学 位 论 文

题 目：CULTURALLY-LOADED IDIOMS AND THEIR TRANSLATION

作 者：陶 颖

指导教师：连淑能 厦大外文系教授

申请学位级别：硕 士 专业名称：英语语言文学

论文提交日期：1996 年 5 月 论文答辩日期：

学位授予单位和日期：

答辩委员会主席：

评阅人：

19 年 月 日
Synopsis

The present thesis discusses two themes: cultural differences between English and Chinese idioms and how to deal with them in actual translation. It is divided into 9 chapters.

Chapter 1. Introduction. This chapter mainly clarifies the concepts of culture and idioms, the relations between culture and language, and the relations between idioms and translation.

From chapter 2 to chapter 7, the idiomatic gap between Chinese and English is discussed through a comparison of the following cultural factors:

Chapter 2. Religions. The most influential religion in China is said to be Buddhism. It penetrates every circle of the Chinese people's life, shedding great influence on the Chinese language and the Chinese culture as a whole. Besides Buddhism, the Worship of Heaven, which is actually what ordinary Chinese believe in, is also discussed. In the West, it is well-known that the dominant religion is Christianity. It is generally accepted that the English Bible is one of the greatest reservoirs of the English language. The English language itself is abundant in scriptural phraseology, allusions and quotations.

Chapter 3. Recreational Activities. Influenced by Confucius “中庸之道” (Doctrine of the Mean), the Chinese people are generally of a mild disposition. They hold the view that activities which can be done at leisure can help them “cultivate their mind and improve their character“ (修心养性), so they like to play chess and musical instruments, watch opera, etc. Westerners, however, pay more attention to “cultivating their body”. Influenced by their ancient Greek and Roman cultures, which are famous for the origin of the Olympic Games and Roman amphitheatres respectively, Westerners are born sports fans. From violent boxing to leisurely fishing, from ball games to card games, sports fascinate numerous participants and spectators.

Chapter 4. Cuisine and Food. Cuisine is generally divided into two schools: Western and Chinese. The two schools differ greatly in manners in which food is selected, prepared, presented and eaten.Feeding habits also differ greatly. The Chinese use chopsticks, while the Westerners use forks and knives. Besides, table manners, ways of entertaining guests are also quite different.

Chapter 5. Women's Social and Matrimonial status. For as many as two thousand years, influenced by Confucianism which advocates that women follow "三从四德" (Three Obediences -- obedience to her father before marriage, to her husband during married life and to her sons in widowhood; and Four Virtues-- fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech and efficiency in needlework), Chinese women led a very restricted and thwarted life. In the West, women enjoyed much more freedom. They could take part in all kinds
of activities so as to choose their own husband, although marriage was more often than not based on practical factors, such as annual income and social status, as well.

Chapter 6. Economic Life. Traditionally, the Chinese people have long regarded agriculture as the foundation of governing the state and maintaining peace and security while condemning industry and commerce. In contrast, the British have been enjoying a highly-developed industry and commerce since the Middle Ages onward. The seeking of profit stimulated greatly the development of navigation while the Chinese were contented with their self-sufficient way of life and regarded overseas commerce as extraneous to their society.

Chapter 7. Metaphors and Associations. Metaphors and associations are found in all languages. They make images more vivid and bring life to a language. But very often the same objects have different associations in different cultures. For example, objects like "crane"(鹤), "pine tree"(松), "plum"(梅), "snow"(雪), and "moonlight"(月光) may arouse some special and subtle feelings in the Chinese people’s minds which the Westerners find hard to appreciate, while the association with "shepherd"(牧羊人), "nightingale"(夜莺), "owl"(猫头鹰) in the western culture is hard for the Chinese to appreciate. In the present thesis, the discussion is limited in the following aspects: colours, animals, plants, and place names.

Chapter 8 discusses the translation of culturally-loaded idioms from the following approaches:

1. Literal translation as the first choice because it can not only convey the meaning but also transmit the cultural message efficiently.

2. Literal translation with explanations when the idiom is so heavily culturally-loaded that we cannot afford to have the cultural significance lost during translation but pure literal translation causes confusion and misunderstanding. When the explanation is too long, it should take the form of a footnote.

