

# 中国谚语英译

## Chinese Proverbs with English Translations

李念培 编著

外语教学与研究出版社  
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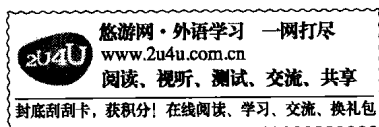
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## 前言

本书虽然以外国读者为主要对象，但自信对国内学习英语的学生以及青年翻译工作者，也具有一定的查阅价值。

首先，它提供了近两千条中国谚语的译文。在翻译过程中，作者曾力求贴切地表达原有谚语简炼或俏皮的风格。虽然往往事与愿违，这些译文在需要时或者仍然值得参考性地加以翻阅。

其次，通过多数中谚可以查阅相应的英语谚语，便于读者在对外交往中引用。在这方面，编译者可以说预先替读者做了大量的查找工作，省却读者不少时间。

最后，中英文的两个索引，实际上（在本书性质限定的范围内）也是中外谚语的集录，都可以独立成书。再通过每条所附的谚语编号，便可以找到相应的中国或英美的谚语，起到互相参照、左右逢源的作用。

这本书的收集、翻译、编辑，因为要力求完备，经历了十多年的时间。但谚语的世界可以说浩瀚如海，加以编译者的能力有限，挂一漏万以及文字欠妥之处，恐在所难免。希望专家学者以及广大读者不吝赐教。

李念培

## 出版说明

十余年前我国开始实行改革开放政策。从那时起我就收集我国的谚语并把它们一一译成英语，准备日后印成一册。之所以这样做，是因为我注意到我国人民不但在日常谈话中喜欢使用谚语，而且在写作中（包括各类反映生活的文艺作品、杂文随笔以及比较严肃的政论文章）也时常引用谚语。我虽然没有花费时间去进行中西双方的比较统计，但我明确无误的印象是：中国人对谚语的使用率肯定大大高于西方人。

当然不能由此得出结论，说中国人是依据谚语进行思考、做出决定的。但是外国人如果熟悉了中国谚语，便能从一个侧面更加理解中国人的思路，更能触到普通中国人的脉搏以及中国文化的部分来龙去脉。

十余年来我从报章杂志、小说杂文、广播、电影、电视中一共搜集、翻译了两千多条中国谚语，经过筛选、合并，采用了现在的1750条。

它们每一条的排列是：

中文谚语，

汉语拼音，

用△引出谚语的直译，

用○引出比较自由的译文，

用()引出进一步的解释，

用||及异体英文引出相应的英语谚语。

当然并不是每个词条都包括上述所有的部分。根据情况，有的有直译并无意译，有的有意译而无直译，有的因找不到合适的相应英语谚语，只好付诸阙如。

另外，有的词条在拼音之后还采用了一些缩写或符号，它们是：

Lit. 代表 literary，说明该条谚语使用的是文言文或诗句等，如果对教育程度不高的人引用，对方可能听不懂；

Vul. 代表 vulgar，说明该条谚语使用了粗俗的词汇，不登大雅之堂，应当慎用；

I. 表示该词条不为人们（或部分人群）所赞许，如轻视妇女的俗话等，应当慎用。

只有少数谚语才有上列的缩写、符号。当然有些处于“边缘地界”的谚语，譬如鼓吹宿命论或其他迷信观点的民谚，并没有一一标明。

书稿主体部分的各词条，是以谚语的汉语拼音为次序，依A, B, C, D...X, Y, Z分别排列的。为了便于做中英文的索引，每条谚语都编了号，如A002, Y123等等。

我在收集、翻译这些谚语的过程中，曾得到一些懂中文的外国朋友的赞许和鼓励。我相信他们这样做并非纯粹出于礼貌。在辑译过程中，我从有关方面获悉，这样的谚语辑译以前也曾有人出版过，尤其是在国外。但我相信，我的书稿可能具有三个特点：

