Supplementary Learner’s Guide

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The *Learn a Chinese Phrase* video series has been produced with the idea that if a phrase is fun or amusing, the learner will be more likely to remember it. Although many phrases we introduce may be memorable, as language instructors we realize that learners must ultimately utilize and regenerate the words and structures within these phrases if they are to become proficient in the language. In essence, we are drawing learners from the enticing (i.e. “sugar coated”) metaphorical phrase to the mechanics of learning individual words, their usage, and their potential expansion.

Verbs in one language seldom correspond perfectly with their alleged counterparts in another language. The verb “to know” in English, for example, is generally translated into Chinese as “zhī dào” when it means “to know a fact” or “to know a person by reputation”, but as “rèn shī” when it refers to “better knowing” or “meeting a person for the first time.” Because of these obvious linguistic differences and potential pitfalls, we have taken considerable pains to demonstrate as simply and as clearly as possible how targeted verbs should and should not be used.

Nouns, though less subject to change between languages (a rose is a rose is a rose!), generally offer a platform for vocabulary expansion in Chinese. Given the lack of cognates between Chinese and English, any chance to expand one’s vocabulary by easy association should be seized! Thus, when the noun “niú” is introduced as the Chinese word for “cow,” for example, we show the learner that several important compound words also include “niú”, such as “niú pái” (“steak” or literally “cow ribs”), “niú ròu” (“beef” or literally “cow meat”), “niú nǎi” (“milk” or literally “cow milk”), and “niú pí” (“leather” or literally “cow skin”).

Of course, we realize that learning a language is an arduous and often uncomfortable process. We are also aware that in the quest to acquire a primary language, children crave comfort and repetition. With these two concepts in mind, we have placed a special emphasis on creating a highly consistent, visually pleasing, and unintimidating layout that will be of special help to visual learners. Our goal, thus, is to teach simple and concise lessons where possible, rather than to be highly thorough or exhaustive. Additionally, we understand that like a children’s book, a language study guide should be inviting and reviewed on a frequent basis!

It may be important to briefly address the question “Why idioms?” In addition to the assertion that they are fun, interesting, and a window on culture, it is critical to note that the majority of any given language is metaphorical or non-literal. Beyond ordering food, asking for directions and simple negotiation, there is a never-ending world of culturally-based metaphors and idioms to be encountered in daily conversation. This highly important aspect of language cannot be ignored.

In sum, we hope that our *Learn a Chinese Phrase* videos, supplementary videos, and *Supplementary Learner’s Guide* will help provide Chinese language learners not only with phrases to pepper their conversations and amuse their Chinese-speaking friends, but with multiple platforms on which they can build their vocabulary and generate new sentences, which is so very critical in the language learning process!
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**Learn a Chinese Phrase**

**duì niú tán qín**  
**对牛弹琴**  
**Play Zither for a Cow**  
**“Casting Pearls before Swine”**

Tā zài duì niú tán qín.

*Example:*  他在对牛弹琴。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>qín</th>
<th>n. general name for a musical instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tán</td>
<td>v. to play a stringed instrument that requires plucking or pounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gāngqín</td>
<td>yi jià/tài gāngqín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>钢琴</td>
<td>a piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shùqín</td>
<td>yi bǎ shùqín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>竖琴</td>
<td>a harp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dàtiqín</td>
<td>yi bǎ dàtiqín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大提琴</td>
<td>a cello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhōngtíqín</td>
<td>yi bǎ zhōngtíqín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中提琴</td>
<td>a viola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiǎotíqín</td>
<td>yi bǎ xiǎotíqín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小提琴</td>
<td>a violin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural Note:**

Additional verbs in Chinese for playing a musical instrument include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dǎ</th>
<th>to play a percussion instrument by pounding or striking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tā zài dǎgǔ.</td>
<td>他在打鼓。 He is playing the drums.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chuī</th>
<th>to play a brass or woodwind instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tā zài chuī dízi.</td>
<td>他在吹笛子。 He is playing the flutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tā huì chuī Sàkèshì.</td>
<td>他会吹萨克斯。 He can play saxophone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Hand
“Green Horn” “Newbie”

Wǒ shì kāi chē xīnshǒu.

