



**MONASH** University

**TO THE PEOPLE, FOOD IS FOREMOST: CULTURAL  
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CANTONESE FOOD-RELATED IDIOMS**

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## Abstract

Food and food-related activities are crucial to human survival and often encode special cultural meanings that vary from one community to another. The significance of food and foodways in a speech community is often reflected in the abundance of food-related expressions in the community language. To the Cantonese people, food and eating are culturally significant, which results in a rich collection of food-related idioms in the Cantonese language. This thesis examines Cantonese food-related idioms within the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2017). The target idioms are sourced from eight authoritative Cantonese dictionaries and reference books published within the last 25 years and selected based on the result of an online survey participated by over 1000 native Cantonese speakers from Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau. The study first identifies the underlying cultural conceptualizations through examining the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the target idioms, and then discusses the extent of figurativeness of the target idioms from an emic perspective through investigating Cantonese speakers' conceptual consciousness of the identified cultural conceptualizations. Subsequently, the study explores the ideological underpinnings of the cultural conceptualizations and presents the dynamics of the Cantonese cultural cognition through examining the reconceptualization of some idioms brought by ideological (re)negotiations in contemporary China. The findings show that cultural conceptualizations established from the source domains *MAI* (米, rice) and *SIK* (食, food consumption) are closely related to the fundamental aspects of the Cantonese life. They are derived from the embodied and lived experience of the Cantonese people. These cultural conceptualizations are to different extents, harnessed by the Cantonese worldview. As such, Cantonese speakers have different degrees of consciousness of the conceptual mappings underlying distinctive idioms, and accordingly acknowledge different extent of figurativeness in these idioms. The study also finds that underpinning the identified cultural conceptualizations are ideologies that evolve from shared history and constantly renegotiate along the sociological development of the Cantonese societies. Furthermore, cultural reconceptualization triggered by the ideological renegotiations can affect the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms, and Cantonese speakers play a crucial role in this process. The current study expands the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics and supplement the current research on reconceptualization. It sheds light on a better understanding of the culturally structured lexicon in the Cantonese speech communities. It also has implications for the research on World Englishes, intercultural communication and translanguaging practice.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Background

Food is essential to human survival and wellbeing. Food-related activities such as eating and drinking are universal human activities. Yet beyond the basic means of keeping us alive, there is so much more involved in the regime of food. What people choose to eat and how people process their food to a certain extent, define who they are and to what group they belong. Eating habits and dietary regimens have important symbolic values, binding us but also strongly dividing us. Montanari (2006) contends that food is more a product of culture than one of nature. Human creativity, culinary techniques and technologies, and personal choices based on criteria that reflect the symbolic values of foodstuffs are integrated in the production, preparation, and consumption of food (see also Lévi-Strauss, 1970). Foodways, or “the traditional customs or habits of a group of people concerning food and eating” (Simpson, 2008), vary from one cultural group to another. As a result, food and food-related activities are common mediums through which social scientists acquire knowledge and understandings of culture and society. Anthropologists study cultural heritage, group identity, relationships between one group and another including those between the mortals and the deities through food (Arnott, 1975; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Farb & Armelagos, 1980; Klein & Watson, 2015; Watson & Caldwell, 2005). Sociologists on the other hand, often explore issues related to morality, wealth, security, power, gender, ethnicity, and class in social spaces through examining food and food-related behavior (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Germov & Williams, 2016; Lang & Heasman, 2004; McMillan & Coveney, 2010; Mennell et al., 1992; Murcott, 1983, 1998; Poulain, 2017; Ward et al., 2010). Food is a non-verbal language which “at an unconscious level communicates the structure of society” (Farb & Armelagos, 1980, p. 106).

Zooming into the field of linguistics, the commonness and significance of food and food-related activities in various sectors of human life has expectedly resulted in the abundance of food language, and the prevalence of food language has drawn the attention of scholars from various subdisciplines of linguistics. There are abundant studies on for example, the semantics of the cooking lexicon (Lehrer, 1969, 1972; A. Newman, 1975; Yoon, 2015; H. Zhang & Kim, 2013), the typology of the eating and drinking verbs (Bonvini, 2008; Boyeldieu, 2008; Family, 2008; Hénault, 2008; Jia & Wu, 2017; J. Newman, 2006, 2009b; Pardeshi et al., 2006; Williams, 1991), food discourse in different text genres (Andoh, 2010; DiVirgilio, 2010; Faivre, 2010; Gerhardt et al., 2013; Jurafsky, 2015; Strauss, 2005), and the pragmatics of food-related conversations and narratives (Dynel, 2020; Szatrowski, 2014).

Examining the semantic extension of food language such as the metaphorical establishment and the figurative use of food expressions is among the common linguistic investigations of food language. In particular, the cognitive



mechanisms such as conceptual metaphors and metonymies underlying the extended use of food language have been widely studied since the prosperity of the Lakoffian school of Cognitive Linguistics<sup>1</sup> and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999, 2003). In many of these studies, foodstuffs and food-related behavior like eating, drinking, and cooking are identified as the source domain. Researchers investigate how knowledge and experience from the source domain are activated and mapped onto the perceptions of concepts in another domain, i.e., the target domain<sup>2</sup> (e.g., Jaggar & Buba, 2009; J. Newman, 1997; Song, 2009; Wierzbicka, 2009; Yamaguchi, 2009) and thus motivate the extended meanings of the food expressions. Food metaphors are salient and extensively studied in domains such as IDEAS (Andrioi, 2010; Berrada, 2007; Hassan, 2010; Khajeh et al., 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Su, 2002; Tsaknaki, 2016; Wen & Yang, 2016), SEXUALITY (Emanatian, 1995; Maalej, 2007; Pham, 2016; Spang, 2011; S. C. Tsang, 2009), HUMAN DISPOSITIONS (Alsadi, 2017; Faycel, 2012; Hassan, 2010; Khajeh et al., 2013; Khajeh & Ho Abdullah, 2012), and INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP (Deng et al., 2017). Multimodal representations of food metaphors are also gaining momentum as a newly found research interest (Pérez-Hernández, 2019; Silaški & Đurović, 2013; Tseng, 2017; H. Zhou, 2014).

With a growing number of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic investigations of conceptual metaphors (e.g., Kövecses, 2003, 2004, 2005), there has been increasing awareness and acknowledgement that conceptual mechanisms, especially those embedded in conventional figurative language, are often culturally constructed (see e.g., Boers, 2003; Boers et al., 2004; Charteris-Black, 2003). Such awareness and acknowledgement is in alignment with Chandler's (2007) emphasis on the semiotic significance of figurative language regarding its representation of the reality of a culture or sub-culture:

However they are defined, the conventions of figurative language constitute a rhetorical code. Like other codes, figurative language is part of the reality maintenance system of a culture or sub-culture. It is a code which relates ostensibly to *how* things are represented rather than to *what* is represented (Chandler, 2007, p. 124).

As such, we have seen a consensus reached by scholars from various fields of linguistics that figurative language encodes the interworking of conceptual mechanisms and cultural models. Scholars like Dobrovolskij and Piirainen

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<sup>1</sup> In the present study, following Peeters' (2001, 2017) proposal of using different labels for a broader field of academic endeavor and for a narrower theoretical framework within the field, we use *Cognitive Linguistics* with upper case initials to refer to the theoretical paradigm associated with the work of the Langacker and Lakoffian school of cognitive linguists, so as to distinguish a wider and more general discipline of *cognitive linguistics* that involves other research related to language and cognition.

<sup>2</sup> There are also a few studies that explore metaphors in which particular food and food-related activities are the target domain. For example, Caballero (2007, 2009) analyzes conceptual metaphors and metonymies in the target domain of wine jargon ("winespeak") under wine advertising and wine tasting contexts.

(2005, 2006) and Yu (2009a) have made remarkable efforts to establish frameworks and models that situate the study of conceptual semantic processing of figurative or metaphoric language in the cultural context of the target language.

Following the trend, in studies of figurative food expressions, cultural factors that motivate the conceptual mappings and/or meaning making of the food expressions are often explored and analyzed. To list a few studies of Chinese food language in particular, Lan (1994) makes one of the early attempts to connect semantic development of food expressions to the history of Chinese culinary culture. Liu (2002) examines Chinese food idioms extensively, and contends that the abundance of food and eating metaphors in Chinese is attributed to the extra-linguistic cultural practices guided by the Chinese worldviews. And Ye (2007, 2010) addresses the “cultural-internal understanding” (2010, p. 127) in her cognitive semantic analyses of taste and eating expressions and their figurative use in Chinese.

In spite of some impressive attempts addressed above however, there has yet to be a study that systematically explicates the layered correlation between food language, its conceptual structure, and its cultural underpinnings. In regard to the Chinese language family specifically, there is rarely a study that 1) focuses on food expressions in a Chinese topolectal/dialectal variety other than Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua); 2) explores these food expressions with a cultural-conceptual approach, especially from the perspective of the speakers; and 3) stresses on the special dynamics of the speech community (-ies) of this particular Chinese variety while situating the examination in the wider context of contemporary China.

The current project therefore, sets out to make such an attempt by investigating food-related idioms in Cantonese within the framework of Cultural Linguistics, a discipline that explores the relationship between language and *cultural conceptualizations* (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a) and presents the nexus between language, speakers, and the cultural cognition of a speech community. The study explores the cultural conceptualizations embedded in Cantonese food-related idioms, focusing on the commonly known and frequently used idioms with rice-related and eating-related keywords. It examines the idioms from the perspective of Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau, with materials that reflect the target idioms in use and through cultural informants’ interpretations and responses. It not only seeks to unpack the culturally structured categories, schemas, metaphors, and metonymies underlying the idioms’ linguistic forms, but also endeavors to explore the underpinning cultural ideologies of these cultural conceptualizations as anchored in the bigger Chinese cultural context.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

China and the Chinese diaspora worldwide are known for their food culture and culinary art. For the Chinese, food carries symbolic cultural meanings. Anderson (1988) synthesizes the sociocultural significance of food and dining in the Chinese society in his monograph *The Food of China*:

Chinese use food to mark ethnicity, culture change, calendric and family events, and social transactions. No business deal is complete without a dinner. No family visit is complete without sharing a meal. No major religious event is correctly done without offering up special foods proper to the ritual context (p.199). For the Chinese, perhaps more than for any other group, food is a central feature of ethnicity, a basic statement about what one is (p.211).

In light of such significant sociocultural status of food and food-related activities, food expressions are abundant and a vigorous unit of the Chinese languages. Numerous Chinese linguists have done in-depth investigations on Chinese food language, many of which explicate the linguistic properties of Chinese food expressions and explore the conceptual mechanisms of the expressions' semantic processing (e.g., Dong, 1995; Jia & Wu, 2017; Ju, 2009; Li & Qu, 2009; Nie, 2008; C. Wang & Gu, 2009; Z. Wang, 2000; Zhao, 1991). There is also an increasing awareness to address the cultural factors that are encoded in the food expressions as previously mentioned (see also He, 2015; B. Liu & Gao, 2008; D. Wang & Zhao, 2003; Y. Wang, 2006; Y. Wang & Lin, 2007; Wu & Quan, 2007).

However, the literature of Chinese food language often tends to be over-generalized, as most relevant studies establish their arguments based on analyses of Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua). They tend to overlook the linguistic and cultural diversity among speech (sub)communities of different Chinese varieties and the probable variation in conceptualizations embedded in distinctive food expressions that are culturally special to a particular Chinese variety. The statement of the problem thus lies in addressing such diversity and variation as reflected in the topolectal or dialectal food expressions and their underlying cultural conceptualizations, in addition to acknowledging the embedded shared aspects of the Chinese cultural ideologies.

Cantonese is one of the most influential Chinese varieties. It is a dominant community vernacular in Guangdong Province of mainland China, and the common language and one of the official languages of Hong Kong and Macau. Cantonese is also widely spoken in the global Chinese diaspora as a community language and by people with Cantonese heritage<sup>3</sup>. There is a rich collection of food-related expressions in Cantonese as represented by food-

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<sup>3</sup> There are no current statistics on the total number of overseas Cantonese speakers. However, based on available statistics of language spoken at home from Southeast Asian and Western countries known to have large Cantonese diasporas such as Malaysia (1,068,008, department of statistics, Malaysia, 2003, cited in Ember, Ember, & Skoggard, 2004, p. 698), Vietnam

related idioms. A study that unpacks cultural conceptualizations embedded in Cantonese food-related idioms and explores the sociocultural roots of these cultural conceptualizations can thereby, provide a prominent response to the need to present the intricate nuances of the culturally constructed Chinese food language. It can also shed light on future studies on food language in different Chinese varieties with a culture-oriented and speaker-oriented approach. Specifically, such a study can cultivate an understanding that the vitality of food idioms, the underlying conceptual mechanisms, and the developing sociocultural reality of the Cantonese societies are closely correlated and interdependent with one another, and the Cantonese speakers play a crucial role in developing the Cantonese cultural cognition and affecting the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

### **1.3 Research Aims**

This project aims to explore cultural conceptualizations of food-related idioms in Cantonese. It features idioms with rice-related and eating-related constituents and with figurative meanings that denote various aspects of life outside the food domain. Adopting the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics, it aims to identify cultural schemas, cultural categories, cultural metaphors, and cultural metonymies from authentic materials where the idioms are in use. It aims to examine the idiomaticity of the target idioms from the speakers' perspective by investigating the speakers' degree of consciousness of the identified cultural conceptualization. As such, it seeks to present the correlation between the extent to which the conceptual mechanisms underlying the idioms are culturally harnessed and the saliency of the idioms' figurative and rhetorical functions as acknowledged by the speakers.

The project also endeavors to explicate the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations embedded in the food-related idioms, rationalizing the semantic development of the idioms within the sociocultural context of the Cantonese speech communities as correlated to the wider sociocultural context of contemporary China. In particular, the study aims to investigate the dynamic process of cultural reconceptualization motivated by the (re)negotiations of the cultural ideologies, and it also aims to examine the semantic change of the target idioms as triggered by the process of cultural reconceptualization. By doing so, it hopes to be able to illustrate how the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms can be affected by both the everchanging sociocultural dynamics of the Cantonese societies and the speakers' individual will and manifestation.

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(823,071, the 2009 Vietnam population and housing census, general statistics office of Vietnam), Singapore (111,200, general household survey 2015, department of statistics, Singapore), the USA (458,840, 2005-2009 American community survey), Canada (300,595, statistics Canada 2006 census) and Australia (263,674, Australian bureau of statistics 2011), the estimated number of overseas Cantonese speakers is over 2.7 million.

Overall, the project aspires to present the interconnectedness between the figurative language of a speech community, members of the community, and the cultural cognition of the community through analyzing Cantonese food-related idioms. It aims to verify that a profound understanding of the cultural conceptualizations of a speech community contributes to the knowledge of intercultural communication and multilingual and translanguaging practice that involves the members of the speech community.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

Corresponding to the research aims, the current project proposes to answer the following research questions. Specific aspects for inquiry are delineated under each question.

### **1. What are the cultural conceptualizations underlying the Cantonese rice-related and eating-related idioms?**

- What are the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the idioms?
- What are the cultural categories, cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and/or cultural metonymies instantiated through the semantic and pragmatic properties of the idioms?

### **2. To the Cantonese speakers, how figurative are the target idioms in use?**

- How do Cantonese speakers understand and interpret the idioms?
- To what extent are the speakers conscious of the underlying cultural conceptualizations embedded in the idioms as reflected in their interpretations?
- What is the extent of figurativeness the speakers acknowledge in the idioms, corresponding to their degree of consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations?

### **3. What are the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations?**

- What are the sociocultural factors that underpin the identified cultural conceptualizations?
- How do the (re)negotiations of ideologies motivate the process of cultural reconceptualization?

### **4. How does the development of the Cantonese cultural cognition affect the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms?**

- How do the idioms adapt to the developing cultural cognition?
- What is the role of the speakers in affecting the vitality of the idioms?

## 1.5 Thesis Overview

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. Introduction, literature review, and research methodology make up the first three chapters, which are followed by three data analysis chapters before the final chapter that concludes the study.

Chapter One introduces the research background, gives a statement of the problem, states the research aims, raises the research questions, outlines the thesis structure, and indicates the significance of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the discipline of Cultural Linguistics and delineates the adaptation of its theoretical and analytical frameworks to the present study. Prior studies on figurative language with a Cultural Linguistics approach are also critically reviewed. The chapter then examines the major viewpoints about idiom regarding its definition, classification, processing, and comprehension. A particular focus is placed on reviewing the existing research of food idioms, which justifies the necessity of the present study. This chapter also contextualizes the study by setting forth an operational idiom model and synthesizing the theoretical foundation and analytical focus.

Chapter Three introduces the research methodology of the current project. It explicates the process of data collection and selection, presenting details including data sources, survey design and distribution, and data screening and exclusion. A sample analysis is provided to verify the empirical feasibility of the analysis approach, based on which the chapter introduces the detailed analysis procedures and the types and sources of materials used for analysis in the present study.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are the data analysis chapters and the core of the thesis. Chapter Four explores the underlying cultural conceptualizations of Cantonese rice-related idioms, focusing on the identification of the cultural conceptualizations and the investigation of Cantonese speakers' interpretations of the idioms and their degree of consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations. Chapter Five follows a similar analysis pattern to that of Chapter Four but focuses on Cantonese eating-related idioms. Chapter Six explicates the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations from the Cantonese food-related idioms. It explores the roots of the cultural conceptualizations and the sociocultural ideologies that motivate the cultural conceptualizations. It also examines the phenomenon of cultural reconceptualization occurring along the social dynamics of the Cantonese societies. The correlation between the development of the Cantonese cultural cognition and the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Seven summarizes the findings of the current project, providing overall responses to the proposed research questions. It outlines the major contributions and implications of the present study to areas of research including Cultural Linguistics, World Englishes, intercultural communication, and translanguaging practice. The chapter concludes the thesis by addressing the limitations of the study and suggesting directions for future research.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The present study is significant for the research of language and culture, and specifically for the development of Cultural Linguistics. It is anticipated that this study will contribute to expanding the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics, and further attesting to the fruitfulness of applying the Cultural Linguistics frameworks to the study of figurative language.

This study is then significant for developing an ethnographic approach in the research of figurative language. It is hoped that the study can cultivate an emic perspective on figurative language processing and interpretation, which highlights the importance of situating the analysis of figurative meaning in the cultural context of the speech community and values the insights of the members of the speech community.

It is also hoped that this study will contribute to the research of Cantonese linguistics and Cantonese cultural studies by raising an awareness of the relationship between Cantonese cultural conceptualizations and the Cantonese language. In this sense, the findings of this project can shed light on the studies of Cantonese-influenced English in the paradigm of World Englishes and have implications on a wide range of Cantonese-relevant studies that call for a culturally oriented approach including but not limited to multilingual and translanguaging practice, intercultural communication, and bilingual education.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the present study. It has six major sections. Section 2.1 gives a comprehensive overview of Cultural Linguistics, including the theoretical and analytical frameworks, the methodological development, and the applied paradigm of the discipline. It also synthesizes figurative language studies conducted with a Cultural Linguistics approach. Section 2.2 summarizes the major viewpoints on idiom definition and classification, followed by section 2.3, which reviews the traditional views and the ‘conceptually motivated’ views on idiom processing and comprehension. Section 2.4 summarizes what have been done on food idioms in the past two decades. Section 2.5 proposes an operational idiom model and explicates the theoretical foundation and analytical rationale of the present study. Section 2.6 concludes the chapter with concluding remarks.

### 2.1 Cultural Linguistics

This section presents an overview of Cultural Linguistics, the discipline of research that constitutes the theoretical basis and provides the analytical tools for the present study. Section 2.1.1 reviews the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics. It foregrounds the notion of cultural cognition, explains the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations, and highlights the applicability of the theoretical framework to interdisciplinary research by addressing the multimodality of cultural conceptualizations. It also explicates the rationale and advantages of adopting this framework as the theoretical foundation of the present study. Section 2.1.2 outlines the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics by elaborating on the three established analytical tools and the notion of reconceptualization. It also evaluates the analytical framework and proposes its adaptation in the present study. Section 2.1.3 outlines the methodological development of Cultural Linguistics and explicates the applied merits of Cultural Linguistics. Section 2.1.4 synthesizes the existing studies on figurative language that employ a Cultural Linguistics approach.

#### 2.1.1 Theoretical Framework

Cultural Linguistics is a discipline with multidisciplinary origins that sets out to explore the relationship between language and *cultural conceptualizations* (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a). It “engages with features of human languages that encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualizations encompassing the whole range of human experience” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 2).

The notion of *cultural cognition* is the theoretical cornerstone of Cultural Linguistics (Frank, 2015; and see Sharifian, 2008, 2009a, 2011, 2015b, 2017a). By foregrounding the notion of cultural cognition, Cultural Linguistics endeavors to “provide a broader frame for understanding the relationship between language, culture and conceptualisation” (Sharifian & Sadeghpour, 2021, p. 2). Cultural cognition is a form of “group-level



collective cognition” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 35) that results from the social and linguistic interactions between members of a speech community, and “affords an integrated understanding of the notions of ‘cognition’ and ‘culture’ as they relate to language” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 3). Cultural Linguistics views cultural cognition as an *emergent* and *dynamic* system that is constantly evolving, negotiating, and renegotiating through communicative interactions of the community members across generations, across time and space, and also through contact between different speech communities. The individuals of a speech community contribute to the development of the cultural cognition; and simultaneously, they are influenced and characterized by the cultural cognition (Sharifian, 2017a). Cultural cognition is also a form of *distributed* cognition. Speakers of a community may access and internalize the cultural cognition of the community differently; and therefore, cultural cognition of the community is heterogeneously distributed among the minds of the individual speakers. Figure 2.1 shows a distributed model of cultural cognition. The distributed view of cultural cognition “allows for generalizations regarding conceptualizations shared by members of a given cultural group, without assuming that all members of that group share all its cultural conceptualizations. [It] also consoles the perspective of the individual mind/speaker with that of the group” (Wolf, 2015, p. 449).

## Distributed, Emergent Cultural Cognition

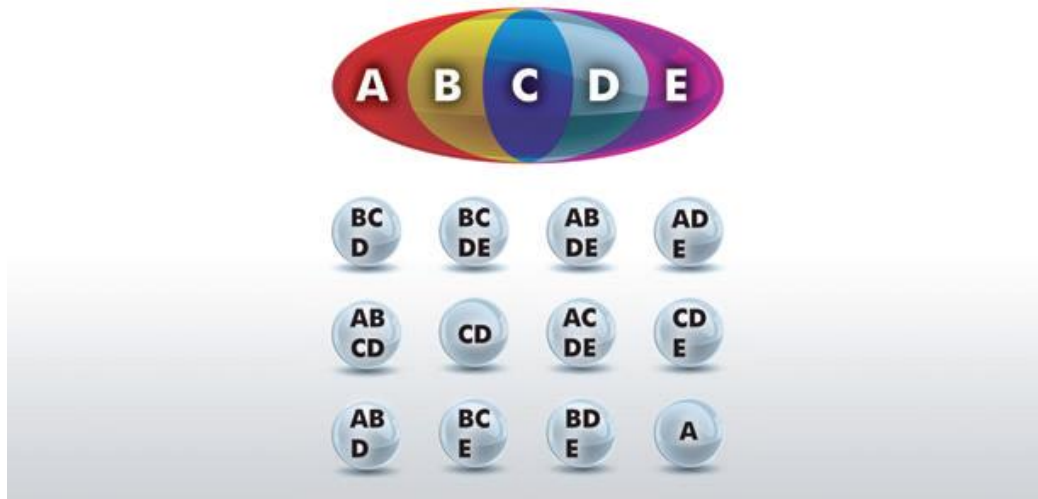


Figure 2.1 A distributed model of cultural cognition

(Sharifian, 2011, p. 6)

*Cultural conceptualizations* and *language* are two central and intrinsic aspects of cultural cognition. Cultural conceptualizations are “the ways in which people across different cultural groups construe various aspects of the

world and their experiences” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 38)<sup>4</sup>, captured in which are instances of cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors—the interrelated components of cultural cognition. Language is a “collective memory bank” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 5) of cultural cognition that stores and instantiates the cultural conceptualizations of a speech community and serves as “an instrument for organizing other cultural domains” (Palmer & Sharifian, 2007, p. 1). Addressing the intertwined relationship between cultural conceptualizations and language, Sharifian (2017a) explains as follows:

Language plays a dual role in relation to cultural conceptualizations. On the one hand, linguistic interactions are crucial to the development of cultural conceptualizations, as they provide a space for speakers to construct and co-construct meanings about their experiences. On the other hand, many aspects of both language structure and language use draw on and reflect cultural conceptualizations (p. 5).

The theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics as presented in Figure 2.2 encompasses the respective relations of cultural conceptualizations and language to cultural cognition, and the twofold relationship between cultural conceptualizations and language.

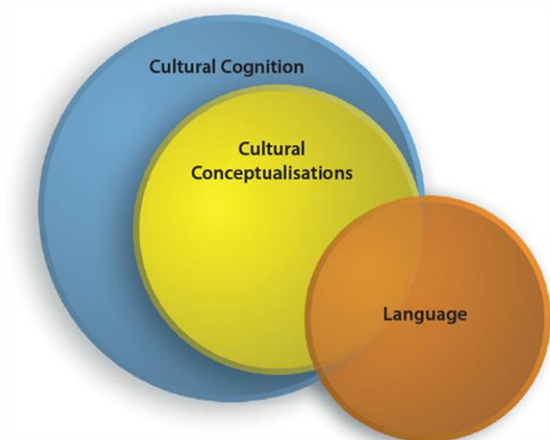


Figure 2.2 Theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics

(Sharifian, 2017a, p. 6)

Although language is the major medium in which cultural conceptualizations of a speech community are instantiated, cultural conceptualizations are also embedded in other aspects and domains of the community life such as cultural events and traditions, rituals, non-verbal behavior, and emotions (Sharifian, 2017a). Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> In his later works (e.g., Sharifian, 2015a, 2017a), Sharifian abandons the term *cultural group* and advocates the use of *speech community* instead.

cultural conceptualizations can be multimodal beyond the verbal and textual boundaries and instantiate themselves in other modalities (see e.g., Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; Yu, 2009b, 2011b). Or as Frank (2015) phrases it, “cultural conceptualizations can be viewed broadly for they encompass not merely a ‘between the ears’ kind of cognitive processing, but also the socially situated actions of the members of the group which give rise to such conceptualizations and, thus, cultural conceptualizations that are often expressed and hence exteriorized in non-verbal ways” (p. 499). Consequently, the Cultural Linguistics framework can be flexibly adopted in disciplines not limited to linguistics. Frank (2017) for example, innovatively applies the framework to studying interspecies communication between human and parrots. The Cultural Linguistics framework can also facilitate interdisciplinary research between linguistics and areas such as anthropology, literature, and fine arts. One outstanding example of such interdisciplinary research is by Baranyiné Kóczy (2018), who examines cultural conceptualizations in Hungarian folksongs. In this study, Baranyiné Kóczy identifies cultural metaphors of nature by interpreting the functions of nature images in the folksongs and discusses the relation between the cultural schemas of emotions embedded in the folksongs and the view on emotions in the traditional Hungarian peasant community. Her study has revealed how Cultural Linguistics can be effectively applied to deconstructing cultural meanings in folk cultural artifacts.

The theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics sets up an appropriate theoretical foundation for the current project, as “[d]ifferent levels and units of language such as speech acts, *idioms* [emphasis added], metaphors, discourse markers, etc. may somehow instantiate aspects of ... cultural conceptualizations” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 12). By adopting this framework, we regard Cantonese food-related idioms as linguistic instantiations of the collective Cantonese cultural cognition. This theoretical stance allows us to identify cultural conceptualizations through examining the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of these idioms in use. It is the project’s expected outcome that cultural conceptualizations that capture Cantonese cultural beliefs and conventional knowledge are identified from the discussed idioms. Through examining these cultural conceptualizations with reference to established historical and sociological accounts, the underpinning cultural ideologies of the Cantonese societies can be uncovered and understood. By recognizing the interconnection between Cantonese cultural conceptualizations and Cantonese socio-cultural dynamics, we open up the possibility to gain an in-dept understanding of the developing ideologies of the Cantonese societies. With the Cultural Linguistics framework, we acknowledge that the cultural conceptualizations identified from the idioms are group-level conceptualizations that are heterogeneously distributed among individual Cantonese speakers, and therefore we are not restrained by discrepancies between individual perceptions. Instead, we expect to see variation in Cantonese individuals’ perceptions of the discussed cultural conceptualizations, as manifested in the speakers’ various interpretations of the meaning and usage of the target idioms, which in fact may shed light on a better understanding of how speakers understand their figurative language. Moreover, we also see the Cantonese cultural cognition as a dynamic and emergent system and therefore, we do not regard the discussed cultural conceptualizations as static. Instead, we

consider these cultural conceptualizations as ever evolving and therefore, endeavor to further explore the shaping factors that motivate the development of the conceptualizations.

## **2.1.2 Analytical Framework**

Built on its theoretical framework, Cultural Linguistics also provides an analytical framework in which *cultural schema*, *cultural category* and *cultural metaphor* are three established analytical tools that allow researchers to investigate the units of language that instantiate the cultural conceptualizations of a speech community and explore the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and traditions that underpin the cultural conceptualizations.

### **2.1.2.1 Cultural Schema**

Schemas are traditionally seen as the building blocks of human cognition and are mechanisms for cognitive scientists to explore the relationship between environment and cognition. In Cultural Linguistics, *cultural schemas* “capture beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behavior as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 7). There are various types of cultural schemas, of which culturally-structured *event* schemas, *role* schemas, *image* schemas, *proposition* schemas, and *emotion* schemas are among the frequently discussed (see Sharifian, 2011, pp. 8–11). A good example of cultural schemas is the Chinese/Cantonese event schema of a ‘wedding’, in which giving the newlyweds *laissee*, red packets with money, is an expected ritual (Z. Xu & Sharifian, 2017). As Xu and Sharifian (2017) explicate, “[t]he term *laissee*, is not simply a linguistic borrowing from Cantonese, but a cultural reflection of ‘face’, ‘politeness’, and *guanxi*. A Chinese [Cantonese] ‘wedding’ event schema thus embodies a number of implicit Chinese cultural schemas such as FACE, POLITENESS, and GUANXI” (p. 74).

Cultural schemas are also an effective analytical tool to decipher speech acts. According to Sharifian (2017a), “the knowledge underpinning the enactment and uptake of speech acts, which is knowledge assumed to be culturally constructed and therefore shared, can be said to be largely captured in such [cultural] schemas” (p. 14). For example, the Chinese speech act of ‘greeting’, which is enacted as asking the question ‘have you eaten?’, has close association with the Chinese cultural schemas of EATING and FOOD (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 14).

### **2.1.2.2 Cultural Category**

Categorization is a fundamental cognitive activity that has been intensively studied by cognitive scientists (e.g., Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Lloyd, 1978; Smith & Medin, 1981) and cognitive linguists (e.g., Brugman, 1984; Lakoff, 1987). Categorization is also “intrinsically cultural” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 15). Members of a community categorize events, objects and experiences based on their cultural environment and knowledge, and aspects of the community

language such as lexical items and grammatical markers often serve as the labels for the categories and their instances.

Cultural categories, similar to cultural schemas, reflect culturally constructed knowledge and motivate the enactment of culturally expected behavior. They are an effective tool for the inquiry and understanding of cultural norms and traditions. For example, the Cantonese categorization of ‘ghost’ as DECEASED FAMILY MEMBER and ANCESTOR lays the foundation for the understanding of related cultural conceptualizations such as PAPER MONEY and JOSS STICK, as well as the cultural rituals in the *Yu Lan Festival* (the Festival of Hungry Ghosts) (Wolf & Chan, 2016). The discrepancy between the Cantonese categorization of GHOST and such categorization in other speech communities on the other hand, may be the source of linguistic creativity in for example, literary writings (see e.g., Fang, 2020).

### **2.1.2.3 Cultural Metaphor**

Conceptual metaphor is a term in Cognitive Linguistics that refers to the conceptualization of one domain in terms of another. The domain that is conceptualized is the target domain while the domain the conceptualization draws on is the source domain. Many conceptual metaphors are also culturally sensitive, and therefore, can be *cultural* metaphors. Sharifian (2017a) argues that cultural metaphors in Cultural Linguistics are cultural conceptualizations, “many of which have their roots in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, ancient religions/worldviews, etc.” (p. 18). For instance, LIFE AS AN OPERA in Chinese is a cultural metaphor rooted in the Chinese opera, a prominent form of performing arts in traditional Chinese culture, which distinguishes it from the LIFE AS A PLAY metaphor in English (Yu, 2017; Yu & Jia, 2016).

Regarding cultural metaphors, Sharifian (2017a) proposes to view them along a cognitive processing continuum and distinguish them based on the speakers’ different degrees of consciousness of the cross-domain mappings. As shown in Figure 2.3, situated at one end of the cognitive processing continuum are what Sharifian calls “worldview metaphors” (2017a, p. 22). They are conceptualizations constructed within the speakers’ cognitive frame of thought with beliefs and knowledge derived from the speakers’ cultural experiences. They provide a schematic guidance rather than a metaphoric perception for the speaker to make sense of their cultural experiences. Therefore, to the speakers, there is no conscious cross-domain conceptualization at work. Situated at the other end of the continuum are creative cultural metaphors, or “creative cross-domain conceptualizations” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 23) that are evidence of highly conscious cross-domain cognitive processing established by the speakers through creative rhetorical use of language, i.e., figures of speech. Other cultural metaphors are somewhere in between these two ends of the continuum. This view of metaphors addresses the interaction between cultural conceptualizations and human cognitive processing. It investigates metaphors and their linguistic instantiations

from the speaker's perspective, accounting for the primary role culture plays in the processing of cross-domain conceptualization.

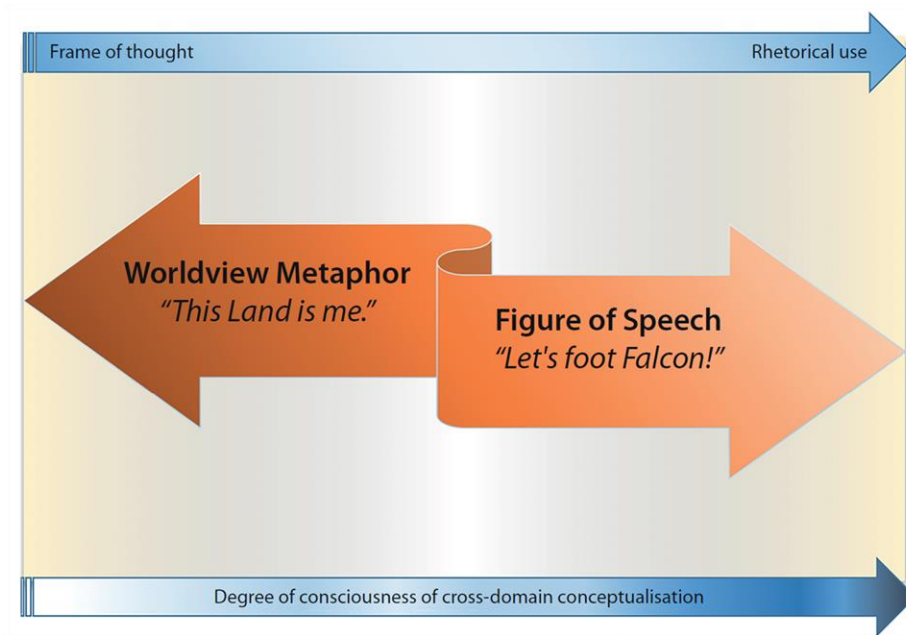


Figure 2.3 The cognitive processing continuum of cultural metaphors

(Sharifian, 2017a, p. 22)

#### 2.1.2.4 Cultural Reconceptualization

In addition to the analytical tools that allow researchers to unveil the cultural cognition of a speech community, Cultural Linguistics also examines the phenomenon of cultural reconceptualization, which represents the emergent and dynamic properties of cultural cognition. As addressed earlier, cultural cognition is constantly (re)negotiated. Reconceptualization can be facilitated when such (re)negotiations happen. According to Sharifian (2017b), cultural reconceptualization is where the cultural conceptualizations are adapted and modified to encompass newly developed cultural knowledge, or where elements from different systems of cultural conceptualizations are blended to provide new entailments for the original conceptualizations. Within a speech community, reconceptualization is often a result of interactions between community members across generations. In the era of globalization, there is increasing contact among different speech communities, *cross-cultural* reconceptualization has thus gained momentum. Cross-cultural reconceptualization, as Sharifian (2017a) defines it, is “the blending of elements of conceptual systems drawn from different speech communities and cultural traditions” (p.9). It provides a useful perspective for a better understanding of the globalized world, effectively explaining, for example, the glocalization of English (see Sharifian, 2016, 2018). The global spread of English has motivated the Englishization of other languages and cultures and the nativization of English that results in new local varieties of

English. At the conceptual level, this process is in fact the interactions between Anglo-English cultural conceptualizations and cultural conceptualizations of the local language/community, giving rise to the blending of cultural conceptualizations, i.e., cross-cultural reconceptualization. Such conceptual blending is a process of meaning (re)construction that often motivates the creation and adaptation of lexical units and grammatical structures in the localized English varieties.

### **2.1.2.5 Adapting the Analytical Framework in the Present Study**

The analytical tools in Cultural Linguistics are effective in revealing and illustrating the cultural cognition of a speech community. The present study adopts these analytical tools to unpack the cultural conceptualizations underlying Cantonese food-related idioms. With cultural categories, we can identify culturally constructed categorization of foodstuffs and food-related behavior, so as to understand the conceptual foundation for the establishment of the underlying cultural conceptualizations of the food-related idioms. By unpacking cultural schemas in the food-related idioms, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the shaping force behind the cultural conceptualizations. Cultural metaphors on the other hand, signpost the conceptual paths following which Cantonese speakers make sense of the world around them through their experience with food and eating. In particular, viewing cultural metaphors along a cognitive continuum is revolutionary for the investigation of figurative language from the speakers' perspective. This point of view is helpful in depicting the nuances in how Cantonese speakers establish and acknowledge the conceptual understructure between the literal and figurative/idiomatic meanings of different idioms. As a result, we are given the possibility to present the complexity in the construction of figurative meaning and argue that to the speakers, perhaps not all food-related idioms are (equally) figurative or metaphoric.

