

# 50

## ESSENTIAL CHENGYU CHINESE IDIOMS MADE SIMPLE

多此一举  
浩浩荡荡  
一见钟情  
半途而废  
蒸蒸日上 粗心大意  
笨鸟先飞 同甘共苦  
心血来潮  
对牛弹琴  
四方为家  
千方百计  
九牛一毛 龙飞凤舞  
刮目相看 虎头蛇尾 骨气无力  
脚踏实地  
力所能及 全力以赴  
深思熟虑  
更胜一筹 屡战屡胜  
一言为定  
合情合理  
如鱼得水  
轰轰烈烈 落叶归根 两肋插刀  
半真半假  
兴高采烈  
津津有味 破釜沉舟 开天辟地  
精打细算  
急于求成  
擦肩而过 见多识广  
耳熟能详

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# Introduction

What are 成语 (chengyu) and why learn them?

Early on, Chinese learners are sure to encounter 成语(chéng yǔ), 4 character idiomatic expressions carrying great cultural context and historical wealth. Mastery of chengyu is seen as a sign of intelligence and sophistication, and a strong grasp of them is necessary for true fluency. Because many are derived from historical folklore, studying chengyu can also help increase knowledge and appreciation of Chinese culture. In addition, there is no beating the “wow factor” of being able to use the right chengyu at precisely the right time.

## The Problem

Amassing a sizable collection of useful chengyu is anything but simple. There are upwards of 20,000 chengyu, and learners can quickly find themselves overwhelmed. Picking the right chengyu to study can feel like a game of Russian roulette - nothing is more discouraging than spending time to learn a chengyu, only to discover that it is overly archaic,

obscure, and nobody understands. Current resources tend to be heavy on esoteric history but light on what learners really need: how exactly the chengyu can be used, and when and where to use it.

## Our Solution: Essential Chengyu

That’s where our series, Essential Chengyu comes in. In the spirit of the FluentU blog, we will:

- Present 50 common Chengyus worth learning
- Present them in a way that will make learning digestible and memorable
- Provide numerous examples equipping you for real world use

We had a great time researching and compiling this ebook, and we hope you find several you can incorporate into your Chinese-speaking life!

# 半途而废

## GIVE UP HALFWAY

**I**s there a shortcut to Chinese fluency?

Nope.

There are ways to learn faster or better, but to achieve fluency, there is one key condition: you have to persevere and not give up. This brings us to our essential chengyu: 半途而废 (bàn tú ér fèi).

半途而废 means to start doing something, only to give up halfway. Literally, it means to walk half the road and give up.

A breakdown of the characters in 半途而废 (bàn tú ér fèi)

半 (bàn): half

途 (tú): way or road (路途-lù tú)

而 (ér): conjunction meaning “but” here

废 (fèi): to abandon (eg. 废弃-fèi qì)



# 半途而废

# GIVE UP HALFWAY

“运动不能半途而废，要坚持不懈”

“yùndòng bùnéng bàntúérfèi, yào jiānchíbúxiè”

“You can't give up halfway with exercising - you need to persevere”

“世界上只有一种失败它叫做半途而废”

“shìjiè shàng zhīyǒu yīzhǒng shībài tā jiàozuò bàntúérfèi”

“In the world there is only one kind of failure, and it is called giving up halfway”

“普京：做事不喜欢半途而废因此打算竞选总统”

“pǔjīng: zuòshì bú xǐhuān bàntúérfèi yīncǐ dǎsuàn jìngxuǎn zǒngtǒng”

“Putin: I don't like to give up halfway when doing things so I plan on running for president”

“我不是半途而废的人”

“wǒ búshì bàntúérfèi de rén”

“I'm not someone who gives up halfway”

# 半真半假

# HALF REAL, HALF FAKE

**Y**ou know to watch out for counterfeit RMB.

But did you know you should also watch out for RMB that's only half real?

It's a kind of "mutant counterfeit currency" (变种假币 - biàn zhǒng jiǎ bì) that has appeared in recent years. Sometimes the counterfeiters cut the bill in half up the middle and stick them together. Sometimes, they actually cut the bill so that it's half as thick!

As always, there is a great chengyu for this phenomenon 半真半假 (bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ).

半真半假 literally means "half real half fake" and it's used for anything that's not completely real. It can be used for both abstract concepts and tangible things. It's important to note that it doesn't necessarily have a negative meaning, and can also mean "half-jokingly" or "half-seriously"

A breakdown of the characters in 半真半假 (bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ):

半(bàn): half

真(zhēn): real (真实 - zhēn shí)

半(bàn): half

假(jiǎ): false (假币 - jiǎ bì)



# 半真半假

# HALF REAL, HALF FAKE

“我们手牵手逛大街小巷，半真半假地穿情侣T恤”

“wǒ men shǒu qiān shǒu guàng dà jiē xiǎo xiàng, bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ de chuān qíng lǚ T xù”

“We held hands and strolled the streets and alleyways, and half-seriously wore matching couple T-shirts”

“...半真半假的东西就成了事实”

“...bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ de dōng xi jiù chéng le shì shí”

“...something that was only half real became completely real”

“...混杂着很多半真半假的洋品牌”

“...hùn zá zhe hěn duō bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ de yáng pǐn pái”

“there are many half real, half fake foreign brands mixed in”

“我跟他半真半假地说，以后我给你写一本书”

“wǒ gēn tā bàn zhēn bàn jiǎ de shuō, yǐ hòu wǒ gěi nǐ xiě yī běn shū”

“I told her half-jokingly, later I'll write you a book”



# 笨鸟先飞

## DUMB BIRDS MUST START FLYING EARLY

**H**ow to express modesty when receiving a compliment? Ditch the commonplace 哪里哪里, and try out this-笨鸟先飞 (bèn niǎo xiān fēi)!

笨鸟先飞 generally means that people with less ability have to try harder, and literally means that "dumb birds have to start flying early." It's usually used to refer to yourself in a self-deprecating manner. It's a light-hearted chengyu.

A breakdown of the characters in 笨鸟先飞 (bèn niǎo xiān fēi)

笨 (bèn): dumb or clumsy

鸟 (niǎo): bird

先 (xiān): first or earlier

飞 (fēi): to fly



# 笨鸟先飞

## DUMB BIRDS MUST START FLYING EARLY

“她知道自己要笨鸟先飞，什么都要努力去争取...”

“tā zhīdào zìjǐ yào bènniǎoxiānfēi, shénme dōuyào nǚlì qù zhēngqǔ...”

“He knows he must make up for his lack of ability with effort, he has to strive to earn everything”

“...优秀的球员太多了，我必须得笨鸟先飞”

“...yōuxiù de qiúyuán tài duō le, wǒ bìxū děi bènniǎoxiānfēi”

“...there are too many great players, I need to make up for my lack of ability by working the hardest”

“以你的经验来说，笨鸟先飞型的人是不是有好处？”

“yǐ nǐ de jīngyàn lái shuō, bènniǎoxiānfēi xíng de rén shì bùshì yǒu hǎochù”

“From your experience, do you think underdogs who have to work extra hard are actually at an advantage”

“我要用笨鸟先飞的精神...”

“wǒ yào yòng bènniǎoxiānfēi de jīngshén...”

“I need to use the spirit of making up for lack of ability through effort...”

# 擦肩而过

## MISSED ENCOUNTER

**T**he fodder for countless chick-flicks: two strangers work and live near each other and would be a perfect couple; however, they keep missing each other!

It turns out there is a chengyu that's perfect for this situation: 擦肩而过 (cā jiān ér guò).

擦肩而过 literally means “to brush shoulders and pass by”. It means to come into close contact with someone or something, but then barely miss it. 擦肩而过 can be used for very specific, tangible things (eg. asteroid almost hitting the earth) as well as very abstract things (love and death).

A breakdown of the characters in 擦肩而过 (cā jiān ér guò):

擦 (cā): to brush, rub up against

肩 (jiān): shoulder (肩膀 – jiān bǎng)

而 (ér): conjunction meaning “but” here

过 (guò): to pass by (as in 过去 – guò qù)



# 擦肩而过

## MISSED ENCOUNTER

“AMY是一个渴望抓住爱情的女孩，却屡屡和真爱擦肩而过”

“AMY shì yí gè kě wàng zhuā zhù ài qíng de nǚ hái, què lǚ lǚ hé zhēn'ài cā jiān ér guò”

“AMY is a girl who longs to experience love, but often barely misses true love”

“乔布斯感到如释重负，因为自己曾经和死神擦肩而过”

“qiáobùsī gǎndào rúshìzhòngfù, yīnwèi zìjǐ céngjīng hé sǐshén cā jiān ér guò”

“Steve Jobs felt a sense of relief because he had brushed up against death, but came out alive”

“在这里，和别人擦肩而过的时候，即使是素不相识的陌生人，大家也会互相打招呼”

“zài zhèlǐ, hé biérén cā jiān ér guò de shíhou, jíshǐ shì sùbùxiāngshí de mòshēng rén, dàjiā yě huì hùxiāng dǎzhāohu”

“Here, whenever anyone brushes shoulders with someone, even if it's a complete stranger, everyone will say “hi” to one another”

“在繁忙的现代都市生活中，不要让擦肩而过的友谊成为遗憾”

“zài fánmáng de xiàndài dūshì shēnghuó zhōng, búyào ràng cā jiān ér guò de yǒuyì chéngwéi yíhàn”

“Amongst the hustle and bustle of a modern city, don't let a barely missed friendship become a regret”

# 粗心大意

## NEGLIGENT AND CARELESS

**K**now anybody extremely careless?

Perhaps they're always spilling something, forgetting dates, or bumping into things?

Here's a chengyu to describe that person (or your own clumsy behavior): 粗心大意(cū xīn dà yì).

粗心大意 simply means negligent or careless. It is a bit stronger in tone than 马虎 (mǎhu), also meaning careless.

Here's a breakdown of the characters in 粗心大意 (cū xīn dà yì):

粗(cū): negligent or rough ( 粗糙 - cū cāo)

心(xīn): heart

大 (dà): generally means "big," but here it means general or approximate (大概 - dà gài)

意 (yì): generally 意 means "meaning," but here it means attention or focus (注意力 - zhù yì lì)



Examples from the wild

# 粗心大意

## NEGLIGENT AND CARELESS

“粗心大意是许多年轻人共有的毛病”

“cūxīndàyi shì xǔduō niánqīngrén gòngyǒu de máobìng”

“Being careless is a common problem shared by many young people”

“...经常犯一些粗心大意的错误”

“...jīngcháng fàn yìxiē cūxīndàyi de cuòwù”

“...to often make some careless mistakes”

“有些粗心大意的消费者在网络购票中落入陷阱”

“yǒuxiē cūxīndàyi de xiāofèizhě zài wǎngluò gòu piào zhōng luòrù xiànjǐng”

“Some careless consumers fall into traps while buying tickets online”

“骗子就是利用广撒网的方式，等待那种粗心大意的人上当”

“piànzi jiùshì liyòng guǎng sǎwǎng de fāngshì, děngdài nà zhǒng cūxīndàyi de rén shàngdàng”

“Swindlers use the method of casting a wide net and waiting for that sort of careless person to get tricked”

# GIVE AN INCH AND TAKE A YARD

## 得寸进尺

**T**here are tough negotiators.

And then there are people you can't give any concessions to. Give them an inch and they'll take a yard.

Or as the Chinese would say, they would 得寸进尺 (dé cùn jìn chǐ).

得寸进尺 describes someone who's so greedy that if you give them a little bit, they'll come right back and ask for much more. It's more or less similar to "give an inch and take a yard," except the units of measurement are Chinese (see below). It indicates insatiable greediness, and is not a term to be tossed around lightly.

