

Episode 17

Cultural Analysis 文化解析

(in the form of a dialogue between a younger brother [B] and an older sister [S] who are college students in the US)

S: Well, little brother, we need to present some more information about using English in social situations—like the proper way to invite guests to a party, and the proper way to accept an invitation. Not that you would know.

B: Hey, I go to parties almost every weekend at college. I'm a big man on campus. Ask anyone.

S: We're talking about proper social situations here, **Squid Brain** (小腦袋). I've heard about the sort of parties you go to. More like **mob scenes** (暴徒現場) than actual parties. Were you even invited?

B: Well, not exactly.

S: Hah! I knew it. **Gate-crasher** (不請自來的不速之客)! Now there's a useful term. A gate-crasher is someone who goes to a party without being invited. There was a movie a few years back, **Wedding Crashers** (婚禮終結者), about two guys who try to meet women by showing up uninvited at weddings. Hey, Bro, maybe that's a career for you.

B: Very funny. Listen, I happen to know a thing or two about invitations. I went to my **senior prom** (畢業舞會) in high school.

S: Didn't you end up inviting three different girls before you found one who accepted? You certainly are experienced!

B: All right, let's get down to business. Actually, there are different kinds of parties. Like the big parties I go to at school, they're pretty much open parties. You hear about them and just show up. No invitation or confirmation necessary. Then there are smaller parties with friends where the invitation and acceptance happen over the phone, in person, or by email.

S: Then there are formal parties and occasions: weddings, fancy dinners, that kind of thing. With those, you usually receive a fancy, written invitation that says "R.S.V.P." and there's usually a deadline for sending your response, maybe even an "R.S.V.P." card to send back. Do you know what "R.S.V.P." stands for?

B: Umm . . . "Really, my Sister's Very **Pompous** (自大)?"

S: Seriously, you **clown** (小丑).

B: I know, I know. It's French: "*Répondez, s'il vous plaît,*" which means, "Please reply." Why do we use a French expression in English, anyway?

S: Actually, there're borrowed words in every language. The Norman conquest of England brought in a French influence upon the English language and culture. Nowadays, we can even use "R.S.V.P." as a verb, as in, "I forgot to R.S.V.P. to that invitation." OK, here's a question for you: What does it mean if an invitation says "Regrets only"?

B: Wow, **beats me** (我懂).

S: That means if you can't go, you should send your "regrets." But if you can go, you don't need to reply—the host will just **assume** (臆測) that the answer is yes.

B: Hey, very efficient. Maybe I'll try that next time I ask someone out on a date!