

A New Leaf

It's the same every New Year. I unearth my dusty old kanji book from its resting place at the bottom of my closet and promise that this will be the year, definitely! I solemnly swear to learn 20 new kanji a week for 52 weeks and.....by the first week of February the book is where I found it, gathering dust again.....

I have always had trouble with New Year's resolutions. As a boy, I would dutifully set out my road plan for the year ahead; as much, I think, to please my parents as anything. As a naïve youngster I foolishly set down verifiable targets e.g. I will never tell a lie or I will wash the dishes 3 times a week but as I grew older and wiser, I learned to choose more abstract goals – I will be a good boy,/ I will think positively, the violation of which was that much harder to prove.

According to research, the most popular New Year's resolutions are: to give up smoking, to get fit, to take a trip and (Scottish influence here I suspect) to be less grumpy. Social scientists estimate that there is a 52% expectation of success for New Year's resolutions but in reality only 12% are actually achieved.

This hopeful (or hopeless) optimism is neatly expressed in a very old expression that will be heard a lot around the UK at this time of year:

'I am going to turn over a new leaf!' meaning I intend to reform my terrible lifestyle and reinvent myself.

The leaf in question is not of the herbaceous variety but refers to a page (leaf) of a book, as with each new year we imagine ourselves beginning a new chapter of a novel, or perhaps unfolding a pristine page of a notebook.

The most popular form of reinvention in recent years in the UK is probably the 'makeover' by which the traditionally dowdy, uncoordinated Brits are transformed into style warriors. This is achieved by the simple application of expert advice from fashion gurus like TV's 'Trinny and Susanna' whose immensely popular shows like 'What not to wear' (recently featured on Japanese TV) have helped to restyle over 5,000 women! With the January sales about to begin this is the best time to test out their philosophy.

By the way, Trinny and Susanna's latest idea is to classify body shapes into types such as 'apple', 'lollipop' and 'pencil' and offer style guidance accordingly. I think I may be a 'pencil'. How about you?

Of course, not everyone embraces the spirit of self correction this season offers. Some older cynics are apt to stubbornly reject any encouragement at self improvement or restyling by replying:

'You can't teach an old dog new tricks!'

Which in turn invites the clinching:

'You're never too old to learn!'

Now where's that kanji book?

http://www.timeout.com/london/features/4039/Beat_the_January_blues.html
http://www.bbc.co.uk/lifestyle/tv_and_radio/what_not_to_wear/