

Corresponding

**ENGLISH & CHINESE
PROVERBS & PHRASES**

英漢俚諺合璧

John D. Chinnery (秦乃瑞)

秋 (Cui Mingqiu)

NEW WORLD PRESS

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With Explanations
And
Examples

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PREFACE

The word "proverb" is defined in *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* as a "popular short saying, with words of advice or warning". It is the second part of this definition which differentiates proverbs from other types of idioms, which may be equally popular, but which do not have this didactic purpose. Proverbs have been polished through the centuries until they glitter like gems. Often their popularity has been enhanced by the use of such devices as rhyme, assonance, alliteration and antithesis, which have made them easier to memorise. But whatever their form may be, it is the wisdom they contain which is their main characteristic. It is the collective wisdom of a people, distilled from centuries of experience of dealing with the problems and difficulties of life. As Lord Bacon said, "The genius, wit and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs".

Although proverbs are national in form, there is a universality about their content. Just as there is a similarity about many of the problems which people must face in different parts of the world, so it follows that the

proverbs which embody the answers to these problems must also correspond in different languages. Both Chinese and English are especially rich in proverbs, and many of these correspond in meaning. Sometimes this correspondence is very close, in other cases it is not so close, but still close enough to make comparison interesting and rewarding. This collection comprises some six hundred English proverbs, each of which has one or more Chinese versions. They are arranged in alphabetical order of the English versions, with the corresponding Chinese proverb placed underneath them.

The total number of corresponding English and Chinese proverbs in existence far exceeds the number included in this collection, but many are either rare or obsolete. Our aim has been to include only proverbs which are either in current use or are at least reasonably familiar to speakers of the language concerned. Decisions as to whether a proverb is still in current use must necessarily be somewhat arbitrary, especially as it may still be used in one part of the English or Chinese speaking worlds but not in another. We have exercised some latitude in this respect, and have even included a few proverbs which are not commonly used where the correspondence between the English and Chinese versions is especially striking.

The main purpose of this book is to provide an aid to understanding and comparing the proverbs in the two languages. Native speakers of English can use their own proverbs naturally and aptly, often varying the wording slightly to suit the situation, a practice which is quite acceptable. Non-native speakers, on the other hand, should be warned against the use of proverbs in a language which is not their own unless they are extremely sure of their ground. This is because the slightest misuse of a proverb can render both it and the speaker comical. Nevertheless, to assist would-be users of English proverbs we have put a mark(*) against those which, in our opinion, are still popular and could be used in contemporary conversation or writing.

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A

*** Actions speak louder than words.**

An ounce of practice is worth a pound of theory.

事实胜于雄辩。

Explanation:

What you do shows your character better and is more important than what you say.

Example:

1. John promised to help me, but he didn't. **Actions speak louder than words.** (It is more important for John to help than just to promise to help.)

2. Joe is very quiet, but **actions speak louder than words.** He is the best player on the team. (We judge Joe by the way he plays, not by what he does or doesn't say about it.)

3. By all means attend your lectures on theory but it is the actual experience you need. **An ounce of practice is worth a pound of theory.**

* * *

Adversity makes men; prosperity, monsters.

*** Adversity is a good schoolmaster.**

生于忧患，死于安乐。

* Those proverbs with asterisks are popular ones used in contemporary English.

Explanation:

People's characters are strengthened through struggle against difficulties: they are weakened by comfort.

Example:

Adversity is a good schoolmaster and it cannot be denied that the hardships of his youth helped to strengthen Dickens' resolve to succeed as a writer.

* * *

*** Adversity makes strange bedfellows.**

Misery acquaints men with strange bedfellows.

风雨同舟共相济，素不相识成真交。

Explanation:

The most unlikely people will co-operate with each other when faced by a common danger.

Example:

At the unemployment office I met Jones the lawyer and Smith the mechanic. None of us had any luck finding a job — **adversity does make strange bedfellows!**

* * *

*** Afraid of one's own shadow.**

杯弓蛇影。

Explanation:

Scared of small or imaginary things; very easily frightened; jumpy; nervous.

Example:

1. Mrs. London won't stay alone in her house at night; she is **afraid of her own shadow**. (She is afraid of all sorts of little things.)

