

# 新编汉英 成语词典

席士敏 编著

A New Concise  
Dictionary of  
Chinese-English  
Idioms

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# 前言

中国的成语,是中国语言文学的一枝奇葩。生动传神的成语,帮助我们增强了语言的表达能力,丰富了语言的色彩。在文学作品中,运用恰当的成语,能使文章精炼增色,活泼有趣,通篇生辉。

记得在求学时代,我就很爱好成语,并曾搜集过成语的典故和出处。后来阅读了许多外国文学名著,发现英语以及其他语言也都有大量能与汉成语媲美的成语,从兴趣出发,也搜集积累了不少资料。到上世纪60年代时,我萌生了汇编汉英成语词典的设想。之后就利用业余时间,开始了有系统的整理和汇编的案头工作。虽进展很慢,期间却得到了不少有识之士的指教和帮助。

这本词典共收汉语成语约4320条。所收入者,大都是目前通用的成语和俚语;冷僻或已少见的成语概予割爱。翻译方式为直译①、意译②和对应译③三种。成语直译,读者可能不易理解,但它能表达原词的含义,所以也是需要的。好在有意译和对应译可以相互参照,读者就容易理解成语的基本内容了,而且更能印证原词的精妙。

汉语成语是与中国悠久的历史一起传承下来的,源远流长。一句成语虽然只有四个汉字,却往往是一则历史故事或者一篇寓言。如“暗渡陈仓”,这是讲述中国古代楚汉相争的一段历史;“叶公好龙”,则是嘲讽那种只会夸夸其谈而不能脚踏实地去实行的人的丑态。要解释清楚上述的历史故事和寓言,势必篇幅冗长。本词典因属于一般性工具书,故对此不再作探源注释等知识性的介绍。对有些经长期演变而丧失原意,或者竟然已褒贬倒置的成语,本词典均以现今通用、约定俗成的意义为准。

近年来,世界各国对学习汉语正在形成热潮。不仅学生来我国攻读汉语,不少国家也已纷纷在中学和大学里开设了汉语课。成语是汉语的重要组成部分。为此,汇编这本词典,旨在帮助学习汉语者,爱好阅读中国文学作品者,以及翻译工作者,更好地理解中国成语、运用中国成语时作个参考。

本词典的出版,承马之骧、张有良、范莉云、夏长新、郭延等大力协助,在此一并感谢。

本词典定有不少未完善处,敬请专家、读者批评指正。

## Preface

Chinese idioms is one of the wonderful works of literary language. Vital and vivid idioms help us to strengthen the expressing ability and enrich the language flavour. Applying suitable idioms throughout a piece of writing makes the essay increase its flavour, fascination and splendour.

When I was a middle school student, I was very fond of idioms. Collecting the idioms' literary quotation and its source was my favourite interest. After having read a lot of foreign famous literary works, I realized that in English and other languages there are also a variety of idioms which can be compared with the Chinese ones. Out of interest, I collected and accumulated a number of material. Up to 1960s, I had an idea of compiling a dictionary on Chinese-English idioms. Afterwards, I began to sort out and compile systematically my desk work in my leisure time. The progress was slow. During that period, a number of intellectuals gave me much help and advice.

This book contains about 4320 idioms and slangs. Many of them are in common use at present. Unfamiliar and seldomly used idioms are all rejected reluctantly. The idioms are sorted out into three categories, i. e., "direct interpretation" ①, "free translation" ② and "equivalent (or counterpart)" ③. It is not easy for the readers to comprehend the "direct interpretations". However, they can express the original meaning. Fortunately, "free translation" and "equivalent" are in consultation with each other. Readers can easily understand the fundamental contents of the idioms. Moreover, it can also confirm the exquisiteness of its original term.

Chinese idioms are handed down together with a history of long standing. It goes back to ancient times. Although there are always only four Chinese characters in an idiom, yet, more often than not, there is a historical story or a piece of fable. For example, "secretly going along another path" tells a dual between Chu and Han Dynasties in ancient time; "Lord Ye's love of dragon" sneers at those who indulge in exaggerations without earnest and down-to-earth attitude. In case you want to explain the above-mentioned story and fables, the entries will be too long. This dictionary belongs to a general

reference book. Therefore it is impossible to do knowledge introduction such as origin trace and annotation. To those idioms which have gone through a long period of evolution thus lose their original meaning or even turn the praise and censure upside down, this book takes the meaning in current use and established usage as the standard.

