

500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions

An annotated frequency dictionary

Liwei Jiao and **Benjamin M. Stone**



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Introduction

500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions: An Annotated Frequency Dictionary is a dictionary of common Chinese proverbs and colloquial expressions known as *suyu*. *Suyu* are an important constituent part of the Chinese language, which Chinese language learners must not neglect. This dictionary, which lists and organizes *suyu* according to their frequency – as determined by a sociolinguistic survey of more than 900 Chinese university students – is designed primarily for Chinese learners at the intermediate level or above whose first language is English, as well as teachers of Chinese as a second/foreign language. Besides being used as a reference work, this dictionary is also suitable for classroom use and independent study.

Characteristics of Chinese *suyu*

The definition of *suyu* in Chinese is relatively broad and does not completely coincide with the definition of the English word ‘proverb.’ What this book catalogues are Chinese proverbs and colloquial expressions, to be referred to hereafter as *suyu*. This book’s definition of *suyu* is as follows: they are phrases or sentences that are widely employed by the general population in colloquial discourse, whose actual meanings are more than the sum of their parts, are mainly employed in expressing ridicule or criticism, and whose structure is relatively fixed. Some examples of *suyu* would be 吃豆腐, whose literal meaning ‘to eat tofu’ comes to mean ‘to take advantage of a woman;’ 皇上不急太监急 which, while literally meaning ‘the emperor is rested and at ease while the eunuch is excessively concerned,’ is used to describe a situation in which the person involved is calm and collected, but observers are very anxious. Specifically speaking, *suyu* should have the following characteristics:

- 1) *Suyu* are evocative and ingenious. In most circumstances, they are the best, most articulate form of expression for a given situation. For example, if one wishes to articulate how someone has overstepped their bounds, both 得寸进尺 (given-inch-advance-foot) and 得陇望蜀 (get-a tip of Southwestern China-hope-the whole Southwestern China) are acceptable, although the latter is possibly too literal. However, neither expression has a humorous connotation. In contrast, the *suyu* 蹬鼻子上脸 (climb-nose-mount-face) is both humorous in meaning and widely used in informal conversations. Similarly, 天上掉馅饼 (sky-upon-fall-stuffed-pancake) is the most apt translation of ‘to have something fall into one’s lap,’ while 躲得过初一, 躲不过十五 vividly invokes the idea that ‘you cannot avoid something forever,’ by making the analogy that you can avoid 初一, the first day of a lunar month with a new moon, but you cannot avoid its counterpart, 十五, the fifteenth day of a lunar month.

- 2) *Suyu* are used by the general population. However, this characteristic does not preclude the use of *suyu* by political leaders or public figures in some situations. It is general knowledge that Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping liked using *suyu*, with some of their most famous *suyu* including, among others: 纸老虎 (paper tigers), 墙头草 (fence-sitters), 东方不亮西方亮 (while something is not workable in one place, it might be workable somewhere else), 摸着石头过河 (to cross the river by touching stones), and 不管白猫黑猫, 能捉老鼠就是好猫 (it does not matter whether a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice).
- 3) *Suyu* are mainly colloquial. However, this does not preclude one from using *suyu* on formal occasions or in writing in order to elicit a special reaction from the audience. Also, based on our observations, the rapid proliferation of the internet has led internet users to begin using more *suyu* in their pursuit of fresh, pithy expressions, therein indirectly influencing the vernacular of the media.
- 4) The actual meanings of *suyu* come not from a literal, character-by-character translation, but rather from the proverb's analogical or synecdochic meaning. For example, consider the sentence 他不是省油的灯. The portion of the proverb, 不是省油的灯 does not actually mean 'a non kerosene-saving lamp,' but rather, 'a real piece of work.'
- 5) *Suyu* mainly express derogatory or critical sentiments. Take, for example, 占着茅坑不拉屎 (to be a dog in the manger), or 临时抱佛脚 (fair weather atheists turn to god in a pinch). About half of the entries in this dictionary carry either a strongly or slightly derogatory connotation, and the most common word in the 500 entries is 不, which appears 119 times in total. However, there are also many neutral *suyu*, such as 一个萝卜一个坑 (each has his own task and there is nobody to spare).
- 6) The structures of *suyu* are relatively fixed. For example, while one can say 一个萝卜一个坑, meaning, literally, 'one radish, one hole,' the proverb does not maintain its implied meaning of 'each has his own task and there is nobody to spare' if the structure is changed. We cannot say 'two radishes, two holes.' Neither can we say 'one sweet potato, one hole.' However, the structures of a number of *suyu*, mainly those embodied in short phrases, can be slightly adjusted. In some instances, it is fine to insert a few components. For example, 吃豆腐, meaning, literally, 'to eat tofu,' actually means 'to come on to,' or 'to take advantage of.' However, one can say 吃她的豆腐, or 吃小姑娘的豆腐, to yield the phrases, 'take advantage of her,' or 'come on to a young woman.'
- 7) The constituent parts of *suyu* are mostly objects or activities which are closely associated with the daily life of the general population. The most common words in the entries included in this dictionary include 人 (people), 吃 (to eat), 打 (to hit, to beat and many other meanings), 水 (water), 马 (horse), 眼 (eye), 狗 (dog), 虎 (tiger), 鸡 (chicken), 风 (wind), 山 (mountain), 脚 (foot), and 刀 (knife).

Why *suyu* are important to learners of Chinese

Suyu are vivid and colorful expressions that are widely and liberally used by Chinese people. Those people who use *suyu* often and well in everyday life project a cultural sophistication, expressive ability, sense of humor, and bonhomie, which facilitates

their acceptance by others and makes them the center of attention. Using *suyu* in certain special situations can work wonders. For decades, countless politicians and economists argued over a still-socialist China's adoption of a capitalist path and were unable to resolve certain resulting theoretical questions. However, with one *suyu*, 不管黑猫白猫, 能捉老鼠就是好猫 (it does not matter whether a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice), Deng Xiaoping promptly settled the dispute. Examples like this cause people to admire the importance of *suyu*. They are a shortcut to establishing a rapport with Chinese people.

It is generally difficult for non-immersion learners of Chinese to come into contact with genuine *suyu*. Even if these learners should happen to encounter a Chinese person, the language environment outside of China, and considerations of practicality, discourage the Chinese from using *suyu* in communicating with Chinese language learners. Moreover, due to the duality of *suyu*, it is not easy for learners of Chinese to quickly guess their implied meaning. They sometimes even develop mistaken – and potentially embarrassing – understandings of *suyu*. Recall, for example, the *suyu* 吃豆腐. The component words, 吃 (eat) and 豆腐 (tofu) are both quite simple, however, when put together, their meaning changes significantly, as shown earlier.

Special characteristics of this dictionary

We hope this dictionary will come to be an indispensable aid to many Chinese language learners and teachers. As such, we have included a number of distinguishing features, which are as follows:

- 1) This dictionary has identified, and lists the 500 most common Chinese *suyu* according to their frequency of use. In this manner, learners of Chinese can be sure about which *suyu* are important and should be learned first. Knowledge of these 500 *suyu* will be sufficient for use in daily life or work situations, when conducting business, or even when writing.
- 2) This dictionary contains accurate English translations and annotations. For example, the *suyu* 会哭的孩子有奶吃, when translated literally, means 'if a baby is good at pretending to cry, it will be rewarded with its mother's milk.' However, given the context of its usage and the functional meaning of the phrase (the squeaky wheel gets the grease), this dictionary has more logically and correctly translated 奶 (milk) as 母乳 (breast milk). Additionally, English translations of Chinese example dialogues were structured, where possible, to adhere closely to the syntactical organization of the Chinese, in order to make it easy for students to learn the characters for words and phrases they are unfamiliar with.
- 3) This dictionary is concise, practical, and convenient for educational purposes. The entry for each *suyu* includes: the *suyu* itself (in simplified and traditional Chinese characters), Pinyin romanization, a character-by-character translation in English, implied meaning in English, functional translation in English (for most entries), two suitable examples (in Chinese, Pinyin, and English), usage, variants (if any), and notes. Most examples take the form of dialogues reflecting commonly encountered situations.

