



300 Chinese Proverbs

5,000 Years of Chinese Wisdom



Week in China

Proverbial wisdom

Our columnist Mei selects 300 Chinese proverbs



During its five thousand years of civilisation, China has created tens of thousands of proverbs which capture the essence of the nation's history, culture and prevailing philosophy. Many of them contain Confucian wisdom, Taoist and Buddhist philosophy, social etiquette, as well as success and survival tactics.

Some of the proverbs are clearly obsolete given changes in Chinese society in recent decades, i.e. those that are derogatory to dogs, feel odd to the country's many dog owners. Some are just outright outdated, i.e. the many that discriminate against women (one of the worst: "An unschooled girl is a virtuous one"). However, some still hold their value and are used by modern Chinese every day.

One of the proverbs that I often use while talking to my Western friends is 塞翁失马，焉知非福. The literal meaning is 'when Old Man Sai lost his horse, it was hard to judge whether it was a good thing or bad thing'.

The story behind it came from ancient times when an old man living in Sai-shang lost his horse. His neighbour pitied him but he replied: "Don't worry. Who knows that this is not a good thing?" A few days later, his horse returned with a herd of beautiful horses. The neighbours congratulated the old man, but he replied: "I'm not sure this is a good thing."

Sure enough, the old man's son was thrown off the back by one of the new horses and broke his leg. Others pitied him again but he said: "I am not upset since this could turn out to be good." Shortly afterwards, a war broke out and all young males were drafted except the old man's son due to his broken leg. As most of the young men from his village died in the war, the broken leg saved the son's life.

This proverb teaches people to maintain a balanced mood and always try to see potential risk in successes and seek silver-linings in disasters.

For this 300th issue of Week in China, I have selected 300 proverbs that I believe are most commonly used and reflective of the Chinese mentality and philosophy, both in the fields of business and daily life. I might have missed some brilliant ones (if I have please feel free to email me at askmei@weekinchina.com) but nevertheless I hope you find some of the Chinese wisdom included here interesting, helpful or even enlightening.

I've mostly arranged the proverbs in two or three parts: the original Chinese (in simplified characters), the direct translation to English, and where necessary what the idiom means.

I hope you enjoy reading them.

张东梅



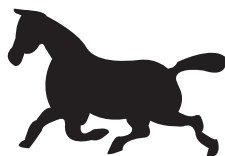
1. 爱叫的母鸡不下蛋 Noisy hens don't lay eggs. / Boastful people are good for nothing.
2. 百闻不如一见 Hearing about it a hundred times is not as good as seeing it just once.
3. 伴君如伴虎 Attending upon a king is like keeping company with a tiger.
4. 饱汉不知饿汉饥 A man with full-belly cannot understand a starving person's hunger. / People with a fully-belly can't understand the needs of the starved.
5. 包子有肉，不在褶上 A dumpling's meat is on the inside, not on the folds outside. / Inner substance can't be judged by its superficial appearance.
6. 笨鸟先飞 A clumsy bird has to fly first. / The slow/disadvantaged should start early and work harder.
7. 病从口入，祸从口出 Illness enters via the mouth, disaster comes out of the mouth. / Too much or careless talk can cause a lot of grievances.
8. 兵败如山倒 Troops defeated are like a mountain collapsing. / (A proverb still frequently used by sports commentators for when a team is being routed).
9. 冰冻三尺，非一日之寒 Ice frozen three feet thick didn't happen due to one day's coldness. / A bad situation didn't develop overnight.
10. 兵在精而不在多 Troops are valued for their quality instead of their numbers. / Quality is more important than quantity.
11. 不当家不知柴米贵 If one is not the household head, he/she can't know how expensive rice and firewood are. / Only those who take responsibilities know how difficult it is to get anything done.
12. 不入虎穴焉得虎子? If one does not enter the tigers cave, how can one obtain the tiger cub? / Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
13. 不如意事常八九 There are usually eight or nine out of 10 things in people's lives which are unsatisfactory. / People should manage their expectations of life and be content with what they have.
14. 不听老人言，吃亏在眼前 If one does not listen to the words of the elders, one will suffer in the long run.
15. 不孝有三，无后为大 As to unfiliality, there are three types and the greatest is to have no descendants. / There are three major offences against filial piety of which not producing an heir is the worst.
16. 不以成败论英雄 We should not judge heroes (purely) by their successes and failures.
17. 苍蝇不抱无缝的蛋 No fly will go for uncracked eggs. / The honest cannot be corrupted.
18. 曾经沧海难为水 Having experienced the great ocean, it is difficult to appreciate [ordinary] waters. / For one who has encountered the extraordinary, everyday experiences pale in comparison.
19. 长江后浪推前浪 In the Yangtze River, the waves behind push on those ahead. / Each generation is replaced by and often surpassed by the next.
20. 长痛不如短痛 Long pain is not as good as short pain. / It's better to get over painful things decisively.
21. 常在河边走，难免不湿鞋 If you often walks by the riverside, you can't avoid getting your shoes wet. / People will give in to constant temptation.
22. 车到山前必有路 When the cart gets to the mountains, there will have to be a way through. / Things always work out in the end.
23. 城门失火，殃及池鱼 When the city gate catches fire, even the fish in the moat are affected. / Innocent bystanders can be implicated in a bad situation.
24. 撑死胆大的，饿死胆小的 Bold people die of over-eating, whereas timid ones die of starvation. / The bold get rich, while the timid stay poor.
25. 成者为王，败者为寇 People who succeed are considered kings, people defeated are considered bandits. / Legitimacy goes to the winner; losers are always in the wrong.
26. 吃得苦中苦，方知甜中甜 Only those who can eat the bitterest of the bitter will appreciate the sweetest of the sweet. / Only those who have suffered can truly appreciate the good life.
27. 吃亏就是占便宜 Being taken advantage of is actually taking advantage of others/ This reflects the core Chinese wisdom that smart people are destroyed by the powerful and jealous: play dumb, it will save you bigger troubles down the road.