A breakdown of the characters in 得寸进尺 (dé cùn jìn chǐ):

得 (dé): to get, acquire (得到 - dé dào)

寸 (cùn): a Chinese unit of length, approximately equal to 3 cm

进 (jìn): to advance (前进 - qián jìn)

尺 (chǐ): a Chinese unit of length, approximately equal to 1/3 of a meter



# GIVE AN INCH AND TAKE A YARD

## 得寸进尺

“越南、菲律宾等国家得寸进尺，一再冲击中国的底线”

“yuènnán, fēilǜbīn děng guójiā décùnjìnchǐ, yízài chōngjí zhōngguó de dǐxiàn”

“Vietnam, the Philippines, and other such countries will get an inch and take a yard, repeatedly attacking China’s Southern border line.”

“老板们又能不能不为了了一些细枝末节得寸进尺，早点跟球员达成协议呢？”

“lǎobǎn men yòu néngbùnénng bú wèile yìxiē xìzhīmòjié décùnjìnchǐ, zǎo diǎn gēn qiúyuán dáchéng xiéyì ne?”

“Can the owners try not to be so greedy over such minor details, and instead, try to reach an agreement with the players a little earlier?”

“在我们做过这么多让步之后，他们现在居然还要得寸进尺”

“zài wǒmen zuò guò zhème duō ràngbù zhīhòu, tāmen xiànzài jūrán hái yào décùnjìnchǐ”

“After we’ve made so many concessions, they are still seeking more”

“不单是进化论，他有点得寸进尺地说...”

“bùdānshì jìnhuà lùn, tā yǒudiǎn décùnjìnchǐ de shuō...”

“He didn’t just stop at the theory of evolution, but further went on to say (negatively) that...”



# 对号入座

## TO ASSUME YOU ARE BEING CRITICIZED

**H**ave you ever made an innocent comment...  
...only to have someone jump on you because they thought you were talking about them?

Use this idiom to keep them at bay: 对号入座 (duì hào rù zuò).

对号入座 literally means “to take your seat based on your number”, but the meaning has expanded to include situations when someone jumps out and assumes that a criticism or comment is about them. Someone mentioning that they hate poorly written blogs, and us getting defensive because we assume that they’re talking about us is a classic example of 对号入座.

A breakdown of the characters in 对号入座(duì hào rù zuò):

对 (duì): to check (对表 - duì biǎo)

号 (hào): number

入 (rù): to enter(进入 - jìn rù)

座 (zuò): seat (座位 - zuò wèi)



# 对号入座

## TO ASSUME YOU ARE BEING CRITICIZED

“...并不针对任何人，请不要自行对号入座”

“...bìng bù zhēnduì rènhé rén,qǐng búyào zìxíng duìhàorùzuò

“...I'm not targeting anyone, please don't assume that we're talking about you”

“...请勿对号入座，没有提到她”

“...qǐngwù duìhàorùzuò,méiyǒu tídao tā “

“...Please don't assume we're talking about her - we didn't bring her up at all”

“不是真凶的人千万别对号入座哦”

“búshì zhēnxiōng de rén qiānwàn bié duìhàorùzuò o”

“If you're not the real killer, please don't assume we're talking about you”

“我并不是要引起80和90的争执，我只是说大多数的情况，请理智的90后朋友不要对号入座”

“wǒ bìngbúshì yào yǐnqǐ 80 hé 90 de zhēngzhí,wǒ zhǐshì shuō dàduōshù de qíngkuàng,qǐng lǐzhì de 90hòu péngyǒu búyào duìhàorùzuò”

“I'm not trying to create conflict between people born in the 80s and 90s. I'm just talking about the majority of situations, so those of you who are rational and born in the 90s - please don't assume we're talking about you.”

# 对牛弹琴

## TO PREACH TO DEAF EARS

**H**ave you ever shared something great on Facebook, only to have no one like it?

Maybe what you shared wasn't actually that great.

Or maybe your friends lack your taste and sophistication. Maybe it was a case of 对牛弹琴(duì niú tán qín).

对牛弹琴 (duì niú tán qín) means “to preach to deaf ears,” and literally means “to play the lute for a cow.” It’s used to describe a situation where A is telling B something that B is unable to understand or appreciate. It is a negative word and implies that A is talking without really considering his or her audience.

A breakdown of the characters in 对牛弹琴(duì niú tán qín):

对(duì): at or to

牛(niú): cow

弹 (tán): to play

琴 (qín): a stringed instrument



# 对牛弹琴

## TO PREACH TO DEAF EARS

“微博营销不是对牛弹琴，而是和粉丝谈恋爱。。。 ”

“wēibó yíngxiāo búshì duìniútánqín, érshì hé fēnsī tán liànài...”

“Microblog marketing is not about preaching to deaf ears, but rather, about dating your fans...”

“如果权力总是不受约束。。。只对官员高唱道德修养和道德自律的调调，无疑是对牛弹琴 ”

“rúguǒ quánlì zǒngshì búshòu yuēshù... zhǐ duì guānyuán gāochàng dàodé xiūyǎng hé dàodé zìlǚ de diàodiào, wúyí shì duìniútánqín ”

“If power is not restricted... just telling officials about moral cultivation and moral self restraint, is undoubtedly just preaching to deaf ears”

“网络上论战是没有意义的。。。根本就是对牛弹琴 ”

“wǎngluò shàng lùnzhàn shì méiyǒu yìyì de... gēnběn jiùshì duìniútánqín ”

“Engaging in a debate online is meaningless... it’s essentially casting pearls before swine”

“在利益驱使之下，对于某些人强调‘不许转包’，恐怕连对牛弹琴的作用都达不到 ”

“zài lìyì qūshǐ zhīxià, duìyú mǒuxiē rén qiángdiào ‘bùxǔ zhuǎn bāo’, kǒngpà lián duìniútánqín de zuòyòng dōu dá bú dào”

“When they’re compelled by profits, to emphasize to some people that “subcontracting is not allowed,” unfortunately is even worse than preaching to deaf ears”

# 多此一举

## UNNECESSARY MOVE

**W**hat's the best way to learn Chinese?

By going all out, every second you're awake, right?

Well, not exactly.

Studies show that 90 minute sessions with short breaks is more effective than doing everything in one sitting.

So although you shouldn't overdo it in your Chinese studies, you should learn this chengyu: 多此一举 (duō cǐ yī jǔ).

多此一举 literally means "this action is unneeded," and it's used to indicate that a move is unnecessary or overdone.

A breakdown of the characters in 多此一举 (duō cǐ yī jǔ):

多 (duō): many or excessive (多余 - duōyú)

此 (cǐ): this (此事 - cǐ shì)

一 (yī): one

举 (jǔ): an act or action (举动 - jǔdòng)



# 多此一举

## UNNECESSARY MOVE

“校车就像蛋箱装鸡蛋那样保护孩子，是最安全的公路交通工具，再装安全带多此一举”

“xiào chē jiù xiàng dàn xiāng zhuāng jīdàn nà yàng bǎohù háizi, shì zuì ānquán de gōnglù jiāotōng gōngjù, zài zhuāng ānquán dài duōcǐyījǔ “

“School buses actually protect children the way egg cartons hold eggs; and, they are the safest transportation instruments. To install seat belts is an unnecessary step”

“也许很多人觉得记录自己吃东西是一件很麻烦，多此一举的事”

“yěxǔ hěnduō rén juéde jìlù zìjǐ chī dōngxi shì yī jiàn hěn máfan, duōcǐyījǔ de shì “

“Many people probably think that recording what one eats is a troublesome, unnecessary thing”

“...其销量也不是靠广告推广出来的，所以花巨资做形象广告属于多此一举”

“...qí xiāoliàng yě búshì kào guǎnggào tuīguǎng chūlái de, suǒyǐ huā jùzī zuò xíngxiàng guǎnggào shǔyú duōcǐyījǔ “

“Its sales did not come from ads, so to spend lots of money on promotional advertisements is overdoing it”

“有车主认为预热时间越长越好，其实是多此一举”

“yǒu chē zhǔ rènwéi yùrè shíjiān yuè cháng yuè hǎo, qíshí shì duōcǐyījǔ “

“Some car owners think that the longer they preheat their car, the better it is, but actually this is overdoing it”

# SEE SOMEONE IN A NEW LIGHT

## 刮目相看

**D**o you know anyone who went to China and came back speaking Chinese fluently, making you look at them in a whole new light?

Or are you in China right now and want to WOW everyone when you go back home?

Here's one step in that direction: 刮目相看 (guā mù xiāng kàn).

刮目相看 means to see someone in a whole new light. Literally, it means to rub your eyes and take a good look. Generally, it's used to describe people who have improved significantly in some way, making it impossible to look at them in the same way as before.

A look at the characters in 刮目相看 (guā mù xiāng kàn)

刮 (guā): to wipe

目 (mù): eyes (目光 - mù guāng)

相 (xiāng): indicates action is being performed by one towards another

看 (kàn): generally means "to see," here it specifically means "to regard" (看待 - kàn dài)



Examples from the wild

# 刮目相看

SEE SOMEONE  
IN A NEW  
LIGHT

“国内消费市场的活力令人刮目相看”

“guónèi xiāofèi shìchǎng de huóli lìngrén guāmùxiāngkàn”

“The domestic consumer market’s vitality makes people see it in a new light (or “do a double take”)”

“这让所有人对她刮目相看”

“zhè ràng suǒyǒu rén duì tā guāmùxiāngkàn”

“This made everyone look at her in a whole new light”

“随时随地跟朋友分享你的生活，让大家对你的拍照水平刮目相看”

“suíshísuídì gēn péngyǒu fēnxiǎng nǐ de shēnghuó, ràng dàjiā duì nǐ de pāizhào shuǐpíng guāmùxiāngkàn”

“By sharing your life with your friends in all places and at all times, it makes everyone see your ability to photograph in a whole new light”

“各品牌先后推出了不少让人刮目相看的产品”

“gè pǐnpái xiānhòu tuīchū le bùshǎo ràng rén guāmùxiāngkàn de chǎnpǐn”

“One after another, all the brands introduced many products that made people look at them in a new light”



# 浩浩荡荡

## A MIGHTY SCENE

**O**ccupy Wall Street was one of the top stories of the year, and Chinese people loved talking about it.

Is there a chengyu that you can use next time you talk about it with your Chinese friend or tutor?

You bet: 浩浩荡荡 (hào hào dàng dàng).

浩浩荡荡 means vast and awe-inspiring, and is used mainly for large groups of people. Originally, it described a tremendous flow of water, but now evokes images of large gatherings.

A breakdown of the characters in 浩浩荡荡 (hào hào dàng dàng):

浩浩 (hàohào): a mighty flow of water

荡荡 (dàngdàng): vast



# 浩浩荡荡

## A MIGHTY SCENE

“越来越多的美国民众参与到了浩浩荡荡的“占领华尔街””

“yuèláiyuèduō de měiguó míngzhòng cānyù dào le hàohàodàngdàng de “zhàn lǐng huá’ěrjiē”

“More and more Americans are participating in the great “Occupy Wall Street” (movement)”

“50余名自行车爱好者组织起浩浩荡荡的长队驶入广场内”

“50 yú míng zìxíngchē àihào zhě zǔzhī qǐ hàohàodàngdàng de chángduì shǐrù guǎngchǎng nèi ”

“Over 50 cycling enthusiasts organized a great long line and biked into the square”

“...热热闹闹、浩浩荡荡的氛围...”

“...rèrènaonào hàohàodàngdàng de fēnwéi...”

“...lively and great atmosphere...”

“休整两个月的渔船大军，又将浩浩荡荡地冲向大海”

“xiūzhěng liǎng gè yuè de yúchuán dàjūn, yòu jiāng hàohàodàngdàng de chōng xiàng dàhǎi ”

“After resting a full 2 months, the fleet of fishing boats will again rush in a grand fashion towards the ocean”

# 合情合理

## FAIR AND EQUITABLE

**D**ebating and persuading can be very difficult in Chinese. You probably find yourself saying a lot of 有道理 (yǒu dào lǐ - that makes sense) or 对 (duì - right)! Here's another word to help bring people to your side: 合情合理 (hé qíng hé lǐ).

合情合理 means to be fair and equitable, and it literally translates as "to be in accord with both emotions and reason". It is a very positive word.