Despite the merits of the three analytical tools, minor adjustments are in place to better apply the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics to the present study. Primarily, the analytical tools are treated as more integrated in the present study and when explicating the cultural conceptualizations underlying the Cantonese food-related idioms, the analytical tools are applied in a manner that they supplement each other. Moreover, reconceptualization is not treated as simply a collateral phenomenon in the development of cultural cognition. Instead, it is investigated as an important medium to understand the Cantonese social dynamics and explain the semantic development of the target idioms. The most important adjustment is that the notion of *cultural metonymy* is employed to examine the intra-domain cultural conceptualizations identified from the Cantonese food-related idioms. The Cultural Linguistics analytical framework mainly focuses on presenting cross-domain cultural conceptualizations, i.e., metaphoric relations, while intra-domain cultural conceptualizations, i.e., metonymic relations, are less explicitly explored. As a result, cultural metonymy is currently under-theorized in Cultural Linguistics. Nevertheless, Sharifian (2017a) does acknowledge that cultural metonymy is “another potentially useful analytical tool in Cultural Linguistics” (p.11). In fact, a successful attempt of using cultural metonymy to analyze particular

language units has been made by Jensen (2017). When examining the semantic prosodies of the *man enough to V* and *woman enough to V* distributions in American English, he argues that MAN and WOMAN in the above collocated patterns manifest a metonymical instantiation where the labels for an entire social category are used to refer to certain culturally stereotypical behavioral aspects of the category (Jensen, 2017). Similar to the relationship between conceptual metaphor and cultural metaphor, cultural metonymies can be identified as *conceptual metonymies* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 35–40; Panther & Radden, 1999; Radden & Kövecses, 1999, 2007) that are culturally rooted and structured. Including cultural metonymies in the analytical framework can enhance the effectiveness and validity of the present study, given the fact that food and eating in the Cantonese community are so closely associated with other aspects of the Cantonese life that as the conceptual sources, they may not always manifest a cross-domain connection with the conceptual targets. With the inclusion of cultural metonymies, Sharifian’s cognitive processing continuum should also be adapted to include intra-domain cultural conceptualizations, and accordingly along the continuum, ‘worldview metonymies’ should join ‘worldview metaphors’ on one end, and ‘creative cultural conceptualizations’ on the other end should also include creative metonymies. The adaptation of the cognitive processing continuum is further elaborated in section 3.3.

### **2.1.3 Methodological Development and Applied Cultural Linguistics**

Along the growth of Cultural Linguistics, various research methods have been developed and Cultural Linguistics also provides an applicable model for various domains of applied studies. This section summarizes the nature of Cultural Linguistics research and synthesizes the methodological development in the discipline. The section also elaborates on the paradigm of Applied Cultural Linguistics, evaluating the value of Cultural Linguistics to more applied research.

The theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics have been applied to a wide range of studies. Accordingly, there is a wide range of research methods designed to meet the objectives of the research topics. Despite the variation in the specific measures, Cultural Linguistics research is fundamentally and essentially conducted with an ethnographic approach. As Sharifian (2017a) frames it, Cultural Linguistics “methodologically speaking... is a form of *linguistic ethnography*” (p.41) combined with “an open-ended ‘set of procedures’ for data collection and analysis aimed at a better understanding of the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the language it studies” (p.41). Cultural Linguistics investigations often involve critical analysis of “*any* body of data, *any* source of knowledge” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 42) that can represent the cultural conceptualizations of the target community. This can be for example, language data that encodes particular cultural meanings, that is associated with particular cultural experiences, or that identifies culturally structured concept in a particular area. A sound Cultural Linguistic study “must combine a language-based analysis...with in-depth inquiries...[that] aim at providing significant insight into the nuances and complexities of the culturally constructed conceptualizations of experiences by the members of a speech community” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 42). The nexus between language,



socio-cultural construct, and members in the socio-cultural reality is the anchor on which Cultural Linguists build their analysis model. Therefore, common research methods include collecting and analyzing data from interviews, field notes, participant observations, and conducting conversation analysis and naturalistic narratives analysis. Lexicographic works that document units of language that represent the sociocultural landscape of a speech community such as dictionaries and corpora of idioms and proverbs are also common data sources.

The diverse and evolving means of data collection are a prominent reflection of the methodological development in Cultural Linguistics. Collecting data directly from the speakers (or sometimes non-speakers) of a language is the most common practice. It can be carried out via various measures with distinctive degrees of intervention from the researchers. Some studies collect data of participant responses in a controlled experimental environment by means of linguistic and cognitive stimuli and prompts. Models such as ‘association-interpretation’ (Sharifian, 2005) and ‘story recount’ (Sharifian et al., 2004, 2012) are examples of such practice. The former elicits cultural conceptualizations in Aboriginal English speakers via an association task using English words as prompts; and the latter reveals the miscommunication caused by discrepant cultural schemas in Aboriginal English and Australian English by asking speakers of one English variety to recall stories told by speakers of the other English variety.

Compared to controlled experimental methods however, semi-controlled mediums such as surveys and interviews are more commonly adopted by Cultural Linguists for data collection. To list a few examples, Musolff (2015, 2017, 2021) investigates the cross-cultural variations in the interpretation of the NATION AS BODY metaphor based on data collected with a metaphor interpretation questionnaire; Bagheri (2020) uses a reflective questionnaire to inquire about Persian speakers’ perceptions of *sadness*; Lu (2017, 2019) unpacks the perceptions of *self* among Chinese immigrants through focus-group interviews; and Nosrati (2020) incorporates focus-group interviews along with other means of research to identify cultural conceptualizations in Persian animal expressions.

Collecting authentic and systematic data from participants with minimal researcher intervention is not easy, but with a thoughtful design is not impossible. Tayebi (2016) conducts a cultural analysis of *taking offense* in Persian based on diary reports from Persian speakers who documented incidents of offenses within a one-month timeframe. During this process, the participants had full control over their contributions to the diary and the researcher was able to build a database with thematic consistency from the diary reports.

Aside from eliciting instant output from the speakers of the target group, established publications or language databases and archives such as literary works, dictionaries and corpora are also commonly referenced sources of target data (e.g., da Silva et al., 2017; Fang, 2020; Ghazi, 2020; Jensen, 2017). Using archives and corpora allows the researchers to access a large body of data at the same time. In particular, documented sources such as historical records and literature can also provide a diachronic perspective that opens the possibility to investigate the historical development of cultural conceptualizations and conduct interdisciplinary research in for example,

history and religion (see e.g., Sharifian & Bagheri, 2019). However, it is important to note that archived and documented sources often need to be supplemented with current sources adhering to the theoretical stance of an everchanging and evolving cultural cognition. As such, questionnaire surveys and follow-up interviews are often employed along the analysis process and cultural informants also make up a significant component of data input. There are also attempts to combine the merits of both the participant-based and the corpus-oriented data collection methods. For example, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017b, 2017a) develop a model of *(meta)discourse analysis* to analyze impoliteness in Persian, within which the analysis is set and based on a meta-database composed of linguistic markers that are words and expressions used to describe impoliteness as detected from participant interactions.

Another novel perspective in data collection is associated with the stance of the researchers in their projects. For ethnographic studies in general, the researcher is often present and engaged in the cultural setting of the target community to various degrees (cf. Spradley, 1980). For many Cultural Linguistics studies in particular, the investigators are often themselves members of the target speech community. Therefore, they assume ‘dual identities’ as both a researcher and a ‘cultural insider’. As such, their intuitive insights give an emic angle to their analysis, and their self-reflections and interpretations on the subject also have the potentials to constitute part of the research data. Sharifian and Jamarani (2015) for example, list “the intuition of the authors, who are both native speakers of Persian” (p. 243) as one of their two data sources when investigating cultural conceptualizations of temperature in Persian. Xu and Dinh (2021) make an even more innovative attempt to take on the dual identities in their analysis of *yuan* in Chinese, *duyên* in Vietnamese, and the comparable cultural concepts across Asian societies with a *mixed emic and etic reflexive approach*. The two investigators respectively of Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds contribute substantially to their own research as cultural informants. They build their analysis on three conversations consisting of their emic reflexive interpretations of *yuan* and *duyên* as ‘cultural insiders’ and etic reflexive interpretations they collect from their cultural informants about similar concepts in other Asian cultural practices.

To synthesize the diverse research methods in Cultural Linguistics, it appears that there are two essential principles researchers follow, despite their distinctive methodological designs. The first principle is to ensure the authenticity and truthfulness of the research data. Whether it is instant output from speakers or drawn from documented resources, the data is often scrutinized and verified through consulting cultural informants and/or referencing ethnographic literature. This is interrelated to the second principle, which is, in one way or another, the analysis process involves members of the target speech community. Speakers’ inputs are valued substantially throughout the investigation in the forms of for example, data samples, field notes, personal narratives, interview records, and informant responses. Engaging with members of the speech community and valuing their point of view provide a strong emic perspective to the research process, which also reflects the ethnographic nature of Cultural Linguistics.

As researchers follow these principles, cultural conceptualizations identified from the collected data to the greatest extent, truthfully profile the socio-cultural reality and ideologies of the target speech community. The current project takes into account both principles in its methodological design and incorporates authentic data from various sources as well as input from participants and cultural informants to ensure that the research findings are truthful representations of the Cantonese cultural cognition.

Through investigating language and cultural conceptualizations, Cultural Linguistics has implications for various domains of Applied Linguistics and communication studies. Applied Cultural Linguistics is “a holistic approach that examines the cultural conceptualizations (e.g. schemas, metaphors and categories) in order to understand cultural meaning, raise awareness of cultural variation and enhance intercultural communication in the areas where language and cultural conceptualizations play a salient role” (Z. Xu, 2017, pp. 704–705). This approach has been applied to studies such as language education (Sharifian, 2007, 2013; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007; Z. Xu, 2017), intercultural communication (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2012), World Englishes (Cummings & Wolf, 2011; Polzenhagen & Wolf, 2021), and political discourse analysis (Ansah, 2017; da Silva et al., 2017; Musolff, 2017; Sharifian, 2009b), and has developed into a paradigm that manifests the applied merits of Cultural Linguistics. The paradigm of Applied Cultural Linguistics suggests that “an explicit understanding of the cultural foundation of language can greatly enhance any form of application that it serves in practical domains” (Palmer & Sharifian, 2007, p. 7).

One valuable fruit the Applied Cultural Linguistics approach has borne is the notion of *metacultural competence*. Metacultural competence is first proposed in the domain of learning English as an international language (EIL). It also has important implications for the research of World Englishes and intercultural communication. In discussing the necessity for the EIL curriculum to help develop learners’ competence in intercultural communication, Sharifian (2013) promotes the idea of metacultural competence based on the Cultural Linguistics framework. He proposes that metacultural competence is “a competence that enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualisations during the process of intercultural communication” (Sharifian, 2013, p. 7). With metacultural competence, interlocutors will have *conceptual variation awareness* to identify distinctive cultural conceptualizations encoded in one and the same language, and thereby, they are capable of using strategies such as *conceptual explication strategy* and *conceptual negotiation strategy* to clarify and negotiate cultural conceptualizations and intercultural meanings in communication (Sharifian, 2013). Xu (2017) later adds three principles to develop metacultural competence in teaching English as an international language (TEIL), namely,

- *[a]cknowledge* the paradigm shift in relation to the current use and users of English;
- *[a]nticipate* different cultural conceptualizations that are embedded in English when using English as an international language for intercultural communication; [and]

- *[a]cquire and accomplish* new literacy, proficiency and competence to engage in intercultural communication in English as an international language (p. 711).

The application of Cultural Linguistics to the studies of World Englishes, intercultural communication and other domains of Applied Linguistics reflects a critical approach to language. Polzenhagen and Wolf (2021) have provided a comprehensive assessment of the Applied Cultural Linguistics approach that accurately synthesizes its significance:

The Cultural Linguistics approach may be fruitfully applied to the study of lexical and conceptual peculiarities of language varieties. This approach allows for the transition from a mere descriptive treatment of a variety's lexicon to an explanatory account based on the underlying cognitive processes. When analysed against the background of cultural models, the specific meaning, salience and the systematic interrelatedness of lexical items within a domain may be captured and compared across varieties... Cultural Linguistics can contribute to a better understanding of the cultural background of groups of speakers in question, an aspect which is neglected by the focus on mere effective communicative *functioning*. This potential can add to an informed way of dealing with intercultural conflicts (p. 391).

The present study in nature can also be defined as an Applied Cultural Linguistics study. Through identifying and explicating the underlying conceptualizations of Cantonese food-related idioms, the study attempts to unpack the cultural meanings encoded in these idioms. By applying the Cultural Linguistics frameworks to the investigation of Cantonese figurative language, the current project has significance beyond the linguistic dimension. It aims to cultivate an in-depth and holistic understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics and conventional norms of the Cantonese speech communities through the lens of cultural conceptualizations. It is a particularly meaningful project in the era of globalization with potential findings that hold pragmatic implications for intra- and intercultural communication involving speakers across the Cantonese diaspora and shed light on the research of Cantonese-influenced English varieties in the field of World Englishes.

#### **2.1.4 Studying Figurative Language with a Cultural Linguistics Approach**

Figurative language by nature is one of the typical units of language that encode cultural conceptualizations. Sharifian (2011) observes that “[t]here is widespread recognition that figurative language is to a large extent socio-culturally constructed in the sense that its intended interpretation may require socio-cultural knowledge that is more or less shared by members of a particular speech community and cultural group” (p.196). This observation implies that an understanding of the socio-cultural construct of a speech community can be achieved through an

in-depth investigation of its figurative language. There are abundant studies of figurative language with a Cultural Linguistics approach found in the literature.

The most common aim of these studies is to identify cultural conceptualizations underlying conventional idioms, proverbs, and sayings in a language with an inquiry about their cultural roots. A series of studies on Chinese embodied metaphors by Yu (2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2009a) are typical examples that fulfill this aim. In each study, Yu features cultural conceptualizations of one body part. He conducts diachronic investigations, making links to the ancient Chinese Classics, Chinese cultural beliefs and traditional philosophy related to the body part in question to interpret the conceptualizations. He then investigates the instantiations of the cultural conceptualizations synchronically in the present-day conventional expressions and discourse where the discussed body part is the key constituent or the theme of narrative. For example, the Chinese HEART (*XIN*) is conceptualized as “the central faculty of cognition” (Yu, 2008, 2009c) and Yu finds its roots in the ancient Chinese philosophy such as Taoism and Confucianism where ‘*xin*’ was considered “the locus of mind, moral sense and societal governance” (Yu, 2009c, p. 36). This conceptualization is embedded in the present-day Chinese language, which Yu verifies with a cognitive semantic analysis of *xin*-related “compound words” and “set phrases” (2009c, p. 150). Similar procedures have been applied to analyze other embodied cultural conceptualizations such as GALLBLADDER (Yu, 2003), FACE (Yu, 2001), FINGER AND PALM (Yu, 2000), and EYES (Yu, 2004). Yu’s studies vividly present an inner connection between the human body and the Chinese perceptions of abstract concepts, especially the ones related to thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and explicate the way this connection instantiates itself in Chinese figurative expressions.

Apart from an in-depth investigation into the Chinese cultural conceptualizations, Yu’s studies also often give a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective by comparing the Chinese cultural conceptualizations with the Western counterparts as reflected in English expressions. In fact, studies on cross-cultural and/or cross-linguistic variation of conceptual metaphors with a Cultural Linguistics approach and through their instantiations in figurative expressions are not rare. Wang and Wilcox (2015) compare the TIME metaphors in English and Chinese and discover that the TIME IS WATER metaphor is unique to Chinese and is salient in many everyday Chinese “metaphorical expressions” (p.74) of time including proverbs, idioms and conventional sayings. Khajeh and Ho Abdullah (2012) on the other hand, tease out the nuanced differences of the appear-to-be universal IDEAS/TEMPERAMENT/LUST AS FOOD metaphors in Persian expressions that have a “metaphorical usage” (p.75) as compared to those in English. They conclude that “metaphorical language would not result merely from certain universal conceptual mappings, but a variety of factors such as language-specific, socio-cultural, and historical realities of a language community would also affect or interfere with these projections” (p.83). Instead of comparing two or more languages, Lu (2017) takes a slightly different angle and unpacks variant cultural conceptualizations of DEATH from Chinese eulogistic idioms respectively influenced by Buddhism and

Christianity. His study has proven that cultural conceptualizations can vary among different subgroups in the same speech community, as members of these subgroups are subjected to the influence of different salient factors. In Lu's (2017) case, the determining factor is the distinctive religious beliefs in the two target groups.

In the paradigm of World Englishes, interest in researching figurative language with a Cultural Linguistics approach mostly lies in two dimensions that are interrelated but with distinctive aims. The first dimension focuses on the variation in figurative expressions and their underlying cultural conceptualizations in post-colonial 'new varieties' of English. Studies in this dimension often aim to demonstrate the pluricentricity of English in the world. They are keen on looking at English varieties in regions with a history of British colonization to find out to what extent the local culture and environment has influenced and reshaped English since its adoption. Fixed expressions such as idioms and proverbs in African varieties of English are among the most commonly studied. For example, Fiedler (2017) compares fixed expressions with MONKEY as the source domain in British and West African online newspapers. He discovers that the natural and physical environment in Africa and its community model and social issues have resulted in "a more varied range of meaning foci" (p. 208) in the instantiations of the HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS MONKEY BEHAVIOR metaphor in West African English than in British English. Fiedler's (2017) findings echo those of Wolf and Polzenhagen (2007), who acknowledge that African varieties of English have "indeed undergone a marked acculturation process" (p. 400) as they observe how cultural conceptualizations of WEALTH, LEADERSHIP, and WITCHCRAFT as instantiated in African English idioms "depart significantly" (p. 410) from those in the Western varieties.

The second dimension of figurative language research in World Englishes is related to cultural conceptualizations embedded in unique expressions that encode culturally constructed concepts and meanings. This dimension of research often aims to highlight the inclusivity of World Englishes. Xu and Sharifian (2018) examine cultural conceptualizations related to CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS among Chinese speakers of English, unpack cultural schemas related to *dragon* and *horse* in particular from a collection of Chinese idiomatic expressions containing the two animals, and decode how these cultural understandings are loaned into the creative Chinese English expression *dragon horse spirit*. This study verifies the significant role of idioms and folklore in "formulating cultural group level cognitions" (Z. Xu & Sharifian, 2018, p. 603) and the existence of "reasonable ways in which culturally constructed concepts can be encoded and decoded through deconstructing cultural conceptualizations among Chinese speakers of English" (p. 604). One systematic way to decode cultural conceptualizations from 'special' expressions in a variety of English is implemented by Cummings and Wolf (2011), who have specifically compiled a dictionary of culturally constructed Hong Kong English expressions, i.e., *Words from the Fragrant Harbour*. In this dictionary, the routes through which the Cantonese cultural concepts are borrowed into the HKE expressions are mapped out with clear explications and examples.

Other than examining figurative language in a broad and general linguistic context, there are also studies that take on the Cultural Linguistics approach to investigate figurative language in literary works (Ehineni, 2017), in a specific text genre (Yu, 2011a), in a specific type of discourse (Sharifian, 2009b), or in the context of language acquisition (D. C.-H. Leung & Crisp, 2011). These studies focusing on specific domains have implied the potential that Cultural Linguistics can be adopted to more applied research of figurative language.

So far, studies on figurative language within the Cultural Linguistics framework have demonstrated the effectiveness of the analytical tools in presenting and interpreting special cultural concepts and meanings conveyed through figurative and conventional expressions of a speech community. These studies have provided a perspective that highlights the nexus between figurative language and its cultural underpinnings. This perspective advocates a more comprehensive approach to explicate figurative meanings, connecting both the diachronic layering of cultural development with the synchronic figurative language use. Both researchers and the general public are reminded of the complex bond between the lively everyday figurative language and the rich cultural history and philosophy lying behind, which can date back centuries. Most importantly, this perspective has established a channel to observe conceptual variation instantiated in figurative expressions at both a macro level, i.e., variation across cultures and languages, and a more micro and intricate level, i.e., variation across different varieties of the same language and across different subgroups of the same community.

However, it is important to note that many of the existing studies did not look into the aspect of semantic change of the figurative expressions. As figurative expressions are highly culturally harnessed, their meanings and usages are prone to change along the social and cultural dynamics. When many of the above studies draw a clear picture of how figurative meanings have come about, they rarely address how these meanings may have been changing. From the Cultural Linguistics perspective, an inquiry of how cultural reconceptualization affects figurative language may complement these studies. The above review has also shown that researchers label their figurative language data with various terms, from the more specific ‘proverbs’ and ‘idioms’, to the more general ‘set phrases’ and ‘fixed expressions’, then to a very broad inclusion of ‘compound words’ and ‘metaphorical expressions’. This indicates that the boundary of figurative language is fuzzy and what to include as target data in studies of cultural conceptualizations underlying figurative language is ambiguous. The fuzziness and ambiguity here is not surprising as it is part of the nature of language. However, it is indeed a takeaway for the present study, of which idioms are the primary data, that setting up a proper operational model to define and collect idioms is crucial for a systematic and valid analysis.

## **2.2 An Overview on Idiom Definition and Classification**

As mentioned above, idioms are the primary type of data for the present study. One fundamental step in a study of idioms is to define what an idiom is and determine the items that should be classified as idioms. The definition

and classification of idioms are crucial to data selection and have impacts on the perspective taken in data analysis. However, it appears that there is no consensus among existing literature regarding the definition of the term *idiom* and an established common standard for idiom classification is seemingly absent. In fact, the general consensus is that *idiom* is fuzzy and hard to define, and it is “an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways” (Moon, 1998, p. 3). This ambiguity of idiom is often attributed to its complex and heterogeneous construct— “[i]dioms are such sophisticated features of language that any one linguistic definition might be easy to contradict...not all idioms are idiomatic to the same degree. This means that not all idioms can be categorized by the same linguistic properties” (Pinnavaia, 2010, p. 26). Despite the complexity and difficulty to define idioms, commonly resorted-to patterns can be identified from various idiom definitions in the literature. Most scholars construct their respective criteria for idiom definition and classification mainly taking into considerations the morpheme-lexical, syntactical and semantic aspects of the lexical items.

Looking at the scope of idiom definition, some researchers use the term *idiom* in a broad sense to refer to and involve most or all sorts of fixed expressions and multiword units including fixed phrases, proverbs, formulae, slangs, and clichés (e.g., Fernando, 1978, 1996; Fernando & Flavell, 1981; Hockett, 1958; Makkai, 1972). While for some other scholars, *idiom* is more restrictive and only refers to fixed expressions that are semantically opaque and/or have metaphorical meanings (e.g., Fraser, 1970; Moon, 1998; Weinreich, 1969; Wood, 1986). There are also more restricted viewpoints that include only semantically opaque items as *idioms* and exclude figurative expressions (Grant & Bauer, 2004).

Idioms can be classified in various ways, and terminologies vary depending on the approaches used for classification. For example, structure-wise, Katz (1963) divides idioms into lexical idiom and phrase idiom; semantically based, Fernando (1996) classifies idioms into pure idiom, non-literal idiom, semi-literal idiom, and literal idiom; and integrating the aspects of lexicogrammar, semantics and pragmatics, Moon (1998) categorizes idioms into anomalous collocations, formulae, and metaphors.

Despite the diverse viewpoints, some frequently attended features can be found in the various criteria for idiom definition and classification. For example, an idiom usually consists of two or more lexical constituents; an idiom is usually rigid in structure and allows no or very limited variance; and semantically the meaning of an idiom cannot be derived from a simple combination or word-by-word interpretation of the meanings of its constituents. Furthermore, to classify idiom, the structural and semantic distinctions of the items such as the degree of structural variation, and semantic transparency are often taken into consideration. Liu (2008) reviews and compares major views on the syntactical and semantic criteria of idiom in the literature and provides the following summary as shown in Table 2.1.



| Scholars  | Syntactical and Semantic Criteria |   |                          |  |  |   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--|--|---|
|           | Mono-morpheme (free or bound)     | Polymorphemic Word (Semantically Unpredictable) |                          | Multi-word (Phrase) (structural variance restricted) | Multi-word (Phrase) (structural variance restricted) | Clause/Sentence (proverbs, sayings, etc.) |
|           | 1 free + bound morphemes          | Minimally 2 free morphemes                      | Literal                  | Non/semi-literal                                     | Totally opaque (excluding figurative/non-literal)    |   |
| Hockett   | Yes                               | Yes   | Yes                      | Yes  |  | Yes                                       |
| Katz      |                                   | Yes   |                          | Yes  |  |   |
| Makkai    |                                   | Yes   | Yes (idioms of encoding) | Yes (idioms of decoding) (including phrasal verbs)   |  | Yes                                       |
| Weinreich |                                   |   |                          | Yes  |  |   |
| Fraser    |                                   | Yes   |                          | Yes (including phrasal verbs)                        |  |   |
| Wood      |                                   | Yes   |                          | Yes  |  |   |

|                  |     |  |     |
|------------------|-----|--|-----|
| Fernando         | Yes | Yes<br>(including<br>phrasal<br>verbs) | Yes |
| Moon             |     | Yes                                    |     |
| Grant &<br>Bauer |     |  | Yes |

Table 2.1 A summary of major viewpoints on criteria for idioms

(Adapted from D. Liu, 2008, p. 14)

Other than the syntactical and semantic criteria, some scholars also take into account the pragmatic functions of idioms. For example, Makkai (1972) includes sayings and proverbs into an idiom category he calls *sememic idiom*, and points out that sememic idioms can perform various speech acts including advice, warnings and requests. Fernando (1996) borrows Halliday (1994)'s terminology for the meta-functions of language and identify idioms that respectively perform ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. A comprehensive discussion about the pragmatic and functional classification of idioms is by Murar (2009). She identifies four major categories of idioms according to the participants of the communication and the contexts where idioms are used, including:

- i. Idioms which indicate the **social relationship** [original emphasis] as well as the **attitude (tenor)** [original emphasis] between the participants in the communication;
- ii. Idioms in **social interaction** [original emphasis];
- iii. Idiomatic expressions used to perform **communicative functions** [original emphasis]; [and]
- iv. Idioms used in **structuring exchanges** [original emphasis] between speakers.

(Murar, 2009, pp. 5–9)

The pragmatically based categorizations offer a more functional approach and place the definition and classification of idiom within the pragmatic context. They can be beneficial for researchers who aim to research the use of idiom in communicative settings.

With reference to the above overview on idiom definition and classification, we have gained an understanding of the possible aspects we should carefully consider in deciding and regulating the scope of data in the present study as well as the potential challenges we may face in the process. However, most of the reviewed works above

establish their definition and classification of idiom based on the structure of European languages, symbolically English. Despite the universality of idioms, there are aspects unique to Cantonese that need to be carefully pondered in order to properly define and classify idioms in the present study, such as the structural buildup of the idiom constituents. As a result, we are in essential need of an operational model that outlines the attributes of an ‘idiom’ in the current project for the purpose of data collection and selection. Such a model is constructed and explicated in section 2.5 of this chapter.

## **2.3 Major Viewpoints on Idiom Processing and Comprehension**

In addition to the different ways of defining and classifying idioms, researchers also exhibit discrepant views in terms of how speakers process and comprehend idiom meanings. In general, the diverse viewpoints can distill into a frozen-dead-metaphor point of view represented by the traditional views of idioms and a conceptually motivated point of view mainly promoted by the Cognitive Linguists. The following two subsections review these two sets of views, respectively.

### **2.3.1 The Traditional Views**

The ‘orthodox’ or ‘traditional’ views of idiom refer to the dominant viewpoints among idiom studies between the 1960s and the early 1990s. Some well-known proponents of the traditional views of idioms include Chomsky (1965, 1980), Cooper (1986), Fraser (1970), Long (1979), Makkai (1972), McArthur (1992), Strässler (1982), and Weinreich (1969). The traditional views treat idioms as a set of conventional multi-word units with syntactic properties and a special meaning that relates to the combined meanings of the constituents. Regarding the idiom meaning, they acknowledge the peculiarity of the idiomatic meaning in a sense that the meaning of an idiom relates to its linguistic form but is not the simple combination of the literal meanings of its constituents. However, the traditional views largely regard idioms as frozen semantic units that have lost their once metaphorical nature and hence semantically and syntactically unanalyzable and noncompositional. They see idioms in a similar fashion as common multi-word units whose meanings are directly stored and stipulated in the mental lexicon. Therefore, speakers’ comprehension of idioms follows the process of analyzing the literal meaning, rejecting the literal meaning, and simultaneously or subsequently retrieving the stipulated meaning from the mental lexicon (see e.g., Aitchison, 1987; Bobrow & Bell, 1973; Brooke-Rose, 1958; Cruse, 1986; J. Katz, 1973). In addition, according to these traditional views, idioms are seen to be independent of each other in the same way that common words are characterized in their syntactic and semantic properties individually with few relations to each other (Kövecses, 2002).

Many contemporary studies about how people process and comprehend idioms, regardless of their diverse theoretical and methodological bases and great disparity in findings, have shown how the traditional views are

problematic, in particular, for categorizing idioms as common lexicon and as noncompositional and lexically frozen dead metaphors (see Gibbs & Colston, 2012, pp. 162–174 for an elaborated overview). For example, psycholinguistic studies on how speakers process idiom meaning reveal that speakers do not necessarily process the literal meaning of idioms to understand the figurative meaning (Gibbs, 1980, 1985, 1986; Giora, 2003, pp. 103–166; Ortony et al., 1978). This finding indicates that speakers do not understand idioms in the same way as non-idiomatic lexical units. Neuropsychological studies also reach similar conclusions by investigating the different roles of the two hemispheres in idiom comprehension and literal speech comprehension (Bohrn et al., 2012; Kempler et al., 1999; Papagno, 2001; Proverbio et al., 2009). Moreover, many researchers strongly rebut the noncompositional-dead-metaphor view of idiom from various perspectives and show with empirical evidence that most idioms are, to a different degree, semantically analyzable and thereby syntactically flexible (e.g., Cacciari & Tabossi, 1993; Fillmore et al., 1988; Glucksberg, 2001; Hamblin & Gibbs, 1999; Moon, 1998; Nayak & Gibbs, 1990; Tabossi et al., 2005; Vega Moreno, 2007).

### 2.3.2 The ‘Conceptually Motivated’ Views

Within the scope of Cognitive Linguistics, linguists such as Lakoff (1987) and Kövecses (2002) critique the traditional views of idiom for isolating idioms from the human conceptual system and conventional experience-based human knowledge. They propose a more dynamic and systematic point of view which advocates that the meanings of most idioms are conceptual rather than linguistic in nature, and therefore, are motivated rather than arbitrarily stipulated (Kövecses, 2002; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996; Lakoff, 1987).

Lakoff (1987) emphasizes the essential role of *conventional images* in forming and understanding idioms, and hypothesizes that the link of *conventional images + associated knowledge + conceptual metaphor* is the motivation for idioms. He finds a remarkable unity among descriptions by various speakers of the associated images and knowledge with the idiom *keep someone at arm’s length* (Lakoff, 1987, pp. 447–448), and explains further with the example *spill the beans* how the conceptual metaphors work in linking the conventional images and the knowledge to the idiomatic meaning (Lakoff, 1987, p. 450).

A series of psycholinguistic studies conducted by Gibbs and colleagues (Gibbs, 1990, 1992; Gibbs et al., 1997; Gibbs & Nayak, 1991; Gibbs & O’Brien, 1990; Nayak & Gibbs, 1990) support Lakoff’s motivation hypothesis with empirical evidence. Experiments show that the speakers’ highly consistent mental images of different idioms with similar figurative meanings are not solely generated from the figurative meanings or the speakers’ basic-level prototypical knowledge, but are rather constrained by the elicited conceptual metaphors (Gibbs & O’Brien, 1990); and the mappings of the conceptual metaphors are consistent with the idiom meanings (Gibbs, 1992). Moreover, idioms that denote the same prototypical concept are inter-related and categorized along the temporal sequence within the conceptual prototype (Nayak & Gibbs, 1990). This discovery provides strong evidence against the

traditional view that idioms are isolated lexical items. More importantly, Nayak and Gibbs's (1990) study reveals that conceptual metaphors motivate not only the idiom meanings but also the contextual appropriateness of idioms. Speakers can consciously identify the underlying conceptual metaphor(s) of the idioms, distinguish the idioms based on their conceptual knowledge of the temporal stages within the prototypical concept, and choose to use a certain idiom by measuring the conceptual coherence between the discourse context and the idiom meaning (Nayak & Gibbs, 1990). Furthermore, Gibbs, Bogdanovich, Sykes, and Barr (1997) discover that speakers access conceptual metaphors when understanding idioms in print, and only the appropriate metaphors are accessed to process the relevant idioms. Their findings have provided a more in-depth understanding on how conceptual metaphors work during idiom comprehension.

Kövecses and Szabó (1996) and Kövecses (2002) elaborate Lakoff's motivation hypothesis for idiom comprehension, and consider the motivation as "cognitive mechanism" (Kövecses, 2002, p. 201; Kövecses & Benczes, 2010, p. 233; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996, p. 330) that connects knowledge domains to idiom meanings. Three major cognitive mechanisms highlighted by Kövecses (2002) as most relevant to figurative idiom motivation are *metaphor*, *metonymy*, and *conventional knowledge*. This view is consistent with that of Lakoff (1987).

In addition to developing Lakoff's hypothesis, Kövecses (2002; see also Kövecses & Benczes, 2010) also emphasizes the possible synergistic motivations of multiple cognitive mechanisms for one idiom. For example, the meaning of the idiom *gain the upper hand* is motivated by both the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL and the conceptual metaphor CONTROL IS UP; and the meaning of the idiom *have blood on one's hand* is jointly motivated by the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY, the conceptual metaphor MORAL/ETHICAL IS CLEAN, and the conventional knowledge of blood being an unclean substance (see Kövecses & Benczes, 2010, p. 246).

Notwithstanding its widespread influence, Lakoff's motivation hypothesis of idiom receives critiques. The most challenged aspect is the role of conceptual metaphor in idiom comprehension and interpretation. Regarding the automaticity of conceptual metaphor activation, Glucksberg, Brown and McGlone (1993) argue that conceptual metaphors are not automatically activated during idiom comprehension albeit their availability in the analogical context and accessibility to facilitate idiom comprehension under certain circumstances. In terms of the impact of conceptual metaphor on idiom meaning, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1995) remark that the Gibbs and O'Brien's (1990) experiments about the structuring of mental imagery related to idiom meaning and the underlying conceptual metaphors suppress the role of idiom's literal strings in constructing mental imagery. And concerning the extent to which conceptual metaphor is involved in idiom comprehension, Keysar and Bly (1999) claim that idiom meaning can be re-motivated per speakers' interpretative strategies based on speakers' intuitions of what

they believe to be the knowledge or elements mapped into the linguistic form of the idiom, and conceptual metaphor is not involved in the process.

With a careful review of the Lakoffian model of idiom motivation and the related critiques, Langlotz (2006) offers a more integrated and, to some extent, compromising viewpoint in terms of idiom comprehension. He considers idiom comprehension as a process of reinterpretation from the literal meaning to the idiomatic meaning that allows room for creativity. He acknowledges the significant motivation of the underlying conceptual metaphors in this process, but he also points out that these conceptual metaphors are presupposed and are insufficient to fully determine the idiomatic meaning. Langlotz (2006) emphasizes on the indispensability of “the concrete knowledge associated with the literal scene” (p. 64) to achieve a fully transparent idiomatic construction. He explicates how encyclopedic knowledge motivates the specific entailments in the conceptual processing of idiomatic meaning:

Since conceptual metaphors are relatively abstract figurative patterns, they do not fully predetermine what conceptual substructures from the literal source-domain are mapped onto the idiomatic-meaning domain. These fine-grained mappings can only be established on the basis of the specific encyclopedic knowledge associated with the literal meaning. Thus, while the motivation of *spill the beans* is guided by the conceptual conduit-metaphor, it is not only this superordinate mapping that motivates the actual idiomatic meaning. Rather, the specific motivation is enriched by one’s specific knowledge about the entailments of the situation of beans being spilled (Langlotz, 2006, pp. 64–65).

The Cognitive Linguistics stance about idiom processing, i.e., idiomatic meaning is motivated by the underlying conceptual mechanisms, is instructive for the conceptual analysis of the Cantonese food-related idioms in the present study. This stance is also in partial consistence with the Cultural Linguistics perspective, as both Cognitive Linguistics and Cultural Linguistics draw on knowledge in cognitive sciences to explain the meaning making of linguistic expressions. That being said, the present study can benefit more from a Cultural Linguistics approach which regards the conceptual mappings underlying the target idioms as culturally constructed. Instead of looking into the “encyclopedic knowledge” associated with the idiom meaning as Langlotz (2006) highlights in the above quote, we are able to make sense of the target idioms with a culturally guided approach by tracing their roots in the distinctive socio-cultural context of the Cantonese communities and unpack their specific ideological underpinnings to better understand the meaning making.

## **2.4 Zooming into Food Idiom Research: What Has Been Done?**

Since the beginning of human civilization, food is paramount to survival, and food consumption such as drinking and eating is “a profound expression of social belonging” (Pinnavaia, 2010, p. 11). As such, it is no surprise that

the domain of food is productive of idioms in almost any existing language. With a change of view about idioms from fossilized dead metaphors to lexical products of conceptual stipulation as outlined above, the past two decades have seen an increasing interest in the research of food idioms across disciplines of linguistics. This section reviews some outstanding recent studies on food idioms.

