

中国国际广播电台汉语教学丛书

· 英文版

中国成语故事

**CHINESE IDIOMS AND
THEIR STORIES**

李树田 编译



中国国际广播出版社

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China Radio International
Chinese Language Teaching Series

Chinese Idioms And Their Stories

by Li Shutian

China International Radio Press

FOREWORD

This book is based on the award-winning series “Idioms and Their Stories” in the programme “Learn to Speak Chinese” broadcast on the English Service of China Radio International.

“Idioms and Their Stories” has been widely acclaimed by listeners from home and abroad ever since it was first put on the air eight years ago. William Carden from Canada finds it “rich in cultural flavour, providing valuable and fascinating insights into Chinese character and thought”. Many a listener has requested the publication of these useful and sometimes enlightening idioms and the interesting stories behind them.

Concise, vivid and expressive, Chinese idioms are a sparkling component of the treasure house of the Chinese language. A few characters suffice to drive home a profound truth. No wonder every time Japanese listener Kadoyama Keisuke hears the programme, he “cannot but admire the rich, fertile intelligence and the linguistic art of the ancient Chinese people”.

In this book, every idiom is presented in the Chinese phonetic alphabet, or Pinyin, in Chinese characters and the literal as well as idiomatic English translation. In many cases an English proverb of similar meaning is used to further explain the idiom. The story behind each idiom shows its origin or the earliest example of its usage, often best illustrating the message it contains. When a mere translation is not enough to show how to use an idiom, examples are given of situations where its use would be very appropriate.

In preparing the radio series, frequent use has been made of

the two books: 《成语故事五百篇》 (500 Idioms and Their Stories) and 《成语故事五百篇续编》 (A Sequel to 500 Idioms and Their Stories), both by Zhou Jinhua 周金桦. Other references include 《(Chinese-English) 100 Chinese Idioms and Their Stories (汉英对照) 中国成语故事一百篇》 by Yang Liyi 杨立义 and 《成语故事 365》 (365 idioms and Their Stories) by Chen Ripeng 陈日朋, Jin Shijie 金士杰 and Li Yubai 李育柏. I hereby express my heartfelt thanks to them. I also owe a lot to Steven Crandell, Stefanie Van Pelt and Debra Liu from the United States, Viveca Abrahams from Britain, my Chinese colleagues Mai Shaomei 麦少楮, Zhang Yuan 张源 and Wang Tianhong 王天虹, and all those who have helped make the programme so successful.

Li Shutian

November, 1996

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Ān Tǔ Zhòng Qiān
安 土 重 迁

Satisfied with one's native land and attaching great importance to moving — Attached to one's native place and hating to leave it

After coming to the throne, Emperor Yuandi of the Western Han Dynasty, who reigned between 48 and 33 BC, abolished many of the laws and decrees that had played an important role in safeguarding the security of the country and stabilizing social order. At the same time, he appointed a large number of scholars to leading posts in an attempt to achieve social stability through their education and edifying influence. These measures didn't work. On the contrary, they weakened the authority of the central Government. Meanwhile, successive years of natural disasters threw the people into dire poverty. Social contradictions sharpened. As a result, the Western Han Dynasty went into decline. To save the empire, the emperor thought to reassure the people by lightening their burden. He no longer required the common people to offer sacrifices at the royal family's ancestral temples, which were scattered

across the country. And when some officials suggested Yuandi to establish a town close to the site he had chosen for his mausoleum, he refused. Again, he had the interests of the people at heart. In an edict, the emperor said, "It is the natural instincts of the common folk to be unwilling to leave their native soil; and it is the way of the world that kinsmen should live together. To force people to migrate to my mausoleum will take these people far from their home land and the graves of their ancestors. This is like flesh and bones torn apart. Everyone needs to maintain a sense of their heritage. Although the migration will ensure things such as sacrifice-offering at the mausoleum, it would waste state money and the migrants will lose spiritual sustenance. So no town will be established at my mausoleum. Let the people of the whole country live and work in peace and contentment."

From that edict of Emperor Yuandi comes the idiom *Ān Tǔ Zhòng Qiān* 安土重迁. It's like saying "to like one's own backyard".