28. 丑妇总要见公婆 An ugly bride will sooner or later meet her parents-in-law. / Truth will finally come to light sooner or later.
29. 初生牛犊不怕虎 A new-born calf doesn't even fear the tiger. / The innocent or naïve don't know enough to be afraid.
30. 出头的椽子先烂 Rafters that jut out from under the roof tend to rot first. / People in the spotlight tend to attract jealousy or be attacked.
31. 聪明反被聪明误 Cleverness may be taken in by itself. / You can be too smart for your own good.
32. 打狗看主人 Before hitting a dog, you'd better think about its owner. / Before you attack somebody, you'd better first find out who else you may offend.
33. 大难不死，必有后福 One who survives a great disaster must be destined for good fortune ever after.
34. 旁观者清，当局者迷 Those involved in affairs are often muddled, whereas the onlookers can see clearly. / Sometimes it takes an outsider to see things more clearly.
35. 道高一尺，魔高一丈 If the Buddha rises one foot, the demon rises 10. / Unjust forces always outnumber just ones.
36. 打人莫打脸，骂人休揭短 Don't slap someone's face in a fight, and don't disclose someone's defects in a quarrel. / When arguing with somebody, be a gentleman and don't make the other person lose face.
37. 大丈夫能屈能伸 A great man can bend as well as extend. / A great man can deal with humiliation as well as glory.
38. 得道多助，失道寡助 A just cause will obtain great support; an unjust cause will gain little support.
39. 得人滴水之恩，须当涌泉相报 If one receives a water drop of kindness, one should repay with a flowing spring. / People should repay several fold kindness that he/she received in times of difficulty.
40. 得人心者得天下，失人心者失天下 Those who gained people's hearts gain the world; those who lose people's hearts lose the world.
41. 东方不亮西方亮 When the east is dark, the west is with light. / No matter how dark things look at one time or place, there are always brighter prospects around the corner.
42. 对牛弹琴 Don't play a flute to a cow. / Don't waste your time trying to explain things to fools.
43. 独木不成林 A single tree doesn't make a forest. / One alone cannot accomplish much.
44. 躲得了初一，躲不了十五 You can hide for the first day of the month, but not till the fifteenth. / Sooner or later, you have to face up to things.
45. 多个朋友多条路，多个冤家多堵墙 One more friend, one more road; one more enemy, one more wall. / It is wiser to make friends than enemies.
46. 儿不嫌母丑，狗不嫌家贫 A son doesn't care if his mother is ugly; a dog doesn't care if its master is poor. / Those who are related have deep bonds.
47. 两虎相斗，必有一伤 When two tigers fight, one is sure to be wounded. / When two powerful people fight, one is sure to get hurt.
48. 法不责众 A law cannot be enforced when everybody breaks it.
49. 防民之口甚于防川 It's more important to stop people's mouths than to block a river. / Public opinion is very important.
50. 肥水不流外人田 Water beneficial to crops should not pass other people's fields. / Benefits should be kept within one's own home territory.
51. 富不过三代 Prosperity won't last for more than three generations. / An entrepreneur's wealth will be squandered by decadent descendants (a favourite proverb among private bankers).
52. 各人自扫门前雪，莫管他家瓦上霜 Each person sweeps the snow before his own door; never mind the frost on another family's roof. / Every individual only cares for himself and doesn't bother with others' difficulties.
53. 功到自然成 You can harvest success when you have achieved mastery. / Hard work makes its own reward.
54. 公道自在人心 Justice resides naturally in people's hearts. / People know what is right in their hearts.
55. 恭敬不如从命 Showing outward respect is not as good as following orders. / Obedience is a better way of showing respect than outward reverence.
56. 狗嘴里吐不出象牙 Out of a dog's mouth cannot grow ivory. / The foul-mouthed cannot say anything good.



