

A HANDBOOK OF CHINESE IDIOMATIC AND COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS  
WITH ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS

# 常用汉语惯用语 英译手册

梁志刚 编著

青岛海洋大学出版社



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## 前 言

本手册是一本日常实用型的汉语惯用语英译工具书。根据词语在日常交流中的使用频率收录了常用的惯用语(以习语和成语为主,另有少量谚语、俗语和俚语)2 000条,范围较为广泛。其中礼貌用语的习惯表达法一般以几种变形形式列出,粗俗语和感叹语表达法也包括在内,便于解释它们的非标准用法。

本手册采用的惯用语表达法对外国人学习汉语颇为实用,中国的英语学习者读来也简单易懂。有时简单的汉语难以用准确的英语表达,从这一点来讲,本手册可称得上是位好帮手。它将有助于汉语惯用语爱好者根据不同场合选择既恰当又简明扼要、丰富多彩的表达方式。

大部分汉语的习语和成语的意思都不能仅从字面理解,因而被称为谚语、短语或固定用法。例如,汉语中“吹牛(皮)chuí niú (pí)”的意思是“说大话、自吹自擂(to brag or to boast)”,若按字面意思译成“blow cow (skin)”则根本讲不通。另外,汉语中“添油加醋 tiān yóu jiā cù (adding oil, adding vinegar)”不是说做沙拉,而是指“夸大其辞(exaggerating)”。还有“过奖 guò jiǎng”是受到表扬时的谦虚说法,意思是“对我的表扬言过其辞了(overly award me)”,常用来削弱表扬的效果。

有些汉语习语和成语让人联想到英语中同样熟悉的用法。本手册在给出逐字译文的基础上,尽可能地提供了汉英习语和成语的对等翻译。如,汉语中的“转眼 zhuǎn yǎn”易于使人联想到英语中表示瞬间动作的“twinkling of an eye”;汉语中“非驴非马 fēi lú fēi mǎ”(not donkey, not horse)可巧妙地与英语的“neither fish nor fowl”(四不像)相对应。

本书中的很多词条都取材于基本词汇,使外国学生易于学习

汉语。例如,按拼音字母索引找到“一路平安”时,可以同时对比其他以“一路”开头的短语,如“一路顺风”。两者都表示祝愿某人路途平安愉快。又如“顶好”用来表示“非常好、到了登峰造极的地步”,有同样表达效果的还有“顶呱呱”。再如,经常说的“慢慢吃”并非让人“吃得慢点”,而是对共餐客人的一种礼貌用语,希望客人轻松进餐,意思是“随便吃、跟在自己家里一样(take your time or make yourself at home)”。同样,以“慢”开头的“慢慢骑”是提醒即将骑车上路的朋友要小心(ride carefully)。“慢走”是向客人告别的话,而不可按字面理解为“走得慢点(walking slowly)”。

本手册吸收了现代汉语的一些表达方法。希望本书对热心的读者能有所帮助,而且你们对汉语惯用语的热爱将激励你们持久地保持对中国语言的热爱,并且有助于你们很好地掌握翻译技巧。

在本书的编纂过程中,范钦慧女士曾倾力相助,在查证拼音、声调和汉字录入等方面做了大量工作,在此谨致谢忱。

由于编者水平有限,错误与不当之处在所难免,请专家和广大读者批评指正。

梁志刚

2001年7月于青岛

## Forward

This book serves as a useful handbook of Chinese-English Colloquial and Idiomatic Expressions in daily life. The criterion of collecting the two thousand entries is based on their usefulness in everyday speech. The scope is wide and broad. Customary expressions of courtesy are adopted, usually in several variants. Rude sayings and expletives are also included, always advantageous to be explained for their non-standard use in Chinese to English dictionaries.

The handbook is designed to be a ready reference to foreign students in China, to Chinese students as English major, to interpreters/translators and teachers as well. To the beginners of Chinese, this book is their good hand. Anyone who has an interest in the Chinese colloquial and idiomatic expressions can benefit from having at hand just the right words in appropriate situations in succinct and colorful ways.

Most items would be considered true idioms, phrases and expressions whose meanings are not apparent from the sense of the individual words. For example, an absolutely nonsensical sequence of words, “blow cow (skin)” [chuí niú (pí) 吹牛(皮)], indicates the kind of conflated talk that means “to brag or to boast”. In addition, if someone is “adding oil, adding vinegar” (tiān yóu jiā cù 添油加醋), he/she is not dressing a salad but “exaggerating”. Another expression “guò jiǎng” (过奖) is a response to being praised for something, which means “welcome, deserved or overly award me”, an expression used in declining

the good praising compliment.