A breakdown of the characters in 合情合理 (hé qíng hé lǐ):

合 (hé): to be in accord with (合乎 - hé hū)

情 (qíng): feelings and emotion (感情 - gǎn qíng)

理 (lǐ): reason, rationality (理智 - lǐ zhì)



# 合情合理

# FAIR AND EQUITABLE

“在解决消费纠纷时，一定要合情合理地依据法律进行处理”

“zài jiějué xiāofèi jiūfēn shí, yídìng yào héqíng hélǐ de yījù fǎlǜ jìnxíng chǔlǐ”

“When resolving consumer disputes, we must proceed fairly and reasonably based on the law”

“他们希望校方能给个合情合理的说法”

“tāmen xīwàng xiàofāng néng gěi gè héqíng hélǐ de shuōfǎ”

“They hope that the school can give them a reasonable explanation”

“业主如果对服务不满意而拒交费用，合情合理”

“yèzhǔ rúguǒ duì fúwù bù mǎnyì ér jùjiāo fèiyòng, héqíng hélǐ”

“If the owner is not satisfied with the service and therefore refuses to pay the fees, it is fair and reasonable”

“欧元的疲弱是合情合理的”

“ōuyuán de píruò shì héqíng hélǐ de”

“The weakness of the Euro is reasonable”

# 轰轰烈烈

## ON A GRAND SCALE

**T**his chengyu can describe everything from love and relationships to revolution and war. Impress your Chinese friends by using 轰轰烈烈 (hōng hōng liè liè) when describing a scene that's on a "grand and spectacular scale."

轰轰烈烈 emphasizes that something has attention-grabbing, awe-inspiring attributes. 轰轰烈烈 is used for anything that can give this sort of feeling, from movies (电影 - diàn yǐng) to love (恋爱 - liàn ài) to war (战争 - zhàn zhēng).

A breakdown in the characters for 轰轰烈烈 (hōng hōng liè liè)

轰(hōng): a loud noise, boom!

烈(liè): strong, intense (强烈 - qiáng liè)



Examples from the wild

# 轰轰烈烈

## ON A GRAND SCALE

“。。。掀起了一场轰轰烈烈的股民狂欢热炒风暴。”

“... xiānqǐ le yìchǎng hōnghōnglièliè de gǔ mín kuánghuān rè chǎo fēngbào.”

“...created a large-scale, speculative buying frenzy among individual investors”

“谈了场轰轰烈烈的恋爱。”

“...tán le chǎng hōnghōnglièliè de liàn'ài.”

“...had a passionate love affair.”

“这场民间打拐行动进行得轰轰烈烈”

“zhè chǎng mínhān dǎ guǎi xíngdòng jìnxíng de hōnghōnglièliè ”

“This civil/grassroots anti-human-trafficking movement proceeded at a grand scale”

“宅男也想轰轰烈烈地恋爱”

“zháinán yě xiǎng hōnghōnglièliè de liàn'ài”

“Geeky guys also want to passionately love”

# 虎头蛇尾

## STRONG START, WEAK FINISH

**W**e all know the tale of the rabbit, bursting out of the gate, but running at an unsustainable pace.

For something that feels very anticlimactic, with a strong start, but weak finish, use 虎头蛇尾 (hǔ tóu shé wěi).

虎头蛇尾 literally means a “tiger head” and “snake tail,” and means that you start off strong, but finish weak.

A breakdown of the characters in 虎头蛇尾(hǔ tóu shé wěi):

虎(hǔ): tiger

头(tóu): head

蛇(shé): snake

尾(wěi): tail



# 虎头蛇尾

## STRONG START, WEAK FINISH

“之前在中国市场虎头蛇尾的几次突围，让现代倍感受挫”

“zhīqián zài zhōngguó shìchǎng hǔtóushéwěi de jǐcì tūwéi, ràng xiàndài bèigǎn shòucuò”

“The several previous strong breakthroughs of the Chinese market, makes us feel several times more frustrated.”

“和小德、纳达尔虎头蛇尾的表现相反，费德勒在赛季尾声找到手感”

“hé xiǎodé, nàdǎěr hǔtóushéwěi de biǎoxiàn xiāngfǎn, fèidélè zài sàijì wěishēng zhǎodào shǒugǎn”

“Contrary to the strong-start-but-poor-finish performance of Nadal and and Djokovic, Federer found his touch at the end of the season”

“影片的形式大于内容，故事明显偏弱，结局虎头蛇尾令人感觉遗憾”

“yǐngpiàn de xíngshì dàyú nèiróng, gùshì míngxiǎn piān ruò, jiéjú hǔtóushéwěi lìng rén gǎnjué yíhàn”

“The form of the movie is bigger than the content - the plot is clearly weak. The strong start but weak ending is disappointing.”

“一项为民办实事工程，办得如此虎头蛇尾，实在令人失望”

“yī xiàng wèimín bàn shíshì gōngchéng, bàn de rúcǐ hǔtóushéwěi, shízài lìng rén shīwàng”

“A project done for the people, with a strong start and a weak finish like this - is truly disappointing.”



# 花言巧语

## DECEITFUL SMOOTH TALK

**H**ave you ever been talked into buying something you didn't want?

Or doing something you didn't want to do?

Then you probably know what it's like to be smooth talked with 花言巧语 (huā yán qiǎo yǔ).

花言巧语 refers to words that sounds nice but are deceiving and artful. Literally, it means "flowery words and cunning language." It's a negative word and is often used for guys trying to attract girls or sly sales people.

A breakdown of the characters in 花言巧语 (huā yán qiǎo yǔ):

花 (huā): flower

言 (yán): speech or words ( 语言 - yǔ yán)

巧 (qiǎo): cunning

语 (yǔ): language (外语 - wài yǔ)



# 花言巧语

## DECEITFUL SMOOTH TALK

“在李彦宏看来，百度从来不是靠花言巧语赢来投资者的，而是真正做好公司”

“zài lǐyànhóng kànlái, bǎidù cónglái búshì kào huāyánqiǎoyǔ yínglái tóuzīzhě de, érshì zhēnzhèng zuò hǎo gōngsī”

“As Robin Li sees it, Baidu never won investors over through smooth talk, but rather by really being a good company”

“...不要被销售人员的花言巧语所蒙蔽”

“...búyào bèi xiāoshòu rényuán de huāyánqiǎoyǔ suǒ méngbì”

“...don't get hoodwinked by the smooth talk from the sales people”

“不管欧盟领导人如何花言巧语，市场仍然很快认清了形势”

“bùguǎn ōuméng lǐngdǎorén rúhé huāyánqiǎoyǔ, shìchǎng réngrán hěnkuài rènqīng le xíngshì”

“No matter how the EU leaders smooth talked, the market still saw the situation clearly”

“...花言巧语的华尔街老手们”

“... huāyánqiǎoyǔ de huáěrjiē lǎoshǒumen”

“...the smooth talk of Wall Street veterans”

# 豁然开朗

## 'A-HA' MOMENT!

**H**ave you ever come across a chengyu that so good, you wish there was a worthy English counterpart?

We have such a chengyu for you today: 豁然开朗 (huò rán kāi lǎng).

豁然开朗 has two related meanings. First, it's the refreshing and liberating feeling you get when you see a beautiful, open expanse. Typically, immediately before this 豁然开朗 moment, the beautiful area is not visible, and you are feeling melancholy.

Second, it's also used as a metaphor for the feeling you get when you achieve an "aha" or "eureka!" moment. It can also be the refreshing feeling when a nagging issue is resolved.

A breakdown of the characters in 豁然开朗 (huò rán kāi lǎng):

豁 (huò): spacious

然 (rán): such that, so

开 (kāi): open, broad (开阔 - kāikuò)

朗 (lǎng): bright



# 豁然开朗

## 'A-HA' MOMENT!

“沿着绿道继续往前，两侧视野豁然开朗”

“yán zhe lǜdào jìxù wǎngqián, liǎngcè shìyě huòránkāilǎng”

“As we walked ahead along the green path, both sides of our field of vision were filled with beautiful open expanses”

“车绕过大山直行时，我们的眼前豁然开朗”

“chē ràoguò dàshān zhíxíng shí, wǒmen de yǎnqián huòránkāilǎng”

“As the car bypassed the mountain and went straight ahead, our eyes were filled with a beautiful open expanse”

“夫妻间有矛盾，还是吵开好，把内心的不满响响亮亮地吵了出来，心也就豁然开朗了”

“fūqī jiān yǒu máodùn, háishì chǎo kāi hǎo, bǎ nèixīn de bùmǎn xiǎngxiǎngliàngliàng de chǎo le chūlái, xīn yě jiù huòránkāilǎng le”

“When a couple has conflict, it's better to argue it out, and to work through all dissatisfaction bottled up inside. It will be very refreshing and eye-opening”

“大学时期，乔尼开始有机会用Mac做设计，那是一种豁然开朗的体验”

“dàxué shíqí, qiáoní kāishǐ yǒujīhuì yòng Mac zuò shèjì, nàshì yīzhǒng huòránkāilǎng de tǐyàn”

“During college, Jony began to have opportunities to use a Mac computer to design, which was a refreshing, eye-opening experience”

# 急于求成

## ANXIOUS FOR FOR SUCCESS

**L**earning Chinese is a lot like starting a blog, a business, or a new relationship. You have to take ups and downs in stride and be prepared for the long haul. You can't 急于求成 (jí yú qiú chéng).

急于求成 means that you are anxious for success, overly so and to your own detriment. It implies a rushed pursuit of short term results that is not effective from a long term perspective.

A breakdown of the characters in 急于求成 (jí yú qiú chéng):

急 (jí): to hurry or be anxious (着急 - zháojí)

于 (yú): with regard to or concerning

求 (qiú) : to strive for (追求 - zhuīqiú)

成 (chéng): success (成功 - chénggōng)



# 急于求成

## ANXIOUS FOR FOR SUCCESS

“急于求成的结果只会导致最终的失败...”

“jíyúqiúchéng de jiéguǒ zhī huì dǎozhì zuìzhōng de shībài...”

“Being overanxious for success will only ultimately lead to failure”

“我们并不急于求成，我们可以保持耐心”

“wǒmen bìngbù jíyúqiúchéng, wǒmen kěyǐ bǎochí nàixīn”

“We’re not overly anxious for success - we can maintain our patience”

“现在中国有很多企业都急于求成，所以造成投资者的不信任”

“xiànzài zhōngguó yǒu hěnduō qǐyè dōu jíyúqiúchéng, suǒyǐ zàochéng tóuzīzhě de búxìnrèn”

“Currently, China has many companies that are overly anxious for success, causing investors to mistrust the companies”

“...急于求成地想要在数量上有很大的一个突破”

“...jíyúqiúchéng de xiǎng yào zài shùliàng shàng yǒu hěndà de yíge tūpò”

“...overly anxious to have a big breakthrough on the numbers”

# 以假乱真

## PASS OFF A FAKE AS REAL

**I**t's not easy being a young, single guy in China.

You live in the era of the 3 highs (三高时代 sān gāo shí dài).

And you have to go home for Spring Festival -- where relatives look forward to meeting your nonexistent girlfriend!

Some Chinese online shopping sites see this as an opportunity, letting you rent someone to pretend to be your girlfriend, and save you from embarrassment.

That's assuming you can pull it off-- that you can successfully 以假乱真(yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn).

以假乱真 means to take something that's fake and try to pass it off as real. It can also mean to take something that's fake and mix it among real things.

Here's a breakdown of the characters in 以假乱真(yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn):

以(yǐ): formal way to say "to use"

假(jiǎ): fake

乱(luàn): to confuse or mix up ( 混乱 - hùn luàn)

真(zhēn): genuine or real (真货 - zhēn huò )



# 以假乱真

## PASS OFF A FAKE AS REAL

“有时候真的不得不佩服这些山寨厂商，模仿也可以以假乱真，功力不浅”

“yǒu shí hou zhēn de bù dé bù pèi fú zhè xiē shān zhài chǎng shāng, mó fǎng yě kě yǐ yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn, gōng lì bù qiǎn”

“Sometimes you can't help but respect these shanzhai manufacturers -- they're able to pass off fake things as real, and their skills are considerable”

“私自勾兑的假酒真的能以假乱真吗？”

“sī zì gōu duì de jiǎ jiǔ zhēn de néng yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn ma?”