57. 狗眼看人低 From a dog's eyes, all people are short. / Narrow-minded people tend to discriminate against less fortunate people.
58. 狗仗人势 A dog borrows its master's power. / A person bullies others because he is related to power.
59. 官不打送礼的 Officials don't whip those who offer presents.
60. 赤脚的不怕穿鞋的 Those who are bare-foot are not afraid of guys wearing shoes. / Desperate people have nothing to lose.
61. 观其友，知其人 To look at someone's friends is to know what kind of person he/she is. / You can learn about a person from the company they keep.
62. 国家兴亡，匹夫有责 For the rise and fall of the nation, every common man has a responsibility. / All men share a common responsibility for the fate of their country.
63. 过了这个村，就没这个店 Past this village there will be no more inns like this one. / Don't pass up a good chance, as it will not come again.
64. 好吃不如饺子，好受不如倒著 In terms of food, nothing is more delicious than dumplings; in terms of being comfortable, no position is better than lying down.
65. 好狗不挡路 A good dog does not block the road. / A decent person shouldn't block others' path/progress.
66. 好汉不吃眼前亏 A real hero doesn't put up a fight when the odds are against them.
67. 好汉不提当年勇 A hero doesn't bring up his past bravery. / A hero never brags about his past glories.
68. 好汉做事好汉当 What a hero does, a hero bears the consequences of. / A good person takes responsibility for the consequences of his own actions.
69. 好虎架不住群狼 A strong tiger is no match for a pack of wolves. / One is no match against many.
70. 好借好还，再借不难 Well-borrowed and well-returned, borrowing again won't be difficult. / Return what you borrow promptly and you will be welcome to borrow again.
71. 好了伤疤忘了疼 Once the wound is healed, one forgets the pain. / People tend to forget their bitter past when they have got better off.
72. 好朋友，勤算账 Good friends are diligent about settling accounts. / Even between good friends, it's better to settle debts often.
73. 好人不长寿，祸害活千年 Good people don't live long, bad people live a thousand years. / Decent people tend to live short lives whereas evil people tend to live longer lives.
74. 好事多磨 Great things require many hardships. / Major accomplishments usually come with twists and turns.
75. 河水不犯井水 River water doesn't intrude into well water. / No one should encroach upon others' territories.
76. 话不投机半句多 When the talk is disagreeable, even half a sentence is too much. / It's painful to talk to people who are incompatible with you.
77. 画龙画虎难画骨，知人知面不知心 When painting a dragon or a tiger, it is most difficult to paint the bone structure. When trying to know a person, it is much more difficult to know their heart than their face. / It's much harder to know a person's inner character than their outer appearance.
78. 花无千日红 No flower blooms for a thousand days. / Nothing beautiful or good lasts forever.
79. 虎毒不食子 Tigers although fierce, never eat their own cubs. / Even mean people don't harm their own children.
80. 慧眼识英雄 Discerning eyes can distinguish a hero from the common crowd. / Discerning eyes can tell greatness from mediocrity.
81. 狐狸的尾巴藏不住 A fox cannot hide its tail. / Evil character, deeds or intentions cannot be covered up forever.
82. 虎门无犬子 In a tiger's gates there are no puppy dogs. / Courageous parents produce courageous children.
83. 活到老，学到老 Living to an old age, learning to an old age. / You should always be learning things no matter how old you are.
84. 货是草，客是宝 Goods are straw, customers are treasure. / Goods are worthless unless there are customers who want to buy them.
85. 货无大小，缺者便贵 It doesn't matter whether the goods are large or small, if scarce they're expensive.
86. 虎死留皮，人死留名 When a tiger dies, it leaves its skin behind; when a person dies, they leave their reputation



behind. / People should take their legacy seriously.

87. 家丑不可外扬 Family scandals should not be raised outside the home. / Don't air your dirty laundry in public.
88. 家和万事兴 A family in harmony prospers in everything.
89. 家家都有本难念的经 Every family has one sutra which is hard to chant. / Each family has its own problems.
90. 江山易改，本性难移 It's easier to move a mountain or a river than to change a person's basic nature.
91. 将在外，君命有所不受 When a general is out in battle, even the emperor's orders may sometimes be ignored.
92. 脚踏两船必落水 People who straddle two boats are bound to fall into the water. / You cannot always sit on the fence, eventually you have to take sides (sometimes used too in situations where a man has two girlfriends).
93. 脚正不怕鞋歪 A straight foot is not afraid of a crooked shoe. / An upright person need not fear slander or rumours.
94. 家有一老，黄金活宝 If a family has an old person, they are a golden living treasure. / An old family member should be respected for their knowledge and experiences.
95. 借酒浇愁，愁更愁 Drowning one's sorrows in drink only makes them worse.
96. 既来之，则安之 Since you are here, just be content with it.
97. 近水楼台先得月 The balconies closer to the water get the moonlight first. / Those with powerful "connections" get preferential treatment.
98. 积少成多，集腋成裘 If you accumulate many small amounts, you will get a lot; if you sew together the smallest fragments of fox fur, you will make a fine coat. / Look after the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.
99. 金无足赤，人无完人 There is no pure gold, there is no perfect person.
100. 酒后吐真言 After drinking liquor, one spits out true words. / In wine there is truth.
101. 君子动口不动手 Gentlemen move their mouths but not their fists.
102. 君子记恩不记仇 A gentleman remembers others' favours but not their enmity.
103. 君子之交淡如水 Friendship between gentlemen is clear as water. / Good fences make good neighbours.
104. 开弓没有回头箭 Once the bow is pulled, the arrow will not come back. / There is no turning back.
105. 看花容易，绣花难 To look at flowers is easy, to embroider them is hard. / It's easier to observe something, but harder to do it oneself.
106. 客随主便 Guests should act according to a host's convenience.
107. 可遇而不可求 Sometimes things happen by chance instead of by pursuit. / Sometimes things just fall into one's lap.
108. 快马跑断腿 A fast horse will run till its legs are broken. / People of ability are usually given more work to do.
109. 快马加鞭，快人一言 A fast horse needs only one touch of the whip, a straightforward person needs only a word in order to understand.
110. 苦海无边，回头是岸 The bitter sea is boundless, but if you turn around there is the shore. / Don't continue on the wrong road, it's never too late to turn around.
111. 来得早不如来得巧 Coming early is not as good as to come just at the right moment.
112. 来而不往非礼也 Taking and not returning is not the right courtesy. / It's impolite not to reciprocate a gift or favour.
113. 来是人情，去是债 To receive a gift or a favour is to incur a debt.
114. 老将出马，一个顶俩 When an old general goes into action, he is as effective as two people. / An experienced hand can get twice as much done.
115. 老马识途 Old horses know the road. / Another proverb about the experience the old bring to problem-solving.
116. 两害权衡，当取其轻 When weighing two harms, one should choose the lighter of them. / Choose the lesser of two evils.
117. 良药苦口利于病，忠言逆耳利于行 Good medicine is bitter in the mouth but good for one's illness; good advice is harsh to the ear but is beneficial to one's conduct.
118. 礼多人不怪 Nobody will blame you for an excess of courtesy. / One will never be blamed for being too polite.
119. 邻居失火，不救自危 If a neighbour's house catches fire and you don't help to put it out you endanger yourself too. / Not lending a helping hand could result in your own loss too.



