

# 第二届



# 辽宁省翻译大赛

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## 2021年第二届辽宁省翻译大赛英译汉 英语原文

### The Oriental Roots of the Art of Lying Down

Typical European furniture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries offered a range of solutions for basic problems but could hardly be described as comfortable in the modern sense. Nevertheless, it apparently met the needs of the time. Outside influence was necessary to make more comfortable lounging part of our modern lifestyle and add it to our day-to-day behaviors. The impulse for this development came from the East. Enthusiasm for the “Orient” left countless marks among Europe’s upper classes. Drinking coffee was one example; Louis XIV’s quirk of giving himself and his mistresses “Oriental” pet names was another. The British diplomat Paul Rycaut (1629–1700) was one of the first outsiders to describe the world of the Ottoman rulers in detail. For seventeenth-century Europeans, the opulent palaces with their marble floors, velvet curtains, and divans upholstered in heavy silk were indescribably exotic. In many accounts, these Ottoman interiors became stage sets for the tellers’ fantasies of unbridled eroticism. But some observers had more elevated ideas. The great German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s intensive occupation with Persian poetry and his realization that Orient and Occident were inseparable inspired *West-Eastern Divan*, one of his major works.

People were drawn to a world that seemed to be the opposite of theirs. The historian Sigfried Giedion describes the typical perception that the Western lifestyle was based in effort, as opposed to the relaxation at the root of life in the East: “In the East everyone, poor and rich alike, has time and leisure. In the West no one has.” And in his “An Idyll on Idleness,” Friedrich Schlegel claimed “only Italians know how to walk and only Orientals how to repose.”

The Oriental influence on furniture design first became apparent in France. In the eighteenth century, the first upholstered chairs were produced. Soon bed-chair hybrids like those we still use entered the scene, making it possible to lie down without going to bed. “Couch,” “chaise longue,” “canapé,” “divan,” “recamier,” “ottomane,” “mériidienne,” and “duchesse” were labels applied to very similar pieces of furniture. But no matter what the name, they all had very little in common with their Oriental models. They were pseudo-Turkish or pseudo-Persian, because of not only how they looked but how they were used. The art historian Lydia Marinelli points to a fundamental misunderstanding between the two cultures: “While the Orient understands the cushion as an amorphous surface on which the user actively seeks a comfortable position of his own choosing, the West attempts to tailor furniture to the body in order to support its functioning.” Relaxation in the East comes from lying down or sitting with crossed legs on the floor or a cushion—no armrest or backrest required. Europe’s supposed Oriental furniture followed a different principle. “The languorous chaise longue encouraged an easy intimacy, not to mention lovemaking,” writes the architect and writer Witold Rybczynski. “Sofas were broad not to provide for many sitters, but to allow space for the grand gesture, the leg drawn up, the arm thrown out over the back, and for the capacious clothing of that time.”

A Turkish divan is a spot for sitting or reclining; it consists of a mat on the floor

or a ledge that can run along an entire wall. In a French boudoir, on the other hand, a divan means an upholstered bench, often decorated with tassels and fringe, in the middle of the room. The term can even be used for a row of chairs grouped around a raised platform. In any case, divans demanded a position consisting of equal parts sitting and lying down, one enjoyed primarily by that traditionally idle class the aristocracy.

Before long this furniture developed a reputation for encouraging laziness, slackness, and “Oriental” behavior, all thoroughly at odds with the bourgeois work ethic. Sofas were also associated with drug use. All this aimless yet unbridled sprawling about was a thorn in the side of champions of propriety, who considered a military-style upright posture a prerequisite for moral integrity. Marinelli describes the sofa as a “risky location” that “leads to indecently hiked hems and unexpected touches.” At the turn of the century, the German etiquette expert Konstanze von Franken was still emphatically forbidding hosts from receiving guests “lying on the chaise longue” in her perennial bestseller *Handbook of Good Form and Fine Manners*. To head off questionable situations, she recommended allowing only older ladies to sit on the sofa at all. Any man brazen enough to take a seat on the couch was summarily dismissed as being “inappropriate” and “tasteless.” For von Franken, taking a more or less horizontal position was a prerogative reserved for dandies.

