

Idiom by Lon Yan

人為財死

ren2 wei4 cai2 si3

People do silly things for love, even sillier things for money, like dying, hence the expression “人為財死” (*ren2 wei4 cai2 si3*).

“人” (*ren2*) is “people,” “a person,” “human,” “為” (*wei4*) “for,” “財” (*cai2*) “money,” “wealth” and “死” (*si3*) “to die,” “death.”

There is a second part to the expression – “鳥為食亡” (*niao3 wei4 shi2 wang2*). “鳥” (*niao3*) is “a bird,” “為” (*wei4*) “for,” “食” (*shi1*) “food,” “to eat,” and “亡” (*wang2*) “to die,” “to lose.”

Birds do risk death for food, as you can always see them greedily feasting on garbage in the middle of busy roads, flying off at the very last minute before being hit by oncoming vehicles. Some, of course, cut it too close, and had to be scrapped off the road.

“人為財死 鳥為食亡” (*ren2 wei4 cai2 si3 niao3 wei4 shi2 wang2*) means, literally,

“human beings die in pursuit of wealth, and birds die in pursuit of food.”

It is an observation of stupid things people do for money, like committing robbery. It is also a reminder that “the wages of avarice (貪婪) is death” – a caution against succumbing to greed, and a green turtle in Thailand that died recently is living proof of the truth of such an observation.

Over the years, the reptile, named Piggy Bank, fittingly, gobbled up over 1,000 coins tossed by tourist in the pond where it lived over the years. The effect of the unusual diet began to show recently. A surgery to remove the coins failed to save its life. Vets said Bank died from blood poisoning.

Terms containing the character “財” (*cai2*) include:

財務 (*cai2 wu4*) – financial affairs

財產 (*cai2 chan3*) – property; money; wealth

財團 (*cai2 tuan2*) – a consortium; big business

財神 (*cai2 shen2*) – the God of Wealth