

Idiom by Lon Yan

逢凶化吉

feng2 xiong1 hua4 ji2

The headline said “The bear with 17 lives”. The bear is, in fact, a cat, and a black one too, which is considered bad luck.

Bear has arguably met more than a cat’s share of misfortunates. According to the news report, he was “found on a motorway, lost all his fur (twice), got poisoned, had a hole ripped in his throat, lost chunks of ear and went AWOL for six weeks.”

He is now 17, and is “still going strong.” So it’s really hard to say whether Bear has been plagued by bad luck, or had enough good luck to let him survive all these near death experiences. What is certain is that the feline has “逢凶化吉” (*feng2 xiong1 hua4 ji2*).

“逢” (*feng2*) is “to come across,” “to meet by chance,” “凶” (*xiong1*) “evil,” “bad,” “unlucky,” “unfortunate,” “bad luck,” “化” (*hua4*)

“to change,” “to transform” and “吉” (*ji2*) is “auspicious,” “good luck.”

Literally, “逢凶化吉” (*feng2 xiong1 hua4 ji2*) is “meet bad luck, turn into good luck,” “misfortune turns to blessing”, which is what the idiom means.

Even more experienced in “逢凶化吉” (*feng2 xiong1 hua4 ji2*) was Fidel Castro. The former Cuban leader was said to have survived over 600 assassination attempts and lived to a ripe old age before passing away in late November.

But perhaps it was not luck that had kept him alive, but the knowledge of how to “趨吉避凶” (*qu1 ji2 bi4 xiong1*) – “to pursue fortune and avoid disaster”, “to seek luck and avoid calamity” – an acute sense of impending danger and, of course, tight security.

Terms containing the character “化” (*hua4*) include:

化學 (*hua4 xue2*) – chemistry

化妝 (*hua4 zhuang1*) – to apply cosmetics

化緣 (*hua4 yuan2*) – to beg alms

叫化子 (*jiao4 hua1 zii2*) – a beggar