

## Material for 21I .107 Chinese Streamlined I

Title of the song: Zhongguohua, *Chinese Language*

This song is by a Taiwanese pop music girl band, S.H.E., and was first performed in May 2007. It was an instant hit in Taiwan and soon became popular in Mainland China, Hong Kong and other Asian countries. It is still very popular even today. The purpose of adopting this material for my class is to expose students to Chinese tongue twisters, to practice pronunciation, to appreciate the Chinese language and to generate meaningful cultural discussions. This song is a cultural hybrid reflecting several aspects of its mixed lineage:

### 1) East and West

*Chinese Language* falls into the genre of pop music. The song celebrates the beauty of the Chinese language and claims that Chinese language and culture have become more and more popular in the world. It mixes traditional Chinese tongue twisters with elements of Hip-Hop music and contains several Rap segments. Rhyme plays a very important part in Chinese tongue twisters, as in many other traditional literary genres. The employment of the Rap style delivers this rhyming characteristic beautifully. It makes the song easy to remember. Unfortunately, this characteristic is lost in the English translation. It is interesting to see that a song celebrating Chinese traditions delivers its theme through the combination of western pop music styles.

### 2) Past and Present

According to one of the singers from the group, the Chinese tongue twister has become a trend in Taiwan recently. However, the Chinese tongue twister has had a long tradition in Chinese culture and is not a modern invention. Although like many other forms of art, the trend of *fugu*, or restoring antiquity, occurs periodically throughout history, the act of combining traditional cultural elements with modern technology allows young artists to create a new space for new generations to ponder the past and look into the future.

### 3) Political References: Taiwan vs. China

The song caused some controversy when it first came out in Taiwan. The Taiwanese government has been trying to establish Taiwan's own image, culture and identity for years. Therefore, the government has tried to sever any ties to Mainland China in terms of culture, ethnicity and languages. While the government was busy "removing" cultural elements of Mainland China from Taiwan, this pop music band released a song celebrating traditional Chinese culture and Mandarin Chinese that was an instant hit. The government harshly criticized the band and called it a shameful action to flatter the Mainland Chinese government in order to make gains in the Chinese music market. Some critics implied that a segment of the tongue twisters referred to the long political struggle of two major figures in the party in power. Some people even revised the lyrics to add the phrase "Taiwanese Language." No one knows the true intention of the song, and neither the lyricist nor the band addressed the political issues raised by these criticisms in any political tones. It is interesting to see despite the political environment of separatism, many Taiwanese people still identify with China culturally.

Lyrics Translation (by Min-Min Liang)

(Tongue twister)

The shouldering pole is wide and the wooden bench is long.  
The shouldering pole wants to be tied to the wooden bench.  
The shouldering pole is wide and the wooden bench is long.  
The shouldering pole wants to be tied to the wooden bench.

(Rap)

Marilyn from London bought a Chinese gown for her mom.  
Tchaikovsky from Russia fell in love with Chinese beef dough soup.  
In the mouths of people with all kinds of skin colors and hair color,  
Chinese words start getting popular.  
How many years have we been studying English pronunciation and grammar  
industriously?  
It is their turn to curl up their tongues to learn the differences between four tones for a  
change these years.  
Ping ping zhe zhe ping ping zhe (the marks for old Chinese phonetics)  
How smart the Chinese people are!  
How beautiful the Chinese language is!

(Tongue twister)

The shouldering pole is wide and the wooden bench is long.  
The shouldering pole wants to be tied to the wooden bench.  
The wooden bench won't let the shouldering pole tie to it.  
The shouldering pole bents on having itself tie to the wooden bench.  
The wooden bench insists on not letting the shouldering pole tie to it.  
After all, is the shouldering pole wider or the wooden bench longer?

Older brother and younger brother sit in front of a hill.  
A goose is sitting on the hill and a river flows under the hill.  
Older brother said that the river was wide.  
Younger brother said that goose was white.  
The goose wants to cross the river but the river wants to cross the goose.  
We don't know whether it is the goose crossing the river or the river crossing the goose.

(Singing)

The whole world is learning Chinese.  
Confucius's words have become more and more international.  
The whole world is speaking Chinese.  
We are making the world to pay a close attention to what we are saying.

(Rap)

Susana from New York opened a Zen style lounge bar.  
Wolfgang from Berlin is playing Chinese violin with electronic guitar.  
In the mouths of people with all kinds of skin colors and hair colors,

Chinese words start getting popular.  
How many years have we been studying English pronunciation and grammar industriously?  
It is their turn to curl up the tongues to learn the differences between four tones for a change these years.  
Ping ping zhe zhe ping ping zhe (the marks for old Chinese phonetics)  
How smart the Chinese people are!  
How beautiful the Chinese language is!

(Tongue twister)

A little kid named little Du went out to buy vinegar and cloth.  
He bought the cloth and the vinegar.  
He turned his head and saw an eagle catching a rabbit.  
He put down the cloth and the vinegar.  
He went to chase the eagle and the rabbit.  
The eagle flew away and the rabbit ran away.  
He spilt the vinegar, wetting the cloth.  
The mouth blamed the leg and the leg blamed the mouth.  
The mouth blamed that the leg liked to run,  
And the leg blamed that the mouth liked to talk sensationally.  
If only moves the mouth, not the leg, or  
Only moves the leg, not the mouth.  
Rather not having both mouth and leg.  
After all, is the mouth blaming the leg or the leg blaming the mouth?

(Singing)

The whole world is learning Chinese.  
Confucius's words have become more and more international.  
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