

**Sabbatical Project Report**

**Fall 2020 – Spring 2021**

**Learning Chinese Characters and Idioms through**

**Their Interesting Stories, Culture and Philosophy**

**by**

**Chih-Ping Chang, Ph.D.**

## Preface

I want to thank the College for giving me this sabbatical opportunity to be refreshed, renewed and reenergized as a professor of the Chinese language. This sabbatical project was approved only a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic. When everything was shot down, I felt so grateful that I was in the magical world of Chinese culture and philosophy. At first, with the experience of teaching the Chinese language as a college professor for over 20 years and a Ph.D. in Chinese Linguistics, I thought I knew the Chinese characters and idioms well enough.

Once I started analyzing them, I noticed that a lot of things that I have been taking for granted are not as easy to understand as I thought they would be. After learning from the idiom Wei Bian San Jue that Confucius studied diligently to truly understand the meaning of what he was learning, I decided to follow Confucius' foot steps. When I began to truly understand something, that knowledge was really joyful and rewarding. I felt like a door in heaven just opened up for me to see the wonders and treasures inside. Such moments of enlightenment kept coming during my sabbatical project.

Now I am back teaching. I noticed that I am different. I am much more relaxed and become way more curious, just like a child. My students also noticed the changes in me and wanted to know more about Chinese characters and idioms, especially in the context of Chinese culture and philosophy. I hope after you read this report, you can also find something interesting that makes your everyday life extraordinary.

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#### **Abstract**

This project focuses on helping people interested in the Chinese language overcome the fear of learning Chinese characters and idioms by giving insight into the wonderful stories, culture and philosophy in these characters and idioms. This project includes two main parts: (1) character analysis through etymology and culture and (2) appreciation of Chinese idioms in the context of interesting historical background and philosophical application. Fifty Chinese characters and twenty idioms were selected and analyzed.

In Part I, a simplified system explaining how Chinese characters were created is proposed and the system includes 3 major methods (Pictographic Method, Associative Method and Semantic-Phonetic Method) plus 1 principle “Recycling.” In addition to analyzing the etymology of the 50 selected characters, interesting usage, as well as cultural and philosophical implications of these characters were also discussed. In Part II, 20 chosen Chinese idioms were analyzed in terms of (1) the literal and intended meaning, (2) historical background, (3) interesting story with philosophical implications, (4) example sentence using the idiom and (5) exercises to reinforce the learning.

The Conclusion includes a summary of the analyzed Chinese characters and idioms, as well as benefits to me, the Chinese Program, the Department, Other Departments, the College and the Academic Chinese Community.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Chinese language is an interesting language, especially its characters (the writing symbols) and four-character idioms because you can learn a lot about Chinese history, culture and philosophies. In addition, you may also obtain a different perspective of things or concepts that you have been taken for granted. In other words, you will have an exciting eye opening experience if you know about the things just mentioned, in addition to just learning the characters and/or idioms.

However, learning Chinese characters and idioms has always been very difficult. To start with, not a lot of Chinese people know about the history, culture or philosophies behind these characters or idioms, not even for teachers teaching this language. Furthermore, even you may pick up something interesting about a few Chinese characters or idioms, most learners of the Chinese language may not even have a systematic study of how characters and idioms are related, which may even give the learners further appreciation of this beautiful language.

With the purpose of helping learners of the Chinese to learn about the wonderful stories, history, culture and philosophies through the study of Chinese characters and idioms, this project will include two main parts: (1) character recognition through pictures and culture and (2) appreciation of Chinese idioms through their stories and cultural background.

However, before we can start analyzing any Chinese characters, a fundamental understanding of how Chinese characters are formed is essential because only by having such a knowledge, we will be able to correctly analyze these characters and fully appreciate the beauty of the Chinese language. Therefore, this project will have the following sections. Section 2 will provide the fundamental knowledge of how Chinese characters are formed. Section 3 will discuss the selected characters in relation to Chinese culture and philosophies. Section 4 will be

In this section, two simple but important concepts about Chinese Radicals are introduced. First, Chinese Radicals are basic elements of a character. To illustrate the point, a Chinese character is like a word in English, so the Chinese Radicals are like letters or alphabets in an English word. Therefore, just like different letters form different words in English, different Chinese Radicals form different Chinese characters. Second, a Chinese Radical provides either information about meaning or pronunciation of the Chinese character and this is different from English letters, which generally provide only information about the pronunciation of the word. With the understanding of the relationship between Chinese radicals and Chinese characters, now we can discuss the methods of forming Chinese characters using Radicals.

## 2.2 Methods Explaining How Chinese Characters Were Created

Traditionally, according to the Han dynasty dictionary called *Shuō Wén Jiě Zì* 說文解字 'Discussing Writing and Explaining Words,' there are six principles or methods explaining how Chinese characters were created. They are Xiàngxíng 象形 'pictograms,' Zhǐshì 指事 'simple indicatives,' Huìyì 會意 'compound indicatives,' Xíngshēng 形聲 'phono-semantic compound,' Jiǎjiè 假借 'borrowed characters' and Zhuǎnzhù 轉注 'transfer.'

As mentioned in that dictionary book, the last two were not the same as the first four because they referred to characters either borrowed or transferred from characters that had different meaning but the same pronunciation (Jiǎjiè 假借 'borrowed characters') or two similar characters with the same meaning (Zhuǎnzhù 轉注 'transfer'). However, Zhuǎnzhù 轉注 'transfer' is rarely found in the Chinese language and you will not even find one example for

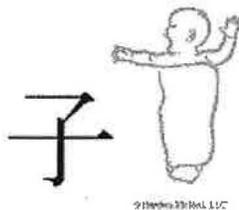
because in reality these characters really lost their original meanings and were recycled to be given new meanings, which are generally more commonly used than their previous meanings.

Furthermore, I have been using my 3+1 proposal, instead of the traditional 4+2 principles, in all my Chinese classes for years and this new proposal has proved to be more efficient than the traditional distinction because there are less principles involved and easier for students to apply the methods to analyze the Chinese characters they are learning.

### 2.2.1 Pictographic Method

A Chinese character formed by the Pictographic Method is generally a picture of the thing or person depicted, for example, 女 nǚ 'female', 子 zǐ 'baby', 木 mù 'tree', 日 rì 'sun', 月 yuè 'moon', etc. For example the character 女 nǚ shows a woman walking with style. By comparison, the character 人 rén 'man' generally does not pay attention to how he walks. Yet, both the man 人 rén and woman 女 nǚ characters have something in common because all human beings walk on two, instead of four like most other animals.

Likewise, 子 zǐ depicts a 'baby' crying with two arms stretching, as shown by the following picture. A baby cannot walk yet, so the bottom part of the character is different from the man 人 rén and woman 女 nǚ characters.



Like all the characters formed by the Pictographic Method, the Chinese character 木 mù 'tree' is a picture of a tree with trunk and branches.

'good' is composed of 女 nǚ 'female' and 子 zǐ 'baby' then makes perfect sense. Since the character 好 hǎo 'good' is formed by combining more than one picture, it is formed by the Associate Method, which requires two or more pictures to form a Chinese character.

Likewise, the characters 林 lín 'woods' and 森 sēn 'forest' are also formed by the Associative Method. Since the character 木 mù means a 'tree,' the meaning of the character 林 lín 'woods' can be easily figured out because woods is a place with more than one tree. However, the character 林 lín cannot mean 'forest' because 'forest' generally has more trees than woods. Therefore, the character 森 sēn is a better idea to mean 'forest' than the character 林 lín because it has more trees in the character.

From the comparison of the characters 森 sēn 'forest' and 林 lín 'woods', we should also notice that characters formed by the Associative Method can have more than two pictures used. Another point that we should also learn is that the maximum that we can repeat in the same Chinese character is three. This is a very important concept to decipher the meaning of a Chinese character. That is, when the same element is repeated three times in a character, it usually implies the concept of 'many.' Therefore, the character 森 sēn does not mean a place with three trees only, but a place like 'forest' with a lot of trees.

### **2.2.3 Semantic-Phonetic Method**

As the name suggests, a Chinese character formed by this method has two parts and two parts only, one giving information about the meaning of the character and the other crucially providing the clue to pronounce the character. Compared with the previous two methods, this

Pictographic Method. By contrast, characters like 好 hǎo 'good' and 森 sēn 'forest' must be formed by the Associative Method because there are two or more radicals in the characters and all the radicals are related to the meaning, not the pronunciation of the characters.

On the other hand, there are two ways to distinguish the Associative and the Semantic-Phonetic Methods. The first way is to see how many radicals there are in the character. For example, the character 森 sēn 'forest' has three radicals in the character, so it can only be formed by the Associative Method. However, for the case of characters that both have two radicals in them such as 好 hǎo 'good' and 媽 mā 'mother,' the second way to distinguish them becomes important and it is by looking for the radical that provides a pronunciation clue.

As a result, the character 媽 mā 'mother' must be formed by the Semantic-Phonetic Method because the radical 馬 mǎ in this character is related to the pronunciation of the character, while the character 好 hǎo 'good' must be formed by the Associative Method because both radicals in the character are all meaning based and have nothing to do with the pronunciation.

Once we can distinguish the three methods, we also need to learn one more important thing about the Chinese characters before we can begin the journey of appreciating the beauty of the Chinese written language. That is, we should know some Chinese characters may lose their original meaning and being "Recycled" to get the new meaning they represent today. Without understanding this, a number of Chinese characters may not make sense at all in the first place and therefore may be difficult to learn because of this.

A famous example will be the character 是 shì 'to be.' It is a complicated character to write without much related to its current meaning 'to be.' However, if we know that this character originally was used to mean 'sundial,' an equipment to tell time in ancient China, then

Chinese people's daily lives. Furthermore, different numbers in Chinese also carry secret messages that only people in this culture will understand. Therefore, having a comprehensive understanding of the secret messages indicated by different Chinese numbers becomes very interesting and important. To accomplish this, first of all, you need to learn the first ten numbers in the language and they will be presented in the following sections. Section 3.1.1 will discuss Chinese number 1 through number 3 with their cultural applications and relationship to Taoism. Section 3.1.2 will focus on the cultural taboos related to number 4 first, and then numbers 5 through 10 will be discussed. Section 3.1.3 will reveal the secret messages indicated by different Chinese numbers.

### **3.1.1 Numbers 1, 2 and 3 in Chinese**

The character yi 一 in Chinese means 'one' and it is very easy to write because all you need to do is to write one horizontal line. In Chinese, numbers 2 and 3 are as easy as number 1 and they are written as èr 二 'two' and sān 三 'three' with two or three horizontal lines, respectively. However, the cultural implications of these three numbers are complicated and interesting.

Chinese people generally interpret numbers as lucky or unlucky. For example, the number yi 一 'one' can be interpreted as lucky because of the association of the meaning "first" with number 'one.' However, the same character can also mean 'alone' or 'lonely,' which then is regarded as unlucky in the Chinese culture. The Chinese Single's Day will probably be the best example to illustrate this unlucky concept implied by this character. The Chinese Single's Day is on November 11 every year because that date can be written as 1111, which is an obvious way to indicate the single status of a person without a partner.

the character shēng 生 ‘life,’ Chinese people generally use the following numbers 1314 to represent a commonly used phrase yì shēng yí shì 一生一世 ‘for all one’s life.’

Again, like the characters yī 一 ‘one’ and èr 二 ‘two,’ the character sān 三 ‘three’ is also a very important number in Taoism, which can be observed from the following expression in Taoism: Èr shēng sān, sān shēng wàn wù 二生三，三生萬物 ‘The Two gave birth to Three and the Three gave birth to everything.’ As mentioned previously, the Two in Taoism refers to the two energies Yīn 陰 ‘the negative energy’ and Yáng 陽 ‘the positive energy.’ From these two energies, three elements were born and they are tiān 天 ‘heaven,’ dì 地 ‘earth’ and rén 人 ‘people.’ From the interactions among tiān 天 ‘heaven,’ dì 地 ‘earth’ and rén 人 ‘people,’ all things begin their lives.

The following table is a summary of the three characters in relation to their cultural implications and the Taoism philosophy.

**Table Summarizing yī 一 ‘one,’ èr 二 ‘two’ and sān 三 ‘three’**

	yī 一 ‘one’	èr 二 ‘two’	sān 三 ‘three’
Cultural Implications	1. Lucky as ‘the first’ 2. Unlucky as ‘lonely’	Lucky	Lucky
In Taoism	Dào shēng yī. 道生一。 ‘The Way gave birth to Yi.’ Yī 一 presents the universe	Yī shēng èr 一生二 ‘One gave birth to Two.’ Èr 二 ‘two’ represents Yīn 陰 ‘the negative energy’ and Yáng 陽 ‘the positive energy.’	Èr shēng sān, sān shēng wàn wù 二生三，三生萬物 ‘The Two gave birth to Three and the Three gave birth to everything.’ Three presents tiān 天 ‘heaven,’ dì 地 ‘earth’ and rén 人 ‘people’ and it is origin of everything.

If you ask a Chinese person, among all the numbers in Chinese, which number is the worst? You will most likely get the answer as number four. If you continue to ask that person why it is number 4, again you may get the same answer even when you ask a different Chinese person and the answer will be as follows. The Chinese character sì 四 ‘four’ has a similar pronunciation as another character sǐ 死, meaning ‘to die or death.’ From this experience to find out the worst number in the Chinese language, you may notice that this concept is so deeply rooted in the Chinese culture that everyone in this culture knows about this.

However, if you continue to ask that Chinese friend how this concept of sì 四 ‘four’ being interpreted as sǐ 死 ‘death’ influences the daily lives of the Chinese people, it may not be easy for your Chinese friend to share examples. Therefore, I will provide some examples from my own personal experiences. Every time when I need to change or get a new telephone number from a Chinese cellular phone store, the worker in the store always asks me if I want a number four in my telephone. Why? Now you know that number four is a taboo for most Chinese people, so it is a common courtesy for a Chinese cellular store to ask such a question.

Another interesting example about sì 四 ‘four’ is from a trip I made to a Chinese medical center in Alhambra. When I entered the elevator, I could not find number 4 to press, instead, I found the letter “P” for the fourth floor. Out of curiosity, I went the fourth floor and asked the people working there. They told me it was because no one wanted to work at that “death” floor, so they changed the number 4 to “P,” meaning “Penthouse,” which everyone wants to stay.

The third example about number 4 in Chinese comes from my experience of participating in a lucky drawing for prizes from the famous Chinese supermarket 99 Ranch Market. Among all the prizes listed, no fourth prize could be found, but instead, the fourth prize was listed as “the

function to restrict each other to make the world harmonious. As a result of the harmonious concept represented by number 5, number 5 is also used to represent the whole classification of something, as listed in the following.

#### Terms Showing Classification Using Number 5

Wǔfú	五福	the five blessings (longevity, wealth, health, virtue and a natural death); all blessings
Wǔwèi	五味	the five flavors (sweet, sour, bitter, spicy and salty); all flavors
Wǔyùè	五嶽	the Five Mountains (Taishan in Shandong, Hengshan in Hunan, Huashen in Shanxi, Hengshan in Shanxi and Songshan in Henan); all the big mountains in China
wǔdàzhōu	五大洲	the Five Continents (Asia, America, Africa, Europe and Australia); the whole world
Wǔguān	五官	the five facial features (ear, eyes, lips, nose, and tongue); facial feature in general

As can be observed from the above table, number 5 is commonly used as a term for classification. For example, wǔfú 五福 ‘the five blessings’ refers to all the important blessings for most Chinese people and they are longevity, wealth, health, virtue and a natural death. Likewise, wǔwèi 五味 ‘the five flavors,’ though refers to the specific five flavors, it is also used as a cover term for flavors in general.

Now, let’s look at how number 5 in Chinese was originally written. Originally the character was written as 𠄎 with the meaning of ‘crossing.’ Later, 𠄎 lost its original meaning and was “Recycled” to have the new meaning as ‘five.’ This is because number 5 is a number right in the middle from 1 to 10. That is, the interception in the character 𠄎 indicates that it is a number above 4 and under 6. Later on, similar to the develop of number 4, two horizontal lines 二 were added to 𠄎 and it became 𠄎. This character eventually evolved into the current form for ‘five’ as 五 wǔ.