Some idioms follow a logic that calls to mind a familiar saying in English. Whenever possible, the book provides idiomatic equivalents after giving a word for word translation. For instance, there is an expression “turning of an eye” in Chinese “zhuǎn yǎn (转眼)”, we have got the instantaneous moment of the “twinkling of an eye” in English. The Chinese colloquialism “not donkey, not horse” (fēi lú fēi mǎ 非驴非马) is aptly equal to “neither fish nor fowl”.

So many entries in this book are collected from basic vocabulary so that foreign students who learn Chinese language can master easily. For example, when the phrase “yí lù píng ān” (一路平安) is listed in Chinese alphabetic arrangement, one can meanwhile compare the expression with another phrase that begins with “yí lù” like “yí lù shùn fēng” (一路顺风), both for wishing somebody a safe and comfortable journey. Similarly, the phrase “dǐng hǎo” (顶好) is to approve of something “very good”, but in addition to this, the more resonantly effective “top quack quack” (dǐng guā guā 顶呱呱) is provided. “màn màn chī” (慢慢吃) is a practically used term which does not refer to eating slowly but a polite expression for guests sharing a meal together, implying “take your time or make yourself at home”, hoping guests have a good and relaxing meal. “màn màn qí” (慢慢骑) is a phrase to tell a friend who’s leaving on bicycle to ride carefully. “màn zǒu” (慢走) is another colloquial expression for saying good-bye to someone who’s leaving your home instead of walking slowly in semantics.

The book has absorbed some modern Chinese expressions in

present days. Hopefully all of the inclusions will be of great help to our enthusiastic readers and your pleasure of learning colloquial and idiomatic expressions will encourage you to make a lasting commitment to the Chinese language and mastery of good translation skills.

Liang Zhigang  
July, 2001, Qingdao, China



## 编纂原则和使用说明

### 1. 收录原则和释义

本手册收录了普通话(pǔtōnghuà)即国语(guóyǔ)中 2 000 条惯用语(以习语和成语为主,另有少量谚语、俗语和俚语),每一词条都是用汉语简化字写成;其上为与之对应的汉语拼音;其下附有英语直译文,直译文用括号括起来;紧接着就是英语的意译文,译文也都是惯用语,有多种译法时,其间用分号(;)隔开。

### 2. 词条编排

正文词条的编排,按照汉语拼音音序排列,首字相同时则按第二字的字母顺序排列,依次类推。关于汉语拼音的有关问题说明如下:

#### (1) 拼音罗马化

这一体系是指用罗马字母表示汉字的发音。一些比较古老的拼写被称为“拼音(pīnyīn)”,直译成英文就是“spell sound”。1959年,中华人民共和国(P. R. C.)采用拼音作为统一标准,中国的所有在校学生都通过拼音学习汉字的正确发音。西方出版界也普遍采用拼音来表示中国的人名和地名。本书亦采用拼音体系。

#### (2) 声调的标法(ˊˋˊˋ)

读者会注意到声调都是标在音节的韵母上。当一个音节中有两个韵母时,声调标在第二个韵母上。没有声调的音节读轻声。

#### (3) 声调变化

在汉语口语中,音节的声调可能会根据音节在句中的位置不同而变化。例如:

yi(一)单独用的时候读一声(ˊ),后面有一个四声(ˋ)的音节时,yi就变为yí(二声),后面是一声(ˊ)、二声(ˊ)或三声(ˇ)时,yí

就变成了 yì(四声)。

bù(不)通常发四声(ˋ),但当后面是四声(ˋ)的音节时,bù就变成了 bú(二声)。

还有一个多出现于口语中的重要音调变化,为避免引起混乱本书没有涉及:如果三声(ˇ)后面还有一个三声,三声就变成二声。如果有三个三声的音节连在一起,中间的那个就读二声。

#### (4) 儿化音(er)

北京地区的人经常在很多音后面加一个“儿(er)”音,这种现象有时被称为北京儿化音。当加上“r”这一后缀时,拼音的拼法变了,但汉字的意思没变。本书没有采用北京“r”后缀。

还有一些拼音加上后缀“r”意思就发生改变,不能与上段提到的情况混淆。例如,zhè意思是“这(this)”,后面加上“r”,“zhèr”就成了“这里(here)”的意思。这种情况下后缀“r”的汉字“儿”必须相应地加上。

### 3. 索引与查阅

为方便读者查阅,本手册正文之后附有词条索引,排列顺序与正文相同,并在书眉上列出词条首字,有若干词条首字相同时只列一个。

## **Compiling Principle and Using of the Handbook**

### **1. Including principle and explanation of the meaning**

The handbook lists 2 000 colloquial and idiomatic expressions in “pütōnghuà”(普通话) or “guóyǔ”(国语). Each expression is also provided with simplified Chinese characters followed by a translation of the literal meaning which was put in parentheses. There are relevant Chinese pinyin above the Chinese characters, below it, the figurative meaning in English is given last, also in colloquial, idiomatic English. The figurative meaning is separated by a semicolon when the meaning is various.