120. 礼轻情意重 The gift is light, but the feelings is profound. / It's not a big gift but means a lot.
121. 留得青山在，不怕没柴烧 As long as green hills remain, don't fear there is a shortage of firewood. / While there is life, there is hope.
122. 流水不腐，户枢不蠹 Running water is never stale, door hinges never get worm-eaten. / You will not get rusty if you constantly practice.
123. 乱世出英雄 Troubled times produce heroes.
124. 露水夫妻不长久 Summer romances don't last long.
125. 路遥知马力，日久见人心 Long journey lets you know a horse's strength; long time lets you know a person's heart. / Time will tell a person's nature or personality.
126. 买卖不成仁义在 Even if a business deal fails, the relationship between the parties still exists. / In the interest of a long-term relationship, one should be civil even if the immediate business deal falls through.
127. 慢工出细活 Slow work produces fine products.
128. 瞒上不瞒下 One can conceal the truth from those above but never from those below.
129. 满招损，谦受益 Self-satisfaction produces losses, while to the modest come benefits. / One loses by pride and gains by modesty.
130. 没有不散的宴席 There is no feast which does not end. / All good things must come to an end.
131. 没有不透风的墙 There is no wall which does not leak wind. / Nothing can forever stay secret.
132. 没有过不去的河 There is no river which cannot be crossed. / There is always a way to solve a problem.
133. 没做亏心事，不怕鬼叫门 If you haven't done anything to trouble your conscience, you don't need to be afraid of devils calling at the door.
134. 民不与官斗 Common people don't put up a fight with government officials. / Ordinary people have no chance of success in conflicts with the government.
135. 明枪易躲，暗箭难防 It's easy to dodge a spear; it's hard to guard against an arrow in the dark. / It's easier to deal with open attacks than hidden innuendo.
136. 明人不做暗事 An honest person does not do underhanded things or do things behind your back.
137. 谋事在人，成事在天 Planning affairs lies with humans; accomplishing things lies with heaven. / Man proposes; God disposes.
138. 哪处黄土不埋人 In what place will earth not be good enough to bury a person? / Be bold, leave home and travel to places.
139. 男大当婚，女大当嫁 When a male grows up, he should take a wife; when a woman grows up, she should take a husband. / Everybody should get married when they reach adulthood.
140. 男儿有泪不轻弹 A man should not shed tears easily.
141. 男怕入错行，女怕嫁错郎 Men should avoid entering the wrong trade; women should avoid marrying the wrong man.
142. 男人三十一枝花，女人三十老人家 A thirty-year-old man is like a flower, a thirty-year-old woman is like an old person. / Chauvinistic proverb denoting that women should marry young, if not they'll be spinsters.
143. 你敬我一尺，我敬你一丈 You respect me one foot and I respect you 10 feet. / Respect or animosity will be reciprocated to an even greater degree.
144. 宁给饥人一口，不给富人一斗 It's better to give one mouthful of food to a hungry person than to give a bushel of grain to a rich man. / It's better to help those in real need.
145. 宁跟要饭的娘，不跟做官的爹 A child is better off staying with a mother who is a beggar than a father who is a government official. / Mothers are much more caring to their children than fathers.
146. 宁愿玉碎，不为瓦全 Rather be a piece of shattered jade than to be a complete piece of tile. / It's better to be true to your value system even if it means making a huge sacrifice.
147. 宁人负我，毋我负人 I'd rather people wrong me than I wrong others.
148. 逆水行舟，不进则退 When sailing against the current, you must forge ahead or be driven back. / When in difficult situation, forge ahead or else you'll go backwards.