3. Using synonymous idioms when a corresponding target language idiom is available. But this method should be applied with great care. Problems that should be paid special attention to are listed.

4. Deformation as the last choice because it can only convey the meaning of the original idiom but not the cultural message and the speech style. Some cases in which this method is applicable are suggested.

Based on the above argument, Chapter 9 comes to the conclusion that whatever approach used, the principle should be to provide a translation both culturally informative and literally understandable, efficient in cultural exchange and as faithful to the original as necessary.

Key words: Cultural difference; Idiomatic gap
CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction .....................................................................................1
Chapter 2. Religions and Idioms ......................................................................3
Chapter 3. Recreational Activities and Idioms ................................................8
Chapter 4. Cuisine, Food and Idioms ..............................................................14
Chapter 5. Women’s Social and Matrimonial Status and Idioms ..................20
Chapter 6. Economic Life and Idioms .............................................................26
Chapter 7. Metaphors and Associations ..........................................................28
   a. colours  
   b. animals  
   c. plants  
   d. place names
Chapter 8. The Translation of Culturally-loaded Idioms ..............................45
Chapter 10. Conclusion ....................................................................................54
Chapter 1

Introduction

1. The Concept of Culture

Different experts and scholars approach the concept of culture from different angles according to the need of their disciplines. Anthropologists and other social scientists define human culture as leered behaviour acquired by individuals as members of a social group. The concept of culture was first explicitly defined by the British anthropologists Edward Burnett Tylor. He used the term to refer to "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Culture in this sense is different from the concept of culture used to describe a highly-cultivated person who is versed in music, literature, philosophy, and other intellectual pursuits associated with civilised life. Human culture in the technical sense includes the insignificant and mundane behaviour traits of everyday life, such as food habits, as well as the refined arts of a society. The concept "culture" in this thesis is used in its broad sense, i.e. it refers to the sum of a people's customs, material and spiritual products, ways of thinking and so on.

2. Culture and Language

Culture exerts great influence in every field of human life, including the fields of language and translation. Language is a part of culture. In fact, the emergence of language was the giant step that made possible the remarkable complexity of human culture. Through language, humans are able to bestow and communicate meanings through sounds and the arrangement of sounds into words and sentences. All human cultures are based on languages, and all human languages, even those of non-literate peoples, are sufficiently complex to transmit the full totality of a human culture. Likewise, every language is influenced and shaped by culture. In a broader sense, language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their way of living and thinking.

3. The Concept of Idiom

What is an idiom? As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, an idiom is 1) a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc. peculiar to a language 2) a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often have a significance other than its grammatical or logical one. From these definitions, we can say that an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone. The way in which the words are put together is often odd, illogical or even grammatically incorrect. Idioms do not mean what they appear to mean. They are peculiar to a language, peculiar to a culture. They
depend very much upon a specific social or ecological setting. The term "idiom" in this thesis is also used in its broad sense, i.e. it refers to phrase idioms, clause idioms and sentence idioms (proverbs and sayings). But for the sake of convenience, idioms consisting of verbs and prepositions or particles are not included.

4. Idioms and Translation

Since language is a cultural system, individual language classifies objects and ideas differently, causing great difficulty in intercultural communication and consequently giving rise to the discipline "Cultural Linguistics". Cultural Linguistics is the study of languages based on its human factors, such as its people's psychological characteristics, value concept, marriage and family system, geography, traditional customs and religion. Idioms form an important and particular part of the general vocabulary of any language. It is an important part because it is difficult to speak or write without using idioms in almost any language; it is particular because idioms are the most culturally-loaded element in any language's vocabulary. For this reason, problems arising from the employment of idioms are the most frequently encountered ones by translators or others working for intercultural communication. It is not hard to see that these problems or difficulties are actually caused by cultural differences. Therefore, having a good knowledge of the cultural background of idioms in both the source and target languages is a fundamental task for all translators. For this reason, the present paper discusses the cultural differences behind English and Chinese idioms and the commonly-used ways to translate culturally-loaded idioms.
Chapter 2  Religions and Idioms