Recently, many countries the world over are in favour of learning Chinese. Not only a large amount of foreign students come from abroad to learn Chinese language, many foreign middle schools and universities offer a course of Chinese subject. Idioms are a component part of Chinese language. For this reason compiling this book is for the purpose of helping those who are eager to learn Chinese language, to read Chinese literary works, and to realize Chinese idioms.

Thanks to Prof. Ma Zhizhou, Mr. Zhang Youliang, Xia Changxin and Fan Liyun who gave me much help in the course of my compiling this book.

Imperfection in this book are almost inevitable. Criticisms and comments are welcome.

Xi Shimin  
June 10, 2008

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【哀而不伤】 āi ér bù shāng

① (said of a person) mournful but not distressing ② (said of poetry, music) graceful, refined, with moderate degree of feelings/(said of doing things) in an appropriate way or to a reasonable degree, neither more nor less than/to a proper extent/just suited/in moderation ③ within limits/to a T (or turn)/to a nicety/just right/The cap fits.

【哀鸿遍野】 āi hóng biàn yě

① The wild (or wailing) geese cry mournfully everywhere. ② disaster victims moaning all over the place/a land swarming with famished refugees/a land of wailing and despair/destitute people to be found everywhere/The wilderness is filled with sufferers./The land is filled with disaster-stricken refugees./Calamity-stricken masses fill the wilderness./Famine-stricken people are found everywhere./Distressed populace fill the wilds./The poor and helpless roam about in their plight./Starving people fill the land. ③ displaced persons (or D. P.'s) everywhere

【唉声叹气】 āi shēng tàn qì

① sorrowful sound with a deep sigh ② an exclamation of regret or disgust/in a weary, sighing voice/give deploring interjections and sighs/sigh in despair/heave a groan ③ moan and groan

【矮人观(看)场】 ǎi rén guān (kàn) chǎng

① the dwarf seeing a show/A short person applauds or boos with audience in theater although he cannot see the play. ② lack independent judgement/follow suit without knowing why/follow the reaction of others without opinion of one's own/ follow the majority blindly/follow another's lead in voicing opinions ③ repeat like a parrot/play second fiddle

【爱不释手】 āi bù shì shǒu

① unwilling to let go for the sake of love ② love sth. too much to part with it/be so delighted with sth. that one can hardly bear to put it down/like sth. so much that one cannot bear to part with it/be reluctant to put sth. away/have an inseparable attachment to sth./clasp sth. to one's heart/hate to go without sth./too fond of sth. to let go of it/unable to tear oneself away from sth./unwilling to kiss sth. good-bye/wouldn't part with sth. for all the world/fondle admiringly/want to keep ③ set (or lay) great (or much, a lot of) store by (or on)



【爱财如命】 ài cái rú mìng

- ① love money as one loves one's life/love wealth (or mammon) like one's life ② actuated by love for riches/hold on to one's money like dear life/put money above everything else/greedy for money/stingy/the accursed thirst/be a money-grubber/The only interest in life is making money. ③ rake and scrape/skin a flint/whip the cat/tight as a drum/skin a flea for its hide/Miser put their back and their belly into their pockets.

【爱莫能助】 ài mò néng zhù

- ① unable to help even though one wants ② willing to help but unable to do so/powerless to do what one likes to/unable to do what one is eager to/desirous but unable to help/would be glad to help but cannot/glad but powerless to render assistance/sympathetic but unable to help ③ The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak./One's hands are tied.

【爱屋及乌】 ài wū jí wū

- ① If you love sb.'s house, you should also love the crows that perch on it./Love for a person extends even to the crows on his (or her) roof. ② love one thing on account of another/If you love any one, you should like all that belongs to him./If one loves somebody, one will or should love everyone associated with him (or her)./Anyone who wishes to remain friendly with me will have to accept and tolerate all that belongs to me./When one loves another, the affection extends even to his (or her) relatives. ③ Love me, love my dog. / He who loves the tree loves the branches.

