



**By Michelle Neoh**

Many of us know that it is bad luck to pass a black cat, to walk under a ladder or that the number 13 is of nasty portent; but do any of you know that according to Chinese superstition it is also bad luck to sleep with your feet pointing to the door? Like Western culture, Chinese culture is rich and literally awash with superstitions and beliefs, many of which are just as colorful and incredible. Though some of the following superstitions may sound out of this world, and hard to swallow, you'd be surprised to know the extent to which some people will go to carry out these beliefs.

Like many other cultures, color is of great significance with the Chinese. Red is an auspicious color and is a symbol of good fortune and prosperity. Hence, many people wear red during Chinese New Year's Day, not only in hopes of obtaining good luck, but also to ward off evil spirits and bad fortune. On the other hand, wearing black on Chinese New Year's Day is a huge no-no, as black symbolizes death and bad fortune. This also holds true

for any other celebrations; wearing black is an unforgivable Chinese fashion faux pas when it comes to birthdays, weddings, and even when visiting the sick. In relation to this, anyone who has had a death in the family is not allowed to attend birthdays or weddings for at least a month or so, depending on how long the family is in mourning. I had a friend who once had a death in his family around the Christmas season, and he was forbidden to go out or to attend any parties. Needless to say, it sucked royally and he was not a very happy camper.

Did you know that having a house facing a T junction brings bad luck? This is a matter of feng shui, a concept that may not look as foreign to many as it might sound. Feng shui, the balance of nature to create harmony leading to health and prosperity, is a strong belief still practiced by many Chinese, both modern and traditional. The Chinese have long observed that certain surroundings are better, or luckier, than others, and for centuries they have used feng shui to create harmonious living environments. today,

feng shui has evolved in to a refined art used to enhance luck and well being through modifications of the layouts of workplaces and homes. Back home, it was not unusual to hear of people tearing down walls and landscaping their gardens just to improve their feng shui. Some would even go so far as to consult a feng shui specialist (for a very tidy sum, of course) for their opinions on various layouts: is it better for my house to face the east or the west? Will having a river in front of my house obstruct my feng shui, and therefore jeopardize the health and well-being of my family? I still remember one of my neighbors who had built this enormous frog statue (don't ask) facing his house. Later, when one of his family members passed away, he was told by a feng shui specialist that by facing the house, the frog had indirectly "eaten" up all his luck. BAM! Frog went DOWN!

Numbers also carry a considerable amount of weight in Chinese beliefs. The Cantonese are the most superstitious about numbers, and they seem to

influence the rest of the Chinese society. The number eight, for example, is considered lucky because it sounds like the Cantonese word for luck ("fatt"). Therefore, 88 is considered to be doubly lucky, 888 is triply lucky, and so on. Six is also taken to be a lucky number because it sounds like the Hokkien word for luck. Unlike Western superstition, the number 13 does not cause frowns on the foreheads of many. In fact, it is the number four which is unpopular. In Cantonese, four sounds like the dead or death ("sei").

The extent to which some people go to carry out these beliefs reflects the seriousness and gravity such matters are given by believers. What would seem an unthinkable decision for an unbeliever would be of no consideration to one who considers these superstitions to be of great importance. It certainly would be interesting if these beliefs were given such comparable consideration in Western society. Try it: move your furniture around a bit, wear more red clothes . . . who knows, you might just get lucky!

# How do you say phlem in Chinese?

**By Dave Hsu**

Have you ever bitten into a banana peel, or unripe fruit? What about arranging your furniture according to which way is best for your fortune? What about eating too many fried foods, and then have your mother tell you it will make your throat sore later? If you have ever done any of these things, and can describe them in a word, then you probably are able to speak Chinese!

The Chinese idioms that I was describing at the beginning are all words that don't really translate into one English word. The first one, which describes the taste of a banana peel or unripe fruit, is pronounced "se" according to the Romanization of the Chinese pronunciation. The sound actually does not translate into an English spelling. The phoneme does not even exist in the English language. But the word is a description of the taste and the feeling that you get. I know most of you probably now are wondering, why is that crazy boy eating banana peels? Don't ask me. But I know that at one time or another, I have and I don't have a clue why I did it, but ironically the Chinese have a word for it. Try it sometime, it will make your life so much more full. You can experience a multi-cultural food!

The second word that I was describing is the word "feng sui." It literally means wind and water. It is a belief that the alignment of the physical objects in your home, or company, will make a difference in the fortune that you will have. It is a very spiritually oriented tradition.

In some families all of the beds in the home must be aligned in the same way, the door has to face a certain direction for you family to have good luck. This word has actually been adopted by many of the American companies. Some companies also believe that there is a certain orientation that will bring their company prosperity.

Another word that has been taken directly from Chinese is the word, "ke tou", which for Chinese means to pay respects by bowing. Corporate America has adopted the word which means taking orders from people higher up the corporate totem pole.