Although wars and conflicts break out every now and then because of religious differences, religion is but a social phenomenon. It is mainly a code of ethics governing personal and social conduct. A universal phenomenon among all cultures, it penetrates into every possible aspect of people's life, which consequently causes great cultural difference between peoples with different religious beliefs. Take the aspect of language for example, there are a lot of idioms in the Chinese language which can not find an equivalent in the English language because the religions influencing the two languages are different. Most Chinese people believe in Heaven or in Buddha, while the dominant religion in the West is Christianity. Great difference between religions causes great difference between idiomatic expressions. To further exemplify this, we are going to discuss the influence of the worship of Heaven and Buddhism on Chinese idioms and that of Christianity on English idioms respectively.

1. the Worship of Heaven and Chinese Idioms

For untold years people have spoken of the Chinese as having three major religions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. This is actually a misconception. To the ordinary believing Chinese, Confucius and his many disciples, Buddha and his followers, and the spirits of Taoist origin are merely intermediaries between Heaven and man. In public prayer meetings called to deal with emergencies such as drought, earthquake or epidemic, it is not unusual to find the tablets of Mohammed and Jesus Christ placed side by side with those of Confucius, Buddha and Lao-tzu, all in a position subordinate to that of the Supreme Ruler of Heaven. All happenings on the earth are believed to be controlled and arranged by Heaven, as reflected in many idioms such as "生死由命，富贵在天" (Life and death are decreed by fate, rank and riches determined by Heaven), "天要下雨娘要嫁人" (If Heaven wishes it to rain or your mother to remarry, there is no way to stop them). As the ruler of everything on the earth, Heaven is believed to be a supreme god of wisdom, mercy, and impartiality, as mirrored in idioms like "天无绝人之路" (Heaven never forces a man at bay), "天理不容" (Heaven will not tolerate it), "天生我材必有用" (There must be some use for the talent Heaven granted me), "苍天不负苦心人" (Heaven helps those who help themselves), etc. For this reason, ancient emperors considered themselves the Son of Heaven (天子). To thank Heaven for its blessing and protection, emperors as well as common people made it a ceremonial rite to offer sacrifice to Heaven (祭天). At a wedding, it was a must procedure for the couple to pay homage to Heaven.
2. Buddhism and Chinese idioms

Buddhism was first introduced into China in the first century AD, more than 500 years earlier than Christianity and Islam. It is the only religion that was introduced from foreign countries but has been dominant in the Chinese people's life for as long as 2,000 years. It has shaped the Chinese language, diet, arts, and sculpture etc., directly inspired the unique pagoda architecture, and greatly stimulated the development of Chinese literature. Hairless monks and nuns in grey robe(灰袍) have become an integral part of the kaleidoscopic world(大千世界). Buddhist temples have taken the place of Confucius temples as the centre of people's life. Many decisions concerning a village's or a family's major affairs are made in Buddhist temples. Annual celebrations are held here as well. As can be seen from many great literary works, such as "A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS", monks and nuns directly took part in the Chinese household affairs. Its influence on the Chinese culture is far more greater than any other foreign religions. As a Chinese scholar commented: "Without a good understanding of Buddhism, it is out of the question to appreciate the after-Han &Wei Dynasty Chinese culture". The large number of words derived from Buddhism is one of the manifestations of its influence, such as “头“ (head), “门外汉” (layman), “罗汉” (disciples of Buddha), “劫数” (inexorable doom).

As soon as Buddhism was introduced into China, its leaders sought successfully the support of Chinese emperors and other rulers. At the same time, it kept adjusting itself to the needs of the common people, thus soon took root in the Chinese people's life. Even some emperors themselves were monks for a certain period of time. The words “和尚”, “庙”, “菩萨”, and “香” (monk, temple, Buddha, incense) were absorbed into the Chinese language and soon became some of the most favourite words in making new expressions and idioms. For example, “做一天和尚撞一天钟” (to go on tolling the bell as long as one is a monk—to have a passive attitude towards one's work), “无事不登三宝殿” (never go to the temple for nothing—never go to someone's place except on business, for help, etc.), “丈二和尚摸不着头脑” (unable to make head or tail of something), “跑得了和尚跑不了庙” (a monk may run away, but the temple remains—impossible to escape, esp. from responsibility), “僧多粥少” (there are too many Buddhist monks but too little gruel—not enough to go round), “和尚打伞,无法无天” [like a Buddhist monk holding an umbrella, no hair(law) nor Heaven—defy laws human and divine; be absolutely lawless (a pun on the homophones fa(发) "hair" and fa(发) "law", a Buddhist monk having a shaven head.)], “渡过西海.自身难保” (to be like a clay idol fording a river—hardly able to save oneself), etc..

