” (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.1) and “Mom, I Want to Be Your Son Again in My Next Life” (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.189), we learn that Professor Dai’s father was a handsome, scholarly man, a “good man” admired throughout his life by his mother. Perhaps due to the frustrations of his era, he had a violent temper, was overly eager for quick success in raising his children, and was extremely strict, causing great psychological harm and leading to a lonely, unsociable personality in his youth, even almost making him lose interest in school. Childhood trauma not only takes a lifetime to heal but can also fatefully extend to the next generation: Professor Dai honestly admits that he unconsciously followed his father’s methods in raising his own son. Although from the reader’s perspective, both father and son are successful models of parenting, Professor Dai profoundly recognizes that the value orientation of “hoping one’s son will become a dragon” can turn parents into demons and children’s childhoods into nightmares. Professor Dai says his “criticism” of his father is essentially a “self-condemnation”: how could he replicate the pain he had suffered onto his own child? Perhaps the value orientation of our entire society should change, no longer making the so-called “standing out” the sole goal of success, but bravely accepting ordinariness and accepting a child who grows up healthily according to their own wishes.

In contrast to his father, Professor Dai’s mother was an uneducated rural woman. However, she was gentle, reasonable, tolerant, and kind. Most valuable of all, she was very skilled at communicating with her children, knowing how to speak words that would resonate with them. She was also an interesting mother, nourishing her children’s hearts with joy and happiness in the most ordinary of days. In “Hakka-accented Mandarin Chats about Macheng” (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.114), Professor Dai recalls how as a child, after his mother made meat cake, she would stroke his head and say, “Have a taste, good little dog, have the New Year first.” When she made fire-baked flatbread, she would say, “Which little glutton wants to eat first?” These warm images convey not only the mother’s diligence and capability but also her loving kindness and sense of fun. Children raised by fun parents usually grow up to live happy lives.

The “Trilogy” also pours out care and affection for his students, and concern and attachment for the broader community of learners. This is a teacher’s unique emotion, as well as a teacher’s unique sense of mission and responsibility. In “The Most Beautiful Teacher-Student Love in the World” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.136+143), written respectively for students from his time as a visiting professor in Taiwan and for the graduating class of 2012 at Central China Normal University, Professor Dai uses heartfelt prose to articulate the essence of the teacher-student relationship: the teacher feels a high sense of responsibility and selfless care for students, perceiving the value of their own existence through giving and obtaining a “peak experience” of self-realization; the student feels deep gratitude for the teacher’s care, respect for the teacher’s character, admiration for the teacher’s wisdom, and through interaction with the teacher, expands their own knowledge and elevates their own character. The most beautiful teacher-student love is the mutual growth and mutual achievement of teacher and student.

For the broad community of learners, even though they are not his own students, Professor Dai does not forget to encourage and enlighten them. When they face the first major challenge of life, the “college entrance examination,” or when they choose to pursue graduate studies, he writes numerous heartfelt articles, guiding them with his own life experience and wisdom.

Professor Dai himself is also a good student. His diligent and persevering scholarly spirit is very inspiring, serving as a powerful model. In “The Aspect of Learning and the Gateway to Writing” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.247), Professor Dai recounts his experience of not valuing textual criticism (philology) as an undergraduate, then teaching himself the subject after starting work through the works of Zhang Shunhui, and finally engaging in textual criticism research himself. Through this retrospective, the article highlights the profound importance and role of textual criticism in academic research, underscores Zhang Shunhui’s great academic achievement of helping researchers clarify “the aspect of learning” and find “the gateway to writing,” and simultaneously, through his own experience of learning textual criticism, points young scholars toward the path of learning. In “The Joy of Affection” (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.242), discussing his relationship with the historian Xiong Tieji, the author says that teacher-student friendship should be judged “by the heart, not by outward signs”. Professor Xiong was not formally his teacher, but in his heart, he deeply respects Professor Xiong as a teacher. Although there was no formal teacher-student connection in deeds, there was the sentiment of teacher and student. Professor Dai transforms his inner respect and admiration for Professor Xiong into witty, humorous, deeply sincere, and affectionate prose, bringing Professor Xiong's noble character, scholarly demeanor, and endearing personality vividly to life.