Lexicography to a certain extent, lays a foundation for any research of food idioms. It documents and provides references to food idioms in a language or across different languages. The compilation of dictionaries and databases of food idioms and related studies based on such dictionaries and databases can establish a knowledge bank that cultivates understandings of food idioms from the historical, etymological, and structural aspects. One remarkable lexicographic project on food and drink idioms in English is Pinnavaia (2010). Sourcing and analyzing food and drink idioms from twelve monolingual English dictionaries and two large general reference corpora, Pinnavaia (2010) aims to “uncover what food and drink idioms have characterized the history of the English language since the year 1755” (p.16) and “to glean how the English think and communicate” (p.15). She starts her investigation by examining the literal and figurative structures of the idioms and evaluating the productivity of the food and drink lexemes in the idioms. She then proceeds to explore the etymological origins of the idioms in question and critically appreciates how these idioms are managed in the twelve dictionaries. She concludes her research by looking at the synchronic usages and communicative functions of the food and drink idioms with a secondary corpus-linguistic analysis. Pinnavaia’s (2010) work is among one of the most thorough and comprehensive on the linguistic inquiry of English food and drink idioms. It carefully examines the syntactic and semantic layouts of the idioms, showcases the idioms’ various levels of semantic transparency and decomposability, and dutifully documents the etymology of each and every idiom. It also makes links between the idioms’ lexicographical treatments in dictionaries and their actual frequency of use in corpus discourse. This lineal methodological pursuit is also extended to her later work on a contrastive analysis of food and drink idioms in English, French, German, and Spanish from the lexicographic angle (Pinnavaia, 2015).

Despite the meticulous investigations and the profound linguistic knowledge generated by research on English food and drink idioms however, there is a lack of flexibility in Pinnavaia’s profiling of the idioms. The idiom items and their linguistic properties are somehow mechanically listed and categorized in her works and the analysis of the idioms is almost entirely lexicographically bound and largely detached from their authentic pragmatic contexts and socio-cultural realities. Researchers in the lexicography and phraseology of food idioms are indeed aware of these limitations. Savin (2014) for instance, proposes a methodological model to build an electronic collection of European food idioms that captures both the conceptual structures and the “cultural taxon” (p.43) related to the idioms. Savin’s methodology combines the lexicographic inquiry into food idioms in European languages and survey results that collect native speakers’ interpretations and knowledge of the food idioms. The collected data is programmed into a computerized model with electronic reference maps that trace the etymological

spread of similar idioms across Europe. Applying such methodological model, Savin (2016; see also Savin & Boghian, 2014) elaborates on an electronic English-Romanian contrastive collection of food set phrases including food idioms as an experimental case. As shown in the following example, all word entries in this e-collection incorporate the food-related lexeme, the etymology of such lexeme, the literal composition of the food idiom, the conceptualization of the idiomatic meaning, and a text example from an external link.

| <b>Word-entry (WE)</b>                 | <b>WE language</b> | <b>WE etymology</b>                     | <b>WE morph. category</b>                                      | <b>WE meaning</b>   | <b>WE realia class</b>     |                         |
|--|--------------------|---|--|---|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>PÂINE</i>                           | Romanian           | Lat. <i>panis</i>                       | noun   | ‘a common food made from flour, water, and usually yeast’ | Dishes made from cereals   |                         |
| <b>Set phrases (SPH)</b>               | <b>SPH type</b>    | <b>SPH literal translation</b>          | <b>SPH meaning</b>   | <b>WE paradigm signification in SPH</b>                   | <b>SPH general concept</b> | <b>SPH text-example</b> |
| <i>a lua (cuiva) pâinea de la gură</i> | idiom              | to take the bread from somebody’s mouth | ‘to leave somebody without the possibility of making a living’ | Food – image for the necessary means of subsistence       | extortion                  | External link           |

(Savin, 2016, pp. 100–101)

Savin’s model is a monument of the technological development of contemporary lexicographic research on food idioms and has implications for the industrialized dimensions of linguistics such as natural language processing. It has also highlighted the increasing awareness of noting and documenting the culturally constructed elements in the conceptual mapping between the literal food lexeme and the figurative meaning of food idioms.

Regarding the conceptual processing, Andrioai (2010) explores the cognitive mechanisms underlying common English food idioms with the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). She explicates in detail how English food idioms are motivated, and in particular, she emphasizes the significant motivation of conventional images. This study is more of a review and explication of CMT with food idioms as examples than a specially targeted investigation of food idioms. Nevertheless, Andrioai (2010) has addressed an important point regarding idiom comprehension in this study. She postulates the employment of different strategies, in addition to conceptual metaphors, in order to understand idioms because “[a]lthough a considerable number of idiomatic constructions can be motivated on the basis of conceptual metaphors, there cannot be stated a precise relationship between conceptual structures and idiomatic expressions as not all idioms are metaphorical expressions” (Andrioai, 2010,



p. 194). This postulation reminds fellow researchers to avoid being preoccupied by the attempt to uncover metaphoric relations underlying food idioms but at the same time, to examine other potential cognitive mechanisms that may (co-)motivate idiomatic meaning. This is relevant to the present study in that the inclusion of cultural metonymies and the references to the interpretations from cultural informants about the Cantonese food-related idioms may draw a more comprehensive and intricate picture of the conceptual processing of the target idioms.

Taking a more culturally oriented approach, C. Y. Lin and Depner (2016) identify food metaphors from Taiwan Hakka food idioms and investigate the cognitive and cultural perceptions of the Hakka people behind the food metaphors. Hakka is a Southern Chinese dialect. C. Y. Lin and Depner's (2016) study and another two that look at Hakka food proverbs (Huang & Depner, 2016; Y. Lin, 2011) are among the very few cognitive linguistic studies that look at Chinese varieties other than Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua). In this study, the investigators find that FOOD in Hakka idioms is mainly mapped onto the conceptualizations of LIFE, PERSONALITY, and HUMAN RELATION. They make great efforts to reveal the Hakka cultural attributes as encoded in the food idioms including the Hakka thinking and behavior that "fulfill the purpose of persuading and encouraging younger generations to be kind, industrious, and sociable" (C. Y. Lin & Depner, 2016, p. 7). Although there can be clearer systematicity in the analysis of cultural perceptions behind the Hakka food idioms, C. Y. Lin and Depner (2016) presents a potential pathway of situating the cognitive analysis of food idioms in the cultural context of the speech community. Similar efforts can be found in the monograph of Liu (2002) which is an impressive work that compares Chinese and American idioms including a chapter specified in food idioms by exploring the distinctive social constructs and cultural traditions of the Chinese and American societies and the different worldviews thus cultivated.

Another set of studies on food idioms are more applied. They focus on the interpretation of food idioms from one language to another, or the deconstruction of food idioms in language education. Malik (2017) for example, examines the semantic misinterpretations of English food idioms by Iraqi EFL learners, and finds that most cases of misinterpretations occur when the learners fail to recognize the figurative usage of a food expression. Such failure, as Malik argues, is mostly due to the lack of knowledge of the cultural-social context where the food idioms are found. Approaching food idiom interpretation from a different perspective, Zhang (2011) discusses various strategies of properly translating Chinese food idioms into English. She argues that translators should to the largest extent, sustain the cultural elements encoded in Chinese food idioms and should not compromise the idioms' cultural meanings during the translation process. Kim (2019) on the other hand, analyzes Korean food idioms in contrast to their close Chinese equivalents, providing references for Chinese Korean learners by outlining the culturally-unique aspects in the semantic processing of Korean food idioms. In these more applied studies on food idioms, there is a noticeable stress on the importance of teaching, conveying, or distinguishing culturally contextualized meanings embedded in food idioms. However, a more in-depth exploration of how to identify and

make use of such cultural uniqueness is lacking, and we are yet to see significant output that explicates the role and impact of cultural knowledge in the application of food idioms in pragmatic discourse.

Overall, despite the increasing academic attention paid to food idioms, the existing studies mainly focus on the documentation of food idioms and the explication of the semantic processing of food idioms. And the majority of these studies look at food idioms in English or European languages. Among the few studies on food idioms in Chinese language varieties, there has not been an established cultural-conceptual inquiry and no systematic link has been made between the target idioms and the cultural and social ideologies of the Chinese speech communities. These gaps thereby call for a comprehensive and profound investigation of food idioms that not only presents the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the idioms, but also dives into the mass of socio-cultural factors that shape the idioms to unveil the underpinning ideologies that attribute to the vitality of the target idioms. It is partially the aim of the present study to contribute to filling these gaps in the literature.

## **2.5 The Present Study: An Operational Idiom Model and a Theoretical-Analytical Synopsis**

Similar to the complexity in the macro-level definition and classification of idiom discussed in section 2.2, opinions on the Cantonese idioms in particular also vary, and there has not been a consensus in the field of Cantonese linguistics in terms of how idioms are defined and classified. In Cantonese, there is not a generic term fully equivalent to the English word *idiom*. Distinctive from free collocations, fixed multi-word units in Cantonese are usually categorized under *formulaic language* (*suk jyu* 熟语), or *conventional language* (*zuk jyu* 俗语), which consists of subcategories such as habitual collocation (*gwaan-jung jyu* 惯用语), four-character idiom (*sing jyu* 成语), colloquialisms (*zuk sing jyu* 俗成语), proverb (or folk idiom) (*zuk jyu* 俗语), adage (*jin jyu* 谚语), two-part allegorical saying (*hit hau jyu* 歇后语), slang (*lei jyu* 俚语) and common fixed expression (*gu-ding jyu* 固定语). However, definitions of the above subcategories are not institutionally standardized, and the scope of each subcategory is not clearly distinguished. Instances classified into one subcategory by one researcher may be classified into another subcategory by another researcher. For example, Li and Wang (1999, as cited in C. F. Tsang, 2008, p. 38) regard *dung-gwaa dau-fu* (冬瓜豆腐, white gourd and bean curd) as a four-character idiom, but Zeng (2008) classifies it into colloquialism, and yet Ouyang, Zhou and Rao (2009) include it in their dictionary of Cantonese proverbs. Despite the tangled definitions and classifications of the Cantonese idioms, most researchers justify their viewpoints taking into account the structural restriction, semantic compositionality, and pragmatic functions of the discussed Cantonese multi-word units, and the linguistic registers the multi-word units are used in.

In terms of the present study, it is important to set up an operational model to define the idiom data and thereby provide a practical guideline for data collection and selection. Taking into consideration the linguistic features of Cantonese figurative expressions and with regard to the aims of the present study, we have constructed the following model as shown in Figure 2.4 and defined linguistic items that meet the model criteria as idiom (or more precisely for this particular study, food idiom).

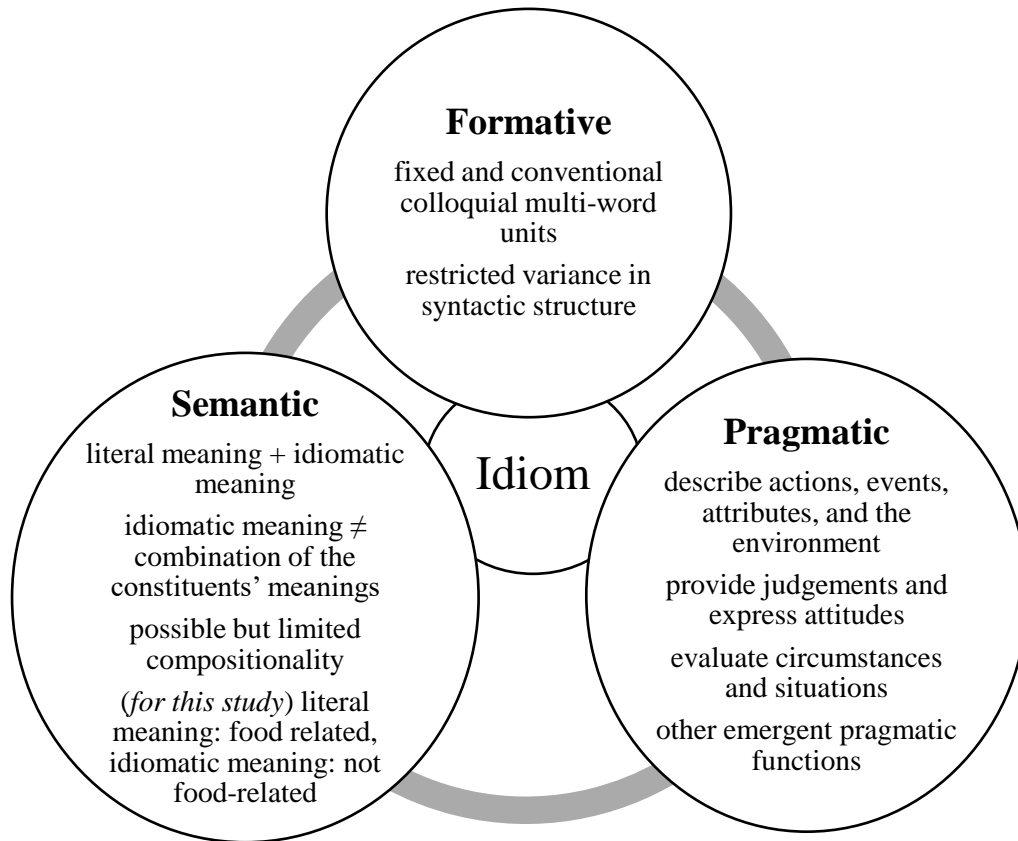


Figure 2.4 An operational idiom model for the present study

The model mainly defines idiom from the formative, the semantic, and the pragmatic perspectives. Formatively, all idioms in the present study should be fixed and conventionally accepted colloquial multi-word units, and they may have certain but restricted variance in syntactic structure. Semantically, all selected idioms should have a literal meaning and an idiomatic meaning, and the idiomatic meaning is not a simple combination of the meanings of the idiom’s constituents. Nonetheless, it is possible that an idiom has a limited degree of compositionality with which the literal meanings of some constituents may contribute to facilitating the overall idiomatic meaning. Moreover, considering the scope of the present study, the literal meaning of an idiom should be within a food-related domain while the idiomatic meaning should be non-food-related. And pragmatically, a Cantonese idiom can be used to describe actions, events, attributes, and the environment, provide judgements and express attitudes, evaluate circumstances and situations, and may serve other emergent pragmatic functions wherever possible and

appropriate according to the emic judgement of the speaker. This operational idiom model provides a set of criteria for the process of data collection in the present study, and also serves as a reference for the first stage of data analysis, i.e., the semantic-pragmatic analysis.

To present a brief project outline with reference to the literature review, Figure 2.5 is a synopsis that explains the correlation between the theoretical rationale and analytical focus of the present study.

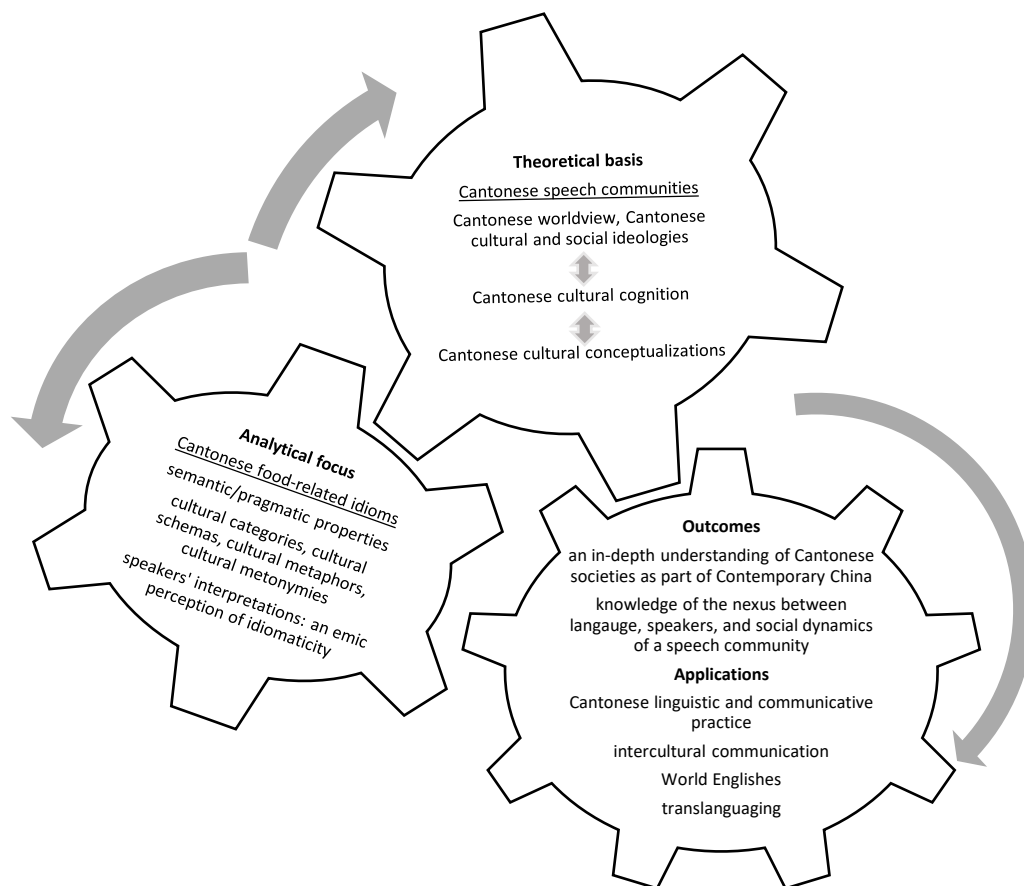


Figure 2.5 A theoretical-analytical synopsis of the present study

The present study is a cultural-conceptual exploration of Cantonese food-related idioms. It is theoretically built on the framework of Cultural Linguistics, and it presupposes a complex adaptive system of cultural cognition in the Cantonese speech communities and its heterogeneously distributed cultural conceptualizations among the members of the communities. The premise of the analysis is that the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the Cantonese food-related idioms are motivated by the underlying cultural conceptualizations which assume the forms of cultural categories, cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural metonymies. These cultural conceptualizations thereby can be identified from the idioms, and the cultural and social ideologies of the

Cantonese speech communities that harness and influence the Cantonese cultural cognition can be unveiled. The members of the communities, i.e., the Cantonese speakers, are the ‘carriers’ and ‘interpreters’ of the cultural conceptualizations. Their interpretations of the Cantonese food-related idioms can thereby reflect the degree to which the conceptual processing is motivated by the Cantonese worldview and offer a distinctive emic point of view regarding how figurative or idiomatic the target idioms are. Through identifying and analyzing cultural conceptualizations underlying the Cantonese food-related idioms, we expect to cultivate an in-depth understanding of the Cantonese societies as part of contemporary China. At the same time, we are hopeful to grasp how language, language speakers, and the social dynamics of a speech community are interrelated to each other and together (re)shape the cultural cognition of the speech community. The knowledge gained in the present study can thereby shed light on linguistic and communicative practice that involves Cantonese speakers. It can also be applied to wider areas of research including but not limited to intercultural communication, World Englishes, and translanguaging practice.

## **2.6 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics and synthesized the methodological development and the growing paradigm of Applied Cultural Linguistics. It has rationalized the appropriateness to adopt the theoretical framework in the present study and proposed the necessary adjustments of the analytical framework when applied to the current analysis. This chapter has also reviewed prior figurative language studies with a Cultural Linguistics approach. It finds that despite the fruitful findings, Cultural Linguistics research on figurative language needs further refinements, mainly in terms of setting up a clearer boundary in the definition and selection of figurative language data and obtaining a more developmental point of view that processes figurative meaning as ever-changing along the social and cultural dynamics. Addressing these issues and focusing on the primary data type of the present study, the chapter proceeds to outline the major views on idiom definition and classification and to review the ‘conceptually motivated’ views of idiom processing and comprehension as opposed to the much critiqued ‘traditional views’. It then zooms into the research of food-related idioms, reviewing existing studies on food idioms across linguistic disciplines. The gaps found from the review have justified the significance of the current project and inferred the potential contributions the current project can make. The chapter concludes with the proposal of an operational idiom model that guides the data collection and selection process and a theoretical-analytical synopsis that illustrates the theoretical foundation, analytical focus, and potential outcomes and implications of the present study.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology**

This chapter introduces the research methodology of the current project and it consists of four sections. Section 3.1 addresses various aspects of data collection to explicate how Cantonese food-related idioms are sourced and selected for analysis. Results of the data selection survey are also summarized in this section. Section 3.2 verifies the empirical feasibility of the project by presenting a small-scale sample analysis of three Cantonese rice-related idioms. This is followed by section 3.3 which distills from the sample analysis a series of procedures for data analysis in the present study. Section 3.4 summarizes the chapter with concluding remarks.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

This section explains the data collection and selection procedures by addressing the data type and data sources, setting up the criteria for data selection, and introducing the design and distribution of the data selection survey. It also presents the results of the survey and a synthesis of the selected target idioms.

#### **3.1.1 Data Type**

The present study aims to analyze cultural conceptualizations underlying the commonly known and frequently used Cantonese food-related idioms. An operational model has been set up to define and classify Cantonese food-related idioms in the study, as introduced in section 2.5 (see Figure 2.4). Therefore, data collected for analysis adhere to the criteria established within this model. The following are the two major indicators of potentially valid data:

1. The target data are colloquial idiomatic multi-word Cantonese expressions.
2. The target data have food-related literal meanings and non-food-related idiomatic meanings.

In practice, there are three steps in the data collection process. Firstly, a fundamental idiom pool is compiled by consulting authoritative Cantonese dictionaries and reference books and extracting food-related idioms from these sources. Secondly, an online survey is conducted to collect Cantonese speakers' input on the knowledge and the frequency of use of the idioms in the idiom pool. Thirdly, the most commonly known and frequently used idioms from the idiom pool are selected for detailed analysis in this thesis. For idioms that are not selected as target analysis data (i.e., the ones that appear to be less known and used), the speakers' input is also documented as sources of references for further discussion on the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms, which is partially addressed in Chapter Six in this thesis and an earmarked topic worthy of future research.

### 3.1.2 Data Sources

Guangzhou Cantonese and Hong Kong Cantonese are regarded as the dual standard and institutionalized varieties of Cantonese (H. Gao, 1990; C. F. Tsang, 2008), with the former being the “root” and “origin” (C. F. Tsang, 2008, p. 43) of Cantonese and the vernacular in Guangzhou, China, and the latter the *de facto* official language of Hong Kong under its *biliteracy and trilingualism* language policy (see Z. Xu, 2014 for a review of language policies in Hong Kong; see Zheng, 1998 for the variations between the two Cantonese varieties). Macau Cantonese, despite its unique features (see X. Yan & Moody, 2010), is highly similar to the two standard varieties both phonologically and lexically. It is simultaneously influenced by Guangzhou Cantonese and Hong Kong Cantonese due to its geographical proximity to the Guangdong Province<sup>5</sup> and its constant social and cultural contact with Hong Kong and Guangzhou (S. M. Lo, 2018; Luo, 2013). Idioms in these three Cantonese varieties are representative of the general Cantonese lexicon and of the collective Cantonese cultural cognition. They are also the idioms commonly recognized and recorded in most Cantonese dictionaries and reference books, which are the first point of reference for data collection.

Corresponding to the data collection criteria, colloquial food-related idioms are collected from the following eight dictionaries and reference books of spoken Cantonese and Cantonese figurative expressions:

- *Cantonese colloquial expressions* (Lo-Tam, 2007)
- *Interesting Cantonese colloquial expressions* (W. W. Lo & Tam, 1996)
- *A glossary of common Cantonese colloquial expressions* (So, 2002)
- *A dictionary of Cantonese colloquialisms in English* (Kwan, 2010)
- *A dictionary of Cantonese slang: The language of Hong Kong movies, street gangs and city life* (Hutton & Bolton, 2005)
- *Guangzhouhua fangyan cidian (xiuding ban) [Guangzhou dialect dictionary (revised edition)]* (Rao et al., 2009, reprinted in 2014)
- *Guangzhouhua suyü cidian [Guangzhou dialect folk idioms dictionary]* (Ouyang et al., 2009, reprinted in 2013)

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<sup>5</sup> Geographically, Macau is adjacent to Zhongshan City of the Guangdong Province, where Zhongshan Cantonese, a Xiangshan dialectal sub-cluster of Cantonese is spoken. According to Luo (2013), Macau Cantonese was phonologically closer to the Zhongshan variety than to the Guangzhou variety (which belongs to the Yuehai sub-cluster together with Hong Kong Cantonese). However, Macau Cantonese started to converge towards Guangzhou Cantonese in around 1897 and by 1941, Macau Cantonese had turned into a variety of the Yuehai sub-cluster, sharing most phonological features with both the Hong Kong and the Guangzhou varieties. One of the main reasons for this convergence, as Luo speculates, is the strong influence of Guangzhou Cantonese as the powerful standard variety of the provincial capital on Zhongshan Cantonese throughout the 200 years since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with which the phonological features of the latter have been gradually assimilated into the former.

- *Xianggang Yueyu guanyongyu yanjiu [A study of idiomatic expressions in Hong Kong Cantonese]* (C. F. Tsang, 2008)

All the above references were (re)published or revised within the last 25 years and have entries of Cantonese colloquial expressions mainly used in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau of China. Restricting the publication/revision dates of the references to the last two decades sets a temporal threshold for the primary data screening which ensures the input of the fundamental data pool is, to a large extent, up to date.

Furthermore, most authors of these dictionaries and reference books are native Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong and Guangzhou, who infuse their works with both academic expertise and emic authenticity. As an exception, Hutton and Bolton's (2005) dictionary of Cantonese slang, composed by two non-Cantonese speaking linguists specializing in language and communication and Asian Englishes including Hong Kong English, complements the sources with more etic insights.

Food-related idioms from the above dictionaries and reference books are gathered to form a fundamental data pool, which is included in Appendix 1. Each idiom is listed with its literal English translation and is annotated with a documentation number that indicates how many of the sources have documented the idiom. The idioms are organized in a descending order according to their respective documentation number, with the most documented idiom on top and the least at the bottom. The rationale for the arrangement is that the total documentation number of an idiom may reflect how commonly recognized this idiom is by the researchers, which to some extent allows a pre-survey assumption on the speakers' potential knowledge of the idioms. For example, the idiom *sik sei maau* (食死猫, eat a dead cat)<sup>6</sup> appears in all eight sources and this may predict a high possibility that most speakers know this idiom in the survey.

Altogether, the completed data pool contains 210 Cantonese food-related idioms. In the process of constructing the fundamental idiom pool, some instances from the sources are excluded. An explanation for data exclusion is provided in the following subsection.

### 3.1.3 Data Exclusion

To construct the fundamental data pool, it is important to properly and correctly identify the target food-related idioms. A small number of instances from the sources are identified as not fitting the data collection criteria and therefore are excluded for the following reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> All idioms are presented in their Romanized form. Their original form in Cantonese characters and their literal English translation are put in round brackets following the Romanized script. The present study uses *the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong Cantonese Romanization Scheme*, or *Jyutping*, for Romanization.



Firstly, idioms used for dish names, such as *gam ngan daan* (金银蛋, gold and silver egg), referring to a dish made with fresh chicken eggs and preserved duck eggs, are ruled out because it is their idiomatic meanings instead of the literal meanings that are food-related.

Secondly, we have excluded idioms that are restricted to certain professional domains and therefore not commonly comprehensible to the general public. One example is *hung dau saa* (红豆沙, red bean soup), which is only used by medical professionals to refer to blood for transfusion.

Thirdly, we have ruled out idioms that only remain active within limited demographic sectors of the society. An example is *lo baak tau* (萝卜头, turnip head), which is only used by senior speakers who had experienced the Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945 to refer to a Japanese man.

Fourthly, we have factored out ‘pseudo-idioms’ that are phonetic substitutes for other lexical items. For example, *bou dung gwaa* (煲冬瓜, boil white gourd) ‘idiomatically’ refers to ‘Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua)’ because it sounds similar to the actual Cantonese word for ‘Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua)’, i.e., *pou tung waa*. Expressions like this one are usually products of Cantonese speakers’ jocular wordplay and do not entail any conceptual mappings.

Finally, where idioms include nominal constituents signifying both an animal/plant species and the food ingredient made of this animal/plant, the data set rejects those with purely species reference. For instance, the idiom *zou daai zap haai* (做大闸蟹, become a big tied-up crab) is included in the data pool because *haai* (蟹, crab) here refers to the crabs tied-up and sold in the seafood market. Contrarily, the idiom *baan haai* (扮蟹, pose as a crab) is excluded because it describes a reckless person who behaves like a crawling crab (as an animal).

### 3.1.4 Survey Design and Distribution

After the construction of the fundamental data pool, a survey investigating the speakers’ knowledge and frequency of use of the food-related idioms is designed for the purpose of selecting the most well-known and commonly used idioms from the data pool. Aligning with the aim of the study to investigate collective Cantonese cultural conceptualizations, it is crucial that the survey is distributed to a relatively large group of participants with demographic features that can represent the general structure of the speech community. A suitable medium that meets the need is an anonymous online questionnaire to which participants can have easy access and of which the responses can be collected efficiently without individual participant-investigator contact. In the meantime, such a questionnaire can be distributed among participants recruited via virtual snowball sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012), a sampling method that combines the advantages of the traditional snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961)

and the virtual social networks such as online social media platforms to efficiently and rapidly collect study samples in a short period of time.

Target participants of the survey are native Cantonese speakers born and regularly living in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau of China. Cantonese should be the participants' primary language, as indicated by the status that it is their only or dominant household language. Participants are also recruited from various educational backgrounds across genders and age groups. To initiate the snowball sampling, a few speakers within the investigator's personal and professional networks are recruited as seed participants. Each seed participant is asked to complete the survey and then forward it to their personal networks to develop new participants. The new participants are then also encouraged to forward the survey to their social networks to further invite more potential participants upon completion of the survey.

A popular Chinese online survey platform Wenjuanxing (<http://www.wjx.cn>) is used to design the survey and later, for the participants to complete the survey. The survey is displayed in simplified Chinese<sup>7</sup>. It consists of three sections: the cover page, the demographic information collection page, and the survey content (see Appendix 2). The cover page gives a brief introduction to the research project, an explanation of the aim of the survey, and a detailed instruction for completing the survey. The participants are required to carefully read through the cover page. If they decide to proceed, they are directed to the second section which asks them to provide demographic information including gender, age, place of birth, usual place of residence, level of education, and language spoken at home. The purpose of collecting participants' demographic information is to ensure that the participants meet the recruiting requirements, and to provide statistical evidence for an overall demographic profile of the participants in the survey report. After the information collection, the participants are directed to the core section of the survey to answer questions about the idioms.

All participants are asked to answer the questions independently. For each idiom, a maximum of two questions are asked. The first question checks whether the participant knows the meaning of the idiom. The participant needs to provide a 'yes/no' answer. If the participant answers 'yes' to the question, a second question will appear to ask how likely the participant is to use the idiom in relevant communicative settings. The participant needs to choose from five listed choices the one that best represents their likelihood of using the idiom. The five choices, i.e., *I don't use it at all*, *I seldom use it*, *I use it neither frequently nor rarely*, *I use it quite often*, and *I use it very frequently*, are respectively given hidden values by the survey platform from 1 to 5 points, ascending from *I don't*

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<sup>7</sup> Both Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) have a character-based writing system even though some characters may have different meanings in the two Chinese varieties, and some characters are unique to Cantonese. Simplified Chinese characters are used in Mainland China and traditional Chinese characters are used in Hong Kong and Macau. In the present case, the majority of the survey participants are from Guangzhou, China and residents of Hong Kong and Macau have no problem reading and understanding simplified Chinese characters. Therefore, all questionnaires are displayed in simplified Chinese characters.

*use it at all* with 1 point, to *I use it very frequently* with 5 points. When the two questions are answered, the participant proceeds to questions about a new idiom. If the participant answers ‘no’ to the first question, the second question will not appear, and the participant will be directed to questions about the next idiom. The survey is complete after the participant answers all the given questions regarding all the target idioms. In total, the survey takes no more than ten minutes and can be completed at any time and at any venue with Internet connection per the convenience of the participants. Upon completion of the survey, the survey platform will generate a QR code and a hyperlink together with a message encouraging the participant to invite their personal contacts to complete the questionnaire via sharing the QR code and/or the hyperlink with them.

The validity of the survey is controlled through the page-turning setting. It is compulsory for a participant to provide an answer to the question displayed and the survey will only proceed when the displayed question is answered. Any incomplete response will not be recorded. During their participation, the participants reserve the rights to withdraw from the survey anytime and at any stage of the survey by closing the browser window. Once a participant withdraws from participation, their previous input in the questionnaire will be erased and no record will be kept. The survey platform will send a mobile phone notification to the investigator every time an attempt of the survey is submitted. The survey platform will also generate a statistics report of all participant responses for each questionnaire after the survey is terminated.

For a fundamental data pool with 210 idioms, it is not practical to survey all the idioms in one questionnaire. Alternatively, eight parallel questionnaires are built, including two pilot questionnaires (i.e., surveys 1-1 and 1-2 in Appendix 2) and six questionnaires in the same format with a slightly bigger capacity (i.e., surveys 2-1 to 2-6 in Appendix 2). As a pilot task verifying the effectiveness of the survey design and the sampling method, 44 Cantonese idioms with rice-related keywords *mai* (米, uncooked rice), *faan* (饭, cooked rice), and *zuk* (粥, rice congee) are extracted from the fundamental data pool and randomized into two groups with 22 idioms in each to build two pilot questionnaires. The two questionnaires are then distributed for snowball sampling on social media platforms such as Facebook, WeChat<sup>8</sup>, and Sina Weibo<sup>9</sup>, as well as via mobile phone messages and emails. The pilot task in the end has yielded a successful outcome. Following the same procedures, the remaining 166 food-related idioms from the fundamental data pool are then randomized into four groups of 28 idioms and two groups of 27 idioms to form six similar questionnaires for a larger-scale sampling. All questionnaires are laid out in the same format and are distributed with the same method. Each participant completes one questionnaire only and the questionnaire given to the participant is a random selection from the collection of the questionnaires. Participants

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<sup>8</sup> WeChat is a popular Chinese multi-purpose social media application developed by Tencent Holdings Limited, China. Its functions include exchanging textual and audio messages, making video calls, sharing media files and hyperlinks, and making and collecting payments.

<sup>9</sup> Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website developed by Sina Corporation, China. It is one of the biggest Chinese social media platforms.

of the pilot sampling do not take part in the subsequent large-scale sampling. The survey results of these eight questionnaires are presented in section 3.1.6.

### 3.1.5 Data Selection

Statistics in the reports generated by the survey platform include a demographic overview of the participants, the percentage of speakers' knowledge of each idiom, the percentage of each frequency option for using each known idiom, and the mean value of the frequency of use for each known idiom. All reports are originally in Chinese. A survey report excerpt with its English translation can be found in Appendix 3. To select the commonly known and frequently used idioms, the mean value that reflects both the knowledge and frequency of use for each idiom (hereafter referred to as capitalized 'MEAN VALUE') is calculated with the Microsoft Excel formula following the equation below:

$$\text{MEAN VALUE} = \text{mean value (frequency of use of the known idiom)} * \text{number of participants who know the idiom} / \text{total number of participants}$$

For example, 56 out of 71 participants know the idiom *wan mai lou* (搵米路, find the route to *mai*), and among these 56 participants, the mean value of the frequency of use for the idiom is 2.64. Therefore, the MEAN VALUE is  $2.64 * 56 / 71 = 2.08$ .

As the value 3 stands for the option 'I use it neither frequently nor rarely' in the second survey question of each considered idiom, it represents an average frequency of use of a known idiom. In other words, an idiom with a MEAN VALUE higher than 3 is known and used above average in the speech community. Therefore, all idioms selected as target data for detailed analysis in the present study have a MEAN VALUE higher than 3.

To construct systematicity of the data analysis, the idioms selected are classified according to the main food-related keyword that constitutes the semantic focus of the idiom. Some idioms contain more than one food-related constituent. The classification of these idioms takes into consideration the semantic salience of the food-related constituents and the semantic relevance of the idiom per se to the other idioms with the same food-related constituents. For example, *sik jyun faan* (食软饭, eat soft *faan*) has two food-related constituents *sik* (食, to eat) and *faan* (饭, the cooked rice) and both are highly productive in constituting Cantonese food-related idioms. However, *faan* (饭) appears to be a more prominent component in meaning making of the idiom (i.e., [of] a man dependent on *financial income* of his female partner) and there are a set of *faan* idioms where *faan* has a similar idiomatic reference (i.e., financial income). Therefore, *sik jyun faan* (食软饭) is classified and analyzed as an instance of the rice-related idioms. This classification method is mainly complying with the systematicity of the analysis. It does not disregard the significance of the other food-related constituent(s) to the meaning making of

the idiom. Altogether, the selected idioms are classified into idioms of staple food (i.e., rice-related idioms), idioms of food consumption (i.e., eating-related idioms), idioms of non-staple foods and ingredients, and idioms of cooking and food preparation. The survey shows that most of the well-known and frequently used food-related idioms by Cantonese speakers fall into the first two groups and thereby this thesis focuses on analyzing the cultural conceptualizations of the rice-related idioms and eating-related idioms.

### 3.1.6 Survey Results

Surveys 1-1 and 1-2 were launched as a pilot task and targeted at selecting rice-related idioms. Altogether, survey 1-1 received 71 valid responses, and survey 1-2 received 76 valid responses<sup>10</sup>. Demographically, about 85% of the participants were born in Guangzhou, and the other 15% in Hong Kong and Macau. All participants speak Cantonese at home, and more than 90% of them speak Cantonese only<sup>11</sup>. The other 9.5% speak Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) and/or another Chinese variety/non-Chinese language at home besides Cantonese. Most participants reside at their birthplace with a few exceptions: three Guangzhou-born participants migrated to Hong Kong and one Hong Kong-born participant became a resident of Guangzhou. The above figures indicate that the Cantonese spoken by all participants is consistent with the features of the standard Cantonese varieties. Moreover, the demographic profile shows moderate distributions of gender and age of the participants and diversity in the participants' level of education. The overall demographic properties of the participants are compatible with the demographic constitution of the target Cantonese speech communities and therefore, the results of the survey are highly reliable as reference for data selection. A detailed demographic profile of the surveys 1-1 and 1-2 participants is provided in Appendix 4.

