CHENGYU AS CULTURAL PERFORMANCES:
INSIGHTS INTO DESIGNING PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS FOR FOUR-CHARACTER CHINESE IDIOMS

THESIS

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Abstract

The learning of idiom has been an important subject in L2 study. L2 learners’ mastery of idiom is an indicator of their L2 proficiency level and communicative ability (Yorio, 1989; Duquette, 1995; Schmitt, 2004). *Chengyu*, a special four-character Chinese idiom which derives from thousands of years of Chinese history and embodies rich traditional cultural references, is used in formal discourses by people displaying high intellectual status and purposeful self-cultivation. This thesis examines closely the treatment of these four-character idioms in both general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials and learning sources dedicated to *chengyu*. CFL/CSL materials published in Mainland China and America targeting beginning, intermediate and advanced level L2 learners of Chinese are analyzed to provide insights on the learning of *chengyu*. Close examination of three types of learning materials dedicated to *chengyu*, including storybooks, dictionaries and pedagogical materials targeting *chengyu* shed light on the current ideas of teaching and learning *chengyu* and their inadequate execution in the materials.

The study indicates a deficient coverage of *chengyu* entries among general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials through all levels, which results from a lack of standard criteria for *chengyu* selection at each proficiency level. This ultimately results from a lack of reflection on when and how to teach which *chengyu*. Close
analysis of the pedagogical treatment of *chengyu* shows that (1) existing materials for *chengyu* emphasize reading and writing skills, with very little attention dedicated to the development of speaking and listening skills; (2) the use of *chengyu* is presented, explained and drilled independent of contexts throughout the materials, and (3) a lack of pedagogical activities that address the collocations for each *chengyu* entry.

The thesis recommends that *chengyu* items be treated and learned as culture performances to convey intentions as opposed to as lexical items with meanings out of context. Several pedagogical principles are proposed pertaining to the inadequate treatments of *chengyu* among existing materials, and a performance-based pedagogical material design is presented as a concrete pedagogical demonstration.
Dedication

Dedicated to my grandmothers: Guirong Yu and Shuqing Ji
Acknowledgement

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1.1 Defining and understanding the nature of idioms

1.1.1 Defining criteria of idioms for L2 learners

The majority of currently existing definitions of idiom lie along a continuum from “inclusive” to “restrictive”. Some scholars believe all fixed phrases, formulaic speeches, proverbs, and even single words can be classified as idioms (Cooper, 1998; Katz & Postal, 1963; Hockett, 1958; Makkai, 1972). Others perceive the term in a more restrictive sense, only including expressions that are fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical (Moon, 1998; Grant & Bauer, 2004). Yet, from the perspective of a second language learner, it is very difficult to find a position for L2 idioms along the continuum mentioned above in a sense that the goal of L2 learners is rather pragmatic and communication-oriented. Also the majority of research on idioms focuses on the English language and, as a consequence, such English-based definitions have a diminished application to the discussion of a syntactically and morphologically different language such as Chinese.

Nevertheless before trying to give a comprehensive account of the diverse accounts of idiom from different scholars, I will first focus on the basic properties of idiom that distinguish it from the other items in the lexicon for L2
learners, laying the ground work for devising a working definition of idiom from the perspective of second language learners.

Originating from the root “idios” which in ancient Greek meant “private” or “of one’s own”, the word idiom shares relationship with many other items in modern English such as “idiosyncrasy” and “idiot” (originally meaning “someone not interested in public affairs”). The word idiom has accumulated a variety of definitions from modern lexicographers, linguists and scholars of various research interests:

(1) An idiom is an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts (Jack Richards et al, 1985).

(2) Idiom is a term used in grammar and lexicography to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit (David Crystal, 1985).

(3) Narrower uses restrict idiom to a particular kind of unit: one that is fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical, or, traditionally ‘not the sum of its parts” (Moon, 1998).

As a summary of the above cited and many other definitions, a simplified version of idiom definition can be a complete element that is semantically restricted and conveys a meaning which is distinct from its constituent parts. Two properties of idiom that most scholars have agreed on stand out as key criteria for defining idioms: opaqueness in meaning and frozenness in structure.

(1) Opaqueness.
From these definition one feature can be identified which all the lexicographers and linguists agree upon, or hold a similar view about: the meaning of an idiom cannot be derived from the conjoined meaning of its elements. A classic example would be the lack of salient links between the literal meanings of the English idioms *kick the bucket* and *buy the farm*, and their meaning *to die*.

Moon (1998) uses the term “non-compositionality” to describe such a property as one of the basic defining features of Fixed Expressions and Idioms (FEIs), even though she admits that such a concept of non-compositionality is flawed not only because “it is essentially idiolectal and synchronous”, the existence of holistic English idiom items such as *spill the beans* and *rock the boat* that are “partly compositional in relation to both syntactic structure and metaphoricality” also argues against the view that idioms are non-compositional. In fact, it is also argued that a wide range of idioms is composed of individual elements that contribute to the figurative meaning of these expressions as a whole. For example, it is analyzable that in the phrase *pop the question*, the *question* refers to marriage proposal and the verb *pop* refers to the action of asking the question.

In order to better tackle the terminological issue, this study adopts the term *opaqueness* to refer to the feature that” idioms have a semantics that is different from what would be created if we applied the regular rules of semantic interpretation” (Martin Everaert at el, 1995: 6). That is to say, even though the independent meanings of the components in an idiom contribute to its overall figurative meaning, there’s still a gap between the literal and figurative meanings of each individual components. While each independent word in the phrase *spill*
the beans might respectively contribute to the meaning "reveal the secret", the opaqueness of the idiom lies in the lack of correspondence between the tenor and vehicle of the underlying metaphor: even native English speakers don't necessarily know why the beans have to refer to an idea or secret.

(2) Fixedness.

Theoretically speaking, idioms are regarded as fixed or frozen in form both syntactically and lexically. For example, we use the expression “break a leg” to wish some good luck, but neither “break your leg” nor “break some legs” means the same or even slightly similar. “It’s raining cats and dogs” is frequently used but not ‘Cats and dogs are raining down’.

However some researches and empirical studies have argued otherwise. Moon's corpus study (1998) demonstrated that approximately 40% of the English FEIs in the database have “lexical variations or strongly institutionalized transformations”. According to Gibbs (1995:102), an idiom’s syntactic versatility and lexical flexibility are affected by its semantic analyzability. That is to say, semantically analyzable idioms can go though lexical alteration (e.g. from fasten your lip to button your lip) and syntactic transformation (e.g. from John laid down the law to The law was laid down (by John)) without significant disruption of their nonliteral meanings, while semantically unanalyzable expressions cannot (e.g., from kick the bucket to *punt the bucket, from John kicked the bucket to *The bucket was kicked by John). Furthermore, idioms differ in the extent to which they are frozen in form. Some expressions do not vary at all (e.g., by and large), whereas other phrases undergo transformations of various levels. Fraser
(1970:39) proposes a seven-level scale elaborating on the transformational potential of idioms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L6 Unrestricted</td>
<td>N/A for idioms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5 Reconstitution</td>
<td>e.g. pass the buck to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4 Extraction</td>
<td>e.g. keep watch over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3 Permutation</td>
<td>e.g. bring down the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 Insertion</td>
<td>e.g. bear witness to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1 Adjunction</td>
<td>e.g. blow off some steam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L0 Completely frozen</td>
<td>e.g. by and large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.1 Fraser's seven-level scale of idiom transformation*

These two features, opaqueness in meaning and fixedness in structure, also appear to be appropriate criteria for identifying idioms from the perspective of L2 learners in a sense that the degree of opaqueness in meaning and extent of fixedness in structure are two factors that correlated with the amount of special attention and effort the learners put into the idioms. The more literal in meaning and compositionally various in structures an expression is, the less difficulties it poses for learners to process and acquire, and thus less “idiom-like” to them. On the contrary, if an expression is fixed or only take restricted variants, and at the same time requires metaphorical interpretation, the level of difficulty in
understanding the meaning and grasping the structure is higher for L2 learners and therefore the expression should be identified as an idiom as opposed to other components in the lexicon.

However, a high level of difficulty is not enough to define idioms from the perspective of L2 learners in a sense that every aspect of a second language may possibly be regarded difficult to non-native speakers of that language, especially when the learner's mother tongue is very distant from the target language. In fact, it is not uncommon for language learners to avoid using specific parts of a language because of predicted difficulty learners may have with the avoided items (Swain, 1975; Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker, 1975; Ickenroth, 1975). So there must be something else deeply embedded in idioms that motivate learners to actively use these formulaic expressions, which serves as the final missing piece in the puzzle of defining idioms for L2 learners.

1.1.2 Motives behind the use of idioms from L2 learners’ perspectives

1.1.2.1 Idiom choice principle

According to Sinclair (1987: 319-320), there are two complementary operating principles that govern the language use of humans: the open choice principle and the idiom choice principle. The open choice principle emphasizes the freedom in word choice, restricted only by grammaticality, possessed by the language users when building up sentences in communications. The idiom choice principle, on the other hand, posits that when language users speak or write, the topic, context, register, etc. of the conversation or text may hugely limit the choice of words at hand, making the speaker resort to the preconstructed
and semi-preconstructed phrases stored in their mental lexicon. The idiom choice principle is further supported by psycholinguistic research findings on lexical storage and retrieval which suggests lexical items are stored and retrieved as elements of preconstructed phrases rather than individual words (Bolinger, 1975; Erman, 2007; Nagy, 1978; Steinberg, 1993; Underwood et al., 2004). Thus from the perspective of second language learning, learners all start with learning every sentence and expression idiomatically in a sense that they memorize and produce lexical items in chunks until they have accumulated enough vocabulary items to substitute words in the previously acquired chunk. For example, when a CFL learner first learns “Zaoshang hao” (Good morning), the phrase is most likely stored as a complete set rather than as a combination of “zaoshang” (morning) and “hao” (good). Then when the learner uses the expression to greet someone in the morning, it is the set phrase that got retrieved as a whole rather than the two individual words.

As an important class of prefabricated and semi-prefabricated phrases, idioms, or idiomatic expressions, are often referred to in discourse as “stereotyped responses” and usually serve as “predictable comments on common experiences” (Moon, 1998:29). Searle (1979) also argued that language users intend to “speak idiomatically unless there’s some special reasons not to” (P. 50). That is to say, in certain contexts idioms are used as anticipated performances by both sides of the discourse participants. For example, what’s the appropriate thing to say to a friend who is anxiously waiting for the result of her graduate school application but has not yet heard anything for months? The
answer might vary depending on the purpose of the speaker, but “no news is good news” surely pops out as one choice in most native English speakers’ minds.

1.1.2.2 Mutual knowledge

One important premise of the idiom usage is that the use of certain idiom items in an appropriate situation should be a common knowledge shared by both sides of the discourse participants.

Many scholars point out that interlocutors use their common ground to communicate effectively – speakers use shared information in constructing their utterances, and addressees use it to disambiguate speakers’ intentions (Clark & Carlson, 1981; Clark & Marshall, 1981; Clark, Schreuder & Buttrick, 1983; Fussell & Krauss, 1989; Gerring & Littman, 1990; Gibbs, Mueller & Cox, 1988.)

Some of the shared information can be inferred from the context: the role of the interlocutors and audience, time and location when the conversation happens, etc.; others are associated with the familiarity of the language employed. In the case of using idioms, the mutual knowledge includes both the understanding of the topic under discussion in the present context and the understanding of the employed idiom, figuratively or conventionally, but most importantly the bridge in between.

Native speakers of a language tend to, consciously or unconsciously, reduce the use of idioms when conversing with foreigners because they assume non-native speakers do not share that particular common knowledge—the nonliteral meaning and the connotation of that particular idiom item in the current context. But when they converse with another native speaker and say something
idiomatically like “It’s raining cats and dogs”, they assume that the other side of the communication wouldn’t act with surprise imaging actual animals coming down from the sky as a non-native speaker would probably do when first hearing the idiom. It is because native English speakers hear it used repeatedly in their life and such repetition fixes the message. Common knowledge is generated publicly among people who hears the use of “It’s raining cats and dogs ”again and again—not only do they get the message, they also know that it is repeated frequently and thus other members of the circle probably also have heard about it (Chwe, 2001). The higher the frequency of hearing a idiom being used, the greater chance one would use it in the communication with other members of a social group, assuming that it resides within the mutual knowledge. The circle, or the social group in which an idiom item is used as a part of mutual knowledge may vary, but from the perspective of idiom learning aiming at successful communication in the target culture, such a circle should include the majority of the L2 native speakers, which makes the mutual knowledge of such a circle part of the shared knowledge specific to the target language community (culture).

1.1.2.3 Communicative goals achieved in the use of idioms

Idiom, as one of the eight distinct types of figurative language (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993), is potentially ambiguous especially when there’s no clear context to distinguish its literal reading from metaphorical reading. However the use of idiom is not uncommon and regarded as a ubiquitous part of spoken and written discourse (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Pollio, Smith & Pollio, 1990). If discourse
participants would always cooperate by expressing themselves as clearly and completely as possible (Grice, 1975), then the use of idioms would outweigh the use of literal language in accomplishing certain communicative goals (Gerring & Gibbs, 1988). In other words, the success in achieving certain goals is a good enough reason for speakers to choose the potentially ambiguous idioms over plain language at the risk of being misunderstood.

The specific communicative goals speakers have in mind might be drastically different among different cultures, and often can be associated with the preferable image projected onto the user of idiom. For instance, Roberts and Kreuz (1994), based on their experiment with 158 undergraduate students identified 17 discourse goals that English native speakers have in mind as they use idioms, including “to be humorous”, “to be conventional”, “to clarify”. Furthermore, they found that “to be humorous” was the goal that most readily recognized among the subjects. This finding indicates that for native English speakers, “to be interesting and humorous” is a very important personal characteristic they want to demonstrate by the use of idioms. On the contrary, the employment of four-character Chinese idioms (i.e. chengyu) in discourse is generally regarded as a demonstration of a knowledgeable and intelligent personal trait among native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, because of the classic and elegant nature of chengyu (Bai, 2010: 21).