Beds have to accommodate not only human biomechanics but also the ways people in a certain time and culture lie down. In his 1924 carpentry dictionary, Carl Wilkens writes: “As a piece of furniture that serves the purpose of complete rest—in other words, sleep—the bed must be designed to afford the human body the state of relaxation only achievable when it lies at length, and meet all requirements of health and comfort.” Rarely has the function of the bed been so clearly stated. Several decades later the philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow described the bed as “the place from which we rise in the morning and go to our daily work, and to which we return in the evening when our work is done. The course of every day (in the normal state of affairs) begins in bed and also ends in bed. And it is the same with human life: it begins in bed, and it also ends (again, assuming normal circumstances) in bed. So it is in the bed that the circle closes, the circles of the day as well as that of life. Here, in the deepest sense, we find rest.” The bed is the primary or innermost home within the home, a place that allows and encourages a retreat to the unconscious form of our being. Yet the bed also has a flip side: it is a site of suffering and distress. The travel writer Bill Bryson has captured the paradoxical nature of beds and the rooms that house them:

There is no space within the house where we spend more time doing less, and doing it mostly quietly and unconsciously, than here, and yet it is in the bedroom that many of life’s most profound and persistent unhappinesses are played out. If you are dying or unwell, exhausted, sexually dysfunctional, tearful, wracked with anxiety, too depressed to face the world or otherwise lacking in equanimity and joy, the bedroom is the place where you are most likely to be found.

During the last centuries, sleep was turned into a private matter and forced backstage, and a sense that the intimate activities occurring in bed were shameful or embarrassing became more acute. Beds ceased to be used for representational purposes, and by the twentieth century the only publicly visible bedrooms were those for sale in furniture stores. There, as Bollnow wrote in the 1960s, they are “placed shamelessly on display.” At home, the right to enter bedrooms remained limited to the immediate family.

In his book about German homes written at about the same time, the sociologist Alphonse Silberman demonstrates that people even maintained a mental distance from their own bedrooms. Attempts to squelch awareness of the bed went so far that people referred to it as a trap or a nest. But a few years later, when barriers around private and intimate realms lowered in Western societies, it was just a matter of time until attitudes toward the bed would undergo a fundamental shift.

The bedroom was no longer a more or less hidden annex to the home, but a location one could proudly show to guests. Since that time an explosion in bed design has taken place. Beds were expected to express something about the personalities of those who slept in them, a way to create distinctions and even garner respect. Stylish lounges and beds lent their owners an avant-garde air. Both the “secrecy” and the “inconspicuousness of this silent piece of furniture”—Bollnow’s explanation as to why so few writers took up the bed as a subject or “to what a small extent the bed seems until now to have stimulated human thought”—were of the past. In an age like our own, in which boundaries seem to oscillate almost randomly between prim reticence and compulsive disclosure, embarrassing and potentially painful situations are practically guaranteed.

Just how new are the thousands of lounges and beds unveiled year after year at international furniture shows? Do they really represent innovations, or are they just endless variations of the same thing? Can the art of lying down keep up with all these advances in design? Not everything on the market follows the well-known dictum “Form follows function.” Sofas that their owners can turn into “seating landscapes” in just a few simple steps or that feature laptop stands for use in a (half-)reclining position are in demand. Forty years ago wall beds were sold as the ne plus ultra in sleeping equipment. Muscling them into their horizontal position was no easy feat. But their time has passed, and they’re hard to find these days. Their disappearance is not necessarily something to be sorry about.

Beds range from fussy, plush Laura Ashley models to the sleek Jailhouse Fuck, made of prison bars of dark steel and accessorized with a pair of Smith & Wesson handcuffs. The manufacturer proudly claims that it’s the world’s most exciting bed. We can only hope that the amatory feats of its owners live up to the promise of this backdrop. Other beds can cost as much as a car. The Rolls-Royce of beds is a model from the Swedish brand Hästens manufactured by hand from horsehair, linen, and wood over the course of many hours. The price: \$99,000.

Designer lounges and beds are coveted collectibles, of course, but artworks about nothing other than beds—and not even particularly attractive ones, we could add—can fetch a good price, too. One such piece is the installation *My Bed* by the English artist Tracey Emin, a large, rumpled, messy bed with cigarette packs and butts, used condoms,

and underwear as evidence of intense use. The sight immediately calls up the image of a nicotine-addicted figure lying in its midst. *A Cama Valium*, a more original work by the Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos, is a bed frame covered with pill packaging that criticizes the widespread obsession with tranquilizers. Surrounded by so many tablets, who would ever wake up again? (1775)