Water, Fire and Earth) Wǔ Xíng 五行. In another famous Chinese philosophy, Taoism, number 7 is also regarded as positive and lucky because qī 七 ‘seven’ has a similar pronunciation as qí 齊 ‘together; neat,’ qǐ 起 ‘rise’ and qì 氣 ‘vital energy,’ and all these associations are positive in meaning. In addition, qī 七 ‘seven’ according to Taoism also implies kindness and beauty. A famous example of number 7 implying harmony, kindness and beauty is the Chinese Valentine’s Day. It is called Qī Xi 七夕 because this important and sweet day is on the seventh night of the seven month according to the lunar calendar every year.

Furthermore, the number 7 qī 七 was originally written as , which had the meaning of ‘marking the highest number.’ The horizontal line represents the whole numbers and the vertical line was used to indicate that this number was the highest of all the numbers. There was a time when number 7 was considered as ‘the highest number of all numbers,’ meaning there was no number higher than 7. Therefore, such a writing fitted  fitted the status of number 7 as the highest number at that time. However, later on number 10 became the highest number in the Chinese number system. As a result, the same symbol  was changed to mean ‘ten’ and the symbol for number 7 was modified as  by bending the vertical line. This modified version became the current writing for number 7.

Now, let’s turn our attention to the luckiest number in Chinese. If you ask a Chinese person, what is the luckiest number for the Chinese people? Most of the time, that person will tell you that Chinese people like number 8 the best. Why? Chinese people will always tell you because bā 八 ‘eight’ has a similar pronunciation as another character fā 發 ‘get rich in a short time.’ Because number 8 bā 八 implies the meaning of prosperity and success, this number

jiǔ 九 'nine' is the largest or highest single digit and wǔ 五 'five' is the most central number among the single digits, the expression jiǔ wǔ 九五 'nine five' then is used to refer to the highest and the most central person of the nation. Obviously that person must be the emperor with the utmost power.

Since number 9 is associated with emperors, everything related to emperors usually has this number in the expressions. For example, only an emperor can wear any clothes with nine dragons. Likewise, the Forbidden City where an emperor lived has nine doors, which in Chinese is called Jiǔmén 九門 'Nine doors.' Why do all the emperors in the history of China like the number nine? Remember we mentioned earlier that jiǔ 九 'nine' sounds the same as jiǔ 久 meaning 'long lasting.' Of course, all the emperors like to rule forever.

Since number 9, being the largest number in single digits, this number also carries the meaning of 'all inclusive.' For example, there are nine levels to classify the positions of all officials in the government. Jiǔ chóng tiān 九重天 'the ninth heaven' refers to 'the highest level of heaven' because Chinese people believe that there are nine levels in heaven. Moreover, the expression 九泉 jiǔ quán literally means 'the nine springs' with the intended meaning of 'the underworld' because in the Chinese belief system there are nine springs in the underworld.

In a similar sense, number nine can also mean 'many times.' For example, the expression jiǔ zhuǎn 九轉 'nine transformations' in the Chinese idiom jiǔ zhuǎn gōng chéng 九轉功成 'become successful after many trials' and the famous Chinese food Jiǔ Zhuǎn Dǎ Cháng 九轉大腸 'Braised Intestines in Brown Sauce.' In both expressions, the number 9 does not mean nine times only, but instead it has the implication of 'many times.' It is also interesting to note that in English number 9 may have the implication of 'many,' just like the Chinese

háng, háng háng chū zhuàngyuán 三十六行，行行出狀元。‘Every trade has its master.’

Again, they will tell you that this is a famous Chinese idiom, but they may also say that it should be sān bǎi liù shí háng 三百六十行 ‘three hundred sixty professions,’ instead of sān shí liù háng 三十六行 ‘three six professions.’

This is because the expression sān shí liù háng 三十六行 ‘three six major professions’ was created about over a thousand years ago in the Tang Dynasty to describe the major professions at that time. By contrast, the term sān bǎi liù shí háng 三百六十行 ‘three hundred sixty professions’ was updated in the Ming Dynasty, which was about five hundred years ago. Since Chinese people nowadays generally use only the second part of the original idiom, háng háng chū zhuàngyuán 行行出狀元 ‘Every trade has its master,’ it then makes sense that not a lot of Chinese people know about sān shí liù háng 三十六行 referring to ‘36 major professions; all walks of life.’

Furthermore, number 9 can be expended 8 times more as the number 72 qī shí èr 七十二. For example, Confucius had the most famous qī shí èr dìzǐ 七十二弟子 ‘seventy two disciples’ and the famous Monkey King in the legendary book, the Pilgrimage to the West, has qī shí èr biàn 七十二變 ‘seventy two changes of tactics.’ Originally, these two expressions did mean ‘seventy two,’ but now they can also be interpreted as having the meaning of ‘countless.’

In addition to the many interesting uses of jiǔ 九 ‘nine’ and its multiplications in the Chinese language, studying the etymology of this character may also help us to recognize or write this character better. To start with, this character was also a borrowed character. That is, this character was originally written as  with the meaning ‘stretch out a hand to grab; explore.’ The X on the top represents a stretched out hand and the rest represents an elbow. Another

number 10 is the “all” number that one needs to learn about simple counting. That is to say, after number 10, all of the numbers under 100 are just different combinations of numbers 1 through 10. For example, number 11 in Chinese is *shí yī* 十一, which is the combination of 10 and 1.

As discussed above, since *shí* 十 ‘ten’ is considered as “all” the numbers that one needs to learn, number 10 in the Chinese culture carries the connotation of “being perfect.” However, it is not the most preferred number in the Chinese culture because something “perfect” can also mean “nothing to improve.” Nothing to improve means reaching the top, and when you reach the top, the only thing that will happen next is going down. Chinese culture emphasizes *Zhōngyōng Zhī Dào* 中庸之道 ‘the Golden Mean.’ As a result of this important Chinese philosophy, *shí* 十 ‘ten’ is not as popular as other lucky numbers like *liú* 六 ‘six,’ *bā* 八 ‘eight’ and *jiǔ* 九 ‘nine,’ which carry positive, but not the “perfect” connotations. That is why you can easily find a Chinese business with *liú* 六 ‘six,’ *bā* 八 ‘eight’ and *jiǔ* 九 ‘nine’ in the names of their business such as the famous Chinese supermarkets *Jiǔ Jiǔ* 九九 ‘99 Ranch Market’ and *Yī Liù Bā* 一六八 ‘168 Market,’ but you will never find any Chinese business with *shí* 十 ‘ten’ in the names of their business such as *Shí Quán Shí Měi* 十全十美 ‘to be perfect in every way’ as the name of the store.

### 3.1.3 Summary of Numbers 1 through 10

The following table summarizes numbers 1 through 10 we analyzed so far.

Number	Lucky	Unlucky	Sound	Philosophy	Etymology
<i>yī</i> 一 ‘one’	‘first’	‘lonely’		Taoism: one represents the universe.	Pictograph: one rod —
<i>èr</i> 二 ‘two’	‘double’			Taoism: two presents the positive	Pictograph: two rods ==

					→ ten → 十
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From the above summary, we can obtain the following observations. First, from numbers 1 through 10, most of them are lucky. The only obviously unlucky one is number 4 sì 四 and everyone knowing Chinese culture has this knowledge as well. As a result, Chinese people try to stay away from this number as much as possible from their daily lives. In addition to number 4, number 1 may sometimes be “unlucky” if it is interpreted as “lonely.” For example, the Chinese Single Day on November 11 every year is also called “Double 11 Day” where number 1 is interpreted as ‘lonely.’ By comparison, all the other numbers are regarded as lucky with various preferences.

Second, an important way to determine if a number is lucky or unlucky is by their pronunciations. For instance, number 4 is regarded as very unlucky is simply because of its similarity in pronunciation to another character sǐ 死 ‘death.’ By contrast, numbers 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are lucky also because of their similarity in pronunciation with characters associated with “lucky meanings.” Among them, number 8 bā 八 is often considered by most Chinese people the most preferred because in this culture fā 發 “getting rich” is probably the number one priority in life.

After number 8, numbers 9 and 6 are the next two numbers generally liked by Chinese people because of their associations in pronunciation with characters having the meanings of jiǔ 久 ‘long lasting,’ or liù 溜 ‘smooth.’ Following numbers 9 and 6, number 3 sān 三 is probably less known as a lucky number due to its association with the character shēng 生 ‘life.’ However, if you mention the following number 1314 yī sān yī sì 一三一四 as a common expression

English	Chinese Characters	Pinyin
January	一月	Yī Yuè
February	二月	Èr Yuè
March	三月	Sān Yuè
April	四月	Sì Yuè
May	五月	Wǔ Yuè
June	六月	Liù Yuè
July	七月	Qī Yuè
August	八月	Bā Yuè
September	九月	Jiǔ Yuè
October	十月	Shí Yuè
November	十一月	Shí Yī Yuè
December	十二月	Shí Èr Yuè

Unlike English where each month is indicated by a different word, each month in Chinese is represented by combining the corresponding number with the character 月 yuè ‘month.’ For example, when yī 一 ‘one’ is combined with 月 yuè ‘month,’ the combination 一月 Yī Yuè refers to ‘January’ because it is the first month of a year. Following the same logic, when shí èr 十二 ‘twelve’ is combined with 月 yuè ‘month,’ the combination Shí Èr Yuè 十二月 means ‘December.’

Please note that in Chinese shí èr 十二 is not a new word like English ‘twelve.’ It is a combination of shí 十 ‘ten’ and èr 二 ‘two,’ so in Chinese ‘twelve’ literally means ‘ten’ plus ‘two.’ With this concept in mind, when we see èr shí 二十 in Chinese, we should be able to figure out it means ‘twenty,’ because it is a combination of èr 二 ‘two’ and shí 十 ‘ten.’ Following this logic, we can also see that as long as we learn number 1 through 10, we can count from 1 to 99. For example, 99 in Chinese is jiù shí jiù 九十九, which literally means ‘nine (times) ten (plus) nine.’

Like 月 yuè ‘month,’ when a number is followed by 日 rì ‘day,’ the combination becomes the day of a month the number specifies. For example, when sān shí yī ‘thirty one’ is combined with 日 rì ‘day,’ the combination Sān Shí Yī Rì 三十一日 becomes ‘the thirty first day of the month.’

In addition to month and day of a month, numbers can also be combined with xīngqī 星期 ‘week’ to refer to a specified day of a week, as shown.

English	Chinese Characters	Pīnyīn
Monday	星期一	Xīng Qí Yī
Tuesday	星期二	Xīng Qí Èr
Wednesday	星期三	Xīng Qí Sān
Thursday	星期四	Xīng Qí Sì
Friday	星期五	Xīng Qí Wǔ
Saturday	星期六	Xīng Qí Liù
Sunday	星期日	Xīng Qí Rì

Again, unlike English where days of a week are indicated by different vocabulary, in Chinese it is much simpler. For instance, when the expression xīngqī 星期 ‘week’ is combined with a number like yī 一 ‘one,’ the combination Xīng Qí Yī 星期一 means ‘Monday.’ The literal translation for Xīng Qí Yī 星期一 is ‘week’s first day’ This shows that for Chinese people the first day of a week is Monday, which is different from the western tradition where Sunday is the first day of a week.

In addition, a day of a week generally corresponds to the number of the day referred to. For example, since Tuesday is considered as the week’s second day for Chinese people, number 2 èr 二 is used with xīngqī 星期 ‘week’ to become 星期二 Xīng Qí Èr ‘Tuesday.’ The only exception is Xīng Qí Rì 星期日 ‘Sunday,’ where 日 rì ‘sun’ is used, instead of qī 七 ‘seven.’ Why? To start with, the concept of a week having 7 days came from the Babylonians, who lived in modern-day Iraq. The Babylonians were outstanding observers and interpreters of the heavens

for so many years, I did not know about this story until I started the research for this project. Almost all the teachers of the Chinese language will translate the Rì 日 in Xīngqī Rì 星期日 ‘Sunday’ as ‘day’ because the character Rì 日 can be translated as either ‘day’ or ‘sun’ in English. Without this story, most people can only regard Xīngqī Rì 星期日 ‘Sunday’ as an exception from the rest of the expressions for days of a week in Chinese.

In addition to use numbers to tell days of a week, numbers can also be used to tell time, as shown below.

English	Chinese	Pīnyīn
one o'clock	一點	yì diǎn
two o'clock	兩點	liǎng diǎn
three o'clock	三點	sān diǎn
four o'clock	四點	sì diǎn
five o'clock	五點	wǔ diǎn
six o'clock	六點	liù diǎn
seven o'clock	七點	qī diǎn
eight o'clock	八點	bā diǎn
nine o'clock	九點	jiǔ diǎn
ten o'clock	十點	shí diǎn
eleven o'clock	十一點	shíyī diǎn
twelve o'clock	十二點	shíèr diǎn

As can be observed, generally a corresponding number is used to tell the time. For example, the number shíèr 十二 ‘twelve’ is used for ‘twelve o'clock’ shíèr diǎn 十二點. However, an exception can be observed in liǎng diǎn 兩點 ‘two o'clock,’ where number 2 èr 二 is supposed to be used, instead of liǎng 兩 ‘two only when used preceding a classifier.’



yì 一 'one'



èr 二 'two'



sān 三 'three'

As can be observed, Chinese Number Gestures 1 through 3 are basically the same as how the Chinese characters are written.



sì 四 'four'



wǔ 五 'five'

Number Gestures 4 and 5 also follow the same principle when people use their fingers to count, regardless what language they speak as a native language.



liù 六 'six'

Chinese Number Gesture 6, however, is quite interesting because the same gesture can have different interpretations in different contexts other than the Chinese language. For example, if you make a hand gesture here, people may think you are 'making a phone call.' If you go to Hawaii, this is a popular hand gesture meaning 'Aloha!' Why does this hand gesture in the Chinese language mean 'six?' If you look at the character six liù 六, you will find this hand

Now, you may also notice that the Chinese Number Gesture for 8 used in China and 7 used in Taiwan may look similar as shown below.



Although they look similar, from the differences in the images they represent and the directions of the pointing finger, we can still make a distinction. First, the one meaning 'eight' as shown in (1) does look like an upside down version of the character bā 八 'eight,' while the Taiwanese version of seven as shown in (2) does look more like the Arabic number 7. Furthermore, for the one meaning 'eight' in (1), the pointing finger is pointing horizontally, while for one meaning 'seven' in (2), the pointing finger is pointing downward.

As the Chinese Number Gesture 9, it has a hand gesture like the following.



The bended pointing finger indicates 'minus one' from ten.

As for the Chinese Number Gesture 10, it has three varieties as shown below.



Five	Wǔ	五			
Six	Liù	六			
Seven	Qī	七			
Eight	Bā	八			
Nine	Jiǔ	九			
Ten	Shí	十			 

As can be observed, most of Chinese Number Gestures are consistently used everywhere in the Chinese communities, for example, numbers 1 through 6 and number 9 gestures.

Furthermore, we also notice that there are differences in the Chinese Number Gestures for 7, 8 and 10, when they are used in China or Taiwan. These differences provide an interesting clue with regard to the influences of the person using different hand gestures to indicate

numbers. For example, if you see a person consistently using  meaning 'seven,' most likely this person is from mainland China or he/she has a great influence from mainland China.

By contrast, if see another person keeps using the hand gesture  to indicate 'seven,' most likely he/she is from Taiwan or has a great influence from Taiwan.

count to 99 because 99 in Chinese is jiù shí jiǔ 九十九, which literally means ‘9 (times) 10 (plus) 9.’ However, with just a few more characters, we will have a comprehensive understanding about how numbers are used in the Chinese language. The following is the list of these characters.

English	Character	Pīnyīn
Zero	〇	Líng
Hundred	百	Bǎi
Thousand	千	Qiān
ten thousand	萬	Wàn

To start with, zero in Chinese is líng 〇. Does the symbol 〇 look like the Arabic number 0? Is it a real Chinese character? Yes, it is a real Chinese character created during the reign of the only empress in the history of China, Empress Wǔ Zhētiān ‘Empress Zhetian Wu,’ in December 689 AD. Only about 30 Chinese characters were created and they were called Zhétiān Wénzì ‘the Chinese characters of Empress Wu.’ Her subjects were forced to use them during her reign, but the use of these characters were stopped right after her death.