However, the mutual knowledge theory previously discussed sheds some light on two common communicative goals achieved by the use of idioms, which is unrestricted by the culture-specific values and traditions:

(1) Deepen the bond.
The exchange of mutual knowledge facilitates the identification of members from the same social group and the establishment of bond or relationship between the interlocutors. Gerrig and Gibbs (1988) posited that figurative language could be used to establish intimacy between some discourse participants while excluding others because many figurative uses of language are inaccessible to listeners who don’t share the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of the speaker. On the contrary, the shared common ground demonstrated by the use and understanding of idiomatic languages creates the intimacy that fosters future relationships. In our case, the ability to utilize L2 idioms in communicative activities with native speakers of that language would be recognized as a sign of a recognition and appreciation of the target culture, because of the underlying extensive time and effort to acquire the knowledge of a second language and culture. For learners of a second language who aim at engaging in personal interactions or conducting social transactions in a foreign culture, employing idioms in communication with native speakers facilitates the establishment of a participant in a target culture group.

(2) Being precise and informative.

Compared to single words which are either general (e.g. creatures) or specific (e.g. hero, heroine), lexicalized multi-word expressions, or idioms, are typically specific (e.g. backseat driver)(Fernando, 1996:99), because they usually carry additional information in their semantic make-up which constrain the generality so that these idioms do not share the same referential scope that single words do. Thus, idioms like man in the street, which seems to have a general reference, also have restrictive components of meaning, referring only to
men and women of average ability, compared to the all-encompassing reference of *humans* and *people*. Furthermore, figurative uses of language such as metaphor are believed to be more precise and informative than literal statements (Glucksberg, 1989; Gerrig & Gibbs, 1988). Specifically if both interlocutors in a conversation share the mutual knowledge about certain idioms,—not only the conventional figurative meaning but also the hidden or inferred messages and emotions associated with the idiom, it leads to a saving in conversational effort to simply choose idioms over plain literal language. For example, when hearing someone commenting on a girl’s recent marriage by saying “她攀上高枝儿麻雀变凤凰啦” (literarily meaning “She flies up to the high branches and transforms from a sparrow to a phoenix”), native speakers of Chinese would at once understand that the girl is married to a rich man and the speaker doesn’t hold a very approving attitude toward this marriage. The imagery and symbolism of the idiom entail rich information recognizable to members of the same language community but elusive to outsiders. It is not economic, if ever possible, to express the same amount of information inferred in the Chinese idiom “麻雀变凤凰” using literal language when one has the option to use the institutionalized set phrase.

From the previous discussion we have established a working definition for idiom as semantically opaque and syntactically fixed expressions shared by members of a cultural group to convey and recognize intentions and cultivate relationship. In the following parts we’ll continue exploring speaker/writer’s intentions expressed through the use of idioms as cultural performances, which will serve as the theoretical foundation of this study.
1.2 Viewing idioms as cultural performances in L2 learning

1.2.1 Defining performance in language pedagogy

The concept of performance has been used and defined by scholars from a wide range of disciplines, chiefly anthropology, linguistics, and literary criticism, to build the framework of a performance-centered approach to the shared interest in human languages in use (Cole 1996; Bruner 1990; Goffman 1959; Bauman 1984; Hymes 1972). Despite their different research disciplines, the scholars all work on the concept of performance as a type of social interaction in which the participants act according to a set of shared agreements and anticipations. Bauman (1984:11) elaborated on the nature of performance: “a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility (on the part of the performer) to an audience for a display of communicative competence...(which) rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways.” He further posited that the way the performance is done, or “the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s display of competence” is what the audience bases their evaluation of the performance on. In the field of language pedagogy, Walker (2010: 8) defines performance as situated acts defined by the specification of five elements: 1) time of occurrence, 2) place of occurrence, 3) appropriated script and/or behavior, 4) roles of participants, and 5) accepting and/or accepted audience. By this definition of performance, it is only logical to identify any exception of one’s life as staged and situated performance, with or without presented audiences and uttered scripts. Walker’s definition of performance serves as a basic concept
in analyzing language learning in the field of language pedagogy. According to Walker and Noda (2000), in language pedagogy, story, defined as the personal memory of having experienced a performance, should serve as the basic unit of analysis for learning the language, as learners learn by accumulating stories of having done various things using the target language in the target culture. As they go through this learning process, learners need to practice the target performance repeatedly and receive feedback from instructors or native speakers of the target language in order to build automaticity and eventually possess their own stories in a certain performance.

However, it is crucial to make sure learners of a second language only practice and memorize performances governed by expectations of the target culture, since it is the kind of performances that serves as instructional samples of appropriate behaviors, and as important foundations for eventually building a second culture worldview. In order to better elaborate on the cultural appropriateness of the learners’ performance and how it affects the learners’ success in target language learning, the next section address the game metaphor as a related concept.

1.2.2 The Game metaphor under socio-cultural framework

Starting from the very literal reading of the concept of game we are familiar with, it's not difficult to recognize that a game, rock-paper-scissors or sports game like football, is governed by the set of rules that regulate the means of participation in and the decision of winning and losing. Even though few people regard the daily activities of our lives as a sort of game since we are never “intentionally trained” to gain the skill of exchanging gifts with friends or having
dinner with your a supervisor’s family, and no one seems to be scoring our performance on a scale of 1-10, consciously or not, we are all familiar with certain social conventions or rituals that function as rules of “cultural games” such as the dos and don’ts under certain circumstances in order to avoid embarrassment or other types of social malfunctions. Shepherd defines cultural games as activities that involves established shared means of participation, exhibiting recognized means for generating particular intentions and achieving the desired goals associated with that type of activity, and being typically characterized by the presence of a culturally accepted mechanism for evaluating successful and unsuccessful performances, i.e., a scoring system (Shepherd, 2005: 157). From his definition of cultural game, culture, as the set of overarching mechanisms that governs the associated behaviors, in the format of the participants’ opinions functions as the scoring device that evaluates our performance. That is to say, as participant of the cultural games, our behaviors are scored abstractly in terms of whether we have performed to the level of other participants’ expectations—or the rules. For example, in the scenario of having dinner with the family of one’s supervisor, the rules may include bringing appropriate gifts, making appropriate compliments (for example on the house and the homemade meals) and offering an invitation to a later meal as a return of the favor. The goal of such social activities is to develop or maintain a relationship, which is evaluated according to the culturally accepted scoring system by the audience, i.e., native speakers of the target language.

It might seem effortless to handle such situations as dining or gift giving in our own culture. That is because we have spent every minute of our life playing
the games and accumulating memories of such performances as both performer and audience. However, as second language learners, it is always daunting to perform in the target culture as the rules of a for playing similar same games vary in different cultures. The A same performance in the context of different sets of rules may generate drastically different interpretations of the conveyed intension. For example, while it is very common to compliment the food or small ornament in the house when you visit a friend’s house in American culture, this act might be interpreted as “I want it as a souvenir” in Chinese culture and the host will probably immediately offer to give whatever you just complimented to you as a gift to show hospitality, especially when it’s a foreigner who made offered the compliment. As learners of a second language who will participant in culture games significantly different from ones in their base culture, they need to adjust their performances as the rules shift.

1.2.3 Viewing the use of idioms as cultural performance

So far we have established several facts about the concept of performance in the context of language pedagogy. First of all, performance is the basic unit we use in analyzing the learning of another language and culture, the accumulation of which builds the foundation of learners’ competences in accomplishing communicative tasks using the target language. Second, one of the merits of using the framework of performance is that it incorporates, in a culturally appropriate fashion, both the linguistic codes and the underlying intentions in specified contexts. And last, performances that learners of a second language should spend adequate amount of time memorizing, practicing and rehearing are
the culturally appropriate ones – those that are governed and regulated by rules of the target culture and that help learners win the target cultural games.

Turning back to our definition of idiom, semantically opaque and syntactically fixed phrases shared by members of a cultural group to convey and recognize intentions and cultivate relationship, it’s not difficult to see the connection here. On one hand, one can view idioms solely as linguistic codes, or vocabulary items that constitute parts of the script. But it would be too narrow a perspective to view it simply as a matter of lexical realization of meaning and separate it from the performance as a whole within the discursive context. These culturally conventionalized phrases exist to convey intentions between speakers and hearers. The realization of this goal has to be based on a shared overarching mechanism, culture — the same scoring system that evaluates one's performance in cultural games. For example, when seeing someone off at the airport or train station, Chinese native speakers would usually say “一路顺风” (literally meaning “go along with the wind all your journey”) or “一路平安” (literally meaning “be safe and sound all your journey”) as an anticipated performance by both sides to convey good wishes to the person on their journey. Since such intention is conventionally expressed verbally in the format of these idioms in Chinese culture, other formats of language such as paraphrasing the same meaning in plain language are less valued by the hearers and might even cause confusion about other unspoken intentions. As a result, the conveying of good intentions for the upcoming journey is compromised to a certain extent by the lack of an anticipated idiom. In the contexts that idioms are canonically used to express certain intentions, failing to use such idioms is the same as failing to follow the
culture rules that govern the game in which one is a participant. In the same sense the use of idioms can be viewed as performances that convey intentions under the shared cultural mechanism.

Idioms, as a unique form of performance, do not occur independent of contexts and intentions. On the sentence level, like other lexical items, they are always well framed and incorporated in syntactically correct sentences, which form the script of the very performance. On the discourse level, idioms, used as a staged act with a specific time, place, script and audience, express intentions in a culturally conventionalized way evaluated by the hearers.
CHAPTER TWO

FOUR-CHARACTER CHINESE IDIOM: CHENGYU

2.1 Introduction to Chinese idiomatic expressions

In Chinese language, there is no single word equivalent for the concept “idiom” in English. In fact, given the multidimensional ways of looking at and analyzing idiom, it is only reasonable to locate its Chinese counterpart according to each context in which the term is used. In this chapter, I intend to first tackle the issue of terminology by giving a general introduction to Chinese idiomatic expressions and how the Chinese system echoes the concept of idiom as cultural performances.

If we follow the working definition of idiom proposed in Chapter 1, the Chinese counterpart of idiom can be defined as syntactically fixed and semantically opaque Chinese expressions used by native speakers of Chinese to communicate intentions and cultivate relationships. By this definition, several types of Chinese fixed phrases fit the description, including chengyu 成语, yanyu 谚语, guanyongyu 惯用语, xiehouyu 歇后语. These different types of phrases constitute the system of Chinese idioms and will be discussed one by one. Before moving on to each of these subgroups of Chinese idioms, it is important to point out that it is not uncommon to have overlaps among the categories. As prototype
theory suggests, every category is defined by the characteristics of an ideal exemplar—a prototype. Yet not all members of the category match the features of the prototype and the fewer of such features one member has, the more marginalized it is in this category (Rosch, 1975, 1976). If this marginalized member obtained features of a prototype in another category at the same time, it gets murky in deciding the belongingness of this item. While we admit the existence of such overlapping items, we also value the fact that there are clearly defined characteristics to distinguish each type of fixed expressions from each other.

2.1.1 Shuyu

The term shuyu 熟语 (familiar sayings, literally meaning “familiar language”) was first borrowed from the Russian term фразеология and introduced in the 1950s as a term referring to the general concept of institutionalized fixed expressions in Chinese. Following the Russian tradition, the term shuyu is used in two fashion: the broad one use it as a collective concept in reference to the category (фразеология); it is also used narrowly to refer to individual shuyu item in the category (фразеологизм). In this study, the term shuyu, together with all other terms used in reference to Chinese idiomatic expressions, is used as a collective concept for the purpose of clear description unless otherwise noted. Chinese lexicographers and scholars (Wu, 2006; Cui, 1997) have a rather unified understanding of shuyu as a set of phrases that are 1) structurally fixed 2) commonly used and familiar to most of native speakers of Chinese, and that 3) include subgroups of idiomatic expressions like chenyu 成语 (four-
Chinese idioms, literally meaning “ready-made language”), guanyongyu (habitual sayings, literally meaning “habitually used language”), yanyu (proverb, literally meaning “adage language”), and xiehouyu (a two-part allegorical saying with the first part posing a riddle and the second part providing the answer, literally meaning “Rest afterward language”).

![Figure 2.1 System of Chinese idiomatic expression](image)

2.1.2 Suyu

Another similar term suyu (common sayings, literally meaning “popular language”) is often used in reference to idiomatic expressions in Chinese as well, which is sometimes confused with the use of shuyu. Similar to the situation of shuyu, suyu in Chinese also enjoys a wide range of different analyses in terms of its defining characteristics and components. In this study we follow Duanzheng Wen’s definition of suyu as phrases and sentences that are created and used in colloquial language by the majority of the people, and that are popular, concise
and fixed in structure (2000: 258). Compared with *shuyu*, which emphasizes on the familiarity to the native speakers of Chinese, *suyu* further features the popular and colloquial nature of the phrases, and thus serves as a secondary category under *shuyu*, composed of subcategories such as *yanyu*, *guanyongyu*, *xiehouyu* and part of *chengyu* used in colloquial language. As illustrated in figure 1, *suyu* together with the component subcategories reside in the concept of *shuyu*.

So far we have started from the general and broad concepts and gradually down to the more specific ones. While individual phrases like *Liú dé qīng shān zài, bù pà méi chái shāo* (literally meaning “As long as the green hills remain, there’s no need to worry about the shortage of firewood”, idiomatically meaning “where there’s life, there’s hope”) and *Zhāng guān Lǐ dài* (literally meaning “to put Zhang’s hat on Lǐ’s head”, idiomatically meaning “to confuse a person with someone else”) can be generally classified as either *suyu* or *shuyu*, there are clear differences between the two types of phrases in terms of syntactic formation and discursive function, which make it necessary to classify each of them with other expressions alike to different subgroups with more specifically defined boundaries.