Buddha is a general term meaning one who is enlightened or awakened. It is primarily applied to the historical founder of Buddhism. When Buddha
died, he was believed to have ENLIGHTENED, free of any worldly worries, his soul arising from his body. In Buddhism, the equivalent for ENLIGHTENMENT is NIRVANA (涅槃). The birth and death of the Buddha then is used in the idiom "一佛出世，二佛涅槃" (one Buddha is born, the other is NIRVANAED) to mean "to be beaten within an inch of one's life".

Buddhists believe that a man has three incarnations, former incarnation, present incarnation, and future incarnation. If someone is "三生有幸" (luck for all three incarnations), he then has the most supreme happiness of his three existences. And since there are three lives for every person, Buddhists turn to believe in fate. Everything is destined, as reflected in idioms like “命中注定” (decided by fate), “有缘千里来相会，无缘对面不相识” (as decreed by Providence you have met him, otherwise you might have failed although you travelled a thousand miles), and “在劫难逃” (impossible to escape from one's doom).

3. Christianity and English Idioms

Soon after the first priest and his followers landed on Great Britain, the religion Christianity and its culture began to shed its influence on the English language. With the spread of its thoughts and beliefs, the English language became more and more religious. The writing style of the Version of the Bible has all the time been highly recommended by British Writers. They encourage people to use the Bible as the best English textbook. Almost all great authors of the English language show a familiarity with the Bible. The use of Biblical themes has been a literary tradition of which the noted examples are Milton's PARADISE LOST, Bunyan's PILGRIM'S PROGREß, Byron's CAIN, up to the contemporary Hemingway's THE SUN ALSO RISES, and Steinbeck's EAST OF EDEN. In fact, few great English and American writers of the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th century can be fully appreciated without a good knowledge of the Bible. For example, in Charles Dickens' THE OLD CURiosity SHOP Chapter 38, there is such a sentence:

"He called to see my Governor this morning", replied Mr. Chuckster, "and beyond that, I don't know him from Adam."

Adam is believed to be the first man God created, therefore he is someone that one can not get to know at all. So the idiom "not know someone from Adam" means "have no knowledge about someone" (根本不知道某人是谁). Other idioms used in this sense include "since Adam was a boy" (很久以前), "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then a gentleman?" (当年亚当夏娃,男耕女织, 可有尊敬乎). This proverb is used in Modern English as a satire on those who like to show off his clan. It was first used as a slogan in the peasants' revolution in England during the 1380s. God created Adam as the first man, but he disobeyed God, so the idiom "the old
Adam" refers to "the evil or selfish part of man's nature that remains unchanged" (难移的本性).