In total, 25 out of the 44 surveyed idioms with rice-related constituent(s) meet the data selection criteria, among which 22 have salient idiomatic meaning derived mainly from the rice-related constituent(s). These 22 rice-related idioms are selected for analysis, with 3 of them analyzed in the sample in section 3.2 and the other 19 analyzed in Chapter Four. Table 3.1 lists these 22 rice-related idioms with their English translations and MEAN VALUE calculated based on the survey results.

| # | IDIOM                   | LITERAL TRANSLATION   | MEAN VALUE |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 | <i>jau mai</i> 有米       | have <i>mai</i>       | 4.210      |
| 2 | <i>tit faan wun</i> 铁饭碗 | iron <i>faan</i> bowl | 4.090      |

<sup>10</sup> Survey 1-2 received in total 80 responses. 4 responses were marked invalid because the participants do not use Cantonese as household language despite that they were born and are living in Guangzhou, China. Similar cases in the other surveys were also marked invalid.

<sup>11</sup> This includes one participant of survey 1-2 (male, age 18-35, born and regularly residing in Guangzhou, China) who speaks a Cantonese variety (Yangjiang dialect) besides the standard Guangzhou Cantonese at home.

|    |  |   |       |
|----|--|---|-------|
| 3  | <i>cou caa daam faan</i> 粗茶淡饭                        | coarse tea and light <i>faan</i>                          | 4.052 |
| 4  | <i>sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai</i><br>食盐多过[你]食米     | have eaten more salt than [you]<br>have eaten <i>mai</i>  | 4.040 |
| 5  | <i>tai sung sik faan</i> 睇餸食饭                        | watch the dishes to eat <i>faan</i>                       | 3.954 |
| 6  | <i>gaak lei faan hoeng</i> 隔篱饭香                      | neighbor's <i>faan</i> [is] fragrant                      | 3.897 |
| 7  | <i>caau laang faan</i> 炒冷饭                           | stir-fry cold <i>faan</i>                                 | 3.802 |
| 8  | <i>yat wok zuk</i> 一镬粥                               | one wok of <i>zuk</i>                                     | 3.640 |
| 9  | <i>caai mai jau jim [zoeng cou caa]</i><br>柴米油盐[酱醋茶] | firewood, <i>mai</i> , oil, salt [sauce,<br>vinegar, tea] | 3.638 |
| 10 | <i>daai wok faan</i> 大镬饭                             | big wok <i>faan</i>                                       | 3.620 |
| 11 | <i>dou mai</i> 倒米                                    | pour <i>mai</i>   | 3.605 |
| 12 | <i>mai faan baan zyu</i> 米饭班主                        | <i>mai faan</i> master                                    | 3.602 |
| 13 | <i>jat gau faan [gam]</i> 一嚙饭[噉]                     | [be like] a lump of <i>faan</i>                           | 3.602 |
| 14 | <i>bou nung zuk</i> 煲焗粥                              | boil burned <i>zuk</i>                                    | 3.563 |
| 15 | <i>zyu mai daai cung</i> 蛀米大虫                        | big <i>mai</i> borer                                      | 3.410 |
| 16 | <i>dak mai</i> 得米                                    | have got the <i>mai</i>                                   | 3.373 |
| 17 | <i>sik baau mou jau mai</i> 食饱无忧米                    | eat worriless <i>mai</i> till full                        | 3.343 |
| 18 | <i>sik jyun faan</i> 食软饭                             | eat soft <i>faan</i>                                      | 3.272 |
| 19 | <i>[bou] mou mai zuk</i> <sup>12</sup> [煲]冇米粥        | [boil] <i>zuk</i> without <i>mai</i>                      | 3.239 |
| 20 | <i>sik sak mai</i> 食塞米                               | eat jamming <i>mai</i>                                    | 3.199 |
| 21 | <i>jyu ci lou faan</i> 鱼翅捞饭                          | shark fin mixing with <i>faan</i>                         | 3.174 |
| 22 | <i>sik to haai faan</i> 食拖鞋饭                         | eat slippers <i>faan</i>                                  | 3.142 |

Table 3.1 Rice-related idioms selected for analysis

Surveys 2-1 to 2-6 were designed and distributed following the same format and method of surveys 1-1 and 1-2, but these six questionnaires included a richer collection of food-related idioms and were distributed through virtual snowball sampling in a bigger scope with a larger number of participants. Altogether, these six questionnaires

<sup>12</sup> In some idioms, certain constituents are put into round brackets “[ ]”. This means in daily use of the idiom, the bracketed part may be optional constituents (e.g., *[bou] mou mai zuk* can be uttered as both *bou mou mai zuk* and *mou mai zuk* in daily use).

received 975 valid responses. The demographic features of the participants are comparable to those of surveys 1-1 and 1-2. The majority of the participants were born (91.2%) and currently reside (90.1%) in Guangzhou, with another about 10% born and residing in Hong Kong and Macau of China. The participants demonstrate a low degree of residential mobility and for the 11 participants that did migrate, the mobility only occurred between Guangzhou and one of the two special administrative regions. Similar to surveys 1-1 and 1-2, all participants of the surveys speak Cantonese at home and about 81% speak Cantonese only. Other than Cantonese, about 18% of the participants acknowledged that they also speak Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) and/or another Chinese variety/non-Chinese language as their secondary home language(s). The above statistics show that the 8 questionnaires respectively distributed in two different stages of this project have maintained consistency overall and the yielded outcomes are reliable to demonstrate Cantonese speakers' knowledge and frequency of use of Cantonese food-related idioms. Therefore, the survey results are well grounded reference for the target idiom selection for the present study. A detailed participant demographic profile of surveys 2-1 to 2-6 is available in Appendix 4. Table 3.2 lists the 25 eating-related idioms analyzed in Chapter Five. One of them, i.e., *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥, have eaten the night *zuk*) is selected based on the result of survey 1-2, and the other 24 are selected based on the results of surveys 2-1 to 2-6.

| #  | IDIOM  | LITERAL TRANSLATION                                   | MEAN VALUE |
|----|--|---|------------|
| 1  | <i>wan sik</i> 搵食                              | look for food   | 4.680      |
| 2  | <i>sik [sai bak] fung</i> 食[西北]风               | eat the [west-north] wind                             | 4.120      |
| 3  | <i>sik zi gei</i> 食自己                          | eat oneself   | 4.113      |
| 4  | <i>m suk m sik</i> 唔熟唔食                        | not ripe not eat                                      | 4.061      |
| 5  | <i>sik sei maau</i> 食死猫                        | eat a dead cat  | 4.006      |
| 6  | <i>sik nou</i> 食脑                              | eat the brain   | 3.883      |
| 7  | <i>sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot</i><br>食得咸鱼抵得渴 | eat the salted fish, have tolerance for the<br>thirst | 3.832      |
| 8  | <i>tau sik m mut zeoi</i> 偷食唔抹嘴                | not wipe the mouth after stealing food                | 3.802      |
| 9  | <i>lin zap [dou] lou maai</i><br>连汁[都]捞埋       | mix even the sauce/gravy                              | 3.734      |
| 10 | <i>sik zo fo jeok</i> 食咗火药                     | have eaten gunpowder                                  | 3.702      |
| 11 | <i>jam tau daam tong</i> 饮头啖汤                  | drink the first sip of soup                           | 3.694      |
| 12 | <i>mou daam hou sik</i> 冇啖好食                   | not even a mouthful of good food to eat               | 3.662      |
| 13 | <i>sik ling [gai] daan</i> 食零[鸡]蛋              | eat zero [chicken] egg                                | 3.636      |
| 14 | <i>jam dak bui lok</i> 饮得杯落                    | be able to drink a glass of liquor down               | 3.581      |

|    |   |  |       |
|----|---|--|-------|
| 15 | <i>sat sik mou ci ngaa</i> 实食冇黏牙            | be sure to eat without sticking food to the teeth  | 3.491 |
| 16 | <i>sik zyu soeng</i> 食住上                    | go upward while eating                             | 3.414 |
| 17 | <i>sik gwo je zuk</i> 食过夜粥                  | have eaten the night-zuk                           | 3.373 |
| 18 | <i>sik wun min faan wun dai</i><br>食碗面反碗底   | eat with the bowl upright then flip it upside-down | 3.372 |
| 19 | <i>sik saang coi</i> 食生菜                    | eat lettuce  | 3.364 |
| 20 | <i>san fu wan lai zi zoi sik</i><br>辛苦搵嚟自在食 | look (for food) hard and eat at ease               | 3.322 |
| 21 | <i>sik zo jan zek geoi</i> 食咗人只车            | have eaten another's chariot                       | 3.319 |
| 22 | <i>saat sik</i> 煞食                          | eat unreservedly                                   | 3.296 |
| 23 | <i>sik gwo faan cam mei</i><br>食过返寻味        | have eaten and returned to seek the taste          | 3.206 |
| 24 | <i>sik dau fu</i> 食豆腐                       | eat tofu   | 3.196 |
| 25 | <i>sik guk zung</i> 食谷种                     | eat the seed corn                                  | 3.124 |

Table 3.2 Eating-related idioms selected for analysis

### 3.2 A Sample Analysis: MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES

In the present study, selected data are analyzed under the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics. This section includes a sample analysis featuring three Cantonese food-related idioms with the rice-related keyword *mai* (米, the uncooked rice grain), in which a cultural metonymy *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* is instantiated. This small-scale analysis exemplifies the data analysis process and serves to verify the empirical feasibility of the project.

This sample analysis looks into three idioms that share a key constituent *mai* (米), namely, *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐, firewood, *mai*, oil, and salt), *sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米, eat worriless *mai* till full), and *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫, big *mai* borer). They were surveyed with the pilot questionnaires 1-1 and 1-2. According to the survey report, these three idioms respectively have a MEAN VALUE at 3.638, 3.343, and 3.410, which means these idioms are commonly known and frequently used by Cantonese speakers. Therefore, they meet the selection criteria and are selected as the target idioms for analysis.

Built on the theoretical basis that language instantiates cultural conceptualizations, examining the idioms at the linguistic level can be a starting point that further leads to an investigation at the conceptual level. As idiom



meanings are conceptually motivated and culturally constructed, a linguistic inquiry highlighting the target idioms' semantic meanings and pragmatic functions can foreground the underlying conceptual mappings and contextualize the idioms in culturally-salient pragmatic settings. As the aim of the study is to investigate how Cantonese cultural conceptualizations motivate the speakers' comprehension and application of the idioms, the linguistic inquiry should be supported with authentic discourse samples produced by Cantonese speakers, reflecting the target idioms in use.

The three *mai* idioms here have meanings associated with different aspects of basic life necessities. Here *basic life necessities and supplies* refers to all the basic commodities that sustain the most fundamental routine of life including substances such as food, shelter, clothing and other fundamental resources. This is partially in concert with the notion of *physiological needs*, the needs situated at the bottom of the Maslow's pyramidal hierarchy of basic needs (see Maslow, 1987).

In *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐), each constituent, i.e., *caai* (柴, firewood), *mai* (米, the uncooked rice grain), *jau* (油, cooking oil), and *jim* (盐, salt), represents one basic product a Cantonese household needs to make a simple meal. A varied form of the idiom *caai mai jau jim zoeng cou caa* (柴米油盐酱醋茶) also includes *zoeng* (酱, sauce), *cou* (醋, vinegar), and *caa* (茶, tea). The idiom is often used as a generic term for all the products needed to fulfill the basic physiological needs of life. It can also extend to refer to the most down-to-earth and fundamental routine of practical and materialistic living, in contrast to ways of living that prioritize spiritual cultivation or ideological development. In example (1) below, the speaker uses the idiom to imply this extended meaning.

- (1) 我 所 关 心 嘅 只 不 过 系 柴 米 油 盐 酱 醋 茶, 至于 乜 嘢 “ 普 世  
*Ngo so gwaansam ge zibatgwo hai caai-mai-jau-jim-zoeng-cou-caa, ziyu matje “pou-sai*  
 价值”, 乜 嘢 “ 天 下 大 同, 人 人 平 等”, 我 并 唔 知 道。  
*gaazik”, matje “tinhaa daai-tung, jan-jan pingdang”, ngo bing m zidou.*

I only care about **the fundamental routine of life** (lit. firewood, *mai*, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea), but regarding things like ‘universal value’ and ‘a world in harmony and all men being equal’, I have no idea.  
 (FC01)

*Sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米, eat worryless *mai* till full) is used to describe someone who lives a comfortable life with stable and sufficient life supplies and thus has no worries about livelihood. Other than neutrally pointing out the well-off status of a person, the idiom can also be used in derogatory context to criticize a privileged individual for not understanding and empathizing with the hardship of other people. For instance, in example (2), the idiom is applied to criticize the referent for being detached from the society and having no empathy for common people.

(2) 遗憾 的是, 身为 学联 秘书长 的 周永康, ..... 只能 显示 他 自己 无  
Waiham dik si, sanwai hok-lyun beisyu-zoeng dik Zau-wing-hong, ... zi-nang hinsi taa zigei mou  
后顾之忧, 食饱无忧米, 不食 人间 烟火, 与 社会 脱节 的 一面.....  
hau-gu-zi-jau, sik-baau mou-jau-mai, bat- sik jan-gaan jin-fo, jyu sewui tyutzit dik jat-min...

Regretfully, Zau-wing-hong, as the secretary-general of the HK Federation of Students ... only showed himself as someone who did not have to look over his shoulder, who **had been living a worry-free life** (lit. had eaten worriless *mai* till full), who was oblivious of the plights of the ordinary people, and who had been detached from the society. (OA01)

As for *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫, big *mai* borer), it is an idiom used to describe someone who consumes the supplies of a household or an organization without making any contribution. The speakers often imply their disapproval towards the referent's behavior when using the idiom. Example (3) is the title of an online news article published by the Oriental Daily News, Hong Kong, in which the boomerang kid is referred to as a *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫).

(3) 做足 8 年 蛀米 大虫 唔 做家务  
Zou-zuk bat-nin zyu-mai daai-cung m zou-gaamou  
纽约 父母 入禀 法院 逐 无业子  
Nau-Joek fu-mou jap-ban faatjyun zuk mou-jip-zi

Son having been 8 years of a **boomerang kid** (lit. a big *mai* borer) and not doing housework, New York parents file to court to banish their unemployed son from home (OA02)

From the above examples with the three idioms in use, we can see that these three idioms illustrate different aspects of possessing and handling basic life necessities and supplies, and they incorporate the speakers' value judgement towards the related status or behavior. These connotations are embedded in the literal compositions of the idioms, where the possessing and handling of *mai* (米), a salient instance of basic life necessities, is the semantic focus. Therefore, we can deduce that for the underlying conceptual mapping, the conceptualizations about BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES are achieved through mapping on the cultural beliefs and knowledge captured in *MAI* (米).

The main cultural conceptualization identified from the three idioms can be represented as *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* following the Cultural Linguistics convention in representing cultural conceptualizations. This is a culturally constructed presentation of the conceptual metonymy PART FOR WHOLE, i.e., a cultural metonymy. The *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* metonymy is also one specific instance of the cultural

conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS through *MAI* identified from the rice-related idioms. Other such cultural conceptualizations are analyzed in Chapter Four.

To further investigate the formation of this cultural metonymy, we can look in more details the cultural categories and cultural schemas entailed in the conceptual mapping. In Cantonese, *MAI* is a cultural category distinguished from other categories of grains such as WHEAT, MILLET, and MAIZE, as *MAI* is the sole (sub)category of the substantial staple grain for the Cantonese. This categorization has its cultural root in the Southern Chinese dietary traditions. As recorded by an early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar K. Xu (1917), the Chinese Southerners had rice (*mai*) as their main food and consequently regarded rice as the only grain and all the other cereals as coarse grains [“南人以米為食之主要品，心目中遂專以米為糧，而於其他，乃皆名之為雜糧”]. Figure 3.1 is a display of the generic cultural category *MAI* with its subcategories and some major instances. Within the generic cultural category of *MAI*, the subcategory *MAI* is the uncooked grains with *mai* itself as an instance, and the subcategory *FAAN* refers to its cooked equivalent within which an instance *faan* is the staple starch food of the Cantonese meals. The cultural category of *MAI* (米) demonstrates the cultural importance of rice in the Cantonese speech community. It has also justified the conceptual rationale for the salient cultural conceptualizations sourced from the generic *MAI* (米) and its subcategories.

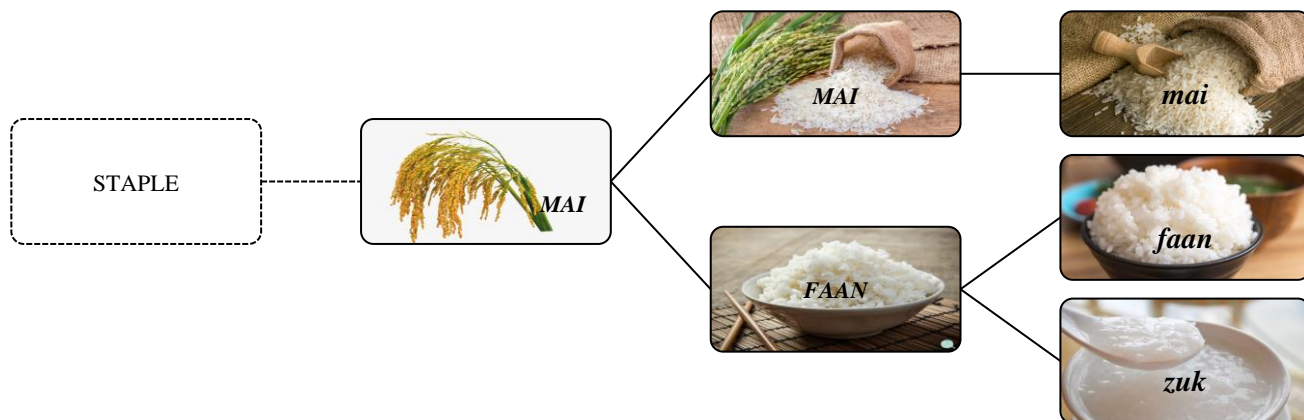


Figure 3.1 Cultural category of *MAI*, its subcategories and major instances<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Image credits:

[generic *MAI*]. Retrieved from <https://www.51miz.com/sucai/240416.html>.

[*MAI*]. Retrieved from <http://www.commonhealth.com.tw/article/article.action?nid=78236>.

[*FAAN*]. Retrieved from <https://www.foodnext.net/science/scsource/paper/5098100228>.

[*mai*]. Retrieved from <https://topick.hket.com/article/1618763/%E6%B8%AF%E7%8F%BE%E8%86%A0%E7%B1%B3%E6%85%8C%E3%80%80%E9%9D%9E%E6%B4%B2%E6%9B%BE%E6%AA%A2%E7%8D%B2%E5%81%87%E7%B1%B3> from

[*faan*]. Retrieved from <https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/246963>

The essential status of *mai* is further reflected in the cultural schema of *MAI*, which facilitates the conceptual connection between *MAI* and BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES. The cultural schema of *MAI* captures the belief that *mai* is the most fundamental and essential substance in a household because *mai* feeds the family, fuels the family with energy that yields productivity, and thereby sustains the livelihood of the family. The cultural schema of *MAI* is embedded in the three idioms and facilitates their idiomatic meanings. The cultural belief captured in the *MAI* schema also transforms *mai* into a medium for the Cantonese to evaluate their living conditions. If a household is stored with sufficient *mai*, there is no need to worry about life. On the contrary, if there is a lack of *mai* in a household, it may pose critical concern to the sustenance of the family, and the family may face the risk of failing to maintain a stable routine. This conceptual entailment of *MAI* STORAGE AS AN INDICATOR OF LIVING CONDITION is what motivates the value judgement incorporated in the idioms *sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米) and *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫). In particular, the idiom *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫) elicits a culturally specific image schema of A PEST EATING INTO *MAI*. Cantonese speakers develop this cultural schema through their lived experience that if *mai* is not stored properly, pests can bore the *mai* and make it inedible.

When unpacking cultural conceptualizations of the target idioms, it is also important to look at cultural conceptualizations that are not directly derived from the food-related keywords but are embedded in the idioms and determine the meaning-making of the idioms. For example, the three *mai* idioms in this sample analysis also reflect the cultural schema of WORLDLY LIFE. *Worldly* here takes the sense “of or concerned with material values or ordinary life rather than a spiritual existence” (“Worldly,” n.d.). The WORLDLY LIFE schema encompasses the cultural understanding that the routine of cooking, eating, and working in exchange for basic life necessities belongs to a way of living that is utterly practical and essential for survival and rarely contains any spiritual cultivation or long-term goals. It prioritizes the practical and materialistic way of living over other purposes or goals of life. The WORLDLY LIFE schema captures the essence of the Cantonese life philosophy. At its core is the cultural value that prefers actions to words and earthly and achievable benefits to hypothesized far-fetched prospects. It also gives considerable importance to the elemental foundation of things and not as much to the other

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[zuk].

Retrieved

from

<https://www2.ccue.ca/vancouver/%E5%90%83%E5%96%9Dvan/%E5%8D%81%E5%88%86%E9%90%98%E7%85%B2%E6%8E%82%E8%B6%85%E7%B6%BF%E7%99%BD%E7%B2%A5>

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aspects built on top of it. In other words, the WORLDLY LIFE schema centers on part of the Cantonese worldview: What is fundamental is essential.

As the cultural conceptualizations are identified, the next step of analysis is to investigate how Cantonese speakers perceive these conceptualizations, how conscious they are of the conceptualizations, and as reflected in the idioms, to what extent they acknowledge the target idioms as ‘figurative’. To fulfill this aim of the analysis, we look at materials that reflect the speakers’ interpretations and understanding of the idioms, and wherever possible, obtain first-hand input from cultural informants to conjure up a ‘cultural insider’ point of view.

As discussed above, the MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES metonymy instantiated in the three *mai* idioms draws on the cultural significance of *mai* in the Cantonese community. It appears that the perception of *mai* as the fundamental element for stable life sustenance and a reflection of life quality is part of the Cantonese worldview. A Cantonese expression that describes a mental state in which people worry about their basic necessities and sustenance of life is in fact *jau caai jau mai* (忧柴忧米), i.e., worry about firewood and *mai*. This expression often occurs in discourse where Cantonese people express concern of their livelihood, a context where the idiom *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐) is often uttered. For instance, examples (4) and (5) below are extracted from the official records of the Hong Kong Legislative Council Proceedings, respectively in June 2007 and April 2002. On both occasions, the council members were discussing the livelihood of manual workers in Hong Kong and expressing concerns towards the negative impact of low income and high expense on these workers. *Caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐) occurs in example (4) and *jau caai jau mai* (忧柴忧米) in example (5).

(4) 这个所谓 高工资 的地方, 即使我住公屋 也要缴交 二千多元

*Zego so-wai gou-gungzi dik deifong, ziksai ngo zyu gung-nguk jaa jiu giugaau ji-cin-do-jyun*  
租金, 交通费 每天 三四十元, 一个月 便要千多元, 还有 柴  
*zougam, gaautung-fai mui-tin saam-sei-sap-jyun, jat-go-jyut bin jiu cin-do-jyun, waanjau caai-*  
*米油盐,* 每月 四千多元 工资, 生活 已过得 很困难.....  
*mai-jau-jim, mui-jyut sei-cin-do-jyun gungzi, sangwut ji gwo-dak han kwannaan ...*

At this place with so-called high wages, even though I live in governmental housing, I have to pay a rent of some 2000 HKD, spend 30 to 40 HKD on daily commuting, which is more than 1000 HKD per month; besides, I have to pay for **basic life necessities** (lit. firewood, *mai*, oil, and salt). With monthly wages of some 4000 HKD, life has already been very difficult ... (OF01)

(5) 如果 一个工人 因为工资太低而忧柴忧米, 便会影响他的  
*Jyugwo jat-go gungjan janwai gungzi taai dai ji jau-caai-jau-mai, bin wui jinghoeng taa dik*  
工作 情绪 及 生产力

If a worker has to **worry about the basic life necessities** (lit. **worry about firewood and mai**) because his wages are too low, his emotions at work and productivity will be affected ... (OF02)

From these two examples, we can see that ‘firewood’ and ‘mai’ (and also ‘oil’ and ‘salt’ in *caai maai jau jim* 柴米油盐) to the speakers appear to be symbolic instances standing in for all basic life necessities. The conceptual mapping between basic life necessities and *mai* is not deliberately or consciously established by the speakers. Similarly, to the speakers, the ‘worry about firewood and *mai*’ appears to be a literal equivalent to ‘livelihood concerns’. This unconsciousness of the conceptual mapping is also reflected in the response from a cultural informant PDW [GZ-F-60] <sup>14</sup>. When asked about her understanding of the three *mai* idioms, she explains,

*Caai mai jau jim (柴米油盐) are those things in life that are trivial but indispensable. They are what you need to survive and live a life. Things like caai mai jau jim (柴米油盐), they are life itself. We Cantonese are Southerners. We eat rice to survive, so at least you need to have rice to live a decent life. If you didn't even have firewood and rice, how would your life be good? When you have enough rice to eat, then your life is good, then there are no worries. That is sik baau mou jau mai (食饱无忧米). Zyu mai daai cung (蛀米大虫) are those bad people who bring destruction without contribution to people's life. We are not really talking about the pest here, we are talking about people. (PC01)*

Therefore, *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* is likely a worldview metonymy. When speakers use the idioms like *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐) and *sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米), they simply intend to describe and evaluate life sustenance and life quality in the literal sense and do not consciously perceive these expressions as figurative. For *zyu mai daai cung* (蛀米大虫), although Cantonese speakers are conscious that the expression compares a person to a pest, this consciousness is built on the *MAI-EATING PEST* schema addressed above, which in turn is cultivated by the Cantonese worldview about *mai*. In other words, the *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* worldview metonymy is the fundamental conceptual vehicle that motivates the meanings of the three *mai* idioms.

As the underlying cultural conceptualizations of the three target idioms are identified and we have gained an understanding from the perspective of the speakers regarding how figurative the idioms are to them, the last step of the analysis is to explore the cultural roots and social ideologies underpinning the cultural conceptualizations, which are the shaping force of the Cantonese cultural cognition. The *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* metonymy and its related cultural conceptualizations are derived from the historical importance of rice in South

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<sup>14</sup> The informant coding rule is specified in section 3.3. In the analysis, only the English translations of the informants' responses are presented. The original Cantonese interview notes are recorded in Appendix 5.

China and the Chinese ideology of land attachment developed from the traditional agricultural way of living. These aspects will be elaborated in detail in Chapter Six, where the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations are systematically analyzed.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Procedures and Materials Used for Analysis

As demonstrated in the sample above, the focuses of data analysis in the present study include:

1. the identification of the cultural conceptualizations underlying the target idioms;
2. the investigation of the speakers' degree of consciousness of the identified conceptualizations and the extent of figurativeness of the target idioms; and
3. the exploration of ideological underpinnings of the cultural conceptualizations.

In line with the first analysis focus, the identification of the underlying cultural conceptualizations is mainly achieved through a two-stage analysis that first elaborates the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the food-related idioms with textual and paratextual samples reflecting the idioms in use, and then unpacks the cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors/metonymies embedded in the idioms. *Paratext* in this study refers to textual data that does not directly contain the target idiom but is closely related to and reflects the discursive context of the target idiom. Instances of paratexts include but are not limited to linguistic components in frequent collocation with the target idiom, linguistic expressions that commonly appear in coherent semantic and/or pragmatic context as the target idiom, linguistic expressions that share relevant connotations with the target idiom, cultural informants' responses to the comprehension and interpretation of the target idiom, and texts that reflect the cultural conceptualizations relating to the target idiom. In identifying cultural conceptualizations, the present study adopts a holistic approach, which views cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors/metonymies as an intertwined system of conceptualizations that do not distinctively separate from each other. Therefore, the analysis of the cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors/metonymies is comprehensively integrated.

Subsequently, the identified cultural conceptualizations are analyzed from an emic perspective through which the speakers' consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations and the extent of figurativeness of the food-related idioms is examined. The notion of *figurativeness* here is similar to the more commonly employed term *idiomaticity*, referring to the semantic nature of idiom, i.e., an idiom's meaning is conceptually motivated and is not directly derived from the literal composition of its constituents (see section 2.3.2). We use the term 'figurativeness' instead of 'idiomaticity' in this study to highlight an emic perception from the speakers' perspective, as distinguished from the scholarly perspective of the researchers of idioms.

To illustrate the findings in this stage, the cultural conceptualizations and the related idioms are placed along a conceptual processing continuum relative to each other. The conceptual processing continuum as shown in Figure 3.2 below is adapted from Sharifian’s cognitive processing continuum (2017, p. 22, see also section 2.1.2). It considers not only cross-domain conceptualizations but also intra-domain conceptualizations, i.e., cultural metonymies, and incorporates the measurement of the extent of idiom figurativeness according to speakers’ consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations.

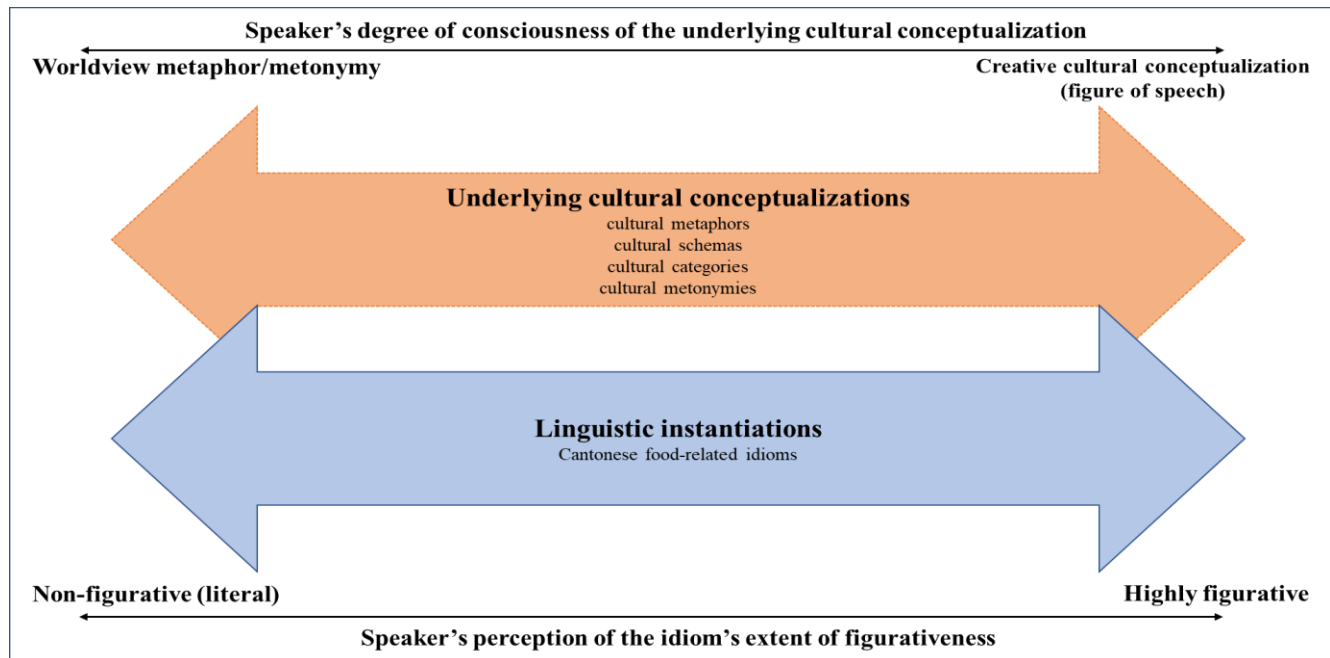


Figure 3.2 The conceptual processing continuum of Cantonese food-related idioms

In this stage, the analyzed materials include cultural informant responses, relevant discourses that generate or explicate the use of the target idioms and paratextual data that reflects the cultural conceptualizations relating to the target idioms. Wherever possible, related non-textual instantiations of the identified cultural conceptualizations such as pictorial, audio and video samples are also referred to in the analysis.

Recruiting cultural informants and referencing to informant responses is an effective measure in identifying and understanding cultural conceptualizations from the speakers’ point of view. As Sharifian (2011) explains, “[t]he highly complex nature of specific cultural conceptualizations starts to surface when discourse is examined in light of the intuitions of several insiders, each of whom might show varying degrees of knowledge about their cultural conceptualizations” (p. 13). In the present study, 20 Cantonese speakers from Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau are recruited as cultural informants. They are recruited through the investigator’s personal, professional and expanded networks. Throughout the course of the project, these cultural informants are engaged in ongoing communication with the investigator, responding to the investigator’s inquiries and providing personal insights on



the interpretation and application of the target idioms. Table 3.3 summaries the profiles of all cultural informants contributed to the current project. All informants and their personal details are coded. The informants' identity is marked with the initial letter of their names in Jyutping. When mentioned in the analysis, an informant's initial is followed by their basic demographic information presented in square brackets including place of residence (GZ stands for Guangzhou, HK stands for Hong Kong, and MC stands for Macau), gender (M stands for male, and F stands for female), and age at the time of the interaction.

| <b>Name Initials</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age when recruited</b> | <b>Profession</b>        | <b>Education</b> | <b>Place of Residence</b> | <b>Remarks</b>                                  |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---|
| <b>PDW</b>           | Female        | 59                        | Retiree                  | Highschool       | GZ                        |   |
| <b>CZK</b>           | Male          | 57                        | Corporate employee       | Highschool       | GZ                        |   |
| <b>WSC</b>           | Female        | 57                        | Retiree                  | Highschool       | GZ/MC                     | has family in MC, often stays with family in MC |
| <b>CMK</b>           | Female        | 34                        | Housewife                | Master           | GZ                        | previously worked in HK                         |
| <b>JZ</b>            | Female        | 31                        | Real estate professional | Bachelor         | GZ                        |   |
| <b>ZJT</b>           | Female        | 32                        | Highschool teacher       | Bachelor         | GZ                        | works in GZ's neighboring city Foshan           |
| <b>WSM</b>           | Female        | 32                        | Corporate employee       | Bachelor         | GZ                        |   |
| <b>JZK</b>           | Female        | 30                        | Employee at US Embassy   | Master           | GZ                        | constantly travels between GZ and HK for work   |
| <b>JHJ</b>           | Male          | 21                        | Student                  | Master           | GZ/HK                     | from GZ, currently lives and studies in HK      |
| <b>DL</b>            | Female        | 39                        | University lecturer      | Master           | GZ                        |   |
| <b>CSM</b>           | Female        | 29                        | Social worker            | Bachelor         | GZ                        | regularly goes to HK for work training          |
| <b>WLJ</b>           | Female        | 50s                       | Retiree                  | Highschool       | GZ                        |   |

|            |        |     |                      |          |    |  |
|------------|--------|-----|----------------------|----------|----|--|
| <b>LJL</b> | Female | 32  | Journalist           | Master   | GZ | received graduate education in HK, constantly travels between GZ and HK for work |
| <b>ZJN</b> | Female | 38  | School teacher       | Master   | GZ |  |
| <b>SJT</b> | Female | 32  | Banker               | Bachelor | GZ |  |
| <b>WCS</b> | Male   | 28  | Businessman          | Bachelor | HK |  |
| <b>ZJS</b> | Female | 80s | Retiree              | Bachelor | GZ | lived her early life in HK   |
| <b>PGJ</b> | Female | 35  | Chinese teacher      | Master   | GZ | lives in GZ but has family in HK and frequently visits HK                        |
| <b>SJM</b> | Female | 40s | University professor | PhD      | GZ | researcher in Cantonese linguistics  |
| <b>LJW</b> | Male   | 27  | Corporate employee   | Bachelor | GZ |  |

Table 3.3 Cultural informant profiles

The last stage of data analysis traces back to the underpinning ideologies that shape and reshape the cultural conceptualizations underlying the target idioms. It is conducted by critically consulting and synthesizing literature and cultural informant responses. In this stage, special attention is paid to cases of cultural reconceptualization and the driving forces behind these re-conceptualizations. Figure 3.3 maps out the overall data analysis procedures.

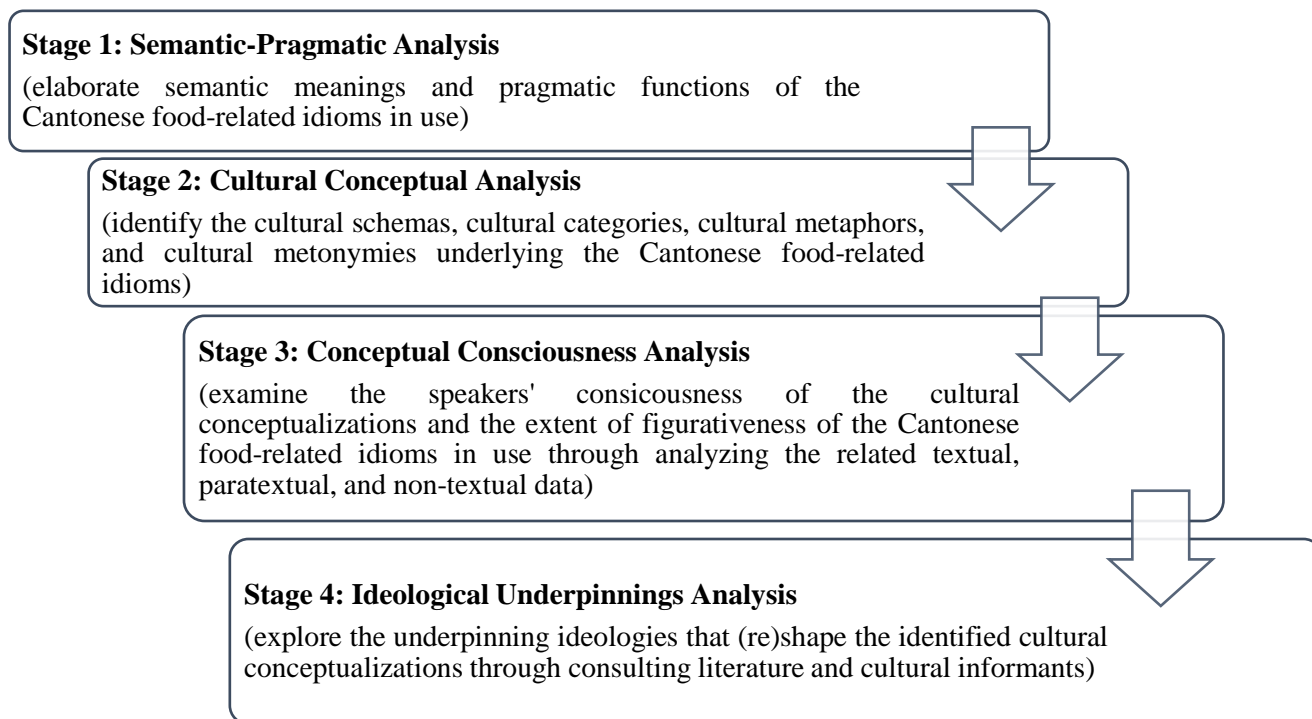


Figure 3.3 Data analysis procedures

A linguistic ethnographic approach is adopted in regard to the collection of the relevant textual and non-textual materials. Linguistic ethnography is “an interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures” (Copland & Creese, 2015b, p. 12). There are no *a priori* presumptions in terms of what an idiom means, how it is used, and what underlying conceptualizations are to be identified. The analysis is conducted based on the emergent data. In other words, instead of searching for materials agreeing with the dictionary-based meanings and usages of an idiom, the idiom’s semantic meanings and pragmatic functions and later on the embedded cultural conceptualizations and the speakers’ related conceptual consciousness are deduced from the immediate materials collected. Adhering to the linguistic ethnographic data collection methods (see Copland & Creese, 2015a for a summary) and more broadly, corresponding to the holistic approach of the present study, the textual and non-textual materials discussed are collected from various sources that represent the speakers’ use of the idioms involving both written and spoken (both narrative and interactive) records. Major sources of materials include online language corpora and databases, online articles, online forums and chatrooms, social media platforms, audio and video databases, printed materials, and the researcher’s personal communication with native Cantonese speakers and cultural informants. Moreover, all collected materials are produced within a time frame of the last two decades (i.e., 2000—the present) consistent with the aims of the study and the production timeframe of the idiom data sources. It is hoped that this approach can yield analysis findings that to the largest extent, reflect the instant linguistic and conceptual dynamics of the idioms in use from an emic perspective.