Only a few of these characters created during the reign of Empress Wu survived and the most famous one and still commonly used is the character 〇 líng. When this character was first created, its meaning was ‘star.’ After all the characters of Empress Wu ceased to be used, their original meanings were also forgotten. When the Arabic numerals were introduced to China during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), the concept of zero was new when it was first introduced because the Chinese numeral system was from 1 through 10 at that time, while the Arabic numeral system is from 0 through 9. Since the character 〇 líng created during the reign of Empress Wu resembled the Arabic symbol 0, the character obtained a new meaning and become a commonly used Chinese character in the modern Chinese language. Now we know that the

case means ‘a lot of,’ then the correct literal translation should be ‘a lot of last names,’ which in turn refers to ‘the common people (with a lot of different last names).’

After the character *bǎi* 百 ‘hundred,’ let’s move to the next important character in counting, *qiān* 千 ‘thousand.’ The original form of this character is  and it is a combination of a person *rén* 人 with one horizontal line 一. This horizontal line indicates an extension of what a person can count. Since it is the next larger unit than *bǎi* 百 ‘hundred,’ this character refers to the meaning of ‘thousand.’

In addition to *qiān* 千 being a unit for ‘thousand,’ some expressions using the character is also interesting to know. For example, although *qiān jīn* 千金 literally means ‘thousand gold,’ this expression is a respected term referring to someone’s daughter. Another interesting example is *qiān suì* 千歲. The literal meaning of this expression is ‘thousand years old,’ but it was used in the past referring to members of the royal family, except for the emperor.

Furthermore, Chinese and English are also different in terms of saying a number that involves the units of ‘thousand’ and ‘hundred.’ For instance, for the number 1100, in English, you can say either ‘one thousand one hundred’ or ‘eleven hundred’ with the expression ‘eleven hundred’ more commonly used. However, in Chinese the only way to say the number 1100 is *qiān yì bǎi* 一千一百 ‘one thousand one hundred.’ Therefore, when an English speaker says the number 1100 as ‘eleven hundred,’ it is a lot more difficult for a Chinese speaker to understand.

Now let’s come to the last character to be discussed regarding the unit of a number, *wàn* 萬 ‘ten thousand.’ This character was originally written as . Just by looking at it, can you figure out what it is? Yes, it is a scorpion. However, the original meaning was lost and now this character changed its meaning to ‘ten thousand’ by way of “Recycling.”

thousand’ into English. For example, when an English speaker talks about a number like ‘thirty thousand,’ Chinese speakers generally will have difficulty to comprehend. Likewise, if an English speaker says a number in Chinese sān shí qiān 三十千, which literally means ‘thirty thousand,’ Chinese speakers will not understand the expression, either. Therefore, knowing the difference between Chinese and English regarding the use of qiān 千 ‘thousand’ and wàn 萬 ‘ten thousand’ is very important in order not to cause any miscommunications.

### 3.1.7 Informal and Formal Numbers

After the discussion of the commonly used units in numbers, it is also important to know that in Chinese there are two forms for numbers, the formal and the informal numbers, as shown below.

Value	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	100	1000	10000
Pīnyīn	líng	Yī	èr	Sān	sì	wǔ	Liù	qī	bā	jiǔ	shí	bǎi	qiān	wàn
Informal	〇	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十	百	千	萬
Formal	零	壹	貳	參	肆	伍	陸	柒	捌	玖	拾	佰	仟	萬

To start with, why is there such a distinction? As suggested by their names, the formal one is used for formal occasions such as check writing or official documents. The main reason for using the formal numbers is to reduce the risks of someone changing the number to a different number. For instance, the number yī 一 ‘one’ can be easily changed to èr 二 ‘two’ or sān 三 ‘three.’ Another reason for using the formal numbers is to make a business look more formal. A famous example for this is the magazine called Yì Zhōu Kān 壹週刊 ‘Next Week.’ If the Yì 壹 ‘one’ is changed to the informal form yī 一 ‘one’ as 一週刊 Yì Zhōu Kān, this famous magazine

The second difference between formal and informal numbers is that some formal numbers are simply added with a person radical rén 亻 to become the formal numbers. There are three of them:

Value	5	100	1000
Pīnyīn	wǔ	Bǎi	qiān
Informal	五	百	千
Formal	伍	佰	仟

Why are only these three formal numbers? Why is only the person radical rén 亻 is used, but not other radicals? It is because all the three characters 伍 wǔ, 佰 bǎi and 仟 qiān were used as an army unit of 5 persons, 100 persons and 1000 person, respectively.

Finally, there is one character wàn 萬 'ten thousand' that is the same used in both formal and informal situations. The reason is also obvious. That is, the character is already complicated enough, so there is no need to find or create another more complicated character to avoid forgery. However, be aware not to be confused with the simplified version of the character wàn 万 as the informal representation because this is a common mistake to mix them.

### 3.2 Colors in the Chinese Culture

In Chinese culture and art, there are five standard colors and they correspond to the Wǔ Xín 'Five Elements' in Chinese philosophy, as shown below.

Color	Chinese character	Pīnyīn	Corresponding Element
cyan or aqua	青	qīng	Wood
Red	紅	hóng	Fire
White	白	bái	Metal
Black	黑	hēi	Water
Yellow	黃	huáng	Earth

By contrast, if qīng 青 is not used as part of a Chinese idiom, then generally the corresponding substitution is possible. For instance, the qīng 青 in qīng píngguǒ 青蘋果 ‘green apple’ can be replaced by the corresponding character lǜ 綠 ‘the color green’ to become the new expression lǜ píngguǒ 綠蘋果, which has basically the same meaning as qīng píngguǒ 青蘋果 ‘green apple.’ Likewise, the qīng 青 in the expression qīng tiān 青天 ‘blue sky’ can also be replaced by the corresponding character lán 藍 ‘blue’ to become lán tiān 藍天 to have the same meaning as ‘blue sky.’

Furthermore, it is also very interesting to note that the color qīng 青 ‘aqua; cyan’ is related to the Wood in the Five Elements of the Chinese culture. From the previous analysis of the etymology of this character, we already knew that the character originally referred to ‘the color of growing plants or trees.’ Therefore, it makes a lot of sense that this color is related to wood because wood is from trees. Since most of the trees are green, it also make sense that character is related to the color green.

By extension, the season that we see the most green is spring, so the character qīng 青 ‘aqua; cyan’ is also associated with the season spring. For example, in the expression qīng chūn 青春 ‘youth,’ qīng 青 is used together with the character chūn 春 ‘spring’ because the combination of both creates the meaning of ‘youth.’ Following that logic, since the spring season is the first season of a year, qīng 青 also implies the direction of ‘east’ because east is where the sun rises at the beginning of a day.

‘hotter.’ In China, the farther south you go, the hotter generally it will become. Therefore, it make sense that the direction of ‘South’ is associated with the color red. By extension, which season of a year will generally be the hottest? Yes, summer. By this simple association, the color red is also associated with the season of ‘summer.’

Do you know what color do Chinese people like the most? Yes, it is the color red. Do you know why? There are two legends about this. The first one is related to the monster Nian, called nián shòu 年獸 ‘the Year Monster’ in the Chinese language. The Nian monster always came out to eat Chinese people at the end of a year. Once Chinese people learned that the monster was afraid of the color red, they started using the color red as much as they could at the end of every year, for example, red spring couplets on doors and windows, red new clothes for everyone and red lanterns.

The second legend is related to the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, Liú Bāng 劉邦 ‘Bang Liu’ (202–195 BC). He rose up as the leader of the rebellion against the Qin Dynasty after he killed a gigantic white serpent, which was the son of the White Emperor. The legend said that Liú Bāng 劉邦 ‘Bang Liu’ was the son of the Red Emperor. Hence, with the establishment of one of the greatest dynasties in the history of China, the color becomes a very lucky color for the Chinese people.

Being the luckiest color for the Chinese people, the color red is used for all the joyful events. For instance, the traditional clothes for the bride and the bridegroom are red in a wedding. Of course, all the decorations for a wedding are also red. In addition, during an important day for new born babies called Mǎn Yuè ‘Baby’s Completion of its First Month of Life,’ hóng dàn 紅蛋 ‘red eggs’ are served to friends and family members to celebrate joy and

and was scared away by the color red and the shining color of the money. The old beggar also told the old couple to Shǒu Sui 守祟, meaning ‘to stay late and watch out for the monster Sui.’ By practicing these, the old couple saved their precious child from the harm of the monster, so they shared these with their neighbors so that everyone could benefit from these practices.

Now, Chinese people still practice these traditions like putting the wrapped red envelope under the pillow of their children and staying up late on the last day of a year. However, most Chinese people nowadays only know the practice of staying up late on the New Year Eve as Shǒu Sui 守歲, which literally means ‘watch out for the year’ without the slightest idea that originally the term was Shǒu Sui 守祟, meaning ‘to stay late and watch out for the monster Sui’ and the interesting story behind this term.

Likewise, now most people only know the term yā suì qián 壓歲錢 ‘Chinese New Year money’ and think that it is the money for their children during the Chinese New Year. Most Chinese people do not even know that the term yā suì qián 壓歲錢 is intended for the elders to wish them for longevity, while the term yā suì qián 壓祟錢 ‘money to hold down the monster Sui’ should be used for their children during Chinese New Year.

After we have a better understanding of the term hóng bāo 紅包 ‘the red packet,’ we should also know an interesting interpretation difference between Chinese and the western cultures in general, regarding the color red used in a stock market. In the United States, when stocks in the stock market are up, the color green is used to indicate profits because the color green in a traffic light means ‘go,’ while the color red is used when stocks are down because that color in a traffic light means ‘stop.’ However, in China, everyone loves to see the color red for a stock market because this color indicates profits and joy because the stocks are up. Now, you

Once we have a better understanding of the Five Elements and what they represent, we can revisit the color white and see why this color is related to the direction of West, the element of Metal and the season of fall? To start with, let's take a look at the etymology of the character. There are two versions about how this character was originally created. The character was originally written as 白. There are two different interpretations of this original form.

The first interpretation is that this character originally represented two tongues, one on top of the other, and it meant to talk without stopping. Because of this originally intended meaning, we get expressions like the following that include using this character: *biàn bái* 辯白 'defend oneself,' *tǎn bái* 坦白 'confess,' *duì bái* 對白 'dialogue' and *páng bái* 旁白 'narrative.' As an extension of this meaning of 'talking without stopping,' this character can also be used to mean 'in vain' or 'empty,' for example, *bái zuò* 白做 'do something in vain' and *kòng bái* 空白 'blank.'

The second interpretation of the original form 白 for the character was the image of a candle flame, with the center stroke representing the wick, or the image of the sun, with the center stroke representing the ray of the sun. For the Chinese culture, the candle flame or the ray of the sun is considered as the color white, which is quite different from those of other cultures. Another interpretation to get the meaning of the color white from this character was to regard the original form 白 as a picture of an acorn, which is white inside of it.

After knowing that the character *bái* 白 can mean 'the color white,' 'empty; in vain,' or 'talk without stopping,' now let's try to understand why the character has something to do with

遊記 ‘Journey to the West’ also confirmed that the West is the direction to the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Since the character **bái** 白 is associated with old age and death, it become easier for us to see the connection between this character and the direction of West.

Then, why is the character **bái** 白 also associated with the fall season? This association also has something to do with the concept of death. The fall season is considered as a “dying” season in the Chinese culture, which can be observed by the falling leaves of trees. Since the color white is the color of death in the Chinese culture, the fall season as the season that all lives begin to fade away. Therefore, the fall season and the color white establish a relation through the concept of death they both indicate. This is how the character **bái** 白 is related to the fall season.

To sum up, according to the above analysis, the character **bái** 白 is related to the element of Metal, the direction of West and the fall season has something more to do with the implied meaning of ‘death’ than the ‘color white’ meaning carried by the character.

### **3.2.4 The Color Hēi 黑 ‘Black’**

After discussing the color white as the element of Metal, let’s continue to the fourth important color in the theory of the Five Elements, the color black. The color black corresponds to the element of Water, which represents the state of calmness. The color black is also associated with the direction of North and the winter season. Why? To start with, if you go to China, the farther north you go, the longer the night will become. What is the color of night? Yes, the color black. That is why the color **hēi** 黑, ‘black’ is associated with the direction of North.

Chinese culture complicate people's lives and make them blind to see the Way. For Taoism, a great method to know the Way is through the color black. A noticeable influence of this philosophy is the Chinese traditional painting called Shān Shuǐ Huà 山水畫 'Landscape Painting,' which generally uses only the color black.

Moreover, it is also interesting to take a look at the stymology of the character hēi 黑 'the color black' because it helps us to see how Chinese people express their concept of this color by things that are common in their daily lives. This character was originally written as 𤟉. The four dots at the bottom of the character means 'fire,' the middle part tǔ 土 'soil' refers to the 'stove' because in the old time stoves were made of soil, and the top part of the character represents 'a cooking pot with things inside.' When people cook, the stove becomes "black" because of the fire. This is how the color black is indicated through things that are familiar to them.

### 3.2.5 The Color Huáng 黃 'Yellow'

Now we have come to the last color of the five major colors in the Chinese culture, the color yellow huáng 黃. This color is associated with the element of Earth. The direction related to this color is Center. This color is used to indicate the change of season or the third month of every season. This color was worshipped as early as the reign of the legendary Huáng Dì 黃帝 'the Yellow Emperor,' who was regarded as the ancestor of all the Han people or Chinese people. The Yellow Emperor and his army honored the value of "Yellow Earth," which was a symbol of farming because the Yellow Emperor taught Chinese people farming. This change from hunting to farming helped Chinese people settle down and gradually become a country.

In addition, according to the Taoism philosophy, the color yellow also indicates the balance of Yin and Yang. The following is an illustration of the relationship between the five major colors and their portion of Yin and Yang.

Color	The portion of Yin and Yang
Aqua	New Yang
Red	Full Yang
Yellow	Balance of Yin and Yang
White	New Yin
Black	Full Yin

As can be observed from the above illustration, the color yellow is in the middle of Yin and Yang with a perfect balance of half Yin and half Yang. In other words, the color yellow serves as the transition from Yin to Yang or vice versa. That is why this color is used to indicate change of season, which is the third month of every season.

Furthermore, the etymology of the character huáng jīn 黄 is 𡗗, which depicts a person wearing a yellow jade indicated by the rectangular box in the middle of the character. Because yellow jades are one of the rarest kinds of jade, the person who wears them must be very special, too. Who is the most special person in the whole country of China? Of course, the emperor. That is how this character is used to indicate the color yellow because it is the color for emperors because only emperors can wear the precious yellow jades.

### 3.2.6 A Summary of the Five Major Colors in the Chinese Culture

This section is to summarize the five major colors in the Chinese culture, as well their corresponding directions, elements in Wǔ Xíng ‘the Five Elements,’ Yin-Yang distribution, seasons and symbolic meanings for Chinese people. Geographical features of China will be the focus of discussion related to these five major colors.

color aqua is related to the element of Wood. Following the same logic, at what season will you see more green trees? That is why this color is associated with the spring season. Then it is easy to associate the spring season with the beginning of Yang and Life.

If you start from Zhōng Yuán 中原 ‘Central Plains’ going west, you will find the weather become hotter and hotter. Moreover, in southern China, you will also find the soil is reddish, instead of being like the yellow soil found in Central Plains. What season of a year will the weather become hotter? That is why the color red is related to the summer season. Then it is also easy to relate the color red with the element of Fire when we know that the color red implies heat. Furthermore, Yang means ‘positive energy,’ so it is also easy to relate the color red with the Full Yang concept because of the color’s association with summer and heat. As for why the color red is considered the luckiest color in the Chinese culture, in addition to the legends mentioned before, it is also easy to associate the summer concept indicated by the color red because people generally like to celebrate when the weather is nice and hot. That is why we have a long summer for vacation.

Again, if you go from Zhōng Yuán 中原 ‘Central Plains’ to the west, the view will be completely different. You will see more big mountains, which are covered by snow almost year round. That is why the color white is associated with the west direction because you will see a lot of white snow going west. When you go west, you will also notice that trees are dying out and fewer and fewer people live in the west of China. Such a scenery will remind you the fall season when everything is fading away. When things are dying out, it is also easy to think of the concept of death. Since the fall season is considered as the beginning of everything turning desolate, the concept of New Yin (the negative energy) can also be easily perceived.

radical 竹 because in the old time baskets were made of bamboo. Another interesting difference between the major color qīng 青 ‘aqua’ and the color blue lán 藍 is that lán 藍 can be used as a last name, while qīng 青 ‘aqua’ cannot.