There are a lot of other biblical names which are now used in allusions known by one and all, like "Judas," a disloyal person who secretly helps the enemies of his friends; "Job" in "the patience of Job"—endless, unlimited patience; Thomas in "a doubting Thomas"—a person who needs to see actual proof of something before he will believe it, or a person who does not easily trust anything which is not in accordance with what he might expect; "Samaritan" in "a good Samaritan"—a person who gives practical help to people in trouble; "Cain" in "Raise Cain"—to make a noise or trouble, etc., by complaining or arguing; "Jonah"—a person who brings bad luck to the people he is with; "Buddha," it is a pet word in English. "God bless me!" (上帝保佑), "for God's sake" (看在上帝的份上), "in God's name" (以上帝的名义), "Thank God" (感谢上帝) are all daily expressions of surprise, disbelief, annoyance or happiness. God is justice; "God writes straight with crooked lines" (上帝的裁决最终是公平的); God is power: "Man proposes, God disposes" (谋事在人,成事在天); God is truth: people swear to God to tell the truth with the emphasizing phrases "Honest to God", "So help me God!" or by "crossing one's heart and hope to die" — to swear that one is telling the truth or that one will not reveal a secret; "God is generous and merciful: god tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" (天助不幸者); "god helps those who help themselves" (自助者天助); "There, but for the grace of God, go I"—if I had not been fortunate, such a thing could just as easily have happened to me( 要不是上帝保佑,我也很可能遭此不幸); "To think that one is God's gift to something"—to believe that one is the best person in a particular profession, etc., or that one possesses all the qualities considered desirable by certain people, used when the speaker considers a person less clever, attractive, etc., than that person believes himself to be (自以为是,自命不凡). But God shows no mercy to those who disobey him. "Whom God will destroy he first makes mad."—when God wishes to punish or destroy a person he first causes him to lose his powers of reason and understanding (天将置人于死地,必先乱其心智).

The teaching of Christianity is embodied in the Bible mainly in a narrative way, so the Bible is full of stories. Stories like "forbidden fruit" (禁果), "Noah's Ark" (诺亚方舟), "the Garden of Eden" (伊甸园), "the last supper" (最后的晚餐), and "Solomon's wisdom" (所罗门智慧) are well-known even to Chinese children. Many idioms are allusions to happenings described in the Bible, like "to sell one's birth right for a mess of
pottage"--to exchange something of lasting value for something that is of value for a short time only(见利忘义, 因小失大), "feet of clay"--a surprising weakness or fault in character, esp. in someone or something that is highly approved of(致命的缺陷), "a'he fly in the ointment"--something or someone that spoils plans, causes trouble, or lowers the value of something (美中不足之处), "the apple of one's eye"--somebody who is the main object of someone's love, devotion, attention, etc.(掌上明珠), "a scarlet woman/lady"--a woman with a reputation for having frequent sexual relationships with men(淫妇), etc.

To facilitate consultation and quotation, the Bible is divided into chapters and verses. The idiom "chapter and verse" thus means "the exact details of where to find a piece of information". For example:

She can give chapter and verse of her belief. (WM. Thackeray, The Adventure of Philip on His Way through the World, 1862)

According to the Bible, Sunday is a rest day for Christians. In the 1900s, Sunday was very sacred on which every Christian must stop working and entertaining to go to church. It was very dull and monotonous, making people feel that it was longer than other days. With an understanding of the above religious custom, we can quite easily guess that "a month of Sundays" means "a very long and dull time" (一段没完没了的时间). On Sundays when people go to church, they wear their best clothes. Hence "Sunday clothes" and "Sunday best" are adopted to mean "the newest and smartest clothes" (最新最好的衣服).

One thing worth emphasising here is the different concepts of gods and devils in the two languages. In English, the concept of a god and that of a devil are completely different. A god is "a being that is thought to have greater powers than any man and considered worthy of worship", while a devil refers to "any evil spirit, fiend, demon". The word "god" when capitalised refers "God the Creator" in the Bible, while capitalised "Devil" refers to Satan, the enemy of God. One is good, one is evil. There is no mistake about that. But in ancient Chinese philosophy, a god can be 1) a ghost, a monster, a demon; 2) any inexplicable happenings in nature; 3) a spirit or a soul in contrast to a human body. To ordinary people, a god can be anything that has magic or supernatural power. Obviously, here gods and devils are "of the same family". Chinese people worship gods as well as devils. In the Chinese language, the two words "神" and "鬼"(gods and devils) often appear side by side, sometimes in derogatory sense, usually in commendatory sense, which can only be told in actual contexts. In translation, we must be very careful about this. Make clear in what sense these two words are used and adjust them to the contexts accordingly.
Chapter 3  Recreational Activities and Idioms