“Is privately blended fake alcohol really able to pass itself off as real?”

“这里的配件和包装足以达到以假乱真的地步”

“zhè lǐ de pèi jiàn hé bāo zhuāng zú yǐ dá dào yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn de dì bù”

“The parts and packaging has already reached the level of being able to pass itself off as real”

“一个以假乱真的记者证，街头只要数百元就可以买到”

“yí gè yǐ jiǎ luàn zhēn de jì zhě zhèng, jiē tóu zhǐ yào shù bǎi yuán jiù kě yǐ mǎi dào”

“A real looking journalist license and title can be bought for just a few hundred yuan”



## 见多识广

EXPERIENCED  
AND  
KNOWLEDGEABLE

**T**welve year old Tian Zhonghe had a secret career unbeknownst to his family and teachers.

First he taught himself how to program and began writing software.

Then he disguised his voice and hired a team of 11 employees.

Then he raised 2,000 RMB, and earned 30,000RMB in 4 months.

But then tragedy struck: his voice disguising software malfunctioned. His team left him. His empire collapsed as quickly as it began.

Though he's young, it's safe to say that Tian already has wide experience and broad knowledge. He has experienced bitter failure, but now he's positioned for success. You could say he's 见多识广 (jiàn duō shí guǎng).

见多识广 literally means "to see a lot and know widely," and generally means that someone is experienced and knowledgeable.

A breakdown of the characters in 见多识广 (jiàn duō shí guǎng):

见 (jiàn): to see

多 (duō): many

识 (shí): to know or knowledge (知识 - zhīshi)

广 (guǎng): broad



Examples from the wild

# 见多识广

EXPERIENCED

AND

KNOWLEDGEABLE

“...名人的孩子见多识广，人脉也广”

“...míng rén de hái zǐ jiàn duō shí guǎng, rén mài yě guǎng”

“...the children of famous people are experienced and knowledgeable, and their networks are vast”

“如今的学员见多识广，传统的兴趣小组已经满足不了他们的需求”

“rú jīn de xué yuán jiàn duō shí guǎng, chuán tǒng de xìng qù xiǎo zǔ yǐ jīng mǎn zú bù liǎo tā men de xū qiú”

“Today’s students are experienced and knowledgeable - traditional interest clubs can’t satisfy their needs”

“...现场见多识广的其他民警...”

“...xiàn chǎng jiàn duō shí guǎng de qí tā mín jǐng...”

“...the other civil police who were experienced and knowledgeable at crime scenes”

“...见多识广的海外智囊团成员们有太多的话要说”

“...jiàn duō shí guǎng de hǎi wài zhì náng tuán chéng yuán men yǒu tài duō de huà yào shuō”

“...the experienced and knowledgeable think tank members based abroad had too much to say”

# 脚踏实地

## DOWN TO EARTH AND PRAGMATIC

**W**e never promise success in just 5 minutes a day, and never will.

We believe that, just like in other areas of life, values like hard work and persistence are the keys to success in learning Chinese.

If you adhere to this old school attitude, you'll appreciate this chengyu: 脚踏实地 (jiǎo tà shí dì).

脚踏实地 literally means "to step on solid ground." It means to apply yourself conscientiously to your work, to focus on the fundamentals, and to proceed in a steady and stable fashion. Think of Warren Buffett and the blue collar sensibilities of

middle-America. It's a very positive chengyu.

A breakdown of the characters in 脚踏实地 (jiǎo tà shí dì):

脚 (jiǎo): foot or feet (脚印 - jiǎo yìn)

踏 (tà): to step on

实 (shí): solid or firm (坚实 - jiān shí)

地 (dì): ground or land



# 脚踏实地

## DOWN TO EARTH AND PRAGMATIC

“我们还是应该脚踏实地，一步一步稳健地走”

“wǒmen háishì yīnggāi jiǎotàshídì, yíbù yíbù wěnjiàn de zǒu “

“We should still stay grounded, and go forth one firm step at a time”

“公司的目标就是脚踏实地地销售正品...”

“gōngsī de mùbiāo jiùshì jiǎotàshídì de xiāoshòu zhèngpǐn...”

“The company’s goal is to stay grounded and keep working at selling quality products”

“每一个人可以通过脚踏实地的努力获得属于自己的幸福”

“měiyígè rén dōu kěyǐ tōngguò jiǎotàshídì de nǚlì huòdé shǔyú zìjǐ de xìngfú “

“Everyone can gain their own happiness through effort that’s grounded and conscientious”

“创业者要具有持久的激情，坚韧不拔的毅力和脚踏实地的态度”

“chuàngyèzhě yào jù yǒu chíjiǔ de jīqíng, jiānrèn bùbá de yìlì hé jiǎotàshídì de tàidù”

“An entrepreneur needs to have a lasting passion, indomitable persistence, and a grounded attitude”

# 津津有味

## WITH GREAT RELISH

**F**ood is, without question, an important part of Chinese culture. Unfortunately, you may find yourself overusing 好吃 (hǎo chī - delicious), the second word you learned in class (after 你好). Here's a chengyu you can use next time you're eating: 津津有味 (jīn jīn yǒu wèi).

津津有味 means to eat something with enthusiasm, zest, or gusto. It can also be used for activities beyond just eating, as long as the person doing the activity finds it very stimulating or engaging. It's not something that people typically use to describe their own actions, but you can liberally use it to describe a friend's conduct.

A breakdown of the characters in 津津有味 (jīn jīn yǒu wèi):

津津 (jīnjīn): saliva (but only in this chengyu - eg. 天津 [tiānjīn] is a major city in Northern China and does not mean "sky saliva")

有 (yǒu): to have

味 (wèi): flavor



Examples from the wild

# 津津有味

WITH GREAT  
RELISH

“大熊猫津津有味地品尝月饼”

“dàxióngmāo jīnjīnyǒuwèi de pǐncháng yuèbǐng”

“The pandas are savoring their mooncakes”

“津津有味地看报”

“jīnjīnyǒuwèi de kànbào”

“to devour the newspaper”

“店里的游客正津津有味地品尝着当地美食”

“diàn lǐ de yóukè zhèng jīnjīnyǒuwèi de pǐncháng zhe dāngdì měishí”

“The tourists in the shop are enthusiastically tasting the local cuisine”

“他们看《哈利·波特》看得津津有味”

“tāmen kàn <hā lì • bō tè> kàn de jīnjīnyǒuwèi”

“They were enchanted as they watched Harry Potter”

# 精打细算

## METICULOUS WITH MONEY

**I**f you've been to China before, you know that many Chinese are shrewd bargainers. The country has among the highest savings rate in the world, and many are always on the lookout for discounts or sales.

For a great chengyu to describe these thrifty habits, try 精打细算 (jīng dǎ xì suàn).

精打细算 means to plan and budget meticulously, and it has a positive tone.

A breakdown of the characters in 精打细算 (jīng dǎ xì suàn):

精 (jīng): refined or precise (精准 - jīngzhǔn)

打 (dǎ): to plan (打算 - dǎsuàn)

细 (xì): detailed or in detail (细节 - xìjié)

算 (suàn): to calculate (计算 - jìsuàn)



Examples from the wild

# 精打细算

## METICULOUS WITH MONEY

“一部精打细算、目标明确的商业电影”

“yī bù jīngdǎxìsuàn, mùbiāo míngquè de shāngyè diànyǐng”

“A commercial movie that has been carefully budgeted and has a clear goal”

“老百姓都是捂着钱包精打细算地过日子”

“lǎobǎixìng dōushì wǔ zhe qiánbāo jīngdǎxìsuàn de guòrìzi”

“The common people are all covering their wallets and spending their days budgeting meticulously.”

“买了房子之后就开始要精打细算...”

“mǎi le fángzi zhīhòu jiù kāishǐ yào jīngdǎxìsuàn...”

“After buying a house, you need to start planning and budgeting meticulously...”

“记账其实就是记生活，精打细算中感受到的是零零碎碎的幸福”

“jì zhàng qíshí jiùshì jì shēnghuó, jīngdǎxìsuàn zhōng gǎnshòu dào de shì línglíngsuìsuì de xìngfú”

“Accounting is actually recording life. As you plan and budget meticulously, you can feel bits and pieces of happiness”



# 精益求精

## STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

**W**hat Chinese words would you use to describe a Macbook Air? 很酷 (hěn kù - cool)? 很薄 (hěn báo - thin)? How about 精益求精 (jīngyìqiújīng) 的做工 (zuògōng - workmanship)?

精益求精 (jīngyìqiújīng) means to be constantly striving for perfection. Literally, it means striving for excellence on top of something that is already excellent. It's a very positive sounding phrase and is commonly used with words like 品质 (pǐn zhì- character or quality) 作风 (zuò fēng- style), or 工艺 (gōng yì - handicraft)

A breakdown of the characters in 精益求精 (jīngyìqiújīng):

精 (jīng): refinement or perfection (精致 - jīngzhì)

益 (yì): here means increasing, but generally means benefit (利益 - lìyì)

求 (qiú): to seek or strive for (追求 - zhuīqiú)

精 (jīng): refinement or perfection



Examples from the wild

# 精益求精

## STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

“苹果 MacBook Air 精益求精的做工让我们不得不折服其出众的工业设计”

“píngguǒ MacBook Air jīngyìqiújīng de zuògōng ràng wǒmen bùdébù zhé fú qí chūzhòng de gōngyè shèjì ”

“The Apple Macbook Air’s excellent workmanship compels us to bow down and respect its outstanding industrial design”

“倡导精益求精的服务意识”

“chàngǎo jīngyìqiújīng de fúwù yìshí”

“To promote a service mentality that is in constant pursuit of excellence”

“公司一贯对品质精益求精”

“gōngsī yíguàn duì pǐnzhì jīngyìqiújīng”

“The company has always striven for excellence in product quality”

“精益求精地做好每一款产品、每一次服务”

“jīngyìqiújīng de zuòhǎo měi yī kuǎn chǎnpǐn, měi yī cì fúwù ”

“Always strive for excellence with every product, and every time we provide service”

# 九牛一毛

## A DROP IN THE BUCKET

The Chinese also have an idiom for “just a drop in the bucket.”

Except it involves cows. And hair.

九牛一毛 (jiǔ niú yì máo) literally means “9 cows and 1 strand of cow hair” and it indicates something that’s so small, it’s like one strand of cow hair among 9 cows. How’s that for rich, intuitive imagery?

A breakdown of the characters in 九牛一毛(jiǔ niú yì máo):

九 (jiǔ): nine

牛 (niú): cow

一 (yì): one

毛 (máo): hair



# 九牛一毛

## A DROP IN THE BUCKET

“对拥有20多辆私藏跑车的郭富城来说，自然是九牛一毛”

“duì yōngyǒu 20 duō liàng sīcáng pǎochē de guōfùchéng láishuō, zìrán shì jiǔniúyīmáo”

“For a city of wealthy people that has more than 20 privately housed race cars, this is really just a drop in the bucket”

“由于YouTube在专业内容频道的建立上只投资了1亿美元，这笔费用对于谷歌来说只是九牛一毛”

“yóuyú YouTube zài zhuānyè nèiróng píndào de jiànli shàng zhī tóuzī le 1 yì měiyuán, zhè bǐ fèiyòng duìyú gǔgē láishuō zhǐshì jiǔniúyīmáo”

“Because Youtube only invested 100 million USD on building professional content channels, for Google this expense is just a drop in the bucket”

“大牌球星损失巨大，但这点钱对他们来说可谓九牛一毛，即便失去了也不会感到肉痛”

“dàpái qiúxīng sǔnshī jùdà, dàn zhèdiǎn qián duì tāmen láishuō kěwèi jiǔniúyīmáo, jíbiàn shīqù le yě búhuì gǎndào ròu tòng”

“For major ball players the loss is major, but to them this money is just a drop in the bucket - even if they lose it, it won't be too painful”

“电子商务的盈利在中国整体商业环境中简直是九牛一毛”

“diànzǐ shāngwù de yínglì zài zhōngguó zhěngtǐ shāngyè huánjìng zhōng jiǎnzhí shì jiǔniúyīmáo”

“In the entire Chinese commercial environment, the profits from E-commerce are simply just a drop in the bucket”

# 举一反三

## TO LEARN BY ANALOGY

**I** once met a boy who thought people from Japan were called “Japanians.”

After laughing for a minute, I thought “why not?”