- 4) Because it is very difficult for non-native learners of Chinese to grasp the degree of sarcasm or abrasiveness associated with a given *suyu*, this dictionary separates the tone of *suyu* into four categories in the annotations: humorous, neutral, slightly derogatory, and derogatory. As such, when employing *suyu*, users of this dictionary will not make egregious and potentially embarrassing errors in usage. For example, when recommending that some leader retire, one would not use a strongly derogatory *suyu* such as 占着茅坑不拉屎 (to be like a dog in the manger). The chart depicted below is included for all entries except the 21 which have complimentary connotations.

humorous	neutral	slightly derogatory	derogatory
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- 5) This dictionary contains necessary cultural annotations. For each entry, we have made a judgment as to whether or not there is a serious gap in relevant cultural understanding between native English and Chinese speakers. In cases where we deemed it necessary, cultural gaps are addressed and further explained. For example, while the practice of foot binding may be one that native English speakers are familiar with, the deeper social and cultural connotations of this custom provide the meaning of the *suyu* 露马脚 and, as such, the tradition is explained in that entry's cultural note.
- 6) This dictionary also includes a large number of relevant Chinese idioms (*chengyu*) to contrast or complement the *suyu* and make the language even more vivid. For example, the Chinese idiom 视而不见 (to turn a blind eye to) appears in the example sentence for 睁着眼睛说瞎话 (to tell bald-faced lies).

As should be clear from the analysis above, *500 Common Chinese Proverbs and Colloquial Expressions* should satisfy the educational needs of Chinese language learners at the intermediate level or higher, enabling them to gain a grasp of the most common *suyu* in the Chinese language one by one. Alternatively, we hope this dictionary will provide significant assistance to Chinese language instructors who, when preparing for class or explaining *suyu* to their students, may select those *suyu* which are most likely to be encountered, and refer to the usage notes and example sentences in this dictionary.

How the entries of this dictionary were determined

As there was no existing corpus of *suyu* organized by frequency prior to the inception of this volume, the writing of this dictionary necessitated the compilation of a frequency ordered corpus of *suyu* using sociolinguistic methods. In order to compile this list, 902 Chinese university students from different regions of China were surveyed to gauge their familiarity with hundreds of different Chinese *suyu*. For each *suyu*, participants were asked to choose among the following options:

- A) I have never heard this *suyu* before.
 B) I occasionally hear others (not counting my family, relatives, friends, classmates, colleagues, or instructors) use this *suyu* colloquially.

- C) I have heard this *suyu* used colloquially by someone close to me (including my family, relatives, friends, classmates, colleagues or instructors).
- D) I believe I can use this *suyu* appropriately.
- E) I have used this *suyu* either in written or spoken form.

At the end of the survey, each participant was asked to list the ten *suyu* that he or she used most often, even if they were not featured on the survey list.

While, on the face of it, it may seem that we have surveyed only a small number of individual university students, our survey methodology is workable because what we were really surveying were the groups to which these students belong. As each survey participant is a member of a larger social or cultural group – be it a family, an affinity group, or a cultural movement – each participant’s responses indirectly reflect the influence and general linguistic tendencies of the groups to which they belong as well as the groups to which their acquaintances belong. This trickle-down diversity makes up for what would otherwise be an excessively homogeneous survey group.

This survey was conducted primarily in June of 2012, whereas compilation and selection of possible entries started as early as 2007. One of the authors, Liwei Jiao, was present when most of the surveys were being conducted. The authors wish to sincerely thank all of the following Chinese faculty and their students for their participation in this survey:

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Ms. Yuhui Shi and her students at Xuzhou Normal University,
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Background of the compilation of this dictionary and acknowledgments

This dictionary is the sister volume to *500 Common Chinese Idioms*, and both books were jointly conceived in 2007. The research for this volume proceeded gradually from 2007 until the completion of *500 Common Chinese Idioms* in 2010. In the fall of 2010, Benjamin Stone joined this project, and we have worked together towards the completion of this book since then.

The authors wish to express here their appreciation to the following people for their assistance in the compilation of this dictionary: Professor Shuiguang Deng of Zhejiang University, Professor Zepeng Wang of Nankai University, Professor

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Liwei Jiao
Benjamin Stone

List of abbreviations and grammatical terms in character-by-character translation

's: possessive
ed: past tense
ing: present progressive tense
MW: measure word

List of entries

- 1 好马不吃回头草
- 2 小菜一碟
- 3 太阳从西边出来
- 4 说曹操，曹操到
- 5 乌鸦嘴
- 6 二百五
- 7 吃一堑，长一智
- 8 睁着眼睛说瞎话
- 9 近朱者赤，近墨者黑
- 10 物以稀为贵
- 11 王婆卖瓜，自卖自夸
- 12 站着说话不腰疼
- 13 天下没有不散的筵席
- 14 天上掉馅饼
- 15 己所不欲，勿施于人
- 16 睁眼瞎
- 17 跳进黄河洗不清
- 18 拍马屁
- 19 情人眼里出西施
- 20 打酱油
- 21 不怕一万，就怕万一
- 22 走着瞧
- 23 不管三七二十一
- 24 吃着碗里的，看着锅里的
- 25 钻牛角尖
- 26 人不可貌相，海水不可斗量
- 27 林子大了，什么鸟都有
- 28 鸡毛蒜皮
- 29 鲜花插在牛粪上
- 30 醉翁之意不在酒
- 31 猴年马月
- 32 眼不见为净
- 33 姜是老的辣
- 34 留得青山在，不怕没柴烧
- 35 拿得起，放得下
- 36 以其人之道还治其人之身
- 37 走桃花运
- 38 成事不足，败事有余
- 39 皇上不急太监急
- 40 三个臭皮匠，顶个诸葛亮
- 41 脚踩两只船
- 42 此地无银三百两
- 43 吃不到葡萄就说葡萄酸
- 44 心急吃不了热豆腐
- 45 家常便饭
- 46 癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉
- 47 天无绝人之路
- 48 走后门
- 49 瞎猫碰上死耗子
- 50 好汉不吃眼前亏
- 51 解铃还须系铃人
- 52 肥水不流外人田
- 53 心有余而力不足
- 54 不分青红皂白
- 55 睁一只眼，闭一只眼
- 56 破罐子破摔
- 57 种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆
- 58 萝卜白菜，各有所爱
- 59 狗嘴里吐不出象牙
- 60 三天打鱼，两天晒网
- 61 一朝被蛇咬，十年怕井绳
- 62 英雄难过美人关
- 63 刀子嘴，豆腐心
- 64 一失足成千古恨
- 65 哪壶不开提哪壶
- 66 炒鱿鱼
- 67 人往高处走，水往低处流
- 68 说得比唱得好听
- 69 强扭的瓜不甜
- 70 老掉牙
- 71 搬起石头砸自己的脚
- 72 卖关子
- 73 一分钱一分货
- 74 九牛二虎之力
- 75 敬酒不吃吃罚酒
- 76 躲得过初一，躲不过十五
- 77 吃香的，喝辣的
- 78 小儿科

- 79 一个巴掌拍不响
80 牛头不对马嘴
81 以小人之心，度君子之腹
82 车到山前必有路
83 鸡蛋里挑骨头
84 吃不了兜着走
85 打肿脸充胖子
86 三十六计走为上
87 当耳旁风
88 恨铁不成钢
89 你走你的阳关道，我过我的独木桥
90 过了这个村，就没这个店
91 抱佛脚
92 有钱能使鬼推磨
93 有其父必有其子
94 不见棺材不落泪
95 三长两短
96 纸包不住火
97 好戏在后头
98 吹牛皮
99 欲速则不达
100 家家有本难念的经
101 墙头草
102 替罪羊
103 近水楼台先得月
104 小巫见大巫
105 过河拆桥
106 一不做，二不休
107 以牙还牙，以眼还眼
108 跑了和尚跑不了庙
109 绿帽子
110 识时务者为俊杰
111 井水不犯河水
112 一棵树上吊死
113 放鸽子
114 一步一个脚印
115 上梁不正下梁歪
116 不入虎穴，焉得虎子
117 赔了夫人又折兵
118 有心栽花花不长，无心插柳柳成荫
119 八字还没一撇
120 有眼不识泰山
121 出气筒
122 八九不离十
123 无风不起浪
124 得便宜卖乖
125 不是省油的灯
126 家丑不可外扬
127 背黑锅
128 兔子不吃窝边草
129 铁饭碗
130 冰冻三尺，非一日之寒
131 远亲不如近邻
132 下马威
133 天下乌鸦一般黑
134 不到黄河心不死
135 狗急了跳墙
136 狗眼看人低
137 只许州官放火，不许百姓点灯
138 偷鸡摸狗
139 死马当活马医
140 新官上任三把火
141 对号入座
142 十万八千里
143 露马脚
144 公说公有理，婆说婆有理
145 上刀山，下火海
146 打退堂鼓
147 磨刀不误砍柴工
148 风马牛不相及
149 一山不容二虎
150 眼里揉不得沙子
151 三下五除二
152 泼冷水
153 杀鸡给猴看
154 生米做成熟饭
155 初生牛犊不怕虎
156 铁公鸡
157 无事不登三宝殿
158 马后炮
159 掉链子
160 纸老虎
161 狐狸精
162 丑话说在前头
163 半路杀出个程咬金
164 麻雀虽小，五脏俱全
165 虎毒不食子
166 小不忍则乱大谋
167 打狗还得看主人
168 万事俱备，只欠东风
169 不管黑猫白猫，会捉老鼠就是好猫
170 真金不怕火炼
171 狗改不了吃屎
172 杀手锏