Each textual and non-textual sample used in the analysis is given a referencing code that encodes the information of its source. Table 3.4 provides a summary of the types of materials used for analysis, their respective abbreviations, and a sample reading of the referencing code. In the thesis, parts of the textual materials or transcriptions that are irrelevant to the analysis are omitted due to the space limit. A summary of all the analyzed materials in their original and complete forms with their original sources can be found in Appendix 5.

| <b>Code</b>  | <b>Material Descriptions</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>AV</b>  | transcription of audio and video content   |
| <b>CD</b>  | corpus and database data   |
| <b>FC</b>  | forum and chatroom response and comment (including comment under online articles)  |
| <b>OA</b>  | online article (including blog and news articles and other articles published and displayed on webpages)   |
| <b>OF</b>  | accessible online file (including all sorts of files uploaded online with public download access, e.g., PDF files, Microsoft Word documents, etc.) |
| <b>PC</b>  | transcription from personal communication with native Cantonese speakers and/or cultural informants  |
| <b>PM</b>  | printed material   |
| <b>PI</b>  | pictorial material and image   |
| <b>SM</b>  | social media post  |
| <b>Sample Referencing Code Reading:</b>  |  |
| PC01: This material is collected and transcribed from the researcher’s personal communication with native Cantonese speakers and/or cultural informants and it is the first of its type in sequence to be used for analysis. |  |

Table 3.4 A summary and coding of materials used for analysis

The discussed idioms and related paratextual expressions are used as keywords to search for the relevant materials. As an example, Figure 3.4 shows the search result for textual data relevant to the idiom *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐, firewood, *mai*, oil, and salt) using the idiom itself and *jau caai jau mai* (忧柴忧米, worry about firewood and *mai*), an expression often used in similar contexts as the idiom (i.e., a paratext sample relevant to the target idiom), as keywords in the database of Linguee ([www.linguee.com](http://www.linguee.com)), an online database with discourse samples from external sources.



the analysis but are not demonstrated and exploited in depth. For these materials, referencing codes are provided when mentioned and the original texts with English translations are documented in Appendix 5.

### **3.4 Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, we have addressed three major issues relating to the methodology of the present study. Firstly, we have explicated the process of idiom data collection including regulating the data type, justifying the data sources, establishing the data exclusion criteria, designing and distributing the survey questionnaires, recruiting the survey participants, and selecting the data for analysis. Secondly, we have presented a sample analysis of three *mai* idioms instantiating the *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES* conceptualization as a demonstration of how idiom data is analyzed in the present study. Lastly, we have highlighted the focuses of analysis and proposed the accorded data analysis procedures. Elaborating on the data analysis procedures, we have specified the types and sources of materials that are used and the methods adopted to collect and code these materials. In all, this chapter has served as the methodological cornerstone for the following chapters dedicated to an in-depth analysis and relevant discussions of the Cantonese food-related idioms and their cultural conceptualizations.

## Chapter 4 Cultural Conceptualizations of Rice-related Idioms

*He heaves his hoe in the rice-field, under the noonday sun,  
Onto the soil of the rice-field, his streaming sweat beads run.  
Ah, do you or don't you know it? That bowl of rice we eat:  
Each grain, each every granule, the fruit of his labor done.*

*“Pity the Peasants”, LI Shen (799), translated by Wong<sup>17</sup> (2010)*

As the sole staple grain in the Cantonese diet, rice is the most important source of carbohydrate for the Cantonese communities and rice foods are prevalent on the Cantonese dining table. Lexically, *mai* (米) and *faan* (飯) are two fundamental morphemes for the rice-related vocabulary, respectively standing for the raw and cooked rice grains. Another common rice-related lexeme is *zuk* (粥), which is the generic name for various types of Cantonese rice congee. In the fundamental data pool, there are a predominant number of idioms constituted with at least one of the three rice-related keywords *mai* (米), *faan* (飯), and *zuk* (粥) including the three *mai* idioms discussed earlier in section 3.2. This chapter analyzes 19 rice-related idioms following the proposed analysis procedures (see Figure 3.3)<sup>18</sup>. It first investigates the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the idioms with examples collected from various sources, then unpacks the cultural conceptualizations underlying the idioms, and lastly, discusses the speakers' perception of the idioms' extent of figurativeness through their degree of consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations.

### 4.1 Cultural Conceptualizations Embedded in the Rice-related Idioms

The cultural conceptualizations identified in the selected rice-related idioms mostly fall into two major categories: the conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and the conceptualizations of VALUABLES. These two categories of cultural conceptualizations represent intrinsic perceptions in the general domain of living. Various specific elaborations on ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES are embedded in distinctive idioms. These conceptualizations are to different degrees, culturally constructed, determined by the Cantonese worldview and cultural values in different ways.

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Wang-Fat Wong (1943- ) is a Hong Kong Cantonese speaker and was the last President of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong during the British rule. He was in office from 1995 to 1997. Wong has been systematically translating Chinese classical poems into English since 2007 after his retirement (see Wong, 2010). His translations encompass various aspects of the Cantonese worldview and cultural values.

<sup>18</sup> This chapter and Chapter Five focus on the first three analysis stages of the proposed analysis procedures. The final stage, i.e., ideological underpinnings analysis, is conducted independently in Chapter Six.

Accordingly, Cantonese speakers' degrees of conceptual consciousness of these cultural conceptualizations vary, which result in the different extents of figurativeness they acknowledge in the rice-related idioms.

In some rice-related idioms, we have also identified a cultural metonymy MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE and a few cases of creative cultural conceptualizations such as A PERSON AS FAAN, and STATE OF AFFAIRS AS STATE OF A ZUK PRODUCT. For the cultural metonymy MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE, the speakers' pragmatic intention may affect the extent of figurativeness of the related idioms. As for the creative cultural conceptualizations, their linguistic instantiations are highly figurative. Moreover, Cantonese speakers' active pragmatic manipulation of these idioms demonstrates not only their linguistic rhetorical creativity but also their proactive conceptual involvement in the establishment of the creative conceptualizations.

Figure 4.1 below presents a synopsis of the identified cultural conceptualizations sourced from the generic MAI underlying the rice-related idioms analyzed in both section 3.2 and this chapter. The cultural conceptualizations are placed along a conceptual processing continuum from the 'non-conscious' end of worldview metaphor/metonymy to the 'highly conscious' end of creative cultural conceptualization (figure of speech), which corresponds to the extent of figurativeness of Cantonese speakers perceive or acknowledge in the target idioms. The arrows alongside the cultural metonymy signify the mobility of the cultural metonymy along the continuum susceptible to the speakers' pragmatic choice. The positions of the cultural conceptualizations in this model are relative to each other and determined on the basis of the analyzed materials and informant feedback. Illustrated with examples, the following sections unpack these cultural conceptualizations and their idiom instantiations in detail.

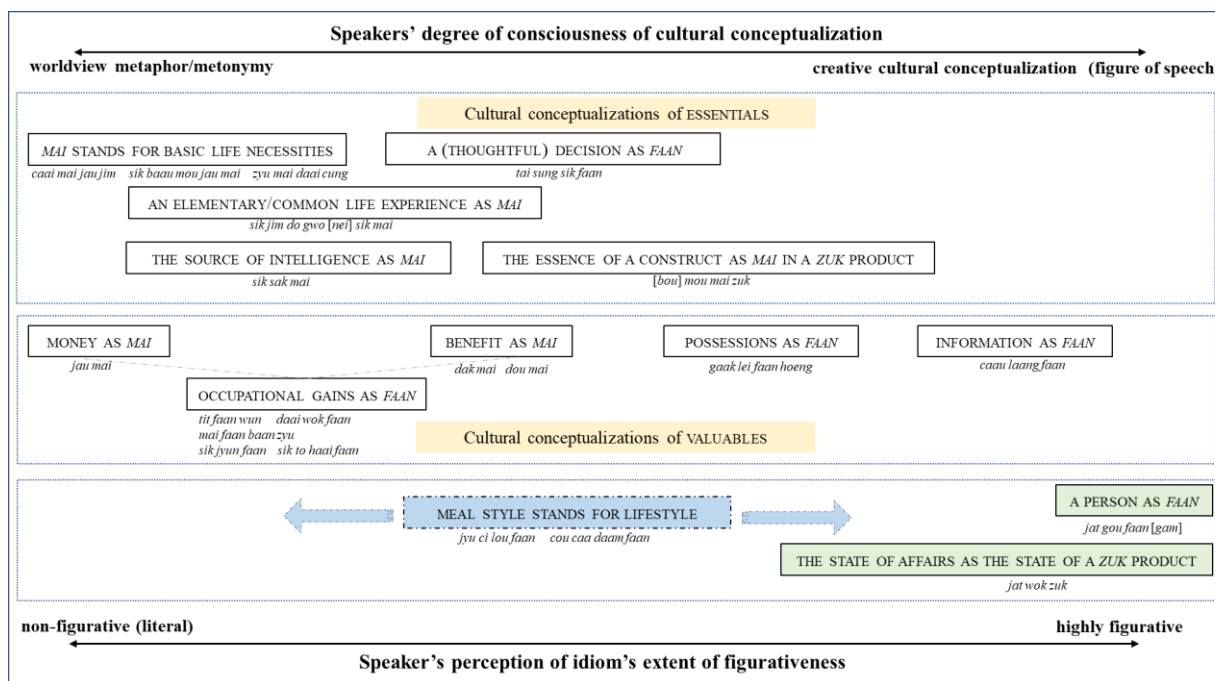


Figure 4.1 A synopsis of the identified cultural conceptualizations sourced from the generic MAI



### 4.1.1 Cultural Conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS through MAI

A few idioms have meanings related to the fundamental and/or essential aspect of a certain substance or abstract entity. The semantic focus of these idioms lies in the rice-related constituents. Conceptually, these idioms instantiate the cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS through the generic domain of MAI (see Figure 3.1). *Essentials* here refers to “the fundamental elements or characteristics of something” (“Essentials,” n.d.). The specific instances of ESSENTIALS conceptualized through MAI differ depending on the idioms’ connotations. Section 3.2 has investigated one of the specific-level conceptualizations, a cultural metonymy MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES. The conceptualizations of more subcategories of ESSENTIALS through MAI are unpacked in the following sub-sections.

#### 4.1.1.1 Cultural Metaphor: AN ELEMENTARY/COMMON LIFE EXPERIENCE AS MAI

The Cantonese regard gaining life experiences as an essential and indispensable part of life. Experiences that are common and fundamental for one’s upbringing are often conceptualized through *mai*. One idiom that reflects this conceptualization is *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米, [I] have eaten more salt than [you] have eaten *mai*). This idiom is usually uttered when a more experienced and usually older/senior interlocutor intends to gain authority over a less experienced and usually younger/junior interlocutor. Example (6) below is excerpted from a Cantonese blog article about intergenerational communication. The blogger gives a comprehensive interpretation of the idiom in use, explaining the implied connotation of the idiom and the pragmatic cues implied when it is uttered.

- (6) 经常 听 老人家 讲: “我 食盐多过 你 食米 啦! 使你 教我?!”  
*Gingsoeng ting lou-jan-gaa gong, “Ngo sik jim do-gwo nei sik mai laa! Sai nei gaau ngo?!”*  
这句 比喻 相当 抵死, 也 十分 贴切, 只是, 言者 沾沾自喜, 听者 耿  
*Ze-geoi beijyu soengdong dai-sei, jaa sapfan tipcit, zisi, jin-ze zim-zim-zi-hei, ting-ze gang-*  
耿于怀, 因为 这句 说话 背后 的 潜台词 是: “我 识 嘢 多过 你!”  
*gang-jyu-waai, janwai ze-geoi syutwaa bui-hau dik cim-toi-ci si, “Ngo sik ge je do-gwo nei!”*  
“你 唔 识 嘢!” “我 唔 使你 教!” 很 不 客气, 甚至 带 点 敌意。  
*“Nei m sik je!” “Ngo m sai nei gaau!” Han bat haakhei, samzi daai dim dik-ji.*

I often hear old people say, “**I have eaten more salt than you have eaten *mai*!** You think I need your lecture/advice?!” This analogy is fairly funny and very appropriate, but the speaker is full of himself/herself, and the listener broods over it, because the unspoken lines behind this saying are, “I know more than you do!” “You know nothing!” “I do not need your lecture!” This is very uncourteous, and even a bit hostile. (OA03)

Conceptually, the idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米) instantiates the conceptualization of LIFE EXPERIENCE through the cultural schema of A REGULAR CANTONESE MEAL. Included in a regular Cantonese meal are the staple food, i.e., *mai/faan*, of which all eaters are likely to have a stable intake, and dishes often seasoned lightly with condiments, *salt* being a very frequently used instance. Drawing upon the regularity of *mai* consumption during a Cantonese meal as opposed to the much lower intake of condiments such as salt, elementary or common life experiences that all individuals acquire are conceptualized through the domain of the indispensable staple food, and rarer or more specialized life experiences are perceived through the domain of the condiments. The conceptual mappings here are represented as two cultural metaphors: AN ELEMENTARY/Common LIFE EXPERIENCE AS *MAI* and A SPECIALIZED/RARE LIFE EXPERIENCE AS SALT.

Entailed in these two cultural metaphors we can also identify a cultural schema of SENIOR AUTHORITY. This cultural schema implies the belief that an individual gains more life experiences as they age. As such, an individual older in age is tacitly reckoned as more experienced and knowledgeable, and therefore, is entitled to a more powerful and authoritative role in interpersonal exchanges with younger interlocutors. The cultural schema of SENIOR AUTHORITY is the conceptual drive of the idiom's pragmatic implications when it is used.

Regarding the extent of figurativeness of *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米), it appears that Cantonese speakers do not consider the action of gaining life experiences and that of eating a meal as belonging to two unrelated conceptual domains. Instead, they tend to establish a near-causal connection between the two actions. This is reflected in multiple informant responses on their understanding of the idiom. Two Guangzhou informants, for example, gave the following explanations:

(7) WSC [GZ-F-57]: *A person only eats very little salt in one meal...he has to be very old to have eaten a lot of salt; but for mai, you eat it at every meal, so it is definitely a lot, but even if you have eaten a lot of mai, it is still less than the salt I have eaten, then shouldn't I be way more experienced than you are?* (PC02)

PDW [GZ-F-59]: *When a person eats, the amount of salt [intake] is very little, only a little bit of salt is needed for the dishes you eat in a meal, but [imagine] how much mai is eaten during a meal! So, if you eat more salt than [he/she] eats mai, of course you are older and more experienced!* (PC03)

The informants' responses uncover a tacit cultural perception of measuring one's experiences according to the person's age, which is naturally reflected in his or her accumulated salt/*mai* intake. This perception reflects part of the SENIOR AUTHORITY schema discussed above and facilitates the conceptual connection between gaining life experience and eating a meal. Therefore, Cantonese speakers are more likely to have a linear logical perception between the idiom's literal and idiomatic meanings and may not be completely conscious of its metaphorical nature. In other words, Cantonese speakers may consider *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米) as more literal than figurative in nature.

#### 4.1.1.2 Cultural Metaphor: THE SOURCE OF INTELLIGENCE AS MAI

Intelligence is another instance of essentials conceptualized through the domain of *mai*. An idiom *sik sak mai* (食塞米, eat jamming *mai*) reflects the Cantonese way of understanding the source of intelligence and the way of gaining it. *Sik sak mai* (食塞米) illustrates a scenario where the eaten *mai* gets jammed in the digestive system and fails to be digested. Cantonese speakers often use this idiom as a stern and harsh scolding of an individual's foolishness and incompetence. Example (8) below is transcribed from the video recording of a governmental meeting hosted by the Hong Kong Panel on Constitutional Affairs in January 2016. In this transcript, a panel member aggressively criticized the incompetence of the staff at a branch bureau and the idiom *sik sak mai* (食塞米) was used to convey this meaning.

(8) 噉 你哋 嗰啲内地 办事处 做咩啊, 食塞米, 通报 唔到嘅, 咩事

*Gam nei-dei go-di noi-dei baansi-qyu zou me aa, sik sak mai, tung-bou m dau ge, me si*  
都未知嘅。

*dou mei zi ge.*

Then what were (the staff of) those Mainland offices doing? (They were) **foolish and incompetent** (lit. ate jamming *mai*), (they) failed to report (the incident), (they) did not even know what had happened. (AV01)

From the idiom *sik sak mai* (食塞米), we see an association between one's intelligence and the digestive state of *mai* one has consumed. The core cultural schema here is that of INTELLIGENCE. It captures the belief that intelligence is not innate but rather sourced from outside the human body and needs to be acquired and internalized. The acquisition and internalization of intelligence is then perceived through the knowledge captured in the schemas of DIGESTION and INDIGESTION. The schema of DIGESTION encodes the dynamic process of breaking down the eaten food in the digestive system into substances within which the nutrients are absorbed by the human body and the wastes are excreted. Building on the schema of DIGESTION, the schema of INDIGESTION then captures the opposite process of a smooth digestion, which leads to the body's failure of absorbing the nutrients in the eaten food. These two schemas related to the digestive system serve as the foundation that establishes the conceptual mapping underlying *sik sak mai* (食塞米).

The main cultural metaphor at play here is THE SOURCE OF INTELLIGENCE AS MAI. Entailed in the cultural metaphor are the following cultural conceptualizations:

INTELLIGENCE LOCATES IN THE NUTRIENTS IN MAI;

EATING MAI IS A PROCESS OF ACQUIRING INTELLIGENCE;

INTERNALIZING INTELLIGENCE REQUIRES THE DIGESTION OF THE EATEN MAI; and

THE LACK OF INTELLIGENCE RESULTS FROM THE INDIGESTION OF THE EATEN MAI.

From these cultural conceptualizations, we can remark upon the essentiality of *mai* to the Cantonese and how they map such essential value to the conceptualization of one's intellectual capacity. In addition, the Cantonese cultural conceptualization of INTELLIGENCE appears to be closely related to the conceptualization of EXPERIENCE discussed in Section 4.1.1.1. The implied proactivity in both gaining experiences and acquiring intelligence is conceptualized through eating, i.e., *sik* (食). In particular, it is perceived through the control asserted by the eater when ingesting foodstuffs in the eating process. *Sik sak mai* (食塞米) also accentuates an aspect on how the foodstuff, i.e., the eaten *mai* in turn affects the eater's intelligence development. There is an incorporated metonymic relation between the eating behavior and the outcome of the eating behavior in *sik sak mai* (食塞米). The cultural conceptualizations PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* and *SIK* STANDS FOR THE OUTCOME OF *SIK* are further analyzed in Chapter Five.

Regarding the figurativeness of *sik sak mai* (食塞米), Cantonese speakers appear to have different degrees of consciousness of the idiom's metaphorical processing. Some speakers are clearly aware that there is a metaphorical connection between eating *mai* and gaining intelligence, but other speakers believe that the connection between eating *mai* and developing intelligence represents a natural course of physiological development. These variant perceptions are reflected in responses from the cultural informants. The investigator-informant interaction in example (9) indicates such variation. When asked about the connotation of the idiom, an informant PDW [GZ-F-59] clearly stated that the idiom was only a metaphor, while another informant WSC [GZ-F-57] asserted that the idiom described a causal connection between eating *mai* and developing intelligence.

(9) Investigator: *Does that (sik sak mai) mean if the digestion and absorption of nutrients are good after eating a meal, then a person will not be dumb?*

PDW [GZ-F-59]: *(laughing) We can't say it like that! This is just a metaphor!* (PC04)

WSC [GZ-F-57]: *What it means is that your parents have fed you so much mai, having eaten so much, you still don't know anything and are still so dumb, isn't it a waste of staple food? Isn't the mai you have eaten jammed? That is what it describes!* (PC04)

Cantonese speakers' different degrees of consciousness of the cross-domain conceptualization manifest the Cultural Linguistics stances of heterogeneously distributed cultural cognition among members of a speech community (Sharifian, 2017a). It also shows that to the Cantonese, the idiom *sik sak mai* (食塞米) is not a pure figure of speech. Its idiomatic meaning cannot be established without the Cantonese cultural understanding of intelligence and its development.

#### 4.1.1.3 Cultural Metaphor: THE ESSENCE OF A CONSTRUCT AS MAI IN A ZUK PRODUCT

Besides being the meal staple, *mai* is also the main ingredient for the common Cantonese rice congee, *zuk* (粥). The idiom *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥, *zuk* without *mai*) instantiates the conceptualization of the essence of a certain construct through *mai* in a *zuk* product.

Unlike the semantic consistency in the idioms discussed previously, *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥) appears to be polysemous and its semantic focus varies in different discursive contexts. For example, in political and social commentaries, commentators often use the idiom to describe a proposal or plan that is not put into practice and therefore has not yielded the projected outcome. In news articles, *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥) can refer specifically to rumors and is often used to clarify the truthfulness of information. In business-related discourse, *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥) can stand for business deals that require efforts but yield no profit, and accepting or taking on such business deals is described as *bou mou mai zuk* (煲冇米粥, boil *zuk* without *mai*)<sup>19</sup>. These different connotations of the idiom are respectively reflected in examples (10), (11), and (12) below.

(10) 不堪 拉城 压力, 永利 在澳设总部 成 冇米 粥

*Bat-ham Laai-sing ngaat-lik, Wing-lei zoi ou cit zung-bou sing mou-mai zuk*

Failed to bear pressure from Las Vegas, Wynn's proposal of setting up headquarters in Macau **fallen into abeyance** (lit. has become *zuk* without *mai*) (OA04)

(11) Stephy 结婚 冇米 粥

*Stephy git-fan mou-mai zuk*

Stephy getting married proven **a rumor** (lit. *zuk* without *mai*) (OA05)

(12) 他..... 经常 把 精神 浪费 在 无偿 的 设计, 行内人 叫 “煲 冇米

*Taa... ging-soeng baa zing-san longfai zoi mou-soeng dik citgai, hang-noi-jan giu “bou mou-mai 粥”*

*zuk”*

He... often wasted his energy on gratuitous designs, which the industry insiders call “**boil *zuk* without *mai*”** (PM01)

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<sup>19</sup> Trading and commerce may be one of the earliest pragmatic settings to which *mou maai zuk* applies. The “topolects”[方言類] chapter of Xu (1917) records that *mou maai zuk* refers to business without capital investment, and people who do such business are looking for fluke profits that may occur in one in a million chances [無米粥, 無資本之貿易, 欲僥幸得之, 猶言無米煮粥, 作萬一之想也]. It appears that this connotation still partially remains in the idiom but is no longer restricted in the commercial setting and no longer the sole semantic focus of the idiom.

Cantonese speakers, however, do not seem to clearly distinguish the semantic variation of the idiom in different contexts. Their comprehension and application of the idiom is centered around a unanimous fundamental sense, which emphasizes on the lack of an essential element in a certain entity or social construct. An interactive survey with seven Cantonese informants on their intuitive understanding of the idiom confirms that the most salient semantic aspects the speakers acknowledge in *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥) are the senses of *emptiness* and *lack of concrete essence* (see PC06 in Appendix 5 for the transcript of informant responses).

Based on the examples and the informant responses, the core cultural metaphor embedded in the complex semantic composition of the idiom *mou mai zuk* (冇米粥) is ESSENCE OF A CONSTRUCT AS MAI IN A ZUK PRODUCT. The cross-domain connection is very likely built through the Cantonese conventional knowledge of *zuk* making and the cultural categorization of *ZUK* as a subcategory of *FAAN*, the cooked subcategory of the generic *MAI*. A *zuk* product is hardly complete or qualified without *mai* in it. This knowledge of *mai* being the essential ingredient in *zuk* is drawn on to conceptualize the indispensable determining factor or intrinsic nature of a construct. If the determining factor or the intrinsic nature ceases to exist in a construct, the construct itself ceases to maintain its character or is stuck at a vague and incomplete stage, much like an unformed or incomplete *zuk* product. In different discursive settings, THE ESSENCE OF A CONSTRUCT can have more specific and concrete referents such as THE CONCRETE ACTION OF A PROPOSAL, THE PROFIT IN A BUSINESS DEAL, THE PRACTICABILITY OF AN IDEA, and THE TRUTH IN A PIECE OF INFORMATION.

Cantonese speakers are likely to be conscious of the metaphorical mappings of [*bou*] *mou mai zuk* ([煲]冇米粥). In a Guangzhou Cantonese online forum, we found a thread of local Cantonese responses to a post asking about the meaning of the idiom. Example (13) below is a response that clearly explains the correlation between the literal and idiomatic meanings.

(13) 煲冇米粥: 只留于空谈的商议。明知不会成功也姑且试试。

*Bou mou-mai-zuk: zi lau-jyu hung-taam dik soeng-ji. Ming-zi bat-wui singgung, jaa guce si-si.*

“粥”是用米来煮的，冇米便煮不成粥。

“Zuk” si jung mai loi zyu dik, mou mai bin zyu-bat-sing zuk.

*Bou mou mai zuk:* A discussion that only stays as an empty talk. (Such discussion) is knowingly not going to yield any fruit, but (the involved party) tries anyway. *Zuk* is cooked with *mai*, if there is no *mai*, one cannot make *zuk*. (FC02)

It is inferred that the author of this forum post has a clear understanding of the idiomatic meaning and how such meaning is extended from the literal meaning about *zuk* making. He is also aware of the analogical association behind the semantic extension. Such consciousness also manifests in the cultural informant responses. An informant CMK [GZ-F-34] gave a similar interpretation—“you boil the *zuk* but then it has no *mai*, then what is

the point of boiling it? So it means it is useless, what you are doing is not going to have any outcome” (Informant 7 in PC06). Despite the speakers’ consciousness however, the cultural conceptualizations underlying the idiom [bou] mou mai zuk ([煲]冇米粥) are not entirely creative. Instead, they reflect the cognitive process of how Cantonese speakers make sense of complex social exchanges through knowledge gained from their culinary experiences.

#### 4.1.1.4 Cultural Metaphor: A (THOUGHTFUL) DECISION AS FAAN

Other than what we have analyzed above, FAAN (饭), the cooked subcategory of the generic MAI can also be the source domain for conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS. An example is the conceptualization of DECISION MAKING underlying *tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食饭, watch the dishes to eat *faan*), an idiom that illustrates a thoughtful decision making process. Here we regard decision making according to the circumstances as an essential step of action taking.

*Tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食饭) originally is part of the Cantonese table manners. The Cantonese practice shared dining like most other Chinese communities. At a proper Cantonese meal, dishes are shared among the eaters to eat with the staple *faan* (饭). Children are often taught at a young age to be considerate for the others at mealtime, keeping an eye on the portion of dishes they eat and ensuring that everyone has enough food. *Tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食饭) is thus often used in its literal sense in contexts such as domestic parenting and social etiquette teaching.

Idiomatically, *tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食饭) refers to decision making that takes into account the resources and conditions in accordance to the circumstances. Cantonese speakers use the idiom either to emphasize the restricted circumstances or to advocate flexibility in decision making. Examples (14) and (15) reflect these two usages, respectively.

(14) 我哋 剩番 好少钱咋, 阵间 买 嘢要睇餸 食饭。

*Ngo-dei zing-faan hou siu cin zaa, zangaan maai je jiu tai sung sik faan.*

We only have very little money left, (so) we have to **make proper use of it** (lit. watch the dishes to eat *faan*) when we go shopping later. (OA06)

(15) 同学 甲..... 一面 担忧: “嗰度 人生 路不熟, 到时都唔知点去学

*Tung-hok Gaap...yat-min daam-jau, “Go-dou jan saang lou bat suk, dousi dou m zi dim heoi hok-*

*校。” 同学 乙 说: “你唔识睇餸 食饭 咩! 有咩车就搭咩车啦! 问*

*haau.” Tung-hok Jyut syut, “Nei m sik tai sung sik faan me! Jau me ce zau daap me ce laa! Man*

*人都得嘎!”*

*jan dou dak gaa!”*

Student Gaap is full of concerns, “That is a completely strange place and I know nobody. I don’t even know how to get to school when the time comes.” Student Jyut says, “Don’t you know how to **maneuver flexibly with the situation** (lit. watch the dishes to eat *faan*)? You can take whatever bus that is available! You can also ask around! (OA07)

Embedded in the idiom is the conceptualization of DECISION MAKING. The cultural schema of DECISION MAKING encompasses the knowledge that the circumstances should be carefully considered and evaluated before making a decision, and it is important to allow flexibility and to adjust the action according to the situation. Through *tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食飯), the whole process of decision making is visualized and analogized as a dynamic meal eating process. It is as if the speakers are observing an ordinary Cantonese meal from a bird’s-eye view. There are dishes on the table, *faan* served in bowls to each individual, and eaters sitting around the table. When such scenario is mapped onto the domain of decision making, the following set of interrelated cultural conceptualizations are instantiated:

DECISION MAKERS AS MEAL EATERS;

CONDITIONS REQUIRED CONSIDERATION AS DISHES AVAILABLE ON THE TABLE;

CONSIDERING THE CIRCUMSTANCES AS WATCHING/OBSERVING THE DISHES;

A (THOUGHTFUL) DECISION AS *FAAN*; and

MAKING A (THOUGHTFUL) DECISION AS EATING *FAAN*.

A crucial entailment in this conceptual chain is the dynamic cultural schema of THE CHANGING STATUS OF THE DISHES DURING THE MEAL. Throughout the meal, the eaters are ‘interacting’ with the food. What accompanies the eaters’ choice and action of eating the dishes is the decrease of food at different paces on different plates. The status of the remaining food on the plates in turn affects the eaters’ next decision on which dish and how much of the dish to eat, and accordingly, how much *faan* to eat. Such implicit dynamics are what motivate the conceptualization of FLEXIBILITY IN DECISION MAKING. Furthermore, entailed in the DECISION-MAKING schema is the tacitly obliged principle of balancing and sharing resources among decision makers. This entailment is mapped from the manners in Cantonese/Chinese shared dining conventions, where all eaters are expected to eat only the appropriate portion of food.

The literal and idiomatic meanings of *tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食飯) reflect distinctive yet interrelated aspects of the Cantonese *gaa gaau* (家教), or ‘home teaching’, through which parents teach their children domestic manners and etiquettes for social conducts. Therefore, the conceptual construct of the idiom is rooted in the Cantonese cultural conventions and codes of conduct. Cantonese speakers are likely to be conscious of how the teaching of table manners is associated with and can be extended to the advice of proper social behavior. Example (16) shows how such conceptual process is developed.





(16)

Text transcript:

我哋 做人 就好似 食饭 [噉], 凡事 要有计划, 睇碟 食饭。

*Ngo-dei zou jan zou hou-ci sik faan gam, faan-si jiu jau gaiwaak, tai sung sik faan.*

Conducting ourselves is like eating a meal. You should have a plan for everything and **make decisions/take actions according to the circumstances** (lit. watch the dishes to eat *faan*). (AV02)

This cartoon featuring a father-and-son *gaa gaau* (家教) scene is taken from a Cantonese TV program that introduces common Cantonese conventional sayings. The literal and idiomatic meanings of *tai sung sik faan* (睇碟食饭) cooccur in the same frame of narrative, where the cartoon images illustrate the literal meaning and the verbal interaction between the characters explicates the idiomatic meaning. The use of a simile marked by *hou-ci* (好似, be like) in the cartoon dialogue represents the production team's consciousness of the idiom's metaphoric nature.

#### 4.1.2 Cultural Conceptualizations of VALUABLES through MAI

Another set of salient cultural conceptualizations embedded in the rice-related idioms is related to various instances of VALUABLES. The word *valuables* here is used in a broad sense to refer to valuable assets including both solid substances and abstract entities. Cultural conceptualizations of VALUABLES identified from the rice-related idioms include those of MONEY, PRACTICAL BENEFIT, OCCUPATIONAL GAINS, PERSONAL POSSESSIONS, and INFORMATION.

#### 4.1.2.1 Cultural Metaphor: MONEY AS MAI

Various kinds of monetary assets are common valuable commodities conceptualized through *mai*. For example, *jau mai* (有米), literally ‘have *mai*’, is an idiom commonly used in place of an adjective to describe one’s well-off financial status. Emotions such as envy, jealousy, and/or admiration are often implied in the discourse when this idiom is used. Example (17) reflects this usage.

(17) 某本 magazine 报导 黎姿, 佢好有米 呀!

*Mau bun magazine boudou Lai-zi, keoi hou jau-mai aa!*

Some magazine wrote about Lai-zi. She is so **rich** (lit. she is so ‘have-*mai*’)! (FC03)

A prominent cultural metaphor underlying the idiom *jau mai* (有米) is MONEY AS MAI. As discussed in section 3.2, the cultural schema of MAI captures the belief that the *mai* storage in a household is a crucial criterion to evaluate status of livelihood. Underlying this idiom, the proposition schema MAI IS AN IMPORTANT HOUSEHOLD ASSET motivates the conceptualization of MONEY, with specific regards to its significance and value. The WORLDLY LIFE schema introduced in section 3.2, which advocates the practical lifestyle of working in exchange of basic life necessities, is also entailed in this cross-domain conceptualization. The cultural informants’ interpretations of the idiom reflect the above conceptual processing. For example, WSC [GZ-F-57] emphasized the similarity between *mai* and money—“*mai* is essential to a family, it is an indispensable daily necessity, money is also necessary for living, as such, it is very appropriate to compare having *mai* to having money” (PC07). On the other hand, CZK [GZ-M-57] contended that the idiom implies a means-purpose relation between *mai* and money—“*jau mai*’ means to have money. A person can buy *mai* if he/she has money, then (with money) he/she has *mai*” (PC08).

It appears that Cantonese speakers can consciously explain an intertwined connection between money and *mai*, but the knowledge base of this connection varies among different speakers. Moreover, such connection appears to be part of the Cantonese worldview or part of the speakers’ cultural knowledge and experiences. Therefore, for the speakers, the conceptual mapping underlying *jau mai* (有米) is not perceived as metaphorical.

Some speakers clearly activate the cultural schema MAI IS AN IMPORTANT HOUSEHOLD ASSET. The transcript from an online audio in (18) is an example of this understanding.

(18) 喺 广东, 米饭 系 最主要 嘅 粮食, 所以“米”…… 系 旧时 每家 每

*Hai Gwongdung, mai-faan hai zeoi zyu-jiu ge loengsik, soji “mai” ... hai gau-si mui-gaa mui-*

*户 嘅 重要 财富, 又因为 唔系 每家人 都 买得起 米 或者 好多 米,*

*wu ge zungjiu coifu, jau janwai m hai mui-gaa-jan dou maai-dak-hei mai waakze hou-do mai,*

*所以 屋企 “有米” 嘅 人 就 属于 有钱人 啦。*

*soji ngukkei “jau-mai” ge jan zau sukjyu jau-cin-jan laa.*

In Guangdong, *mai-faan* is the major grain, so in the past, ‘*mai*’ was an important treasure for every household; and since not every household can afford *mai* or a lot of *mai*, those who “have *mai*” at home belong to the wealthy class. (AV03)

Some speakers, such as CZK [GZ-M-57] who gave the following response, draw on myths in history to explain the relation between *mai* and money:

*Mai is a type of grain, grain was like money in the past, the wage of the imperial officials in the past was not calculated by money, but by how many daams [unit of measurement] of mai they had earned. This probably extended to associating money with mai, so now in Cantonese, having money is having mai (PC09).*

There are also speakers who relate the idiom to *paai mai* (派米, to distribute *mai*), a popular Cantonese charity function, where non-profit organizations or wealthy individuals donate gratis bags of *mai* to the community as a means to assist the financially disadvantaged. It is widely believed to be a better means to honor the dignity and attend to the practical needs of the assisted parties than monetary donation. The image in example (19) shows a slogan printed on the volunteer uniform of a 2017 *paai mai* (派米) function in Hong Kong. This slogan associates *jau mai* (有米) with *paai mai* (派米) and elicits a creative pun by implying both the literal and the idiomatic meanings of *jau mai* (有米). Such punning will only be comprehensible in the Cantonese cultural context.



(19)

Text transcript:

因為 有米, 所以 派米

*Janwai jau-mai, soji paai mai*

Because (we) have *mai*/money, so (we) give out *mai*. (PI01)

Cantonese speakers' various interpretations of the money-and-*mai* connection are evidence of a dynamic system of cultural cognition and the heterogeneously distributed cultural conceptualizations. They also manifest the complex cultural motivations behind the conceptual establishment of a collective cultural conceptualization.