2.1.3 *Yanyu*

*Yanyu* 谚语 obtains the general features of *suyu* as institutionalized expressions that are 1) familiar to the majority of native speakers and 2) popular and colloquial. Normally *yanyu* items are relative long phrases or sentences that can be used independently, such as *Hē shuǐ bù wàng wā jǐng rén* (literally meaning “when you drink the water, don’t forget the person who dig
the well”, idiomatically meaning “to remember the forerunners that laid foundation of your happiness”). When used in written discourse, *yanyu* items often appear in quotation marks and function as sayings that express social morals or wisdom in plain language, as opposed to language that evokes sophistication and intelligence. Though traditionally viewed as structurally fixed expressions, compared to other Chinese idiomatic phrases that require the exactness of wording, *chengyu* for example, *yanyu* items have more variants and are relatively more tolerant to substitution of component parts. For example, all the following forms are acceptable to native speakers of Chinese to express the idea that a clear conscience makes a soft pillow:

(1) *Wéi rén bù zuò kuīxīnshì, bànyè qiāomén xīn bù jīng* ..

为入不做亏心事，半夜敲门心不惊。

(*Lit. Do no wrong things as a rule of being a man, so one’s heart doesn’t shiver at a knock at midnight.*)

(2) *Píngshēng bù zuò kuīxīnshì, bānyè bù pà guǐ qiāomén.*

平生不做亏心事，半夜不怕鬼敲门。

(*Lit. Do no wrong things all one’s life, so one doesn’t fear a ghost’s knock at midnight.*)

(3) *Bú zuò kuīxīnshì, bù pà guǐ qiāomén.*

不做亏心事，不怕鬼敲门。

(*Lit. Do no wrong things, so one doesn’t fear a ghost’s knock.*)

2.1.4 Guanyongyu
The term *guanyongyu* 惯用语 came into use in the 1960s and ever since enjoyed a variety of different definitions. Some scholars posit that *guanyongyu* are mostly three-character expressions with a predicate-object inner structure, and usually have a metaphorical reading, such as *dài gāo mào* 戴高帽 (literally meaning to put high hat on somebody else, referring to the act of flattering someone) and *huò xì ní* 和稀泥 (literally meaning to blend mud, referring to the act of mediating others' differences at the sacrifice of principle) (Ma & Gao, 1982). Others held opposing opinions that *guanyongyu* refers to descriptive expressions that are not necessarily restricted by the three-character rule and doesn’t always have a figurative reading, such as *hē xībēi fēng* 喝西北风 (literally meaning to drink northwestern wind, referring to the situation of having nothing to eat) and *dà yú chī xiǎo yú* 大鱼吃小鱼 (literally meaning “Big fish eats small fish”, idiomatically meaning “the strong bully the weak”) (Wen & Zhou, 2000; Lv, Dai & Zhang, 1987). The later view makes a legitimate case in pointing out the existence, though few in number, of non-three-character idiomatic phrases that fit in the *guanyongyu* group, but it fails to demonstrate valid examples of non-metaphorical *guanyongyu* item.

After reviewing the diverse views on *guanyongyu*, we conclude several distinguishing features for prototypical *guanyongyu* items, including 1) mostly composed of three characters, 2) descriptive rather than argumentative, and 3) mostly metaphorical. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, less prototypical members that do not meet all the criteria, such as ones composed of
more than three characters, also exist in a rather marginalized position, but we
do not exclude them from the category.

2.1.5 Xiehouyu

Xiehouyu 歇后语, also known as qiaopi hua 俏皮话 (playful sayings),
xiehouyu are sentences that are structurally composed of two parts. The first
part functions as a metaphorical riddle and the second part as the answer that
explains the gist of the idiom. Here are some examples.

(4) Yābā chī huánglián ----- yǒu kǔ shuō bù chū.
哑巴吃黄连------有苦说不出。

(Lit. A deaf-mute person tastes coptis (bitter root)----he can't express the
bitterness.)

(5) lǎo taitai de guǒjiāo bù ------ yòu chòu yòu cháng
老太太的裹脚布------又臭又长。

(Lit. An old lady's foot-bindings------smelly and long.)

The very distinct feature of xiehouyu is that when in use there's always a
salient pause between the two parts. Sometimes, the second part is even omitted
in the discourse given that both hearers and speakers are familiar with the
expression and can understand the reference immediately.

The last type of shuyu to introduce is chengyu. Most chengyu items can be
traced back to written records in ancient times, and still carry features of
classical Chinese. Compared to all the other subtypes of shuyu that generally fit well in oral Chinese the way slang does in English, chengyu are used in written discourse more often than in spoken discourse and thus carry distinct discursive and rhetorical functions. In this study, we choose to use chengyu as a case to illustrate how to view Chinese idioms as performances in second language learning. In the following section, we will give a detailed account of chengyu,

2.2 Chéngyu

The term chéngyu gradually evolved from a loosely defined concept referred to in lexicographical works and vernacular fictions during the imperial period, which incorporates set phrases, newly created words and quotations of famous poems and lyrics, to meticulously worded and well-boundaried definitions by modern Chinese lexicographers and linguists. There are two different readings of the term chéngyu. In a broad sense chéngyu can be viewed as “set phrases” that include suyu and yanyu (Ma, 1983), while it can also be narrowed down to the four-character set phrases that can be traced back to written records in ancient fables, histories and literary works. In the present paper we refer to chéngyu in the narrow sense.

Modern Chinese Dictionary (2002), a standard dictionary published in a later time gives an updated detailed definition of chéngyu:

“Chéngyu are set phrases and short sentences, usually in pithy forms with concise meanings, prevalent in society, used by the common folk, which have seen ages of constant use. Chéngyu items are mostly composed of four
characters. The meanings for some of them are not difficult to deduce from the constituents, such as *xiǎo tí dà zuò* 小题大做 (literally meaning “to write a big article out of a small topic”, idiomatically meaning “to make a fuss over a minor issue”). On the other hand, with some *chengyu*, their meanings cannot be directly gained from their constituents unless we know the semantic fields or the historical origins such as the incident or the background from which the particular phrase comes about. Examples of this are *zháo sān mù sì* 朝三暮四 (literally meaning “three in the morning and four in the evening” which means “change one’s mind frequently”). (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2002:160)

While giving a comprehensive definition of *chengyu* is not as important a purpose as understanding characteristics of *chengyu* itself, this definition does help us set about exploring some of its features distinctive from other types of Chinese idioms.

2.2.1 Origins of *chengyu*

Although in general *chengyu* as a category is known as originated from stories of ancient time and can be traced back to written records, there are some that started as habitual collocations that gradually became stable and fixed in terms of both meaning and structure. Ma (1983: 96) posits that *chengyu* are inherited from the ancient written language system and spoken language system. Historical records of *chengyu* originated from written language system include fables, legend stories, historical events and quotations from famous works of ancient texts such as Buddhist and Confucian classics. *Chengyu* items inherited
from spoken languages are evident in the dialogues depicted in later time vernacular fictions. Jiao, Kubler and Zhang (2011) also describe three common origins of Chinese idioms as 1) ancient fables and historical tales; 2) works of ancient Chinese literature and 3) habitual collocations of terms that came to be stable and used in a certain way, of which the exact origin in not known today.

As scholars have pointed out, the distinction between chengyu items originated from ancient written records and those passed down mouth to mouth without a clear traceable origin. The difference of origin matches the two types of four-character chengyu mentioned in the above quoted definition. Items from the first type have specific historical origins, *si miàn Chǔ gē* 四面楚歌 (literally meaning “surrounded by Chu songs in all four directions”) for example, comes from the famous historical event recorded in *Shiji* 史记 about the Battle of *Gaixia* in 202 BC when Han armies led by Liu Bang sang folk songs from the Chu region to create the false impression that Chu armies led by Xiang Yu were surrounded and isolated by their own people. The chengyu item is now used to describe desperate situations in which one is surrounded by enemies and has no chance for help. Chengyu items like *si miàn Chǔ gē* are hardly intelligible to people without the background knowledge of the historical events from which the four-character set phrase comes, since its meaning cannot be deduced from the constituent characters. In this sense, this first type of chengyu shares the semantically opaqueness with our working definition of idioms.

The second type of chengyu usually does not have origins as traceable as the first type does, given that they are believed to have gradually derived from oral language. These chengyu items are usually easily understandable by its
component characters even though sometimes it also requires metaphorical readings to get the gist. For example, 风平浪静 (literally meaning “gentle breeze and calm sea”) is rather transparent in reference to a tranquil situation without trouble and thus intelligible to people with a basic understanding of metaphorical discourse.

2.2.2 The classical and elegant nature of chengyu

Most of the chengyu items currently used in modern Chinese language can be traced back to thousands of years ago. Originated from works of ancient Chinese, they remain several features that can be traced back to the use of classical Chinese and thus marked with a sense of classic elegance.

First of all, the inner grammatical structure of chengyu items follows the syntactic rules of classical Chinese rather than modern Chinese. For example, in 声东击西 (literally meaning “to make a feint to the east and to attack in the west”, idiomatically meaning “to look one way and row another”), the word 声 ("voice, noise"), which is used as a noun in modern Chinese, functions as a verb "to make noise", and the location nouns 东 ("east") and 西 ("west") appear after the action verb, which is not uncommon in classical Chinese but not seen in modern Chinese.

Secondly, following the convention of classical Chinese, chengyu items are composed of monosyllabic words. Most chengyu items follow the four-character format while only a few contain a different number of characters. Statistics show that among the 5446 chengyu items listed in Cidian 辞典, 93.22% of them are four-character chengyu, and 96.38% of the 17977 items listed in Zhongguo
*chengyu dacidian* 中国成语大词典 are four-characters. Looking inside of a four-character *chengyu* item, normally each component character corresponds to one intact semantic unit. Take *jiàn yì sī qiān* 见异思迁 (“to see a different thing and then think about changing the original idea”) as an example, each character contributes to the whole meaning of the idiom independently and it would take triple the number of characters to express the *chengyu* item in modern Chinese (“*kàn dào bù yìyàng de dōngxi jiǔ xiǎng gǎibiàn* 看到不一样的东西就想改变”) since nowadays Chinese vocabulary is mostly composed of disyllabic or trisyllabic words rather than monosyllabic words. This convention of using monosyllabic word in *chengyu* makes it possible to express a relatively complicated meaning with only four characters.

Thirdly, *chengyu* has preserved many ancient meanings and pronunciations of its monosyllabic component words that are different from, or give birth to their modern use. In the *chengyu* item *yí pù shí hán* 一暴十寒 (literally meaning “to expose something to sun heat for one day and to cold for ten days”, idiomatically meaning “to do something in fits and starts”), the word *pù* following the convention of classical Chinese means “to expose something to sun heat”, while in modern Chinese the character 暴 takes the pronunciation *bào*, meaning “violent”.

These features inherited from the classical Chinese make *chengyu* a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary Chinese that still carries the otherwise lost beauty of an old language in its original form. As a fossil fragment of the classical Chinese language kept alive throughout the history, it carries different
messages from the other components of the lexicon. One salient message that always gets through in a conversation is the speaker’s personal traits demonstrated by the choice to use *chengyu.* Chinese native speakers value the appropriate use of *chengyu* in discourse, spoken or written, as evidence of high intelligence and fine self-cultivation. The use of such language units (*chengyu*) displays one’s familiarity with the past elegance of the Chinese tradition, because otherwise it is not possible to and appropriately comprehend and apply them (Bai, 2010; Cui, 1997). Yet on the other hand, it is also these features that pose difficulties other than the semantic opaqueness to learners of Chinese language with no background in classical Chinese, especially in terms of comprehension.

2.2.3 Characteristic features of *chengyu*

In this section, three characteristic features of *chengyu* are analyzed in comparison and contrast with features of English idioms. The acknowledgment of the differences between *chengyu* and English idioms in terms of their respective roles and functions in discourse is crucial to CFL learners who are native English speakers in a pragmatic sense that the use of English idioms and the use of *chengyu* play by different sets of rules and project totally different language-user images. If we adopt the sports metaphor (Walker, 2000) to illustrate the situation, the English-speaking CFL learners are like professional players of American football who never played soccer before. If they are placed in the soccer pitch without any training about the differences between the rules of the games, they will most likely play by the football rules and foul out. Starting to learn *chengyu* with only a prior knowledge of how English idiom
functions will cause false assumption about chengyu as learners have no other sources but to rely on their prior knowledge and experiences of using first language. In this section, we aim to explore the distinction of chengyu and English idiom learners should carry in mind before entering the journey of learning the four-character Chinese idioms.

2.2.3.1 Chengyu are mostly used to convey positive intentions

Idioms, including chengyu, are typically attitudinal. Chengyu items are mostly attitudinal positive, used to express positive emotions and evaluations. This is supported by a small-scale corpus-based study conducted in exploration of this issue. Among the 500 chengyu items selected based on frequency among six well-balanced corpuses in Jiao, Kubler and Zhang’s 500 Common Chinese Idioms (2011), 48.6% conveys positive meaning, 29.4% neutral (meaning that such chengyu items can be used to express both positive or negative attitudes and thus not marked as attitudinal), and 22% are negative in a salient way. On the contrary, English idioms relatively negative (Fernando, 1996: 99). In Moon’s (1998:247) corpus analysis of English idioms, roughly 66% of the idioms found in her data convey negative meanings, or evaluation towards the subject.

Further more, many "negative" chengyu items are used with positive intentions. For example, the chengyu item shǒu zhū dài tù (literally meaning “to guard a tree-stump waiting for rabbits”, idiomatically meaning “to sit back doing nothing but dreaming of success”) refers to the negative idea of achieving success with little effort. An examination of how this chengyu item is used in discourse shows that people seldom directly use it to describe someone who wants to achieve success without making efforts. Instead, it is often used to
persuade, warn or teach a moral lesson that one should avoid such unrealistic thoughts. The following is an example sentence:

(6) 在学习中不可有守株待兔的心理，没有什么是可以不劳而获的。

(6) In learning you can’t think about sitting back doing nothing and success, nothing can be achieved with no effort.