### **2. Compiling of expression entries**

Each expression entry is numbered and arranged alphabetically by Chinese pinyin system. Arranged alphabetically by the second letter if the capital is similar, the rest may be inferred. several comments on Chinese pinyin system are as follows:

#### (1) Romanization

This is a system for representing the sounds of the Chinese characters using the Roman alphabet. Several older Romanizations, or transliterations, are known as “pinyin” which translates as “spell sound”. In 1959 the People’s Republic of China (P. R. C. ) adopted pinyin as the official system. All school children in China are introduced to pinyin to teach correct pronunciation of the Chinese Characters. The western press uses pinyin almost universally for proper Chinese names and places. This book uses the pinyin system.

## (2) Placing of the tone marks (ˉ ˊ ˋ ˋ)

The reader will note that the tone mark is always placed over the vowel in the pinyin syllable. When there are two consecutive vowels, it is placed over the second vowel. A syllable without a tone mark carries a neutral tone.

## (3) Tone changes

In spoken Chinese, the tone of a syllable may change depending on the position of syllable in a distinct sentence part. For example:

yī(one) in isolation has the first tone, but when it precedes a syllable with a fourth tone it becomes yí in the second tone. When yī precedes a first, second or third tone it changes to yì in the fourth tone.

bù (not) is usually pronounced in the fourth tone. However, when it is followed by another syllable also in the fourth tone, it is changed to bú in the second tone.

Another important tone change, especially in speaking, but one which is not followed in this book to avoid confusion is: if a third tone (ˇ) is followed by another third tone, the first one changes to the second tone. If there are three consecutive syllables in the third tone, the middle one changes to the second tone.

## (4) The suffix “er”

In the Beijing area it is common practice to add “er” to many pinyin words. This is sometimes called the Beijing “r”. When it is used as a suffix, the spelling of the pinyin word may change but the meaning of the word does not change. The Beijing “r” suffix is *not* used in *A Handbook of Chinese Idiomatic and Colloquial Expressions with English Equivalents*.

This should not be confused with the use of this suffix in certain pinyin words where it does change the meaning. An example is zhè meaning “this”. When “r” is added to make zhè r it means “here”. The Chinese character for this suffix must be added accordingly.

### **3. Index and consultation**

Following the main body, an expression entry index is given in order to make it convenient for reader. On the top of the page we list the first Chinese character of each expression entry. If many entries share the same first character, we only list one.

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ài bú shì shǒu  
爱不释手

(love not part hand)

so fond of something that one cannot take one's hands off it; be unable to tear oneself away from something

ài chī bù chī  
爱吃不吃

(like eat, not eat)

eat it or not as you please; I don't give a damn whether you eat or not

ài chū fēng tóu  
爱出风头

(love out wind head)

to be a "show-off"; like to show off

ài mò néng zhù  
爱莫能助

(love unable to help)

would be glad to help but cannot; love but have no ability to render assistance

ài sā yě  
爱撒野

(love behave wild)

behave rudely

ài shàng  
爱上

(love above)

to fall in love with

ài wū jí wū  
爱屋及乌

(love house to crows )

the love for a person extends even to the crows on his roof;  
love me, love my dog

ài zuò shén me zuò shén me  
爱做什么做什么

(like do whatever, do whatever)

to do what one pleases; to suit oneself

ān fèn shǒu jǐ  
安分守己

(abide by the law behave oneself)

know one's own place; law-abiding

ān jiā luò hù  
安家落户

(settle home establish house)

settle down in a place; make one's home in a place; estab-  
lish oneself in some place

ān shēn wéi lè  
安身为乐

(settle life as pleasure)

be glad (pleasant) to find a settled place for life (or a job for  
life)

àn xià hú lu fú qǐ piào  
按下葫芦浮起瓢

(press gourd floats another)

hardly has one gourd been pushed under water when another  
bobs up



àn jiàn shāng rén  
暗 箭 伤 人

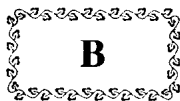
(concealed arrow injures others)

anomalous attack on others; speak ill of somebody behind his back; arrow shot from concealed source injures others

àn sòng qiū bō  
暗 送 秋 波

(stealthily convey autumn wave)

make eyes at somebody; make secret overtures to somebody; convey one's love by stealing a look



bā jiǔ bù lí shí  
八 九 不 离 十

(eight nine not far ten)

pretty close; about right; very near

bā miàn líng lóng  
八 面 玲 珑

(eight sides exquisite)

manage to please everyone; a popular guy; all things to all men; be smooth and slick

bā xiān guò hǎi, gè xiǎn shén tōng  
八 仙 过 海, 各 显 神 通

(eight Genii cross the sea, each shows his special power)

Immortals cross the sea at the same time, each displaying his own supernatural power

bá miáo zhù zhǎng  
拔 苗 助 长