149. 你走你的阳关道，我过我的独木桥 You may walk the main road and I'll take the single plank bridge. / You can do things the easy way, I'd rather choose my own way even if it's harder.
150. 女大自巧，狗大自咬 When girls grows up, they will naturally be skilful with house chores; when dogs grow up, they will naturally learn to bite. / Things will develop naturally with time. No need to worry now.
151. 驽马千里，功在不舍 If an inferior horse travels one thousand miles, its achievements lies in perseverance. / Perseverance is the most important factor in success.
152. 跑了和尚跑不了庙 A monk may run away, but a temple cannot. / You can never completely escape the consequences of your actions.
153. 平安就是福 Peace and security are blessings. / Nothing is more important for a person or family than peace and safety.
154. 平时不烧香，急来抱佛脚 It's unwise to neglect burning joss sticks (to pay tribute to the Buddha) in ordinary times but then embrace the Buddha's feet in times of need. / Make preparations well in advance.
155. 贫贱之交不可忘，糟糠之妻不下堂 Don't forget friends from the times when you were poor; don't abandon your wife who shared hardships with you. / Treasure those who had been good to you when you were in need.
156. 贫无本，富无根 Poverty has no stem; wealth has no root. / People become rich or poor mostly due to their own effort or actions.
157. 破家值万贯 Even a poor home is worth 10,000 strings of coins. / It is not only material things that bring contentment.
158. 前车之覆，后车之鉴 The overturned cart ahead provides a warning to the cart behind. / People should learn from others' mistakes.
159. 千夫所指，无疾而死 The person at whom thousands of people point fingers (with disgust) will die even if he's not sick. / Few people can withstand attack by public opinion.
160. 枪打出头鸟 The leading bird is the first to be shot. / People who stand out tend to be attacked first.
161. 墙倒众人推 When a wall is collapsing, everybody gives it a push. / People like to attack those who are losing power.
162. 强将手下无弱兵 There is no weak soldier under a strong commander. / An able leader tends to inspire and employ able followers.
163. 墙里开花墙外香 Flowers bloom inside the walls, but their fragrance is strongest outside the walls. / Venture forth
164. 强龙压不过地头蛇 A strong dragon can't crush a local snake. / It's difficult to tackle a local despot.
165. 强扭的瓜不甜 A melon forcefully picked off the vine is not sweet. / You won't get good result by forcing people to do things they don't like.
166. 墙头一棵草，风吹两边倒 The grass atop a wall will sway with the wind. / People with no principles will follow the prevailing opinion.
167. 千军易得，一将难求 It's easy to acquire a thousand soldiers but hard to find one good general. / It's more difficult to hire a good manager than a thousand employees.
168. 千里送鹅毛，礼轻人意重 When a goose feather is sent a thousand miles, the gift is light but the sentiment is heavy. / A gift from afar is very valuable.
169. 千里之堤，毁于蚁穴 A thousand mile long dike can collapse because of ant holes. / Even slight negligence can lead to disasters.
170. 千里之行，始于足下 A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. / All grand projects have to start somewhere.
171. 前人栽树，后人乘凉 The forebears plant the trees, and their descendants enjoy the shade. / You work hard for the benefits of future generations.
172. 巧妇难为无米之炊 Even a clever housewife can't cook a meal without rice. / You can't produce something with out the right material.
173. 青出于蓝 Indigo comes from blue, but it surpasses blue. / The younger generation surpasses the older generation.
174. 清官难断家务事 Even a good official cannot judge domestic cases. / Family disputes are the hardest to resolve.