2.2.3.2 Chengyu are used in formal situations

Valued by native Chinese speakers as demonstration of the past grace of Chinese traditions, chengyu are mostly used in formal situations in both spoken and written discourse. English idioms, on the other hand, are very colloquial and informal the use of which is not appropriate under the three general situations: (1) formal situations such as writing a legal document, (2) serious situations and topics like talking about the death of a dear friend or college, and (3) interaction with individuals of higher social status or much older age (Liu, 2008:35).

It’s crucial to point out though that the distinction between formal and informal language doesn’t necessarily feature written and spoken language. There are often elements characteristic of written language contained in spoken language and vice versa. Chengyu, for example, though predominantly occurring in written language, are also often used in speech by people who intend to sound formal, intelligent, knowledgeable in a culturally appropriate manner. This formal style of spoken language initiated by the use of chengyu, however, is not identified by the genre of the event, since as shown in the following examples people use chengyu in both formal public speech and casual daily conversations.
The following dialogue is a small excerpt from the TV drama Chuncao 春草 between the heroine Chuncao and her teacher Lou laoshi. Chuncao was worried about the fact that her husband He Shuiyuan was putting all their money in the stock market, so she wanted Lou laoshi to talk to her husband for her.

This performance is defined by the following elements:

Time: In the morning when Chuncao was selling goods and worried about the money issue.
Place: Outside of Chuncao’s shop on the street.
Roles: Chuncao and Lou laoshi, Chuncao’s teacher and a caring close friend of her family
Audience: Curious passers-by
Script:
春草: 娄大哥，你要是看着他，你帮我劝劝他吧。他听你的，他今天就在那儿呢。

Chuncao: Brother Lou, if you see him, try to persuade him for me. He’ll listen to you. He’s there today.

娄老师: 我呢，要见着他随便说说可以，可一本正经那不好。因为这毕竟是你们家的事儿。

Lou laoshi: I, can talk to him casually if I meet him, but being too serious is not good. Because after all this is business of your household.

The above conversation happened on the street between two friends who have known each other for many years over the buying of food. The idiom *yi ben zheng jing* is used by Lou laoshi, a college instructor, when he responded to Chuncao’s request and indirectly indicated he couldn’t promise any result. The use of *chengyu* doesn’t define the conversation as anything near a formal genre; instead it features the formal and fine language style suitable to Luo laoshi’s role as an intellectual.

The next example is an excerpt selected from a public speech at Yale University delivered by Bai Yansong, a famous CCTV news host and interpreted by an American interpreter.

This performance is defined by the following elements:

Time: In the morning when Bai is delivering a public speech on “Chinese Dreams”.

Place: A lecture hall at Yale University.

Roles: Bai Yansong, a famous CCTV news host, and American interpreter

Audiences: Students, faculties, stuff members at Yale.
In the excerpt cited above, Bai Yansong was delivering a formal public speech at Yale University facing a lecture hall filled with audience with high education background. The idiom *gǎn kǎi wàn qiān* was used to express the complicated feelings and emotions he felt on his 40th birthday during the Beijing Olympics. The speech was interpreted onsite by an American interpreter, who has demonstrated excellent language and interpretation skills as well as
knowledge of Chinese culture right before this point. Yet after Bai used the idiom gǎn kǎi wàn qiān, for the first time in this speech she failed to get the meaning of it and repeated the idiom in Chinese. Bai helped her out by paraphrasing the meaning of the four-character idiom into plain Chinese.

The above two examples demonstrate that chengyu are not only used widely in written language, but also, more that people have realized, occurs in spoken language. In both cases, speakers using chengyu in their discourses displayed intelligent personal traits by knowing how and when to use what chengyu item appropriated to the context.

2.2.3.3 Chchengyu has a low tolerance on innovative substitution of its components

While the innovative re-creation of idiom is valued by native speakers of English as a sign of intelligence to display humor or creativity, Chinese native speakers regard the mixing and re-creating of new “idioms” based on old ones generally unacceptable. As a country that values the history and the exactness of the ancient’s words, one of the long standing educational traditions is to have children memorize poems, lyrics, prose, and sayings reflecting moral discipline under the belief that ‘memorizing is behaving”. Chinese intellectuals tend to apply chengyu in their speech and writings, as the exactness of wording in using chengyu is the demonstration of knowledge in a rich and deep cultural referentiality. Also, the substitution of any component word in a chengyu item will jeopardize its well-institutionalized structure and hence undermine the classical and elegant nature of chengyu.
On the contrary, in terms of actual use of idioms, it is not uncommon that English native speakers innovatively play with the idioms by creating their own idiosyncratic substitutions, while the meaning of which still can be traced back to the original ones. In some cases certain parts of the idioms are substituted in order to make it more precisely applicable to a particular situation, assuming that the hearers are familiar with the original idiom items. For example,

(1) ...In Denmark no one is his sister's keeper.

• (I am not my brother's keeper.)

• *(The Australian 28 November 1975)*

(2) “I am a great one for rushing in where angels fear to tread.”

• (Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.)

• *(Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered County, 1991)*

(3) “It was a simple bread and butter issue. I examined my bread very closely to see where it was buttered”

• (Bread and butter)

• *(The Australian, 29 June 1991:3, Review Section)*

In (1) the meaning of the idiom “I’m not my brother’s keeper” doesn’t change; we understand that *brother* is substituted for *sister* in the example sentence because here it specifically means ‘to not take responsibility for my sister’. But in (2), the original idioms “fools rush in where angels fear to tread” is used as a self-deprecating joke. The same idiom item also has other variants like “fools rush in and get the best seat” which turns the tables with a praising tone to the “fools”. Other examples like (3) involves a higher level of word manipulation
with the mentioning of the original idiom and a mix of literal and metaphorical reading.
CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CHENGYU LEARNING MATERIALS

3.1 Chengyu learning materials

This chapter presents a detailed examination of how chengyu items are introduced and explained in the various learning materials currently available on the market. Specifically I will look into the treatment of chengyu in (1) general CFL/CSL (Chinese as Foreign Language or Chinese as Second Language) pedagogical materials, and (2) learning resources dedicated to chengyu, in order to gain insights into the pedagogy of chengyu at present.

3.1.1 Defining pedagogical material

Before touching upon specific chengyu materials, it is necessary to clarify the terminology first. Pedagogical materials refer to materials that are designed, created or compiled with the specific purpose of facilitating learners (Rubin and Thompson, 1982). Taking the definition to a more specific level, Noda (2003: 223) points out that pedagogical materials select and present a set of relevant entities in a certain sequence, and provide a set of ordered activities designed to aid the learning process. Noda’s definition is crucial to our discussion in a sense that it draws a distinction between materials with pedagogical activities well aligned according to a particular pedagogical design and ones that are solely referential.
Importance should be also attached to the medium of pedagogical materials. There was a time when a print textbook, with supplementary audio materials at most, was all that most people have in mind when they think about pedagogical materials. Yet with the lowered cost of production for online and digital publishing, new forms of pedagogical materials other than the traditional textbook have entered the market in the past decade. Digitalized materials including interactive software, web-based courses and assessment are gaining more attentions, which used to be focused on printed matters, from both the material consumers and designers. In many cases, a full set of pedagogical materials nowadays contains both textbooks and interactive DVD programs.

In the following section of this chapter, I will first examine several general pedagogical materials for Chinese from beginning level through advanced level, the majority of which the teaching and learning of chengyu is not the pedagogical focus. As will be discussed in more depth in the latter section, existing learning materials specifically dedicated to chengyu on the market, by our definition, are mostly not considered pedagogical materials as they are either “storybooks” that present famous originating stories of some chengyu items, or chengyu dictionaries following different lexicographical principles.

3.2 Treatment of chengyu in general CFL/CSL pedagogical material
3.2.1 Selected Chinese pedagogical materials

In order to present an overview of the treatment of chengyu in general pedagogical materials for Chinese, 11 sets of textbooks, as well as supplementary audio and DVD programs when applicable, are selected for examination,
including 4 sets for beginning level, 3 sets for intermediate level and 4 sets for advanced level. Efforts have been made to include both materials published in Mainland China and ones published in United States\(^1\). Table 3.1 summaries relevant information of the 11 sets of pedagogical materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Title of the material</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Audio/Media materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Level</td>
<td><em>Chinese: Communicating in the Culture</em></td>
<td>Ohio State University Foreign Language Publications</td>
<td>Galal Walker</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>I, II, III</td>
<td>Yes(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>New Practical Chinese Reader</em></td>
<td>Beijing Language University Press</td>
<td>Xun Liu</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>I, II</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fundamental Spoken Chinese</em></td>
<td>University of Hawaii press</td>
<td>Robert Sanders &amp; Nora Yao</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Hanyu Yuedu Jiaocheng</em></td>
<td>Beijing Language University Press</td>
<td>Zhiping Peng</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Level</td>
<td><em>Bridge: a practical intermediate Chinese Course</em></td>
<td>Beijing Language University Press</td>
<td>Shuo Chen</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>I, II</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Trip to China: Intermediate Reader</em></td>
<td>Princeton University Press</td>
<td>Chih-p’ing Chou</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^1\) Due to the lack of availability during the writing of the thesis, CFL pedagogical materials published in Taiwan, as well as *Integrated Chinese* are not included in the study. The inclusion of these materials might provide wider perspectives and fullness into this issue.

\(^2\) In *Chinese: Communication in the Culture*, the textbook is supplementary to the audio program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced Level</th>
<th>Reading Into a New China: An Advanced Reader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Interpretations of China: An Advanced Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All things considered: advanced reader of modern Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy &amp; Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1 Selected CFL/CSL pedagogical materials**

A total of 262 *chengyu* entries are collected from the 11 sets of selected pedagogical materials. The criterion adopted in the research to decide whether a four-character expression is considered *chengyu* is whether they are gathered in the *chengyu* dictionary section in the online Chinese lexicon database *Handian*.³

3.2.2 Chengyu presentation in materials of three different levels

![Pie chart showing distribution of Chengyu items among three levels]

Figure 3.1 Distribution of the total 262 Chengyu items among the three levels of materials

3.2.2.1 Beginning level

At this level, the learning of Chengyu is of no significant pedagogical concern. Very few Chengyu items, 7 entries in total, are included in beginning level Chinese materials. These entries are either introduced as achievement culture in “cultural notes” (e.g. the story of hua she tian zu 画蛇添足 introduced in New Practical Chinese Reader), or only as supplementary vocabularies that occur in the texts selected for other pedagogical goals, target grammar or characters for example. Only simple English translations are given in the vocabulary section and no exercises are designed for these Chengyu entries.
One reason only so few *chengyu* entries are included in beginning level materials is that materials at this level usually select colloquial conversational texts as opposed to formal written genres like news articles and essays. The metaphorical nature and classical inner structure of *chengyu* also requires a better linguistic foundation than what beginning level learners obtain.

### 3.2.2 Intermediate level

Compared to beginning level materials, intermediate textbooks covers more *chengyu* entries. Learners of this proficiency level have accumulated a certain amount of linguistic code and knowledge, and accordingly the materials start to pick different text genres that introduce formal and written discourse. Yet, the learning of *chengyu* is not a major pedagogical focus.

In these intermediate level materials, *chengyu* are introduced as general vocabulary the same way other lexical items are treated, though much less in quantity. No special usage notes are given to distinguish *chengyu* or other idiomatic expressions. In the exercises section, some of the *chengyu* items will be included, together with other vocabularies, in vocabulary exercises that ask learners to choose the appropriate words and finish the sentence, or to make a sentence using the target words.

### 3.2.3 Advanced level

The advanced level pedagogical materials feature a salient emphasis on the teaching and learning of formal written style, in which the use of *chengyu*, together with other metaphorical or idiomatic expressions, is identified as a unique rhetorical strategy. *Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy &
Communication, for example, introduces the use of four-character expressions as a strategy for raising language level and making statements terse and vivid in lesson 2, 9 and 10. Cultural Interpretations of China: An Advanced Reader contains a separate “idiomatic expression” section in addition to the vocabulary list, which presents the figurative meaning of the idioms together with two example sentences. Corresponding exercises are also dedicated to four-character idioms. In advanced level pedagogical materials, the teaching and learning of chengyu is identified as an independent pedagogical target.

3.2.3 Insufficient treatment of chengyu in general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Title of the material</th>
<th>Amount of chengyu covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Level</td>
<td>Chinese: Communicating in the Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Practical Chinese Reader</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fundamental Spoken Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hanyu Yuedu Jiaocheng</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate level</td>
<td>Bridge: A Practical Intermediate Chinese Course</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Trip to China: Intermediate Reader of Modern Chinese</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Level</td>
<td>Reading Into a New China</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Interpretations of China: An Advanced Reader</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Things Considered: Advanced Reader of Modern Chinese</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy &amp; Communication</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Number of chengyu entries included in each set of general Chinese pedagogical material
After examining the manners in which *chengyu* are treated in the selected CFL/CSL materials, several aspects are identified in the following section that demonstrate a lack of adequate attention towards the teaching and learning of *chengyu* among the existing general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials.

3.2.3.1 Deficient coverage of *chengyu* entries

A detailed examination of the total of 261 entries found in the 11 sets of materials shows an insufficient coverage of *chengyu* resulting from the lack of standard *chengyu* selection criteria among the materials.

First of all, as displayed in table 3.2, there is a large difference of the amount of *chengyu* entries included among materials of the same level, except for beginning level materials which unanimously present a very few amount. Among the intermediate level materials, *Bridge: a practical intermediate Chinese Course* introduces a total of 104 *chengyu* entries while *Intermediate Chinese* presents only 5. Also, among the advanced level materials, *Reading Into a New China* includes a relatively small amount of 15 entries, while others like *Cultural Interpretations of China: An Advanced Reader* covers 62.