一、它收集了近年来在作品中、在报刊上最常出现的中国谚语；

二、它除了按拼音排序外，还有一个汉字关键字索引，无论中外读者，一查这个索引便可以找到他所需要的汉语谚语；

三、它有一个相应英文谚语中的关键词索引。外国读者如果要找一个合适他使用的中谚，可凭自己知道的英谚，按图索骥，便可以查到一个以至数个中谚，供其选用。

另外要说明的一点是，这本稿子收集的不是中国成语（idioms），而是中国的谚语（proverbs或sayings）。前者主要用于描绘或说明一些情况，而这里收集的则是总结人生或者某一方面的经验教训，给人以教诲、启迪、警示的具有格言意义的所谓俗话（当然有的也颇文雅，有的则未必科学）。有个别的“双栖”词组，既是描绘性的又具有教诲性质，也收了进来，但为数不多。

我本人在最近十余年中编译了不下十种对外发行的出版物，有的还在中国香港、德国等地出了译本或国外版本。其中包括《中国传统故事集》、《颐和园长廊故事集》和《京剧故事一百则》，还有大型画册《秦始皇兵马俑》、《北京，迷人的城》和《中华风貌》等，都获得了较好的销路。我相信如果这本书能获得出版，经过适当的宣传，可能会有相当大的销路。外国的外交官、记者，来华的商人，学习中国语言和文化的外国留学生，甚至想对我国民俗、民情有所了解的广大旅游者，都可能对它感兴趣。他们借此可以从一个侧面认识中国，甚至在与我国人民交往中引用中国谚语，增加双方的亲切感。当然，这样一本书，对我国学习英语的莘莘学子以及青年翻译工作者，也可能具有一定的参考价值。

李念培

1990年12月8日

# INTRODUCTION

This modest collection is addressed to all readers with the slightest interest in China.

— To foreign diplomats and media correspondents who may wish to catch a glimpse of the Chinese way of thinking, and to spice their dispatches with a dash of Chinese wit and wisdom in the form of indigenous sayings;

— To the foreign businessmen who, in negotiations with their Chinese counterparts, may wish to support their arguments with the latter's own old saws, or to banter with them at the dinner table by quoting Chinese witticisms;

— To the foreign students in China – especially those whose interest is in the field of the Chinese language and social studies – to whom the necessity of possessing such a collection needs no elaboration;

— Even to the large numbers of tourists provided they wish to acquire any in-depth knowledge of the Chinese as a people in addition to the sights and attractions they see as they pass through the country as mere trippers.

In short, the collection is dedicated to all foreign readers who wish to see themselves drawn closer to the Chinese by being able to quote Chinese proverbs as the Chinese themselves often do.

My people are indeed fond of resorting to proverbs, age-old or newly in vogue, to prove a point, to add power to an argument or just to give added color or cadence to their speeches and writings – definitely more so than people of the West. This can be easily proved, in spite of the absence



of scholarly statistics, by the casual perusal of any Chinese newspaper, say, the *People's Daily*, or by listening to the dialogue of a Chinese soap opera on radio or television and comparing it with its American or English counterpart. This remark is true not only of the people on the mainland but also of those in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and of the Singaporeans of Chinese descent.

It does not follow from this that Chinese thinking is guided by their stock of old saws. But there does seem to be a sense of security in the subconscious mind of the speaker or writer if he could find reliance on a time-honored saying when he advances an argument or a point of view.

Incidentally, it may be the same state of mind that has made quoting an established authority – Confucius for instance for over a thousand years – such a popular practice among the literati and the commonalty as well.

The blind awe felt for authoritative quotations as guiding rules may have worn itself out in these more sober-minded days, but the respect reserved for proverbs and maxims, judging by their not infrequent appearances, does not seem to have diminished.

This is why I think it important for a foreigner to have a store, at least a smattering, of knowledge of Chinese sayings if he wants to understand his Chinese friends, appreciate their way of thinking, feel their pulses and foretell how they will react to given situations.

This is also why at the outset of China's open-door policy some dozen years ago I began to collect and translate Chinese proverbs into English with a view to publishing them in the form of a book. I have gathered over the years more than 2,000 old sayings from various sources but have, after sifting and combining, put down on paper 1,750 entries for the present volume.

They represent, I would like to stress, a collection of proverbs on old saws, in other words “short sentences drawn from long experience” that sum up life’s wisdom or horse sense or that advise, teach, moralize, admonish, warn... They include, therefore, some maxims, epigrams and much quoted sayings and poetical lines of ancient figures which have become proverbial and play the same role as proverbs, but they do not include Chinese idioms that merely describe a character or situation. However, a limited number of the latter category found to be lying on the borderline are also included.