If we have Italians and Australians, why not “Japanians”?

Though he was technically “wrong,” I think his approach to grasping the English language was right on. He was recognizing patterns and applying them to new situations. Perhaps he was wrong because of the arbitrary nature of the English language, but in the long run I’d bet he’ll learn faster this way.

There’s a chengyu for what the boy was doing: 举一反三 (jǔ yī fǎn sān).

举一反三 (jǔ yī fǎn sān) means to infer many things from one fact, and literally means to “list one and infer three.”

A breakdown of the characters in 举一反三 (jǔ yī fǎn sān):

举 (jǔ): to list (列举 - liè jǔ)

一 (yī): one

反 (fǎn): usually means “opposite” but here means “to infer”

三 (sān): three



Examples from the wild

# 举一反三

## TO LEARN BY ANALOGY

“我们应该举一反三，学会如何把金融做为战略武器来使用”

“wǒmen yīnggāi jǔyīfǎnsān, xuéhuì rúhé bǎ jīnróng zuòwéi zhànlüè wǔqì lái shǐyòng”

“We should infer from what we know, and learn how to use finance as a strategic weapon”

“他们在实际生产中通过事故案例举一反三，预防事故的发生”

“tāmen zài shíjì shēngchǎn zhōng tōngguò shìgù ànlì jǔyīfǎnsān, yùfáng shìgù de fāshēng”

“They prevent accidents from occurring in actual production by inferring from accident case studies”

“为此，我们要举一反三，进一步完善政府服务”

“wèicǐ, wǒmen yào jǔyīfǎnsān, jìnyībù wánshàn zhèngfǔ fúwù”

“Regarding this, we should infer from previous facts, to further improve government services”

“要求管理员举一反三地做好整改”

“yāoqiú guǎnlǐyuán jǔyīfǎnsān de zuòhǎo zhěnggǎi”

“Request administrators to do solid reform based on strong inferences from known facts”

# 开天辟地

## A HISTORIC, UNPRECEDENTED ENDEAVOR

**A**t FluentU, we're trying to create **a whole new way to learn Chinese**. You could say it's nothing short of 开天辟地 (kāi tiān pì dì).

开天辟地 basically means to do something historic and unprecedented. Literally it means "to open up heaven and earth."

It comes from Chinese mythology; the story goes that before there was heaven and earth, there was only darkness. The first living being and the creator of the universe - 盘古 (pán gǔ) - used his axe to cleave the darkness into heaven and earth, from whence the universe began.

A breakdown of the characters in 开天辟地 (kāi tiān pì dì):

开 (kāi): to open (开门 - kāi mén)

天 (tiān): sky

辟 (pì): to open up territory/land or to break ground (开辟 - kāi pì)

地 (dì): earth or ground (地理 - dì lǐ)



Examples from the wild

# 开天辟地

## A HISTORIC, UNPRECEDENTED ENDEAVOR

“他们应当勇于在这个领域开天辟地”

“tāmen yīngdāng yǒngyú zài zhè gè lǐngyù kāitiānpìdì”

“They should be brave enough to try to do something unprecedented in this area”

“开天辟地搞创意的可能性几乎为零”

“kāitiānpìdì gǎo chuàngyì de kěnéngxìng jīhū wéi líng”

“The probability of making history and doing creative things is almost zero”

“这让李娜和她的团队在面对着开天辟地般的变化时也显得束手无策”

“zhè ràng lǐ nà hé tā de tuánduì zài miànduìzhe kāitiānpìdì bān de biànhuà shí yě xiǎnde shùshǒuwúcè”

“This made Li Na and her team look helpless in facing unprecedented changes.”

“许多体验，都是开天辟地第一回”

“xǔduō tǐyàn, dōushì kāitiānpìdì dì yī huí”

“Many experiences, are all unprecedented ‘firsts’”



# 理所当然

## TO GO WITHOUT SAYING

**I**f you are tired of saying 当然 (dāngrán- obviously, of course), try this out: 理所当然 (lǐ suǒ dāng rán).

理所当然 sounds like “to go without saying” or “as a matter of course,” and literally means that “according to reason, it should be the case.” Think of it as a slightly higher-brow “well duh!”

A breakdown of the characters in 理所当然 :

理 (lǐ) : reason, logic (真理 - zhēn lǐ)

所 (suǒ) : particle expressing emphasis

当 (dāng) : proper or appropriate (应当 - yīng dāng)

然 (rán) : this way or like this



# 理所当然

## TO GO WITHOUT SAYING

“女人伤害男人就理所当然了吗？”

“nǚrén shānghài nánrén jiù lǐsuǒdāngrán le ma ?”

“Is it just natural that girls will hurt guys?”

“。。。以纳达尔在比赛中表现出来的水平，落败是理所当然的”

“...yǐ nà dá ěr zài bǐsài zhōng biǎo xiàncū lái de shuǐpíng , luò bài shì lǐsuǒdāngrán de”

“...based on Nadal's performance level in the match, defeat was a matter of course”

“。。。在婚姻中的一些理所当然的事”

“。。。zài hūnyīn zhōng de yīxiē lǐsuǒdāngrán de shì “

“Some things which are obvious or natural in the course of a marriage...”

“我们很多人都理所当然地认为。。。 ”

“wǒmen hěnduō rén dōu lǐsuǒdāngrán de rèn wèi 。。。 ”

“We all believe as a matter of course...”

# 力所能及

## TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY

One of the important phrases intermediate Chinese learners study is “努力” (nǔ lì), which means “to try hard.” If you’ve grown tired of saying 努力, try supplementing it with a more sophisticated phrase: 力所能及 (lì suǒ néng jí).

力所能及 basically means “to the extent of one’s ability,” and literally means “as far as one’s strength can reach.” It is often used in the context of helping others.

A breakdown of the characters in 力所能及 (lì suǒ néng jí):

力 (lì): strength or force (体力 - tǐ lì)

所 (suǒ): conjunction that functions grammatically to hold the phrase together

能 (néng): to “be able to” or “be capable of” (能力 - néng lì)

及 (jí): to “reach” or “come up to” (普及 - pǔjí)



# 力所能及

## TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY

“提供力所能及的支持和帮助”

“tígōng lìsuǒnéngjí de zhīchí hé bāngzhù”

“To provide all the support and help in my capacity”

“她会帮助妈妈做一些力所能及的家务”

“tā huì bāngzhù māmā zuò yīxiē lìsuǒnéngjí de jiāwù”

“She helps her mom with some household chores that she’s able to help out with”

“力所能及地为他们排忧解难”

“lìsuǒnéngjí de wèi tāmen páiyōujiěnnán”

“To do all in one’s power to remove worries and solve problems for them”

“力所能及承担更多国际责任”

“lìsuǒnéngjí chéngdān gèngduō guójì zérèn”

“To take on more international responsibility to the extent of one’s ability”

# 两肋插刀

## GO TO GREAT LENGTHS FOR A FRIEND

**T**his is probably our most violent chengyu ever.  
But it's also one of the most positive.

Use this chengyu for close friends that you'd do anything for, including sticking knives in your ribs. It's 两肋插刀 (liǎng lèi chā dāo).

两肋插刀 literally means "stick knives into both sides of your ribs," and it's used to express a friendship that is so great that you're willing to do anything for it. Not surprisingly, it's generally used among guys.

A breakdown of the characters in 两肋插刀 (liǎng lèi chā dāo):

两 (liǎng): two

肋 (lèi): ribs (肋骨 – lèi gǔ)

插 (chā): to insert (插入 - chārù)

刀 (dāo): knife



# 两肋插刀

## GO TO GREAT LENGTHS FOR A FRIEND

“加入军团，您将拥有为您两肋插刀的兄弟...”

“jiārù jūntuán, nín jiāng yōngyǒu wéi nín liǎnglèichādāo de xiōngdì...”

“After joining your army unit, you’ll soon have brothers who will do anything for you...”

“王先生为人慷慨大方，是那种可以为朋友两肋插刀的硬汉”

“wáng xiānshēng wéirén kāngkǎi dàfāng, shì nàzhǒng kěyǐ wéi péngyǒu liǎnglèichādāo de yìng hàn”

“Mr. Wang is generous, and is that sort of strong-willed guy who will do anything for his friends”

“为了朋友我可以两肋插刀”

“wèi le péngyǒu wǒ kěyǐ liǎnglèichādāo”

“For friends, I’d do anything”

“他反对的理由不是自己不愿意为朋友两肋插刀，而是认为袁世凯不可靠”

“tā fǎnduì de lǐyóu búshì zìjǐ bú yuànyì wéi péngyǒu liǎnglèichādāo, érshì rènwéi yuánshìkǎi bù kěkào”

“The reason why he opposed was not that he was unwilling to make sacrifices for his friends, but rather because he thought Yuan Shikai was not reliable”

# 落叶归根

## TO RETURN HOME

**I**f you've spent significant time in China, you are likely familiar with the homesickness that creeps up once the euphoria of being in the Middle Kingdom wears off. At those times, you can say 我想念家乡 (wǒ xiǎng niàn jiā xiāng - "I miss my hometown"). Or you could take it another step further and knock your friends' socks off with 落叶归根 (luò yè guī gēn).

落叶归根 means returning to your hometown, and literally describes a withering leaf that falls to the roots of its own tree. It's a literary metaphor that paints a very vivid picture. It's generally used for cases of people who've spent a significant time away in distant lands, and are finally returning home.

A breakdown of the characters in 落叶归根 (luò yè guī gēn):

落 (luò): to fall 坠落- zhuì luò)

叶(yè): leaf

归 (guī):to return (回归- huí guī)

根 (gēn): root, foundation (根据- gēn jù)



# 落叶归根

## TO RETURN HOME

“你哥哥的身体一天不如一天，最后知道快要不行了，让他落叶归根”

“nǐ gēge de shēntǐ yìtiān bùrú yìtiān, zuìhòu zhīdào kuàiyào bùxíng le, ràng tā luòyèguīgēn ”

“Your brother’s health is worsening day by day, we finally know that he won’t make it - let’s let him return to his hometown”

“阔别多年回到北京，有没有落叶归根的感觉？”

“kuòbié duōnián huídào běijīng, yǒuméiyǒu luòyèguīgēn de gǎnjué ?”

“After leaving Beijing for so many years, do you have the feeling that you’ve returned back to your hometown?”

“近年来我非常想念家乡，大概是到了落叶归根的时候了”

“jìnniánlái wǒ fēicháng xiǎngniàn jiāxiāng, dàgài shì dào le luòyèguīgēn de shíhou le ”

“These past few years I’ve missed my hometown very much - it’s probably time to return back to my hometown”

“到了退休年龄的龙运昌有了落叶归根的打算”

“dào le tuìxiū niánlíng de lóngyùnchāng yǒu le luòyèguīgēn de dǎsuàn ”

“Having reached retirement age, Long Yun Chang planned to return to his hometown”



# 抛砖引玉

## JUST TOSSING AN IDEA OUT THERE

**H**ere's a sure way to impress your Chinese friends.

Next time you're discussing something with them, try this chengyu: 抛砖引玉(pāo zhuān yǐn yù).

抛砖引玉 means you're "just tossing an idea out there," and it literally translates as "to cast a brick to attract jade." You're basically saying, "this idea I'm tossing out there is just a brick, but perhaps it will lead one of you to contribute jade." You are trying to get the ball rolling in hopes of sparking an intelligent discussion. It's a humble way to contribute to a conversation and is sure to make your friends **see you in a new light**.