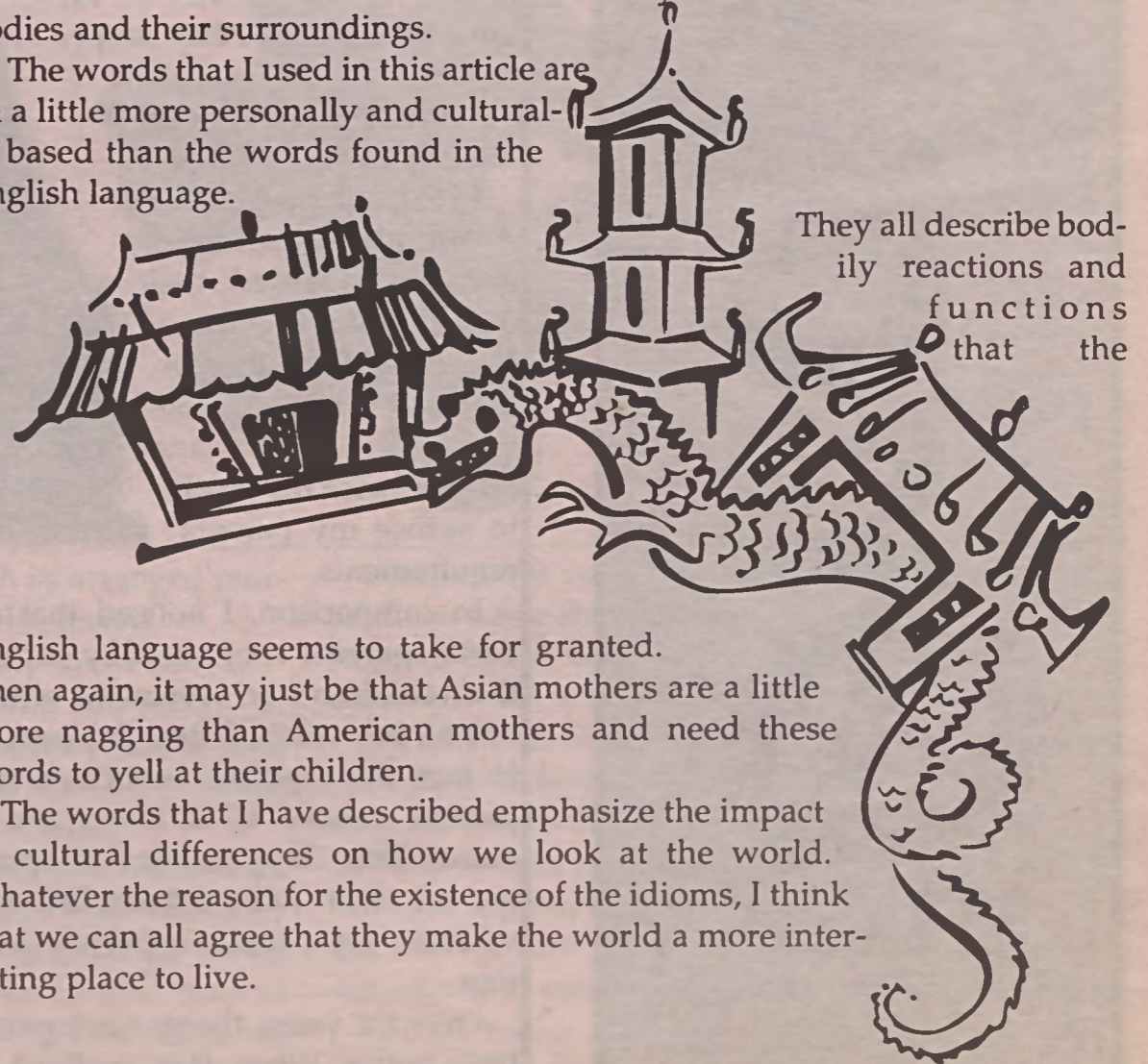
The final idiom I would like to talk about is the word ihuo chi. This word translates into "fire-air." Altogether the word is used to describe the fried or roasted foods that will make your throat sore, and make you cough. It is used by Chinese mothers everywhere to warn their children not to eat too much

junk food without drinking enough water. It is an interesting word, in that it is hard to believe that there is no English word that can describe this effect. It has always played a big role in my life, so I can not imagine life without knowing it.

Idioms are everywhere in our language, but what is the reason for them? Do we have an innate need to differ ourselves from other groups of people based on how we speak?

Maybe it is a result of how our culture expresses itself. I think that it stems from our culture itself. The Chinese have always been more in tune with their bodies and their surroundings.

The words that I used in this article are all a little more personally and culturally based than the words found in the English language.



English language seems to take for granted. Then again, it may just be that Asian mothers are a little more nagging than American mothers and need these words to yell at their children.

The words that I have described emphasize the impact of cultural differences on how we look at the world. Whatever the reason for the existence of the idioms, I think that we can all agree that they make the world a more interesting place to live.