175. 穷家富路 Be poor at home, be rich on the road. / When at home, be economical; when on the road, bring extra money just in case.
176. 人不可貌相，海水不可斗量 People cannot be judged by their looks, just like the sea cannot be measured in bushels. / Don't underestimate people purely based on their looks.
177. 人到无求品自高 When a person has no desire, their morality is naturally high. / A noble person tends not to have many desires.
178. 人非圣贤，孰能无过? People are not saints, how can they be flawless? / Nobody is perfect.
179. 人怕出名，猪怕壮 People are afraid of becoming famous, just like pigs are afraid of being fat. / Fame is not always a good thing.
180. 人怕丢脸，树怕剥皮 People are afraid of losing face, just like trees are afraid of losing bark. / Losing facing is a serious matter.
181. 人善得人欺，马善遭人骑 A nice person tend to be taken advantage of, just like a nice horse makes it easier for people to ride. / Being too kind is not always a good thing.
182. 人靠衣服，马靠鞍 People rely on clothes to make good appearances, just like horses rely on saddles.
183. 人死如灯灭 When a person dies, it's like a candle flame goes out. / Life is vulnerable and short.
184. 人往高处走，水往低处流 People tend to walk to higher grounds, whereas water tends to flow downhill. / It's natural that people pursue a better life, job, etc.
185. 人为财死，鸟为食亡 People would die for wealth, just like birds would die for food. / People always want to pursue wealth, no matter what.
186. 人无千日好，花无百日红 Few people can stay nice for a thousand days, just like few flowers can stay blooming for a hundred days. / Don't expect good things to last forever.
187. 忍字头上一把刀 The Chinese character of "forebearance" is "knife" on top of "heart". / Endurance and patience are naturally hard but they are important.
188. 柔软是立身之本，刚强是惹祸之胎 To be flexible is essential for getting along in the world, whereas to be unyielding is the embryo of disaster. / It's important to be flexible and compromise.
189. 入境问禁，入国问俗 When crossing a border, ask what is forbidden; when entering a country, ask about the local customs. / When arriving in a new environment, check out the local taboos and customs first.
190. 若要人不知，除非己莫为 If you don't want people to know about something you did, it's better never do it in the first place. / Don't do things that you may feel embarrassed or ashamed to let others know.
191. 塞翁失马，焉知非福 When Old Man Sai lost his horse, it is hard to judge whether it was a good thing or a bad thing. / There is good in bad and bad in good. So don't jump to conclusions quickly.
192. 三个臭皮匠，顶个诸葛亮 Three cobblers with their wits combined can equal Zhuge Liang. / Three fools are the equal of one wise man [in the classic novel The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Zhuge Liang epitomises wisdom].
193. 三人行必有我师 If three people are walking together, at least one of the other two can teach me something. / One can always learn something from others.
194. 三十六计走为上计 Among the 36 stratagems, running away is the number one stratagem. / When facing bad odds, the best thing to do is withdraw.
195. 三十年河东，三十年河西 Thirty years on the east bank of the river, 30 years on the west bank of the river. / Things are cyclical. No good or bad fortunes stay in place forever.
196. 山不转路转 Even if the mountains don't turn, the roads can turn. / Don't stick to one approach. Be flexible and explore other ways.
197. 山高遮不住太阳 However high a mountain may be, it cannot block the sun. / No matter how powerful a person is, they cannot hide the truth.
198. 上梁不正下梁歪 If the main roof beams are not upright, the lower ones will be crooked too. / If the senior people don't behave properly, their subordinates won't either.
199. 上山容易，下山难 It's easier to go up a hill than to go down the hill. / It's easier to get into a situation than to



get out of it. So think it through before jumping into things.

- 200.** 上有天堂，下有苏杭 Above there is heaven, below on earth there are Suzhou and Hangzhou. / Suzhou and Hangzhou are two cities as beautiful as heaven.
- 201.** 上有政策，下有对策 Those above have policies; but those below have counter policies. / People can always find loopholes in government policies.
- 202.** 山外有山，天外有天 Beyond mountains there are more mountains, and beyond heaven there are more heavens. / Don't be cocky. There are always more capable people out there.
- 203.** 善有善报，恶有恶报 Goodness is repaid with goodness, evil is repaid with evil. / You get what you deserve.
- 204.** 山中无老虎，猴子称大王 When there is no tiger in the mountain, the monkey becomes king. / In absence of capable people, less capable ones are in charge.
- 205.** 少壮不努力，老大徒伤悲 If you don't work hard when you are young and strong, you will only harvest sadness when you get old. / Work/Study hard when you are young so that you don't have to be miserable when you get old.
- 206.** 舍不得孩子，套不住狼 If you are not willing to risk your child, you won't be able to catch the wolf. / High risks bring about high returns.
- 207.** 胜败乃兵家常事 Both victory and defeat are ordinary affairs for armies. / You win some and you lose some. It's normal.
- 208.** 胜不骄，败不馁 Don't be arrogant in victory, and don't be depressed in defeat. / Keep a stable mentality and don't let success or failure affect your mood.
- 209.** 生米煮成熟饭 The rice has already been cooked. / What is done is done.
- 210.** 胜者为王，败者为寇 The winners tend to be treated as king, whereas the losers as bandits. / Justice and respect tend to be given to winners instead of losers.
- 211.** 深山出俊鸟 From deep mountains come beautiful birds. / Outstanding people often come from remote places.
- 212.** 身正不怕影子斜 If your body is upright, you don't need to worry about your shadows being crooked. / As long as you didn't do bad things, don't worry about slanderous accusations.
- 213.** 事不过三 Bad actions should not be repeated more than three times. / You may be forgiven once or twice, but not a third time.
- 214.** 虱子多了不痒，债多了不愁 When somebody has too many lice, they don't itch; when a person has too much debt, they stop worrying about repaying it./ Equivalent to English phrase 'too big to fail'.
- 215.** 是非自有公论 Rights and wrongs are subject to public opinion. / Public opinion is the best judge of what's right and what's wrong.
- 216.** 十个指头不一般齐 The 10 fingers are not equal in length. / All people are not the same.
- 217.** 十年树木，百年树人 It takes 10 years to grow a tree, but a hundred years to rear a people. / Educating a generation of good people takes a long time.
- 218.** 世上无难事，只怕有心人 Nothing in the world is too hard for those who are determined.
- 219.** 识时务者为俊杰 Those who are attuned to the tide of times are people of outstanding talent. / Realists are smart people.
- 220.** 士为知己者死，女为悦自者容 A true man is willing to die for a convivial friend, a woman puts on make-up for the one who truly appreciates her. / People tend to make an effort for those who value them.
- 221.** 失之毫厘，差之千里 A miscalculation of a millimetre can cause a discrepancy of 1,000 kilometres. / A small error can lead to a huge mistake later on.
- 222.** 树大招风 Big trees attract the wind. / High-profile people attract jealousy.
- 223.** 树高千尺，落叶归根 The tree may grow a thousand feet tall, but when its leaves fall, they fall back to its root. / No matter how far you travel, when you get old, you always want to go return home.
- 224.** 水至清则无鱼 If water is too clear, there will be no fish in it./ Sometimes ambiguity is necessary (often used in Hong Kong to discuss stock market regulation and the need for some ambiguity to make things work).
- 225.** 树挪死，人挪活 A tree moved might die, a person moved may thrive. / Moving can be a good thing.