#### 4.1.2.2 Cultural Metaphor: BENEFIT AS MAI

Apart from money, valuables can also be various types of practical benefit. *Benefit* here is a label for all kinds of beneficial yields resulted from purposeful human behavior. Some instances can be financial profits (which may partially overlap with monetary assets discussed above), achieved goals, or secured advantages. Similar to money, the generic connotation of benefit is often perceived through the source domain of *mai* in Cantonese.

*Dak mai* (得米), literally meaning 'have got the *mai*', is an idiom used by Cantonese speakers to denote one's success in achieving a goal. The context of the idiom often implies the interrelation between the efforts put into achieving a goal and the benefit gained from such efforts. For instance, in example (20), which is the title of an online article that advises on developing good workplace relationships, the efforts required is stated in the first half of the title, and the potential benefit gained from the efforts is suggested in the second half, as represented by the use of the idiom *dak mai* (得米).

(20) 搞好 人际 你就 得米

*gaau-hou jan-jai nei zau dak-mai*

Handle the interpersonal relationship well, (and) you will **get what you want** (lit. get the *mai*) (OA08)

Semantically associated with *dak mai* (得米) is the idiom *dou mai* (倒米, pour *mai*). Similarly, the semantic focus of *dou mai* (倒米) is on how an action affects the potential benefit, but it has an opposite meaning to *dak mai* (得米). Cantonese speakers use *dou* (倒米) to judge behavior that causes others their loss of profits or advantages. Pragmatically, while *dak mai* (得米) is usually used to objectively report the success of an action, *dou mai* (倒米) often encodes personal judgements that express disapproval of an individual and their behavior. In addition, *dou mai* (倒米) appears to have more structural flexibility than *dak mai* (得米). The patient that suffers from the loss caused by the agent can be inserted between the two constituents *dou* (倒) and *mai* (米). Example (21) shows an instance of *dou mai* (倒米) in use. This example also captures the flexible collocation of this idiom, where the action taker *ginglei* (经理, manager) and the consequence bearer *loubaan* (老闆, boss) are both specified, and the latter as underlined, is inserted in the idiom.

(21) 呢个 经理 讲 嘅 嘢 好似 喺 度 倒佢老闆米。

*Ne-go ginglei gong ge je hou-ci hai-dou dou-keoi-loubaan-mai.*

It seems that what this manager said is **harming his boss' interest** (lit. pouring his boss' mai). (PM02)

The starting point of the conceptual mappings underlying *dak mai* (得米) and *dou mai* (倒米), is again the core conceptualizations of *MAI*. The Cantonese cultural category of *MAI* as the sole staple grain and the proposition schema *MAI IS AN IMPORTANT HOUSEHOLD ASSET* incorporate the understanding that *mai* represents the core value of the household properties. Such understanding is mapped onto the target domain and facilitates the perception of benefit associated with an action, instantiating the cultural metaphor *BENEFIT AS MAI*.

The status of benefit is perceived through the status of *mai* in possession. The idiom *dak mai* (得米) encodes the cultural metaphor *GAINING AND SECURING BENEFIT AS ACQUIRING AND POSSESSING MAI*. The idiom *dou mai* (倒米) on the other hand, reflects the opposite metaphor, i.e., *CAUSING LOSS OF BENEFIT AS REDUCING THE POSSESSION OF MAI*. Specifically, a cultural schema *GAINING BENEFIT REQUIRES EFFORTS* is entailed in *dak mai* (得米), motivating the semantic aspect of prior efforts implied in the idiom. This entailment draws on the experience-based knowledge that *mai* is not affordable for all households and it is earned from hard work. As for *dou mai* (倒米), the cultural schema of *POURING MAI OUT OF THE MAI CONTAINER* is entailed in its conceptual construct. When the Cantonese retrieve *mai* for cooking, it is a more common habitual practice to scoop *mai* from its container instead of lifting the container to pour *mai* out of it. The notion of pouring *mai* implies an act of carelessness that may contaminate the *mai* and make it inedible. It is this subtle knowledge of handling *mai* in the Cantonese kitchen that partially facilitates the conceptualization of *BENEFIT LOSS* in the idiom.

For *dak mai* (得米) and *dou mai* (倒米), Cantonese speakers are likely to be conscious of the conceptual mappings and aware of their figurativeness. This is reflected in the abundant textual records in which Cantonese speakers acknowledge and interpret the metaphorical nature of the two idioms. In many of these interpretations, it is common that the speakers make a close association between *mai* and material wealth. For instance, in example (22), the speaker acknowledges that *mai* is used as an analogy to *lei-jik* (利益, profits and benefits) and *ji-sik* (衣食, clothing and food, referring to daily life commodities), and *dak mai* (得米) implies *fung-ji zuk-sik* (丰衣足食, abundant clothing and sufficient food), i.e., generous gains of material possessions. And in example (23), the speaker contends that the extended meaning of *dou mai* (倒米) is derived from the symbolic implication of abandoning one's wealth in the action of pouring out *mai*.

(22) 米.....经常 被人用来 比喻“衣食、利益”..... 如果事情 得心 应手, 好  
*Mai ... ging-soeng bei jan jung-loi bei-jyu “ji-sik, lei-jik” ... jyugwo si-cing dak-sam jing-sau, hau*  
多人会 高兴噉 讲 一声“得米”, 噉 就自然 得心 应手, 丰衣 足  
*-do jan wui gouhing-gam gong jat seng “dak mai”, gam zau zijin dak-sam jing-sau, fung-ji zuk-*

食 啦。

*sik laa.*

*Mai* is often metaphorically used to refer to “**clothing and food, profits and benefits**” ... if things go smoothly as the heart wishes, many people will happily say “*dak mai*”, and naturally they will achieve what they desire and have **abundant clothing and sufficient food**. (OA09)

(23) “米” 代表 粮食, 把 粮食 倒掉, 就是 把 财富 抛弃掉, 引申 为 拆

“*Mai*” *doibiu loeng-sik, baa loeng-sik dou-diu, zausi baa coi-fu paau-hei-diu, jansan wai caak-台.....帮倒忙。*

*toi... bong-dou-mong.*

“*Mai*” represents cereals, to pour the cereals away is to abandon the wealth, which extends to mean pulling the rug from under someone’s feet, ... doing a disservice. (PM03)

The clear association between *mai* and material wealth reflects in the speakers’ interpretations show that the Cantonese worldviews of *mai* are activated in the idiom processing. Drawing from the worldview schemas that highlight the symbolic value and core status of *mai*, the speakers then extend the understanding of material wealth to all sorts of practical benefits and as such, process the metaphoric meanings of the two idioms. A response from the informant CZK [GZ-M-57] about *dak mai* (得米) clearly reflects this conceptual processing:

*‘Dak mai’ means something is successfully handled. Let’s explain in this way following the understanding ‘mai is money’, so dak mai is you have become wealthy, you have gained your fortune, so it implies [extendedly] you have taken care of something and have gained something [out of it]. (PC10)*

Apart from *dak mai* (得米) and *dou mai* (倒米), another idiom *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥 boil burned *zuk*) also associates benefit with *mai*, but the association is established in a less direct and more complex fashion. *Bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥) semantically focuses on the outcome of an action in terms of whether the action has successfully yielded the desired result.

Literally, *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥) describes a failure in *zuk* making in which the boiling *zuk* is burned and inedible. Idiomatically, *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥) implies the consequences of a failed action, where the prior efforts are made in vain and the potential benefits are ruined. Cantonese speakers often use the idiom to cast warnings of possible failure as shown in example (24), or to predict a failed attempt like in the case of example (25).

(24) 你 要 认真 啲 做, 因住 煲焗 粥 呀!

*Nei jiu jingzan di zou, janzyu bou-nung zuk aa!*

You need to take this seriously, (or else) be mindful that you may **fail** (lit. boil burned *zuk*)! (OF05)

(25) 听日 要 测 LAW, .....我 未 温过, 今次 真系 煲焗 粥.....啦!

*Ting-jat jiu caak law ... ngo mei wan-gwo, gam-ci zan-hai bou-nung zuk ... laa!*

There is a law exam tomorrow... I haven't done any review, this time I am really **going to fail** (lit. going to boil burned *zuk*)! (OA10)

Identified from the linguistic composition of *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥) are the following cluster of cultural metaphors:

TAKING AN EFFORTFUL ACTION AS BOILING *ZUK*,

THE OUTCOME OF AN ACTION AS THE FINAL *ZUK* PRODUCT, and

THE FAILURE OF AN ACTION AS A BURNED *ZUK* PRODUCT.

In particular, the notion of an effortful action is perceived through the cultural schema of *BOU ZUK* (煲粥, boil *zuk*), which incorporates the culinary knowledge that boiling *zuk* requires patience and constant attention. Such knowledge is drawn on to conceptualize the demanding nature of an effortful action.

The conceptualization related to benefit is more implicit compared to the ones identified above. The cultural knowledge about *zuk* making is called on to unpack the conceptual entailments. Traditionally, *mai* is the only cereal used to make the Cantonese *zuk* and the grains of *mai* are largely dissolved in a final *zuk* product, resulting from the long cooking time. Therefore, even though *mai* is not a constituent of the idiom *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥), it is a covert component of the idiom that constructs its semantic implication related to the potential benefit involved in an action. A cultural metaphor BENEFIT INVOLVED IN AN ACTION AS (DISSOLVED) *MAI* IN A *ZUK* PRODUCT is entailed in the idiom. This cultural metaphor can be a specific variant of the cultural metaphor THE ESSENCE OF A CONSTRUCT AS *MAI* IN A *ZUK* PRODUCT as discussed in section 4.1.1.3. Specifically, the loss of the potential benefit is conceptualized through the status of *mai* in a burned *zuk* product. As the *zuk* is burned, the *mai* is wasted, and as such, we can identify the cultural metaphor THE FORFEIT BENEFIT OF A FAILED ACTION AS THE WASTED *MAI* IN A BURNED *ZUK* PRODUCT.

Cantonese speakers appear to have clear and conscious understanding of the conceptual mapping underlying the idiom *bou nung zuk* (煲焗粥). They understand the idiomatic meaning through their knowledge of *zuk* making and their belief in the importance of *mai* to a family. In particular, the semantic aspect relating to the loss of benefit is clearly explicated through the consequence of burning the *zuk*, as shown in the interpretation in example (26).

(26) 旧时粤谚, 煲焗粥 乃 棹忌 之事, 形同 烧坏 瓦。贫家 少米, 煮一

*gau-si jyut-jin, bou-nung-zuk naai zaagei zi si, jingtung siu-waai ngaa. pan-gaa siu mai, zyu jat*  
煲 粥 为 一家之食, 煲焗 了便无 可食。

*bou zuk, wai jat-gaa-zi-sik, bou-nung liu bin mou ho sik.*

In the old Cantonese saying, burning the *zuk* is something to avoid, it is like making bad tiles. The poor households have little storage of *mai*; cooking a pot of *zuk* is to feed the whole family, if the *zuk* is burned, there is nothing to eat. (OA11)

In all, the cross-domain conceptualizations between benefit and *mai* instantiated in the Cantonese rice-related idioms are deeply culturally motivated and dependent on the cultural worldviews of *mai*. As Cantonese speakers consciously apply their cultural understanding and knowledge about *mai* and *zuk* making to explaining the status of gaining or losing benefit, the cross-domain mappings motivate the use of the related idioms and construct their figurative nature.

#### 4.1.2.3 Cultural Metaphor: OCCUPATIONAL GAINS AS *FAAN*

In a set of *faan* idioms, we have identified cultural conceptualizations particularly related to income and benefits gained specifically from one's occupation. These cultural conceptualizations can be classified as subordinate-level elaborations of the previously discussed MONEY AS *MAI* and BENEFIT AS *MAI* metaphors in the job-related domain. As they are particularly salient in the *faan* idioms and have intricate and complex entailments underlying each idiom, they are worthy of a closer look in detail.

In various varieties of Chinese, the job one relies on to make a living is commonly referred to as one's 'rice bowl'. The Cantonese equivalent is *faan-wun* (饭碗). *Tit faan wun* (铁饭碗, iron *faan-wun*/iron *faan* bowl) then refers to a highly stable and secure position in the governmental or public service sector or in a state-owned enterprise. This idiom is a linguistic product of the Planned Economy Era of China between the 1950s and the early 1980s, a marked national history of China's socioeconomic development. Therefore, this idiom is not unique to Cantonese. Nevertheless, *tit faan wun* (铁饭碗) in the contemporary Cantonese context appears to have gone through a semantic narrowing and occurs more restrictedly as a synonym of *governmental job* or *civil servant position*. Such semantic change is acknowledged by the cultural informants, such as the following response given by a Guangzhou university student JHJ [GZ-M-21] who currently studies in Hong Kong:

*In Cantonese we say 'wan loeng caan faan sik' (to look for two meals to eat) to represent working and making money. So 'faan-wun' (rice bowl) is associated with 'eating', the most important human activity, and we relate 'eating' to making money, because you need to have money to buy food, so I think faan wun is your job. 'Tit (Iron)' is symbolic for its firmness, which is stability. So my first reaction [to tit faan wun] is civil servants. I think most of my friends share my understanding. I was eating with my friends a few days ago when one said his parents wanted him to compete for a civil servant position because of the job stability, but he didn't want to. So we started talking about what a tit faan wun a civil servant position is. (PC11)*



Example (27) below shows the typical discursive context where the idiom is in use.

(27) “国考”热 咁多年嚟持续升温， 因乜解究？ 想做公务员，  
“Gwok-haau”-jit gam-do nin lai ci-zuk sing-wan, jan mat gaaigau? Soeng zou gung-mou-jyun,  
争 铁饭碗 争到头崩额裂 都系因为特权 思想同埋 “学  
zang **tit-faan-wun** zang dou tau-bang-ngaak-lit dou hai janwai dak-kyun sisoeng tungmaai “hok  
而优则仕” 嘅传统 观念 作崇 咯。  
ji jau zak si” ge cyuntung gunnim zokseoi lo.

Why has the heat of “National Civil Servants Examination” been continuously rising for so many years? Desiring to become civil servants and fighting to despair for the **iron rice bowl** are all due to the incitement of the privilege mindset and the traditional "he who excels in study should pursue an official career" value. (OA12)

*Daai wok faan* (大鑊饭, big wok *faan*) is another idiom that shares a similar origin with *tit faan wun* (铁饭碗). It initially described the particular communal dining routine in a *People's commune* advocated during the *Great Leap Forward campaign* period (1958-1962). Following this routine, all members of the same commune ate together the food prepared by the communal kitchen. The expression later extended to describe an egalitarian employment system where all employees receive the same job remuneration and benefits despite their different workloads and allocations. Nowadays, *daai wok faan* (大鑊饭) has developed a negative connotation and Cantonese speakers use it to criticize the egalitarian practice in the workplace. An example of this usage is shown in (28).

(28) 港台 必须 引入 “衡工量值” 机制，……任何不达标 的节目 及制  
Gong-toi bit-seoi jan-jap “hang-gung-loeng-zik” gei-zai... jamho bat daat-biu dik zitmuk kap zai-  
作人， 必须 有 惩处 机制。 否则， 与 食“大鑊饭” 有何 区别？  
zok-jan, bit-seoi jau cing-cyu gei-zai. Fauzak, jyu sik “**daai-wok-faan**” jau ho keoi-bit?  
RTHK must introduce the “Value for Money” mechanism... there must be a penalty mechanism for any programs and producers that are not up to the standard. Or else, how is it different from eating **big wok faan**? (OA13)

Both *tit faan wun* (铁饭碗) and *daai wok faan* (大鑊饭) describe the job and income status of the workers. Another idiom *mai faan baan zyu* (米饭班主, the *mai-faan*<sup>20</sup> master) on the other hand, portrays the figure who has the decisive power on the occupational gains of the workers. The referent of *mai faan baan zyu* (米饭班主) varies in

<sup>20</sup> *Mai-faan* is a more formal synonym of *faan*.

different contexts. The most common referent is the employer, such as in the case of example (29). *Mai faan baan zyu* (米饭班主) can also be for example, the customers to a salesperson, the taxpayers to a civil servant, or even the supporting fans to an artist. It can also refer to enterprises that create jobs or the financial sponsors of an institutional establishment.

- (29) 我 而家 嘅 老闆 黑妹姐..... 系 我 米饭班主..... 同 我 接 好多 工作  
*Ngo jigaa ge loubaan Hak-mui-ze... hai ngo mai-faan-baan-zyu... tung ngo zip hou do gung-zok*  
 My current boss Hak-mui-ze is my **mai-faan master** ... she arranges many jobs for me. (PM04)

Apart from the three idioms above that draw a multifaceted picture of the workplace, another two synonymous idioms have meanings related to the breadwinner in a domestic partnership. Both *sik jyun faan* (食软饭 eat soft *faan*) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭, eat slippers *faan*) describe a man who lives on the financial support from his female partner. It is not the conventional expectation in a traditional Chinese marital relationship that an adult man financially depends on his wife. We will elaborate on this ideological aspect in Chapter Six. Therefore, Cantonese speakers often use *sik jyun faan* (食软饭) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭) to belittle and criticize such men. Examples (30) and (31) are the two idioms in use and both examples reflect this negative judgement.

- (30) 食软饭 已经 系 男人 最 痛.....已经 系 接近 无 晒 面。  
*Sik-jyun-faan jiging hai naam-jan zeoi tung ... jiging hai zip-gan mou saai min.*  
**Financially relying on their women** (lit. eating soft *faan*) is already the biggest pain of man...it is close to a complete loss of face. (OA14)

- (31) 港女 餐厅 大 闹 男友 食拖鞋饭: 几百蚊 都 俾唔起, 正 垃圾!  
*Gong-neoi caanteng daai naau naam-jau sik-to-haai-faan: Gei-baak-man dou bei-m-hei, zing lap-ge!*  
*sap!*  
 Hong Kong woman loudly scolding her boyfriend at a restaurant for **being a kept man** (lit. eating slippers *faan*): Can't even afford to pay for a several-hundred-dollar meal, what a piece of trash! (AV04)

Conceptually, the five *faan* idioms above all instantiate a salient cultural metaphor OCCUPATIONAL GAINS AS FAAN<sup>21</sup>. As a subsidiary and integrated elaboration of MONEY AS MAI and BENEFIT AS MAI, the OCCUPATIONAL

<sup>21</sup> Cummings and Wolf (2011) list *iron rice bowl* and *one big pot wages*, the Hong Kong English equivalents of the Cantonese idioms *tit faan wun* and *daai wok faan*, as entries in their work *A Dictionary of Hong Kong English: Words from the fragrant harbor*. They specify that the cultural conceptualizations underlying these two phrases are SALARY IS FOOD, A JOB IS A FOOD CONTAINER, and EQUAL PAY IS EATING FROM THE SAME FOOD CONTAINER (p.84, 126). The underlying cultural conceptualizations of the idioms *tit faan wun* and *daai wok faan* identified in the present analysis are consistent with Cummings and Wolf's findings. However, on labeling the cultural conceptualizations, we prefer *occupational gains* to *salary*,

GAINS AS *FAAN* metaphor also encompasses the cultural worldviews and understandings of the generic *mai* category we have analyzed in the previous two sections. In spite of this shared metaphor, embedded in each of these five idioms are more specific-level conceptual constructs that in different manners, detail the Cantonese speakers' perceptions on aspects of jobs and earnings.

First of all, a job or an employment system is conceptualized through the *faan* containers. In the idiom *tit faan wun* (铁饭碗), the *faan* container is a rice bowl, i.e., a *faan-wun* (饭碗), and the embedded cultural metaphor is A JOB AS A *FAAN-WUN* THAT CONTAINS *FAAN*. Moreover, the level of job security is conceptualized through the properties of the material that makes the *faan-wun* (饭碗). In particular, the hard and unbreakable properties of iron facilitate the perception of a highly secure job, instantiating the cultural metaphor A HIGHLY SECURE JOB AS AN UNBREAKABLE *FAAN-WUN* MADE OF IRON.

On the other hand, in the idiom *daai wok faan* (大镬饭), the *faan* container is a big wok, a piece of cookware used to cook for a large group. Instead of a single job, what is conceptualized in *daai wok faan* (大镬饭) is a particular type of EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM. Entailed in the idiom is the understanding that all grains of *faan* cooked at once in a big *wok* will have the same taste and texture. Such understanding and the mental image of people sharing *faan* from the same wok facilitate the conceptualization of an EGALITARIAN EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM. The main conceptual entailments here are:

AN EGALITARIAN EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM AS A BIG WOK ALL PEOPLE EAT FROM; and  
REMUNERATION IN AN EGALITARIAN EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM AS *FAAN* COOKED AND KEPT IN A BIG WOK.

From a different angle, the idiom *mai faan baan zyu* (米饭班主) activates the role schema of A *MAI-FAAN* MASTER, who is in possession of *faan* and has the power to distribute *faan* to others. The embedded schema *FAAN IS THE ESSENTIAL FOOD SUPPLY* which encodes the cultural significance of *mai* facilitates the speakers' understanding of the powerful status of the *mai-faan* master, which in turns maps onto the conceptualization of an influential party in the workplace that has the power to impact on others' occupational gains.

As for *sik jyun faan* (食软饭) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭), both idioms incorporate the cultural metaphor SPENDING THE EARNED INCOME AS EATING *FAAN*, which itself can be a culturally structured variant of the conceptual metaphor USING UP RESOURCES IS EATING FOOD (Lakoff, 1993) and a specific elaboration of the PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* metaphor analyzed in Chapter Five. While the *faan*-related conceptualizations build up the idiomatic foundation, the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the attributive components *jyun* (软, soft)

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*faan* to food, and *faan* container to food container, considering *faan* in these idioms implies not only the monetary income but also non-monetary benefits and incentives included in the whole remuneration package, and *mai/faan* is the main sources of food in Cantonese that has the idiomatic reference to remuneration.

and *to haai* (拖鞋, domestic slippers) in the two idioms are what motivate the derogatory connotations. *Jyun* (软) in *sik jyun faan* (食软饭) not only refers to the soft texture of *faan* in its literal sense. It also encodes the cultural schema of SOFTNESS in the domain of gendered temperament, which illustrates temperamental traits and properties that are stereotypically associated with female. This cultural schema then motivates the idiomatic reference of *jyun faan* (软饭, soft *faan*) as income earned by a female figure. Similarly, *to haai* (拖鞋, domestic slippers) are footwear for a casual domestic attire, which cultivates a metonymic reference to someone spending time at home such as a domestic caretaker, whose role is also traditionally assumed by a female family member. Activating conceptual elements that are typically associated with women in idioms that are used to describe actions of men is how sarcasm and criticism is encrypted in the two idioms.

The cultural conceptualizations we have identified from the above five idioms are significantly culturally harnessed. They are inspired by the Cantonese worldview and established from the Cantonese cultural experiences. Therefore, Cantonese speakers may only be partially conscious of these conceptual constructs, and these idioms are not purely creative figures of speech.

#### 4.1.2.4 Cultural Metaphor: POSSESSIONS AS *FAAN*

Besides occupational gains, *faan* can also be the source to conceptualize various types of valuable possessions. A *faan* idiom *gaak lei faan hoeng* (隔篱饭香, the neighbor's *faan* [is] fragrant) instantiates this conceptualization. The meaning of this idiom is very similar to the English saying *the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence*. Cantonese speakers often use the idiom to express envy or jealousy, or covetous desire toward things that do not belong to themselves. Example (32) shows how this idiom is used.

- (32) 一个.....女人 多次.....斥责我, 常常 赞 隔篱饭香, 不好好 珍惜  
*Jat-go... neoi-jan do-ci... cik-zaak ngo, soengsoeng zaan gaak-lei faan hoeng, bat houhou zan-sik*  
 香港 自己所有的。  
*Hoeng-Gong zi-gei so-jau dik.*

A woman rebuked me many times for praising **how good things in other places are** (lit. how fragrant the neighbor's *faan* is) without cherishing dearly what I have in Hong Kong. (OA15)

Underlying the idiom is a cultural metaphor POSSESSIONS AS *FAAN*, which can be a culturally-constructed variant of the near-universal conceptual metaphor RESOURCES ARE FOOD (Lakoff, 1993). The incorporated value of the discussed possessions is acknowledged analogically through the significant value of *faan* as the staple food. It is also implied that the ownership of the possessions is perceived through the ownership of *faan*, instantiating the conceptual entailment OTHER PEOPLE'S POSSESSIONS AS NEIGHBOR'S *FAAN*. Furthermore, emotions such as ENVY

and JEALOUSY toward others' possessions encoded in the idiomatic connotation are elicited through a synesthetic mapping from the physiological reaction triggered by the fragrance of *faan*.

As the idiom's semantic focus is on illustrating the emotional covetousness toward other people's possessions, the specific type of possession as conceptualized through *faan* is highly context based. This allows the Cantonese speakers to use the idiom creatively to achieve rhetorical purposes. For instance, example (33) below is the opening sentence of an article that provides marriage counsel. The writer starts their article by jokingly analogizing a wife to a man's possession. Such analogy is likely to trigger various opinionated reactions from the readers, and the use of the idiom in this context appears to be a deliberate wordplay that aims to instigate the readers to read on to find out the writer's actual stance.

(33) 男人 总 觉得 自己 老婆 点衰 点衰, 别人 老婆 就 点好 点好, 正是

*Naam-jan zung gokdak zigei loupo dim seoi dim seoi bitjan loupo zau dim hou dim hou, zing-si*

俗语 所云 隔篱 饭 香 也。

*zuk- jyu so-wan gaak-lei faan hoeng jaa.*

Men always complain about how bad their wives are, and how good other men's wives are, this is exactly how the saying goes—the neighbor's *faan* is fragrant. (OA16)

To use the idiom with such creativity and flexibility, Cantonese speakers are likely to be fully conscious of the underlying conceptualizations. The Guangzhou newspaper excerpt shown in example (34) explicates that the idiomaticity of *gaak lei faan hoeng* (隔篱饭香) is derived from a jocular comment made by parents about the good appetite of their children at the neighbor's home.

(34) “佢屋企嘅饭好好食啊”, 细路去邻居小朋友屋企翻餐, 总会

*“Keoi ukkei ge faan hou hou-sik aa”, sailou heoi leon-geoi siu-pang-jau ukkei ci-caan, zung-wui*

带住 满意嘅心情 返来。“梗系啦, 隔篱饭香呀嘛”, 大人

*daai-zyu mun-ji ge sam-cing faan-loi. “Gang-hai laa, gaak-lei faan hoeng aa-maa”, daai-jan*

总会 [噏]样 总结 一下。隔篱饭香……就来源于呢个情景, 后来

*zung-wui gam-joeng zung-git jathaa. Gaak-lei faan hoeng... zau loi-jun-ju ni-go cing-ging, hauloi*

俾人引申为, 总会羡慕人啲, 或者距离创造美感之类。

*bei jan jan-san wai, zung-wui sinmou jan-dei, waakze keoilei cong-zou mei-gam zileoi.*

“*Faan* in their home is so delicious”, kids who go and eat at their neighboring friends' home always come back satisfied. “Of course, the neighbor's *faan* is fragrant”, adults always make such deduction. That is where *gaak lei faan hoeng* originates, and later people extend its meaning to *constant envy to other people*, or *distance creating beauty* and the like. (OA17)

In other words, the initial occurrence of *gaak lei faan hoeng* (隔籬飯香) is already a rhetorical device that has great potential to become figurative. It is through the speakers' conscious conceptual engagement, activating the cultural schemas of *FAAN* and associating it with the concept of valuable possessions, that the expression develops its figurativeness. Therefore, *gaak lei faan hoeng* (隔籬飯香) showcases linguistic creativity that fuels the development of many figurative idioms. In this particular case, the linguistic creativity is simultaneously motivated by the collective cultural cognition and the speakers' initiative.

#### 4.1.2.5 Cultural Metaphor: INFORMATION AS *FAAN*

Information can also be a valuable entity conceptualized through the domain of *faan*. We treat *information* here as a generic label for content that is conveyed or represented through various means or media and incorporates value and significance evaluable by the recipients. From this perspective, the conceptualization of information through *faan* can be viewed as a culturally-structured representation of the near-universal metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD and its variant RESOURCES ARE FOOD (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). An idiom *caau laang faan* (炒冷飯, stir-fry cold *faan*) instantiates this cross-domain conceptualization.

*Caau-faan* (炒飯), or more widely known as *fried rice* in English, is a rice dish made by stir-frying *faan* with other diced ingredients in a wok (see Image 4.1 for a plate of *caau-faan*). To make *caau-faan* (炒飯), the Cantonese chefs often use left-over *faan* in favor of its dryer and looser texture than the freshly steamed alternative. Left-over *faan* is called *laang-faan* (冷飯, cold *faan*) in Cantonese, hence *caau laang faan* (炒冷飯) is in fact a more specific or accurate synonym of *caau-faan* (炒飯).



Image 4.1 *Caau-faan*

Idiomatically, *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) refers to the action of reposting outdated news and messages or re-producing and re-promoting old products without any updates. Cantonese speakers often use the idiom to express their annoyance caused by the repetitive information and the dull duplication. In example (35), the speaker expresses his dismay about a reposted article.

(35) 呢篇 古仔 年几两年 前 出过 啦啲, 而家 玩 炒冷饭 呀?

*Ne-pin guzai nin-gei-loeng-nin cin ceot-gwo laa-waa, jigaa waan caau-laang-faan aa?*

This story was posted about a year or two ago, is **reposting old stories** (lit. stir-frying cold *faan*) what we are playing at now? (FC07)

Salient in the idiom *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) is the cultural metaphor INFORMATION AS *FAAN*. The stale information is perceived through the left-over *laang-faan* (冷饭). The unappetizing cold temperature of the *laang-faan* (冷饭) is highlighted to emphasize the outdated status of the information, instantiating the cross-domain conceptualization STALE/OLD INFORMATION AS COLD *FAAN*. Furthermore, the action of repetition or reproduction of something old is perceived through the schema of *STIR-FRYING*, or *CAAU* (炒), one of the most common ways to cook Cantonese cuisine. *STIR-FRYING* is a cultural category of Cantonese fast cooking methods, of which the essential step is to repeatedly stir and flip the ingredients in a wok on rapid fire so all ingredients are evenly heated and cooked in a short time (see Image 4.3 for the motions of stir-frying). The flipping motion in stir-frying allows the more cooked ingredients at the bottom of the wok to be flipped to the surface and those less cooked to the bottom to receive more heat.



Image 4.2 Stir-frying

Cantonese speakers transplant the culinary knowledge of stir-frying in the information domain, drawing on the motion of flipping up the bottom ingredients in the wok to conceptualize the action of bringing up outdated information or digging up and re-presenting buried stories and old productions. This cross-domain mapping is more explicitly instantiated in the Cantonese verbal phrase *faan-caau* (翻炒, flip and stir-fry), which often cooccurs with the idiom *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) as a semantic synonym. Example (36) below is a text sample where these two linguistic items cooccur and semantically complement each other.

(36) 有 咁多套 炒冷饭 综艺, 你哋 仲 有 边套 想 翻炒 呢?

*jau gam-do-tou caau-laang-faan zung-ngai, nei-dei zung jau bin-tou soeng faan-caau ne?*

There are so many **re-produced** (lit. stir-fried cold *faan*) entertainment shows, which one do you want to **recap** (lit. flip and stir-fry)? (OA18)

Altogether, the schema of *LAANG-FAAN* and the schema of *STIR-FRYING* allow the speakers to conceptualize the reproduction of old information. More importantly, the unpleasantness aroused by the image of *laang-faan* transcends the domain of food and conjures up the speaker's unpleasant sentiment towards the dull repetition in the domain of information production.

It appears that the speakers are conscious of the cross-domain conceptualizations underlying *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) and often use the idiom creatively with strong and apparent traits of figurative and rhetoric manipulation aiming to create effects such as humor, irony, or punning. Example (37) is excerpted from a movie commentary. The commentator here criticizes the cramming of outdated jokes in the movie with a humorous analogy between watching multiple outdated jokes in the same movie and eating ten plates of *caau-laang-faan* (炒冷饭) at one meal. The idiom is placed in a textual context where both the literal and idiomatic meanings are elicited<sup>22</sup>. Through this rhetorical play, the commentator can successfully voice his criticism as sarcasm and the sarcasm resonates in readers who are conscious of the cross-domain conceptualization underlying *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭).

(37) 炒冷饭 唔系 问题, 周星驰 都话 自己系 炒冷饭; 但系 一

*Caau-laang-faan m hai man-tai, Zau-sing-ci dou waa zigei hai caau-laang-faan; daanhai jat-*

*餐 饭 要 食 十 碟 唔 同 味 嘅 炒饭, 真 系 会 好 想 反 枱。*

*caan faan jiu sik sap-dip m-tung mei ge caau-faan, zanhai wui hou soeng faan-toi.*

<sup>22</sup> The section of the commentary where this example is excerpted is in fact titled *faan-caau* (翻炒), which 'sets the scene' for the activation of the idiomatic meaning of *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭).



**Re-presenting old jokes** is not a problem, even [the famous] Zau-sing-ci said he would **repackage old jokes** (lit. Stir-frying cold *faan* is not a problem, even Zau-sing-ci said he would stir-fry cold *faan*); but if I had to eat ten plates of **stir-fried *faan*** of different flavors at one meal, I would really want to flip the table. (OA19)

Cantonese speakers' complete consciousness of the cross-domain conceptualizations situates the INFORMATION AS *FAAN* metaphor closely to the end of figure of speech along the conceptual processing continuum of cultural metaphors, and the rhetorical flexibility of the idiom *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) reflects the speakers' creativity in idiom use. Nevertheless, it is worth addressing that *caau laang faan* (炒冷饭) is not an instance of pure figure of speech. The embedded cross-domain conceptualizations are the determining factors that motivate and allow the idiom's figurativeness and they are themselves culturally constructed and deeply rooted in the speakers' conventional knowledge on Cantonese cooking and dietary habits. On this account, the idiom is in fact a representation of Cantonese speakers' rhetorical creativity restrained and refined by their cultural cognition.

#### 4.1.3 Cultural Metonymy: MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE

The significance of *mai* and *faan* in the Cantonese dietary culture has motivated a series of rice-related idioms to develop meanings related to all kinds of essentials and valuables. The previous sections of the chapter have analyzed these idioms comprehensively. This section on the other hand, focuses on the discussion of a cultural metonymy motivated by a specific sense of *faan*. Apart from referring to the cooked rice grains, *faan* also is the metonymic reference of a whole meal. The Cantonese expressions for cooking and eating a meal are respectively *zyu-faan* (煮饭) and *sik-faan* (食饭), literally cooking and eating *faan*. This meaning of *faan* is derived from the *faan-sung* (grains-dishes) dichotomy in the Chinese culinary traditions which distinguishes the status of the grain food from other foods. We will further explicate the historical roots of this dichotomy in Chapter Six. This metonymic sense of *faan* can be identified from a few *faan* idioms that describe particular lifestyles. We will analyze here two such idioms, i.e., *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭, have shark fin to mix with *faan*) and *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭, coarse tea and light *faan*).

*Jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭) originally refers to a Cantonese gourmet dish—simmered shark fin soup served with *faan* (see Image 4.3).



Image 4.3 *Jyu ci lou faan*<sup>23</sup>

When the *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭) dish first gained its popularity in Hong Kong restaurants in the 1970s, it was promoted as a dish of luxury and a symbol of wealth (W. Chen et al., 2014). Nowadays, *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭) has become a euphemism for a luxurious lifestyle, or an extravagant way of living of those who have accumulated material wealth, such as its use in example (38) below.

(38) 虽 有 获 利, 看 破 股 市 无 常, 股 民 不 再 鱼 翅 捞 饭

*Seoi jau wok-lei, hon-po gu-si mou-soeng, gu-man bat-zoi jyu-ci lou faan*

Although still profiting, stock traders have witnessed the irregularity of the stock market and stopped **living an extravagant life** (lit. mixing shark fins with *faan*). (OA20)

The other idiom *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭, coarse tea and light *faan*) has quite an opposite connotation to that of *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭). *Cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭) first appeared in a Song Dynasty poem composed by HUANG Tingjian (1045-1105). The poem illustrates a folk regimen of health cultivation: Stop eating when fully fed with **coarse tea and light *faan***, stop clothing when warm enough to keep out the cold with patched clothes (粗茶淡饭饱即休, 补破遮寒暖即休). The expression has lived on and remained in the modern lexicon of Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) and other Chinese varieties. It is worth noting that both the constituents *caa* (茶, tea) and *faan* (饭) here are metonymic, respectively standing for beverages and meals in general. The literal meaning of *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭) therefore, is in fact *light beverages and simple meals*.

<sup>23</sup> Image credit: [*Jyu ci lou faan*] Retrieved from <http://www.nipic.com/show/11468078.html>

Despite its ubiquity in varieties of Chinese, *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭) or its variant form *cing caa daam faan* (清茶淡饭, clear tea and light *faan*) is frequently used by Cantonese speakers<sup>24</sup> nowadays to describe a thrifty and minimalistic way of living that is either a result from financial constraints or a decision made according to personal preference. A sample of this usage is shown in example (39). This usage is in fact a process of semantic broadening, similar to the idiomatic use of *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭).

(39) 只要 两个人 有 同一个 信念, 就算 粗茶淡饭 依然 食得 咁 开心。

*Zi-jiu loeng-go-jan jau tung-jat-go seon-nim, zausyun cou-caa daam-faan ji-jin sik dak gam hoi-sam.*

As long as two people share the same faith, even **an unadorned life** (lit. coarse tea and light *faan*) is enjoyable.

(SM01)

Although *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭) and *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭) have developed idiomatic connotations outside the food domain, we have noticed from the collected materials that the two idioms are most often articulated in a meal-relating context. It is common that both the literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning are salient when the idioms are in use. The speakers appear to be more inclined to making statements about ways of living or status of life through first talking about food and meal styles. Social media posts that allow both image and text insertion can illustrate this property especially well. Example (40) below presents two Cantonese Instagram posts containing the two idioms, respectively. The first post was made by a Guangzhou Cantonese speaker and the second post by a Hong Kong Cantonese speaker.

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<sup>24</sup> According to the survey result, 70 out of 71 participants acknowledge that they know the idiom *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭), and 67 participants including all of those from Macau and Hong Kong claim that they use the idiom often or very frequently in relevant communicative settings. The MEAN VALUE of the idiom is 4.052, indicating a high degree of acknowledgement and frequency of use.