To know about a person's personality, the best way is to see what kind of entertainment he likes in his spare time. The same is true with a nation. A nation's characteristics are reflected to a great degree in its people's recreational activities. For example, influenced by Confucius "中庸之道" (Doctrine of the Mean), the Chinese people are generally of a mild disposition. They like to take recreational activities which do not require much energy, such as playing chess and musical instruments, practising calligraphy, watching opera. They hold the view that activities which can be done at leisure can help them "cultivate their mind and improve their character" (修心养性). Westerners, however, pay more attention to "cultivating their body". The greatest international sports contests, the Olympic Games, originated in Greece as early as 776 B.C., and amphitheatres were built in cities throughout the Roman Empire. Influenced by their ancient Greek and Roman cultures, Westerners are born sports fans. From violent boxing to leisurely fishing, from ball games to card games, sports fascinate numerous participants and spectators. Since recreation is a very important part of people's life, it is but natural to find a lot of idiomatic expressions concerned. Without knowing the rules and associations with a certain entertaining way, it is usually hard to understand those idioms. This chapter discusses idioms associated with recreational activities in the following aspects:

1. Musical Instruments and Chinese Idioms

A great Chinese writer Lu Pu-wei (呂不韦) once said, "Only with a man who has grasped the meaning of the world are you able to speak of music with." He was right because music is an emanation of the heart and an image of the cosmos. It is another kind of language, complex, profound, and subtle, expressing an all-embracing world view. People express all kinds of feelings through music and musical instruments, and associate certain musical instruments with certain emotions and phenomena. Let's exemplify this by looking at some Chinese musical instruments and Chinese idioms.

鼓 (ku--drum) was one of the earliest musical instrument in the Chinese music history. As early as in "the Book of Songs" (诗经), we can find "窈窕淑女，钟鼓乐之". It was widely used in ancient wars to boost the morale of the warriors as well as to issue orders, as can be seen in idioms like: "一鼓作气" (at the first drumming, warriors are the most vigorous--press in to the finish without letup; get something done in one sustained effort), "重整旗鼓" (rally one's flags and drums--rally one's forces after a
defeat), “偃旗息鼓” (put down the flag, stop the drum—cease all activities). Drum is also used in opera. Before a character appears on the stage, there is usually intense drumming and gonging to create the atmosphere and to inspire the audience's suspense. So we have the idiom “开台锣鼓” (a flourish of gongs and drums introducing a theatrical performance—prelude). The most frequently used idiom associated with the drum might be “打退堂鼓” (beat a drum to a court, a practice in a feudal yamen—a government office in feudal China). This practice no longer exists, but the idiom is still widely used to mean to retreat, withdraw, back out, give up.

The drum is a very common music instrument. Not only was it used in wars, operas, and ancient yamen, but it was also popular with ordinary people. In fact, it still is. In some parts of the Chinese countryside, a big drum can still be seen kept sacred in the village auditorium, usually located in the centre of the village. And on dawn of the first day of the Chinese lunar year, the Spring Festival, a senior and prestigious villager would be assigned to beat the drum to announce the coming of a new year. The drum is so close to people’s life that you may expect a lot of proverbs and allegorical sayings associated with the drum or the use of the drum, such as “锣鼓听音，说话听声” , “偷来的锣鼓打不响” , “背鼓上门，讨打”.

Of the string instruments, the chin 琴 (lute), the zheng 弹 (similar to the zither), the pipa 琵琶 (a plucked string instrument with a fretted fingerboard), and the se 西 (a twenty-five-stringed plucked instrument) were most closely associated with the scholars of ancient times. Chin-playing, chess, calligraphy and painting (琴棋书画) were considered to be the four biggest fancies for men of letters. One who were good at chin-playing, chess, calligraphy and painting would be considered highly accomplished. Later, the chin came to mean something very precious and elegant, a symbol of scholars, as reflected in the idiom “焚琴煮鹤” (to burn a chin for fuel and cook a crane for meat—to destroy precious things; to offend the culture). (crane is also considered something precious in the Chinese culture, which will be discussed in the coming chapter).

The chin琴 and the se瑟 are often used together to refer to husband and wife. When the chin and the se are in tune(琴瑟调和), there is harmony between husband and wife; when they are out of tune, there is discord(琴瑟失调). When the strings break(断弦), one of the couple dies, and to replace the broken string(续弦) means to get remarried. So we have the idiom “断弦再续” (to replace the broken string on one’s lute—to get remarried).