Here's a breakdown of the characters in 抛砖引玉(pāo zhuān yǐn yù):

抛 (pāo): to throw or toss

砖 (zhuān): a brick

引 (yǐn): to attract (吸引 - xī yǐn)

玉 (yù): jade



# 抛砖引玉

## JUST TOSSING AN IDEA OUT THERE

“我的建议还不够成熟，算是抛砖引玉吧”

“wǒde jiànyì hái búgòu chéngshú, suànshì pāozhuānyǐnyù ba”

“My suggestion is still half-baked -- you could see it as just me tossing an idea out there”

“希望本文抛砖引玉，能引起大家更多的思考”

“xīwàng běnwén pā zhuānyǐnyù, néng yǐnqǐ dàjiā gèng duō de sīkǎo”

“I hope that this document can act as a brick that attracts jade -- that it can make everyone think a little more”

“...希望能起到抛砖引玉的作用”

“...xīwàng néng qǐdào pāozhuānyǐnyù de zuòyòng”

“...I hope this can have the effect of initiating an intelligent conversation”

“主持人通常在晚会中起到抛砖引玉的作用”

“zhǔchíren tōngcháng zài wǎnhuì zhōng qǐdào pāozhuānyǐnyù de zuòyòng”

“At an evening party, the host will usually try to get the ball rolling with conversation”

# 破釜沉舟

**TO FULLY  
COMMIT**

**T**his chengyu is near and dear to our entrepreneurial, Chinese learning hearts.

The next time you want to express your resolve and determination to study Chinese, instead of saying 我很努力 (“I try hard”) use 破釜沉舟 (pò fǔ chén zhōu). 破釜沉舟 means to “pull out all the stops and fully commit to a course of action,” but literally means to “destroy your cauldrons and sink your boats.” It’s inspired by a general who forced his soldiers to destroy their food as well as their transportation home. Victory became the only option!

A breakdown of the characters in 破釜沉舟 (pò fǔ chén zhōu) :

破 (pò): to destroy or break (打破- dǎ pò)

釜 (fǔ): a cauldron or large pot (not commonly used)

沉 (chén): to sink (下沉- xià chén)

舟 (zhōu): a boat



# 破釜沉舟

## TO FULLY COMMIT

“奥巴马政府终于破釜沉舟，向华尔街宣战”

“àobāmǎ zhèngfǔ zhōngyú pòfǔchénzhōu, xiàng huáěrjiē xuānzhàn”

“The Obama administration is finally going all out and declaring war on Wall Street”

“诺基亚破釜沉舟挺 Windows Phone”

“nuòjīyà pòfǔchénzhōu tǐng Windows Phone”

“Nokia is going all in and supporting the Windows Phone”

“我们要破釜沉舟地落实党中央提出的科学发展观”

“wǒmen yào pòfǔchénzhōu de luòshí dǎngzhōngyāng tíchū de kēxuéfāzhǎn guān”

“We need to totally commit to fulfilling the Party Central Committee’s concept of scientific development”

“成绩差也破釜沉舟地拼一次吧！”

“chéngjī chà yě pòfǔchénzhōu de pīn yīcì ba !”

“Even if our grades suck, let’s give it our best shot”

# 强词夺理

## A WEAK ARGUMENT

**O**ne of the hardest things to do in a second language is to argue.

We'll help you out in your next debate with this chengyu: if you want to call somebody out for not making any sense, try 强词夺理 (qiǎng cí duó lǐ).

强词夺理 means that the person is using weak arguments and arguing illogically. Literally, it means that the person is "forcing words and seizing logic."

In the wrong situation 强词夺理 could be interpreted as fighting words, so it's best to use it in a lighthearted manner that makes it obvious that you're joking.

A breakdown of the characters in 强词夺理 (qiǎng cí duó lǐ):

强 (qiǎng): to force (勉强 - miǎn qiǎng)

词 (cí): words (生词 - shēng cí)

夺 (duó): to seize (夺取 - duó qǔ)

理 (lǐ): reason or rationality (理性 - lǐ xìng)



# 强词夺理

## A WEAK ARGUMENT

“奔驰汽车是强词夺理，利用汽车专业知识糊弄消费者”

“bēnchí qìchē shì qiǎngcíduólǐ, lìyòng qìchē zhuānyè zhīshì hùnòng xiāofèizhě”

“Mercedes-Benz is arguing irrationally, using its expert automotive knowledge to fool consumers”

“我却觉得这个广告是一个强词夺理自以为是广告的典型代表”

“wǒ què juéde zhè gè guǎnggào shì yī gè qiǎngcíduólǐ zìyǐwéishì guǎnggào de diǎnxíng dàibiǎo”

“I think this ad is a classic example of irrational and arrogant advertising”

“‘强词夺理’必定会成为公众们对这种思维攻击的利器”

“qiǎngcíduólǐ 'bìdìng huì chéngwéi gōngzhòngmen duì zhèzhǒng sīwéi gōngjī de lìqì”

“Distorting logic will inevitably become the public’s weapon for attacking this way of thinking”

“被抓住了不承认错误，还满嘴强词夺理”

“wúshì shèhuì guīzé, bèi zhuāzhù le bù chéngrèn cuòwù, hái mǎnzǔi qiǎngcíduólǐ”

“(They’ve) gotten caught and are not only not admitting their mistakes, but saying lots of things that defy logic”

# 全力以赴

**TO GIVE IT  
YOUR ALL**

**T**he essential characteristic of the successful student of Chinese? 全力以赴 (quán lì yǐ fù)! It means to exert all ones strength to reach a goal. It has a positive tone, and is slightly formal, but can still be used in everyday speech.

A breakdown of the characters in 全力以赴 (quán lì yǐ fù):

全 (quán): complete or all (eg. 全部 - quán bù)

力 (lì): strength (eg. 力量 - lì liàng)

以 (yǐ): preposition meaning “by”

赴 (fù): formal word for go



# 全力以赴

## TO GIVE IT YOUR ALL

“我们一定全力以赴，不让梦想飞走”

“wǒmen yídìng quánliǎyǐfù, bù ràng mèngxiǎng fēi zǒu”

“We will definitely give it our all, and not let our dream fly away”

“无论是什么作品他都全力以赴”

“wúlùn shì shénme zuòpǐn tā dōu quánliǎyǐfù”

“No matter what product it is, he will always give it his all”

“雅虎高管致函全体雇员：请继续全力以赴”

“yǎ hǔ gāo guǎn zhìhán quánǐ gùyuán : qǐng jìxù quánliǎyǐfù ”

“Yahoo executive sends message to all employees: please continue giving your all”

“无论考生的笔试成绩如何，都要全力以赴准备面试”

“wúlùn kǎoshēng de bǐshì chéngjì rúhé , dōuyào quánliǎyǐfù zhǔnbèi miànshì”

“No matter how the student’s written test score is, he/she needs to give 100% to prepare for the interview”



# 群龙无首

## A GROUP WITH NO LEADER

**I**n China, even a group of dragons need a leader.

This chengyu, 群龙无首 (qún lóng wú shǒu), is used to describe a situation where the lack of a leader works to a group's detriment.

With no guiding force, the group is muddled in disarray. This is a negative chengyu to describe a disorganized group- a sports team, a business, or even an entire industry.

A breakdown of the characters in 群龙无首 (qún lóng wú shǒu)-

群 (qún): group

龙 (lóng): dragon

无 (wú): without, no

首 (shǒu): first, head, chief



# 群龙无首

## A GROUP WITH NO LEADER

“在群龙无首的情况下，股市重心的下移也就在所难免”

“zài qúnóngwúshǒu de qíngkuàng xià, gǔshì zhòngxīn de xià yí yě jiù zài suǒ nánmiǎn”

“Without leadership, it’s hard to avoid the core of the stock market descending”

“现在的曼联更衣室可谓是群龙无首”

“xiàn zài de mànlián gèngyīshì kěwèi shì qúnóngwúshǒu”

““Right now you could say that Manchester United’s locker room needs a leader“

“共和党群龙无首，民主党的现任总统奥巴马也未见得淡定”

“gònghédǎng qúnóngwúshǒu, míngzhǔdǎng de xiànrèn zǒngtǒng àobāmǎ yě wèijiàn de dàndìng”

“The GOP needs a leader, and the Democratic Party’s President Obama does not yet appear to be calm and collected”

“他的生意也因为群龙无首陷入混乱”

“Tā de shēngyì yě yīnwèi qúnóngwúshǒu xiànrù hǔnlùn”

“Because his business had no leader, it descended into disorder”

# 如鱼得水

## LIKE A FISH IN WATER

**D**o you ever have those moments when you know your Chinese is ON?

When you almost feel like you were born to speak Chinese?

When you feel like a fish in water?

If so, or if you're aspiring to reach that point, you need this chengyu: 如鱼得水(rú yú dé shuǐ).

如鱼得水 literally means "like a fish in water," and it means the same thing as it does in English. It's generally used to describe someone who performs well in a certain situation, making it seem like they were meant to be in that environment. It is a very positive chengyu.

A breakdown of the characters in 如鱼得水 (rú yú dé shuǐ):

如(rú): like or as if

鱼(yú): fish

得(dé): to get or acquire (得到- dé dào)

水(shuǐ): water



# 如鱼得水

## LIKE A FISH IN WATER

“奥尼尔退役依然如鱼得水，声称还要当NBA球队老板”

“àoníěr tuìyì yīrán rúyúdéshuǐ, shēngchēng hái yào dāng NBA qiúduì lǎobǎn”

“After retirement, O’Neal is still like a fish in water, and asserts that he wants to be the owner of an NBA team”

“一款优质鼠标，让你在各种游戏里如鱼得水”

“yī kuǎn yōuzhì shǔ biāo, ràng nǐ zài gèzhǒng yóuxì lǐ rúyúdéshuǐ”

“A high quality mouse can make you like a fish in water for many kinds of games”

“马修能让默多克家族在伦敦社交圈内如鱼得水”

“mǎxiū néng ràng mòduōkè jiāzú zài lúndūn shèjiāoquān nèi rúyúdéshuǐ”

“Marshall is able to make the Murdoch family like a fish in water in London’s social circles”

“在水中漂游时，真的会让你有如鱼得水之感”

“zài shuǐ zhōng piāoyóu shí, zhēn de huì ràng nǐ yǒu rúyúdéshuǐ zhī gǎn”

“When you are drifting in the water, you will really have the feeling of being like a fish in water”

# 深思熟虑

## DEEP THOUGHT AND CONSIDERATION

**S**ummer is a perfect time to unwind. Beaches, hikes, and personal vacations are all great times to reflect on your life and work, and plan for a great autumn.

Its a time for people to 深思熟虑 (shēn sī shú lǜ).

深思熟虑 means to think deeply and carefully about something. It is a very positive idiom.

A breakdown of the characters in 深思熟虑(shēn sī shú lǜ):

深 (shēn): deep, thorough (深入 - shēnrù)

思 (sī): to think or contemplate (思考 - sīkǎo)

熟 (shú): familiar

虑 (lǜ): to consider (考虑 - kǎolǜ)



# 深思熟虑

DEEP

THOUGHT AND  
CONSIDERATION

“...每走一步都要深思熟虑”

“...měi zǒu yí bù dōu yào shēn sī shú lǜ”

“...every step we take requires careful thinking and consideration”

“经过深思熟虑，他决定自己创业”

“jīng guò shēn sī shú lǜ, tā jué dìng zì jǐ chuàng yè”

“After deep thought and consideration, he decided to start a business”

“从长远看，油价将保持在较高的价位，很多想买车的消费者必然要深思熟虑”

“cóng cháng yuǎn kàn, yóu jià jiāng bǎo chí zài jiào gāo de jià wèi, hěnduō xiǎng mǎi chē de xiāo fèi zhě bì rán yào shēn sī shú lǜ”

“Looking at it from a long term view, oil prices staying at a relatively high point will make many consumers think carefully”

“针对人民币问题，奥巴马政府与国会将一起寻找一个深思熟虑的方案”

“zhēn duì rén mín bì wèn tí, ào bā mǎ zhèng fǔ yǔ guó huì jiāng yì qǐ xún zhǎo yī gè shēn sī shú lǜ de fāng àn”

“Targeting the RMB problem, the Obama administration and Congress will together look for a carefully considered proposal”

# 四海为家

## WELL TRAVELED

**D**espite the unprecedented international connectivity offered by the internet, there are still those of us who seem to spend more time on planes than the ground. We can say such jetsetters 四海为家 (sì hǎi wéi jiā).