@jerseyleung  
 东海海鲜酒家 (流花店)  
 5 months ago 2 likes 0 comments  
 东海既 捞捞饭好好食 miss. #鱼翅捞饭 #food  
 #rich #woo #东海 #delicious



@mikiyeung  
 2 years ago 798 likes 11 comments  
 Hubby making soup for friends, I get the benefit 😊  
 #我最鐘意湯飯 #清茶淡飯好幸福 #他說這是全世界最  
 好飲既青紅蘿蔔白湯 #我好贊成

(40)

(PI02)

Both Instagram users posted a food image corresponding to the literal meaning of the idiom. In the text section, keyword/topic tags are added, which include both the idioms and evaluative adjectives such as *rich* and 幸福 (happy, felicitous) (see framed texts in the sample). Cantonese speakers with knowledge of the particular idiomatic connotations are very likely to infer from the tags that the posts encode evaluative messages associated with both the food itself and the users' reflection on lifestyle or living status.

As shown in the materials, the idiomatic references of the two idioms are closely associated with and possibly inclusive of their literal references. This tight connection reflects that the conceptual mechanism at play is an intra-domain metonymic connection MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE. This is a culturally constructed representation of the PART FOR WHOLE conceptual synecdoche. The sociocultural significance of food and eating has made one's food choice and meal style the symbolic indicator of his or her lifestyle, which motivates the conceptual establishment of the cultural metonymy. Entailed in this cultural metonymy are a set of more specific metonymic conceptualizations. One of the most prominent is the FAAN IN A MEAL STANDS FOR THE MEAL metonymy underlying the semantic broadening of the constituent *faan* in the two idioms. It can be considered as the backbone cultural metonymy that motivates the idiomatic meanings and facilitates the core MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE metonymy. As previously mentioned, this metonymy is highly cultural dependent and can be traced back to the important cultural status of *faan* as staple food in a Cantonese meal. Additionally, metonymic relations developed from cultural categorization in which a cultural sub-category stands for a generic cultural category are also embedded in the idioms. These cultural metonymies include SHARK FIN STANDS FOR EXTRAVAGANT DISHES and TEA STANDS FOR ALL KINDS OF BEVERAGES. Similarly, their establishment is deeply

rooted in the Cantonese/Chinese cultural categorization of shark fin being a symbolic choice of EXTRAVAGANT FOOD and tea being a salient instance and subcategory in the Cantonese/Chinese BEVERAGE category.

As discussed above, the idiomatic meanings of *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭) and *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭) are developed through semantic broadening, and are often elicited in a context that also stimulates their literal meanings, and the underlying conceptualizations are metonymic instead of metaphoric. Therefore, the extent of figurativeness of the idioms may highly depend on the speakers' pragmatic intention when using the idioms. Cantonese speakers with their innate understanding of the related cultural knowledge are likely to be conscious of the broadened meanings of the idioms. However, they may be more inclined to conceptually process the transition between the literal and idiomatic meanings as a slide on a continuous spectrum rather than a flip between two sides of a coin. When using the idioms, the speakers are likely to endow the two expressions with emergent semantic value based on the communicative context and their pragmatic purpose. The *ad hoc* reference of the idioms ranges from the literal food choice of a meal to the more figurative preference of a lifestyle, or more often, is a mixture of both in the immediate context. In other words, the figurativeness of the two idioms is more of a result of the speakers' operational and reflexive choice in communication, and thereby the speakers may not always be able to consciously identify how figurative the idioms are when they are uttered.

#### 4.1.4 Creative Cultural Conceptualizations

In addition to the idioms that embody various conventional and culturally constructed conceptualizations, there are also rice-related idioms that manifest as products of Cantonese speakers' pure rhetorical creativity. These idioms are highly figurative and can create various rhetorical effects such as humor, sarcasm, irony, and exaggeration. Cantonese speakers often actively manipulate the meanings and implications of the idioms to achieve their purposes in communication. These creative idioms, although they may still reflect Cantonese cultural elements, their underlying mappings are mainly constructed and activated consciously by the speakers. These idioms are instances of pure figures of speech.

*Jat gau faan* [gam] (一嚟饭[啲]), [be like] a lump of *faan*) is frequently uttered as a euphemism for addressing a person being slow in perception and comprehension, or dullness in expressions and performances. When using the idiom, Cantonese speakers often build a figurative connection between a lump of *faan* and the subject referent, i.e., the individual being commented on, with an analogical marker *gam* (啲), which is equivalent to ...*be like* in English. Alternatively, the speakers may collocate the idiom in similes with preceding adverbs such as *hou-ci* (好似), or *jyu* (如), both equivalent to the English adverb *like*.

There may be different rationales and motivations behind the speakers' use of the idiom. In example (41), the speaker compares her younger self to a lump of *faan*, implying that she was unskillful and unknowledgeable at the

time. The speaker here is a popular Hong Kong actress and she uses the idiom in a public interview. It is possible that the use of the idiom is a pragmatic strategy with which the actress attempts to close the gap between the audience and herself through self-mockery. The idiom here serves as a trigger of humor achieved through the figurative analogy portraying a human figure as food.

(41) 高Ling 形容 当时 只有 21 岁 的 自己 如 “一嗜饭”， 没有 特别 技能， 只好  
Gou-Ling jingjung dongsi zijau 21-seoi dik zigei jyu “*jat-gau faan*”, mutjau dakbit gei-nang, zihou  
性感 示 人。  
*singgam si jan.*

Gou-Ling described her 21-year-old self at the time as “**a lump of faan**”. Without special skills, she could only impress people with her sexy look. (OA21)

Aside from closing the hierarchical gap between the interlocutors, Cantonese speakers may also employ the idiom to lighten the mood in their comment and maintain positive interpersonal relationship with the subject referent. In example (42), a Hong Kong artist makes a sarcastic comment on the dull performance of his colleagues in a TV show. The sarcasm is conveyed through the speaker’s deliberate substitution the name of the show ‘*faan-hau-gam*’ with a variant form of the idiom, i.e., *gau-faan-gam*<sup>25</sup>, taking advantage of the homophones in these two lexical units. While inferring his critique through a jocular wordplay of the idiom *Jat gau faan* [*gam*] (一嗜饭[噉]), the speaker manages to minimize the unpleasantness of a negative comment and save the face of his colleagues.

(42) 之前 睇过 一个 电视 节目， 叫做 “范后感”， 噉 但系 嗰 两个 主持 呢，  
Zi-cin tai-gwo jat-go dinsit zitmuk, giuzou “*Faan-hau-gam*”, gam daanhai go loeng-go zyuci ne,  
好 呆 啊…… 噉 我 就 话， 不如 叫 “嗜饭噉” 啦， 哈哈 讲 笑 姐！  
*hou ngoi aa... gam ngo zau waa, batju giu “Gau-faan-gam” laa, haa-haa-haa, gong-siu ze!*

I watched a TV show before, it was called “Faan-hau-gam”, but the two hosts were so dull... so I said, maybe it should be called “**Gau-faan-gam**”, ha ha ha, just kidding! (AV05)

The examples above have shown how Cantonese speakers can flexibly manipulate the idiom to fulfill their pragmatic purpose. To be able to do that, they should be completely conscious of the underlying cultural conceptualization. In fact, the speakers are actively engaged in establishing the conceptual mapping. The idiom

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<sup>25</sup> For nominal phrases that indicate the amount of something, the common collocation in Cantonese is *number that indicates the amount + measure word + noun*. It is a habitual usage that when the number of an object is one, the number is omitted. Therefore, in this text sample, *gau faan gam* is a variant of *jat gau faan gam* (一嗜饭噉) with the number *jat* (一, one) omitted.

*Jat gau faan* [gam] (一嚙饭[噉]) projects the shape of *faan* to the description of a person, reflecting a creative cultural metaphor A PERSON AS FAAN.

The pejorative connotation is embedded in the choice of the measure word for *faan* in the idiom. There are multiple measure words for *faan* in Cantonese depending on the attributes of *faan* a speaker is to address. *Gau* (嚙), as closely equivalent to *lump* in English, is a measure word that highlights ‘shapelessness’. It is used to describe a lump of *faan* that is in a compact mass but of ambiguous shape and size. Cantonese speakers creatively associate the semantic aspect of ambiguity in this measure word with the appraisal of one’s reaction and performance, and thus generate the conceptualization of the euphemistic ‘fuzziness’ of one’s intellectual competence, instantiating a more elaborated cultural metaphor A PERSON OF DISADVANTAGEOUS INTELLECTUAL COMPETENCE AS A LUMP OF FAAN IN AN AMBIGUOUS SHAPE.

Reflected in this creative cultural conceptualization is Cantonese speakers’ conceptual initiative of sourcing from the features of a familiar cultural item, i.e., the Cantonese staple *faan* in this idiom, to encode a culturally special interpretation of a more general or near-universal concept, which in this case is one’s intellectual competence. This interpretation in turn, is presented in the communicative context through the utterance of the idiom, which creates a certain rhetorical effect that meets the speaker’s pragmatic needs. The implied meanings can only be decoded by members of the same speech community who share similar cultural knowledge and understanding.

Another idiom that reflects Cantonese speakers’ active engagement in establishing creative cultural conceptualizations is *jat wok zuk* (一鑊粥, one wok of *zuk*). This idiom is frequently used to describe and highlight the chaotic status or confusing outcome of an action or event. This usage is most commonly found in commentary texts. For instance, the idiom is used in example (43) to comment on the messy staffing condition of Real Madrid, the famous Spanish football club.

(43) 皇马 不断 向外 寻找 新帅 人选.....最尾 搵到 洛佩特吉  
Wong-Maa battyun hoeng-ngoi camzaau san-seoi jansyun... zeoi-mei wan-dou Lok-pui-dak-gat  
肯 落搭, 搞到 一鑊粥, 洛佩特吉 成为 代罪羔羊。  
hang lokdaap, gaau-dou **jat-wok zuk**, Lok-pui-dak-gat singwai doi-zeoi-goujoeng.

Real Madrid had been looking for new coach candidates nonstop...in the end they found Lopetegui who agreed to take the bait, [the whole thing] turned out **a mess** (lit. a wok of *zuk*), and Lepetegui became the scapegoat. (OA22)

The idiomatic meaning of *jat wok zuk* (一鑊粥) is developed from Cantonese speakers’ experience and knowledge on *zuk* making. It is likely that the initial form of the idiom is *jat wok paau* (一鑊泡, a wok of foams), which

originally describes a stage in *zuk* making where *mai* fails to dissolve in water and thick layers of foams are formed instead. This is usually due to over-stirring during *zuk* making and may result in a disappointing *zuk* product.

Similar to the idiomatic development of *jat gau faan* (一嚙飯) discussed above, Cantonese speakers creatively correlate the image of a familiar cultural item, i.e., a poorly made foamy *zuk* product, to a more general and more abstract concept, i.e., a poor management of state of affairs, through which the latter concept is figuratively outlined and culturally contextualized. The cultural contextualization realized in the use of the idiom allows members from the same speech community to not only perceive the semantic connotation but also identify the entailed pragmatic intensions such as casting criticism or evoking public resonance.

Conceptually, underlying the idiom *jat wok zuk* (一鑊粥) is the cultural metaphor STATE OF AFFAIRS AS STATE OF FOOD. Specifically entailed in this idiom is the creative cross-domain conceptualization A DISSATISFACTORY MANAGEMENT OF STATE OF AFFAIRS AS A POORLY MADE *ZUK* PRODUCT. The criticism against incompetent management is covertly implied in the idiom through the metaphorical mapping from Cantonese speakers' cultural knowledge about the cause of a poor *zuk* product. Cantonese speakers again, are fully conscious of the conceptual mapping, which leads to the idiom's high extent of figurativeness. And like *jat gau faan* (一嚙飯), the speakers can flexibly manipulate the idiom to create rhetorical effects. For instance, the newspaper title in example (44) creates the effect of humor through a jocular pun generated by the idiom, which not only conveys the idiomatic meaning, but also coincidentally illustrates the incident with its literal composition. Inside jokes like this one are only to be understood by Cantonese speakers.

(44) 客货车 油门 当 脚刹, 铲入 铺 一鑊粥

*Haak-fo-ce jaumun dong goeksaat, caan-jap pou jat-wok zuk*

Van (driver) mistaken gas pedal as break, vehicle charged into *zuk* shop *jat wok zuk* (lit. the vehicle charged into a wok of *zuk* in a *zuk* shop; fig. the vehicle charged into a *zuk* shop and created a chaos) (OA23)

Through analyzing the two idioms that reflect creative cultural conceptualizations, we have had a glimpse of how Cantonese speakers make active use of their linguistic and cultural repertoire to understand and describe the world. In spite the fact that the two idioms analyzed are classified as figures of speech, we can still see the cultural knowledge and experiences that inspire the speakers' creativity in establishing the cross-domain mappings.

## 4.2 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have explored the cultural conceptualizations underlying the well-known and commonly used Cantonese rice-related idioms. The findings show that the Cantonese worldviews and conventional knowledge embedded in the cultural conceptualizations of *MAI* are the foundation for a more elaborated system of cultural



conceptualizations in the rice-related idioms. Instantiated in distinctive rice-related idioms are also other culturally rooted conceptualizations that motivate the idiomatic meanings. For example, the WORLDLY LIFE schema represents Cantonese speakers' work-life value, the INTELLIGENCE and DECISION-MAKING schemas reflect the Cantonese understanding on intellectual development and resource management, and the schemas associated with the elderly and the female community members highlight the traditional social structure and hierarchy of the Cantonese society. Furthermore, when looking at the MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE cultural metonymy and the creative cultural conceptualizations, we have discovered how speakers' pragmatic intentions may affect the extent of figurativeness of the idiom in use and how speakers may create special rhetorical effects through the creative wordplay. We have also recognized the speakers' autonomy in actively retrieving and applying the resources from the memory bank of their cultural cognition to meet their communicative purposes.

## Chapter 5 Cultural Conceptualizations of Eating-related Idioms

*When digging a well, I anticipate the water I'll draw,*

*When plowing the field, I hope for a harvest in fall,*

*Don't I have ambition in this life I live?*

*It is the drinks and the eats that I've been striving for.*

*"Venting My Feelings", WANG Mian (1310-1359), the present writer's translation<sup>26</sup>*

The previous chapter identifies a dynamic system of cultural conceptualizations underlying the prevalent Cantonese rice-related idioms. This chapter shifts the focus from the Cantonese starch staple to the cultural activities and experiences of food consumption and examines the underlying cultural conceptualizations of 25 Cantonese eating-related idioms. The key constituent that constitutes the semantic focus in these idioms includes one of the three eating-related keywords *sik* (食, to eat), *jam* (饮, to drink), and *lou* (捞, to mix).

### 5.1 Cultural Conceptualizations Embedded in the Eating-related Idioms

The eating-related keywords *sik* (食), *jam* (饮), and *lou* (捞) in the 25 idioms are instances of the Cantonese cultural category of *SIK*, which represents the Cantonese conceptual categorization of food consumption behaviors. The generic category label 'sik' is roughly equivalent to 'eating' or 'to eat' in English. Under the generic umbrella category *SIK* are the dichotomic subcategories *SIK* and *JAM*. The subcategory *SIK* refers to the consumption of thick liquid food and/or solid food<sup>27</sup>, while the subcategory *JAM* includes liquid and/or light liquid food consumption. These two subcategories are partially correspondent to the near-universal dichotomic categorization of EATING and DRINKING. However, specific instances within the two respective subcategories and their conceptual entailments are highly culturally harnessed. They do not fully adhere to the universal categorization. For example, *lou* (捞) is a unique instance within the subcategory *SIK*. It stands for a specific food consumption process of mixing the ingredients, sauce or gravy of a dish with the solid starch food and eating the mixture as a whole. And the two salient instances *jam*<sub>1</sub> (饮<sub>1</sub>) and *jam*<sub>2</sub> (饮<sub>2</sub>) of the subcategory *JAM* respectively refer to the consumption of light liquid food, which is almost exclusively the Cantonese soup, and the general consumption of water and beverages. The Cantonese cultural category of *SIK*, its subcategories and the major instances are presented in Figure 5.1 below. This cultural category has set a conceptual scope for the source domains of the identified cultural

<sup>26</sup> The original poem excerpt in Classical Chinese: 鑿井思所汲，耕田期有秋。人生豈無志？每為飲食謀。

<sup>27</sup> In the Cantonese categorization, the consumption of 'thick' liquid food such as *zuk* (粥), the rice congee, and *gang* (羹), a type of soup of which the texture is thickened by the addition of corn starch, is classified into the same category as the consumption of solid food.

conceptualizations and provided a foundation for the metaphoric and metonymic conceptual mappings underlying the eating-related idioms.

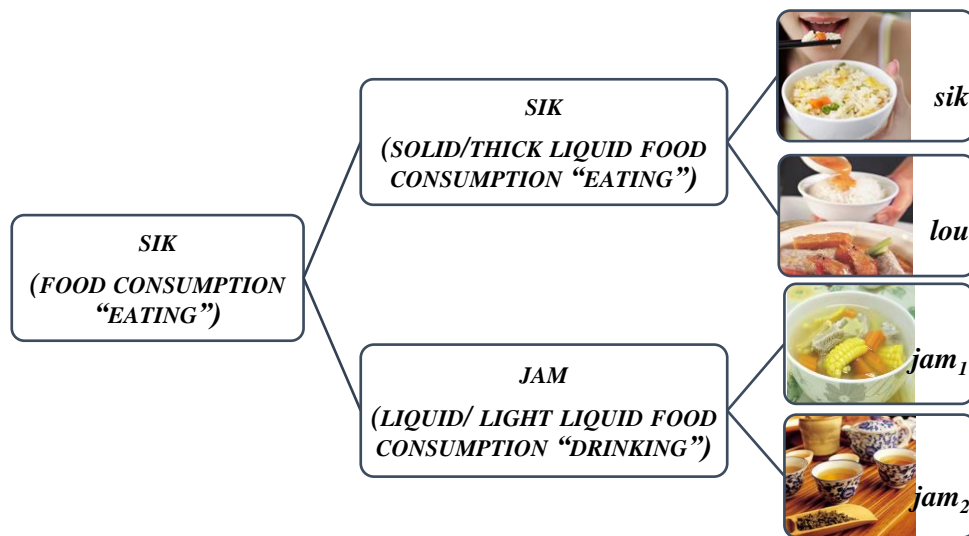


Figure 5.1 Cultural category of *SIK*, its subcategories and major instances<sup>28</sup>

The cultural conceptualizations underlying the eating-related idioms can be largely classified into three categories, depending on the salient aspects of food consumption that are mapped onto the target domains. Figure 5.2 presents a synopsis of the identified cultural conceptualizations through the generic *SIK* underlying the target eating-related idioms. The three categories of conceptualizations are grouped separately. Similar to Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four, these cultural conceptualizations are placed along the conceptual-processing continuum, in accordance with the extent of figurativeness Cantonese speakers acknowledge in the related idioms. The arrows alongside some idioms signify the varied extents of figurativeness in distinctive idioms motivated by the same cultural conceptualization, or a developing trend of an idiom’s figurativeness, the latter of which is addressed in Chapter Six. The positions of the cultural conceptualizations are relative to one another, and what the figure shows is only an indicative portrait of a complex conceptual system identified from the perspective of the speakers.

<sup>28</sup> Image credits:

[*sik*]. Retrieved from <http://content.mybb.com.hk/135174/>

[*lou*]. Retrieved from [https://static.appledaily.hk/images/next-photos/Eat\\_Travel/592/640pixfolder/ETA592-007c/ MG\\_0602no.jpg](https://static.appledaily.hk/images/next-photos/Eat_Travel/592/640pixfolder/ETA592-007c/ MG_0602no.jpg)

[*jam<sub>1</sub>*]. Retrieved from <https://ali.xinshipu.cn/20110804/original/1312449284240.jpg>

[*jam<sub>2</sub>*]. Retrieved from [http://a3.att.hudong.com/30/45/01100000000000144725459160606\\_s.jpg](http://a3.att.hudong.com/30/45/01100000000000144725459160606_s.jpg)

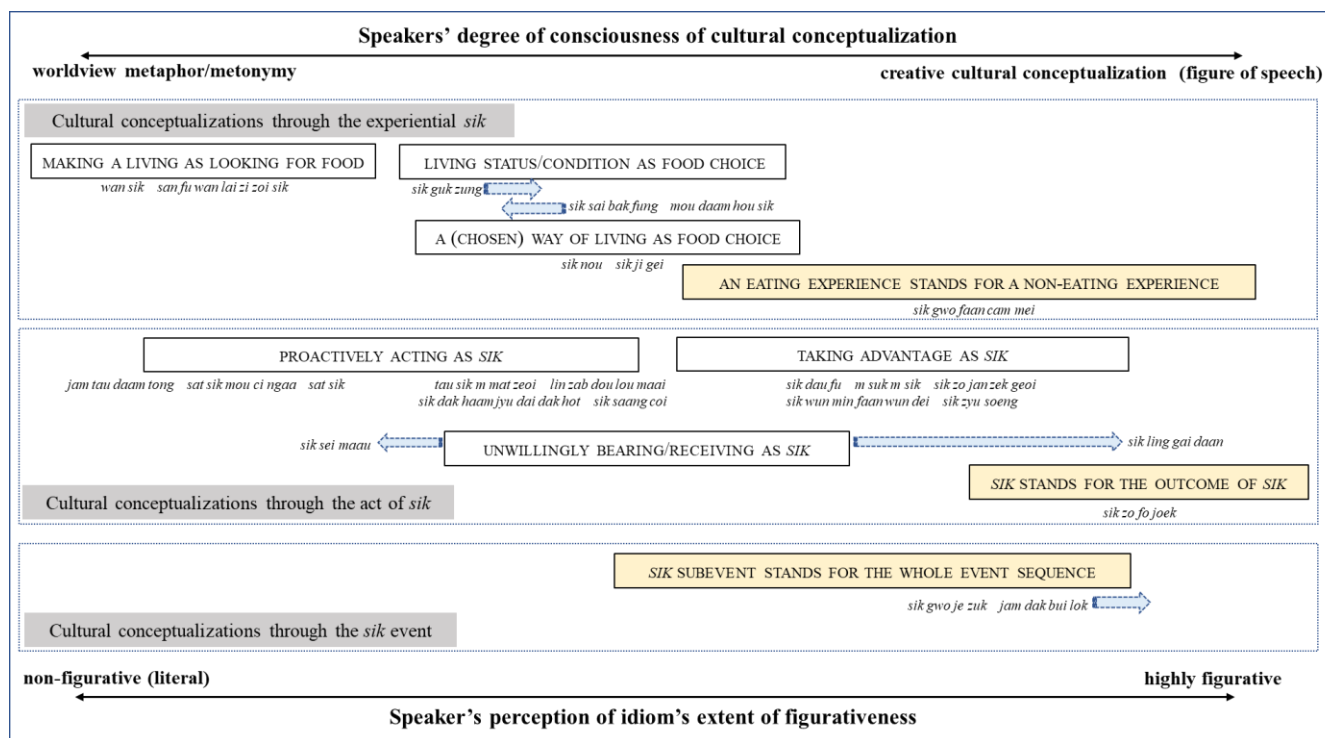


Figure 5.2 A synopsis of the identified cultural conceptualizations sourced from the generic *SIK*

The first category is the conceptualizations of living through *sik*. The conceptual base of these cultural conceptualizations is the experiential nature of food consumption. *Sik* is viewed as a particular *experience* that consists of multi-faceted aspects including for example, the seeking of food, the choice of food, the taste of food, and the physical and psychological reactions brought about by consuming the food. These nuanced aspects are the sources of multiple conceptualizations related to living or making a living, as reflected in an outstanding number of Cantonese *sik* idioms. Food consumption, when viewed as a complex experience, is very closely associated with the experience of living. In fact, the boundary between the domain of eating and that of living is fuzzy. When in one context it seems proper to distinguish eating and living as two independent conceptual domains with their own complex entailments; in another context, the ‘experiential’ eating may as well be treated as a specific sub-domain incorporated in a broader domain of living. The conceptual ambiguity presented in the distinction of eating and living is also reflected in the cultural conceptualizations of living identified from the Cantonese *sik* idioms. There are metaphoric conceptualizations like MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD and LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE. There are also metonymic conceptualizations like AN EATING EXPERIENCE STANDS FOR A NON-EATING EXPERIENCE. Many of the related idioms that reflect these cultural conceptualizations are considered as non-figurative or only partially figurative by Cantonese speakers. These idioms are analyzed in section 5.1.1.

The second category of cultural conceptualizations identified from the eating-related idioms is sourced from the *act* of *sik*. When food consumption is viewed as an instant action, it involves both the agent, i.e., the eater and the patient, which is the consumed foodstuff. During the act of eating, the eater actively internalizes the foodstuff, and the foodstuff disappears in sight and is destructed by the eater. In the meantime, the consumed foodstuff may also affect the eater both physically, as in sustaining the life and affecting the health of the eater, and psychologically, as in conjuring up the eater's feeling of satisfaction/dissatisfaction after eating. These aspects motivate a few action-related conceptualizations. An agentive action is conceptualized through the eater's proactivity and its impact on the foodstuff; while something that is forced upon someone to their dismay or against their will is conceptualized through the impact the foodstuff has on the eater. In addition, the 'affected-eater' aspect also facilitates a particular Cantonese conceptualization of the emotion of anger. Many of the related idioms instantiating these cultural conceptualizations are figurative to Cantonese speakers, although the extent of figurativeness varies in distinctive idioms. Sections 5.1.2, 5.1.3, and 5.1.4 analyze the related idioms and the embedded cultural conceptualizations thoroughly.

The third category of cultural conceptualization is culturally specific to the Cantonese speech communities. Food consumption is contextualized in a social context and perceived as an event of commensality, which in the Cantonese communities, is often a sub-event involved in a bigger sequence of events organized to achieve certain social purposes. From this point of view, the *sik* event is taken as a symbolic component to stand for the sequence of events, constructing a cultural metonymy *SIK* SUBEVENT STANDS FOR THE WHOLE EVENT SEQUENCE. Although this metonymy is rooted in the Cantonese cultural traditions, Cantonese speakers have demonstrated outstanding rhetorical creativity in using the idioms, revealing clear acknowledgement in the idioms' figurativeness. This cultural metonymy and the related idioms are analyzed in section 5.1.5.

### **5.1.1 Cultural Conceptualizations of LIVING through *SIK***

In the Chinese societies, people often relate eating experiences to other life experiences. In her analysis of eating expressions in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua), Chinese semanticist Zhengdao Ye postulates that "in the eyes of the Chinese people, eating activity is intrinsically linked to making a living" (2010, p. 378). This argument is reinforced by the salient conceptualizations of living experience through *sik* (食) found in Cantonese, as analyzed in the following section. The living experience conceptualized mainly refers to the speakers' general experiential status of 'living a life' or 'making a living' as members of the community. *Sik* (食) as the source domain in this section refers to both eating for survival and eating for leisure purposes. Entailed in the conceptualizations between living and eating and at a more implicit level, 'the person who lives' or the 'life experienter' is conceptualized through the role of the eater. Accordingly, various aspects of living, including the status and condition of living,

the (chosen) way of living, and/or the means for making a living are often conceptualized through the food choice in an eating experience.

### 5.1.1.1 Cultural Metaphor: MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD

The conceptual connection between living and eating may be most primarily rooted in the fundamental human experience of obtaining food for survival. In Cantonese, the idea of making a living can be illustrated by the experience of looking for food. This is reflected in the idiom *wan sik* (搵食, look for food), in which the key constituent *sik* takes its nominal sense of ‘food’. *Wan sik* (搵食) is the Cantonese way of saying ‘to work to earn a living’. Example (45) is an instance of the idiom in use.

(45) 政府会 向 一群 靠自己 双手 搵食 嘅 打工仔 给予 支持。

*zingfu wui hoeng jat-kwan kaau zigei soeng-sau wan-sik ge daa-gung-zai kapjyu zici.*

The government will support wage earners who **make a living** (lit. look for food) with their own hands<sup>29</sup>.

(OF04)

Closely relevant to *wan sik* (搵食), the idiom *san fu wan lai zi zoi sik* (辛苦搵嚟自在食, eat at ease the food sought with hard work) represents a common way of thinking among Cantonese people about the work-life relation. The idiom extends from describing the specific enjoyment of eating food to denoting a mentality of life that advocates the motto ‘a hard-earned life is worth enjoying’. Despite its semantic extension, this idiom is still most commonly found in an eating-related context, emphasizing the importance of rewarding one’s hard work with good food. Example (46) below shows how this idiom is used in an eating-related context. In this example, both the literal and the idiomatic meanings are evoked.

(46) 辛苦 搵 嚟 自在 食, 星期六 啲下 食 餐 好, 调剂 一下 好 正常。

*san-fu wan lai zi-zoi sik, singkei-luk tau-haa sik caan hou, diu-zai jat-haa hou zing-soeng.*

**A hard-earned life is worth enjoying** (lit. eat at ease the food sought with hard work), it is very normal to rest and eat a good meal on Saturdays as an adjustment from work. (OA24)

Underlying these two idioms is a cultural metaphor MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD. It is worth noting that this metaphor may be culturally salient for Cantonese speakers but are hardly culturally exclusive. For example, the English idioms *put food on the table* and *bring home the bacon* imply a similar conceptualization manifesting a connection between obtaining food and working to financially support an individual and the

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<sup>29</sup> This is the original English translation taken from the Hong Kong Legislative Council’s official record of proceedings for the November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 council meeting.

household. Nevertheless, this conceptualization is more a reflection of the Cantonese worldview than a metaphorical construct to the Cantonese speakers. Collected from a Guangzhou tourism commentary, example (47) explains the Cantonese perception of working and its relation to eating as reflected in the two idioms.

(47) “辛苦搵来自在食”，代表广州人的价值理想。他们把工作叫做“*San-fu wan loi zi-zoi sik*”，*doibiu Gwongzau-jan dik gaazik leisoeng. Taa-mun baa gungzok giuzou* “搵食”，直解就是“找吃”，来来去去折腾不过为了两餐，一定要“*wan-sik*”，*zik-gaai zausi “zaau-hek”*，*loi-loi-heoi-heoi zittang batgwo wailiu loeng-caan, jatding jiu* 吃好。

*hek hou.*

“*San-fu wan loi zi-zoi sik*” represents the Guangzhou people’s value and ideal. They call working “*wan-sik*”, the literal understanding is ‘looking for food’. (They) struggle back and forth simply for the two meals of a day, so they will make sure they eat well at those meals. (OA25)

Reflected in this example are two cultural schemas of *sik*: *sik* IS THE PARAMOUNT MEANS FOR SURVIVAL, and *sik* IS THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES. We can also identify here a partial reflection of the *WORLDLY LIFE* schema we discussed in Chapter Four, which captures the Cantonese materialistic work-life value. In other words, the cultural metaphor *MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD* underlying *wan sik* (搵食) and *san fu wan lai zi zoi sik* (辛苦搵来自在食) is likely to be a worldview metaphor and Cantonese speakers may not perceive the two idioms as overtly idiomatic or figurative.

### 5.1.1.2 Cultural Metaphor: LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE

Other than the two idioms discussed above, Cantonese speakers also describe and evaluate a household or an individual’s living status or condition using *sik* idioms, in which different food choices in the *sik* experience appear to signify different living status or conditions. One such idiom is *sik guk zung* (食谷种, eat the seed corn). This idiom originally describes a situation in the agricultural society where a household or an individual is running short of sustainable food supply and has to feed on the seed corn saved for the upcoming planting season. The expression later on extends to describe a straitened financial condition, in which an individual or a household is short of financial income and has to live off their savings. Example (48) reflects this usage.

(48) 搵到客就好……搵唔到客就食谷种。

*wan-dou haak zau hou... wan-m-dou haak zau sik guk-zung.*

It’s good when (I) can find customers... (if I can’t) find customers (I) have to **live off my savings** (lit. eat the seed corn). (FC05)

In the traditional practice of crop planting, the seed corn farmers preserved from the previous harvest i.e., *guk zung* (谷种), was the core raw material to allow a sustainable crop planting cycle. Farmers placed their hope in the seed corn for a potential good yield that would provide food and financial income and therefore, it was stored with extra care and would not be consumed as food unless the family had exhausted food options and was facing starvation. Consequently, *guk zung* (谷种) has assumed a symbolic role of a last-resort food choice that motivates the conceptualization of a poverty-driven living condition or status.

Cantonese speakers appear to conceptualize the idiomaticity of *sik guk zung* (食谷种) through the conventional knowledge of staple food consumption. Example (49) is transcribed from an audio podcast where a Cantonese language instructor explains the meaning of the idiom. The instructor's explanation highlights a clear connection between the choice of staple food and its reflection on an individual's living status.

(49) 平时 呢我哋 就系 食米嘅, 噉 如果.....譬如话, 我哋 冇晒 米食, 粥都  
*Ping-si ne ngo-dei zau-hai sik mai ge, gam jyugwo... peijyu waa, ngo-dei mou-saai mai sik, zuk dou*  
食唔起 喇, 噉 呢个 时候 你总要 搵啲嘢 食嘎, 噉 食乜嘢呢? 食谷种 啦.....  
*sik-m-hei laa, gam ne-go sihau nei zung-jiu wan di je sik gaa, gam sik matje ne? Sik guk-zung laa...*  
啲 米你 都 冇得 食喇, 噉 你唯有 食返 原先 啲啲种 啦..... 所以 食谷种  
*di mai nei dou mou-dak sik laa, gam nei wai-jau sik-faan jyunsin go-di zung laa... soji sik-guk-zung*  
呢就 代表 一个人 要食 老本 喇, 撑唔落去 喇.....  
*ne zau doibiu jat-go-jan jiu sik lou-bun laa, caang-m-lok-heoi laa...*

Usually we eat *mai*, but if... for example, we run out of *mai* to eat, and can't even afford to eat *zuk*, then at this moment we will have to look for something to eat, then to eat what? eat seed corn... You don't even have *mai* to eat, then your only solution is to eat those original seeds... Therefore, *sik-guk-zung* means a person has to live on (lit. eat) his old savings, (and) he struggles to sustain... (AV06)

As shown in the above transcript, a financially sufficient living status is reflected in the affordability of *mai* consumption, a less sufficient but manageable living status is represented by the affordability of *zuk* consumption, and in a condition where even *zuk* is unaffordable, the last and only alternative is the consumption of seed corn, which is a manifestation of desperation caused by poverty and starvation.

The cultural informants' interpretations, as shown in example (50), share a similar understanding, with an emphasis on the desperation and unsustainability implied by the idiom.



(50) PDW [GZ-F-60]: *Seed corn originally is preserved to plant in the field, but when you are so poor and you don't have any food, you will have to eat even the seed corn. And when you eat the seed corn, you have nothing to plant, then you won't be able to get back on your feet.*<sup>30</sup> *That means you are poor to the extreme.* (PC12)

CZK [GZ-M-57]: *When the Guangzhou people say sik-guk-zung, it means they have to exhaust all the wealth and possessions they have.* (PC13)

JZ [GZ-F-32]: *Seed corn is the seed for the upcoming year, eating the seed corn is killing the hope for future, it's suicidal.* (PC14)

ZJT [GZ-F-32]: *There is no food, a person will even have to eat the seed corn, that's like cursing him to have no comeback.* (PC15)

Cantonese speakers' understanding of the idiom reflects and aligns with the previously discussed conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES through *MAI* in Chapter Four. Particularly, *sik guk zung* (食谷种) is closely related to and a side-way reflection of the cultural schema *MAI IS THE FUNDAMENTAL FOOD SUPPLY AND A SIGNIFICANT HOUSEHOLD ASSET*. The seed corn, which for the Cantonese farmers is the seed of the rice plant, is the last possible *mai*-related food choice and the last resort for the household or individual sustenance. Thereby, it is also the symbol for the last remain of the family or individual wealth. If we recall the idiom *sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米) discussed in section 3.2, which describes a worry-free status of living represented by eating a sufficient supply of 'worry-free' *mai*, it has a completely opposite meaning to *sik guk zung* (食谷种). The two idioms respectively illustrate the two ends of the Cantonese spectrum in evaluating living condition/status. The emergence and long-lasting vitality of these idioms is evidence of a worldview system developed from the Cantonese agricultural rice crop planting experiences which allows Cantonese speakers to establish a conceptual connection between food choice and the overall family financial status, both in rural China affected by the seasonal harvest.

Other than *sik guk zung* (食谷种), there are another two *sik* idioms that express similar connotations of difficult living condition/status but in a more exaggerated and figurative manner and less associated with the *MAI* conceptual model. *Sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风, eat the [west-north] wind) introduces an 'unusual' food consumption experience of eating the wind, implying the lack of access to 'real' food. This allows the speakers to express anxiety about their difficult financial status through rhetorical exaggeration. Similarly, the idiom *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食, not a mouthful of good food to eat) implies an unsatisfactory living condition due to financial

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<sup>30</sup> The original Cantonese phrase the informant used to mean 'get back on one's feet' here is *faan san* (翻身), 'to turn one's body over', meaning to have a second chance.

difficulty or concern towards an unpromising financial future. Examples (69) and (70) reflect these two idioms in use, respectively.

(51) 内地 经济 继续 没精打彩, 香港人 亦 只得 食 西北风, 勒紧 裤头  
*Noi-dei gingzai gaizuk mut-zing-daa-coi, Hoeng-Gong-jan jik zi-dak sik sai-bak-fung, lak-gan fu-tau*  
过 紧日子!  
*gwo gan-jatzi.*

With the continuous lack of vitality of the Mainland economy, Hong Kong people have no choice but to **live a difficult (low-income) life** (lit. eat the west-north wind), getting by through strict budgeting. (OA26)

(52) 燃油 费用 大幅 上升, 已经 令 渔民 鸡毛鸭血 和 冇啖好食。  
*Jin-jau faijung daai-fuk soeng-sing, jiging ling jyu-man gai-mou-ngaap-hyut wo mou-daam-hou-sik.*

The significant increase in fuel costs have put them (fishermen) in a tough situation and **made life very difficult** (lit. left them with not even a mouthful of good food to eat) for them.<sup>31</sup> (OF05)

The major eating-related cultural metaphor underlying the three idioms discussed here is the LIVING AS *sik* metaphor. Living is conceptualized through the experience of food consumption, or the experience of *sik*. The condition or status of living is then conceptualized through the food choices in the *sik* experience, instantiating a more subordinate cultural metaphor LIVING CONDITION/STATUS AS FOOD CHOICE. This metaphor is interconnected with the MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE cultural metonymy we discussed previously in section 4.1.3. They are both motivated by the significant Cantonese cultural belief that a family's or an individual's lifestyle is reflected in their meal style. As such, the financial condition of the family or individual also manifests itself through the food choice on the dining table.