Secondly, among the total 261 entries collected, only 14 occur in two, or more than two, different sets of materials, as displayed in table 3.3.
| **Chengyu entries that occurs once** | 爱屋及乌、爱民如子、百感交集，悲喜交集、毕恭毕敬、不近人情、背道而驰、不劳而获、不远千里、不约而同、不切实际、不以为然、 草木虫鱼、出人头地、出以进补、出人意料、成千上万、 沉默不语、矗立而起、催人泪下、出人意料、粗心大意、刀光剑影、大公无私、大丈夫气、 驰马难追、地久天长、大惊小怪、 多子多福、地久天长、 荡然无存、 风风雨雨、反复无常、 奉公守法、 丰富多彩、 风雨无阻、 固若金汤、 肝肠寸断、 功成名就、 各式各样、 呱呱坠地、 行各业、 化为乌有、 好事多磨、 海枯石烂、 和气生财、 毫不留情、 糊里糊涂、 孜然一身、 久别重逢、 精疲力竭、 根然不同、 急中生智、 惊慌失措、 精明强干、 君子固穷、 价廉物美、 开门见山、 哭哭啼啼、 屡战屡败、 绿水青山、 另当别论、 临危不惧、 柳暗花明、 恋恋不舍、 寥寥无几、 命运亨通、 门当户对、 明目张胆、 毛遂自荐、 模棱两可、 没完没了、 连绵不绝、 目不斜视、 面红耳赤、 鸟语花香、 浓妆艳抹、 难得糊涂、 南来北往、 难上加难、 品学兼优、 情真意切、 敲锣打鼓、 奇耻大辱、 倾家荡产、 勤勤恳恳、 气势汹汹, 冷不防声、 前所未有、 燃眉之急、 惹是生非、 如泣如诉、 人山人海、 独有同生、 身强体壮、 手舞足蹈、 三心二意、 三从四德、 生死契阔、 随时随地、 三令五申、 杀鸡取卵、 亭亭玉立、 童叟无欺、 替人受过、 天之骄子、 头昏脑胀、 提心吊胆、 天长地久、 头头是道、 吞吞吐吐、 万事大吉、 万寿无疆、 唯我独尊、 无足轻重、 万众一心、 闻名于世、 忘恩负义、 为所欲为、 文质彬彬、 唯利是图、 无家可归、 玩世不恭、 惜者于事、 无所事事、 五花八门、 五体投地、 无所不能、 喜上眉梢、 心不在焉、 喜怒无常、 显而易见、 心照不宣、 心服口服、 小题大做、 贤妻良母、 相夫教子、 心灰意冷、 心急火燎、 虚幻迷离、 假娘半老、 幸灾乐祸、 杏花春雨、 鸦雀无声、 衣不遮体、 衣履鲜鲜、 阳奉阴违、 一塌糊涂、 抑郁寡欢、 耀祖光宗、 一诺千金、 以柔克刚、 约定俗成、 应运而生、 有所作为、 移尸灭迹、 以假乱真、 一举两得、 养老送终、 有声有色、 与众不同、 有情有义、 衣食住行、 鱼米之乡、 左右兼顾、 坐立不安、 张口结舌、 自作主张、 自食其力、 总而言之、 张冠李戴、 争分夺秒、 之乎者也、 至高无上、 自顾不暇 |
| **Chengyu entries that occurs twice** | 悲欢离合不计其数、 不知不觉、 不可避免、 传宗接代、 后顾之忧、 画蛇添足、 理所当然、 怒不可遏、 千里迢迢、 喜出望外、 振振有词、 子孙满堂 |
| **Chengyu entries that occurs three times** | 马马虎虎 |

Table 3.3 Chengyu entries that occur among the 11 sets of materials
Thirdly, after comparing the 261 *chengyu* entries with the updated version of HSK\(^4\) graded word and character list\(^5\), only 21% (24 out of the total 114 entries) of the *chengyu* items from the HSK graded word and character list is covered.

### 3.2.3.2 Reading/writing oriented presentation

Generally speaking, language use can be categorized as formal and informal. While overall written discourse is regarded more formal than conversational discourse, it is not uncommon that written language might contain some elements that are characteristic of spoken language, and vice versa. As discussed in chapter 2, *chengyu* is typically used in formal situations both in writing and in speech.

However, the majority of the *chengyu* entries examined in this study are presented in written texts and reading/writing exercises as opposed to in conversational texts and oral performance. It is clear that CFL/CSL materials using conversational texts, most of the beginning level materials for example, introduce much fewer *chengyu* entries than reading/writing materials that employ traditional written texts like news articles. Very few, if any, *chengyu* entry is introduced in a conversational setting in daily communication.

Even when some advanced level materials do feature texts containing the use of *chengyu* in conversations, or conversation-like discourse (e.g. the direct

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\(^4\) Abbreviated from *hanyu shuiping kaoshi* 汉语水平考试, HSK is the only national standard Chinese language proficiency test for non-native speakers.

\(^5\) The new version of HSK word and character list is published in 2010, which lists the target words and characters from level one to level six in HSK test.
speech in the texts of lesson two in *Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy & Communication*), the following exercises and drills never require learners to listen to, read, recite, or do any other form of oral practice for using *chengyu*. As a result, learners receive only reading/writing skills training on *chengyu*. They might be able to recognize and comprehend *chengyu* encountered in reading, or even produce them in their own writing, but they will not perform as well when *chengyu* items occur in TV news, or in actual dialogues with Chinese native speakers.

3.3 Treatment of *chengyu* in *chengyu* learning materials

In hope of gaining a comprehensive overview of the existing resources as well as the underlying pedagogical philosophy for *chengyu* teaching and learning, in this section we explored *chengyu* learning materials accessible in print and online for both native speakers and non-native learners, with an emphasis on the latter. Based on the content, these learning materials generally fall into three categories: 1) “storybooks”, 2) dictionaries and 3) “textbooks”. The first two types are referential while the third one, by our definition, is considered pedagogical. As previously mentioned, all the three types of materials are not limited to the print medium.

Though as previously pointed out, referential materials such as storybooks and *chengyu* dictionaries do not qualify as pedagogical materials in this study, it is important to include these materials in the discussion for two reasons.
First, in the field of *chengyu* teaching and learning, storybooks of various *chengyu* origins and *chengyu* dictionaries are the two most common types of learning resources available. Especially the majority of open educational materials for *chengyu* such as online videos, e-books, and online dictionaries also fall into these two categories. Second, these *chengyu* learning materials directly reflect a current mainstream pedagogical view on *chengyu* teaching and learning that emphasizes etymological elaboration, an approach that is widely adopted in the teaching of *chengyu* to native Chinese speakers in the stages of their education.

In the discussion that follows, I introduce in more depth the features of the three types of *chengyu* learning materials as well as a detailed review of one existing pedagogical material *Chengyu jiaocheng* 成语教程 as an example. This will help provide a clear overview of the *chengyu* pedagogical (and other) materials as well as the pedagogical decisions involved.

3.3.1 “Storybooks”

“Storybook” refers to materials or resources that introduce the originating story of *chengyu* items, for example, *Best Chinese idioms*. Not restricted to printed books, this type of *chengyu* materials can also be produced in the format of video, animation, PowerPoint, and electronic book. For each *chengyu* item, one originating story is given together with its literal meaning as well as metaphorical meaning in one or two sentences, usually either at the beginning or end of the story. Depending on the target readers (factors include

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age differences among native Chinese and level differences among non-native language learners), the discourses vary from short to long, and from simple to complex, but as the telling of a story is the main content in such materials, generally the origin tales of each chengyu item are told in an elaborative fashion. For example, in *Best Chinese Idioms*, the chengyu item *jǔ àn qí méi* (holding the tray to he height of the brow) is first explained followed by its originating story from the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*:

*To hold the tray containing a meal to the height of the eyebrows symbolizes love and mutual respect between husband and wife.*

LIANG Hong was a scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty. His family was very poor when he was young. But he studied hard and eventually became a very learned man. Many rich families wanted to marry their daughters to him. But Liang was an upright man and regarded with disdain those who were rich and powerful. He refused all their offers and decided to marry Meng Guang, the daughter of his neighbor, who was not beautiful but cherished the same ideas as his own.

When Meng Guang first came to Liang Hong’s house, she was rather gorgeously dressed. Liang Hong refused to speak to her for seven days. One the eighth day, when Meng Guang coiled up her hair, removed her ornaments, changed into common cotton clothes and began to work in the house, Liang was pleased. “Good. You are now my wife,” he said.

After their marriage, Liang Hong and Meng Guang loved and helped each other and treated each other with extreme courtesy as if they are each other's guest. Every day, when Liang came home from work, Meng would have supper ready. Shou would put the meal in a tray, raised it to the height of her brouws and delivered it to Liang.
Liang would happily took it from her and the two of them would then enjoy their supper together.

*History of the Later Han Dynasty*

There are many *chengyu* storybooks on the market in China designed for young children as supplementary reading materials. Compared with those materials that are mostly written in Chinese, materials targeting second language learners normally either provide English translations together with the Chinese version, or use English only.

The selection of idioms to be included in this type of *chengyu* material is often not the most practical for non-native learners of Chinese, since the nature of such materials indicates exclusiveness to *chengyu* items traceable to historical records of a certain origin. On one hand, *chengyu* items with famous originating stories are not necessarily frequently used in writing and in speech. On the other hand, as introduced in the previous chapter, there is also another type of *chengyu*, the origins of which are not traceable to any historical records. Many *chengyu* items of this kind, *po bu ji dai* (literally meaning “eager and cannot wait”) for example, although frequently used in written and spoken discourses, will never appear in “storybook” type of *chengyu* materials.

This type of material treats *chengyu* as informational and achievement culture, emphasizing historical references behind each *chengyu* item. In fact, many materials of this kind are designed to interest and motivate learners with fascinating stories and vivid images. For Chinese native speakers, the “storybook” type of *chengyu* materials is mostly used in early educations, which also serves the purpose of character recognition training and teaching traditional values.
(since most of the chengyu stories teach moral lessons). For non-native language learners, acquiring characters and gaining cultural values are also very important, and the stories might also be helpful for non-native language learners to make connections between literal meaning and figurative meaning. However, in terms of measurable skill developments for responding to and actively using these idioms, the “storybook” type of material provides very limited guidance.

3.3.2. Chengyu dictionaries

Chengyu dictionaries vary with respect to their target users. While most editions of chengyu dictionaries available on the market target native Chinese speakers, there are a few collected and arranged particularly for the use of Chinese language learners. There are several distinctions between dictionaries targeting the two different user groups. Taking 500 common Chinese Idioms: an annotated frequency dictionary, a dictionary designed for the use of Chinese language learners, as an example, it differs from other chengyu dictionaries in China with respect to the followings:

First, the selection of chengyu items to be included is relatively small-scaled and is based on frequencies of occurrence and practicality for non-native learners, compared with chengyu dictionaries in China with the largest volume of over 20,000 entries, some of which are not readily understandable to, let alone frequently used by, native Chinese speakers. Second, clear English explanation

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and English translation of the exemplifications is provided for the convenience of language learners, while the lack of English translation and difficult Chinese explanations in traditional *chengyu* dictionaries for native speakers can easily obstruct learners’ understanding. Third, for each entry, *500 common Chinese Idioms* provides two clear example sentences written in modern Chinese with an invaluable context, while traditional dictionaries either provide no example sentences, or give example sentences that are too difficult for learners, deriving from classical literature works such as *The West Chamber* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Fourth, *500 common Chinese Idioms* provides detailed descriptions of *chengyu* usage, together with additional information such as synonyms, antonyms, sociolinguistic information are provided, which are seldom given in *chengyu* dictionaries targeting native speakers (Jiao, Kubler and Zhang, 2011).

*Chengyu* dictionaries generally serve for reference purposes for language learners like any other reference work. Though some of them claim to be able to function as supplementary textbooks of either classroom instruction or autonomous learning, the lack of pedagogical activities fails to provide guidance and opportunities for learners to develop their skills of comprehending and producing *chengyu* in communications. Also, *chengyu* dictionaries normally list more information than a learner at a certain level of proficiency needs, and do not have a clearly stated pedagogical goal, or end point for learners to measure their own progress.

3.3.3. “Textbooks”

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The “textbooks” type of *chengyu* materials refers to ones with specific pedagogical purposes and an alignment of a set of ordered pedagogical activities that facilitate learners’ understanding, memorizing and application of *chengyu* items. Compared to *chengyu* “storybooks” and dictionaries, this type of *chengyu* materials provides learners with opportunities to learn by actively using *chengyu* through scaffolding drills and application exercises. This type of material offers guidance to measurable skill developments dictated by the pedagogical purpose. The coverage of the idiom entries is usually less in quantity than most dictionaries and more representative than storybooks. These features self-evidently would indicate a great need for such pedagogical materials for learners who aim at using *chengyu* correctly and appropriately rather than simply knowing the originating stories about them.

However there’s a huge gap between the existing need and the available pedagogical materials on the market. After examining *chengyu* materials published in United States and China, I found only one featuring supplementary drills and exercises. This lack of availability shows the inadequacy of attention on treating *chengyu* as an important pedagogical subject in Chinese learning.

In the following section, a detailed examination of *Chengyu jiaocheng* is given to offer some insights further on what is offered in the existing pedagogical materials and what is not addressed.

3.3.4 Material review of a textbook: *Chengyu jiaocheng*

3.3.4.1 Basic introduction
Chengyu jiaocheng (hereafter CJ), or A chengyu textbook, is one of the three in Vocabulary and Culture series of pedagogical materials of Chinese shuyu published in China by Fudan university press. Together with the other two textbooks devoted to the teaching of guanyong yu and suyu, CJ is one of the few pedagogical materials currently on the market specifically designed for the teaching and learning of suyu.

3.3.4.2 Target population

CJ targets HSK level 6 and above CSL (Chinese as a second language) learners who has accumulated basic Chinese grammar knowledge and a vocabulary of around 2500 items. According to the HSK grading system, level 6 indicates that the learners have acquired an intermediate (low) level competence in Chinese, though more detailed interpretation of the level is not provided.