四海为家 basically means that the whole world (literally, the four seas) is your home. It's often used in the context of someone who wants to go out and see the world. It's also used to talk about someone who doesn't have a permanent home.

A breakdown of the characters in 四海为家 (sì hǎi wéi jiā):

四 (sì): four

海 (hǎi): oceans

为 (wéi): to regard as or treat as

家 (jiā) : home



# 四海为家

## WELL TRAVELED

“诗人们。。。四海为家，在一个城市存在1小时就会离开”

“shīrénmen... sìhǎiwéijiā, zài yí gè chéngshì cúnzài 1 xiǎoshí hòu jiù huì líkāi ”

“Poets... have the whole world as their home - they're in a city for one hour and then leave”

“温州人四海为家，哪里有钱我们就出现在哪里”

“wēnzhōu rén sìhǎiwéijiā, nǎlǐ yǒuqián wǒmen jiù chūxiàn zài nǎlǐ ”

“Wenzhou people have the whole world as their home - they appear wherever the money is”

“四海为家的开拓精神”

“sìhǎiwéijiā de kāituò jīngshén ”

“A pioneering spirit that treats the whole world as home”

“孙中山四海为家的革命生涯。。。 ”

“sūnzhōngshān sìhǎiwéijiā de gé mìng shēngyá ”

“Sun Zhongshan's revolutionary career in which he traveled the world...”



# 同甘共苦

## SHARE BOTH JOYS AND SORROWS

**N**obody said learning Chinese was easy.

What always helps is having friends who are undergoing the process with you. Those who understand both the frustrations and the exuberance inherent in studying this language. In short, to find people with whom you 同甘共苦 (tóng gān gòng kǔ).

同甘共苦 basically means to go through thick and thin together, and literally means “to enjoy sweetness together, and undergo suffering together.” You can use it to describe any person - colleague, teammate, family member - who you have been through a lot with.

A breakdown of the characters in 同甘共苦 (tóng gān gòng kǔ):

同 (tóng): together ( 共同 - gòngtóng)

甘 (gān): sweet

共 (gòng): together (共同 - gòngtóng)

苦 (kǔ): difficulties or hardships (吃苦 - chīkǔ)



# 同甘共苦

“未来的日子有困难也有喜悦，我们一定会同甘共苦，不离不弃”

“wèilái de rìzi yǒu kùnnán yě yǒu xǐyuè, wǒmen yídìng huì tónggāngòngkǔ, bùlíbúqì”

“The future holds both challenges and joy - we will definitely stay together through thick and thin”

“承认自己有点物质，不太可能和男人同甘共苦”

“chéngrèn zìjǐ yǒudiǎn wùzhí, bú tài kěnéng hé nánrén tónggāngòngkǔ”

“I admit I'm a little bit materialistic, and not capable of staying with a man through thick and thin.”

“全家人平安地在一起，同甘共苦，好好生活”

“quánjiārén píng'ān de zài yīqǐ, tónggāngòngkǔ, hǎohǎo shēnghuó”

“Have the whole family safely together, through thick and thin, and living life”

“他们两个是同甘共苦走过来的”

“tāmen liǎng gè shì tónggāngòngkǔ zǒu guòlái de”

“The two of them got here by staying together through thick and thin”

# 小鸟依人

## DAINTY AND LOVABLE

**I**t's time that you learned another way to say "cute". You probably learned "可爱" (kě ' ài) during the first year of Chinese class, and by now have worn it thin. How about something more nuanced - like "dainty": 小鸟依人 (xiǎo niǎo yī rén)?

小鸟依人 means that someone or something is small, cute, and delicate. It translates literally as a small bird which relies on people. It's generally used for girls or small children, and has a positive tone.

A breakdown of the characters in 小鸟依人 (xiǎoniǎoyīrén):

小 (xiǎo): small

鸟 (niǎo): a bird

依 (yī): to depend on (依赖- yīlài )

人 (rén): a person



# 小鸟依人

## DAINTY AND LOVABLE

“有时我也会靠着他宽阔的肩膀，小鸟依人的样子”

“yǒushí wǒ yě huì kào zhe tā kuānguò de jiānbǎng, xiǎoniǎoyīrén de yàngzi”

“Sometimes I will also lean on his broad shoulders, in a cute and delicate way”

“小鸟依人的形象，可爱又时尚”

“xiǎoniǎoyīrén de xíngxiàng, kěài yòu shíshàng”

“A dainty image, both cute and fashionable”

“我老公186公分，在他旁边有种小鸟依人的感觉”

“wǒ lǎogōng 186 gōngfēn, zài tā pángbiān yǒu zhǒng xiǎoniǎoyīrén de gǎnjué”

“My husband is 186 cm, so at his side I have a feeling of being small and dainty”

“曾经的小鸟依人，婚后突然变成河东狮吼”

“céngjīng de xiǎoniǎoyīrén, hūnhòu túrán biànchéng hédōngshīhǒu”

“Previously a cute and dainty girl, after marriage she became a dominant and demanding woman”

# 笑里藏刀

## A SMILE OF TREACHERY

**F**or 49 year-old billionaire Long Liyuan, it was just a lunch to talk business.

Little did he know that it would be his last.

The local official he was meeting with allegedly laced the meat with toxic herbs.

You can just imagine the official's expression while offering Long the meat. The Chinese idiom 笑里藏刀 (xiào lǐ cáng dāo) seems appropriate.

笑里藏刀 literally means "to have a smile hiding a knife," and it refers to someone who looks nice and benign, but is actually thinking sinister thoughts.

A breakdown of the characters in 笑里藏刀 (xiào lǐ cáng dāo):

笑 (xiào): to laugh or smile (笑容 - xiào róng)

里 (lǐ): inside (里面 - lǐ miàn)

藏 (cáng): to hide or conceal (隐藏 - yǐn cáng)

刀 (dāo): knife



# 笑里藏刀

## A SMILE OF TREACHERY

“此次希拉里的巴基斯坦之行，也是笑里藏刀，更在是威胁巴基斯坦”

“cǐcì xīlǎlǐ de bājīstān zhī xíng, yěshì xiàolǐcángdāo, gēng zài shì wēixié bājīstān”

“Hillary’s trip to Pakistan, is a smile hiding a knife - she’s really threatening Pakistan”

“人类总说野生动物是好朋友，可是笑里藏刀...”

“rénlèi zǒng shuō yěshēng dòngwù shì hǎo péngyǒu, kěshì xiàolǐcángdāo...”

“People always say that wild animals are all great friends, but their smiles are actually hiding knives...”

“他们...不会做出笑里藏刀的事情”

“tāmen... búhuì zuòchū xiàolǐcángdāo de shìqíng”

“They... are incapable of doing things like hiding knives behind their smiles”

“明显是轻视对手，这也给了笑里藏刀的高洪波出刀机会”

“míngxiǎn shì qīngshì duìshǒu, zhè yě gěi le xiàolǐcángdāo de gāohóngbō chū dāo jīhuì”

“(They) clearly underestimated their opponent, and this gave the innocent looking but malevolent Gao Hongbo an opening”

# 心花怒放

## BURSTING WITH JOY

**T**here are no shortages of **moments of terror** while learning Chinese.

So here's a chengyu to help you celebrate the moments of joy: 心花怒放 (xīn huā nù fàng).

心花怒放 means to “be bursting with joy,” and literally translates as “your heart is like a flower in full bloom”. As its imagery suggests, it is an extremely positive word. Arguably it's an even more intense state of joy than **兴高采烈**.

A breakdown of the characters in 心花怒放 (xīn huā nù fàng):

心 (xīn): heart

花 (huā): flower (鲜花 - xiān huā)

怒放 (nù fàng): to be in full bloom (used for flowers)



# 心花怒放

**BURSTING**

**WITH JOY**

“他是我新的约会对象，令我心花怒放，希望可以维持下去”

“tā shì wǒ xīn de yuēhuì duìxiàng, lìng wǒ xīnhuānùfàng, xīwàng kěyǐ wéichí xiàqù”

“He is the new person I’m dating, and he makes me really happy. I hope it lasts”

“心花怒放的陈女士一回家，立即将此  
事向丈夫汇报”

“xīnhuānùfàng de chén nǚshì yīhuíjiā, lìjí jiāng cǐshì xiàng zhàngfu huibào”

“Mrs. Chen was elated, and as soon as she returned home, she immediately reported to her husband about the matter”

“消费者买得开心，经营者更是心花怒放”

“xiāofèizhě mǎi de kāixīn, jīngyíngzhě gèng shì xīnhuānùfàng”

“When consumers happily make purchases, managers are even more joyful”

“...让原本心花怒放的心情更是锦上添花”

“...ràng yuánběn xīnhuānùfàng de xīnqíng gèngshì jǐnshàngtiānhuā”

“...to take a great mood and make it even better”



# 心血来潮

## SPUR OF THE MOMENT

**T**elling a story can be a challenge in Chinese. Even a great story can be dulled by limited vocabulary. When you have a story featuring an impulsive decision or a rash action (as many great stories do), use this chengyu: 心血来潮 (xīn xuè lái cháo).

心血来潮 basically means “spur of the moment” or “on a whim.” Literally, it evokes the image of blood rushing to your heart (in English, we’d say blood rushing to your head).

A breakdown of the characters in 心血来潮 (xīn xuè lái cháo), literally translating as “blood of the heart rising up”:

心 (xīn): heart

血 (xuè): blood

来 (lái): come, rise

潮 (cháo): tide, wave



# 心血来潮

## SPUR OF THE MOMENT

“那天，去报名的人非常多，她心血来潮也凑了个热闹”

“nà tiān, qù bàomíng de rén fēicháng duō, tā xīnxuèláicháo yě còu le gè rè nào”

“That day, there were many people who went to sign up, and on a whim she decided to join in on the fun”

“相比之下投资NBA球队更像是他们心血来潮的一项副业而已”

“xiāng bǐ xià tóuzī NBA qiúduì gēng xiàng shì tāmen xīnxuèláicháo de yī xiàng fùyè éryǐ”

“In comparison, investing in NBA teams seems more like just a side business started on a whim”

“我心血来潮地问了一遍身边的同事：你们的高考成绩是多少？”

“wǒ xīnxuèláicháo de wèn le yíbiàn shēnbiān de tóngshì: nǐmen de gāokǎo chéngjì shì duōshǎo?”

“On a whim, I asked my nearby colleagues: how high were your college entrance exam grades?”

“这个诉求不是美国百姓的一时的心血来潮”

“zhè gè sùqiú búshì měiguó bǎixìng de yìshí de xīnxuèláicháo”

“This is not a spur of the moment request from the American people”

# 兴高采烈

## FEELING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

高兴 (gāoxìng - happy) is a common word you learn in first year Chinese, but now it's time you found a better way to express your joy.

We have one for you: 兴高采烈 (xìng gāo cǎi liè).

The next time you want to describe someone as being more than just happy, you can use 兴高采烈 to put some extra oomph into it. It means “elated” or “on top of the world,” and literally translates as “high excitement due to intense literary talent.” It seems the ancient Chinese really enjoyed reading.

