

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 功成身退

*gong1 cheng2 shen1 tui4*

After working diligently 24/7 for 20 years, Cassini wasn't given a pension or a comfortable retirement, but was sent to die a fiery death.

Treating a loyal worker that way just isn't right, but Cassini is not a human being. It is NASA's spacecraft launched in 1997 to explore space, Saturn and its moons specifically. Cassini was the only spacecraft to ever orbit Saturn, beaming back close-up images of the planet, its rings and moons.

NASA explained that it wasn't cold-hearted when it decided to destroy Cassini. "Having expended almost every bit of the rocket propellant it carried to Saturn, operators are deliberately plunging Cassini into the planet to ensure Saturn's moons will remain pristine for future exploration."

Cassini burned up like a meteor in the skies above Saturn early on September 15.

In a way, we can say that it has "功成身退" (*gong1 cheng2 shen1 tui4*).

"功" (*gong1*) means "merit," "achievements," "meritorious deed or service," "成" (*cheng2*) "to accomplish," "to succeed," "to complete," "to achieve," "身" (*shen1*) "body," and "退" (*tui4*) "to move backward," "to withdraw." Literally, "功成身退" (*gong1 cheng2 shen1 tui4*) is "mission accomplished, step down."

It means "to retire after winning merit," "to retire from political life after winning tremendous successes," to retire after having made one's mark." "功成身退" (*gong1 cheng2 shen1 tui4*) is wiser than hanging onto power until one outlives one's usefulness.

A related idiom is "功成不居" (*gong1 cheng2 bu4 ju1*), meaning "to claim no credit for one's service," "not to claim personal credit for achievement."

### Terms containing the character "退" (*tui4*) include:

退休 (*tui4 xiu1*) – to retire; to step down; retirement

退出 (*tui1 chu1*) – to withdraw from; to exit

退回 (*tui4 hui2*) – to send back (something delivered); to turn back

退步 (*tui4 bu4*) – to do less well than before; regression