226. 说曹操，曹操到 When speaking of Cao Cao, Cao Cao arrives. / Speak of the devil [Cao Cao was an evil warlord from the Three Kingdoms period].
227. 书中自有黄金屋 In books you will find golden houses. / If you study hard, you will harvest the knowledge hand somely later.
228. 四海之内皆兄弟 Within the four seas are many brothers. / If you are good and popular, you can find friends everywhere.
229. 四两拨千斤 Four ounces can move a thousand pounds. / If you are clever, you can accomplish great things with limited resources.
230. 死猪不怕开水烫 A dead pig is not afraid of being scalded by boiling water. / A person without hope doesn't care about anything.
231. 踏破铁鞋无觅处，得来全不费工夫 One may vainly wear out a pair of iron shoes to look for something, another end up getting it without effort. / Sometimes people get things by pure luck.
232. 天高皇帝远 The sky is high and the emperor is far away. / People in remote places enjoy more freedom from authority.
233. 天塌下来，自有高个子撑着 Even if the sky falls down, there are taller people holding it. / Don't worry, even if things go wrong, there are other more important people taking care of the situation.
234. 天网恢恢，疏而不漏 The vast net of Heaven has large meshes, but it lets nothing through. / The legal system is sound. Justice will ultimately be served.
235. 天下乌鸦一般黑 All crows under the sky are black. / Bad people are the same all over the world.
236. 天有不测风云，人有旦夕祸福 Just as in nature there are unexpected storms, people can experience unexpected good and bad fortunes in life. / Human fortunes are as unpredictable as the weather.
237. 退一步，海阔天空 Take a step back and you will see a bigger ocean and broader sky. / Making the necessary concessions now, can profit later.
238. 兔子不吃窝边草 A rabbit doesn't eat the grass next to its burrow. / People don't cherish things that are easily available.
239. 万事开头难 In doing anything, beginning is always the most difficult.
240. 无风不起浪 Without wind, there are no big waves. / There is always a cause behind bad things.
241. 无酒不成席 Without alcohol, there is no banquet. / Alcohol makes a banquet complete.
242. 无知者无畏 Ignorant people have no fear.
243. 物以类聚，人以群分 Just as things come together in categories, people divide into similar groups. / Like attracts like.
244. 县官不如现管 A county magistrate's power is not as effective as that of a junior official who happens to be in charge of the issue. / Immediate manager on the spot can be more useful than a senior official.
245. 先下手为强了 The first to strike will gain the upper hand. / Seek first mover advantage.
246. 小不忍则乱大谋 If you don't show forbearance in little matters, you may create big havoc in the larger scheme of things. / Sometimes it's wise to put up with small insults or inconveniences for the greater good.
247. 邪不压正 Those who are evil cannot prevail over the righteous.
248. 新官上任三把火 A new official that assumes office often sets three fires. / People assuming new positions like to make a few major changes to impress people.
249. 小别胜新婚 A short separation (between the newly-wed) is better than the wedding night. / Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
250. 心静自然凉 If your mind is calm, you naturally feel cool.
251. 新来的和尚好撞钟 A newly arrived monk likes to ring the bell. / Newcomers like to work more owing to their enthusiasm.
252. 心有灵犀一点通 For those whose hearts or minds are connected, just a hint can make them understand each other perfectly.
253. 心有余而力不足 The mind is strong but the power lacking.