- 173 饥不择食
 174 对事不对人
 175 皮笑肉不笑
 176 双刃剑
 177 热脸贴冷屁股
 178 好了伤疤忘了疼
 179 醋坛子
 180 君子之交淡如水
 181 三个和尚没水吃
 182 赶鸭子上架
 183 小白脸
 184 放长线，钓大鱼
 185 依葫芦画瓢
 186 隔墙有耳
 187 巧妇难为无米之炊
 188 不是吃素的
 189 嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗
 190 打开天窗说亮话
 191 人算不如天算
 192 小动作
 193 远水解不了近渴
 194 占着茅坑不拉屎
 195 碰一鼻子灰
 196 死猪不怕开水烫
 197 换汤不换药
 198 救命稻草
 199 明枪易躲，暗箭难防
 200 谋事在人，成事在天
 201 三个女人一台戏
 202 有鼻子有眼
 203 枪打出头鸟
 204 碰钉子
 205 蹬鼻子上脸
 206 吃豆腐
 207 眉毛胡子一把抓
 208 偷鸡不成反蚀把米
 209 众人拾柴火焰高
 210 快刀斩乱麻
 211 吃软饭
 212 一着不慎，满盘皆输
 213 听风就是雨
 214 鸿门宴
 215 吃哑巴亏
 216 眼中钉、肉中刺
 217 舍不得孩子套不住狼
 218 挂羊头、卖狗肉
 219 煮熟的鸭子飞了
 220 常在河边走，哪有不湿鞋
 221 三脚猫
 222 吃闭门羹
 223 三十年河东，三十年河西
 224 土包子
 225 树大招风
 226 酒逢知己千杯少
 227 当一天和尚撞一天钟
 228 是骡子是马拉出来遛遛
 229 一个鼻孔出气
 230 身在曹营心在汉
 231 瘦死的骆驼比马大
 232 树欲静而风不止
 233 丑媳妇早晚也得见公婆
 234 胜者王侯败者贼
 235 下三烂
 236 上了贼船
 237 病急乱投医
 238 打如意算盘
 239 龙生龙，凤生凤
 240 不看僧面看佛面
 241 雷声大、雨点小
 242 脸红脖子粗
 243 一棍子打死
 244 拿鸡蛋碰石头
 245 没有不透风的墙
 246 人怕出名猪怕壮
 247 山中无老虎，猴子称大王
 248 杀鸡焉用宰牛刀
 249 大树底下好乘凉
 250 跑龙套
 251 七大姑，八大姨
 252 一是一，二是二
 253 多个朋友多条路
 254 下台阶
 255 打小算盘
 256 坐山观虎斗
 257 羊毛出在羊身上
 258 一口吃成个胖子
 259 屋漏偏逢连阴雨
 260 老油条
 261 捅马蜂窝
 262 小意思
 263 倒打一耙
 264 陈芝麻、烂谷子
 265 一条龙
 266 四两拨千斤

- 267 前怕狼，后怕虎
268 吃水不忘挖井人
269 有仇不报非君子
270 不倒翁
271 干打雷，不下雨
272 鸡飞狗跳
273 事后诸葛亮
274 落水狗
275 板上钉钉
276 一碗水端平
277 烫手的山芋
278 笑掉大牙
279 一回生，二回熟
280 鱼与熊掌不可得兼
281 咸鱼翻身
282 一根绳上的蚂蚱
283 趟浑水
284 狗腿子
285 用在刀刃上
286 鸡飞蛋打
287 胳膊扭不过大腿
288 饱汉不知饿汉饥
289 笑面虎
290 二
291 给力
292 母老虎
293 五十步笑百步
294 门外汉
295 前人栽树，后人乘凉
296 烂泥扶不上墙
297 关公面前耍大刀
298 高不成，低不就
299 胳膊肘往外扭
300 长痛不如短痛
301 酒香不怕巷子深
302 一条路走到黑
303 不是鱼死，就是网破
304 冰山一角
305 身体是革命的本钱
306 说风凉话
307 紧箍咒
308 唱双簧
309 开空白支票
310 保护伞
311 一个萝卜一个坑
312 狗咬狗
313 唱高调
314 打水漂
315 开小差
316 两面派
317 一盘散沙
318 和稀泥
319 敲竹杠
320 扯后腿
321 穿小鞋
322 给他一点颜色看看
323 天高皇帝远
324 拣软柿子捏
325 打马虎眼
326 千里马
327 打擦边球
328 摸着石头过河
329 半路出家
330 老狐狸
331 一窝蜂
332 开夜车
333 手心手背都是肉
334 缩头乌龟
335 走过场
336 做文章
337 吃大锅饭
338 戴高帽
339 秋后算账
340 僧多粥少
341 坐冷板凳
342 不当家不知柴米贵
343 红眼病
344 葫芦里卖的是什么药
345 三句话不离本行
346 糖衣炮弹
347 树倒猢猻散
348 硬骨头
349 二虎相争，必有一伤
350 拆东墙，补西墙
351 大鱼吃小鱼
352 狐狸尾巴露出来了
353 开绿灯
354 歪瓜裂枣
355 小辫子
356 一头雾水
357 隔行如隔山
358 一亩三分地
359 成也萧何，败也萧何
360 大水冲了龙王庙

- 361 乱弹琴
 362 挤牙膏
 363 墙倒众人推
 364 莫须有
 365 拿鸡毛当令箭
 366 捅破窗户纸
 367 三字经
 368 苍蝇不叮无缝的蛋
 369 大跌眼镜
 370 说一千，道一万
 371 绊脚石
 372 过五关、斩六将
 373 求爷爷、告奶奶
 374 羡慕嫉妒恨
 375 打掉门牙往肚里咽
 376 唱对台戏
 377 分一杯羹
 378 变色龙
 379 独木不成林
 380 既生瑜，何生亮？
 381 撂挑子
 382 敲门砖
 383 试金石
 384 火烧眉毛
 385 空手套白狼
 386 一瓶子不满，半瓶子晃荡
 387 脱了裤子放屁
 388 借东风
 389 白开水
 390 鲤鱼跳龙门
 391 强龙压不住地头蛇
 392 这山望着那山高
 393 光脚的不怕穿鞋的
 394 不成功，便成仁
 395 滚刀肉
 396 久病成良医
 397 枕边风
 398 一锤子买卖
 399 横挑鼻子竖挑眼
 400 唱空城计
 401 一刀切
 402 旧瓶装新酒
 403 两面三刀
 404 一把钥匙开一把锁
 405 打一巴掌，给个甜枣
 406 先君子后小人
 407 尺有所短，寸有所长
 408 出来混的，总要还的
 409 画虎不成反类犬
 410 大意失荆州
 411 卸磨杀驴
 412 躺着都中枪
 413 脚正不怕鞋歪
 414 有奶就是娘
 415 肉烂在锅里
 416 说你胖你就喘
 417 擦屁股
 418 皇帝女儿不愁嫁
 419 一朝天子一朝臣
 420 活人让尿憋死
 421 走马灯
 422 花无百日红
 423 东风压倒西风
 424 岁月是把杀猪刀
 425 丁是丁，卯是卯
 426 多年的媳妇熬成婆
 427 强将手下无弱兵
 428 头痛医头，脚痛医脚
 429 拉不出屎来怨茅房
 430 东方不亮西方亮
 431 老牛拉破车
 432 放卫星
 433 鸡同鸭讲
 434 一锅端
 435 老皇历
 436 家花没有野花香
 437 又想当婊子又想立牌坊
 438 遮羞布
 439 耍花枪
 440 又要马儿跑，又要马儿不吃草
 441 牛不喝水强按头
 442 摆乌龙
 443 各打五十大板
 444 一个将军一个令
 445 抱大腿
 446 砸了锅
 447 会哭的孩子有奶吃
 448 二一添作五
 449 风一阵，雨一阵
 450 剃头挑子一头热
 451 远来的和尚会念经
 452 揪辫子
 453 小姐的身子丫鬟的命
 454 只见树木，不见森林