【爱憎分明】 ài zēng fēn míng

- ① clear-cut on (or clear about) what to love and what to hate/ draw a clear demarcation between whom or what to love and whom or what to hate ② have a very acute sense of love and hatred/unequivocal love and hatred ③ see everything in black and white

【碍手碍脚】 ài shǒu ài jiǎo

- ① obstruct (the movement of) one's hand and feet ② in such a position or of such a nature as to cause inconvenience/impede the progress/be a hindrance/cumbersome ③ stand in one's way

【安不忘危】 ān bù wàng wēi

- ① In time of security do not be unprepared for the possibility of danger. ② mindful of possible danger in time of peace/always provide against danger/Never relax one's vigilance while one lives in peace./In time of peace take precautions against a rainy day. ③ If you wish for peace, be

prepared for war.

【安步当车】 ān bù dàng chē

- ① Walking step by step is as good as riding in a carriage. / Walk over leisurely on foot is as good as going about in a chariot. / Walk with ease is as good as riding in a cart. ② walk rather than ride/hike rather than drive ③ go on shank's mare/ leg (or foot) it/ ride Bayard of ten toes/pad the hoof/take Mr. Foot's horse/hit the grit/skin stage/ride the shoe leather express/ride on the marrow-bone coach/take the walker's bus

【安常处顺】 ān cháng chǔ shùn

- ① accustomed to a comfortable life and being under favourable circumstances ② take the peaceful world as one finds it/go along with things as they are/rest content with the status quo/live in comfort/lead a sheltered life/content oneself with/self-complacent/self-content/self-satisfied ③ in smooth water/sail before (or with) the wind/let well alone

【安分守己】 ān fèn shǒu jǐ

- ① keep one's duty and have self-control ② abide by the law and behave oneself/walk up to the trough, fodder or no fodder/contend oneself with bounden duty/control one's own behavior/be counted with one's lot/mind one's own business ③ dree one's weird/keep on the rails/know (or keep) one's place/live within the tether/shinny on one's own side/follow the straight and narrow/ remain in one's proper sphere/stick to one's last/keep to oneself/let the cobbler stick to his last/The goat must browse where she is tied./Where the buck is bound, there he must bleat.

【安富尊荣】 ān fù zūn róng

- ① content with one's wealth and rank ② ensure one's own prosperity and position/enjoy wealth and honour/indulge in comfort and revel in an honourable position/mind one's safety, wealth, dignity and honour/live in the best possible material way, especially without much effort of one's own ③ go large and eat the bread of idleness/eat (or live on) the fat of the land/ live (or be) in clover/live high off the hog/eat high on the hog/live on easy street/sit in high cotton

【安家落户】 ān jiā luò hù

- ① fix one's abode and live permanently in a place ② set up a home and settle down/take up one's residence/make one's home in a place/ settle down in a place/ establish oneself ③ hitch one's team to the fence/put down roots/plant oneself/range oneself/make one's pitch/set (or put) up (or down) one's staff/pitch one's tent/stick one's spoon in the wall/put

one's shoes under the bed

【安居乐业】 ān jū lè yè

- ① enjoy security in one's dwelling-place and take delight in his occupation  
② take up one's residence/make a good living and feed contented in his (or her) station/live in peace and work in happiness/live and work in peace and contentment/live in prosperity and contentment/enjoy a good and prosperous life ③ drive stakes/drop one's anchor

【安乐窝】 ān lè wō

- ① peaceful and pleasant nest ② a pleasant and easy place/a happy retreat/a place for contented living/place of ease and comfort/an easy, comfortable situation/a situation of peace, pleasure, happiness, etc./an abode of pleasure ③ cosy (or love) nest/bed of down (or roses, flowers)/lotus land/cotton wool

【安贫乐道】 ān pín lè dào

- ① contented in poverty and devoted to things spiritual ② live contentedly as a poor scholar/happy to lead a simple, virtuous life ③ submit (or bend, or bow) to one's lot (or fate) /a dog's life, hunger and ease/as happy as a pig in muck/ Better saught with little aught than (or nor) care with many (a) cow. /A horn spoon holds no poison. /I would not change with my Lord Mayor. /If we have not the world's wealth, we have the world's ease. /It is better to enjoy a little with quietness than to possess much with trouble. /Much coin much care. /Poor folks fare the best. /Poverty in surety is better than riches in fear. /Better is a little with content than much with contention.