Another color relating to qīng 青 ‘the color aqua’ is the color lǜ 綠 ‘green.’ For the western cultures, the color green generally means wealth or growth, and that is why when the stock market is up, the color green is used to indicate the growth of wealth. However, for the Chinese culture, this color may carry a negative meaning and therefore should be used more carefully. For example, if a man dài lǜ màozi 戴綠帽子 ‘wears green hat,’ it means his wife is having an affair with another man. This is because in the old time, the color green was considered as a color for the lower class of a society. In addition, to describe that someone is very upset, we can use the expression liǎn dōu lǜ le 臉都綠了, which literally means ‘face all turns green.’ This is another example to show the color green in the Chinese culture can be used in a negative sense.

Even for the character qīng 青 ‘the color aqua,’ when it is associated with a negative meaning for the color green, the expression may also carry a negative connotation. For example, the expression qīng lóu 青樓 ‘whorehouse’ literally means ‘green house’ where the character qīng 青 is used to mean the color green in a negative sense. That is why one should be careful about using this color. For example, it will be very bad if you give your Chinese male friend ‘a green hat.’ If he happens to be married, he will be very upset for getting a green hat from you.

In addition, the character lǜ 綠 ‘green’ is also created by the Semantic-Phonetic Method where the left hand side radical 糸 ‘silk’ is related to the meaning, while the right hand side radical lǜ 彖 contributes the pronunciation clue. Using the radical 糸 ‘silk’ to indicate colors can

translation of Zǐ Jìn Chéng 紫禁城 is ‘Purple Forbidden City.’ However, the character Zǐ 紫 was not translated at all in its English translation because it has nothing to do with the color purple in that expression.

According to traditional Chinese astronomy, the northern sky was divided into three parts called Sān Yuán 三垣 ‘the Three Enclosures’ and the central part is called Zǐ Wēi Yuán 紫微垣, which has the literal meaning as ‘Purple Forbidden Enclosure.’ Zǐ Wēi Yuán 紫微垣 represents a group of constellations in the northern sky associated with the emperor. Although the character Zǐ 紫 in Zǐ Wēi Yuán 紫微垣 has nothing to do with the color purple, the character has been related to emperors, especially the emperor’s palace, Zǐ Jìn Chéng 紫禁城 ‘the Forbidden City.’ That is why in English the meaning “purple” is not included.

Furthermore, although in both Chinese and western cultures the color purple is associated with the royalty, the color purple in Chinese represents another meaning, which is very different from western cultures. That is, the color purple in the Chinese culture indicates a meaning of divinity. The expression Zǐ Qì Dōng Lái 紫氣東來 is the famous expression for showing this special meaning of the color purple in the Chinese culture. The word for word translation of this expression is “(the) purple cloud (that) comes (from the) east” where the underlined English words correspond to the Chinese characters. In Chinese, this expression means ‘very auspicious according to the Chinese astronomy because there are purple clouds coming from the east.’

There is an interesting story behind this famous Chinese idiom. The story is about the founder of Taoism, Lǎo Zǐ 老子 ‘Laozi or Laotze.’ When he was leaving the Zhou Dynasty to a small country in the west, a purple cloud followed him from the east. During this trip, Lǎo Zǐ 老

Looking white or lighter in skin color has always been highly valued in the Chinese society for women because those who do not need to work in the field for an agricultural society generally belong to the upper class. If a woman who has lighter skin color also has the color red on her face, she will then be considered as healthy, on top of being rich. That is why in Chinese the color pink is called fěn hóng 粉紅, which literally means ‘white (plus) red’ with the implication that the woman with this color is both rich and healthy. As a result, the color pink becomes a popular color, especially for women in the upper class of the Chinese community.

To sum up, the following shows the colors analyzed in this section.

Color	Wǔxíng 五行 ‘Five Elements Theory’	Special Feature(s)
lán 藍 ‘blue’	Water	Last name
lǜ 綠 ‘green’	Wood	Negative; lower class color
jīn 金 jīn huáng 金黃 ‘gold’	Earth	Wealth
zǐ 紫 ‘purple’	Fire	Royalty
jú 橘 or chéng 橙 ‘orange’	Earth	Harvest, good luck
fěn hóng 粉紅 ‘pink’	Fire	White + Red = Rich + Healthy

As can be observed from the above table, the colors blue and green belong to different elements according to the Theory of Five Elements. Although the color qīng 青 ‘aqua’ belong to the same element Wood as the color green, it is different from the color green in that there is generally no negative connotations associated with the color qīng 青 ‘aqua.’

Furthermore, although the color qīng 青 ‘aqua’ is a color between the color green and the color blue, the color lán 藍 ‘blue’ does not belong to the same element as the color qīng 青 ‘aqua.’ On the contrary, the color lán 藍 ‘blue’ belongs to the same element Water as the color hēi 黑 ‘black.’

generating interaction, Wood generates Fire because one can start fire by robbing two pieces of wood and Wood fuels Fire. In terms of overcoming interaction, Wood overcomes Earth because Wood breaks Earth with its roots.

In the theory of Wǔ Xíng 五行, Mù 木 ‘Wood’ is the first element or phase. The character mù 木 is a picture of a tree, and from its original form , you can clearly see a tree with roots, trunk and branches. It represents a matter’s growing stage or phase, the beginning of life. Since Mù 木 ‘Wood’ indicates the growing and beginning of something, it is then reasonable for Mù 木 ‘Wood’ to associate with spring, the beginning of a year, the time all the plants grow. Mù 木 ‘Wood’ is also related to the color qīng 青, which a color between green and blue, a color of life. Furthermore, Mù 木 ‘Wood’ has something to do with the direction of East because it is the direction where the sun rises to mark the beginning of a day. According to the Yin and Yang theory, Mù 木 ‘Wood’ is also considered as the New Yang, which marks the beginning or growing of something. All these relations point out that the nature of Mù 木 ‘Wood’ indicates the growing phase of matters.

After Mù 木 ‘Wood,’ the second element or phase in the theory of Wǔ Xíng 五行 is Huǒ 火 ‘Fire.’ The original form of huǒ 火 ‘fire’ is , showing the flames going up. Huǒ 火 ‘Fire’ represents a matter’s prosperity stage like fire burning up. Huǒ 火 ‘Fire’ is associated with summer because of the heat represented by the season. It is also related to the direction of South because the farther south you go, the hotter it will become. Huǒ 火 ‘Fire’ is connected to the color hóng 紅 ‘red’ because both represent the prosperous stage of a matter. Their close relation can be observed from a Chinese expression hóng huǒ 紅火, which can be translated word for

to do with a combination of metals, the character was then used to refer to metals in general and gold in specific. Since this character jīn 金 ‘metal’ can be used to refer to metals in general, it is also a commonly used radical to go with characters that are metals. For example, in the characters tóng 銅 ‘copper’ and tiě 鐵 ‘iron,’ the left hand side radical in both characters uses jīn 金 ‘metal’ as an indication that they are both metals.

Jīn 金 ‘Metal’ shows the decline stage of matters and its corresponding season is fall. Jīn 金 ‘Metal’ is also associated with the color white because it is the color of death in the Chinese culture. Likewise, Jīn 金 ‘Metal’ refers to the direction of West for the same reason that it is the direction for the dead to go in the Chinese culture.

In terms of generating relation, Jīn 金 ‘Metal’ generates Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ because when metal containers hold running water, water has shapes and can be measured. In terms of overcoming relation, Jīn 金 ‘Metal’ overcomes Mù 木 ‘Wood’ because axes made of metal can cut down trees.

Now, we come to the fifth and the last stage of the Wǔ Xíng 五行 ‘Five Elements’ cycle, Shuǐ 水 ‘Water.’ Its original form was written as , showing the flowing water in a river. Since water generally flows down, not up, Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ indicates the low point of the matter, or the matter’s dying or hiding stage. Its corresponding season is winter because it is the season to rest. The color that matches Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ is black because in winter nights are a lot longer. The cardinal direction related to Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ is north. Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ as a representation for winter and the color black, so it is also considered as Full Yin in the Yin and Yang theory.

In terms of generating relation, Shuǐ 水 ‘Water’ generates Mù 木 ‘Wood’ because water makes trees grow. Mù 木 ‘Wood’ is the first stage of the Wǔ Xíng 五行 ‘Five Elements’ cycle,

Two important things can be observed from the above table. First, the Five Elements in the theory of Wǔ Xíng 五行 can be clearly distinguished in terms of their distribution of Yin (the negative energy) and Yang (the positive energy). Second, the theory of Wǔ Xíng 五行 'Five Elements' really influences almost every aspects of Chinese people's daily lives. In addition to the five major colors, seasons and directions, tastes, human organs, music sounds and emotions are also classified into five elements or phases according to the Wǔ Xíng theory.

Furthermore, even the Traditional Chinese Medicine is deeply influenced by this theory. According to the Traditional Chinese Medical Science, people get sick mainly for two reasons: (1) outside reasons such as cold caused by season change and (2) inside reasons such as illness caused by emotions. It is a lot easier to take care of illness caused by outside reasons than inside reasons. For example, when people get sick because of catching a cold during a cold season like winter, according to the the Wǔ Xíng theory, Chinese herbal doctors generally will prescribe something that may warm up the body to take care of the illness caused by the winter, the element of Water. That is also the reason that Chinese people eat Tonic Food during the winter to keep themselves warm and healthy.

As for the reasons caused by inside reasons such as emotions, doctors with Traditional Chinese Medical Science training generally uses another emotion from the element that will overcome the emotion that caused the illness. A famous example was a story recorded in the book of Guǎng Yáng Zǎ Jì 廣陽雜記 'Guangyang Miscellaneous.' At the end of Ming Dynasty, there was a student who studied extremely hard for ten years in order to pass the National exam. One day he passed the very difficult exam. He was overjoyed to the point of becoming very sick.

music focusing on the Shāng 商 ‘re’ musical note is generally fast and clear and is good for the lungs.

The Jué 角 ‘me’ is comfortably high pitched with a long duration and is good for the liver. The Zhǐ 徵 ‘sol’ music makes people passionate and high spirited and therefore is said to be good for the heart. Finally, the Yǔ 羽 ‘la’ music is light and gentle, which is good for the kidneys. The gentle Chinese music makes people peaceful and the high spirited music build up people’s confidence. Listening to different types of Chinese music thus benefits people’s five major organs.

This usage of music as part of the Traditional Chinese Medicine can also be observed in the characters for music and medicine, which are yuè 樂 and yào 藥, respectively. The original character for music is 樂, which is composed of 系 ‘string’ and 木 ‘wood’ to represent a wooden musical instrument. The only difference between yuè 樂 and yào 藥 is the grass radical 艹 on the yào 藥 ‘medicine’ because most of the Chinese medicine are herbal. This interesting similarity between yuè 樂 ‘music’ and yào 藥 ‘medicine’ is another example showing that music is an important part as medicine according to Traditional Chinese Medical Science.

### 3.4 The Characters for Cardinal Directions

The four cardinal directions in Chinese are dōng 東 ‘east,’ xī 西 ‘west,’ nán 南 ‘south’ and běi 北 ‘north.’ In this section, we will analyze dōng 東 ‘east’ and xī 西 ‘west’ together first because the combination of dōng 東 ‘east’ and xī 西 ‘west’ as one word dōngxī 東西 has a

Now, let's discuss the character nán 南 'south.' Its original form is , which is a picture of a house with a door. Why does a house with a door have something to do with the direction of 'south?' Again, to understand this, we need to understand Chinese culture. According to Fengshui, the art of placement in Chinese culture, a good house generally has its door facing south and it is called Zuò Běi Cháo Nán 坐北朝南 'Sitting in the north and facing south.' Chinese people have been using this criterion to buy houses for thousands of years because in China houses facing south do have the advantage of getting less cold wind in the winter. Once you understand this cultural background, then the character nán 南 showing a house with a door meaning 'south' make perfect sense because it represents the wisdom of the Chinese ancestors.

How about the character běi 北 'north?' Its original form  shows that it is a picture of two persons having their 'back' against each other because originally this character did mean 'the back of a person.' Why does the back of a person have something to do with the direction of 'north?' Again, to understand this, you need to understand the Chinese culture. Since the cold wind generally comes from the north during winter, a leader in Chinese culture always stand in a place with his back facing north so that the leader will not catch a cold. This is such a common practice that the direction of 'north' is considered as the VIP or emperor's position.

To sum up, the analysis of the characters showing cardinal directions shows us that it is important to look at these characters from the context of the Chinese culture. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that people from the Chinese culture may have different perspectives about concepts like 'east' and 'west' from other cultures. In addition, by studying these

were the greatest enemy for growing new and young plants of rice. The second reason for using the huǒ 火 ‘fire’ radical is because it is believed to be the color of fall in the Chinese culture.

Then, how about dōng 冬 ‘winter?’ To start with, this character is composed of two radicals: the ice radical 冫 at the bottom of the character and the 夂 radical at the top of the character and its original form 𠂔 is basically the same as its modern form. In the Chinese language, the water radical is presented by three dots, as shown 氵. When water becomes ice, it is less water, and that is why the ice radical 冫 is indicated by two dots. The reason for having the ice radical is obvious because the winter is generally icy and cold. Then how about the other radical 夂? This radical is an abbreviation of another character zhōng 終 meaning ‘end.’ Since winter is the last season of a year, it then make sense to indicate winter with the radical 夂 to indicate it is the season to end all the seasons of a year.

To sum up, the analysis of chūn 春 ‘spring,’ xià 夏 ‘summer,’ qiū 秋 ‘fall’ and dōng 冬 ‘winter’ provide interesting information about how each character was created to show the features of each season in terms of the Chinese culture. Such an analysis for sure will make the study of these characters more interesting and informative than simply memorizing them.

### 3.6 List of All Characters Analyzed with a Brief Summary

A total of 50 characters were analyzed and they are listed below by categories with a brief summary for each.

#### (1) Numbers

Value	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	100	1000	10000
Pīnyīn	Líng	Yī	èr	Sān	Sì	Wǔ	Liù	Qī	bā	Jiǔ	shí	bǎi	qiān	wàn
Informal	0	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十	百	千	萬
Formal	零	壹	貳	參	肆	伍	陸	柒	捌	玖	拾	佰	仟	萬

#### (4) The Four Cardinal Directions

<b>Direction</b>	dōng 東 'east'	xī 西 'west,'	nán 南 'south'	běi 北 'north'
<b>Etymology</b>	東 = 日 'sun' rises from the 木 tree in the 'east.'	西 shows a bird return to its nest when the sun sets in the west.	南 is a house with a door facing 'south'	北 is a picture of two persons having their backs against each otherg
<b>Cultural Notes</b>	dōng xī 東西 gets the meaning of 'things' because people must go to the east or west market to buy thihgs.		Zuò Běi Cháo Nán 坐北朝南 'Sitting in the north and facing south.' is an important criterion for a good house in Chinese Fengshui.	VIPs always have their backs facing 'norht.'

#### (5) The Four Seasons

<b>Season</b>	chūn 春 'spring,'	xià 夏 'summer,'	qiū 秋 'fall'	dōng 冬 'winter'
<b>Etymology</b>	☁☀ clouds+sun Spring is marked by being sunny and cloudy.	☀☞ sun+person Summer is the time a person needs to raise his hand to protect his eyes from the heat.	秋 grain+fire Fall is the harvest season and the color of fall is fire.	冬 end + ice Winter marks the end of four seasons and is icy.

### 4. Chinese Idioms and Schools of Philosophy

A Chinese idiom like Duiniú Tánqín 對牛彈琴 “to play the lute to a cow” generally has four characters. From Chinese idioms, you will learn a lot about Chinese culture, for example, mythical fables, historical stories, classical well-known expressions or the wisdom of the ancestors

philosophy will be discussed in light to see their influences on the development of Chinese idioms.

The first major school of Chinese philosophy to discuss is Rújiā 儒家 ‘Confucianism.’ This school was developed from the teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and the teachings were recorded in the famous book called Lún Yǔ 論語 ‘the Analects of Confucius.’ It is a system of moral, social and political thought and its influence also spread to Korea and Japan. The major Confucian concepts include rén 仁 ‘humanity,’ zhōng 忠 ‘loyalty,’ xiào 孝 ‘filial piety’ and lǐ 禮 ‘ritual.’

