

Idiom by Lon Yan

鳥倦知還

niao3 juan4 zhi1 hai2

A parrot flew away from its home of 10 years at a government quarters in Cheung Sha Wan. Firemen who were called in to help failed to recapture it.

The news report did not mention “投其所好” (*tou2 qi2 suo3 hao3*), the tactic of using a piece of cake to lure a runaway cat out from her hiding place on the same day, probably because the bird just wasn't as fond of food. So the owner now just hoped the bird would “鳥倦知還” (*niao3 juan4 zhi1 hai2*).

“鳥” (*niao3*) is “a bird,” “倦” (*juan4*) “weary,” “tired,” “知” (*zhi1*) “to know,” “to be aware of,” and “還” (*hai2*) “to return to a place.” Literally, “鳥倦知還” (*niao3 juan4 zhi1 hai2*) is “a bird that has become tired will return home.”

The expression came from a work

of reclusive ancient Chinese poet Tao Yuanming's (陶淵明) in which he talked about quitting the life of an official, which he hated, and returning to a life in the countryside, which he loved, as he could leisurely watch flowing clouds and “tired” birds returning to their nests.

The line, interpreted to be alluding to his own mentality, was condensed into “鳥倦知還” (*niao3 juan4 zhi1 hai2*), which means, figuratively, the returning home of someone who is tired of a life outside.

Birds usually go back to their nest after a long day out, and “鳥倦知還” (*niao3 juan4 zhi1 hai2*) is a comforting thought for those desperately waiting for the return of a loved one.

Terms containing the character “倦” (*juan4*) include:

疲倦 (*pi2 juan4*) – tired' fatigue

厭倦 (*yan4 juan4*) – to be weary of; to be fed up with

倦意 (*juan4 yi4*) – tiredness; sleepiness

困倦 (*kun4 juan4*) – exhausted; tired out