- 254.** 雪中送炭真君子，锦上添花是小人 The person who sends charcoal in snowy weather is a true gentleman; the person who merely adds flowers to a brocade is a lowly person. / People who provide timely help are true gentlemen. Those who only jump on the bandwagon are not.
- 255.** 眼不见为净 What the eye doesn't see is clean. / What you don't see or know doesn't upset you.
- 256.** 养兵千日，用兵一时 You maintain an army for 1,000 days in order to use it once. / People should always be prepared for emergencies.
- 257.** 养儿方知父母恩 Not until you have children will you appreciate your parents' kindness.
- 258.** 一朝天子一朝臣 Every new sovereign brings in his own ministers. / A new leader brings in new aides.
- 259.** 一臣不事二主 A minister cannot serve two masters.
- 260.** 一花独放不是春 A single flower blooming does not make a spring. / A single person's accomplishment is not that significant.
- 261.** 一年之计在于春，一天之计在于晨 Make your whole year's plan in springtime, and make your whole day's plan in the morning. / Plan ahead, plan early.
- 262.** 饮水不忘挖井人 When you drink water, don't forget those who dug the well. / You should not forget those who have helped you.
- 263.** 一瓶子不响，半瓶子咣当 A full bottle doesn't make noise, half a bottle does. / Truly knowledgeable or sophisticated people don't talk much, whereas people who don't know much tend to be the most talkative.
- 264.** 一人得道，鸡犬升天 When a person attains the Tao [i.e. enlightenment], even his pets ascend to heaven. / When one person gets promoted to an important position, all their relatives enjoy the privilege.
- 265.** 疑人莫用，用人莫疑 If you suspect someone, don't hire him. If you hire someone, don't suspect him. / Trust is the most important thing in managing your staff.
- 266.** 一日不见如隔三秋 One day of not seeing somebody is like three autumns have passed. / Another version of absence makes the heart grow fonder.
- 267.** 一夜夫妻百夜恩 One day as husband and wife can create affection that lasts for a hundred days. / The love between husband and wife is very long-lasting.
- 268.** 一日为师，终生为父 A teacher for a single day is a father for a lifetime. / People should respect their teachers like they respect their parents.
- 269.** 一山不能存二虎 One mountain can't keep two tigers. / In any team two strong people will tend to clash.
- 270.** 一问三不知，神仙怪不得 If you reply with "I don't know" to every question, even the gods can't blame you. / If you claim complete ignorance, no one can blame you.
- 271.** 以小人之心，度君子之腹 Use a petty person's heart to gauge a gentleman's feelings. / Small minds can't comprehend the thoughts or noble motives of gentlefolk.
- 272.** 一言既出，驷马难追 Once a word has been said, even a team of four horses cannot overtake it. / What has been said cannot be unsaid.
- 273.** 有理走遍天下，无理寸步难行 With right on your side, you can go anywhere; without right, you can hardly step one inch. / As long as you are on the right side, don't worry about anything.
- 274.** 有钱能使鬼推磨 With money you can even make a ghost turn the millstone. / Money makes the world go round.
- 275.** 有钱难买老来瘦 You can't buy slimness in old age with money. / Slimness in old age is a blessing.
- 276.** 有意种花花不开，无心插柳柳成荫 When you deliberately plant a flower, the flower doesn't bloom; whereas when you slip a willow casually in the mud, it grows to give shade. / When you really want something, you may never get it. When you least expect something, it may present itself to you.
- 277.** 有缘千里来相会，无缘对面不相逢 If fate works its magic, people can come together from thousands of miles away. / It's thanks to fate that we can meet up and become friends.
- 278.** 远亲不如近邻 A faraway relative is not as good as a nearby neighbour. / It's important to cultivate relationship with your neighbours as they can sometimes be more useful than your own family.
- 279.** 与君一席话，胜读十年书 Speaking with a gentleman once is better than 10 years of reading.



280. 在家靠父母，在外靠朋友 At home you depend on parents, outside home you depend on friends. / Friends are as important as family.
281. 这山望着那山高 Standing on this hill, you may find other hills higher. / The grass is always greener on the other side.
282. 众人拾柴火焰高 When many people collect firewood, the fire burns high. / The power of the masses is significant.
283. 醉翁之意不在酒 The drunken old man's true motivation lies not in liquor. / Sometimes people's true motivation is often not the ostensible one.
284. 读万卷书不如行万里路 Reading 10,000 books is not as useful as travelling 10,000 miles.
285. 师傅领进门，修行在个人 The master can bring an apprentice inside the door, but it's up to the apprentice to decide how much he may learn.
286. 玉不琢，不成器 Uncarved jade won't become a piece of art. / Without training or education, people won't be come useful or accomplished.
287. 授人以鱼不如授人以渔 Giving people fish is not as good as teaching people to fish. / It's better to teach poor people skills than giving them donations.
288. 天生我材必有用 Since Heaven gave me life, it must be useful. / I must be good for something.
289. 拣了芝麻丢了西瓜 You picked up a sesame seed but lost sight of the watermelon. / You made a false economy.
290. 现上轿现扎耳朵眼 That's like a bride getting her ears pierced just before she got into the wedding sedan. / You left things till the last minute.
291. 刀子嘴豆腐心 They have a mouth as sharp as a dagger but a heart as soft as tofu. / Somebody who may be harsh with words but really has a kind heart.
292. 一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴 One inch of time is like one inch of gold, however one inch of gold cannot buy one inch of time. / Time is the most precious thing.
293. 搬起石头砸自己的脚 You lifted a rock, only to drop it on your own feet. / Used to describe an act that is likely to backfire.
294. 一遭被蛇咬，十年怕井绳 Once bitten by a snake, you fear ropes for 10 years. / Once harmed by something, you will always scared of it (i.e. once bitten, twice shy).
295. 笑一笑，十年少 Have a laugh and you will get younger by 10 years. / Positive attitude keeps people young and healthy.
296. 儿行千里母担忧 When people travel afar, their mothers always worry about them. / A mother's love is profound.
297. 不怕慢，就怕站 Be not afraid of going slowly, but be afraid only of standing still. / It's ok to go slow but you have to keep moving forward.
298. 不俵裤脚不过河 Don't cross the river before rolling up your trousers. / Don't open your mouth before knowing the details.
299. 僧多粥少 Too many monks, not enough congee. / There is not enough to go around.
300. 三人成虎 Three liars makes a tiger. / Proverb recently used by President Xi Jinping to convey idea that rumours can be easily believed.

谚语

Chinese characters for the term 'proverb'