The second major school of Chinese philosophy is Dàojiā 道家 ‘Taoism,’ which later developed into a religion. The character Dào 道 literally means ‘way’ or ‘path’ and it is often used to describe the force behind natural order. Taoism emphasizes on Wú Wéi 無為, which literally means ‘non-action or not intervening’ with the focus on doing nothing unless there are needs to improve. Taoism also emphasizes on emptiness and the strength of softness or flexibility. In Taoism, nature, ancestor spirits and a group of gods, led by the Jade Emperor, are often mentioned. The most important book is *Tao Te Ching* (or *Daodejing*), written around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by Lao Tzu (or Laozi). The second important book for Taoism is *Zhuangzi*, named after its author. The Yin and Yang symbol is also important in Taoism.

Fǎjiā 法家 ‘Legalism’ is the third school of Chinese philosophy. Legalism’s main idea is to set strict laws, or deliver harsh punishment. According to Legalism, a ruler should govern his subjects according to Fǎ 法 ‘law,’ Shù 術 ‘tactic’ and Shì 勢 ‘power.’ Legalism is a pragmatic political philosophy. Under Lǐ Sī 李斯 ‘Si Li,’ in the third century B.C., Legalism essentially became a system of government that was centralized, dictatorial and having a tendency to tell

- (3) Brief introduction of the sources and background of each idiom story;
- (4) Example sentence using the idiom with Pinyin (phonetic spelling) and English translation;
- (5) Exercises to reinforce the learning of the idiom and its story.

## 4.2.1 Idioms Related to Confucianism

Four idioms related to Confucianism are presented below and they are Wěi Biān Sān Jué 韋編三絕, Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ 克己復禮, Mèng Mǔ Sān Qiān 孟母三遷 and Yà Miáo Zhù Zhǎng 揠苗助長.

### 4.2.1.1 Wěi Biān Sān Jué 韋編三絕

The character by character translation of this idiom is as follows.

韋 Wěi = leather

編 Biān = binding

三 Sān = three (intended meaning: many times)

絕 Jué = broken

When you put all the four characters together, it literally means ‘the leather binding (of the bamboo scrolls) has broken three times or many times.’ This idiom is used to describe someone who studies diligently.

Who was the first person being described by this idiom? Yes, he was the famous Confucius (551–479 BC)! This story is from Volume 47 called Kǒngzǐ Shǐjiā 孔子世家 ‘Confucius Family’ of the famous Shǐjì 史記 ‘Historical Records of Sima Qian.’ Confucius is honorably called 至聖先師 ‘the First and the Greatest (or literally the Holiest) Teacher.’ His

times, even the binding leather of the bamboo scrolls were broken many times. Chinese people, therefore, created this idiom Wěi Biān Sān Jué 韋編三絕 ‘the leather binding (of the bamboo scroll) has broken three times or many times’ to describe Confucius’s diligence on studying with the purpose of encouraging their decendents to study hard, following Confucius’s example.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

讀書要有“韋編三絕”的精神，只有這樣才能瞭解所學的真正意義。

Dúshū yào yǒu “Wéi Biān Sān Jué ” de jīngshén, zhǐyǒu zhèyàng cái néng liǎojiě suǒ xué de zhēnzhèng yìyì.

‘When we study, we should have the spirit like Confucius ‘who studied so digelently that the bidning leather of the bamboo scrool got broken many times,’ and only in this way, we can understand the true meanings of what we are learning.’

#### **Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:**

1. What is the meaning of 韋 Wéi in this idiom?

Answer = leather

2. What is the meaning of 編 Biān in this idiom?

Answer = binding

3. What is the meaning of 三 Sān in this idiom?

Answer = three (implying many times)

4. What is the meaning of 絕 Jué in this idiom?

Answer = broken

5. What are the literal and intended meanings of this idiom?

Answer = (1) The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘the leather binding (of the bamboo scrolls) has broken three times or many times.’

### 4.2.1.2 Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ 克己復禮

The character for character translation is as follows:

Kè 克 = restrain

Jǐ 己 = oneself

Fù 復 = return

Lǐ 禮 = rites

The literal meaning of this idiom is “restrain oneself and return to the rites. The intended meaning of this idiom is to “achieve the Perfect Virtue by having self-control and following rites.’

This is a famous Chinese idiom from the bible of Confucianism Lún Yǔ 論語 ‘the Analects of Confucius’ in the chapter of Yán Yuān 顏淵 ‘Yuan Yan.’ To start with, Yán Yuān 顏淵 ‘Yuan Yan’ (521 to 481 B.C.) was the best student among Confucius’ 72 famous students. One day, he asked Confucius about Rén 仁 ‘The Perfect Virtue or humaneness,’ which is an essential concept for Confucianism. Confucius answered, “Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ wéi Rén 克己復禮為仁,” which means ‘Restraining oneself and returning to rites is the Perfect Virtue.’ In simpler and easier to understand terms, Confucianism thinks that Rén 仁 ‘the love for all human beings’ can be achieved by self-control and returning to rites (or following rules).

Then Yán Yuān continued to ask about the rules to follow in order to achieve the Perfect Virtue, and Confucius answered, “Fēi lǐ wù shì, Fēi lǐ wù tīng, Fēi lǐ wù yán, Fēi lǐ wù dòng. 非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動。” which can be translated as ‘look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety.’

Therefore, to make the four Codes of Conduct of Confucius' teaching easier to remember, I will re-translate this famous expression "Fēi lǐ wù shì, Fēi lǐ wù tīng, Fēi lǐ wù yán, Fēi lǐ wù dòng. 非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動" as 'See no evil, Hear no evil, Speak no evil and Do no evil.' Hopefully, through such a discussion of this idiom, you can see the wisdom in the Chinese idioms in general. For instance, by a simple expression of only four Chinese characters like Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ 克己復禮, we understand the essential and probably the most important concept in Confucianism.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

他一直是一個奉公守法，克己復禮的人。

Tā yìzhí shì yíge Fèng Gōng Shǒu Fǎ, Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ de rén.。

'He has always been a person, who is law-abiding and self-refrain in order to return to the Perfect Virtue.'

### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of 克 Kè in this idiom?

Answer = restrain

2. What is the meaning of 己 Jǐ in this idiom?

Answer = oneself

3. What is the meaning of 復 Fù in this idiom?

Answer = return

4. What is the meaning of 禮 Lǐ in this idiom?

Answer = rites

5. What is the meaning of the idiom 克己復禮 Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ?

Mǔ 母 = mother

Sān 三 = three (times)

Qiān 遷 = move

The literal meaning of this idiom is: Mencius's mother moved three times. This idiom is to emphasize the importance of choosing the right place for a child's education by using Mencius' mother as an example.

This idiom is from Mèngzǐ Tící 孟子題詞 'Preface to Mencius' by Zhào Qí 趙岐 'Qi Zhao' in the Han 漢 Dynasty. The word "Mencius," like Confucius, is translated from the Chinese expression Mèngzǐ 孟子, meaning 'Master Meng.' Mencius's last name is Mèng 孟 and his first name is Kē 軻. Mencius (372-289 BC) has often been honorably described as Yǎshèng 亞聖 'the second Sage,' after only Confucius. Mencius was a student of Confucius' grandson, he inherited Confucius' ideas and developed it further. A key belief of Mencius was Rén Xìng Běn Shàn 人性本善, meaning 'humans are innately good,' but this innately good quality requires the right environment to grow.

This key belief of Mencius is closely related to this idiom because Mencius' mother really set a good example about finding the best place for his son's education. Mencius' father died when he was very young. His mother took care of him all by herself and their lives were difficult. At first, they lived by a cemetery, where the mother found her son, Mencius, imitating the paid mourners in funeral processions. Being aware of this bad influence, Mencius' mother decided to move.

The second place they moved to was near a market in the town. Mencius then started to imitate the shouting of merchants to sell. Seeing this, his mother became very concerned about his son's new habit under the influence of the market environment. Therefore, they moved

(2) the intended meaning: Moving for the purpose of finding the best environment for one's children.

6. What are Mencius' last and first names?

Answer = Mencius's last name is Mèng 孟 and his first name is Kē 軻.

7. What is Mencius' key idea in relation to this idiom?

Answer = A key belief of Mencius in relation to this idiom is Rén Xìng Běn Shàn 人性本善, meaning 'humans are innately good,' but this innately good quality requires the right environment to grow.

8. What is the Chinese expression for Mencius and its meaning?

Answer = The word "Mencius" is translated from the Chinese expression Mèngzǐ 孟子, meaning 'Master Meng.'

9. What is the respected term for Mencius and its meaning?

Answer = Mencius has often been honorably called as Yǎshèng 亞聖 'the second Sage,' after only Confucius.

10. What were the three places that Mencius' mother moved in this idiom?

Answer = The first place was near a cemetery, the second place was close to a market, and the final place was next to a school.

#### 4.2.1.4 Yà Miáo Zhù Zhǎng 揠苗助長

The character for character translation is as follows:

Yà 揠 = pull up

Miáo 苗 = seedling

Xióngjījí 雄雞集 ‘Roaster Set’ published in 1959. Mr. Guo’s reasonings for changing the Yà 揠 in the idiom to Bá 拔 was because Bá 拔 was easier to write and recognize. At the same time, there was the nationwide Campaign Eliminating Illiteracy in China, so the original idiom was replaced in all the elementary school textbooks. The new term was widely used in the sixties. However, in the nineties the original idiom Yà Miáo Zhù Zhǎng 揠苗助長 was restored in all the elementary school textbooks.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence:

很多人為了在短時間內減輕體重就不吃飯，這種“苗助長”的減肥方法只會有害健康。

Hènduō rén wéi le zài duǎn shíjiān nèi jiǎnqīng tǐzhòng jiù bù chīfàn, zhèzhǒng “Yà Miáo Zhù zhǎng” de jiǎnféi fāngfǎ zhīhuì yǒuhài jiànkāng.

‘In order to lose weight quickly, many people choose not to eat, but this short cut of losing weight like the farmer ‘pulling up his seedlings to help them grow’ will only be harmful to one’s health.’

#### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Yà 揠 in this idiom?

Answer = pull up

2. What is the meaning of Miáo 苗 in this idiom?

Answer = seedling

3. What is the meaning of Zhù 助 in this idiom?

Answer = help

4. What is the meaning of Zhǎng 長 in this idiom?

Answer = grow

5. What are the literal and the intended meanings for Yà Miáo Zhù Zhǎng 揠苗助長?

really impressive by this philosophy, so I spent more time studying idioms related to this philosophy. After finishing the writing for the first four idioms related to Taoism, by accident I saw this idiom Sàì Wēng Shī Mǎ 塞翁失馬. As a professor of the Chinese language, I have taught this idiom in my Chinese 4 classes for many years, but have never learned so much when I revisited this idiom this time for my project. I really love to share what I learned this time about this idiom. That is why there are five idioms for Taoism. I hope you can enjoy these stories and the enlightments I gained from this great philosophy.

#### 4.2.2.1 Péng Chéng Wàn Lǐ 鵬程萬里

The character for character translation of this idiom is as follows:

Péng 鵬 = Chinese legendary giant bird

Chéng 程 = fly

Wàn 萬 = ten thousand

Lǐ 里 = a traditional Chinese unit of distance (about one third of an English mile)

The literal translation of this idiom is: Peng, the Chinese legendary giant bird, flies ten thousand Li. This idiom is now used to congratulate someone when they graduate and wish them ‘a bright future with unlimited potential.’

This idiom was from *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 Xiāoyáoyóu 逍遙遊 'Enjoyment in Untroubled Ease.' The book *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 is authored by Zhuāngzǐ 莊子 'Master Zhuang' (369-286 BC). Master Zhuang's first name is Zhōu 周 and his Zi 字 'courtesy name' is Zǐxiū 子休. Master Zhuang was the most important scholar after Lǎozǐ 老子, the founder of Taoism, and people

also about several thousand miles. When it was motivated to fly, its wings looked like clouds hanging in the sky. At that time, there was a person called Qí Xié 齊諧 'Xie Qi' and he was good at recording things strange and special. He said that when the bird was moving to the Southern Sea, its wings flapped the surface of the water with a splash longer than 3000 Li. Then it soared on the whirlwind as far as 90,000 Li in the sky. The expression Jiǔwàn lǐ 九萬里 '90,000 Li' here was shortened as wàn lǐ 萬里 '10,000 Li' as a common expression to indicate long distance, for example, Wàn lǐ Chángchéng 萬里長城 'the Great Wall of China.' Therefore, from this story, we obtained the idiom Péng Chéng Wàn Lǐ 鵬程萬里.

This idiom has been used as congratulations when someone graduates. On a personal note about this idiom, I had been given this idiom by my teachers every time when I graduated from kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, high school, college and all the way to Ph.D. graduation. When I became a teacher myself, for many years I always gave my students this idiom to wish them a bright future. However, I never knew that there was such a wonderful story behind this idiom, neither did I know about the great philosophy that Master Zhuang tried to share as an inspiration to break away from what other people think of you and soar just like the legendary giant bird Péng 鵬. In addition, I also discovered from this research project that one should know about one's ability to become adept to different changes in life, just like the fish Kūn 鯤 adepting itself to the new role as the bird Péng 鵬, which becomes even greater than before.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

畢業的時候，老師都會用“鵬程萬里”來祝福畢業的學生。

Bìyè de shíhòu, lǎoshī dū huì yòng “Péng Chéng Wàn Lǐ” lái zhùfú bìyè de xuéshēng.

Answer = very big Chinese legendary fish

9. What is the intended meaning for the expression Wànlǐ 萬里 in Péng Chéng Wàn Lǐ 鵬程 萬里 and Wànlǐ Chángchéng 萬里長城?

Answer = It is used to indicate a long distance.

10. Why did the idiom story talk about the big fish Kūn 鯀 that could turn into the giant bird Péng 鵬?

Answer = It is to emphasize one's ability to adapt to different changes in life, just like the fish Kūn 鯀 adapting itself to the new role of the bird Péng 鵬, which becomes even greater than before.

#### 4.2.2.2 Zhāo Sān Mù Sì 朝三暮四

The following is the character by character translation of this idiom:

Zhāo 朝 = morning

Sān 三 = three

Mù 暮 = evening

Sì 四 = four

The literal translation of this idiom is: three in the morning and four in the evening. The intended meaning of this idiom has changed a lot and now it is used to describe someone who is indecisive and keeps changing his/her mind.

This idiom was also from the book of *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子, in the second chapter of the book called *Qíwù Lùn* 齊物論 'On Leveling All Things.' The philosophy about this chapter is that all things should be treated the same and equally. The reasons that things are different are because

are the same as Zhāo Sān Mù Sì 朝三暮四. The idiom Zhāo Qín Mù Chǔ 朝秦暮楚 is used to describe someone indecisive based on the fact that at that time smaller states kept changing their political alliance with either the Qín 秦 or Chǔ 楚 states, which were a lot stronger states during the Warring States period.

Furthermore, one should also know another related idiom called Jǔgōng Fù Xù 狙公賦芋, where Jǔgōng 狙公 means ‘the old man who loved monkeys,’ Fù 賦 means ‘to give’ and Xù 芋 means ‘chestnuts.’ Therefore, this idiom means ‘the old man who loved monkeys gave chestnuts.’ This idiom has the same story as Zhāo Sān Mù Sì 朝三暮四. However, very few people know this idiom, which makes it special for the readers of this report to know something that even most of native speakers of the Chinese language do not know.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence:

如果我是你，我不會相信他說的，因為他那“朝三暮四”的個性讓我浪費了很多時間。

Rúguǒ wǒ shì nǐ, wǒ bú huì xiāngxìn tā shuō de, yīnwéi tā nà “Zhāo Sān Mù Sì” de gèxìng ràng wǒ làngfèi le hěnduō shíjiān.

‘If I were you, I will not believe what he said, because his indecisive personality wasted a lot of my time.’

### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Zhāo 朝 in this idiom?

Answer = morning

2. What is the meaning of Sān 三 in this idiom?

Answer = three

3. What is the meaning of Mù 暮 in this idiom?

Answer = Jǔgōng Fù Xù 狙公賦芋 ‘the old man who loved monkeys gave chestnuts,’

### 4.2.2.3 Yú Gōng Yí Shān 愚公移山

The following is the character by character translation of this idiom:

Yú 愚 = foolish

Gōng 公 = old man

Yí 移 = move

Shān 山 = mountains

The literal translation of this idiom is: The Foolish Old Man Moved the Mountains.

This idiom is similar to a well known English saying: Where there is a will, there is a way. Such a translation of this idiom by using the English saying just mentioned is common. However, one should know that the Chinese equivalent for this English saying is: Yǒu Zhì zhě, shì jìng chéng. 有志者事竟成。 ‘Where there is a will, there is a way.’