3.3.4.3 Objectives

CJ aims at enhancing learners’ lexicon as well as knowledge of Chinese cultural references from antiquity and modern times. After finishing this material learners will accumulate certain amount of frequently used Chinese idioms, enhancing their reading and writing skills through both chengyu comprehension and production.

3.3.4.4 Organization and content

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8 The whole series is named Yuhui yu wenhua 语汇与文化.
9 Abbreviated from hanyu shuiping kaoshi 汉语水平考试, HSK is the only national standard Chinese language proficiency test for non-native speakers.
CJ covers 300 chengyu entries, which include the chengyu items listed in the HSK graded vocabulary and character list\(^\text{10}\) and 160 most frequently used chengyu items from corpus research. The book consists of 20 lessons, each of which consists of five sections: (a) texts; (b) vocabulary list; (c) chengyu list; (d) exercises; and (e) supplementary reading.

The texts include two parts: a reading passage about the originating story of a chengyu item, and a dialogue on topics related to the chengyu item from the previous reading passage and other aspects of Chinese culture between a native Chinese speaker and a non-native learner. For example, in lesson 6, the reading passage introduces the story of *záo bì tōu guāng* (literally meaning “to bore a hole on the wall and make use of the neighbor’s light”), which is used together with several other chengyu items about the spirit of hardworking in study like *xuán liáng ci gǔ* (literally meaning “to tie one’s hair on the house beam and jab one’s side with an awl to keep oneself awake”) in the following dialogue to encourage the frustrated non-native Chinese learner. In other cases, the dialogue might not be as closely related to the chengyu introduced in the reading passage, for example in lesson 12, the reading paragraph introduce the origin of the idiom item *kāi juàn yǒu yì* (literally meaning “opening the books will always do goods”), but in the dialogue the two interlocutor, a native Chinese and a foreign learner, talk about the four treasures of the study (brush, ink-stick, paper and ink-stone) without making reference to the *kāi juàn yǒu yì*.

\(^{10}\) *Hanyu shuiping cihui yu hanzi dengji dagang*, 汉语水平词汇与等级大纲.
A vocabulary list covers words that might obstruct learners’ understanding in both texts, providing pinyin, part of speech and English translation, while the *chengyu* list provides pinyin, *chengyu* explanations and two example sentences in Chinese for each entry.

The following exercise section consists of six reading and writing drills and exercises that help learners understand, memorize, and utilize idioms in new contexts. Exercise 2 and 4 are designed to facilitate memorizing the meaning, in which learners are required to write down the explanation of each *chengyu* item in Chinese in exercise 2 and to write the *chengyu* according to each given explanation in exercise 4. Exercise 3 helps learners to memorize the orthography by asking them to filling the blank of one missing character in a *chengyu* entry. Exercise 1, 5 and 6 aims at helping learners further understand the *chengyu* items by utilizing them in new contexts. For exercise 1 and 5, learners are asked to finish a sentence by choosing the most suitable idiom item from the given choices or word bank, while in exercise 6 learners are required to write a sentence using the *chengyu* item given in the brackets as either the conversation starter or the response in a conversation exchange.

Supplementary reading section in each lesson selects one reading text that introduces related cultural knowledge mentioned in the dialogue of the same lesson. A passage about the four treasures of the study, for example, is selected as the supplementary reading in lesson 12 to provide some background knowledge of the dialogue topic.

3.3.4.5 Strengths
1. CJ distinguishes itself from most other existing textbooks by providing pedagogical activities designed to help learners enhance and self-check their learning. Scaffolding drills are provided for learners to memorize the exact wording of *chengyu* items and its figurative meaning, while application exercises help learners apply them in new sentence contexts.

2. Both narrative discourse and conversational discourse are provided in the texts of each lesson. The reading passage tells the story of a certain *chengyu* item while the dialogue demonstrates ways to “talk about” *chengyu* and related cultural references in conversations. Some of the dialogues provide good models of how to respond to *chengyu* related questions and conversations, which happen quite frequently in conversations between a Chinese native speaker and a foreign Chinese language learner. For example:

(1) 海伦：我们今天刚刚学了一个成语叫“一衣带水”。
    林森：你能讲讲“一衣带水”的意思吗？
    海伦：能，“一衣带水”是指像一条衣带那样狭窄的河流，意思就是关系很密切。

    Hailun: We learned a *chengyu* called “yi yi dai shui” today.
    Linsen: Can you tell me what does the *chengyu* “yi yi dai shui” mean?
    Hailun: I can. “Yi yi dai shui” refers to a river as narrow as a cloth belt, meaning that the relationship is close.

(2) 王刚：你有没有听到过关于“朝三暮四”的故事？
    玛丽：没有，但是我知道这个成语是说对爱情不专一。

    Wanggang: Have you ever heard about the story of “zhao san mu si”? 
    Mali: No, but I know this *chengyu* is used to describe being unfaithful in love.
(3) 田志民：有的成语是这样的，比如“一目十行”。

大卫：这个我知道，它的意思是一眼就能看十行字，形容看书的速度很快。

Tian Zhimin: Some of the chengyu are like that, for example “yi mu shi hang”.

Dawei: I know this one. It means that reading ten lines at one sight, and used to describe people who read very fast.

The three examples above are part of the conversation happened between a native Chinese and a foreign learner, in which the foreign learners show their understanding of chengyu by explaining the meaning of a certain chengyu. In (1) and (2), the learners do the explanation as responses to questions from a Chinese native speaker, while in (3), with no question asked, the foreigner actively explains the meaning of the idiom in order to show his knowledge about it. These are provided as valid examples users of CJ can use in their own communication with native Chinese.

Other dialogues present certain aspects of Chinese culture in conversation exchanges. These dialogues, as good models, relate chengyu with social conventions and culture related topics in various fashion.

3. CJ also distinguishes itself from other existing materials with its chengyu selection. As mentioned previously, the 300 chengyu entries covered by CJ are selected based on two criteria. First, it includes all the 138 chengyu entries listed in the HSK graded vocabulary and character list, a national guidance for learners of Chinese preparing for the HSK tests. Second, the rest of the 300 items are selected from corpus research based on occurrence frequency. The selection
criteria not only meet the needs of test-oriented learners, but also take into consideration the factor of practicality.

3.3.4.6 Weaknesses

(1) Over-simplified *chengyu* usage notes.

In the *chengyu* list section, for each *chengyu* entry only one sentence of the *chengyu*’s figurative meaning is given. There’s no other usage notes on syntactic, pragmatic and sociocultural functions on the idioms, which cannot be easily summarized from the limited example sentences. Without sufficient guidance on when and where to use it to whom, as well as how to incorporate the *chengyu* in sentences, learners might rely on their previous knowledge about their first language and most likely use the idioms in inappropriate ways.

(2) Decontextualized example sentences and dialogues.

No specified context is given in regard to whether these sentences are chosen from a written passage, or a conversation, let alone what types of passage or conversation it might have been. The lack of context for the example sentences provides very limited information on the kind of intention expressed through the use of *chengyu*. The same issue also occurs in the treatment of dialogue texts in which, even though it is indicated that the dialogue happens between a native speaker of Chinese and a language learner, more detailed context information such as the relationship between the two roles, time and location of occurrence are not given.

(3) Insufficient exercises.
Exercises provided in CJ are mainly scaffolding exercises which focuses a lot on basic reading and writing skills development, such as filling the blank with the missing character in a chengyu entry, and finishing the sentences by filling the blanks with the appropriate chengyu from the word bank. It is not a problem to provide scaffolding activities, which are in fact very helpful pedagogical activities to prepare learners for actual language use. The real problem is CJ provides scaffolding exercises only. Task-authentic activities that treat chengyu the way native speakers do is needed for learners to make use of the skills developed in the previous scaffolding activities and perform authentic language tasks. Very few such activities are suggested in the exercise section.

The only exercise provided that represents features of authentic language tasks is exercises 6, which asks learners to finish one conversational exchange using the chengyu given in the parentheses. Here's an example of how exercise 6 is presented:

(1)A: 小王的公司为什么要帮助小刘的公司？
   A: Why did little Wang’s company help little Liu's company?)
   B: ________________________________。（千丝万缕）

It provides neither any contexts in regard to what role is A and B, nor any clue for what learners are supposed to express in the conversation. Also, since no note or exercise addressing the common collocations for each chengyu is included, there’s a very big gap for users of this material to produce syntactically correct sentences. It is also very odd that the exercise does not suggest learners orally perform the conversation exchange as an authentic communicative task.
All the above-mentioned insufficiencies of CJ's exercises indicate that CJ only targets 1) basic reading/ writing skills independent of other related skill areas; and 2) surface structures deprived of sociocultural contexts. The result of such pedagogical decisions is that learners do not get to practice the use of chengyu items in communication, which is exactly what learners need in order to master a chengyu and gradually develop skills of using it in new contexts.

3.4 Conclusion:

The analysis of both the general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials and learning materials that are dedicated to the teaching and learning of chengyu has demonstrated insufficient attention and treatment of chengyu as a result of inadequate research and reflections on the use of the four-character Chinese idioms. Several conclusive points can be drawn here.

(1) It is believed that the appropriate level of proficiency to start the systematic learning of chengyu is intermediate or even advanced level, which is based on the consideration that the amount of character and grammatical knowledge learners already accumulated should be sufficient to handle the authentic materials and tasks related to the use of chengyu. This arrangement is also established on the pedagogical sequence that written genres in which chengyu is most frequently and extensively used should be touched upon only after learners have developed certain language skills. However, as discussed in chapter 2 the use of chengyu is in fact not restricted to written language. Further study on the use of chengyu in speech is needed to legitimize the current practice.
that most CFL learners only start learning the use of *chengyu* after they’ve reached intermediate or above level.

(2) Current learning materials for *chengyu* emphasize on reading and writing skills, with very little attention dedicated to the development of speaking and listening skill areas. In general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials, *chengyu* mostly occurs in reading passages as opposed to dialogues. The “storybook” type of material and dictionaries provide no performance scripts of *chengyu* in use at all. Drill and exercises in existing pedagogical materials designed for *chengyu* are also reading/writing oriented which focuses mainly on practicing the orthography and meaning of *chengyu* items; pedagogical activities that require learners to practice using them in speech is rarely provided (in fact only two cases are found in beginning level materials). The only audio and visual input provided are from the *chengyu* stories presented in video clips and animations, which only present the telling of the story rather than actual uses of *chengyu* in formal conversations or speech. This might be helpful if one aims at learning how to tell the origin story of a certain *chengyu*, but not so much if one wants to use it otherwise to convey intentions.

(3) *Chengyu* is presented and treated out of context in the current materials.

Words don’t have meaning all by themselves; it is the context of how, when and where the words are used that gives them meanings. Many of the *chengyu* items can only be used in limited contexts with specific fixed factors. Some, for example, can only be used by parents to talk about their children, others among peers. Some used at the beginning of an event, others afterwards. In the existing *chengyu* learning materials, these specified contextual elements are seldom
introduced, let alone targeted in the drills and exercise. The lack of specified context of texts, example sentences and exercises in which chengyu items are used makes the situation even worse by leaving the learners wondering, and making wrong assumptions based on their prior knowledge of English idioms.

(4) The choice of chengyu items is not standardized.

General CFL/CSL pedagogical materials employ no criteria for chengyu selection, as the teaching of these four-character idioms is not among their pedagogical objectives, or at least the major ones. Most of the chengyu items covered in these general materials are introduced as the byproduct of target grammars and vocabularies. On the other hand, different types of materials aiming at respective goals, either to present the origin story and the underlying cultural values, to map chengyu items onto definitions in a lexicographic structure, or to facilitate the mastering of these idioms in various fashions, require different standards. There’s really no clear ending point for compiling a chengyu dictionary, while nature of “storybook” type of materials indicates the inclusion of only items with a traceable origin. Systematic guidance on the selection of chengyu is needed at least among the materials that identify the teaching and learning of chengyu in their pedagogical goals.
CHAPTER FOUR

DESIGNING PERFORMANCE-BASED PEDAGOGICAL MATERIAL FOR

CHENGYU

In this chapter, several principles pertaining to the design of performance-based pedagogical materials for chengyu are presented following a complete instructional sequence, which directly addresses the insufficient treatments of chengyu in existing materials discussed in chapter 3. A prototype of performance-based chengyu material design is analyzed as a case to illustrate how each principle can be realized in the form of a concrete product. The complete material design is attached in the appendix for future reference.

4.1 Pedagogical suggestions on designing performance-based material for chengyu

4.1.1 Presenting authentic model performances: a speaking/listening oriented case

Model performances selected and compiled in pedagogical materials serve as instructional samples of appropriate behaviors of using chengyu, from which learners gain their first concrete experience of how certain chengyu items are used in specified communicative events. Authenticity of the performance, or

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11 The prototype material design is a group project developed in collaboration with Zhini Zeng and Yawen Zheng.
the end product of such performances like a text, is important if learners are to memorize, practice and base their own performance on these examples.

The examination of existing pedagogical materials for chengyu in chapter 3 has shown a preference towards texts as model performance scripts for chengyu. However, as demonstrated in chapter 2, chengyu are used in both written and spoken discourses and thus learners' capability of comprehending, responding to, and actively producing chengyu in speech is no less significant than the ability to perform these tasks through reading and writing. As a result, speaking and listening skills of using chengyu should be viewed as legitimized target skills in pedagogical materials.

The prototype material design, How to sound intelligent in Chinese, aims to facilitate the development of listening and speaking skills in using chengyu in communication events. How to sound intelligent in Chinese is designed as a multimedia program. Duihua (Dialogue), a popular talk show in China, is selected as the model performance to provide learners with authentic conversations among Chinese people with high intellectual status. Learners watch the video clips from the TV show to form initial concrete experiences, and then answer compulsory comprehension questions designed to guide learners through the stages of forming and testing hypothesis.