- 455 屁股决定脑袋
456 兔子尾巴长不了
457 骑马找马
458 敲锣边儿
459 扣帽子
460 拔出萝卜带出泥
461 满嘴跑火车
462 温水煮青蛙
463 万金油
464 树挪死，人挪活
465 按下葫芦起了瓢
466 到什么山唱什么歌
467 拔根汗毛比腰粗
468 阎王好见，小鬼难搪
469 不见兔子不撒鹰
470 当面锣，对面鼓
471 眼大肚子小
472 浅水养不了大鱼
473 吃别人嚼过的馍不香
474 起大早，赶晚集
475 打不着狐狸惹身骚
476 多面手
477 鸟枪换炮
- 478 矮子里拔将军
479 给个棒槌就当针
480 捧臭脚
481 咬人的狗不露齿
482 炒冷饭
483 一只羊是赶，一群羊也是放
484 虱子多了不咬，账多了不愁
485 攒鸡毛，凑掸子
486 骑脖子拉屎
487 指着和尚骂秃子
488 蚂蚱也是肉
489 背着抱着一般沉
490 一言堂
491 乱拳打死老师傅
492 端起碗来吃肉，放下筷子骂娘
493 出头的椽子先烂
494 一马勺坏一锅
495 终日打雁，让雁啄了眼
496 老鸱嫌猪黑
497 别人牵驴你拔橛
498 仔卖爷田不心疼
499 萝卜快了不洗泥
500 接地气

Structure of entries

sequential number of the entry, based on frequency

entry in traditional Chinese characters

entry in Pinyin romanization

143. 露马脚 (露馬腳) lù mǎ jiǎo

entry in simplified Chinese characters

character-by-character translation of the entry

implied meaning of the entry

functional translation of the entry

Translated character by character, 露马脚 means 'expose-horse-foot,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to accidentally reveal information about one's wrongdoing.' Its functional translation is 'to let the cat out of the bag.'

Example 1:

A: 这个坏蛋太狡猾了, 让人抓不到他的一点把柄。
B: 别着急, 即使他再狡猾, 总有一天也会露出马脚的。

A: Zhègè huàidàn tài jiǎohuá le, ràng rén zhuābúdào tā de yí diǎn bǎbǐng.
B: Bié zháojí, jíshǐ tā zài jiǎohuá, zǒngyǒuyìtiān yě huì lù chū mǎjiǎo de.

A: This scoundrel's too cunning. He makes it hard to get a handle on him.
B: Don't worry. No matter how cunning he is, there will be a day when he'll let the cat out of the bag.

example in simplified Chinese, Pinyin and English

Example 2:

A: 你怎么知道他在撒谎?
B: 他前面说的谎话还能自圆其说, 可是后来说那天路很黑, 没有月亮, 所以他迷路了。这句话露了马脚, 因为那天晚上的月亮又大又圆。

entry highlighted in bold within example

A: Nǐ zěnmē zhīdào tā zài sāhuǎng?
B: Tā qiánmiàn shuō de huǎnghuà hái néng zìyuán-qíshuō, kěshì hòulái shuō nà tiān lù hēn hēi, méi yǒu yuèliang, suǒyǐ tā mílù le. Zhè jù huà lùle mǎjiǎo, yīnwèi nà tiān wǎnshàng de yuèliang yòu dà yòu yuán.

A: How did you know he was lying?
B: He could explain away the first lie he told but, after that, he said that since the road was dark and there was no moonlight, he got lost. With that sentence, he let the cat out of the bag, because there was a full moon that night.

grammatical function(s) of the entry

Usage: Functions as predicate.

variant(s) of the entry

Variant: 露出马脚

tone of the entry phrase in use

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning. Folk legend holds that the wife of Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, had large feet and the surname Ma. At a time when female children in wealthy families would have their feet bound, this fact revealed that she had come from a poor family. This is how the proverb 露马脚 was born.

cultural annotation of the entry provided where necessary

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tone of the entry indicated by position of shading in chart (from left to right): humorous, neutral, slightly derogatory, derogatory

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500 common Chinese proverbs and colloquial expressions

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1. 好马不吃回头草 (好馬不吃回頭草)

hǎo mǎ bù chī huí tóu cǎo

Translated character by character, 好马不吃回头草 means 'good-horse-not-eat-turn-around-grass,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'a good man doesn't backtrack.'

Example 1:

A: 我已经决定要离开现在的公司了, 可是公司又提出给我加薪。你看我应该走还是留?

B: **好马不吃回头草。** 你还是走吧。

A: Wǒ yǐjīng juéding yào líkāi xiànzài de gōngsī le, kěshì gōngsī yòu tíchū gěi wǒ jiāxīn. Nǐ kàn wǒ yīnggāi zǒu hái shì liú?

B: Hǎo mǎ bù chī huítóu cǎo. Nǐ hái shì zǒu ba.

A: I already decided that I was going to leave the company I'm at now, but they're discussing giving me a raise. What do you think, should I leave or should I stay?

B: A good man doesn't backtrack. You should still leave.

Example 2:

A: 听说他们想复婚呢。

B: **好马不吃回头草,** 那已经是过去的一页了。

A: Tīngshuō tāmen xiǎng fùhūn ne.

B: Hǎo mǎ bù chī huítóu cǎo, nà yǐjīng shì guòqù de yí yè le.

A: I've heard they want to remarry.

B: A good man doesn't backtrack. They've already turned over a new leaf.

Usage: Used singly.

Note: Neutral or humorous in meaning.



2. 小菜一碟 (小菜一碟) xiǎo cài yì dié

Translated character by character, 小菜一碟 means 'small-dish-one-plate,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'something that can be done very easily.' Its functional equivalent is 'a piece of cake.'

Example 1:

A: 这个国家的篮球队对于美国队来说简直是**小菜一碟**。美国队的替补阵容都能把他们打得稀里哗啦的。

4 Entry 3: 太阳从西边出来

A: Zhègè guójiā de lánqiú duì duìyú Měiguó duì láishuō jiǎnzhí shì xiǎo cài yì dié. Měiguó duì de tǐbǔ zhènróng dōu néng bǎ tāmen dǎ de xīlǐhuālā de.

A: This country's basketball team really is a piece of cake for the American team. Even the American substitutes could clean their clocks.

Example 2:

A: 我外甥女今年要毕业了，你能不能把她安排进交通局工作？

B: 不就是交通局嘛，小菜一碟。

A: Wǒ wàishēngnǚ jīnnián yào bìyè le, nǐ néngbùnénng bǎ tā ānpái jìn jiāotōngjú gōngzuò?

B: Bú jiùshì jiāotōngjú ma, xiǎo cài yì dié.

A: My sister's daughter is graduating this year. Would you be able to arrange a job for her at the Traffic Department?

B: We're talking about the Traffic Department, right? It'll be a piece of cake.

Usage: Functions as predicative.

Note: Neutral or humorous in meaning.



3. 太阳从西边出来 (太陽從西邊出來) tàiyáng cóng xī biān chūlai

Translated character by character, 太阳从西边出来 means 'sun-from-west-side-come-out,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'something is very unlikely to happen.' Its functional translation is 'hell freezes over.'

Example 1:

A: 他工作三年了，今天第一次加班。

B: 太阳从西边出来了吧？要不肯定是他的电脑、手机、手表上的时间同时晚了。

A: Tā gōngzuò sān nián le, jīntiān dì-yī cì jiābān.

B: Tàiyáng cóng xībiān chūláile ba? Yàobù kěndìng shì tā de diànnǎo, shǒujī, shǒubiǎo shàng de shíjiān tóngshí wǎn le.

A: He's been working for three years now. Today's the first time he's worked late.

B: Has hell frozen over? Otherwise his computer, phone, and watch are all running slow at the same time.

Example 2:

A: 你们的关系恢复了吗?