This idiom is from the chapter called Tāngwèn 湯問 ‘The Questions of Tang’ in the book *Lièzǐ* 列子. This book was authored by Lièzǐ 列子 ‘Master Lie,’ whose first name was Yùkòu 御寇. Master Lie is another representative of Taoism in the early years of the Warring States period, in addition to Lǎozǐ 老子 and Zhuāngzǐ 莊子. Most *Leizi* chapters are named after famous figures in Chinese mythology and history. For example, in the chapter Tāngwèn 湯問 ‘The Questions of Tang,’ Tang refers to the founding father of the Xia dynasty. In addition, the book *Liezi* is generally considered to be the most practical of the major Taoist works, when it was compared with the more poetic narrative of *Laozi* and the more philosophical writings of

Moved by Yugong's spirit and perseverance, the Emperor of Heaven ordered the two mountains to be moved. Finally, Yugong's dream came true.

This is a good idiom for speech as well because the two mountains can be any two difficulties you would like to overcome. For example, in a speech at Yan'an on 11 June, 1945, Chairman Mao, the leader of China at that time, reinterpreted this idiom story as a call for collective action and received a great success for using this well known Chinese idiom story.

### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Yú 愚 in this idiom?

Answer = foolish

2. What is the meaning of Gōng 公 in this idiom?

Answer = old man

3. What is the meaning of Yí 移 in this idiom?

Answer = move

4. What is the meaning of Shān 山 in this idiom?

Answer = mountains

5. Which English saying is similar to this Chinese idiom?

Answer = Where there is a will, there is a way.

6. What book and chapter did this idiom come from?

Answer = This idiom is from the chapter called Tāngwèn 湯問 'The Questions of Tang,' in the book *Lièzǐ* 列子.

7. What were the two mountains that Yugong wanted to move?

Answer = Tàiháng 太行 and Wángwū 王屋

idiom came from was called chá chuán 察傳, which means ‘investigate rumors.’ Since this idiom is from this chapter, this idiom is an example of making things ambiguous clear.

To start with, this is not a commonly used idiom and very few people know what the second character in the idiom Kuí 夔 really means. Kuí 夔 was originally a monster that appeared at a mountain in the East Sea during the Yellow Emperor period. It looked like an ox with no horns. It only had one foot, but it ran very fast like flying. Its eyes could emit light as bright as the sun, and its roars were louder than the thunder.

When Yáo 堯, a legendary ruler in ancient China, was ruling the country, there was a famous musician also called Kuí 夔. He was a master of music and the legend said that whenever he was playing his musical instrument, all the animals would start dancing, following his music. After Shùn 舜 succeeded after Yáo 堯 as the ruler, he thought music could represent the essences of heaven and earth, and decided to let Kuí 夔 be the official in charge of music.

Shùn 舜 really appreciated Kuí’s talents and decided to send him to all the places to teach people about music. Another high ranking official Zhònglí 重黎 worried that Kuí 夔 could not handle this important task by himself and suggested that Shùn 舜 should send more musicians to do the task. However, emperor Shùn 舜 replied, “The root of music lies in harmony and with Kuí 夔 so talented in music, one person will be enough.” Therefore, we got this idiom to describe a person so talented to do a good job alone.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

他是不可多得的科技人才，公司有了他，真是一夔已足。

Tā shì bùkě duōdé de kējì réncái, gōngsī yǒu le tā, zhēn shì yì kuí yǐ zú.

Answer = Lǚ Bùwéi 呂不韋 ‘Buwei Lü’

9. What was Kuí 夔 was originally in the Yellow Emperor period?

Answer = Kuí 夔 was originally a monster that appeared at a mountain in the East Sea during the Yellow Emperor period..

10. Who did Kuí 夔 refer to in this idiom?

Answer = He was a very famous and talented musician when Yáo 堯 and Shùn 舜 were emperors ruling ancient China.

#### 4.2.2.5 Sàì Wēng Shī Mǎ 塞翁失馬

The following is character by character translation of this idiom.

Sàì 塞 = border

Wēng 翁 = old man

Shī 失 = lost

Mǎ 馬 = horse

This idiom literally means ‘The old man who lived on the border lost a horse.’ This idiom is used to mean ‘a blessing in disguise.’

This idiom is from the book *Huáinán Zǐ* 淮南子 ‘*Master of Huannan*’ in Chapter 18 called *Rénjiān Xùn* 人間訓 ‘Teachings Concerning Human Beings.’ The author of this book is Liú Ān 劉安 ‘An Liu’ (179–122 BC), who was a Han dynasty Chinese prince, ruling the Huainan Kingdom. He is best known for editing the *Huáinán Zǐ* 淮南子 ‘*Master of Huannan*,’ a

happiness. That point of view is to accept life as it is, a concept very similar to the French expression ‘C’est la vie,’ meaning ‘that is life.’

The second important concept worth mentioning is that such a knowledge of Dào 道 ‘the Right Way’ is accessible to everyone. As shown by this story, the wisdom in this story does not come from a monk, teacher or a king, nor is it discussed at length. This wisdom comes from a simple, ordinary old man, who showed us this wisdom by using just a few sentences and these sentences were often repetitive and easy to understand and follow. Therefore, things very important do not have to be complicated. For example, you can start a new and healthy attitude toward all events in your life like this simple old man.

The following is an example sentence using the idiom in a sentence.

中國人的破財免災的觀念就是一種”塞翁失馬”的人生態度。

Zhōngguó rén de pò cái miǎn zāi de guānniàn jiù shì yìzhǒng “Sāi Wēng Shī Mǎ” de rénshēng tàidù.

‘Chinese people’s concept of “Losing Money to Avoid Disaster” is a life attitude like the old man on the border losing his horse, meaning to see silver lining behind the cloud.’

#### **Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:**

1. What is the meaning of Sāi 塞 in this idiom?

Answer = border

2. What is the meaning of Wēng 翁 in this idiom?

Answer = old man

3. What is the meaning of Shī 失 in this idiom?

Answer = lost

4. What is the meaning of Mǎ 馬 in this idiom?

### 4.2.3.1 Shǒu Zhū Dài Tù 守株待兔

The character by character translation of this idiom is as follows:

Shǒu 守	= guard
Zhū 株	= tree stump
Dài 待	= wait for
Tù 兔	= rabbit

The literal translation of this idiom is to guard a tree stump and wait for rabbits.

The intended meaning of this idiom is to wait idly for opportunities.

This idiom is from the book *Hánfēizǐ* 韓非子 'Hanfeizi' in the chapter called Wūdù 五蠹 'Five Bookworms.' The author of this book is Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han,' whose last name is Hán 韓 and first name is Fēi 非. Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han' (280 – 233 BC) was a prince in the state of Han during the Warring States period. He is regarded as the greatest representative for the Legalism philosophy. Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han' promoted the idea that kings should rule their people by establishing appropriate policies according to the current situations, instead of blindly believing that the policies from the ancient saints were always right. Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han' used this idiom story to illustrate that it is not good to follow the tradition without any flexibility.

During the Warring States period, in the state of Song, there was a farmer. One day, when he was working, a rabbit hit a tree stump and died. The farmer took the rabbit home and had a nice meal out of it. After this experience, the farmer thought he did not need to work any

7. What book and chapter did this idiom come from?

Answer = This idiom is from the book *Hánfēizi* 韓非子 'Hanfeizi' in the chapter called Wūdù 五蠹 'Five Bookworms.'

8. What was the purpose of Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han' telling this idiom story?

Answer = Hán Fēi 韓非 'Fei Han' promoted the idea that kings should rule their people by establishing appropriate policies according to the current situations, instead of blindly believing that the policies from the ancient saints were always right.

9. In which state was Hán Fēi 韓非 a prince?

Answer = Hán Fēi 韓非 was a prince in the state of Han during the Warring States period.

10. Where did the farmer live in idiom story?

Answer = The farmer lived in the state of Song.

#### 4.2.3.2 Mǎi Dú Huán Zhū 買櫝還珠

The character by character translation of this idiom is as follows:

Mǎi 買 = buy

Dú 櫝 = wooden box

Huán 還 = return

Zhū 珠 = pearl

The literal translation of this idiom is to 'buy a wooden box and return the pearls inside.'

Tián Jiū 田鳩 ‘Jiu Tian’ then explained the meaning of the story. This story showed that the merchant was good at selling the box, but not the pearl. Moreover, it also showed that the man in the Chu state, who bought the box and returned the pearl, did not know the true value of the pearl.

Tián Jiū 田鳩 ‘Jiu Tian’ used this story to illustrate that most scholars liked to express their theories with beautiful words, and kings only paid attention to those beautiful words, instead of the usefulness of the theories. However, the theories of Mòzǐ 墨子 ‘Master Mo’ were really practical and functional. Therefore, these theories were not decorated with beautiful words so that people would not just love the words and ignore the real functions of these theories. From this story, the idiom Mǎi Dú Huán Zhū 買櫝還珠 was obtained and its meaning is also similar to another Chinese idiom Shě Běn Zhú Mò 捨本逐末 ‘neglect essentials and pay attention to trifles.’

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

學習如果不了解所學的真正意義，只是知道表面的字句，就會像“買櫝還珠”一樣；學得再多也沒用。

Xuéxí rúguǒ bù liǎojiě suǒ xué de zhēnzhèng yìyì, zhī shì zhīdào biǎomiàn de zìjù, jiù huì xiàng “Mǎi Dú Huán Zhū ” yíyàng; xuéde zài duō yě méi yòng.

‘When you study, if you do not understand the true meanings of what is being studied, then it will be like the person who bought the box, but returned the pearl; no matter how much you study, it is going to be in vain.’

#### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Mǎi 買 in this idiom?

Answer = buy

9. Which states did the seller and the buyer come from in this idiom story?

Answer = The seller was from the Chu state and the buyer was from the Zheng state.

10. What is another idiom similar to Mǎi Dú Huán Zhū 買櫝還珠?

Answer = Shě Běn Zhú Mò 捨本逐末 ‘neglect essentials and pay attention to trifles’

### 4.2.3.3 Wēi Rú Zhāo Lù 危如朝露

The word for word translation for this idiom is as follows:

Wēi 危 = dangerous

Rú 如 = as

Zhāo 朝 = morning

Lù 露 = dew

The literal translation of this is: dangerous as the morning dew. This idiom is used to describe that someone’s life is in great danger, just like the morning dew that can vanish the moment the sun rises.

This idiom is related to another important person in Legalism philosophy, Shāng Yāng 商鞅 ‘Yang of the Shang land’ (390 – 338 BC), and it is from the famous book *Shǐjì* 史記 ‘Records of the Grand Historian’ in the chapter of Shāng Jūn Liè Chuán 商君列傳 ‘The Biography of Lord Shang.’

To start with, Shāng Yāng 商鞅 ‘Yang of the Shang land’ has many names. Although the first character in a Chinese full name generally is the last name, the Shāng 商 in both Shāng Jūn 商君 ‘Lord of Shang’ and Shāng Yāng 商鞅 ‘Yang of the Shang land’ refers to the land of Shāng

Although his extreme attitude to uphold the law made the Qin state the strongest among all the states, he also offended a lot of royalties and high ranking officials. Someone reminded him that if he continued to be so strict about upholding the laws, his life would face immediate great danger just like the morning dew that would vanish as soon as the sun came out. Very much hated by the nobility of the Qin state, the next ruler killed Shāng Yāng and his whole family because he was punished and humiliated by Shāng Yāng for an offense, in which he was treated as if he were an ordinary citizen before he became the ruler. This is why we obtained the idiom Wēi Rú Zhāo Lù 危如朝露 to describe a person's life facing immediate and great danger.

The following is an example using this idiom in a sentence.

感到胸部疼痛的人並非都是“危如朝露。”

Gǎndào xiōngbù téngtòng de rén bìng fēi dū shì "Wēi Rú Zhāo Lù.

‘Not everyone who has a chest pain will face immediate danger in life.’

### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Wēi 危 in this idiom?

Answer = dangerous

2. What is the meaning of Rú 如 in this idiom?

Answer = as

3. What is the meaning of Zhāo 朝 in this idiom?

Answer = morning

4. What is the meaning of Lù 露 in this idiom?

Answer = dew

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = The two theories are (1) Dingfǎ 定法 ‘Fixing the Standards’ and (2) Yīmín 一  
氏 ‘Treating the People as One.’

#### 4.2.3.4 Tǔ Rǎng Xì Liú 土壤細流

The character for character translation for this idiom is as follows:

Tǔ 土 = soil (from the nature)

Rǎng 壤 = soft soil (ready for farming)

Xì 細 = small

Liú 流 = stream

This idiom literally means ‘be it any soil or small stream.’ The intended meaning is: Though things may be tiny, if accumulated without stopping, they may produce a great effect.

This idiom is also from the famous book *Shìjì* 史記 ‘Records of the Grand Historian’ in the chapter of Lǐ Sī Chuán 李斯傳 ‘The Biography of Si Li.’ Lǐ Sī 李斯 ‘Si Li’ (280-208 BC) was originally from the state of Chu and served as a low ranking official in the local administration of Chu. One day, he observed that rats outside the house were dirty and hungry, but the rats in the barn were well fed. Then he realized that like rats, people’s social status often depended purely on the random life events around them. Li Si was not able to advance his career in Chu. After finished his education with the famous Confucian philosopher Xunzi, he moved to the State of Qin, the most powerful state at that time to find a better political career.

During his stay in Qin State, Li Si became a guest of the Prime Minister Lu Buwei and got the chance to talk with Ying Zheng, who later became the first emperor of a unified China. Ying Zheng was impressed by Li Si’s view of how to unify China, so the ruler of Qin adopted Li

Answer = soil (from the nature)

2. What is the meaning of Rǎng 壤 in this idiom?

Answer = soft soil (ready for farming)

3. What is the meaning of Xi 細 in this idiom?

Answer = small

4. What is the meaning of Liú 流 in this idiom?

Answer = stream

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = This idiom literally means 'be it any soil or small stream.'

6. What is the intended meaning of this idiom?

Answer = Though things may be tiny, if accumulated without stopping, they may produce a great effect.

7. What book and chapter did this idiom come from?

Answer = It is from the famous book *Shǐjì* 史記 'Records of the Grand Historian' in the chapter of *Lǐ Sī Chuán* 李斯傳 'The Biography of Si Li.'

8. What is the name of the first emperor of a unified China?

Answer = Ying Zheng

9. What was Li Si's proposal to unify China?

Answer = The ruler of Qin spent a lot of money to lure intellectuals to the state of Qin and sent out assassins to kill important scholars in other states, who were not willing to come.

10. What is the quote from Li Si's famous *Jiàn Zhúkè Shū* 薦逐客書 'Petition against the Expulsion of Guest Officers' where we obtained the idiom?

The literal meaning of this idiom is: many armpits make a fur coat. When we first look at the literal meaning of this idiom, we may wonder: How can many armpits make a fur coat. By taking a closer look, then we realize that the Yè 腋 in this idiom does not refer to an ‘armpit,’ but the fur under the armpit of a fox. Therefore, a more accurate literal translation of this idiom should be: many pieces of fur under the armpits of foxes make a fur coat. Then, the intended meaning of this idiom is: Many small contributions add up to something big. In English, we can find something similar like this idiom and it is: A penny saved is a penny earned.

This idiom is from the book called *Mòzǐ* 墨子 ‘*Mozi*’ in the chapter Qīn Shì 親士 ‘Close to the Scholars.’ The author of this book is Mò Dí 墨翟 ‘*Di Mo*’ (470–391 BC). He founded the school of Mohism that argued strongly against Confucianism and Taoism. During the Warring States period, Mohism was actively developed and practiced in many states, but fell out of favor when the legalist Qin Dynasty came to power in 221 BC. During that time, many classics on Mohism were destroyed when the emperor Qin Shi Huang carried out the burning of books. The importance of Mohism further declined when Confucianism became the dominant school of thought during the next dynasty after the Qin Dynasty, the Han Dynasty. Most of the Mohism disappeared by the middle of the Western Han Dynasty.

An important idea in Mohism is promoting the worthy. That is, hire competent and worthy people to fill important positions, regardless of their social class. Such an idea is illustrated in the chapter Qīn Shì 親士 ‘Close to the Scholars,’ where our idiom came from. In this chapter, Mo Di discussed how to get close to and promote people with talents. Master Mo emphasized that there was nothing more important and urgent for a ruler to use people with talents. To illustrate his point that it requires the power of many talents to rule a country well, Mo Di used the following metaphor:

The following is an example sentence using this idiom:

定期定額投資就是一種"集腋成裘"的作法。

Dìngqī dìngé tóuzī jiù shì yì zhǒng "Jí Yè Chéng Qiú" de zuò fǎ.