【安然无恙】 ān rán wú yàng

- ① safe and well ② come through unhurt/come through unscathed/completely uninjured/well and in good shape/no harm done/without mishap ③ safe and sound/sound in life and limb/in (or with) a whole skin/home and dry/without a scratch/save one's skin/ land (or fall) on one's feet

【安身立命】 ān shēn lì mìng

- ① find a secure job or settled place for life and set one's vigour at rest  
② settle down and get on with one's pursuit/nestle oneself in a place for a living/establish oneself in a locality (or business)/enjoy peace and stability both physically and spiritually ③ begin the world (or go out into the world)

【安土重迁】 ān tǔ zhòng qiān

- ① not care to migrate from one's native land ② attached to one's native land and unwilling to leave it/hate to leave a place where one has lived long/dislike transfer of population to new place/love one's homeland and not wish to leave it/fond of one's home and loath to leave it for other parts/content to live in native land and unwilling to leave ③ not want to pull up stakes

【安营扎寨】 ān yíng zhā zhài

- ① camp one tent in a place and tie up a stockade ② station a military force at or in a certain place/set up a temporary station or construction site ③ pitch one's tent/drop one's anchor/ set ( or put ) up ( or down ) one's staff/drive stakes

【安于现状】 ān yú xiàn zhuàng

- ① show satisfaction with the *status quo* ② be satisfied with the existing condition and not try to make it better or different/content with things as they are ③ let well enough alone/stick in the mud

【按兵不动】 àn bīng bù dòng

- ① stop an army and take no action ② keep back the troops from battle/keep the troops unmoved or entrenched/stop the advance of an army/not throw the troops into battle/stop or delay from taking an action/await the best opportunity ③ stay one's hand/bide one's time/wait and see/play a waiting game/lay on ( or upon ) the oars/phoney war

【按部就班】 àn bù jiù bān

- ① follow a definite method or a prescribed procedure ② methodical and systematic/keep to conventional ways of doing things/proceed in an orderly way/conform to ancient customs or style ③ step by step/first things first/like a clock/learn to creep before you leap/learn to say before you sing/First catch your hare then cook them./First hatch your chickens then count them./If you want to acquire profound knowledge, you must start from the ABC.

【按图索骥】 àn tú suǒ jì

- ① look for a thoroughbred horse with the aid of its picture/look for a noble steed to correspond with the one drawn/find a horse according to a drawing ② locate sth. by a plan or chart, or by following up a clue/search after sth. according to the track/search for sth. with a key drawing/using hackneyed method/lack originality, initiative or imagination in doing a job ③ follow ( or on ) the trail

【暗渡陈仓】 àn dù chén cāng

① secretly cross the river into Chencang ② gain a secret advantage over a rival or opponent/unexpectedly gain an advantage over one's adversary/do a thing in secret/do one thing under cover of another/pretend to prepare to advance along one path while secretly going along another ③ steal a march

【暗箭伤人】 àn jiàn shāng rén

① hurt sb. with a secret arrow/shoot an arrow at someone who is unprepared for a fight/wound or harm sb. with an arrow shot from a concealed place ② slander others behind their backs/take a treacherous, unfair or mean advantage of someone/hurt sb. by employing a certain measure secretly/injure sb. by underhand means/strike the other people a foul blow/make a sniping attack ③ stab in the back/hit (or strike, tackle) below the belt

【暗送秋波】 àn sòng qiū bō

① convey the autumn ripples furtively ② send silent endearing messages with one's eyes to a man/convey love by stealing a look at a man/reveal one's love for a person by looking at him in a flirtatious way/cast (or send) amorous glances of a half-furtive sort/stealthily give sb. the glad eye/make secret overtures to sb./make friendly gestures to sb. ③ cast (or throw) sheep's eyes at sb./give sb. a come-hither/make eyes at sb./leer at sb./hitch up with sb.

