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TRANSLATION HANDBOOK ON CHINESE IDIOMS
AND 4-CHARACTER TERMS IN COMMON USE

HELEN W.L.Y. CHEUNG

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501 Hung On Mansion
177-181 Jaffe Road,
Wanchai,
Hong Kong.
Tel: 5-728477

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01-02012-11

First Edition November 1980

Printed in Hong Kong
By Man Ying Printing Press Factory

Acknowledgements

The author is indebted to

Miss Li So-Yan who painstakingly assisted the editorial work and unfailingly exerted her utmost efforts in proof reading.

Mr. CHEUNG Wood-Nang who untiringly gave the author advice and support and whose beautiful Chinese calligraphy adds splendour to the cover of this book.

Foreword

The "Translation Handbook On Chinese Idioms And 4-Character Terms In Common Use" has been compiled to help both foreign students studying or reading Chinese and Chinese students studying English.

The Chinese idioms and 4-character terms are arranged in ascending order according to the number of strokes of the first word in each idiom or term, while the English and American idioms are arranged in alphabetical order.

As Hanyu Pinyin has become more and more popular nowadays this book is also designed with a Hanyu Pinyin Index to give the proper pronunciation and the four tones are denoted by the symbols: $\bar{\quad}$ $\acute{\quad}$ $\check{\quad}$ $\grave{\quad}$.

This Handbook is the fruit of long years of research by a practising translator. In the course of research the author has received valuable advice from several experts in Chinese and English. Here the author thanks them whole-heartedly.

In a work of this nature errors are inevitable. Comments and criticisms will, therefore, be greatly appreciated.

HELEN W.L.Y. CHEUNG

B.A. (Hons.) University of Hong Kong

一劃

一暴十寒	to do something by fits and starts
一諾千金	a solemn promise
一面之詞	one-sided statement
一鱗半爪	fragments (of antiques, ancient ruins, etc.)
一念之差	a false step (which brings untold woes)
一概而論	discussed or regarded in the same frame of mind or in an indiscriminating manner
一國三公	too many leaders in a country or organisation
一官半職	an unimportant official post
一匡天下	to unite the whole empire under one government
一孔之見	very limited outlook; short-sighted
一揮而就	to finish writing an article or drawing a painting very quickly
一蹶不振	unable to recover from a failure or after a decline
一決雌雄	to fight it out; to compete for championship
一氣呵成	to complete in one breath

一文不值 一錢不值	} not worth a penny; completely worthless
一枝獨秀	to outshine others
一枝之棲	a shelter or a minor position
一擲千金	to spend money recklessly
一朝之忿	a sudden outburst of anger
一針見血	pungent; incisive; to the point
一張一弛	off and on (referring to pressure, political or military situation)
一柱擎天	to lead the nation safely through a crisis single-handed; to be the only man capable of saving the nation in time of trouble
一籌莫展	not knowing what to do; at wit's end; helpless
一成不變	fixed; conservative; unchangeable; invariable; inflexible
一觸即發	imminent
一視同仁	impartial; without discrimination
一身是膽	to have plenty of guts; very brave
一絲不苟	no detail is overlooked; to do things carefully and seriously

- 一刀兩斷 to cut the Gordian knot
- 一石二鳥 }
一矢雙雕 } to kill two birds with one stone
- 一舉兩得 to obtain two objectives or gain two advantages by a single move
- 一知半解 smatter; with very limited knowledge; incomplete comprehension
- 一刻千金 every moment is precious
- 一勞永逸 by one supreme effort to win eternal ease
- 一了百了 when a man is dead everything is finished (the solution of one problem leads to the solution of all problems)
- 一丘之貉 birds of the same feather; very much the same; people of the same liking
- 一團和氣 harmonious; full of good will toward one another
- 一日千里 rapid advance
- 一片胡言 all nonsense
- 一毛不拔 very parsimonious; miserly; stingy
- 一竅不通 utterly stupid and dense

- 一絲不掛 utterly naked; not a stitch on
- 一網打盡 to capture all in one net
- 一落千丈 rapid declination; utter failure
- 一敗塗地 a crushing defeat; a complete failure
- 一波三折 meeting repeated difficulties; hitting one snag after another
- 一本正經 in a serious manner
- 一筆勾銷 to undo something by a single stroke; all cancelled; to settle an account once for all
- 一臂之力 help; assistance
- 一表人材 handsome or dashing
- 一步登天 a sudden rise in high position or fast advancement (in one's career, etc.)
- 一貧如洗 as poor as a church mouse
- 一鳴驚人 to become famous overnight; to achieve enormous success at the very first try
- 一目了然 to understand fully at a glance
- 一髮千鈞 to hang by a thread (referring to a desperate or critical situation)

一衣帶水	separated by a narrow strip of water
一葉知秋	a falling leaf augurs the coming of autumn; a straw shows which way the wind blows
一笑置之	to dismiss it with a laugh
一瀉千里	rushing down (the river) swiftly; a bold and forceful style of writing
一心一德	united as one
一心一意	whole-heartedly
一無可取	nothing worth taking; not a point worth acclaiming
一無是處	nothing is right; all wrong
一無所長	without a speck of talent
一無所有	to have nothing
一無所知	to know nothing
一息尚存	still breathing; not dead yet
一廂情願	unilateral desire or aspiration
一往無前	advancing fearlessly as if there are no obstacles
一往情深	unrestrained, deep emotional involvement
一望無際	a limitless expanse of land or water etc.