B: 我已经跟他一刀两断，如果想恢复关系，除非**太阳从西边出来**。

A: Nǐmen de guānxi huīfù le ma?

B: Wǒ yǐjīng gēn tā yìdāo-liǎngduàn, rúguǒ xiǎng huīfù guānxi, chúfēi tàiyáng cóng xībiān chūlái.

A: Have you reconciled with him?

B: I already broke things off with him. If he wants to reconcile our relationship, it won't happen unless hell freezes over.

Usage: Functions as predicate or used singly.

Note: Slightly derogatory and humorous in meaning.



4. 说曹操，曹操到 (說曹操，曹操到)

shuō Cáo Cāo, Cáo Cāo dào

Translated character by character, 说曹操，曹操到 means 'speak-Cao Cao, Cao Cao-arrive,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'someone appears right after you have said their name.' Its functional translation is 'Speak of the devil (and he shall appear).'

Example 1:

A: 今天晚上的饭局谁做东呢?

B: 老刘啊! 他刚抱上孙子。

(老刘进来。)

A: 这不，**说曹操，曹操就到**。

A: Jīntiān wǎnshàng de fānjú shéi zuòdōng ne?

B: Lǎo Liú a! Tā gāng bào shàng sūnzi.

(Lǎo Liú jìnlái.)

A: Zhè bú, shuō Cáo Cāo, Cáo Cāo jiù dào.

A: Who is hosting tonight's dinner party?

B: Old Liu! He's just become a grandfather.

(Old Liu enters)

A: Speak of the devil.

Example 2:

A: 我得给王局长打个电话。

(王局长从远处出现。)

B: 不用打了，**说曹操，曹操到**。

A: Wǒ děi gěi Wáng júzhǎng dǎ gè diànhuà.

(Wáng júzhǎng cóng yuǎnchù chūxiàn.)

B: Búyòng dǎ le, shuō Cáo Cāo, Cáo Cāo dào.

A: I should give Director Wang a call.

(Director Wang appears from a distance)

B: There's no need. Speak of the devil and he shall appear.

Usage: Used singly.

Variant: 说曹操，曹操就到

Note: Neutral or humorous in meaning.



5. 乌鸦嘴 (烏鴉嘴) wūyā zuǐ

Translated character by character, 乌鸦嘴 means 'crow-mouth,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'a person who is believed to bring bad luck.' Its functional translation is 'jinx.'

Example 1:

A: 他又预测巴西队会夺冠。

B: 他是个有名的**乌鸦嘴**，看好哪个队哪个队倒霉。

A: Tā yòu yùcè Bāxī duì huì duóguān.

B: Tā shì gè yǒumíng de wūyāzuǐ, kàn hǎo nǎ ge duì nǎ ge duì dǎoméi.

A: He once again predicted that Brazil would win the championship.

B: He's a well-known jinx. Whichever team he favors gets unlucky.

Example 2:

A: 有我保佑，你一定成功。

B: 闭上你那只**乌鸦嘴**!

A: Yǒu wǒ bǎoyòu, nǐ yídìng chénggōng.

B: Bì shàng nǐ nà zhī wūyāzuǐ!

A: With my blessing, you will definitely succeed.

B: Shut your jinx mouth!

Usage: Functions as object or predicative.

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.



6. 二百五 (二百五) èr bǎi wǔ

Translated character by character, 二百五 means ‘two-hundred-fifty,’ whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be ‘an idiot.’ Its functional translation is ‘halfwit,’ or ‘pea-brain.’

Example 1:

A: 你能告诉我怎么用电子表格求和吗?

B: **二百五**，连电子表格都不会，以后怎么做秘书?

A: Nǐ néng gàosù wǒ zěnmē yòng diànzǐbiǎogé qiúhé ma?

B: Èrbǎiwǔ, lián diànzǐbiǎogé dōu búhuì, yǐhòu zěnmē zuò mìshū?

A: Can you show me how to do a summation on Excel?

B: You pea-brain! If you can't even use Excel, how can you become a secretary?

Example 2:

A: 别人跟他说了要再研究研究，可是他非得逼着人家当面作决定，人家只能拒绝了。

B: 他真是**个二百五**，听不出来别人话里有话。

A: Bìéren gēn tā shuōle yào yánjiū yánjiū, kěshì tā fēiděi bīzhe rénjiā dāngmiàn zuò juédìng, rénjiā zhīnéng jùjué le.

B: Tā zhēn shì gè èrbǎiwǔ, tīng bù chūlai biéren huàlǐyǒuhuà.

A: They told him they needed to think more about it, but he forced them to make a decision on the spot. They had no choice but to reject him.

B: He really is a halfwit. He can't read between the lines.

Usage: Functions as noun.

Note: Derogatory in meaning.



7. 吃一堑，长一智 (吃一堑，长一智) chī yí qiàn, zhǎng yí zhì

Translated character by character, 吃一堑，长一智 means ‘fall-once-pit-increase-bit-wisdom,’ whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be ‘to derive wisdom from one’s mistakes.’ Its functional translation is ‘a fall in the pit, a gain in your wit.’

Example 1:

A: 你没事吧?

B: 我没事，就是汽车废了。下次我再也不喝酒了。

A: **吃一堑，长一智**。

B: 是，就算花钱买个教训吧。

A: Nǐ méishì ba?

B: Wǒ méishì, jiùshì qìchē fēi le. Xiàcì wǒ zài yě bù hējiǔ le.

A: Chī yí qiàn, zhǎng yí zhì.

B: Shì, jiù suàn huāqián mǎi gè jiàoxùn ba.

A: Are you OK?

B: I'm alright, just my car's wrecked. Next time I'm not drinking.

A: A fall in the pit, a gain in your wit.

B: Yeah, it's like paying to learn a lesson.

Example 2:

A: 中国的企业在与外国的企业打官司时，因为对国际惯例不熟悉而败诉。不过，**吃一堑，长一智**，以后再打类似的官司时就有经验了。

A: Zhōngguó de qǐyè zài yǔ wàiguó de qǐyè dǎ guānsī shí, yīnwèi duì guójì guànlì bù shúxī ér bàisù. Búguò, chī yí qiàn, zhǎng yí zhì, yǐhòu zài dǎ lèishì de guānsī shí jiù yǒu jīngyàn le.

A: When Chinese corporations participate in lawsuits with foreign corporations, they lose because they aren't familiar with international practices. However, a fall in the pit is a gain in your wit. When faced with similar lawsuits in the future, they will have experience.

Usage: Functions as predicate or used singly.

Note: Neutral in meaning.



8. 睁着眼睛说瞎话 (睜著眼睛說瞎話) zhēng zhe yǎnjīng shuō xiā huà

Translated character by character, 睁着眼睛说瞎话 means 'open-ed-eyes-tell-lies,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to say what one knows to be untrue.' Its functional translation is 'to flout reality,' 'to tell bald-faced lies,' or 'to lie through one's teeth.'

Example 1:

A: 他太不诚实了，常常**睁着眼睛说瞎话**，连他父母都骗。

A: Tā tài bù chéngshí le, chángcháng zhēngzhe yǎnjīng shuō xiā huà, lián tā fùmǔ dōu piàn.

A: He's so dishonest. He often tells bald-faced lies, even to his parents.

Example 2:

A: 那家电视台**睁着眼睛说瞎话**，赤裸裸地攻击别的国家，而对自己国家的问题却视而不见。

A: Nà jiā diànshìtái zhēngzhe yǎnjing shuō xiā huà, chīlǔluǒ de gōngjī biéde guójiā, ér duì zìjǐ guójiā de wèntí què shì'érbújiàn.

A: That TV station is flouting reality. It plainly slanders other countries, but turns a blind eye towards its own country's problems.

Usage: Functions as predicate.

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.



9. 近朱者赤, 近墨者黑 (近朱者赤, 近墨者黑)

jìn zhū zhě chì, jìn mò zhě hēi

Translated character by character, 近朱者赤, 近墨者黑 means 'close-red-person-red, close-black-person-black,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'one is marked by the company one keeps.'

Example 1:

A: 最近你交往的人里面有一些不三不四的人, 你得小心。

B: 爸, 我知道。我跟他们只是认识而已, 算不上朋友。

A: 那也不行, **近朱者赤, 近墨者黑**, 时间久了也会染上恶习。

A: Zuìjìn nǐ jiāowǎng de rén lǐmiàn yǒu yìxiē bùsān-bùsì de rén, nǐ děi xiǎoxīn.