Professor Dai’s humor and wit are not only a distinguishing feature of his identity as “Professor Dai Jianye,” but also a hallmark of the “Dai Jianye style.” His humorous expressions give readers a pleasant and relaxed reading atmosphere, deepen the impression of the reading, and increase the reader's gains from reading. Professor Dai’s humor sometimes suddenly emerges from between the lines, catching readers off guard and tickling their funny bone. In “Hakka-accented Mandarin Chats about Macheng” (Dai Jianye, 2025, p.114), after praising the delicious Macheng meat cake, his wife says: “The only good thing about marrying this bumpkin is getting to eat meat cake.” Professor Dai then writes, “I must truly thank my hometown’s meat cake; it gives my mouth flavor and my face glory.” This is a display of the deep love between husband and wife, but also an expression of Professor Dai’s playful humor. Reading this, I couldn't help but laugh. Humor needs to be experienced personally, not argued for, so I will not elaborate further here.

The “Trilogy” integrates the author’s nostalgia, familial affection, friendship, romantic love, and teacher-student love, as well as the intellectual's sense of responsibility, commitment, and love for society.

3. The Power of Ideological Appeal

The “Trilogy” contains many profound reflections. The issues the author critiques, the concepts and actions he advocates, and the proposals and warnings he issues all possess significant and enduring practical relevance, exerting a powerful attraction and guidance for readers.

“Men” is the first essay in the first volume of the “Trilogy,” and its viewpoint and advocated spirit run

throughout the entire “Trilogy.” This spirit and viewpoint is the advocacy and pursuit of vitality and passion in life, and a critique of the mediocre and dispirited reality of society.

The author uses Li Bai as an example, advocating the poet's extremely heightened exuberance of life, his defiant arrogance and wildness, and his astonishingly imaginative hyperbole, believing them to be filled with the great national vitality of our nation's peak period. The author criticizes the popularity of “peace is a blessing,” the prevalence of “a contented mind is a perpetual feast,” and the fashion for “ignorance is bliss,” seeing them as signs of the exhaustion of the era's passion and the decline of public morale. While many people adopt “ignorance is bliss” as their motto, Professor Dai declares that he hates this “life maxim” that the whole populace esteems, because its essence is to teach people to disregard right and wrong and to lose the spirit of struggle. In “No Fine Lakeside Views Here Like at Home” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.105), the author again criticizes the three maxims mentioned above, encouraging young people to leave their hometowns and realize their “Chinese Dream” in the wider world. Even when visiting scenic spots, Professor Dai issues a call, hoping that people will revere the courage to leap into the abyss, like the Huang Guoshu Waterfall, and the spirit of sacrifice willing to be dashed to pieces—this is precisely a negation and critique of a mediocre existence. When advising graduate students, Professor Dai passionately urges young scholars to possess an “irrepressible passion and impulse for their work.” What the author advocates is not the kind of spectacular life that ordinary people find difficult to achieve, but a life that does not let one's talents go to waste, a life of pursuit, achievement, and courage, a life that radiates vitality, a life that struggles against inertia and decline.

Professor Dai is unafraid to express views that differ from the mainstream culture of “going with the flow,” demonstrating extraordinary courage and intellectual independence. The vitality of life, spirit of adventure, and passion for life that Professor Dai advocates are even more valuable and meaningful in today's society, where being a “Buddhist youth” or “lying flat” is popular.

Contemporary society is increasingly advanced in information technology, bringing profound changes and transformations to every field. For instance, in the realm of communication and learning, the emergence of the internet and AI technology has completely transformed traditional ways of reading, writing, and interacting. While people fully enjoy the convenience and benefits brought by new technologies, Professor Dai has also personally experienced being both a surfer and a trailblazer on the internet. However, Professor Dai quickly identified the problems.

The drawbacks of online reading that Professor Dai identifies and criticizes serve as a wake-up call for modern society, where information technology is developing rapidly. They are sincere advice to all internet users and an appeal for humanity to hold fast to its own capacity for thought. Looking back at Professor Dai's remarks in today's AI era, we can further appreciate his strong foresight and accurate judgment, and recognize even more clearly that the alarm bell he rang is still resonating.