【暗无天日】 àn wú tiān rì

① so dark that the sky and the sun cannot be seen/complete darkness without daylight ② gross lack of justice under misgovernment/total absence of justice/no respect of human rights/in an abyss of untold misery/under inhuman conditions/in the dark days/in a state of anarchy/without civilized law ③ The jungle law reigns.

【暗中摸索】 àn zhōng mō suǒ

① grope (or fumble) in the dark ② move about in darkness in order to find one's way/try to solve a problem without guidance ③ grope (or feel) one's way/feel after/feel all along/go darkling

【黯然失色】 àn rán shī sè

① look despondent and pale with fear ② be made to appear dull or pale into insignificance/cause to appear unimportant, ineffective, unimpressive, etc./render less noticeable, attractive, remarkable, etc., by comparison ③ be cast (or put, thrown) in (or into) the shade/be cut out of all

feathers/under (or suffer) an eclipse

【昂然自得】 áng rán zì dé

- ① upright and pleased with oneself ② behave in a self-satisfied way/  
assume a superior manner/in a stately (or pompous) manner/elated  
③ put on airs/take one's ease/walk (or tread) on air

【昂首阔步】 áng shǒu kuò bù

- ① march forward with head erect and in big stride/stride forward with  
one's chin up ② step along in high spirits/stride proudly ahead/proud or  
vainglorious/strut about ③ set up one's comb/have a roll on/square up  
and down/walk tall/hold one's head high

【嗷嗷待哺】 áo áo dài bǔ

- ① cry piteously for the breast ② (young of birds, children) clamour for  
food/The masses cry with hunger under the rule of the exploiting class.  
③ (as) hungry as a hawk/in a hungry case

【傲慢不逊】 ào màn bú xùn

- ① treat with contempt and disobedient ② behave arrogantly and rudely/  
insolent or conceited/ a portentous manner/insolate and rough ③ big as  
bull-beef/a type of Caption Grand/give cheek/have pepper in the nose/lift  
up the horn/look big/have a big hand/as proud as Lucifer

## 【八面玲珑】 bā miàn líng lóng

- ① cute in every way ② (of art objects) dexterous, dainty/(of objects) fine and dainty as seen from each side/(of persons) tactful and agreeable, able to deal with people of different opinions, ranks, etc., satisfactorily (generally used disparagingly)/(of speech) cover all sides beautifully/(of character) manage to please everybody/smooth and slick (in establishing social relations)/tactful in dealing with all sorts of people/be a perfect mixer in any company ③ all things to all men/set up one's sail to (or with) every wind/a good mixer

## 【八面威风】 bā miàn wēi fēng

- ① an awe-inspiring reputation extending in eight directions ② present a magnificent appearance/give oneself majestic airs/an aura of awesome might/a commanding presence/bright and bold/majesty and pomp/One's prestige is in its climax. ③ pomp and circumstances

## 【八字不见一撇】 bā zì bù jiàn yī piě

- ① Not even the first stroke to the left of the character is in sight. ② (of discussion) too far away from the subject/There's not the slightest sign of anything happening (or of success) yet. /Things aren't even starting to take shape yet. ③ haven't put on the drawing board

## 【拔来报往】 bá lái bào wǎng

- ① come and go busily ② exchange visits/have frequent contacts ③ fetch and carry/ride for dear life

## 【拔苗助长】 bá miáo zhù zhǎng

- ① try to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward/pull up the seedlings in order to help them grow faster ② spoil things by excessive enthusiasm or being too impatient/do harm to a thing by being over-enthusiastic/over-anxious to have sth. accomplished ③ Haste makes waste.

## 【拔山扛鼎】 bá shān gāng dǐng

- ① move a mountain and lift up a tripod ② remarkable and outstanding/have great strength/strong in physical prowess ③ herculean effort

## 【拔帜易帜】 bá zhì yì zhì

- ① haul down enemy's flag and plant one's own ② triumph by force of arms/occupy the position another person had/take the place of another and do as well/substitute satisfactorily for ③ fill a person's bonnet/fill (or step into) sb's shoes/put sb's nose out of joint

【拔箸短筹】 bá zhù duǎn chóu

- ① take the chips away as soon as one wins a little money in gambling  
② (of a person) die suddenly when still young or at the best moment of his life/die of an early age/die prematurely/die untimely/an early death/short lived ③ come to an untimely (or a premature) end/cut off in one's prime/draw a poor lot/too early to dine with Mahomet (or sup with Pluto, stick one's spoon in the well, kick the bucket, pay the debt of nature, go to the land of the leal, go to the happy hunting ground(s), go to one's maker, shuffle off this mortal coil)/One's life was cut short.