B: Bà, wǒ zhīdào. Wǒ gēn tāmen zhǐshì rènshí éryǐ, suànbúshàng péngyǒu.

A: Nà yě bú xíng, jìn zhū zhě chì, jìn mò zhě hēi, shíjiān jiǔle yě huì rǎnshàng èxí.

A: You've been interacting with a few shady characters recently. You should be careful.

B: Dad, I know. They're just acquaintances, I wouldn't call them friends.

A: That's also an issue. One is marked by the company one keeps. After a while, their vices will rub off on you.

Example 2:

A: 这位政治家年轻时曾是白宫的实习生, 与总统接触较多。现在这位政治家的做事风格与那位总统一模一样, 所谓**近朱者赤, 近墨者黑**。

A: Zhè wèi zhèngzhìjiā niánqīng shí céng shì Báigōng de shíxíshēng, yǔ zǒngtǒng jiēchù jiào duō. Xiànzài zhè wèi zhèngzhìjiā de zuòshì fēnggé yǔ nà wèi zǒngtǒng yí mú yí yàng, suǒwèi jìn zhū zhě chì, jìn mò zhě hēi.

A: This politician was a White House intern in his youth. He had a good amount of contact with the president. Now, he does things in exactly the same manner as that president. It's as they say: one is marked by the company one keeps.

Usage: Used singly.

Note: Neutral in meaning.



10. 物以稀为贵 (物以稀為貴) wù yǐ xī wéi guì

Translated character by character, 物以稀为贵 means ‘goods-by-rare-be-expensive,’ whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be ‘scarcity makes something valuable.’ Its functional translation would be ‘that which is rare is dear.’

Example 1:

A: 收藏市场的普遍原则是**物以稀为贵**。

A: Shōucáng shìchǎng de pǔbiàn yuánzé shì wù yǐ xī wéi guì.

A: The rule in the collectors’ market is that which is rare is dear.

Example 2:

A: 据说真正的龙井茶树不多，**物以稀为贵**，因此清明节前的龙井茶被炒成了天价。

A: Jùshuō zhēnzhèng de Lóngjǐng chá shù bù duō, wù yǐ xī wéi guì, yīncǐ qīngmíngjié qián de Lóngjǐng chá bèi chǎo chéng le tiānjià.

A: I’ve heard there aren’t many true Longjing tea trees. That which is rare is dear, so the price of Longjing tea picked before Tomb Sweeping Day was speculated to high heaven.

Usage: Functions as predicate or used singly.

Note: Neutral in meaning.



11. 王婆卖瓜, 自卖自夸 (王婆賣瓜, 自賣自誇) wáng pó mài guā, zì mài zì kuā

Translated character by character, 王婆卖瓜, 自卖自夸 means ‘nanny-Wang-sell-melon, self-sell-self-brag,’ whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be ‘to praise one’s own work.’ Its functional translation is ‘every potter praises his own pot.’

Example 1:

A: 他又在吹嘘他儿子怎么怎么棒呢。

B: **老王卖瓜, 自卖自夸**。他那个儿子, 学习成绩在班上倒数第一, 他还真好意思夸奖。

A: Tā yòu zài chuīxū tā érzi zěnmē zěnmē bàng ne.

B: Lǎo Wáng mài guā, zì mài zì kuā. Tā nàgè érzi, xuéxí chéngjì zài bān shàng dàoshǔ dì-yī, tā hái zhēn hǎoyìsi kuājiǎng.

A: He’s boasting about how his son’s so great again.

B: Every potter praises his own pot. That son of his has the worst grades in his class and yet he somehow still praises him.

Example 2:

A: 他的评论有“王婆卖瓜”的嫌疑，对自己的产品表扬多，对其他家的产品批评多。

A: Tā de pínglùn yǒu “Wáng pó mài guā” de xiányí, duì zìjǐ de chǎnpǐn biǎoyáng duō, duì qítā jiā de chǎnpǐn pīpíng duō.

A: His comment smacked of a potter praising his own pot. He praised his own products a lot and criticized other people's products a lot.

Usage: Used singly.

Variant: 老王卖瓜，自卖自夸

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.



12. 站着说话不腰疼 (站著說話不腰疼) zhàn zhe shuōhuà bù yāo téng

Translated character by character, 站着说话不腰疼 means 'stand-ing-speak-not-waist-ache,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'easier said than done.' Its functional translation would be 'to be an armchair quarterback' or 'talk is cheap.'

Example 1:

A: 这事儿还不容易，要是我早就办完了。

B: 你是**站着说话不腰疼**，真的让你干，未必比我快呢。

A: Zhè shìr hái bù róngyì, yàoshi wǒ zǎo jiù bàn wán le.

B: Nǐ shì zhàn zhe shuō huà bù yāo téng, zhēnde ràng nǐ gàn, wèibì bǐ wǒ kuài ne.

A: This should be easy. If it were me, it would have been finished a long time ago.

B: You're an armchair quarterback. If you really were to do it, you wouldn't necessarily be faster than me.

Example 2:

A: 政府应该再追加三百亿人民币在这个项目上。

B: **站着说话不腰疼**，三百亿哪儿那么容易来啊？

A: Zhèngfǔ yīnggāi zài zhuījiā sānbǎi yì rénminbì zài zhègè xiàngmù shàng.

B: Zhàn zhe shuō huà bù yāo téng, sānbǎi yì nǎr nàme róngyì lái a?

A: The government should supplement this program with another 30 billion RMB.

B: Talk is cheap. Since when has it been easy to find 30 billion?

Usage: Functions as predicate.

Note: Slightly derogatory and humorous in meaning.



13. 天下没有不散的筵席 (天下沒有不散的筵席) tiānxià méiyǒu bú sǎn de yánxí

Translated character by character, 天下没有不散的筵席 means 'heaven-under-not-have-not-dispersed-banquet,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'nothing good lasts forever.' Its functional translation is 'all good things must come to an end.'

Example 1:

A: 留步吧，天下没有不散的筵席，多保重！

A: Liúbù ba, tiānxià méiyǒu bú sǎn de yánxí, duō bǎozhòng!

A: Don't bother to see me out. All good things must come to an end. Take care of yourself!

Example 2:

A: 时间过得真快，转眼一个月过去了，真舍不得离开你们。

B: 天下没有不散的筵席，以后保持联系。

A: Shíjiān guò de zhēn kuài, zhuǎnyǎn yí gè yuè guò qù le, zhēn shěbù dé lí kāi nǐ men.

B: Tiānxià méiyǒu bú sǎn de yánxí, yǐ hòu bǎo chí lián xì.

A: Time really flew. A month went by in the blink of an eye. I really hate to part with you guys.

B: All good things must come to an end. Keep in touch.

Usage: Used singly.

Note: Neutral in meaning.



14. 天上掉馅饼 (天上掉餡餅) tiānshang diào xiànbǐng

Translated character by character, 天上掉馅饼 means 'sky-upon-fall-stuffed-pancake,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to receive a windfall without working.' Its functional translation is 'to have something fall into your lap.'

Example 1:

A: 你怎么不努力工作呢？

B: 我运气好，下午就去买彩票，说不定中两百万呢。

A: 你就等着天上掉馅儿饼吧，有饿死你的一天。

A: Nǐ zěnmē bù nǔlì gōngzuò ne?

B: Wǒ yùnqì hǎo, xiàwǔ jiù qù mǎi cǎipiào, shuōbùdìng zhòng liǎng bǎi wàn ne.

A: Nǐ jiù děngzhe tiānshang diào xiànrǎng bǐng ba, yǒu è sǐ nǐ de yì tiān.

A: Why aren't you working hard?

B: I have good luck. I'm going to buy lotto tickets this afternoon, who says I won't win two million dollars?

A: You just wait for money to fall into your lap. One day you'll starve.

Example 2:

A: 有人幻想国家富裕了，人民的生活水平自然会提高，不工作也能过上好日子，于是他们天天盼望天上掉馅儿饼。

A: Yǒu rén huànxiǎng guójiā fùyù le, rénmín de shēnghuó shuǐpíng zìrán huì tígāo, bù gōngzuò yě néng guò shàng hǎo rìzǐ, yúshì tāmen tiāntiān pànwàng tiānshàng diào xiànrǔbǐng.

A: Some people fantasize that when the country becomes prosperous, the citizens' quality of life will naturally rise, and even if they don't work they can still live well. So, they're always waiting for something to just fall into their laps.