Usage notes, scaffolding drills and application exercises are also provided with real-life videos clips to enhance both visual and audio input, and elicit learners' oral performance.

In the usage notes, for each chengyu entry, two to three sample videos are presented as supplementary performance models in addition to the talk show.
video. Scaffolding drill and application exercise sections also provide video clips of example target performances. Pre-recorded videos are utilized to elicit target *chengyu* in collocation as shown in the example video clips. Compared to traditional ways of presenting example sentences in the *chengyu* lists and text-based exercises in existing materials, the video clips not only provide visual and audio elements but also situate the script in appropriate and readily recognizable contexts.

4.1.2 Contextualized *chengyu* presentation and drilling

The biggest criticism of current *chengyu* materials is the absence of context in the treatment of *chengyu* items. As discussed previously, a successful performance of using *chengyu* requires the production of the appropriate script at the right time in the right place and to the right audience. To pedagogical materials that aim at helping learners achieve the automaticity in conducting great performances using *chengyu*, whether textually or orally, it is crucial to always present the use of *chengyu* within specified context and provide corresponding performance supporting information that facilitates learner's processing of how and why certain *chengyu* item is used in certain contexts.

In the prototype material design, contextualization is realized in (1) model performance, (2) *chengyu* usage note, and (3) drill and exercise section.

4.1.2.1 Contextualized model performance script

At the beginning of the each unit, background information of the episode, including the genre of the talk, the roles of the interlocutors and the audience, and the topic of the current episode, are presented in Chinese. Learners are
expected to read these introductions to get a general idea about the performance before watching the video clips.

After learners watch the video clip for the first time, they are required to finish some compulsory built-in context questions. These questions are designed to check learners’ understanding of the background information, which serves crucial purposes helping learners understand and process the performances.

4.1.2.2 Contextualized *chengyu* usage notes

In the prototype material design, *chengyu* usage notes are provided addressing four aspects of *chengyu* usage: (1) the literal meaning of the target idiom, (2) the generalized contexts to which the idiom applies, (3) interlocutor’s intention of using the idiom and the actual effect achieved in the talk show, and (4) variants on the use of *chengyu* in the model performance in new contexts (through videos). Take the *chengyu* item 成龙成凤 as an example, the notes introduce that (1) in modern Chinese culture, dragon refers to an excellent male and phoenix refers to an excellent female; 2) the idiom generally is used to express someone very excellent who is a top-notch; (3) in the talk show, the guest speaker emphasizes that she’s not someone who’s becoming dragan and phoenix but rather a normal person. The idiom is used to express modesty.

After presenting the notes, video clips of collocation variants are given as example performances of a specific *chengyu* item in addition to the model performance in the talk show. Learners can read the context setting first and then watch the video. For example, in the variant example video for 成龙成风, an additional context under which the idiom *cheng long cheng feng* is frequently
used, to describe Chinese parents’ eagerness for their children’s success usually accompanied by giving excessive pressure on the children, is presented to the learner. The conversation happened between an American graduate student who is working as an intern in a foreign trade company in Nanjing and his Chinese colleague. Appropriate discourse strategies for the role of the American student as a lower status intern to first agree with the colleague and then as a foreigner to avoid criticizing the prevailing phenomenon in China is also provided and analyzed.

The variant example video clips not only present new contexts in which the target *chengyu* item is frequently used. They also provide variant collocations of the target idiom at the same time. In the above cited example of *cheng long cheng feng*, the original collocation used by Tan Haiyan in the talk show was “成龙成风的人” (people who becomes dragon and phoeni) in which the idiom modifies a noun, while in the new collocation “希望孩子成龙成风” (hope the children become dragon and phoeni) introduced in the note video, the idiom serves as the complement in the sentence.

4.1.2.3 Contextualized scaffolding drills and exercises

Drills provided in the prototype material are designed for learners to practice (1) the use of *chengyu* and its collocation introduced in the model performance and (2) the variant use of the *chengyu* item in different situations introduced in the *chengyu* usage note section. The drills are designed in coherence with these two types of model performances in a sense that learners will know how to adapt the model performance to new contexts. The following
two examples are respectively adapted from the model performance script and the variant performance script introduced in the usage note of *cheng long cheng feng*.

**Sample 1:**

**Drill context:** After graduating from Peking University, you gain admission to the medical school at Harvard University. Peking University invites you to share your experience with the junior students. When asked about your admission to Harvard, be modest and mention that excellence is not the only criteria.

Junior student: Shìjìě, shàng Hāfó tèbié nán bā ? Yāo hên bájiàn de rén cái néng shěnqǐng shàng bā?
You: Yě búshì yídīng yào chéng lóng chéng fèng de rén cái néng shěnqǐng shàng Hāfó , hěn pǔtōng de rén , zhī yào yǒu juéxīn , jiù néng shěnqǐng shàng.

Junior student: It must be very difficulty to go to Harvard. One has to be extremely excellent to get admission, right?
You: One doesn't have to be the dragon and phoenix to go to Harvard. Very ordinary people, as long as you are determined, can also get admitted.

**Sample 2:**

**Drill context:** You work at a foreign trade company as a foreign intern in China. One of the Chinese interns tells you that her mother sent her to learn three instruments when she was a child. Express that you think it’s understandable.

Chinese intern: Shàngxué de shíhòu wǒ mā méizhōu yào wǒ xué sān zhǒng yuèqì , lài sǐ wǒ le.
You: Xiànzài de jiāzhāng dōu xiàng wǒ hái cái *chéng lóng chéng fèng*, xué sān zhǒng yuèqì yě kěyǐ líjiě.

Chinese intern: When I was in school, my mother sent me to learn three instruments every week. I was so exhausted!
You: Nowadays parents all what their children to become dragons and phoenixes, it is understandable they send them to cram school on weekends.

The first example drill is adapted from the use of *cheng long cheng feng* in the talk show, when the guest speaker Tan Haiyan talks about her study experiences in Harvard. The example drill targets two aspects. First, the sentence structure “不是一定要成龙成凤的人才能...” (don't have to be the
person who becomes dragon and phoenix to do something). Second, the strategy of expressing modesty when talking about one’s own impressive experience. The context of the drill is designed to create a rather formal interview-like situation in which the learner’s role is ask to talk about his/her admission to Harvard medical school, which is similarly to the situation in the talk show. The second example drill follows the same method. The target collocation is the one “家长希望孩子成龙成凤” (parents hope the children become dragon and phoenix) while the target discourse strategy is to be tactful and avoid criticizing a common practice in Chinese as a foreigner.

4.1.3 Preparing learners for improvisational performance

For language learners, the ultimate goal of language learning is not to get a good score in language test, but rather to be able to participate in the target culture in an appropriate manner. In order to achieve this goal, learners need to accumulate enough linguistic and cultural knowledge and go through sufficient drilling before they are able to improvise appropriate performances under any given contexts. Pedagogical materials that aim at preparing learners for improvisational performances should build the whole instructional cycle towards this goal. The following steps may provide some insight into a coherent material design, in which some of the features previously mentioned are revisited.

First, provide authentic contextualized model performances, including both the core model performance and supplementary performances so that learners can observe the use of certain target chengyu item in various contexts.
Second, provide performance supporting information that explicitly explains the use of *chengyu*, its literal and figurative meaning, its collocation, as well as the accompanying discourse strategies in the given context.

Third, provide contextualized drills adapted from the model performances, so that learners get to practice the linguistic codes and discourse strategies in simulated communicative environments.

Finally, provide learners with application exercises as opportunities to utilize in performance appropriate rhetorical strategies using idioms in collocations previously drilled. These improvisational performance tasks should be designed based on what learners are able to handle, linguistically and culturally. Yet, learners are encouraged to construct their speech as active participants in a reciprocal conversation rather than only focusing on using target idioms. Suggestions should also be made to encourage in-class performances to instructors using the materials in classroom instruction.

In the prototype material design, application exercises are presented through the format of a mini-interview. Learners are given a certain context, a job interview for example, and are asked to perform accordingly in the manner they consider appropriate. The interlocutor will be making conversations and asking questions through a pre-recorded video clip to best simulate the actual performances in real life. Learners are expected to respond to the interviewer’s question about their impressive education background appropriately. However, learners are free to decide the supporting reasons for their response based on their personal experiences. Compared with the previous drills, each application
exercise contains more than one conversation exchange, and is more flexible and open-ended.

Such applications are also recommended for classroom instruction as teachers can provide onsite feedbacks and suggestions to help constructing better culturally appropriate performances. And more variations can be adapted in new contexts to broaden learners’ case compilations of using the same chengyu items on their way towards improvisational performances.

4.2 Limitations of the research

One of the claims upon which the current study is based is that native Chinese speakers use chengyu in communication events and through proper use of chengyu intelligence is displayed and intensions conveyed. However few researches has previously been conducted in examination of this issue. The lack of empirical study pertaining to when, how and why native speakers of Chinese utilize chengyu fails to support this intuition-based claim with concrete data. Future researches are needed to provide empirical evidence of the use of chengyu by native speakers of Chinese as well as what intensions are conveyed. This will not only better justify the teaching and learning of chengyu, but also provide insights into the question whether it is necessary to produce pedagogical materials dedicated to chengyu instead of integrating chengyu in general CFL/CSL materials.

Another limitation of the study is in chapter two when I try to introduce several major categories in the system of Chinese idiomatic expressions based on existing literature. As each of the categories enjoys several different versions of
definition among scholars, the definitions introduced in chapter two only represent parts of the whole picture and are not the most precise and efficient ways to introduce these idiomatic expressions from second language learners’ perspective. One of the possible solutions for future study of this issue is to focus on the intentions conveyed through the use of Chinese idiomatic expressions under specified contexts. Instead of defining and categorizing them solely on the basis of linguistic codes, incorporation of intentions and contexts benefits learners of Chinese idiomatic expressions who aim to perform successfully in the target culture.

4.3 Conclusion

The concept of idiom has been defined and shaped by scholars of various research disciplines. In this thesis, I propose a working definition of idiom from second language learners’ point of view which emphasize viewing idioms as cultural performances: idioms are semantically opaque and syntactically fixed expressions shared by members of a cultural group to convey and recognize intentions and cultivate relationship. This definition not only addresses linguistic properties but also accounts for motives behind the use of idioms.

Treatment of chengyu, the four-character Chinese idiom, in both general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials and learning sources dedicated to chengyu is examined. The study shows that (1) there’s a deficient coverage of chengyu entries among general CFL/CSL pedagogical materials through all levels, which results from a lack of standard criteria for chengyu selection at each proficiency level; (2) existing materials for chengyu emphasize reading and writing skills,
with very little attention dedicated to the development of speaking and listening skills; (3) the use of *chengyu* is presented, explained and drilled independent of contexts throughout the materials, and (4) a lack of pedagogical activities that address the collocations for each *chengyu* entry.

The thesis recommends that *chengyu* items be treated and learned as cultural performances that convey intentions as opposed to as lexical items with meanings out of context. Three pedagogical principles for designing performance-based *chengyu* materials are proposed, which include (1) present authentic model performances; (2) provide contextualized *chengyu* presentation and drilling; and (3) prepare learners for improvisational performance. A prototype pedagogical material design for *chengyu* is developed as a concrete pedagogical demonstration of the pedagogical principles. The prototype material design address the shortcomings identified among existing materials by presenting a speaking and listening oriented case with contextualized *chengyu* presentation and drilling.
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Appendix: How to sound intelligent:

A performance-base chengyu pedagogical materials prototype

Objectives

*How to sound intelligent in Chinese* is designed for learners to learn how to establish their discourse authority and to display intelligence as a working professional through using and responding to Chinese idioms and cultural references in relatively formal situations, such as interviews, formal banquet, presentations, when working in a Chinese organization.

Target population

*How to sound intelligent in Chinese* is for Chinese learners at intermediate level and above, who have already accumulated a certain number of linguistic items, which enables them to perform (act and respond) in mostly casual and some formal communicative events, meeting the social expectations of native Chinese speakers. It can be used for both autonomous adult learners and learners within an instructional program such high school and college students.

Material Presentation and Structure

Accessible through a multi-media DVD accompanied by a text version for users’ references, this set of material is composed of three units, which are three talk shows (lasting around 1 hour) taken from the TV program *Duihua* (Dialogue). Each unit is divided into 10 stages and each stage is based on a 90-
second-video clip from the talk show. On average, there are two to three idiomatic expressions in each stage. We expect learners or any curriculum using this set material to spend one or two class periods on one stage.

Unit 1: 职业经理人和企业家: MBA 与职业生涯

Professional Manager and Entrepreneur: MBA and Professional Life

Unit 2: 政府发言人：告诉你一个当代的中国

Government Spokesman: Telling You a Modern China

Unit 3: 信息技术与股市：新经济的再探索

IT Technology and Stock Market: Re-exploring the New Economy

Instructional sequence

In each stage learners are expected to go through eight steps no matter through self-study or under the guidance of instructors. Figure 1) presents the detailed descriptions of every step that a learner is expected to go through in each stage, as well as the delivery media of each activity as listed on the left column.
**Step 1:** Read introduction for background information

**Presentation:** Text

An introductory paragraph about the selected TV interview program, the host, the interviewee, and the major topics of the current episode will be presented at the beginning of each unit and each stage. Learners are expected to go through these introduction first before watching the video clips to get a idea about the general context information. The following three samples introduce respectively the general information of the TV program *Duihua*, personal vita of host Yiming Lu and the guest speaker Haiyin Tan, and the main topic of the episode in Unit 2 *Professional Managers and Entrepreneurs: MBA and Business Careers.*
Sample 1: Introduction to *Duihua (Dialogue)*

*Dialogue* is a studio talk show produced by CCTV Economic Section after its brand-new revision in July 2000. With 60-minute length for each episode, it enjoys the longest television time among serious programs of CCTV for now. Each episode starts from a current crisis, a person in the media spotlight, a currently controversial topic or some economic phenomena, capturing fresh economic events, discussing trendy ideas, showing the conflicts of stories and giving prominence to the confrontation of ideas as well as the collision of intelligence. Through abundant conversations and communications between the host, the guests, and the audience, *Dialogue* points out the real thoughts and experiences of celebrities, exposes their anguish and joy of success, reflects the newest trend of economic society, fully reveals the personal glamour and the unknown other side of dialogists.