Other idiom connected with the instrument chin and its strings include: “对牛弹琴” (to play the lute to a cow— to waste one’s efforts on someone who won’t understand), “乱弹琴” (to play the lute in an incorrect way— talk nonsense), “弦外之音” (tone out of the string— overtone, implication),
“改弦更章” (to relit a string -- to change policy), and “扣人心 弦” (to tug at one's heartstrings-- touch somebody to the heart), etc.

Some songs or melodies have become so popular that later they come to stand for the music style they represent, like “阳春白雪”, a highbrow song popular in the Kingdom Chu. Now it stands for highbrow art and literature or something selected among the best. Existing side by side with "阳春白雪" but opposite in meaning is the idiom “下里巴人” (the song of the rustic poor -- bubble gum music).

“高山流水” is still a very popular classic melody. It is said to be created by Boya (伯牙), a famous musician in the ancient time. Having the lofty mountain in his mind, he played his lute. His friend Ziqi (子期) could tell from his playing that he was thinking of the mountain. Then he turned to think of the flowing water, again his friend read his mind from his music. Later, people use the idiom “高山流水” (lofty mountain and flowing water) to mean the brilliance of music and the difficulty of finding a bosom friend.

2. Sports and English Idioms

a. Horse-racing

Horse-racing is immensely popular in Britain, not only on the great racing days such as the Derby at Epsom and the Grand National at Liverpool but on any racing day when the population can have a small gamble, or "flutter". Licensed betting offices abound in all neighbourhoods and appear to be used benevolently by the government as a means of permitting people to unwind from life's frustrations. Horses may win or lose by a neck, which most people find thrilling. Before the race starts, horse riders “jockey for position” (挤其他骑师以占据有利位置). Now this idioms means “to try to gain a better position in any kind of competition, esp. by some skillful action”. At the same time, people put their bets on the horses which they think will win the race. But not everyone can “back the right horse” (下对了赌注), because a horse "in form" (竞技状态良好) that is expected to win with “hands down" (毫不费力) may turn out to be “pipped at the post" (出其不意地被超越) by a “dark horse”-- a horse whose ability to win the race is unknown (黑马). This idiom now refers to a person or thing whose true character or worth is unknown but may be better than is thought.

b. Fishing

Fishing is a very popular style of entertainment in the United States. Blessed with some 88,000 miles (142,000km) of tidal shoreline and 78,000 square miles (202,000sq.km) of inland waterways, much of which is accessible to anglers, Americans have often made the expression "gone fishing" synonymous with their vacations or days off. It is surely one pastime, since the earliest days of the country, in which nearly all American males, and many females, have participated. The things used to catch fish--"hook, line and sinker"(钓钩, 钓丝, 和 垂子), are referred to as an idiom meaning
"completely, in every way" (毫无保留地). When someone "swallows hook, line, and sinker", he is stupid enough to "believe or accept something untrue in every detail" (对不真实的事信以为真). Fishing can't be done without bait. "To rise to the bait" means "to act in exactly the manner that someone else hoped one would; often, to be drawn into a situation, esp. in a conversation, that gives amusement to others" (上钩, 上当). "To swallow the bait" means "to accept completely an offer, etc. that has been made in order to get one to act in a desired manner" (中圈套).

Once a girl who finally succeeded in going abroad with the help of an American teacher for whom she cooked for a quite long time was humorously referred to as "by hook and cook", which was twisted from the idiom "by hook or by crook"—by or using any means possible (想方设法). Finally she got "off the hook" (脱高险境) which she thought she was on and went to a place where she thought "there are plenty of fish in the sea" or "there are plenty of other pebbles on the beach"—there are plenty of other people for someone to meet and things for him to do (更为广阔的天地). (This saying is often quoted to comfort a person who has lost a boyfriend or girlfriend.)