【跋前踬后】 bá qián zhì hòu

- ① encounter obstacles ahead and behind ② meet hindrances/beset with difficulties/threatened from two quarters/between two equally serious conditions or circumstances/between two courses of action, both of which are dangerous and unpleasant ③ between two fires/between Scylla and Charybdis/between the devil and the deep blue sea

【跋山涉水】 bá shān shè shuǐ

- ① climb up hills and wade rivers/scale mountains and ford streams  
② make an arduous (or difficult) journey ③ up hill and down dale

【白璧微瑕】 bái bì wēi xiá

- ① a slight (or tiny) blemish (or flaw) in a piece of white jade (or gem)  
② some small blemishes in an apparently excellent person or thing/a flaw in an otherwise perfect character/a tiny flaw which corrupts a thing of value/a slight blemish in a man's good character/small faults or defects/the little imperfections ③ a stain on one's reputation/a fly in the ointment/broken feather in one's wing/no silver (or gold) without its dross/There are lees to every wine./The best cloth may have a moth in it./There are spots (even) on (or in) the sun.

【白璧无瑕】 bái bì wú xiá

- ① flawless white jade (or gem)/a pure and spotless jade/(a rare gem) untainted and untarnished ② impeccable moral integrity/(of a person, his or her) flawless character/(of a girl, her virginity)/without a spot on one's reputation/pure and noble (or pristine)/without blemish/faultless/perfect ③ a clean sheet/a new-born babe

【白费唇舌】 bái fèi chún shé

- ① do a lot of talking for nothing ② dispute in a manner not likely to lead to any definite conclusion/speak or argue with no result/talk a lot without any effect/gain nothing by talking ③ waste one's breath/whistle down



the wind/speak to the wind

【白驹过隙】 bái jū guò xì

- ① a white colt flashing past a chink in a wall/The white horse has leaped over the crack. ② the fleeting of time/Time flies like the shadow of the sun passing through a crevice./Time passes with maddening speed./Time passes swiftly. ③ in a split second/Time and tide wait for no man.

【白面书生】 bái miàn shū shēng

- ① a pale-faced (or fair-skinned) scholar ② an inexperienced youth/a scholar inexperienced in family affairs/a pasty-faced bookworm/a fledgling ③ a greenhorn

【白日不做亏心事, 半夜敲门不惊心】 bái rì bù zuò kuī xīn shì, bàn yè qiāo mén bù jīng xīn

- ① A man who does nothing wrong by day need not fear a midnight knock./In the daylight if you do not do things which conscience condemns, you need not fear a knock at the door at midnight. ② If you have a high moral conscience, your life will be peaceful./Living a decent (or clean) life will lead us to a smoother sailing in our lives. ③ sleep the sleep of the just/A clear conscience laughs at false accusations./A clear conscience is a sure card./A good conscience is a constant feast (or soft pillow)./A quiet conscience sleeps in thunder./A clear hand wants no washing./A good anvil does not fear the hammer.

【白日做梦】 bái rì zuò mèng

- ① spin daydreams/cherish a fond (or pipe) dream ② plans, hopes or desires that are unlikely to become reality/imaginary plans/indulge in wishful thinking/a pure fancy ③ build a castle in the air (or in Spain)/seek (or plant, reap, sow) gapeseed/out to lunch/walking dream

【白手起家】 bái shǒu qǐ jiā

- ① start empty-handed ② build a fortune without resources/succeed by one's own efforts/rise in life without other people's help/build up from nothing ③ run up from a shoestring/start from scratch (or taw)/lift (or raise) oneself by one's own bootstraps

【白头如新】 bái tóu rú xīn

- ① remain aloof from each other though associated till the hair is white ② They have been acquainted with each other for a long time, but they seem to recognize only a moment ago. ③ keep at arm's length/speaking acquaintance