Sample 2: Introduction to the host and guest speaker

Lu Yiming

PhD in business management from Xi’an Jiaotong University. Participated in various levels of undergraduate argumentation contests home and abroad
from 1996 to 1999 and obtained "champion" or "the best debater" three times.

Since 2000, successively hosted Samsung Intelligence Express, Business Celebrities, Dialogue; designed and hosted columns like Crossfire, Moral Observation in CCTV.

谭海音

1994 年毕业于上海交通大学。1999 年哈佛大学 MBA。同年回国创办易趣网（世界最大中文网上交易平台）并担任易趣网络信息服务公司总裁和财务总监。美国 eBay 公司于 2002 年和 2003 年数度注资易趣网并取得控股权，成立 eBay 易趣。

Tan Haiyin

Graduated from Shanghai Jiaotong University in 1994. Acquired an MBA from Harvard University in 1999. The same year, returned to China and established Eachnet (the biggest online trading platform in Chinese worldwide). Assumed the role of president and CFO of Eachnet network information Service Corporation. The eBay company of USA capitalized Eachnet several times in 2002 and 2003 and finally acquired control of the company. Then eBay Yiqu was formally set up.

Sample 3: Introduction to the topic

通过与一位海归 MBA 兼企业家、一位本土 MBA 兼职业经理人以及几位在政府、商界和教育界工作的官员和专业人士的对话，探讨对于中国的经济发展与中国的职业经理人而言，MBA 的涵义和意义。值得注意的是其中关于“文化”和关于学习过程的讨论。

Through the dialogues with a returned MBA/entrepreneur, a local MBA/professional manager, and some officials and professional persons working in the government, business circles and academic circles, discussing the implications and meanings of MBA for the economic development of China and Chinese professional managers. The discussion of "culture" and learning process is particularly notable.

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**Step 2:** Watch video for the first time

**Presentation:** Video

**Step 3:** Check preliminary understanding for background information and basic understanding of an identified idiom

**Presentation:** Compulsory built-in questions in the multi-media program

Step 3 involves compulsory built-in questions having two purposes. The first purpose is to check learner’s understanding of the background information including the genre of the talk, the roles of the interlocutors and the audience, the topic of the talk show and so on. The second purpose is to check learner’s basic understanding of an identified idiom, including its part of speech, literal meaning, figurative meaning, range of use, etc. The following examples are designed for the previous background knowledge introductions.

**Sample questions:**

1. Dialogue is:
   A. A serious and formal talk show  B. A relaxing and funny talk show

2. The guest, Ms. Tan Haiyin, is:
   A. A returned entrepreneur who acquired MBA in Harvard  B. A local MBA/professional manager

3. The topic of this episode is:
   A. The difference between education in China and USA and the underlying problems
B. The meaning of MBA for economic development of China and Chinese entrepreneurs

**Step 4:** Watch video for the second time

**Presentation:** Video

**Step 5:** Check deep understanding focusing on rhetorical strategy

**Presentation:** Compulsory built-in questions in the multi-media program

Questions in step 5 focuses on learner’s understanding of the function of using a certain idiom, including the interlocutor’s intention of using that idiom as well as the actual effect he/she managed to achieve in the talk.

**Sample:**

1. “哈佛不是那种一定要成龙成凤的人才能进去的”，所以（ ）?
   A. 只有优秀的人才能进  B. 普通的人也可能进

2. “哈佛一定要成龙成风的人才可以进”这可能是
   A. 大多数中国人的印象 B. 哈佛学生的观点 C. 节目主持人的想法

3. 谭海音女士这么说的目的是（可多选）:
   A. 说明哈佛的教育水平并不高 B. 谦虚地表表示自己也很普通
   C. 特别强调信心，决心和毅力很重要

1. "Harvard University is not a place that only some chenglongchengfeng de ren (extraordinary people) can get into", so...?
   A. Only outstanding people can get into Harvard University
   B. Ordinary people can get into Harvard University as well

2. Only chenglongchengfeng de ren (extraordinary people) can get into Harvard University- this is probably:
   A. The impression of most Chinese people
   B. The perspective of students from Harvard University
C. The thoughts of the host

3. Tan Haiyin said so, because her purpose is (multiple response)
   A. To illustrate the quality of the education of Harvard is not high
   B. To humbly indicate she is an ordinary people as well
   C. To specifically stress confidence, resolution, and willpower is very important
   D. To show that she is outstanding

**Step 6: Learn through reading notes**

**Presentation: Text**

After two rounds of Q&A sessions, we expect students to clarify some of their hypothesis through self-learning the notes. In the notes, we not only include detailed answers to all the questions they came across in the previous questions, but also introduce the highly restricted constructions in which an idiom can be used.

**Sample chengyu usage note:**

成龙成凤

在现代中国大众文化里，“龙”指杰出的男人，“凤”指优秀的女人，比如，“望子成龙”、“望女成凤”，等等。因此，我们也可以用“杰出”、“特别优秀”、“拔尖”、“非常厉害”等词表达相同的意思。

开场白中，谭海音虽在哈佛受过良好教育，但依旧通过强调自己并不是“成龙成凤的人”而只是个普通人。在访谈这样比较严肃和高雅的场合，用这个成语表达自己的谦虚和教养，十分合适。

除了“成龙成凤的人”，常见的搭配还有“父母/家长都希望孩子/子女成龙成凤”，或者“如今的家长都望子成龙，望女成凤”。

**Cheng long cheng feng**

In modern Chinese culture, the word “dragon” refers to an excellent male while “phoenix” refers to an excellent female. The idioms “wang zi cheng long” (hoping one’s son to become dragon) and “wang zi cheng feng” (hoping one’s daughter to be
come phoenix) shares the similar usage. Therefore the idiom “cheng long cheng feng” is used when we want to express someone very excellent, who is a top-notcher.

In the opening of the talk show, Haiyin Tan emphasizes that she is not someone who’s becoming dragon and phoenix but rather a normal person, although she is well-educated with degree from the MBA program in Harvard. In formal situations like a TV interview program, the idiom “cheng long cheng feng” is used appropriately to show modesty and fine self-cultivation.

Other collocations of the idiom include:

1. 父母 / 家长都希望孩子 / 子女成龙成凤。
2. 如今的家长都望子成龙望女成凤。

After presenting the notes, video clips of collocation variants are given as example performances of a specific *chengyu* item in addition to the model performance in the talk show. Learners can read the context setting first and then watch the video. The following example presents a variant use of the idiom *cheng long cheng feng* under a new context in addition to the original talk show situation.

**Sample collocation variants:**

**Setting:** American graduate student He Wei is working as an intern in a foreign trade company in Nanjing. His colleague, Lao Zhang, brings up that it’s so wrong that so many Chinese parents have their children go to cram school on weekends. As a foreign intern, He Wei first agrees with Lao Wang, and then expresses his understanding about the phenomenon.

Lao Zhang: 现在的家长都希望孩子上辅导班，你说是不时太过分了？

He Wei: 是有道理，不过现在的家长都希望孩子 *cheng long cheng feng*, 现在都希望孩子的辅导班也够了。

Lao Zhang: Nowadays parents have their children go to cram school even
on weekends! Don’t you think it’s too much?
He Wei: Indeed it’s a little bit too much. But nowadays parents all want their children to become dragons and phoenixes, it is understandable they send them to cram schools on weekends.

**Step 7: Drills to build automaticity and redundancy**

**Presentation:** Multi-media, self-recording function, videos for example and answer

We provide three types of drills in a scaffolding way. The first kind is a complete dialogue substitution, in which students will perform in highly identical contexts as what they have encountered in the video. The exactly same pattern will well fit into all the contexts in this drill. The second kind of drill involves dialogue variation, in which some syntactic variations we have introduced in the notes will be drilled in appropriate contexts to help learners build the redundancy. The last type drill is a “responding drill” in which learners practice how to make response to people who just used a certain idiom to show linguistic and cultural competence. Learners are expected to learn how to paraphrase an idiom in the notes and then put them into practice.

**Sample:**

**Drill 1- Dialogue substitution**

**Context:** 许婷北大毕业后，成功申请到了哈佛大学医学院读博士。北大邀请许婷给师弟，师妹们介绍一下经验，当被问到怎样才能申请上哈佛，许婷谦虚地表示优秀不是唯一的标准。

师弟：师姐，上哈佛特别难吧？要很拔尖的人才能申请上吧？
Drill context: After graduating from Peking University, you gain admission to the medical school at Harvard University. Peking University invites you to share your experience with the junior students. When asked about your admission to Harvard, be modest and mention that excellence is not the only criteria.

Junior student: Shìjiě, shàng Hāfó tèbié nán bǎ? Yào hěn bájiān de rén cái néng shēnqǐng shàng bǎ?
You: Yě bùshì yídīng yào chéng lóng chéng fèng de rén cái néng shēnqǐnishàng Hāfó, hěn pǔtōng de rén, zhī yào yǒu juéxīn, jiù néng shēnqǐng shàng.
Junior student: It must be very difficulty to go to Harvard. One has to be extremely excellent to get admission, right?
You: One doesn't have to be the dragon and phoenix to go to Harvard. Very ordinary people, as long as you are determined, can also get admitted.

Drill 2- Dialogue variations

美国研究生何伟在南京一家外贸公司实习。他的同事老张和他聊起很多中国家长都让孩子周末上补习班的话题，老张很生气。作为美国实习生，何伟并没有太多评论这件事，而是对这样的情况表示理解。请你扮演何伟，回答老张的问题。
老张：现在的家长周末都要让孩子上补习班，你说是不是太过分？
何伟：是有点儿过分，不过现在的家长都希望孩子成龙成凤，周末让孩子上补习班也可以理解。

Drill context: You work at a foreign trade company as a foreign intern in China. One of the Chinese interns tells you that her mother sent her to learn
three instruments when she was a child. Express that you think it’s understandable.

Chinese intern: Shàngxué de shíhòu wǒ mā měizhōu yào wǒ xué sān zhòng yuèqì, lèi sì wǒ le.
You: Xiànzài de jiāzhāng dōu xiàng huí lái chóng lóng chóng fèng, xué sān zhòng yuèqì yè kěyì lijiē.
Chinese intern: When I was in school, my mother sent me to learn three instruments every week. I was so exhausted!
You: Nowadays parents all what their children to become dragons and phoenixes, it is understandable they send them to cram school on weekends.

Drill 3-Responding Drills

你是在香港大学学习计算机的大学生李享，你的学长上个月在谷歌公司技术部实习，他回来后和你聊起他的一些感受——在那个部门工作的人都十分优秀。你也谦虚地表示，你对此有所了解。
学长：谷歌技术部真厉害，都是些成龙成凤的人在那儿工作。
李享：那是肯定的，我也听说只有特别拔尖的人才能在那儿工作。

Drill context: You are Li Xiang, an undergraduate studying computer science in Hong Kong University. One of your seniors was doing his internship in technique department of Google. He talked about some of his feelings after coming back: the people who work there are all outstanding. You modestly say that you had heard about it before.

Senior: The technique department of Google is really fantastic. I felt that everyone working there is outstanding.
Li Xiang: Of course. I heard that only those who stand out can work there.

Step 8: Application Exercises
Presentation: Multi-media (mini-interview)

In the open-ended application exercises, learners are expected to apply appropriate rhetorical strategies using the idioms in fixed patterns previously drilled. Learners are expected to construct their speech as participants in a reciprocal conversation rather than only focusing on using the target idioms.

Sample application exercises:

Context: You are a Yale finance major M.A. graduate and you earned a B.A degree from Tsinghua university before you came to the US. Now you are in a job interview for a position in a Fortune 500 company in China. The PR manager asks about your education background.

PR manager: Nǐ běnkē shì Qīnghuá , shuòshì yǒu qúle Yēlū , dòu shì hǎo xuéxiào , bù shì tèbié yōuxiù de rén dòu jìn bù qù ba?
You: Qíshí Qīnghuá hé Yēlū dòu bù shì yīdìng yào chéng lóng chéng fèng de rén cái néng jǐnqù de , hěn pǔtōng de rén , zhīyào yǒu juéxīn , dui zìjī de wēilái yǒu míngquè de guihuá , dòu kěnéng xīyín xuéxiào lǚqū nǐ.
PR manager: Nà nǐ juédé nǐ suàn shì pǔtōng de rén ne, háishi yōuxiù de rén ? nǐ zěnme kàn zìjī zhèduàn jīnglì?
You: liǎn ér yǒu zhì ba. wǒ shì yīgè zixin de rén , érqì dui zìjī de wēilái hěn yǒu guihuá , suǒyǐ wǒ huì shuō zījī shì yīgè yōuxiù de rén. Dàn tóngshí wǒ yě shì pǔpǔtōngtōng niánqīngrén zhǒng de yīgè, wǒ néng yǒu duān qiúxué jīnglì , kěnéng yě zhīshǐ yīnwéi wǒ bǐ biérén fūchū le gēngduō nŭlǐ.

PR manager: You got Bachelor’s degree in Tsinghua university, and Master’s from Yale. They are both outstanding schools. Is it true that only exceptional people can be enrolled in?
You: In fact, the students of Tsinghua and Yale are not necessarily exceptional. Even though you are an ordinary person, as long as you have determination and clear plan for the future, you can make them believe you are the student
they need.

PR manager: Then how do you define yourself, an ordinary one or an exceptional one? How do you regard the experiences as a student?
You: Both, I think. I’m confident and I have a plan for my future, therefore I define myself as an exceptional person. However, I’m just one of the common young people. Perhaps the reason why I could attend these two schools is I exerted more effort than other people.