‘Investing regularly with certain amounts is an act of “many small contributions adding up to something big.”’

**Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:**

1. What is the meaning of Jí 集 in this idiom?

Answer = collect

2. What is the meaning of Yè 腋 in this idiom?

Answer = armpit

3. What is the meaning of Chéng 成 in this idiom?

Answer = make

4. What is the meaning of Qiú 裘 in this idiom?

Answer = fur coat

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = many pieces of fur under the armpits of foxes make a fur coat

6. What is the intended meaning of this idiom?

Answer = Many small contributions add up to something big.

7. What book and chapter did this idiom come from?

Answer = the book called *Mòzǐ* 墨子 ‘*Mozi*’ in the chapter Qīn Shì 親士 ‘Close to the Scholars.’

8. When did many classics on Mohism destroyed and by whom?

respectively, not fate. Now, let us enjoy the story and see how Mozi insisted on his principle of anti-fatalism.

One time, when Mozi was on his way to the Qi State in the north, he met a fortune teller. That fortune teller said, “Today the Emperor of Heaven is killing a black dragon in the north. Since your face is black, it is not suitable for you to go north.” Mozi did not listen to the fortune teller’s advice and continued to go north. The things that Mozi wanted to do was not completed successfully. On his way home, Mozi met the fortune teller again and the fortune teller said, “Didn’t I say that it was not suitable for you to go north?”

Mozi started arguing with the fortune teller. Mozi thought what the fortune teller was nonsense, and what he insisted was the truth. Then Mozi told the fortune teller, “When you use your nonsense to go against my truth, it is like throwing at the stone with eggs, you will have no chance of winning. Even when you throw all the eggs in the world at me, my hard stone will remain undamaged!” After this, people started using this idiom Yǐ Luǎn Tóu Shí 以卵投石 to describe someone doing the impossible, which will for sure lead to failure.

In addition to this idiom, we should also know about another almost identical idiom Yǐ Luǎn Jī Shí 以卵擊石 ‘to strike a stone with eggs.’ The only difference between the two idioms is the third character in each idiom. One uses Tóu 投 ‘throw at’ and the other uses Jī 擊 ‘strike.’ Another difference is that the idiom Yǐ Luǎn Jī Shí 以卵擊石 ‘to strike a stone with eggs’ is from the book Xúnzǐ 荀子 in the chapter called Yìbīng 議兵 ‘On Military Actions.’ Over there, Master Xun used the army of evil going against the army of righteousness was like striking the stone with eggs.

The following is an example sentence using the idiom Yǐ Luǎn Tóu Shí 以卵投石.

明知道打不過他；為什麼還要以卵投石呢？

Answer = In Mozi's opinion, fatalism is an irresponsible belief by those who refuse to admit that their own wrong doing has caused the hardships of their lives.

10. What is another idiom almost identical as Yǐ Luǎn Tóu Shí 以卵投石?

Answer = Yǐ Luǎn Jī Shí 以卵擊石 'to strike a stone with eggs'

#### 4.2.4.3 Sān Cháng Liǎng Duǎn 三長兩短

The following is character by character translation of this idiom.

Sān 三 = three

Cháng 長 = long

Liǎng 兩 = two

Duǎn 短 = short

This idiom literally means 'three long and two short.' The intended meaning is 'unexpected death or death caused by accidents.'

A common understanding is that this idiom is related to a coffin, which generally have four long boards and two short boards. The top and bottom two long boards of a coffin are called tiān 天 'heaven' and dì 地 'earth' and the two long boards on the two sides are called rì 日 'the sun' yuè 月 'the moon.' The two short boards of a coffin are called cǎitóu 彩頭 'the color head (board)' and cǎiwěi 彩尾 'the color tail (board).' It is also interesting to note that cǎitóu 彩頭 in Chinese now generally refers to 'profits (gained in gambling or lottery).' If you put the character hǎo 好 'good' in front of cǎitóu 彩頭, then the combination hǎo cǎitóu 好彩頭 means 'good luck or good omen,' which is very commonly used in almost everything that needs good luck.

Answer = long

3. What is the meaning of Liǎng 兩 in this idiom?

Answer = two

4. What is the meaning of Duǎn 短 in this idiom?

Answer = short

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = This idiom literally means 'three long (boards of a coffin) and two short (boards).'

6. What is the intended meaning of this idiom?

Answer = This idiom generally refers to 'unexpected or accidental death.'

7. What are the four long boards of a coffin called in Chinese?

Answer = The top and bottom two long boards of a coffin are called tiān 天 'heaven' and dì 地 'earth' and the two long boards on the two sides are called rì 日 'the sun' yuè 月 'the moon.'

8. What are the two short boards of a coffin called in Chinese?

Answer = The two short boards of a coffin are called cǎitóu 彩頭 'the color head (board)' and cǎiwěi 彩尾 'the color tail (board).'

9. What is the meaning of hǎo cǎitóu 好彩頭 in Chinese?

Answer = good luck or good omen.

10. What is the practice of Tóu Qī 頭七 'the First Seven Days'?

Answer = Traditionally, the coffin will remain uncovered for seven days and in Chinese we call such a practice tóu qī 頭七 'the First Seven Days.'

Buddha's teaching of Buddhism using fables, parables and stories. The original purpose of this idiom story was to teach people to build up their understanding and learning of Buddhism step by step. Now let us enjoy this story by Buddha himself.

There was a foolish rich man, who was also ignorant. One day, he went to another rich person's house and saw a tall, big and magnificent building. He was envious of that rich person and said to himself, 'I am as rich as that person. Why can't I build a house with three floors like that?' He immediately called for the carpenter and asked him, "Do you know how to build a house like that rich person's?" The carpenter replied, "Of course I do because I built that house." Then the foolish rich man said, "Then, build me a house exactly like the one you built for that rich person."

The carpenter started right away to measure the foundation of the house and prepare the bricks and stones for building that house. The foolish rich man, seeing what the carpenter was preparing for building the house, began to wonder and asked, "What are you doing?" The carpenter replied, "I am going to build a house with three floors!" The foolish rich man said in a stubborn voice, "I do not want the first two floors of the house and you must build me the top floor!" Other people heard about this and they all laughed at this rich man. All the people said, "How is it possible to get the top floor without building the first floor first?"

Then Buddha explained that this was like a person who wanted to practice Buddhism, but did not want to study the bibles of Buddhism diligently and still expected to get a good result. Such a person even said, "I do not want to study to get the first three fruits and I just want to get the best and the highest fruit, which is the āluóhàn guǒ 阿羅漢果 'Arhat.'" Such a thought would also be laughed by people because it was the same mistake made by that rich man. From

6. What was the original purpose of this idiom story?

Answer = The original purpose of this idiom story was to teach people to build up their understanding and learning of Buddhism step by step.

7. Why was it impossible for that foolish rich man to build his dream house?

Answer = He just wanted the top floor without the first two floors.

8. What is the highest fruit that a practitioner of Buddhism can reach?

Answer = The highest fruit is the āluóhàn guǒ 阿羅漢果 'Arhat.'

9. What is the Chinese idiom for 'mirage'?

Answer = Hǎi Shì Shèn Lóu 海市蜃樓

10. What is Shèn 蜃?

Answer = Shèn 蜃 in Chinese is a mythical sea serpent that can create imaginary images of things to confuse people.

#### 4.2.5.2 Jìng Huā Shuǐ Yuè 鏡花水月

The character by character translation of this idiom is as follows:

Jìng 鏡 = mirror

Huā 花 = flower

Shuǐ 水 = water

Yuè 月 = moon

This idiom literally means 'flower in a mirror and the moon in water.' This idiom is used to describe something that is visible but having no substance or something that is an illusion.

expressions *Jìng Xiàng Shuǐ Yuè* 鏡像水月 and *Jìng Huā Shuǐ Yuè* 鏡花水月 are accepted Chinese idioms with the same meaning ‘illusions’ and of course with *Jìng Huā Shuǐ Yuè* 鏡花水月 being more popular. Furthermore, since both *Jìng Huā* 鏡花 ‘flower in a mirror’ and *Shuǐ Yuè* 水月 ‘the moon in water’ basically refer to the same thing as ‘reflections or illusions,’ you can even switch the order and use it like *Shuǐ Yuè Jìng Huā* 水月鏡花, where ‘the moon in water’ goes before ‘flower in a mirror.’ Likewise, you can also switch the original idiom and make it *Shuǐ Yuè Jìng Xiàng* 水月鏡像.

The following is an example sentence using the idiom.

榮華富貴如”鏡花水月，”不必太在意。

Rónghuá fùguì rú “Jìng Huā Shuǐ Yuè,” bú bì tài zài yì.

‘Fame and wealth are just illusions, so we should not care too much.’

**Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:**

1. What is the meaning of *Jìng* 鏡 in this idiom?

Answer = mirror

2. What is the meaning of *Huā* 花 in this idiom?

Answer = flower

3. What is the meaning of *Shuǐ* 水 in this idiom?

Answer = water

4. What is then meaning of *Yuè* 月 in this idiom?

Answer = moon

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = flower in a mirror and the moon in water

Xiàng 象 = elephant

This idiom has the literal meaning as ‘blind people touching an elephant.’ This idiom is used to describe ‘not being able to see the whole picture.’

This idiom is from *Dàbān Nièpán Jīng* 大般涅槃經 ‘Nirvana sutra.’ As mentioned in the book, most people interpreted the nature of Buddha and Buddhism according to their own personal experiences. With the following story, the book showed that when people did that, they would never see the whole picture.

A long time ago, there was a king who asked his officials to invite some blind people to touch an elephant. After touching the elephant, the king would ask each person what they thought an elephant looked like:

- (1) The first one touch one of the tusks and said, “An elephant is just like a turnip.”

其觸牙者，即言象形如菜菔根（蘿蔔）。

- (2) The second person touched one of the elephant’s ears and said, “It is like a dustpan.”

其觸耳者，言象如箕

- (3) The third person touching the head of the elephant shared that the elephant was like a rock.

其觸頭者，言象如石

- (4) Then the fourth person touching the elephant’s trunk confirmed that the elephant was like a pestle.

其觸鼻者，言象如杵

- (5) The fifth person put his arms around one of the elephant’s legs and said, “It is like a wooden mator.”

其觸腳者，言象如木臼

read this story in a bigger picture and in some way understood the intention of this wonderful idiom story.

The following is an example sentence using this idiom.

研究過這個成語故事，我才明白要做到不盲人摸象，真的很不容易！

Yánjiū guò zhège chéngyǔ gùshi, wǒ cái míngbái yào zuòdào bù Máng Rén Mō Xiàng, zhēnde hěn bù róngyì!

‘After studying this idiom story, I then realized that it is not easy to see the whole picture without bias!’

#### Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of Máng 盲 in this idiom?

Answer = blind

2. What is the meaning of Rén 人 in this idiom?

Answer = people

3. What is the meaning of Mō 摸 in this idiom?

Answer = touch

4. What is the meaning of Xiàng 象 in this idiom?

Answer = elephant

5. What is the literal meaning of this Chinese idiom?

Answer = blind people touching an elephant.

6. What is the intended meaning of this idiom?

Answer = This idiom is used to describe ‘not being able to see the whole picture.’

7. Where did this idiom come from?

Answer = This idiom is from *Dàbān Nièpán Jīng* 大般涅槃經 ‘Nirvana sutra.’

A Brahmin disciple called ShànHùi 善慧, meaning ‘Kind and Wise.’ Brahmin disciples are a class in Hinduism, trained as priests or teachers of sacred literature across generations.

ShanHui, on his way to visit the Lotus City, heard that Rán Dēng Fó 燃燈佛 ‘Burning Lamp Buddha’ was going to preach in the Lotus City and he wanted to offer the Buddha fresh flowers.

However, the king of the Lotus City already collected all the fresh flowers before him. When ShanHui searched the whole city for the flowers and became worried because no flowers were left, a young maid passed by him. She was holding a bottle with seven green lotuses. The Heaven, moved by ShanHui’s sincerity of search flowers, made the green lotuses jump out of the bottle. When ShanHui saw this, he sincerely asked the girl to sell him those flowers.

Touched by ShanHui’s sincerity, the maid promised to give him five green lotuses, and for the remaining two green lotuses, she wanted him to offer to the Buddha on her behalf so that she could accumulate blessings for herself. Moreover, she also wanted Shanhui to promise to marry her for generations to come before he became a Buddha himself. The Burning Lamp Buddha told him that he would for sure become a Buddha called Shìjiāmóuní 釋迦牟尼, who was also called Rúláifó 如來佛, the all knowing and powerful Buddha in the famous Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. The young maid that lent him the 7 green lotuses was Yéshūtuóluó 耶輸陀羅, the wife of Shìjiāmóuní Buddha before he became the most honored and famous Buddha in the Chinese culture. This story was condensed into the idiom Jiè Huā Xiàn Fó 借花獻佛 ‘Borrow flowers and offer to the Buddha’ that we know today with the intended meaning ‘to win favor or influence using someone else's property.’

The following is an example sentence using the idiom.

Answer = Rán Dēng Fó 燃燈佛 ‘Burning Lamp Buddha’

9. How many green lotuses did ShanHui offer?

Answer = seven

10. What Buddha did ShanHui eventually become?

Answer = He eventually became a Buddha called Shijiāmóuni 釋迦牟尼, who was also called Rúláifó 如來佛, the all knowing and powerful Buddha in the famous Chinese novel *Journey to the West*.

## **5. Conclusion**

Three parts are included in the conclusion. Part One, 5.1, is a summary of my work on the analysis of Chinese characters. Part Two, 5.2, is a summary of the 20 Chinese idioms presented in this project with my concluding remarks about the five schools of philosophy. Part Three, 5.3, focuses on the benefits that this project will bring and my plan to continue working on the analysis of Chinese characters and idioms as a life long interest for my career as a tenure professor at Mt. San Antonio College.

### **5.1 Summary of My Work on the Analysis of Chinese Characters**

The analysis of Chinese characters were divided into two parts in this project. First, the concept of Chinese Radicals was clarified and the Methods on how Chinese characters were created were improved. Instead of using the traditional six methods, I proposed to use my 3+1 Methods. The three Methods are Pitographic Method, Associative Method and Semantic-Phonetic Method and they are the major principles explaining how Chinese characters were

qī 七 'seven'	'together,' 'rise,' and 'vital energy'		qí 齊 'together' qǐ 起 'rise' qì 氣 'vital energy'	Taoism: qī 七 'seven' = qì 氣 'vital energy'	Borrowing: dividing the whole → seven 十 → 七
bā 八 'eight'	'get rich'		fā 發 'get rich'		Borrowing: Divide → eight 八
jiǔ 九 'nine'	'long'		jiǔ 久 'long'		Borrowing: Explore (stretch out a hand to grab; explore) → nine 乙 → 九
shí 十 'ten'	'perfect'				Borrowing: all → ten 十 → 十

The reason in choosing them first is simply because they are the basic of a number of important things for Chinese people, as well as learners. First, if you know these numbers, you can count from 1 to 99. Second, they are closely related to the concept of 'good luck' or 'bad luck,' which is extremely important for Chinese people. However, most people only know that number 4 in Chinese is bad luck and number 8 represents good luck, but most of them do not know that all other numbers are also commonly used to deliver the concept of 'good or bad luck.' Finally, even though some people may know that other numbers have the function of indicating 'good or back luck,' very few people know in reality that the sources of enabling these numbers to be lucky or unlucky are: (1) the Meaning of the numbers themselves defined in the Chinese culture (2) Pronunciation in association with other characters having a lucky or unlucky meaning and (3) Chinese philosophy, especially Taoism.

The first five colors are the major five colors, which correspond to the Five Elements in the Chinese culture. The cultural implication and language usage of these five major colors were discussed. The other 6 colors were also analyzed in terms of their relation to the Five Elements and their special features, in addition to just being words for colors.

The fourth group of the 5 analyzed characters is listed below.