Example: 我是开车新手。

xīn
新 adj. new

xīn yīfu
新衣服
new clothes

yì běn xīn shū
一本新书
a new book

xīn wánjù
新玩具
new toy

yī gè xīn wánjù
一个新玩具
a new toy

xīn gē
新歌
new song

yī shǒu xīn gē
一首新歌
a new song

xīn
新 adv. newly/recently

xīn de
(新+v. +的+n.)

xīn lái de xuésheng
新来的学生
newly-arrived student

xīn mǎi de chē
新买的车
newly-bought car

Xīn xiě de shū
新写的书
newly-written book(s)

shǒu
手 n. a person associated with a job or profession

gē wèi
个; 位 (respect);

gēshǒu
歌手
singer lit: song hand

gūshǒu
鼓手
drummer lit: drum hand

zhūshǒu
助手
assistant lit: assist hand

bāngshǒu
帮手
helper lit: help hand

shuǐshǒu
水手
sailor lit: water hand
### hútu zhòng 糊涂虫

**Mixed-up Bug**

**“Space Cadet”**

Tā shì gè hútu zhòng.

*Example:* 他是个糊涂虫。

### hútu

**糊涂**  adj. muddled or confused

| hútu zhàng  | chaotic financial records  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhè shì yī bǐ hútu zhàng.</td>
<td>This is a muddled account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhuāng hútu</td>
<td>pretend to be confused (play dumb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tā zài zhuāng hútu.</td>
<td>He is playing dumb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wǒ yǒu diǎnr hútu.</td>
<td>I'm a little bit confused.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### chóng

**虫**  n. insect or worm

- **kūn chóng** 昆虫  insect
- **huáng chóng** 蝗虫  locust
- **máomao chóng** 毛毛虫  caterpillar
- **hài chóng** 害虫  pests
- **piáo chóng** 瓢虫  ladybug
- **yíng huǒ chóng** 萤火虫  fire fly

**mw:** 只
### Sing the Opposite Tune

**“Naysayer”/“Contrarian”**

#### Nǐ gēn wǒ chàng fǎndiào.
**Example:** 你跟我唱反调。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cháng</th>
<th>fǎn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>唱</td>
<td>v. to sing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dúchàng</th>
<th>chóngchàng</th>
<th>héchàng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>独 唱</td>
<td>重 唱</td>
<td>合 唱</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solo</td>
<td>duet</td>
<td>choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lit: layer singing</td>
<td>lit: together singing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>diào</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>调</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>qūdiào</th>
<th>zǒudiào</th>
<th>lǎodiào</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>曲 调</td>
<td>走 调</td>
<td>老 调</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tune; melody</td>
<td>out of tune; off key</td>
<td>old tune</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>di yī shēngdiào</th>
<th>di èr shēngdiào</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>第一 声 调</td>
<td>第二 声 调</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first tone</td>
<td>second tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>shēngdiào</th>
<th>jiàngdiào</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>升 调</td>
<td>降 调</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rising tone</td>
<td>falling tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Wasting Mouth and Tongue

"Wasting Your Breath"

Nǐ báifèi kǒushé.

**Example:** 你白费口舌。

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>fèi</strong></td>
<td><strong>fèi</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>费</td>
<td>费</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. to cost/take (time or effort)</td>
<td>（交/付+）费 n. fee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Zhè jiàn shì hěn fèi shíjiān.**
  - 这件事很费时间。
  - *It takes a lot of time.*

- **Dǎsǎo fángjiān hěn fèilì.**
  - 打扫房间很费力。
  - *Cleaning the house takes a lot of effort.*

### 白费

**báifèi**

**白费** v. to waste

- **báifèi jīngli**
  - 白费精力
  - *to waste mental or physical effort*

- **báifèi gōngfu**
  - 白费功夫
  - *to waste physical effort lit: to waste work*

- **báifèi shíjiān**
  - 白费时间
  - *to waste time*

- **báifèi liqi**
  - 白费力气
  - *to waste strength*

### 口

**kǒu**

**n. mouth**

- **kǒuxiāngtáng**
  - 口香糖
  - *chewing gum lit: mouth fragrant candy*

- **kǒuyǔ**
  - 口语
  - *spoken language lit: mouth language*

Tā zài jiáo kǒuxiāngtáng.

- 他在嚼口香糖。
  - *He is chewing gum.*

Tā zài liànxí zhōngwén kǒuyǔ.

- 他在练习中文口语。
  - *He is practicing spoken Chinese.*
Luóbo báicài,  gè yǒu suǒ ài.

*Example:*  萝卜白菜, 各有所爱。

cài  
菜  n. vegetable; dish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>zhòng cài</th>
<th>to grow vegetables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tā zài yuànzi lǐ zhòng cài.</td>
<td>He plants vegetables in the yard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>diǎn cài</th>
<th>to order food (at a restaurant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tā zài fàndiàn diǎn cài.</td>
<td>He is ordering food at a restaurant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ài</th>
<th>n. love; affection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tā hěn ài guó.</td>
<td>He is very patriotic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wǒ ài tīng yīnyuè.</td>
<td>I’m fond of listening to music.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ài</th>
<th>v. be fond of; to love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wǒ ài wǒ de mǔqīn.</td>
<td>I love my mom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

真愛  zhēn’ài  
true love

母愛 / 父愛  mūài  fùài  
maternal love / paternal love

友愛  yǒuài  
friendly love
léirén  雷人

**Thundering Someone**

“Shocking Someone”

Nǐ de yīfu hěn léirén.