Usage: Functions as object.

Note: Slightly derogatory and humorous in meaning.



15. 己所不欲，勿施于人 (己所不欲，勿施於人)

jǐ suǒ bú yù, wù shī yú rén

Translated character by character, 己所不欲，勿施于人 means 'oneself-what-not-desire, not-impose-on-others,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'don't treat others differently than you would like to be treated.' Its functional translation is 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

Example 1:

A: 他这样要求别人也太过分了。

B: 是啊，连他自己都做不到，己所不欲，勿施于人嘛。

A: Tā zhèyàng yāoqiú biérén yě tài guòfēn le.

B: Shì a, lián tā zìjǐ dōu zuò bù dào, jǐ suǒ bú yù, wù shī yú rén ma.

A: He's going too far by asking that of others.

B: Yeah, even he wouldn't do that. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Example 2:

A: 你这样做恐怕不合适吧？

B: 怎么不合适？

A: 你再想想，如果别人这样对待你，你会高兴吗？己所不欲，勿施于人。

A: Nǐ zhèyàng zuò kǒngpà bù héshì ba?

B: Zěnmé bù héshì?

A: Nǐ zài xiǎngxiǎng, rúguǒ biérén zhèyàng duìdài nǐ, nǐ huì gāoxìng ma? Jǐ suǒ bú yù, wù shī yú rén.

A: I'm afraid it would be inappropriate for you to do that.

B: How is it inappropriate?

A: Think about it. If other people treated you like that, would you be happy? Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Usage: Used singly.

Note: Neutral in meaning.

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16. 睁眼睛 (睁眼睛) zhēng yǎn xiā

Translated character by character, 睁眼睛 means 'open-eyes-blind,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'a bad judge of character.'

Example 1:

A: 我真是个**睁眼睛**，怎么没看出他是个披着人皮的狼！

A: Wǒ zhēn shì gè zhēngyǎnxiā, zěnmé méi kànchū tā shì gè pīzhe rén pí de láng!

A: I'm such a bad judge of character. How could I not see that he was a wolf in sheep's clothing?

Example 2:

A: 他是个**睁眼睛**。他老婆在外面跟别人搞，他好像一点儿都不知道。

B: 谁知道呢？没准儿他是睁一只眼、闭一只眼。

A: Tā shì gè zhēngyǎnxiā. Tā lǎopo zài wàimiàn gēn biérén gǎo tā hǎoxiàng yìdiǎnr dōu bù zhīdào.

B: Shéi zhīdào ne? Méizhǔnr tā shì zhēng yì zhī yǎn, bì yì zhī yǎn.

A: He's a bad judge of character. His wife is having an affair and he seems not to have a clue.

B: Who knows? Who's to say he's not just turning a blind eye?

Usage: Functions as predicative.

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.

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17. 跳进黄河洗不清 (跳进黄河洗不清)

tiào jìn Huáng Hé xǐ bù qīng

Translated character by character, 跳进黄河洗不清 means 'jump-in-Yellow River-wash-unable-clean.' Its functional translation is 'to be unable to clear one's name.'

Example 1:

- A: 那位有前途的政治家与一个名声很不好的女人泡夜店的照片被曝光了。
- B: 完了，这下他**跳进黄河也洗不清**了，以后肯定会被政治对手攻击的。
- A: Nà wèi yǒu qiántú de zhèngzhìjiā yǔ yí gè míngshēng hěn bù hǎo de nǚrén pào yèdiàn de zhàopiàn bèi bàoguāng le.
- B: Wán le, zhèxià tā tiào jìn Huáng Hé yě xǐ bù qīng le, yǐhòu kěndìng huì bèi zhèngzhì duìshǒu gōngjī de.
- A: That picture of the politician with the bright future and a girl with a bad reputation at a nightclub has surfaced.
- B: That's it, this time there's no way he can clear his name. He will definitely be attacked by his political adversaries for this in the future.

Example 2:

- A: 昨晚公司失窃了，丢了很多现金。监控录像只发现老李一个人进去过。
- B: 以老李的人品不会偷东西啊。不过，他**跳到黄河里都洗不清**了。
- A: Zuó wǎn gōngsī shīqiè le, diū le hěnduō xiànjīn. Jiānkòng lùxiàng zhǐ fāxiàn Lǎo Lǐ yí gè rén jìnqù guò.
- B: Yǐ Lǎo Lǐ de rénpǐn búhuì tōu dōngxi a. Búguò, tā tiào dào Huáng Hé lǐ dōu xǐ bù qīng le.
- A: The company was robbed last night. A lot of cash was taken. The surveillance tapes show that only Lao Li had gone in.
- B: It's not in Lao Li's nature to steal, but now there's no way for him to clear his name.

Usage: Functions as predicate or predicative.

Variants: 跳到黄河(也)洗不清

Note: Neutral or humorous in meaning. The Yellow River has a lot of silt in it and is very murky. The more one washes, the dirtier one gets.



18. 拍马屁 (拍馬屁) pāi mǎ pì

Translated character by character, 拍屁股 means 'hit-butt,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to fawn over.' Its functional translation is 'to suck up to.'

Example 1:

A: 她既有工作能力, 又善于**拍**上司的**马屁**, 所以提升很快。

A: Tā jì yǒu gōngzuò nénglì, yòu shànyú pāi shàngsī de mǎ pì, suǒyǐ tīshēng hěn kuài.

A: She's a good worker and she's good at sucking up to her superiors, so she was promoted quickly.

Example 2:

A: 老板, 您的领带真漂亮, 跟您的西装最配了。

B: 你少**拍马屁**, 这条领带我都戴了八回了, 你怎么第一次说好?

A: Lǎobǎn, nín de lǐngdài zhēn piàoliang, gēn nín de xīzhuāng zuì pèi le.

B: Nǐ shǎo pāimǎpì, zhè tiáo lǐngdài wǒ dōu dài le bā huí le, nǐ zěnmé dì-yī cì shuō hǎo?

A: Boss, your tie is really nice. It goes great with your suit.

B: Stop sucking up to me. I've already worn this tie eight times. Why is this the first time you've commented on it?

Usage: Functions as predicate.

Note: Derogatory in meaning.

19. 情人眼里出西施 (情人眼裏出西施)
qíngrén yǎn lǐ chū Xīshī

Translated character by character, 情人眼里出西施 means 'lover-eyes-in-come out of-Xishi,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'one's lover always appears beautiful to oneself.' However, it should be noted that this expression is exclusively used to refer to girls or women. Its functional translation is 'love is blind,' or 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder.'

Example 1:

A: 他老婆也太丑了。

B: **情人眼里出西施**, 他认为漂亮就行。

A: Tā lǎopo yě tài chǒu le.

B: Qíngrén yǎn lǐ chū Xīshī, tā rènwéi piàoliang jiù xíng.

A: His wife is hideous.

B: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; as long as he thinks she's pretty, it's OK.

Example 2:

A: 听说他们两个人在谈恋爱呢。你觉得他们合适吗？男的高富帅，女的可是相貌平平啊！

B: **情人眼里出西施**，那个男的应该更重视女朋友的内在美吧。

A: Tīngshuō tāmen liǎng gè rén zài tán liàn'ài ne. Nǐ juéde tāmen héshì ma? Nánde gāofùshuài, nǚde kě shì xiàngmào píngpíng a!

B: Qíngrén yǎn lǐ chū Xīshī, nàgè nánde yīnggāi gèng zhòngshì nǚpéngyǒu de nèizàiměi ba.

A: I heard they are dating. Do you think they are a good match? The boy is tall, rich and handsome, but the girl is too plain looking!

B: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. That boy obviously cares more about the inner beauty of his girlfriend.

Usage: Used singly.

Note: Neutral or humorous in meaning. Xishi (c. 506 BC) was one of the renowned Four Beauties of ancient China.



20. 打酱油 (打酱油) dǎ jiàngyóu

Translated character by character, 打酱油 means 'get-soy-sauce,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'it's none of my business.' Its functional translation would be 'I couldn't care less,' or 'that's above my pay grade.'

Example 1:

A: 请问您对中东局势有什么看法？

B: 抱歉，我要去**打酱油**。

A: Qǐngwèn nín duì Zhōngdōng júshì yǒu shénme kànfǎ?

B: Bàoqiàn, wǒ yào qù dǎ jiàngyóu.

A: Excuse me, what's your view on the situation in the Middle East?