A breakdown of the characters in 兴高采烈:

兴 (xìng): interest or zeal (兴致 - xìngzhì)

高 (gāo): high

采 (cǎi): literary talent or language ability (文采 - wéncǎi)

烈 (liè): intense (强烈 - qiángliè)



# 兴高采烈

## FEELING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

"我兴高采烈地拿了钥匙去看新房子"

"wǒ xìnggāocǎiliè de ná le yàoshi qù kàn xīnfáng zi"

"I elatedly got my key and went to see the new house"

"当一个孩子兴高采烈地冲回家告诉妈妈得到老师表扬了"

"dāng yīgè háizi xìnggāocǎiliè de chōng huíjiā gàosu māmā dédào lǎoshī biǎoyáng le。 。 。"

"When a child joyfully runs back home and tells their mom that they got praised by the teacher..."

"两人即场切磋球技，打得兴高采烈"

"liǎng rén jí chǎng qiēcuō qiújì , dǎ de xìnggāocǎiliè"

"The two tested each other's skills on the court, and they played joyfully"

"兴高采烈的学生们在校园里"

"xìnggāocǎiliè de xuéshēngmen zài xiàoyuán lǐ"

"The elated children are on the school grounds"

# 眼花缭乱

## DAZZLING AND OVERWHELMING

**E**ver been to a Chinese casino? If not, take our word—they're so grandiose and glitzy they make Western ones seem quiet and subdued in comparison!

If you go, we can't guarantee that you'll make money, but they'll definitely make you 眼花缭乱(yǎn huā liáo luàn).

眼花缭乱 is a Chinese idiom that literally means that "one's vision has become blurred" and it's generally used when someone is dazzled by a sight that is colorful, beautiful, numerous, or complicated. When used for something that is complicated, it's more just like "overwhelmed."

A breakdown of the characters in 眼花缭乱(yǎn huā liáo luàn):

眼 (yǎn): eye or eyes (眼睛 - yǎnjīng)

花 (huā): means many things, but here means blurred

缭 (liáo): in a mess, tangled ( 缭绕 - liáorào)

乱 (luàn): to lack order



# 眼花缭乱

## DAZZLING AND OVERWHELMING

"男帅女靓，简直就是眼花缭乱的美丽"

"nán shuài nǚ liàng, jiǎnzhí jiùshì yǎnhuāliáoluàn de měilì "

"The guy is handsome and the girl is beautiful - it's simply dazzling beauty"

"...眼花缭乱的Android系统手机..."

"...yǎnhuāliáoluàn de Android xìtǒng shǒujī..."

"...the dazzling Android phones on the market today..."

"各种各样的商品广告充斥着多种媒体，让消费者眼花缭乱，不知该如何选择"

"gèzhǒnggèyàng de shāngpǐn guǎnggào chōngchì zhe duōzhǒng méitǐ, ràng xiāofèizhě yǎnhuāliáoluàn, bùzhī gāi rúhé xuǎnzé"

"All kinds of product commercials fill many media platforms, overwhelming consumers, and making them not know how to choose"

"市场上各大运营商纷繁复杂的各种套餐，让用户们觉得眼花缭乱"

"shìchǎng shàng gè dà yùnyíng shāng fēnfánfùzá de gèzhǒng tàocān, ràng yònghùmen jué de yǎnhuāliáoluàn"

"In the market, the many complicated packages offered by all the big operators make users feel overwhelmed"

# 一见钟情

## LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

**D**o you believe in love at first sight?

Or do you believe that love is "a temporary insanity curable by marriage"?

No matter which side you fall on, you should definitely know this chengyu: 一见钟情(yí jiàn zhōng qíng).

一见钟情 means "love at first sight." It's generally used for people, but you can also use it for material things you adore at first glance.

A breakdown of the characters in 一见钟情 (yí jiàn zhōng qíng):

一 (yí): one - here indicates the first time

见 (jiàn): to see (见面 - jiàn miàn)

钟 (zhōng): usually means clock, but here means to concentrate your affections

情(qíng): love, emotion (爱情 - ài qíng)



# 一见钟情

## LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

“我们在大学一见钟情，从没有想过分开”

“wǒmen zài dàxué yíjiànzhōngqíng, cóng méiyǒu xiǎng guò fēnkāi “

“In college we fell in love at first sight, and have never ever thought of breaking up”

“这次和他一见面，不知为何就有点心动了，难道这就是所谓的一见钟情？”

“zhè cì hé tā yíjiànmiàn, bùzhī wèihé jiù yǒudiǎn xīndòng le, nándào zhè jiùshì suǒwèi de yíjiànzhōngqíng? “

“This time when I met with him, I don't know why, but I felt a little spark - is this what they call love at first sight?”

“其实，每个女人和男人的心里，都有一见钟情的渴望”

“qíshí, měigè nǚrén hé nánrén de xīnlǐ, dōu yǒu yíjiànzhōngqíng de kěwàng “

“Actually, in every girl and guy's heart, they all have a desire for love at first sight”

“新宝马7系拥有经典豪华轿车令人一见钟情的魅力”

“xīn bǎomǎ 7 xì yōngyǒu jīngdiǎn háohuá jiàochē lìngrén yíjiànzhōngqíng de mèilì “

“The new BMW 7 series has the appeal of a classic luxury sedan that can make you fall in love with it at first sight”



# 一言为定

## WORD IS BOND

**T**here usually isn't much overlap between hip-hop slang and Chinese idioms.

Here's a great example where there is. 一言为定 (yì yán wéi dìng), translated as "word is bond", is a favorite saying of the Wu Tang Clan.

一言为定 is usually used in conversation to reinforce a commitment been made. It conveys that the commitment is solid and will be followed through with. It can be used for both small or important matters.

A breakdown of the characters in 一言为定 (yì yán wéi dìng):

一 (yì): one

言 (yán): language (语言 - yǔ yán)

为 (wéi): to be or act as

定 (dìng): to settle or decide (决定 - jué dìng)



# 一言为定

## WORD IS BOND

“好！我们一言为定！”

“hǎo! wǒmen yìyánwéidìng!”

“OK! So it’s settled then, that’s how we’ll do it!”

“‘我把你的心愿记在心上，来年第一个通知你。’‘行！一言为定！’”

“wǒ bǎ nǐ de xīnyuàn jìzài xīn shàng, láinián dìyī gè tōngzhī nǐ!” ‘xíng! yìyánwéidìng!”

“I will remember your wish, next year you’ll be the first person I notify.” “OK! It’s settled then!”

“胖老伯一拍胸脯：‘没问题，一言为定！’”

“pàng lǎobó yìpāixiōngpú: ‘méi wèntí, yìyánwéidìng!”

“Fat Uncle patted his chest: “No problem, it’s settled then (or - my word is bond)!”

“姐姐，那就一言为定”

“jiějie, nà jiù yìyánwéidìng”

“Sister, then it’s settled then”

# 有气无力

## FEELING WEAK AND FEEBLE

If you're tired of the word "tired" (累 - lei), read on!

We've got a chengyu that's much cooler: 有气无力(yǒu qì wú lì).

有气无力 literally means "to have breath but no strength," and describes someone or something which is weak, anemic, and lacking energy.

有气无力's tone is quite formal, and can be used for bigger things like countries and markets, unlike 累.

A breakdown of the characters in 有气无力(yǒu qì wú lì):

有 (yǒu): to have

气 (qì): breath ( 气息 - qìxī)

无 (wú): to not have

力 (lì): strength (力气 - lìqì)



# 有气无力

## FEELING WEAK AND FEEBLE

“他说话头也不抬，有气无力，恍若梦游”

“tā shuōhuà tóu yě bù tái, yǒuqìwúli, huǎng ruò mèngyóu”

“When he speaks, he doesn't lift his head and lacks energy - it's as if he's sleepwalking”

“...有气无力的欧洲债券市场”

“...yǒuqìwúli de ōuzhōu zhàiquàn shìchǎng”

“...the listless EU debt market”

“有气无力的握手给人不安全感，会引起对方强烈的不满”

“yǒuqìwúli de wòshǒu gěi rén bù ānquán de gǎnjué, huì yīnqǐ duìfāng qiángliè de bùmǎn”

A weak, listless handshake will make the other person feel uneasy, and will make them feel very unsatisfied.”

“它好像饿了很久，盯着我的口袋，一直有气无力地跟着我”

“tā hǎoxiàng è le hěn jiǔ, dīng zhe wǒ de kǒudài, yìzhí yǒuqìwúli de gēn zhe wǒ”

“It seemed to have been hungry for a long time. It kept staring at my pocket and weakly followed me”

# 蒸蒸日上

## FLOURISHING

**I**t's always worth learning another great way to compliment someone.

And it's always satisfying (at least for us) to encounter a new chengyu that's both vivid in its imagery and usable in many situations.

蒸蒸日上(zhēng zhēng rì shàng) generally means to be rising or improving each day, and its characters evoke the image of steam billowing up. It is flexible in usage, and can be used to describe your business, career, or love life. It's also a word that is colloquial and down to earth enough for you to use it in every day life. It's a positive, pleasant sounding word.

A breakdown of the characters in 蒸蒸日上 (zhēng zhēng rì shàng)

蒸蒸 (zhēng zhēng): each character individually means “to steam”, and combined they describe the way something is rising

日 (rì): day

上 (shàng): up/above or rising



# 蒸蒸日上

## FLOURISHING

“...三星则凭借其智能手机的优异表现，业务蒸蒸日上”

“...sānxīng zé píngjiè qí zhìnéng shǒujī de yōuyì biǎoxiàn, yèwù zhēngzhēngrìshàng”

“On the contrary, Samsung relied on its smartphone’s exceptional performance, and its business performed better day by day”

“旧社会生活艰苦，现在物质生活水平蒸蒸日上”

“jiù shèhuì shēnghuó jiānkǔ, xiànzài wùzhí shēnghuó shuǐpíng zhēngzhēngrìshàng”

“Life in the old society was very tough, while currently our material standard of living improves day by day”

“灿烂的花朵，象征爱情，蒸蒸日上”

“cànlàn de huāduǒ, xiàngzhēng àiqíng, zhēngzhēngrìshàng”

“The splendid flower, symbolizes love, growing day by day”

“相对蒸蒸日上的消费需求，儿童奶市场却略显疲软”

“xiāngduì zhēngzhēngrìshàng de xiāofèi xūqiú, értóng nǎi shìchǎng què lüèxiǎn píruǎn”

“In comparison to fast growing consumer demand, the baby milk market looks a little soft”

# 千方百计

## GREAT TENACITY AND EFFORT

**T**he next time you want to tell your Chinese client, professor, or significant other the great lengths you went for the project, homework, or anniversary, you can use 千方百计 (qiān fāng bǎi jì).

千方百计 means “to think of or employ all means imaginable” to a goal, and literally means “1000 methods and 100 plans.”

A breakdown of the characters in 千方百计 (qiān fāng bǎi jì) :

千 (qiān): thousand

方 (fāng): method (eg. 方法- fāng fǎ)

百 (bǎi): hundred

计 (jì): plan (eg. 计划-jì huà)



Examples from the wild

# 千方百计

## GREAT TENACITY AND EFFORT

“法国兴业银行正千方百计地安慰投资者”

“fàguó xīngyè yínháng zhèng qiānfāngbǎiji de ānwèi tóuzīzhě”

“The French bank Société Générale is currently using all means possible to comfort investors”

“为弥补用电的缺口，我们会千方百计地购电。”

“wèi míbǔ yòngdiàn de quēkǒu , wǒmen huì qiānfāngbǎiji de gòu diàn 。”

“To make up for this electricity shortage, we will make every effort possible to purchase electricity”

“千方百计维护香港经济社会稳定”

“qiānfāngbǎiji wéihù xiānggǎng jīngjì shèhuì wěndìng”

“To use all means possible to maintain Hong Kong’s economic and social stability”

“千方百计保持经济平稳较快发展”

“qiānfāngbǎiji bǎochí jīngjì píngwěn jiào kuài fāzhǎn ”

“Use all means possible to preserve economic stability and rapid economic development”



# About FluentU

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# About the Authors

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**B**en lived in China for several years after college, working in marketing at a NASDAQ listed Chinese internet company. He is now back in the US and is a regular contributor to the FluentU blog. Just to be clear, his Chinese name is not 笨.

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