**Example:** 你的衣服很雷人。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>léi</th>
<th>léi</th>
<th>kē</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>雷 n. thunder</td>
<td>雷 n. mine</td>
<td>雷 n. mine mw: 颗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>léiyǔ</td>
<td>díléi</td>
<td>yúléi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>雷雨  thunderstorm</td>
<td>地雷  land mine</td>
<td>鱼雷  torpedo lit: fish mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>léidìàn</td>
<td>yùléi</td>
<td>shǒuléi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>雷电  thunder and lightning</td>
<td>鱼雷  torpedo lit: fish mine</td>
<td>手雷  grenade lit: hand mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>léishēng</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>雷声  thunderclap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Caution:**

“雷” is only used as a verb with the noun “人”.

hěn léirén  很雷人  very shocking

tèbié léirén  特别雷人  extremely shocking

**Cultural Note:**

Wàimiàn diàn shǎn léi mínɡ.

Outside it’s lightning and thundering.

lit: Outside electricity strikes and thunder sounds.
**Giving Strength**

*Nǐ de lǎoshī hěn gěilì.*

*Example:* 你的老师很给力。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>bǎ</th>
<th>gěi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>给  v. to give (给+sb.+sth.)</td>
<td>给  v. to give (把+sth.+给+sb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qǐng gěi wǒ yàoshi.
请给我钥匙。
*Please give me the keys.*

Bié gěi tā zhàopiàn.
别给他照片。
*Please don’t give him the photos.*

Qǐng bǎ shū gěi wǒ.
请把书给我。
*Please give me the book.*

Bié bǎ pánzi gěi tā.
别把盘子给他。
*Please don’t give him the plates.*

**li**

*力*  n. power; strength; ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tīngli</th>
<th>wōli</th>
<th>jiāyì li</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>听力</td>
<td>握力</td>
<td>记忆力</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hearing or listening ability</td>
<td>grip strength</td>
<td>ability to remember/memorize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural Note:**

*给力* is a term that gained popularity on the internet in China. The original meaning was to give someone strength, but it soon came to be used as “encouraging.”
**diàndēngpào**

**Light Bulb**

*“Third Wheel”*

Tā shì gè diàndēngpào.

*Example:* 他是个电灯泡。

---

**diàn**

电 n. electricity

**diànchí**

电 池 battery

**diànnǎo**

电 脑 computer

**diàndòng yáshuā**

电动牙刷 electric toothbrush

**pào**

泡 n. bubble; blister; something shaped like bubbles

**qìpào**

气 泡 air bubbles (i.e. carbonated beverage)

**qìpào yú**

气 泡 鱼 puffer fish

**shuǐpào**

水 泡 bubbles/blister lit: water bubbles

**féizào pào**

肥 皂 泡 soap bubbles

---

**dēng**

灯 n. lamp; light; lantern

zhǎn gè

mw: 盏; 个

**lùdēng**

路灯 street light

**táidēng**

台 灯 table/desk lamp

**dēngtǎ**

灯 塔 lighthouse

**hónglǜdēng**

红 绿 灯 traffic lights

**pào**

泡 v. to soak; to steep

**pào**

泡菜 kimchi

Chènyī pào zài shuǐ lǐ.

衬衣泡在水里。

*The shirts are soaking (in the water).*

Shuǐjiào qián pàozǎo

睡觉前泡澡。

*Before sleeping, take a bath.*

Wǒ gěi kèrén pàochá.

我给客人泡茶。

*I make/steep/brew tea for the guests.*
### Fall into Love River

#### Example:

Nǐ zhuì rù àihé le.

你坠入爱河了。

<p>| zhuì | zhui |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>v. to fall; to drop; to tumble</th>
<th>n. weight; hanging object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fēijī zhuì rù dàhǎi.</td>
<td>diàozhuì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>飞机坠入大海。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The plane fell into the ocean.*

<p>| hé | tiáo |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n. river</th>
<th>条</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shù shàng de guǒzi yáoyáo-yúzhuì.</td>
<td>qiānzhui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>树上的果子摇摇欲坠。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rù</th>
<th>v. enter; join; become a member of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rùkǒu</td>
<td>rúkōu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>入口</td>
<td>entrance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| rùjìng | rújìng |
| v. enter a country |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rùxué</th>
<th>rúxué</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>入校</td>
<td>start school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Huáng Hé**

The Yellow River is the second-longest river in Asia after the Yangtze River, and the sixth-longest in the world with an estimated length of 5,464 km.