

Idiom by Lon Yan

凶多吉少

xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3

A Russian military plane carrying members of the army's official choir disappeared from radar after taking off from Moscow. Initial news reports in the Chinese media described the 92 people on board the Tupolev Tu-154 plane as “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*).

Subsequently, the Russian defense ministry confirmed that the plane has crashed in the Black Sea, and there were no survivors.

“凶” (*xiong1*) is “unlucky,” “unfortunate,” “inauspicious,” “多” (*duo1*) “many,” “much,” “plenty,” “more than,” “much more,” “吉” (*ji2*) “auspicious” and “少” (*shao3*) “not many,” “few,” “less.” Literally, “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*) is “unlucky more, lucky less.”

If good luck is less than bad luck, the situation is not very optimistic. So “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*) means “to be grim-

looking,” “to be ominous,” “to be ill-boding,” “to be fraught with grim possibilities” or “to bode ill rather than well.”

When a plane disappeared from radar and was not heard from for hours, it has usually crashed so it is “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*). An elderly person with dementia wandered into the hills and was not heard from for a week, one would have to sadly conclude that it is “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*).

But the idiom can be used in situations that do not involve loss of human life, such as when the company in which you own stocks got into financial troubles, you may say your investment is “凶多吉少” (*xiong1 duo1 ji2 shao3*).

Terms containing the character “吉” (*ji2*) include:

吉祥 (*ji2 xiang2*) – lucky; auspicious

大吉 (*da4 ji2*) – extremely lucky; very auspicious

吉人天相 (*ji2 ren2 tian1 xiang1*) – heaven helps the good man

吉凶 (*ji2 xiong1*) – good and bad luck