Wǔ Xíng 五行 Five Elements	Mù 木 'Wood'	Huǒ 火 'Fire'	Tǔ 土 'Earth'	Jīn 金 'Metal'	Shuǐ 水 'Water'
Yin and Yang	New Yang	Full Yang	Balance: half Yin and half Yang	New Yin	Full Yin
Colors	Aqua	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Seasons	Spring	Summer	Change of Every Season	Fall	Winter
'Directions	East	South	Center	West	North
Tastes	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Spicy	Salty
Human Organs	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
Music Sounds	Jué 'Mi'	Zhǐ 'Sol'	Gōng 'Do'	Shāng 'Re'	Yǔ 'La'
Emotions	Angry	Happy	Thinking	Worried	Afraid

The five characters listed here represent the theory of Wǔ Xíng 五行 'Five Elements,' which influences the Chinese culture and Chinese people's lives on a daily basis. The interactions among the Five Elements were discussed in terms of the Yin and Yang theory. The influences of these Five Elements were also illustrated in terms of the aspects of Colors, Seasons, Directions, etc.

The fifth and the final group of the 8 characters is presented in the following.

#### The Four Cardinal Directions

<b>Direction</b>	dōng 東 'east'	xī 西 'west,'	nán 南 'south'	běi 北 'north
<b>Etymology</b>	東 = 日 'sun' rises from the 木 tree in the 'east.'	西 shows a bird return to its nest when the sun sets in the west.	南 is a house with a door facing 'south'	北 is a picture of two persons having their backs against each other

Without the analysis of characters indicating numbers greater than 99 would for sure miss out on a better understanding of the Chinese numbering system, which is very different from other languages. Likewise, the lack of discussion of the formal writing for numbers and how these formal writings were developed will definitely be like having a delicious cake without frosting. The same can be said about including the characters for the four seasons. Including them makes the comprehension of the Five-Element and Yin-Yang theories complete and clearer. Moreover, these characters are in the vocabulary list of the Chinese 3 language class, so including them in the analysis will also help students better recognize these characters with greater appreciation.

## **5.2 Concluding Remarks about the Analyzed Chinese Idioms**

Following the original plan, a total of 20 Chinese idioms were analyzed in terms of the five major schools of Chinese philosophy. Without realizing the little research has been conducted about connecting Chinese idioms and the major schools of Chinese philosophy, at first I did run into the problem of finding the appropriate idioms for the right representatives of different schools of Chinese philosophy, especially for the Mohism philosophy. After a more thorough and diligent study about Mohism, then I realized that this school of philosophy simply disappeared from the history of China about 150 years after Mo Di established this philosophy.

There were two main reasons for the disappearance of this great Chinese philosophy. The first reason is political. The Qin State eventually conquered the other strong states during the Warring States period. The first thing that the Qin dynasty, the first empire in the history of China, did was to kill this school of philosophy. Most people know that the first emperor of the

2	Kè Jǐ Fù Lǐ 克己復禮	Achieve the love for all human beings by self-control and following rules	Yu Yuan (Confucius' greatest student)	Self control and follow rules
3	Mèng Mǔ Sān Qiān 孟母三遷	Move for the education of one's child	Mencius (the second in Confucianism)	The importance of education
4	Yà Miáo Zhù Zhǎng 揠苗助長	spoil things by excessive enthusiasm	Mencius	The importance of doing things step by step
<b>Taoism</b>				
1	Péng Chéng Wàn Lǐ 鵬程萬里	a bright future with unlimited potential	Master Zhuang	Sky is the limit
2	Zhāo Sān Mù Sì 朝三暮四	Indecisive	Master Zhuang	Same thng, just different perceptives
3	Yú Gōng Yí Shān 愚公移山	Where there is a will, there is a way.	Master Lie	The power of strong will
4	Yì Kuí Yì Zú 一壺已足	One talented person is enough for the job	Lǚ Bùwéi	Quality, not quantity
5	Sài Wēng Shī Mǎ 塞翁失馬	A blessing in disguise	Liú Ān	Accept life as it is
<b>Legalism</b>				
1	Shǒu Zhū Dài Tù 守株待兔	Wait idly for opportunities	Hán Fēi	It is not good to follow the tradition without any flexibility
2	Mǎi Dú Huán Zhū 買櫝還珠	put the horse behind the cart	Hán Fēi	Doing things in the wrong order
3	Wēi Rú Zhāo Lù 危如朝露	Dangerous as the morning dew	Shāng Yāng	Being too strick may be life streatening
4	Tǔ Rǎng Xì Liú 土壤細流	Rome was not built in one day.	Lǐ Sī	Accept all talents, including foreign ones
<b>Mohism and One Special Idiom</b>				
1	Jí Yè Chéng Qiú 集腋成裘	Many small contributions add up to something big.	Mo Di	The importance of having many talents to rule a country well
2	Yǐ Luǎn Tóu Shí 以卵投石	Attempt the impossible	Mo Di	Anti-fatalism

Qin Dynasty, people were very tired of fighting. The first few emperors of the Han Dynasty followed the teachings of Taoism and made this dynasty one of the best dynasties in the history of China. Furthermore, after the founding father Laozi, there were so many leaders such as Master Zhuang, Master Lie, Lǚ Bùwéi and Liú Ān, who continued to make this philosophy popular and well liked by emperors, as well as people in China.

The schools of Legalism and Mohism were both originally developed from Confucianism, but both of them quickly disappeared from the history of China without leaving much record of these two great schools of philosophy. The founder of Legalism, Han Fei, was the student of Xun Zi, who was a great philosopher of Confucianism, believing that human nature was evil. Xun Zi proposed to use strict rules to suppress people's evil nature. Legalism went to the extreme by having the most severe laws that everyone must follow, including the emperor and the royal families.

The Qin State adopted this philosophy, unified China and became the first empire in the history of China. However, the three great leaders of this philosophy, Han Fei, Shang Yang and Li Si, were all killed with the most cruelty because the royal families that they punished eventually used the strict laws they established to kill them. Although the Qin Dynasty became the first empire by using this philosophy, this dynasty perished in a short time, only after two emperors. Since this philosophy is really against human nature, after the Qin Dynasty, it also died with the dynasty.

The school of Mohism was also from Confucianism because the founding father, Mo Di, was originally a student of Confucianism. Unlike Legalism, which chose the extreme case of upholding laws, Mo Di went against everything in the teachings of Confucianism. In a time when science was not respected or cherished, with the Qin state's determination to kill this

- Prepare all the instructors in the Chinese Program to be better equipped with systematic instruction and presentation, especially in the areas of learning Chinese characters and idioms.
- Allowing all the instructors of the Chinese language to learn more about the Chinese characters or idioms in the context of the fascinating Chinese culture and a variety of Chinese schools of philosophy.
- Provide detailed, systematic and interesting teaching materials, which require lengthy preparation.
- Share the new resources with my colleagues so that all instructors will be working at the same pace and covering the same materials per chapter and semester.

(3) Benefits to the Students of the Chinese Language:

- Motivate them to become more interested in learning the Chinese language because of the many wonderful stories and cultural notes provided by this project.
- In general, help students at all levels of Chinese classes to have a basic but clear understanding of Chinese characters and idioms; specifically, making Chinese 4 students become good at using Chinese idioms correctly with a knowledge of their sources, historical background and Chinese philosophies.
- Provide them a more interesting way to understand and learn Chinese characters and idioms.
- Appreciate the Chinese culture more because of this detailed and interesting information.

(4) Benefits to the Department:

students with Chinese parents generally have never heard about those fascinating stories or cultural notes about the Chinese characters or idioms.

- Provide interesting and informative teaching materials to other Chinese programs from elementary schools to graduate schools.

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## **Appendix I: the Original Proposal**

### **Sabbatical Project Proposal for Fall 2020 – Spring 2021**

#### **Learning Chinese Characters and Idioms through Their Interesting Stories, Culture and Philosophy by**

**Chih-Ping Chang, Ph.D.**

#### **Abstract**

This project focuses on helping people interested in the Chinese language overcome the fear of learning Chinese characters and idioms by giving insight into the wonderful stories, culture and philosophy in these characters and idioms. This project includes two main parts: (1) character recognition through pictures and culture and (2) appreciation of Chinese idioms by being familiar with their interesting stories and philosophical application. I will carefully select 30 Chinese characters and 20 idioms based on over 20 years of teaching experience and my Ph.D. academic training in Chinese morphology (study of words), and I will use 2 to three pages to analyze each chosen character or idiom. Therefore, I am confident that this project, with over 100 pages of informative analysis of these hand-picked Chinese characters and idioms, will become a wonderful journey toward the appreciation of the Chinese language, culture and philosophy to many interested people and will surely increase student enrollment and retention for the Chinese Program, the World Languages Department and the college.

expression dōngxī 東西 to mean ‘thing.’ Again, we need to learn the meaning from the historical background. When this word was created, the capital city of China was Cháng’ān 長安. In the capital city, there were only two major market places, one in the east of the city and the other in the west. If people wanted to buy things, they could only go to the east or the west market place. The expression dōngxī 東西 meaning ‘things’ becomes a lot more obvious and easy to remember. The following illustration will help to remember the meaning of this expression.

dōngxī 東西 =

dōng 東 east market      xī 西 west market

People buy “**things**” from the east market or the west market in the capital city.

## Part II: Learning Chinese Idioms by Stories and Philosophies

A Chinese idiom like Duiniú Tánqín 對牛彈琴 “to play the lute to a cow” generally has four characters. From Chinese idioms, you will learn a lot about Chinese culture, for example, mythical fables, historical stories, classical well-known expressions or the wisdom of the ancestors of the Chinese people. Moreover, Chinese people use idioms on a daily basis, so learning idioms is a very important part of learning the Chinese language well.

In the second part of my project, I will select 20 commonly used Chinese idioms and describe each idiom in the following format:

- (1) title in Pīnyīn, Chinese characters, and English.
- (2) first paragraph: translation of each character in the idiom of their literal meaning and real meaning, a drawing of the idiom and a similar English idiom.
- (3) second paragraph: a brief description of the story.
- (4) an example sentence using the idiom with its English translation.
- (5) exercises to reinforce the learning of the idiom and its story.

Now let us use the idiom Duiniú Tánqín 對牛彈琴 “to play the lute to a cow” as a sample.

undifferentiated love (*jian'ai*) challenged Confucianism for several centuries and became the basis of a socio-religious movement known as Mohism.

Exercises for reinforcing the learning of this idiom story:

1. What is the meaning of 牛 niú in this idiom?  
Answer: cow
2. What is the meaning of 彈琴 Tánqín in this idiom?  
Answer: play the flute
3. What is the real meaning for the idiom Duiniú Tánqín 對牛彈琴?  
Answer: Someone got the wrong audience to show his talents.
4. When did this story happen?  
Answer: over 2000 years old
5. What is the name of the musician in this idiom story?  
Gongming Yi
6. What happened in this story?  
Answer: The famous musician Gongming Yi performed his best music to a cow, but the cow ignored him.
7. How is the philosopher Mozi's philosophy Jian'ai 'Udifferentiated Love' different from Confucianism?  
Answer: As a simplified comparison, Mozi's Jian'ai is like ancient Chinese socialism, while Confucianism is more like ancient Chinese capitalism.
8. Why did the philosopher Mozi write this idiom story in his book?  
Answer: He wrote the story to tell people why most people could not understand his philosophy Jian'ai 'Udifferentiated Love.' During the Warring States Period, many different smaller countries in China attacked each other to expand their territory. Therefore, most people during Mozi's generation would not understand his idea of 'Udifferentiated Love,' which encouraged countries to love instead of attacking each other. Mozi used this story as a metaphor to illustrate that his great idea was just like the famous musician's music, not appreciated, simply because of the wrong audience.

As shown by the above example of explaining the idiom Duiniú Tánqín 對牛彈琴 "to play the lute to a cow," people interested in studying this idiom for will surely learn a lot more than just knowing the meaning of the idiom. They will know about the famous musician Gongming Yi. They will also learn that this idiom comes from an interesting story that happened more than 2000 years ago. In addition, they will also learn an interesting Chinese philosophy called Mohism because of this idiom.

	Week 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Summarize the most interesting aspect of all the analyzed 30 Chinese characters.</li> <li>2. Discuss the possibilities of combining the analyzed characters to form new expressions.</li> </ol>
	Week 13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review literature for major schools of Chinese philosophy.</li> <li>2. Write a summary for the reviewed schools of Chinese philosophy.</li> </ol>
	Week 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the story, the historical and philosophical background of the first idiom.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report for the first idiom following the format described in this project.</li> </ol>
	Week 15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study the second idiom in relation to its philosophical and cultural background.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report to help people to have a full appreciation of this idiom.</li> </ol>
	Week 16	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research on the third idiom to discover its interesting historical and philosophical background.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report as a result of the research about this idiom.</li> </ol>
<b>Winter</b>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work on the fourth and the fifth idioms in relation to their stories and schools of Chinese philosophies.</li> <li>2. Write two 2-3 page report, one for the fourth idiom and the other for the fifth idiom.</li> </ol>
<b>Christmas and New Year Break</b>		
<b>Spring semester</b>	Week 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study the sixth idiom with the purpose of understanding its historical, philosophical background.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report about the six idiom with the emphasis on its story and its service to a specific school of Chinese philosophy.</li> </ol>
	Week 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work on the seventh idiom emphasizing its story, application to practical usage and the philosophy behind this idiom.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report to describe its story and cultural background.</li> </ol>
	Week 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research on the eighth idiom to understand its story and educational purpose.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report analyzing the individual meaning of each character in the idiom as well as the purpose of the idiom story.</li> </ol>
	Week 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study the ninth idiom to know its meaning, story and philosophical background with a practical application.</li> <li>2. Write a 2-3 page report to describe the findings about the ninth idiom.</li> </ol>

		2. Write a 2-3 page report for the twentieth idiom with an explanation of each character used in the idiom, the story that created the idiom, the philosophical aspect of the idiom and an example sentence using the idiom.
	Week 16	Write a summary of all the 30 characters and 20 idioms studied in this project for the convenience of quick reference and review.

		2. Researched on schools of Chinese philosophy
<b>Winter</b>		1. Wrote Sections 4 and 4.1 (pages 91-95) 2. Prepared and studied about the idiom Wei Bian San Jue
<b>Christmas and New Year Break</b>		1. Wrote Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.1.1 (pages 95-99) 2. Prepared and studied about the idiom Ke Ji Fu Li
<b>2021 Spring semester</b>	Week 1	1. Wrote Section 4.2.1.2 (pages 99-102) 2. Researched on the idiom Meng Mu San Qian
	Week 2	1. Wrote Section 4.2.1.3 (pages 102-105) 2. Studied the idiom Ya Miao Zhu Zhang
	Week 3	1. Wrote Section 4.2.1.4 (pages 105-108) 2. Prepared and studied materials for Taoism and the idiom Peng Cheng Wan Li
	Week 4	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.2.1 (pages 108-113) 2. Researched on the idiom Zhao San Mu Si
	Week 5	1. Wrote Section 4.2.2.2 (pages 113-117) 2. Studied and researched on the idiom Yu Gong Yi Shan
	Week 6	1. Wrote Section 4.2.2.3 (pages 117-120) 2. Studied and researched on the idioms Yi Kui Yi Zu and Sai Weng Shi Ma
	Week 7	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.2.4 and 4.2.2.5 (pages 120-126) 2. Researched on Legalism and the idiom Shou Zhu Dai Tu
	Week 8	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.3.1 (pages 126-129) 2. Prepared materials for the idioms Mai Du Huan Zhu and Wei Ru Zhao Lu
	Week 9	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.3.4 and 4.2.3.3 (pages 129-137) 2. Researched on the idioms Tu Rang Xi Liu and the School of Mohism
	Week 10	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.3.2 and 4.2.4 (pages 137-140) 2. Prepared and studied materials for the idioms Ji Ye Cheng Qiu and Yi Luan Tou Shi
	Week 11	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.4.1 and 4.2.4.2 (pages 140-147) 2. Literature review for the idiom San Chang Liang Duan and the school of Buddhism philosophy
	Week 12	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.4.3 and 4.2.5 (pages 147-150) 2. Prepared and studied materials for the idioms Kong Zhong Lou Ge and Jing Hua Shui Yue
	Week 13	1. Wrote Sections 4.2.5.1 and 4.2.5.2 (pages 150-156) 2. Prepared and studied materials for the idiom Mang Ren Mo Xiang
	Week 14	1. Wrote Section 4.2.5.3 (pages 156-160) 2. Studied materials for the idiom Jie Hua Xian Fo
	Week 15	1. Wrote Section 4.2.5.4 (pages 160-163)

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