



活用成語

USING

IDIOMS



Sisyphus, by Franz von Stuck, Public Domain.
德國畫家法蘭茲·史塔克的畫「薛西佛斯」，公眾領域。

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CHINESE PRACTICE

徒勞無功

to work to no avail

(tu2 lao2 wu2 gong1)

中國古代道家思想家和哲學家莊子在《莊子》外篇的〈天運〉中，寫了一句耐人尋味的話：「今蘄行周於魯，是猶推舟於陸也」，意思是說，若期望把古代西周的制度搬到現今的魯國來推行，就好比是要在陸地上推船一樣。

孔子是東周春秋時代人，但莊子此處所指的周是比孔子的年代更早的西周。魯國是孔子的出生地。孔子主張恢復古代周公和堯舜的禮樂道德，並將之應用在我們生活中，而這句話是莊子對孔子這主張的評論。莊子把過去比喻為水，把現在比喻為陸地，船代表周，馬車代表魯國。莊子這話是表示使用錯誤的交通工具不但會很費力，而且哪裡都到不了。如同他說的「勞而無功，身必有殃」：這只是費力，但永遠不會成功；誰這麼做就一定遭殃。

莊子論辯道，所有的事都是相對的，有其特定的時空背景，若欲達成目標，則必須運用適當的方法。因此有了這個成語「徒勞無功」，意指沒有成效的努力，或是浪費時間。

在英語中，有很多方式可以用來表示「無勞無功」的意思，最常見的或許是 to work to no avail 或 to labor in vain。另一個更生動卻有點灰暗的片語，是 flogging a dead horse。動詞 to flog 意指打擊、鞭打。而 flogging a dead horse 就是無端費了很多力氣。(台北時報編譯林俐副譯)

◆ 你別再鬧了！這樣下去是徒勞無功的。

(Enough, enough. You're not going to get anywhere being like that.)

英文練習

flogging a dead horse

The ancient Chinese Taoist thinker and philosopher Zhuangzi, in the *Revolution of Heaven* chapter of the *Outer Chapters* section of the work attributed to him, wrote the curious phrase 「今蘄行周於魯，是猶推舟於陸也」：“attempting these days to put into practice the old ways of Zhou in Lu is like pushing a boat on dry land.”

The ancient sage Confucius lived during the Spring and Autumn period of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, but Zhuangzi here is referring to the earlier Western Zhou, before Confucius' time. Lu was the state in which Confucius was born.

The phrase was a comment on Confucius' idea that one should look back to the ancient ways of the Duke of Zhou and former sage kings Yao and Shun for models of propriety and good conduct, and apply them in your life. Zhuangzi is likening the past to water and the present to dry land, and using the boat to represent Zhou and the carriage to represent Lu. His point is that to use the wrong mode of transport is not only hard work, but it will — literally — get you absolutely nowhere. As Zhuangzi said, 「勞而無功，身必有殃」：“It is not only laborious work, but hopeless, too; he who proceeds in this way is sure to meet disaster.”

He is arguing that all things are relative and have a place and time, and that you should employ the appropriate method if you wish to achieve your goals. From 勞而無功 we now have the idiom 「徒勞無功」, meaning to work to no avail, or to waste one's time.

In English, there are many ways in which to say 徒勞無功, the most obvious perhaps being “to work to no avail,” or “to labor in vain.” A more colorful phrase, albeit quite dark, is “flogging a dead horse.” The verb “to flog” means to beat, to hit. Flogging a dead horse, then, would be to expend a lot of effort for no reason. (PAUL COOPER, TAIPEI TIMES)

◆ I can't get my head around this piano piece. It's like flogging a dead horse.

(我實在是搞不懂這首鋼琴曲，這就像是徒勞無功。)

◆ He spent years trying to perfect that dance, but never managed to master it. All that work, and to no avail.

(他花了很多年想把那舞練好，但一直都跳不好。花了那麼多工夫還是沒用。)