2. Mrs. Howard does not dare to go out, even on moonlight evenings; she is **afraid of her own shadow**.

* * *

After meat, mustard.

After death, doctor.

雨后送伞。

Explanation:

This describes a situation where assistance or comfort is given when it is already too late.

Example:

Just as I had cancelled my application to go abroad, I had a promise of money for my fare. It was a case of "after death, the doctor!"

* * *

*** After praising the wine they sell us vinegar.**

挂羊头卖狗肉。

Explanation:

To offer to give or sell something which is inferior to what you claim it to be.

Example:

That fellow completely misled us about what he was capable of doing. **After praising the wine he sold us vinegar.**

* * *

*** After rain comes fair weather.**

After a storm comes a calm.

雨过天晴。

时来运转好景回。

Explanation:

In life a bad period is often followed by a good.

Example:

After rain comes fair weather and Rachel soon forgot the trials and tribulations of the past few months amidst the quiet enjoyment of family life.

* * *

*** After supper walk a mile.**

饭后百步走，活到九十九。

Explanation:

This is practical advice for those who wish to enjoy good health.

Example:

My grandparents always take a stroll after their evening meal. They believe the old maxim **"after supper walk a mile."**

* * *

Agues come on horseback, but go away on foot.

Ill comes in ells and goes out by inches.

病来似山倒，病去如抽丝。

Explanation:

Misfortune comes rapidly and leaves slowly.

Example:

It's taking the country months to recover from the sudden collapse of oil prices last year. Agues come on horseback but go away on foot.

* * *

A high building, a low foundation.

Great oaks from little acorns grow.

千里之行始于足下。

Explanation:

As great oak trees grow from tiny acorns, so many great people or things grew from a small and unimportant beginning.

Example:

1. Our Association may be small but, given time, I'm sure we shall achieve our aims: **a high building, a low foundation.**

2. Many great men were once poor, unimportant boys. **Great oaks from little acorns grow.** (We cannot expect to grow great or important in a short time.)

* * *

*** A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.**

一知半解误大事。

Explanation:

Imperfect knowledge renders one liable to conceit or false conclusions.

Example:

John has read a book on driving a car and now he thinks he can drive. **A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.** (It would be dangerous for John to try to drive just because he has read about it.)

* * *

*** All are not friends that speak us fair.**

面誉者未必不背非。

Explanation:

People who flatter us are not always our friends.

Example:

Don't listen to those flatterers. **All are not friends that speak us fair.**

* * *

**All cats love fish but fear to wet their paws.
The cat wanted fish but dared not wet her feet
in the stream.**

又吃鱼，又嫌腥。

Explanation:

An old adage, said of one who is anxious to obtain something of value but does not care to incur the necessary trouble or risk.

Example:

He said he would like to join the project but when I mentioned money he had cold feet. He is like the **cat who wanted the fish but feared to wet her paws.**

* * *

All covet, all lose.

*** Grasp all, lose all.**

样样都想要，一样也得不到。

Explanation:

An inordinate desire may end in getting nothing.

Example:

His bankruptcy resulted from his greed. It was a case of grasp all, lose all.

* * *

All his geese are swans.

敝帚自珍。

Explanation:

1. Ordinary people and things and events he has to do with he regards as remarkable.

2. He sees things in too rosy a light, is too pleased with his own doings and his own possessions.

3. He overestimates or exaggerates the qualities of persons and things.

Example:

To listen to him talking, we might think our fortunes were made, but **all his geese are swans.**

NOTE:

The goose (at all events when domesticated) is a bird lacking outstanding appearance; the *swan* (at all events when in the water) is the most graceful of birds.

The phrase is recorded as far back as in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

* * *

All his swans are geese.

All swans are turned to geese.

大言成泡影，希冀变云烟。

Explanation:

All one's expectations end in nothing; all one's boasting ends in smoke.

Example:

He's very popular now but it won't last. **All swans are turned to geese.**

* * *

All is over but the shouting.

大局已定。

Explanation:

Finally decided or won; brought to an end; not able to be changed.

Example:

After Bill's touchdown, the game was **all over but the shouting**. (Bill's touchdown decided the winner of the game.)

* * *

*** All's well that ends well.**

The end crowns the work.

The evening crowns the day.

最后好了就是好，别管经过苦多少。