In 2012, Professor Dai wrote an article titled “The Flattening of Thought and the Fragmentation of Knowledge” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.109) commenting on Weibo (microblogging), pointing out that its disadvantages outweigh its advantages. Although Weibo, as a new form of expression and communication platform, has brought many benefits, the author argues that if a person frequents Weibo for a long time, it will

lead to the flattening of thought, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the blunting of senses. Professor Dai very accurately points out that most Weibo statements are “positions” and “expressions of attitude”—isolated conclusions that cannot present a person’s thought process. However, Hegel said in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that “the process of thinking is more important and more valuable than the conclusion of thought.” The large number of illogical expressions on Weibo, along with the transience and fluidity of the content, ultimately lead to the flattening of thought. Moreover, the vast amount of miscellaneous knowledge on Weibo is fragmented, piling up in the brain and ultimately leading to a situation where a person seems to know everything in general but knows nothing when it comes to practical application. At the same time, the constant novelty of Weibo information and the strange tales from home and abroad initially provide a sense of freshness, but over time, people go from novelty to boredom, from shock to numbness, resulting in a dull and indifferent feeling that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Weibo addiction can also lead many enthusiasts to become irritable, distracted, and unable to focus on reading or studying after returning to the real world.

In an article published in 2020, “Reading Habits and the Future of Life” (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.129), Professor Dai suggests that in today’s society, where it is impossible to reject mobile and internet reading, people should read classics online or on their phones, upgrading from casual browsing to challenging reading, because different reading choices determine whether a person’s future will be “outstanding” or “unexceptional.”

Professor Dai, the “clickbait” master, also wrote “Watch Out! Your Idle Brain Will Be Taken Away” (Dai Jianye, 2023b, p.141). Although the article discusses the importance of thinking, looking back from the early days of the internet to the present emergence of AI, countless teenagers are addicted to the internet and gaming, countless adults are addicted to the distractions of smartphones, and countless students have gone from relying on search engines to thinking to replacing thinking with AI. In modern society, with its rapid iteration of information technology, our brains are being increasingly thoroughly idled. How far away can the day when they are taken away be?

As a university teacher, Professor Dai’s reflections on higher education are also profound and forward-looking. As early as 2011, in “Can We Please Not Torment Doctoral Students?” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.86), Professor Dai raised profound questions such as “Who can think of a way to not torment doctoral students?” and “Who can think of a way to not torment Chinese academia?” Fifteen years later, doctoral students are still “striving” for the quantity and “level” of their publications, and Chinese academia still has not emerged from the vicious circle of measuring academic standards by “level.” Similarly, fifteen years ago, in “Compulsory or Elective?” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.78), Professor Dai suggested that universities should pay attention to College Chinese education, putting forward practical proposals to enhance the instrumental, practical, and aesthetic aspects of the College Chinese course, hoping that through this course, students would feel the charm of their mother tongue, improve their thinking abilities, and master the norms and techniques of academic paper writing. However, today, many university curricula have removed College Chinese from their offerings.

In “Just Kidding: Undergraduate Thesis Defense” (Dai Jianye, 2023a, p.89), the “going through the motions and formalities” that Professor Dai criticized remains, over a decade later, one of the persistent problems of higher education.

The British scholar and chairman of the board of editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica, Mortimer Adler, once proposed criteria for selecting classics: classics are enduring bestsellers; classics are accessible to the general public; classics do not lose their value with political changes; classics are rewarding to read repeatedly; classics are most influential, most inspiring and instructive, and contain unique insights. If we ask whether Professor Dai's “Trilogy” meets the above criteria, this question must be left to the judgment of more readers and the passage of longer time. Professor Dai is an extremely humble and clear-headed gentleman. May Professor Dai continue to create freely and spontaneously, and continue to guide readers with his independent spirit and free thinking.

As a native of Hubei Province who graduated with a BA in Chinese from Central China Normal University, reading and reviewing Professor Dai's essay “Trilogy” is a task imbued with a sense of mission. Although I know that I cannot match Professor Dai's book reviews in combining insight with literary elegance, giving equal weight to praise and criticism, I nevertheless, disregarding my own shallowness, have boldly taken up my pen, hoping to sincerely seek the guidance of Professor Dai himself and other experts in the field.

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ORCID

Ma Lili ^{ID} <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4565-4916>

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