B: I'm sorry, that's above my pay grade.

Example 2:

A: 您是来欢迎总统的吗？

B: 不是，我是来**打酱油**的。

A: Nín shì lái huānyíng zǒngtǒng de ma?

B: Búshì, wǒ shì lái dǎ jiàngyóu de.

A: Are you here to welcome the president?

B: No, I couldn't care less.

Usage: Functions as predicate.

Note: Humorous or neutral in meaning. This *suyu* is Chinese Internet slang dating from 2008. When responding to a TV reporter's commentary on some issue (an elementary school student refusing to look at pornographic and violent content on the internet), someone said, "What does this have to do with me? I'm here to '打酱油' (get some soy sauce)," meaning that he was indifferent to current events and government. '他不是打酱油的' is a very popular usage, meaning that the person in question is not a bystander, but someone wielding great influence on a certain topic or issue.



21. 不怕一万，就怕万一 (不怕一萬，就怕萬一)

bú pà yí wàn, jiù pà wànyī

Translated character by character, 不怕一万，就怕万一 means 'not-fear-one-ten thousand, just-fear-one-ten thousandth,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to be prepared for all eventualities.' Its functional translation is 'one can never be too careful.'

Example 1:

- A: 孩子，晚上太晚了千万别出门。
 B: 妈，没事儿的，我们学校安全得很。
 A: 那也不行，**不怕一万，就怕万一**。尤其是周末晚上，有些人喝醉了酒，很危险。
- A: Háizi, wǎnshang tài wǎn le qiānwàn bié chūmén.
 B: Mā, méishìr de, wǒmen xuéxiào ānquán de hěn.
 A: Nà yě bùxíng, bú pà yí wàn, jiù pà wànyī. Yóuqí shì zhōumò wǎnshàng, yǒuxiē rén hēzuì le jiǔ, hěn wēixiǎn.
- A: Child, when it's too late at night, don't, under any circumstances, go out.
 B: Mom, it's not an issue. Our school is incredibly safe.
 A: That's not good enough. You can never be too careful. Especially on weekend nights, some people get drunk; it's very dangerous.

Example 2:

- A: 老板，明天的谈判我们万无一失了。
 B: **不怕一万，就怕万一**。你们还是要准备一套应急方案。
- A: Lǎobǎn, míngtiān de tánpàn wǒmen wànwú-yīshī le.
 B: Bú pà yí wàn, jiù pà wànyī. Nǐmen háishì yào zhǔnbèi yí tào yìngjí fāng'àn.
- A: Boss, we're guaranteed success in tomorrow's negotiation.
 B: One can never be too careful. You guys still need to prepare an emergency plan.

Usage: Used singly.

Variant: 不怕一万，只怕万一

Note: Neutral in meaning.



22. 走着瞧 (走著瞧) zǒu zhe qiáo

Translated character by character, 走着瞧 means 'walk-ing-look.' Its functional translation is 'wait and see.'

Example 1:

A: 这次你输定了。

B: 不要高兴太早，走着瞧吧。

A: Zhècì nǐ shū dìng le.

B: Búyào gāoxìng tài zǎo, zǒuzheqiáo ba.

A: This time you're definitely going to lose.

B: Don't celebrate too soon. Just wait and see.

Example 2:

A: 你再赔偿我名誉损失费20万。

B: 我已经给你精神损失费20万了，现在又要名誉损失费。你不要把我逼急了，逼急了我什么样的事都能干出来，不信咱们走着瞧。

A: Nǐ zài péicháng wǒ míngyù sǔnshīfèi 20 wàn.

B: Wǒ yǐjīng gěi nǐ jīngshen sǔnshīfèi 20 wàn le, xiànzài yòu yào míngyù sǔnshīfèi. Nǐ búyào bǎ wǒ bī jí le, bī jí le wǒ shénmeyàng de shì dōu néng gàn chūlái, bú xìn zánmen zǒuzheqiáo.

A: Pay me another 200,000 RMB for libel damages.

B: I already gave you 200,000 RMB for emotional distress; now you also want libel damages? Don't push me too hard. When I'm pushed, I'm capable of anything. If you don't believe me, just wait and see.

Usage: Functions as predicate.

Note: Slightly derogatory or neutral in meaning.



23. 不管三七二十一 (不管三七二十一) bùguǎn sān qī èrshíyī

Translated character by character, 不管三七二十一 means 'not-care-three-(times)-seven-twenty-one,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to act recklessly.' Its functional translation is 'to throw caution to the wind.'

Example 1:

- A: 这款电子产品你根本不懂有什么用处, 怎么一下子买了两个?
B: 那不是圣诞节大减价嘛, **不管三七二十一**, 先买回家再说, 以后再慢慢看怎么用。
- A: Zhè kuǎn diànzǐ chǎnpǐn nǐ gēnběn bù dǒng yǒu shénme yòngchū, zěnmē yíxiàzi mǎile liǎng gè?
B: Nà búshì Shèngdànjié dàjiǎnjià ma, bùguǎn sān qī èrshíyī, xiān mǎi huí jiā zàishuō, yǐhòu zài mǎnmǎnr kàn zěnmē yòng.
- A: You actually don't know what this gadget does; why did you impulsively buy two?
B: Wasn't it a big Christmas sale? I threw caution to the wind and bought two; I'll figure out how to use them later.

Example 2:

- A: 你今天说话可伤了不少人。
B: 只要我站在正义的立场上, 我才**不管三七二十一**。
- A: Nǐ jīntiān shuōhuà kě shānle bùshǎo rén.
B: Zhǐyào wǒ zhàn zài zhèngyì de lìchǎng shang, wǒ cái bùguǎn sān qī èrshíyī ne.
- A: You hurt a lot of people with what you said today.
B: As long as I am on the side of justice, I throw caution to the wind.

Usage: Functions as predicate or used singly.

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.



24. 吃着碗里的, 看着锅里的 (吃著碗裏的, 看著鍋裏的) chī zhe wǎn lǐ de, kàn zhe guō lǐ de

Translated character by character, 吃着碗里的, 看着锅里的 means 'eat-ing-bowl-inside, watch-ing-pot-inside,' whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be 'to eat what's in one's bowl while eyeing the pot.' Its functional translation is 'to be unsatisfied with what one has.'

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available

28. 鸡毛蒜皮 (雞毛蒜皮) jī máo suàn pí

Translated character by character, 鸡毛蒜皮 means ‘chicken-feathers-garlic-skins.’ Its functional translation is ‘trivial,’ or ‘trivialities.’

Example 1:

A: 王哥，你能不能帮我看一下我的电脑，死机了。

B: 这点儿**鸡毛蒜皮**的小事也找我，我的时间那么不值钱啊？去，买个新的去。

A: Wáng gē, nǐ néngbunéng bāng wǒ kàn yíxià wǒde diànnǎo, sǐjī le.

B: Zhè diǎnr jī máo suàn pí de xiǎoshì yě zhǎo wǒ, wǒde shíjiān nàme bù zhíqián a? Qù, mǎi gè xīn de qù.

A: Brother Wang, could you take a quick look at my computer? It crashed.

B: Is my time really worth that little, bothering me with such trivial matters? Go buy a new one.

Example 2:

A: 咱们头儿大事干不了，整天讲一些**鸡毛蒜皮**的事情，都烦死我了。

A: Zánmen tóur dà shì gàn bùliǎo, zhěngtiān jiǎng yìxiē jī máo suàn pí de shìqing, dōu fán sǐ wǒ le.

A: Our leader can't handle big issues, and talks about trivial matters all the time. I'm sick of it.

Usage: Functions as attributive.

Note: Slightly derogatory in meaning.



29. 鲜花插在牛粪上 (鲜花插在牛粪上)

xiān huā chā zài niú fèn shàng

Translated character by character, 鲜花插在牛粪上 means ‘fresh-flower-stick-in-cow-dung,’ whereas the implied meaning of this proverb would be ‘a beautiful woman is married to an old or ugly man.’

Example 1:

A: 那个大美女怎么嫁给了一个老头子？**鲜花插在牛粪上**，太可惜了！

B: 别这么说。是各取所需，老头子是亿万富翁。

A: Nàgè dà měinǚ zěnmē jiàgěi le yí gè lǎotóuzi? Xiānhuā chā zài niú fèn shàng, tài kěxī le!

B: Bié zhème shuō. Shì gè qǔ suǒ xū, lǎotóuzi shì yìwàn fūwēng.

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