Similar books of translated Chinese proverbs have been published since long ago, in China as well as foreign countries. My repeated effort, I hope, will not prove redundant, for I believe, in due respect for my forerunners, it may stand apart in several ways as the following description of the book’s layout will show.

### **ARRANGEMENT, SYMBOLS, SHORT FORMS**

The 1,750 entries are arranged alphabetically by their Romanized pronunciation under groups A, B, C, down to X, Y and Z. Each entry, serially numbered A001 down to Z107 for easy reference in the indexes, consist of the following parts.

1. The proverb in Chinese, written in standard, simplified characters for the benefit of those readers who have learned such characters or wish to learn the sayings as they are written on the mainland of China (and in Singapore);
2. The pronunciation of the proverb spelt out in the Chinese phonetic alphabet which has been officially adopted in China (and reorganised by the UNESCO) for the benefit of those who wish to say the proverbs even though they do not read Chinese characters;

3. Introduced by the symbol  $\triangle$ , a literal translation of the proverb for those linguistically interested;
4. Following the symbol  $\bigcirc$ , a freer translation;
5. Enclosed with in a pair of parentheses ( ), any further explanation, if necessary;
6. Introduced by the symbol ||, one or several English or American sayings which carry a similar message as the Chinese headphrase.

Not every entry embodies all the above six parts. Some may be translated only literally, others only freely, and a small number are so close in wording to similar English ones that the latter are quoted (after ||) without any translation from me.

And when no similar English sayings can be found within my limited resources and store of knowledge, the part marked by || is left out.

Other short forms and symbols used include:

Lit. = literary, indicates that the proverb is in the style of classical Chinese or of poetical diction and that it may not be easily understood by Chinese with little schooling;

Vul. = vulgar, indicates that the proverb contains vulgarities and that it may be inappropriate to quote it in polite company;

I. = inverted exclamation mark, indicates that the proverb is frowned upon for one reason or another by at least certain groups of people, for instance the kind holding the fair sex in contempt, and, therefore, it should be quoted with care.

The above three marks are used only occasionally in a few examples, and they represent only my personal judgement. A much greater number of the proverbs, for instance those which advocate fatalism and other superstitious ideas, though they receive no approval from the enlightened Chinese public, are not marked, and I leave them to the judgement of the

reader.

These marks, if used, are put as a rule before the symbol  $\triangle$  or  $\bigcirc$ .

I have also employed other marks in the “body” of the book and in the indexes, and they are:

The curved parentheses (), apart from enclosing further explanations, may also contain (1) in the headphrases optional Chinese words which may be read out or left out, and (2) in the English translations words understood but not expressed in the originals;

The square parentheses [], used in the Chinese headphrases and Chinese index, enclose one or two words which may substitute for the word or words just preceding the mark;

The slanting stroke / separates a choice of words in the English translations and proverbs;

The vertical stroke | separates two lines of verse in which an English proverb is composed;

The symbol ~, used only in the Chinese index, stands for the head word in the phrases listed under it; and the hyphen —, used in parentheses following some head words in the Chinese index, indicates the position of the head word when it appears in word groups, thus 鼠 (老—)

## GLOSSARY AND INDEXES

As Chinese proverbs sometimes contain allusions to Chinese customs, historical figures and popular literature, a short glossary of some 30 items is appended towards the back of the book to give brief explanations to certain Chinese names or expressions. They are arranged roughly in the same order in which they appear in the body of the collection, but certain expressions have been shifted forward or back to be grouped together with related ones

for easier treatment. Since there are only a limited number of entries, I hope this will not inconvenience the readers who may wish to refer to the glossary.

The book ends with two indexes.

One is in Chinese arranged by the key words in the headphrases. This I hope will be useful because by looking up a key word, say, 钱(money), 志(will), 水(water), etc., the reader will find a number of proverbs containing that key word and, therefore, easily come to the one or ones serving his purpose.

Chinese ideas are more often than not expressed in groups of two or three words. Readers looking for any such word group in the index should look up the key word in the group. Thus, he will find 老鼠 under 鼠(老—), 君子 under 君(—子) and so on. Where it is difficult to decide which character is the most important in the word group, it is listed under the first character, e.g. 黄鼠狼 under 黄, 夜猫子 under 夜, and the like.