c. Boxing

Boxing is one of the oldest forms of competition ever known to human beings. It was very popular during the Roman times. It died out after the fall of Rome but was revived in England in the early 18th century. In the United States, boxing was illegal for many years before New York became the first state to legalise it (1896). Since then boxing has captured the fascination of Americans. Today professional boxing is regulated in each state by an athletic or boxing commission. In 1904 boxing became an Olympic sport. Modern boxing began with the code of rules introduced (1865) by the marquess of QUEENSBERRY (昆斯伯里侯爵规则), which called for the use of protective leather gloves. If the two opponents "take off the gloves", it is a sign that they are going to "stop acting towards somebody with gentleness or mercy and begin to fight with serious intention to win" (毫不留情地抨击). The general meaning of mercilessness is also understood in such idioms as "to fight without gloves" and "the gloves are off".

For safety’s sake, fighters not only have to wear gloves, but also have to keep his neck and chin drawn in or protected. If otherwise he “sticks his neck out”, he is “taking a risk, esp. to do or say something that might cause trouble” (自找麻烦).

According to the rules, when a fighter has been knocked down by his opponent, the judge begins to count. If he cannot rise before the judge has finished counting to 10, he is then "out for count", which now means "unconscious or sleeping deeply" (昏迷或昏睡). One boxer cannot strike the other until he stands up after a fall, because “hit a man (or someone)
when he's down” is considered “attacking, hurting, or taking advantage of someone who has been weakened by an earlier attack or misfortune and cannot yet defend himself” (乘人之危; 落井下石). It is also against the rules to hit an opponent lower than the belt worn round the waist, so “to hit below the belt” means “not in accordance with the rules; unfair or unfairly” (犯规; 暗箭伤人). Perhaps the most tricky technique is the false friend “pulled-back punches”. When one fighter is about to hit his opponent, he may pull his hand back before doing so. Now the idiom “to pull one’s punches” (故意宽容; 故意用词温和) is often used in its negative form “pull no punches” which means “showing one’s true attitude or opinion honestly and completely” (毫无保留, 语率真地表示自己的态度).

At the end of each period of a boxing match, a bell is rung to announce the break. It is not uncommon that one boxer is at the very moment to lose that round of the match. The ringing of the bell may happen to save him from the edge of failure, so the idiom “to be saved by the bell” now means “to be saved or freed from an awkward situation at the last possible moment, esp. by a person’s arrival” (因某人的到来而将最后关头脱离险境). When a boxer feel that he is going to lose, he would “throw in the sponge” as a sign of admitting defeat. (认输; 放弃不打).

Black boxers often hold the first place in boxing. A white fighter who attempts to beat a black fighter is considered “the white hope”--a person who (or a thing that) is expected to bring fame, glory, victory, etc., to a team or group of which he (or it) is a representative (被寄予厚望的人; 承担重大责任的人).

d. Ball games

Ball games, like football, basketball, volleyball, are the most widely played around the world. Most ball games originated in the West, so it is but natural that we find a lot of idioms associated with the word “ball” in the English language. Like “bounce the ball” (对公众舆论，股票市场等的试探), “catch the ball before the bound” (事先采取行动; 操之过急), “have the ball at one’s feet” (有希望; 一蹴而就), “keep the ball rolling” (使活动不断), “leave the ball in somebody’s court” (有待某人作出反应), “stay on the ball” (保持警惕), “run with the ball” (赶紧执行任务), “set the ball running” (开始某项活动), “take up the ball” (接在别人后头做), “the ball is in somebody’s court” (轮到某人作出反应), “throw the ball to somebody” (敦促某人作出反应), while in Chinese, we can find few of such idioms.

c. Betting

Whatever games they play, Westerners like to bet. Chips (圆形筹码) are usually used in many bettings. “When the chips are down” means “when all the bets have been made, but it is still unknown who will win and who will lose”. Now it means “when a situation has reached a stage at which action or
Degree papers are in the “Xiamen University Electronic Theses and Dissertations Database”. Full texts are available in the following ways:

1. If your library is a CALIS member libraries, please log on http://etd.calis.edu.cn/ and submit requests online, or consult the interlibrary loan department in your library.

2. For users of non-CALIS member libraries, please mail to etd@xmu.edu.cn for delivery details.