一絲一毫	wee bit
一潭死水	a pool of stagnant water
一手包辦	everything is handled by one person who refuses the participation of others; to do something all by oneself
一事無成	nothing has been accomplished
一日三秋	a day seems as long as three autumns
一掃而空	swept clean at one attempt
一盤散沙	a plate of loose sand; lack of unity
一目十行	reading ten lines at a glance
一模一樣	identically alike
一命嗚呼	died
一面之辭	evidence given by one party
一馬當先	a horse in the fore; to be in the lead
一脈相承	following in the same vein
一技之長	a talented skill
一見如故	like old friends at the first meeting

一見鍾情	love at first sight
一呼百諾	numerous attendants; one call will evoke hundred replies
一鼓作氣	to do something in one breath
一乾二淨	nothing is left
一改故轍	reversing away from the old tracks
一板三眼	words and action in accord with rules; dull and unimaginative
一唱一和	singing a duet
一塵不染	not contaminated by dirt or vice
一意孤行	to do something against the advice of others
一言九鼎	a solemn promise or pledge
一言興邦	a timely warning may avert a national crisis
一言喪邦	a single wrong statement may bring disaster to the nation
一言爲定	to reach a binding agreement verbally
一語道破	to hit the nail on the head; to expose someone's ulterior motive or secret design by a single remark; to disclose it by a word

- 一言以蔽之 in a few words
- 一報還一報 tit for tat; to serve one with the same sauce
- 一蟹不如一蟹 getting worse and worse
- 一不做，
二不休 over shoes, over boots; in for a penny, in for a pound
- 一失足成千古恨 a slip in life may turn out to be the sorrow for the years to come
- 一將功成萬骨枯 what millions died that Caesar might be great
- 一寸光陰一寸金 time is money; an inch of time is an inch of gold
- 一波未平，
一波又起 while one problem has not yet been solved another is cropping up
- 一犬吠日，
百犬吠聲 if you pull one pig by the tail, all the rest squeal
- 一言既出，
駟馬難追 the swiftest horse cannot recall the word spoken; what is said cannot be retracted
- 一朝被蛇咬，
十年怕井繩 a burnt child dreads the fire
- 一鼻子灰 to meet rejection, humiliation or frustration
- 一長二短 the general effect and the minute details

一線希望	a gleam of hope
一如既往	consistently like the past
二 劃	
八拜之交	sworn brotherhood
八面玲瓏	to be pleasant all round; well polished and elegant throughout; to be perfect mixer in any company
八面威風	influential in every quarter; having an awe-inspiring reputation everywhere
八斗之才	a very talented or gifted person
卜晝卜夜	day and night; around the clock
刀山火海	the most hazardous place
刁鑽古怪	crafty and queer
人云亦云	to parrot what others say
人生朝露	life is ephemeral
人生如夢	life is but a dream
人生如寄	life is short
人人自危	everyone feels insecure
人贓並獲	caught together with the loot

人才輩出	great talents appear successively
人才濟濟	there is a wealth of talents
人一己百	if others can do it, I must exert myself a hundred times harder in order to do the same
人言可畏	criticisms should be feared
人仰馬翻	to suffer an utter defeat
人微言輕	words from a man of lowly position (like me) carries little weight
人煙稠密	crowded condition
人亡物在	the relics of the dead heightens the grief of the living
人慾橫流	mass indulgence in decadent life
人地相宜	the right man in the right place
人心所向	with people's support
人心向背	people's support or opposition
人棄我取	I pick up what others discard
人聲鼎沸	human voices as loud as when the cauldron is boiling with water
人壽年豐	longevity and bumper harvest – scene of peace and prosperity

人之常情	the normal human nature
人山人海	a sea of faces
人滿之患	trouble of overpopulation or overcrowdedness
人面桃花	memory of an old sweetheart
人面獸心	gentle in appearance but cruel at heart; wolf in sheep's skin
人命關天	human life is of utmost importance
人非木石	man is a sentimental creature
人浮於事	there are more job hunters than jobs
人地生疏	to have trouble getting about in a strange land because of unfamiliarity with the local people and their customs
人定勝天	man's determination will conquer nature
人間地獄	pandemonium; a hell away from hell
人間何世	What a world is this?
人盡可夫	promiscuous; a woman who will take any man as her husband
人笨怨刀鈍	a bad workman quarrels with his tools

人生如朝露	man's life is like the morning dew. Our life is but a span.
人不可以貌相	appearances are often deceptive
人死不能復生	the dead cannot be brought back to life
人生七十古來稀	it is seldom that a man lives to be seventy years old.
人生自古誰無死	man is mortal; death comes to all men
人肉市場	the sex market; houses of ill fame
人文地理	political geography
人造衛星	satellite
人才外流	the brain drain
人言嘖嘖	there are plenty of criticisms
人民公社	people's commune
人民陣線	popular front
人海戰術	human-sea tactics
入不敷出	to live beyond one's means; to live beyond one's income; cannot make both ends meet
入境問禁	never wear a brown hat in Freisland
入境問俗	in Rome do as the Romans do

入木三分	penetrating analysis
力不從心	to have too little power or resources to do as much as one wishes
力透紙背	so forceful are the strokes that the force seems to penetrate the paper
力竭聲嘶	exhausted and hoarse
力爭上游	to try to excel by strenuous efforts; to strive for the best
力挽狂瀾	using tremendous effort to retrieve a critical situation
力排眾議	to dispute the views of others to establish one's own
力所能及	within one's power or ability
十全十美	perfect
十室九空	nine out of ten houses are vacant — whole villages or cities deserted as a result of war, natural disaster, etc.
十有八九 } 十之八九 }	eight or nine chances out of ten; most probably; very likely
十拿九穩	to be very sure of success, etc.
十惡不赦	crimes that cannot be pardoned