A characteristic of Chinese proverbs is that they appear sometimes as antithetical or parallel couplets. When these can be separated without impairing the message they convey, they are halved and listed separately in the Chinese index under the key word of each half of the couplet, with the missing half represented by a row of three dots (...).

The second index — perhaps a special feature of this collection — is in English, arranged by the key words in the similar or corresponding English proverbs listed under most of the entries in the body of the book. The purpose of this index is to enable foreign readers, if they wish to quote a certain Chinese proverb, to locate it by looking up a similar English one they have in mind. Often they will be offered at their choice one or more serial numbers, which will lead them to the Chinese saying they find most suitable.

However, it should be borne in mind that the English index is limited only to the sayings quoted in this translated collection and therefore does not run the whole gamut of old saws of the English-speaking world. East and West, in spite of modern communications, still think differently and, in this book of sayings, only meet (or overlap) half-way or even less. So there will understandably be occasions when the reader cannot find the saying he thinks of in the English index.

To ensure that the reader does find within a minimum of time what he wants, if it is there, in the English as well as the Chinese index I have listed on occasions the same proverb or headphrase more than once if it contains two or more words which seem equally important.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collection does not purport to be the result of any academic research. It is only the result of observing everyday conversation, daily reading and what is shown on the screen or stage for the Chinese proverbs that are currently in use. In the course of compiling and translating, I have not consulted a good number of previous works in the field.

I must, however, mention the following titles which have proved useful to me:

1. Wolfgang Mieder: *Encyclopedia of World Proverbs*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986.
2. Augusto Arthaber: *Dizionario Comparato di Proverbi a Modi Proverbiali*. Ulrico Hoepli, Milano, 1972.
3. English Department, Beijing Foreign Languages Institute: *A Chinese-English Dictionary*. Beijing, 1978.
4. Liang Shih-chiu et al: *A New Practical Chinese-English Dictionary*. the Far East Book Co., Ltd., 1971.

The first two works are the main sources among others for the English proverbs I have quoted in the collection. The last two I have consulted most as dictionaries in the process of my translation; in a limited number of cases, however, I have not hesitated to borrow their translations especially for such phrases as lie on the borderline between idioms and proverbs.

In the end, I would like to thank a number of my friends for the encouragement and help they gave me in many valuable ways for the preparation of this book. I owe many thanks to Nancy Farwell, Dominique Dreyer, Hanna Widnig and Hody Brungger. My heart-felt indebtedness goes to Charles and Bettie Chu of New London CT. With great patience and Charles' help, Bettie has read through and edited my translations one by one to make them more readable and presentable to the English-reading public. Last but not least, my thanks go back all these dozen years to Chas and Pat Freeman. Chas was Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) of the large U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and he "squeezed" time out of his busy work to read and edit a good part of my first translations. Although this happy cooperation was interrupted by my change of employment, I must say that without the Freemans' enthusiastic encouragement I would never have embarked on this volume.

LNP

Beijing, January 1991

**ai****A 001 哀兵必胜** āi bīng bì shèng

Lit. △ An aggrieved army is bound to win. (The army of an oppressed or invaded country will be victorious as it is burning with grief and vengeance.) ○ An army impassioned is an army destined for victory.

**A 002 哀莫大于心死** āi mò dà yú xīn sǐ

Lit. ○ There is no grief as great as that for a dead heart.  
|| There is no vulture like despair.

**A 003 挨着大树有柴烧** āi zhe dà shù yǒu chái shāo

○ There is always firewood under a big tree. (It is useful to have powerful connections.)  
|| Great trees keep under the little ones.

**A 004 爱人者人恒爱之** ài rén zhě rén héng ài zhī

Lit. △ Those who love others are always loved in return. ○ Those who love will be loved in return. ○ Be kind and people will be kind to you.  
|| Good finds good.

**A 005 爱屋及乌** ài wū jí wū

Lit. ○ Love for a house reaches even the crow on the roof.  
|| Love me, love my dog. || He that loves the tree loves the branches.

**A 006 爱之深，责之严** ài zhī shēn, zé zhī yán

Lit. ○ He who loves deeply, reproaches severely.



**an****A 007 安不忘危** ān bú wàng wēi

Lit. △ Be prepared for danger in times of peace. ○ In times of peace it is well to recall the world's dangers.

|| The price of peace is preparation for war.