For the LIVING CONDITION/STATUS AS FOOD CHOICE metaphor, embedded in the three target idioms is a more specific elaboration POOR LIVING CONDITION/STATUS AS UNUSUAL/LACK OF FOOD CHOICE. In both *sik guk zung* (食谷种) and *sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风), the nominal constituent collocated with *sik* is not a common or edible food choice in everyday life. Cantonese speakers appear to capture the financial distress in a poverty-driven living condition through visualizing the scenario where an unusual or unlikely item is used for food, implying the unavailability of 'real' food and inferring from the symbolic cultural schema FOOD IN A MEAL IS A REFLECTION OF LIFESTYLE. In the idiom *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食), the conceptual process seems to follow a similar path but the financial difficulty in this case is perceived through a lack of decent food.

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<sup>31</sup> This is the original English translation taken from the Hong Kong Legislative Council's official record of proceedings for the June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008 council meeting.

When asked about the idiom *sik guk zung* (食谷种), all cultural informants acknowledged that this expression is a literal description of challenging livelihood in the famine season in underdeveloped agricultural China, and this acknowledgement is also largely resonated in the collected materials such as example (49) above and conceptually in concert with the *MAI* cultural worldviews. The consistency shown in Cantonese speakers' understanding of this idiom shows that the idiom is deeply rooted in cultural experience gained from a shared history and passed down along generations. Therefore, the idiom does not seem to be a pure figurative construct by itself. That being said, we have discovered from our inquiry that this idiom is now becoming increasingly figurative in the present days. This is closely related to the ideological renegotiation prompted by the urbanization in China. Section 6.1.2 in Chapter Six will elaborate on this issue.

As for *sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风), the unusual collocation of 'sik + inedible item (i.e., *fung*, wind)', suggests the highly figurative property of the idiom. The collected materials also attest that Cantonese speakers are highly aware of the figurativeness of the idiom. Textual samples such as example (53) below shows Cantonese speakers' wordplay with the expression. In this example, the speaker jokingly compares the two idioms *sik guk zung* (食谷种) and *sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风), which are near-synonyms. The remark makes sense only if the speaker is aware that *sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风) has both a literal and a figurative meaning. The punchline, namely 'in poverty, it's better to eat the seed corn than the wind, as seed corn is at least a solid substance while the wind is nothing', is delivered through the speaker's deliberate wordplay with the literal and idiomatic meanings.

(53) 有 谷种 食 至少都仲 有得 食..... 凄惨 程度 点 都 唔 及得上 食 西

*Jau guk-zung sik zisiu dou zung jau-dak sik... cai-caam cingdou dim dou m kap-dak-soeng sik sai-*  
 北风 嚟。

*bak-fung lo.*

**Eating seed corn** is at least having something to eat... the level of misery is not as high as **eating the west-north wind**. (SM02)

Similarly, Cantonese speakers are likely to be conscious of the cross-domain conceptualization POOR LIVING CONDITION/STATUS AS LACK OF GOOD FOOD underlying the idiom *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食). When asked about the idiom, three out of four cultural informants clearly stated that the expression is metaphorical, and they do not use it in situations where they make negative comments on the quality of food. For example, informant ZJT [GZ-F-32] explained that "if the food is bad I will say it's not tasty and won't use this expression" (PC16), and informant CMK [GZ-F-35] commented that using the expression in its literal sense is "rare and almost impossible" (PC17).

Although speakers are clearly aware of the figurativeness of *sik [sai bak] fung* (食[西北]风) and *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食), it appears that the idiomaticity of the two expressions is weakening, especially in Hong Kong Cantonese. Examples such as the two shown below are commonly found in Hong Kong Cantonese discourse, where the two expressions are used with almost no hint of figurativeness.

(54) 食咗 50 分钟 西北风, 啲 串烧 嘢食 就 开始 嚟.....

*Sik-zo 50 fanzung sai-bak fung, di cyunsiu jesik zau hoici lai...*

After eating the west-north wind for 50 minutes<sup>32</sup>, the skewers started to come... (FC06)

(55) 对 牙齿 状况 不佳 的 长者 来说, 每日 每餐 都 冇啖好食。

*Deoi ngaa-ci zong-fong bat-gaai dik zoeng-ze loi syut, mui-jat mui-caan dou mou-daam hou-sik.*

For the elderly who have bad dental condition, every day and every meal offer not a mouthful of good food to eat. (OA27)

The trend that these two idioms are reclaiming their literal senses may also be related to the socioeconomic development and Cantonese speakers' ideological detachment from the land, the same factor that has triggered the figurativeness of *sik guk zung* (食谷种), which we will further discuss in Chapter Six.

### 5.1.1.3 Cultural Metaphor: A (CHOSEN) WAY OF LIVING AS FOOD CHOICE

With the rapid socioeconomic development of the Chinese society, Chinese individuals, especially those of the younger generations, enjoy greater opportunities and freedom to decide on their ways of living and means to make a living. This is particularly true for Cantonese speakers who reside in some of the most urbanized areas of China. Their exposure to greater flexibility in life planning is linguistically reflected in the growing number of neologisms in the Cantonese language, including the evolving number of 'young' idioms, or what the Cantonese youngsters call *ciu jyu* (潮语, trendy language). The two *sik* idioms discussed in this section are instances of these trendy idiomatic expressions that exemplify Cantonese speakers' initiative in response to the changes of social and personal environments brought by societal development.

*Sik nou* (食脑), literally 'eating the brain', discloses both the division of labor in modern Chinese society and society members' attitude towards this division. The idiom refers to the utilization of intellectual abilities and the engagement in intellectual labor which includes work/labor forms that usually require expertise knowledge and labor by the brain. Cantonese speakers often use *sik nou* (食脑) to emphasize the importance of making good use of one's intellectual abilities. The idiom is also commonly used by the speakers to convey their strong preference

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<sup>32</sup> Here 'eating the west-north wind' implies 'being in a windy environment'.

of intellectual work to manual work, especially in conversations about job hunting and career planning. Example (56) reflects such usage and implication.

(56) 如果 我有其他嘅能力 去做其他嘅嘢嘅话, 食脑 嘅话, 我就.....唔同

*Jyugwo ngo jau keitaa ge nang-lik heoi zou keitaa ge je ge waa, sik-nou ge waa, ngo zau... m tung*

其他人 一样 我做餐馆 嘢。

*keitai-jan jatjoeng ngo zou caan-gun lo.*

If I am capable of doing something else, of **using my intellectual abilities** (lit. eating my brain), then I can't be like the others working in a restaurant. (CD01)

The use of *sik nou* (食脑) to express the preference of intellectual work over manual work allows us a glimpse into the social attitude and prejudice regarding an individual's professional development in the Cantonese communities. It appears that to the Cantonese speakers, especially the youngsters, an individual's social profile is interconnected with their career choice, and the division of labor is not merely a categorization of work types but more of a symbolic differentiation of the privileged and underprivileged social status. The development of this judgement seems to have renegotiated a more conventional Chinese belief of gaining success through hard work, in which the conceptualization of 'hard work' is moving further away from hard physical labor and towards industrious use of brain power. The underpinning drive of this renegotiation is likely associated with the shaping force of urbanization that reconstructs the community members' conceptualization of the relation between self and the land and the position of ego in the community. This issue will be further addressed in sections 6.1 and 6.3, Chapter Six.

The socio-economic prosperity and advanced level of urbanization in the Cantonese speaking areas have also seen a growing value for independence and individualism. An idiom *sik zi gei* (食自己) has gained popularity with its recently developed connotation relating to self-independence and reliance. Literally translated as 'eating oneself', Cantonese speakers have long been using the expression to describe a situation where an individual has to prepare and eat a meal alone without help or company.

In the recent years, the semantic element relating to 'self-reliance' in the expression seems to have become more salient in use, and *sik zi gei* (食自己) has developed a more idiomatic connotation referring to an individual making a living and supporting themselves relying on their own skills and resources. The capability of self-independence is acknowledged positively in general in the Cantonese communities, and *sik zi gei* (食自己) thereby, is often used in a complimentary context, as one example shown in (57).

(57) 佢 真系 犀飞利, 中学 毕业 之后 都系 食自己。

*Keoi zan-hai sai-fei-lei, zung-hok bat-jip zi-hau dou hai sik-zigei.*

He is truly remarkable, (he) has been **self-reliant** (lit. eating himself) since graduating from high school. (OA28)

More recently, there has been an increasing ‘trendy’ use of the idiom, especially by younger speakers to express their resolution for self-independence. *Sik zi gei* (食自己) appears to have become not just a description of the state of living but also a youthful symbol of self-growth. Example (58) is a radio program interview excerpt, where a young Guangzhou Cantonese speaker ‘C’ recalls his former experience as an international student studying overseas. He asserts how he maintained financial independence in response to the interviewer’s inquiry about *sik zi gei* (食自己).

(58) L: 因为你就 係 谗住 去 食自己 嘅嘛

L: *janwai nei zau hai lam-zyu heoi sik-zigei gemaa...*

C: 係呀。.....我 临走 之前 我都 同 我 爸爸 妈妈 讲, 所有 嘅钱 都 係 我 出

*Hai aa... ngo lam-zau zi-cin ngo dou tung ngo baabaa maamaa gong, sojau ge cin dou hai ngo ceot*  
嘅.....其实 我 最后 都 冇, 冇 问 佢哋 搵过 一分钱 嘢。

*ge... keisat ngo zeoi-hau dou mou, mou man keoi-dei lo-gwo jat-fan-cin lo.*

L:... because you were thinking of **relying on your own** (lit. eating yourself) when you were there...

C:...Yes. I said to my parents before I left that I would pay for everything myself. In fact, in the end I didn’t ask them for even one cent. (CD02)

The two idioms, although only gained popularity recently, have manifested conceptual grounding related to the (likely developing) Cantonese worldviews. Similar to all *sik* idioms discussed in section 5.1.1.2, both *sik nou* (食脑) and *sik zi gei* (食自己) instantiate the LIVING AS *SIK* cultural metaphor, and the individuals in the living experience are also conceptualized through the role schema of THE EATER. Particularly, a major and salient cultural metaphor entailed in the two idioms is A (CHOSEN) WAY OF LIVING AS FOOD CHOICE. This metaphor is distinguished from the LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE metaphor discussed previously. The idioms in section 5.1.1.2 are more descriptive of living condition subjected to the environmental restriction, while the two idioms discussed here focus on the life experiencer’s initiative in choosing their way of living. In other words, a salient entailment in the conceptualization of ways of living through eating experiences is the autonomy implied in the eater’s decision on food choice. Similar to the idioms in section 5.1.1.2, the ‘food choices’ in the two idioms *sik nou* (食脑) and *sik zi gei* (食自己), namely, the brain and the individual themselves, are outside the conceptual category of ordinary food. This may indicate a high degree of figurativeness of the expressions, which we will further discuss shortly.

Conceptually, the two unusual food choices respectively reflect Cantonese speakers' conceptualizations about intelligence and self. For *sik nou* (食脑), the brain is conceptualized as the seat of intelligence. This is associated with the cultural schema of INTELLIGENCE instantiated in the idiom *sik sak mai* (食塞米) discussed in section 4.1.1.2, Chapter Four. As discussed before, the Cantonese schema of INTELLIGENCE captures the belief that intelligence needs to be acquired from an outside source and internalized in the human body. While intelligence is sourced from *mai* and internalized through the digestion of *mai* according to the Cantonese belief, the brain appears to be perceived as the destination of the internalized intelligence. The conceptualization of THE BRAIN AS THE SEAT OF INTELLIGENCE represents the Cantonese folk understanding of intelligence development and partially aligns with the cognitive science point of view in which the measurement of intelligence correlates with the general properties of the brain<sup>33</sup> (see e.g., Roth & Dicke, 2005). When using the idiom *sik nou* (食脑), Cantonese speakers in fact imply a metonymic relation where the idiom constituent *nou* (脑, brain) stands for intelligence or intellectual competence, i.e., THE SEAT OF INTELLIGENCE STANDS FOR INTELLIGENCE. The use of intelligence, thereby, is conceptualized through the experience of 'eating the brain', entailing a specific-level elaboration of the USING UP RESOURCES AS EATING FOOD metaphor (Lakoff, 1993), which itself is a metaphorical entailment of the LIVING AS SIK metaphor in the Cantonese context and has been briefly outlined in the analysis of *sik jyun faan* (食软饭) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭) in section 4.1.2.3.

On the other hand, the idiom *sik zi gei* (食自己)'s salient semantic meaning implies an aspect of the Cantonese cultural schema of SELF, in which an individual's overall financial capability and intellectual skills and abilities are represented as the individual's physical or biological self. The Cantonese word *zi gei* (自己) is largely equivalent to the English word 'self'. It generally refers to an individual's own overall being as distinguished from the social 'others', including both the individual's physical existence and other aspects of this existence. In the idiom *sik zi gei* (食自己), the constituent *zi gei* (自己) is collocated with the verb *sik* (食), which seems to tacitly highlight the physical aspect of the sense of *zi gei* (自己) because the literal understanding of a 'food choice' implies a tangible substance of some sort. However, as analyzed earlier, when Cantonese speakers use the idiom *sik zi gei* (食自己), what they are referring to is really the utilization of the more intangible 'skillsets' or 'qualities' of the self. The idiomatic usage instantiates a metonymic relation in which a more substantial or tangible aspect of self stands in for a less salient and more intangible aspect of self. The *zi gei* (自己), in the idiomatic sense, is a pool of resources that the individual can draw on, and an individual's use of their resources and skillsets is

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<sup>33</sup>According to Roth and Dicke (2005), the correlation between general properties of the brain and the development of intelligence is crucial and applies to all animal intelligence including the human's. Other cognitive properties such as imitation, theory of mind, grammatical-syntactical language and consciousness also play significant roles but whether they are unique to human intelligence development remains controversial.

conceptualized through eating, instantiating again the USING UP RESOURCES AS EATING FOOD metaphor. This conceptualization of SELF physicalizes the assessable features that compose an individual's self-schemas into the individual's biological construct or physical being, seemingly incorporating the psychological perception of 'who I am' with the more tangible notion of 'my physical existence'.

The cultural informants appear to largely take for granted the idiomatic meanings of *sik nou* (食腦) and *sik zi gei* (食自己). They do not seem to be fully conscious of the underlying interrelated metaphoric or metonymic constructs, despite the seemingly apparent figurative collocation of the constituents.

Four cultural informants were asked to provide their interpretation of the two idioms. For *sik nou* (食腦), all informants associated the constituent *nou* (腦) with intelligence. Interestingly, older informants tended to directly equate the human brain to the entity of intelligence. Collocations such as “*clever and agile brain*” (CZK [GZ-M-57], PC18) and ‘*cunning brain*’ (WSC [GZ-F-57], PC19) came up in their interpretations. They did not seem to perceive brain and intelligence as two related but distinctive entities, hence a lack of consciousness of the metonymic mapping between them. Younger informants, on the other hand, often made links between the brain and intelligence through the idea of active thinking. For example, CSM [GZ-F-29] explained that “‘*nou*’ represents thinking with the brain power, and it extends to mean wisdom” (PC20), and JHJ [HK-M-22] reasoned that “‘*sik nou*’ is to use your brain to think, and people who ‘*sik nou*’ are good at thinking and therefore, smart” (PC21). Although with limited informant input, we cannot deduce if interpretations of the two idioms are age sensitive, it does seem that younger speakers’ logical thinking between brain and intelligence demonstrate their high initiative as the agent to take control of their intellectual ability. This also represents a possibly high extent of consciousness of the cultural metonymy SEAT OF INTELLIGENCE STANDS FOR INTELLIGENCE in *sik nou* (食腦) among younger speakers.

For *sik zi gei* (食自己), all consulted informants immediately identified *zi gei* (自己) as referring to an individual's ‘*nang-lik* (能力, ability)’ without making any connection to the constituent's semantic aspect of ‘physical self’, despite the salient priming of the eating verb *sik* (食). This possibly indicates that Cantonese speakers do not overtly elicit the metonymy PHYSICAL SELF STANDS FOR SCHEMATIZED SELF when processing the idiom, which attests that the belief of an individual's physical self being the representation of their self-competence and self-capability is part of the Cantonese worldview and does not manifest as figurative or metonymical to Cantonese speakers.

Regarding Cantonese speakers’ consciousness of the conceptualization of *sik* (食) in the two idioms, there also seems to be generational variation. The two cultural informants in their 50s were hesitant to provide elaborate interpretations of *sik* (食), especially the one in *sik zi gei* (食自己). Informant CZK [GZ-M-57] gave the following



response after a long pause, “*this is simply the straight-forward Cantonese way to talk about self-reliance, ‘sik’ here means ‘to rely on’, it’s just how it’s understood in Cantonese*” (PC18). The two younger informants at their 20s, on the contrary, both acknowledged the existence of a figurative process of *sik* (食) in both idioms, even though the acknowledgement does not represent a full awareness about the cross-domain mapping between eating and using resources. A symbolic response comes from JHJ [HK-M-22]— “*‘sik’ here is an analogy to ‘consume’ and ‘spend’, because when you sik faan [eat rice], you ‘consume’ the faan. When you sik nou, you are also consuming your brain power, although it’s not really eating with your mouth. So yes, I think the ‘sik’ here is a type of figure of speech like analogy*” (PC21).

Overall, the collected materials and cultural informant responses show that Cantonese speakers may not be overtly conscious of the conceptualizations underlying the idioms *sik nou* (食脑) and *sik zi gei* (食自己), albeit a seemingly higher degree of consciousness among younger speakers. The extent of figurativeness of the two idioms appears relatively low to the speakers, which situates the related cultural conceptualizations closer to the end of cultural metaphor/metonymy along the conceptual processing continuum.

#### 5.1.1.4 Cultural Metonymy: AN EATING EXPERIENCE STANDS FOR A NON-EATING EXPERIENCE

Other than denoting specific aspects of living, living experiences in general can also be illustrated by *sik* idioms. The idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米) analyzed in section 4.1.1.1 is one such example. Another example is *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味, have eaten and returned to seek the taste). The expression originally is a compliment given to a gourmet dish, implying that the food is tasty and worth having again. Extended from its original meaning, *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) describes the scenario where an individual re-engages in an enjoyable activity in the hope of replicating the pleasant experience. Interestingly, when used idiomatically, the connotation of the expression can shift from complimentary to pejorative. For example, in (59), the idiom implies the criticism against the repetition of a risky investment.

(59) 佢 买 股票 赢 咗 啲 钱 之后, **食过 返 寻 味**, 点知 跟住 就 输 晒 啲 钱。

*Keoi maai gu-piu jeng zo di cin zi-hau, **sik-gwo faan cam mei**, dim-zi gan-zyu zau syu saai di cin*

After he bought in the stock and won some money, he **went for a second try** (lit. ate and returned for the taste), who knows, he then lost all the money. (CD03)

Underlying *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) and the previously discussed *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米) is a cultural metonymy AN EATING EXPERIENCE STANDS FOR A NON-EATING EXPERIENCE. In the case of *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味), the emotional satisfaction gained from the non-eating experience is

perceived through the element *mei* (味, taste) in the eating experience. This particular cognitive establishment is culturally special to the Chinese cognition.

Linguistically, *mei* (味) is partially equivalent to ‘taste’ in English. Conceptually however, *mei* (味) and its counterpart *wei* (味) in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) appear to be a more productive source domain than ‘taste’ in English. Ye (2007) investigates the cognitive mechanisms underlying Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) expressions with *wei* (味) and identifies three major semantic categories. One of such categories is ‘thinking’, in which a symbolic instance is *huiwei* (回味, recall the taste). *Huiwei* (回味), according to Ye (2007), has the gastronomically grounded prototypical meaning “to recollect the pleasant flavor of” (p.117), which then “extends to other pleasant experiences that are non-gastronomic in nature” (p.117). The collocation *faan cam mei* (返寻味, return to seek the taste) in the Cantonese idiom *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) has a highly similar semantic extension to *huiwei* (回味), except that when *huiwei* (回味) stresses the mental recalling of a pleasant experience, *faan cam mei* (返寻味) focalizes the actual action to relive the experience. The conceptual mapping from taste to emotional satisfaction is underlying this semantic extension of *mei* (味) and is synesthetic, revealing the metaphorical entailment THE EMOTIONAL SATISFACTION IN AN EXPERIENCE AS THE GOOD TASTE IN FOOD.

Cantonese speakers are fully conscious of the underlying cultural conceptualizations. This is reflected in the speakers’ autonomy in interpreting and using the expression *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) in a non-eating context. Ten cultural informants aged 22-60 were consulted about using the expression in a non-eating context. All informants agreed that *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) can be used as a figurative/rhetorical device and their interpretations of the idiomatic meaning were highly consistent. They all clearly pointed out that ‘*sik*’ in the discussed context refers to experiencing something unrelated to eating. Some informants also provided sample sentences covering a wide range of non-eating topics, showing their flexibility in using the idiom (see PC22 in Appendix 5 for selected responses and sample sentences made by cultural informants). Through manipulating the literal and idiomatic meanings of the expression, Cantonese speakers can produce creative puns to incorporate layers of meanings in one sentence. For instance, example (60) is taken from a news article about cultural activities in a fast-food restaurant in Guangzhou. The expression *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味) here implies satisfaction in both the dining and the cultural experiences.

(60) 这是 广府 文化 主题 餐厅, 这里的 传统 韵味 总能 让人 “**食过返寻味**”!  
*Ze si Gwong-fu manfaa zyu-tai caan-teng, ze-leoi dik cyuntung wan-mei zung nang joeng jan “sik-gwo faan cam mei”!*

This is a Cantonese-culture-featured restaurant, the traditional taste (implying the taste of both the food and the Cantonese culture) here always makes people **come back for more** (lit. have eaten and returned to seek the taste). (OA29)

### **5.1.2 Cultural Conceptualizations of AN AGENTIVE ACTION through PROACTIVE SIK**

The conceptual model developed between living and eating is motivated by its experiential basis. Other than the living-eating idioms analyzed in section 5.1.1, there are also eating-related idioms of which the idiomaticity is developed from the actual act of food consumption. Newman (2009a) examines the linguistic behavior of ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ verbs cross-linguistically, and observes that “[f]igurative extensions of ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ constructions... have their sources in the simultaneous but distinct aspects of the acts of eating and drinking: the sensation of the consumer while ingesting and the destruction or disappearance of the entity consumed” (p.1). He distinguishes the figurative extensions of eating and drinking into agent-oriented and patient-oriented extensions. Specifically, he points out that the agent-oriented image focusing on the eater’s *internalization* of food and the patient-oriented image highlighting the *destruction* of the eaten food are two powerful mechanisms that motivate the figurative extensions (J. Newman, 1997, 2009a). Ye (2010) concurs with Newman but maintains that in the case of many Sinitic dialects, both the role of the eater (i.e., the agent) and the destructive effect posed on the foodstuffs (i.e., the patient) from the act of food consumption should be integrated to fully understand the figurative eating expressions.

In Cantonese, a number of eating-related idioms with idiomatic meanings related to agentive actions reflect the aspects of food consumption discussed above. Particularly, the eater’s agentive internalization of food is used to conceptualize an individual’s proactivity in taking actions, and the dominance and control the eater asserts over the foodstuffs is drawn on to conceptualize the action taker’s confidence and certainty in taking actions. On the other hand, the combination of the eater’s active food ingestion and the effect cast upon the foodstuffs motivates the conceptualization of taking advantage of a person or a situation.

#### **5.1.2.1 Cultural Metaphor: PROACTIVELY ACTING AS SIK**

Among the selected idioms, there are seven that reflect the conceptualization of proactive action taking through the agentive aspect of food internalization in the acts of eating and drinking. Various eating-related keywords including *sik* (食), *jam*<sub>1</sub> (饮<sub>1</sub>), and *lou* (捞) are key constituents in these idioms. These idioms are listed in Table 5.1 below. Although motivated by similar sources, the seven idioms involved can express very different semantic connotations and have distinctive pragmatic usages.

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*jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤, drink the first sip of soup)

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*sat sik mou ci ngaa* (实食冇齙牙, be sure to eat without sticking to the teeth)

---

*saat sik* (煞食, eat unreservedly)

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*tau sik m mat zeoi* (偷食唔抹嘴, not wipe the mouth after sneak eating)

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*lin zap dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋, mix and eat even the sauce)

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*sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴, eat the salted fish, have tolerance for the thirst)

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*sik saang coi* (食生菜, eat lettuce)

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Table 5.1 Seven eating-related idioms that reflect the conceptualization of proactive action taking through agentic food consumption

The first three idioms emphasize the initiative the action taker asserts and/or the advantageous position they secure in action taking. The idiomaticity is centered around the agentic eating action represented by the eating-related keywords. *Jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤, drink the first sip of soup) describes a bold and adventurous action of attempting something new and securing the initial advantages and rewards only available for the pioneers. Cantonese speakers use the idiom to highlight the courage or proactivity of the action taker, and/or to imply the entitled benefits resulting from the leading action. In example (61), the idiom emphasizes the morning exercisers' entitlement to be the first visitors to the Guangzhou Museum on its first re-open day after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic city lockdown.

(61) 广博 今天 恢复 开放 部分 区域 晨运 市民 饮 “头啖汤”

*Gwong-Bok gam-tin fui-fuk hoifong boufan keoi-wik San-wan si-man jam “tau-daam-tong”*

Guangzhou Museum today reopened part of its exhibition areas, morning exercising citizens **became the first visitors** (lit. drank the first sip of soup) (OA30)

On a different note, the idiom *sat sik mou ci ngaa* (实食冇齙牙) highlights the positive mental state of the action takers. Literally, the expression describes the certainty that an eater will leave no food residues stuck in their teeth when eating. Action takers or planners often use the idiom to express reassurance that they are in full control of and have complete confidence in their action. Example (62) shows how this idiom is used in the popular Guangzhou TV show *Ngoi-loi Sik-fu Bun-dei Long* ('Out-comer Daughter-in-laws and Local Sons').

(62) 我 谗 呢次 去 美国 实食冇齙牙 嘞喂!

*Ngo nam ni-ci heoi Mei-gwok sat-sik mou ci-ngaa laak-wai!*

I think this time going to America **is a secured deal** (lit. is sure to eat without sticking to the teeth). (AV10)

*Saat sik* (煞食), compared to the above two idioms, has a more complex connotation. The literal composition may be roughly translated as ‘to fiercely eat’ or ‘to unreservedly eat’, which shows the collocating feature of a verb phrase. However, it manifests the quality of an adjective when it is used idiomatically. If an entity or an individual is described as ‘*saat sik* (煞食)’, they have an outstanding positive quality that gives them a competitive advantage over their peers. In different contexts, *saat sik* (煞食) can imply different specific positive qualities/attributes, of which some common ones include ‘effective’, ‘leading’, ‘winning’, ‘invincible’, ‘competitive’, ‘attractive’, and ‘popular’. Sometimes, the meaning of *saat sik* (煞食) may entail an integrated package of more than one of these attributes. For instance, in example (63) below, *saat sik* (煞食) can be interpreted as a combination of most attributes mentioned above. The speaker may simply be expressing a general idea here that a singer with both good appearance and good skills is *the best* among their peers.

(63) 做 歌手 要 兼顾 声 色 艺, 唱得 睇得 就 最 煞食 啦!

*Zou go-sau jiu gim-gu seng sik ngai, coeng-dak tai-dak zau zeoi saat-sik laa!*

To be a singer, (you) need to take care of your voice, your look, and your skills, it is **the best** if you both look well and sing well. (OA31)

All three idioms introduced above incorporate a conceptual connection between the agentive aspect of eating and the proactive attitude and/or execution in action taking, instantiating a cultural metaphor PROACTIVELY ACTING AS (GENERIC) *SIK*. This cultural metaphor, however, is reflected in the three idioms with differently nuanced entailments.

The PROACTIVELY ACTING metaphor is the most salient in *jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤). The cultural source of the metaphor in this idiom is related to the importance of soup in the Cantonese diet. The Lingnan areas of China where most Cantonese reside have a hot and humid climate, and the residents are susceptible to various climate-related illnesses. Traditionally, Cantonese adjust their food intakes and daily routines in accordance with the weather changes to maintain their wellbeing<sup>34</sup>. Soups made with seasonal ingredients are believed to be an effective remedy to hydrate and nurture the human body and balance it against the heat and humidity. Cantonese also believe that a bowl of soup is most flavorful and nutritious when consumed hot and fresh, and they often consume it immediately when served. On this account, the initiative of being the first person to take in a sip of

<sup>34</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century Cantonese scholar QU Dajun provided a detailed documentation of the *Lingnan* climate and its relation to illnesses in Volume one, Section *Zhang* (瘴, the heat and humidity that causes illnesses) in his historical sketch *Gwong-Dung San-Jyu* (广东新语, ‘New Notes of Guangdong’). As he recorded, *Lingnan* is a place where excessive heat accumulates, and summer humidity gathers. The climate there often triggers heat-related diseases that are different from the cold-related ones, and therefore, whoever that enters the *Yue* (Canton) area needs to be very careful with their diet and daily routine [嶺南之地, 愆陽所積, 暑溼所居……其候多興暑症類而絕貌傷寒, 所謂陽淫熱疾也。故入粵者飲食起居之際不可以不慎] (Qu, 1997, p. 23).

soup develops a symbolic meaning of acting promptly and securing the best benefits. The eating-related verb for soup consumption is *jam*<sub>1</sub>(*饮*<sub>1</sub>). The specific cultural metaphor, therefore, is ACT PROMPTLY AS *JAM* THE FIRST SIP OF SOUP. And the initial advantages resulted from the prompt action is conceptualized implicitly through the assumed nutrients taken in from the first sip of soup.

The salient conceptualization in *sat sik mou ci ngaa* (实食冇齙牙), on the other hand, is the action taker's assertive control and confidence in the action, conceptualized through the aspect of eating where the eater has full control over the foodstuffs. Apart from the PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* metaphor instantiated in the constituent *sik*, another entailed cultural conceptualization is HAVING FULL CONTROL AND CONFIDENCE IN AN ACTION AS INTERNALIZING FOODSTUFFS SMOOTHLY WITHOUT LEAVING RESIDUES. This idiom is an outstanding example of how Cantonese speakers draw on their full knowledge of agentive eating to illustrate both their physical ability and emotional state in carrying out an action. Such knowledge includes both the eater's act of internalization and the sensational certainty of the eater's ability to manipulate the foodstuffs during the eating process.

Cantonese speakers are conscious of the idiomaticity of *jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤) and *sat sik mou ci ngaa* (实食冇齙牙). They commonly identify the two expressions as metaphors and consider using eating-related expressions to describe aspects of action taking as an innate aspect of the Cantonese language. For example, an informant WSC [GZ-F-57] pointed out that *jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤) can only be used in a metaphorical sentence and *sat sik mou ci ngaa* (实食冇齙牙) is a metaphor for certainty about an action. Particularly, she emphasized that the Guangzhou people always talk about eating and drinking, and many metaphors as such are very well-put and easy to understand (see PC23 in Appendix 5).

However, as much as they acknowledge the metaphorical nature of the expressions, Cantonese speakers do not seem to regard the two idioms as pure figures of speech that reflect creative cross-domain mappings. Instead, they see the idiomatic meanings as simply further extensions of the literal meanings, which are rooted in their cultural experience of food consumption. In the case of *jam tau daam tong* (饮头啖汤), it is the cultural belief in 'drinking' soup that motivates the meaning making process. Such reasoning of the idioms is commonly seen in both cultural informant responses and collected materials (see e.g., PC24, PC25, and AV08 in Appendix 5). Therefore, the underlying conceptualizations of these two idioms are culturally harnessed and Cantonese speakers' acknowledgement of their figurativeness is mostly developed from their cultural understanding of eating as an agentive action rather than their consciousness of the cross-domain mappings.

As for *saat sik* (煞食), the underlying eating-related conceptualization is more complex and implicit due to its conversion from a verb phrase to an adjective when in idiomatic use. The proactive eating aspect is manifested mainly through a 'fierce' and 'unreserved' eating manner, represented by the constituent *saat* (煞). This eating

manner is then used as the source to conceptualize an outstanding or winning factor in an entity or an individual. The idiomaticity, in other words, is achieved not through direct mapping from the agentive eating action itself, but through the attributive similarity between the *out-showing* ‘aggressiveness’ of the eater when eating and the *eye-catching* quality that makes an entity or an individual stand out from the crowd. Therefore, even though the PROACTIVELY EATING AS *sik* metaphor is embedded in the idiom and serves as the conceptual base of the conceptualization, it is a specific attributive entailment of the metaphor that motivates the cross-domain mapping.

There seems to be a lack of consciousness of the idiom’s conceptual motivation. Literature documenting the expression’s idiomatic development is hardly found, and no evidence in the collected materials shows Cantonese speakers relate the idiomatic meaning of *saat sik* (煞食) to its literal construct. Seven cultural informants were consulted regarding their understanding of the idiom. All of them showed a clear understanding of the meaning and usage of *saat sik* (煞食) but admitted that they did not comprehend the linguistic collocation of the two constituents (see PC26 in Appendix 5 for the consultation records). This result may indicate that many Cantonese speakers do not recognize *saat sik* (煞食) as figurative. In this case however, the expression’s lack of figurativeness from the speakers’ perspective does not directly result from the speakers’ unconsciousness of the underlying conceptualization. It is more primarily due to the meaning loss in the expression’s linguistic composition caused by its word class conversion, which obscures the source domain at the conceptual level and thereby impedes the clarity of the mapping process.

The other four eating-related idioms in Table 5.1 have meanings associated with moral judgements, executive advice, or subjective evaluation of an action. The semantic focus of these idioms is usually not solely on the eating-related keywords. Other constituents also contribute crucially to the essential meaning making.

*Tau sik m mat zeoi* (偷食唔抹嘴) has the literal composition that illustrates a derogatory scenario where an individual forgets to wipe their mouth after sneak eating. This negative connotation is then mapped onto the action taking domain to describe a situation where a person leaves behind evidence after acting unethically, or to criticize a person who is not ashamed of their unethical actions. Example (64) shows one instance of this idiom in use. In this example, an adverb *gingjin* (竟然, have the impudence to) is inserted as part of the collocation, revealing the potential syntactical flexibility of the idiom.

(64) 盜版 侵权 乜 都 齊 偷食 竟然 唔 抹嘴

*Dou-baan cam-kyun mat dou cai tau-sik gingjin m mat-zeoi*

Copyright piracy, infringing acts and all sorts of such misconduct, (they) **even had the impudence to leave evidence of their unethical doings** (lit. they even had the impudence to not wipe their mouths after sneak eating). (OA32)

*Lin zap dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋) is an example of an eating-related expression that originally had a positive meaning but then deteriorated as it became idiomatic. This expression outlines an eating behavior where the eater takes in all edible substances of a dish, not even wasting the remaining sauce. Originally, the expression was a compliment given to a delicious dish. As it developed its idiomaticity however, it is now used to describe an action that exhausts all resources and options without leaving any room for maneuver. Depending on the context, the idiom may imply an unfavorable opinion of the speaker, such as in the case of example (65). This example also shows the flexibility of the idiom to insert an attributive *dinsi* (电视, television) for *zap* (汁, sauce) in its constituency.

(65) 系唔系 要我熄电视啊! 一望住 个电视就呆晒型 噉! 连 电视汁 都

*Hai-m-hai jiu ngo sik din-si aa! Jat mong-zyu go din-si zau ngoi-saai-jing gam! Lin din-si-zap dou*  
捞埋! 以后食电视啦, 唔好食饭 啊!

*lou-maai! Ji-hau sik din-si laa, m-hou sik faan aa!*

Do I have to turn off the TV! As long as you look at the TV, you are in daze! **You watch whatever that is on it** (lit. you eat even the sauce of the TV)! Eat the TV in the future, don't eat *faan*! (PM05)

Eating-related idioms that give executive advice or a subjective evaluation of an action usually have a neutral connotation. These idioms often talk about the consumption of common Cantonese foodstuffs in their literal composition and develop their idiomatic meanings from Cantonese conventional knowledge about the special qualities or features of the foodstuffs involved. *Sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴) and *sik saang coi* (食生菜) are examples of such idioms.

*Sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴 eat the salted fish, bear the thirst) describes the experience of eating the Cantonese salted fish<sup>35</sup> (see Image 5.1 for a Cantonese salted fish).

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<sup>35</sup> The Cantonese salted fish *haam-jyu* (咸鱼) is sea fish preserved or cured with salt and hung dry under the sun. It is extremely salty and a very common side dish for a rice-based meal in especially the grassroot Cantonese households. The Cantonese salted fish used to be a common dish for the poor and it nowadays has become a prominent cultural symbol associated with the grassroot Cantonese culture (see Z. Lo, 2019). Threadfin fish and Mackerels are among the most common fish used to make the Cantonese salted fish.





Image 5.1 A Cantonese salted fish: a mackerel ‘*haam-jyu*’

The idiomaticity is developed from Cantonese speakers’ familiarity with the thirst-inducing high salinity of the Cantonese salted fish. Cantonese speakers use the idiom to give a counsel that a person should be responsible for the consequences of their own choices and actions. Example (66) reflects the idiom in use.

- (66) 来回 4 个钟 送 女友 返 元朗 鸭脷洲 男: 爱情 呢家嘢, 食得  
*loi-wui sei-go-zung sung neoi-jau faan Jyun-Long Ngaap-Lei-Zau naam: ngoi-cing ne-gaa-je, sik-dak*  
 咸鱼 抵得 渴  
*haam-jyu dai-dak hot*

Taking 4-hour round trips to accompany girlfriend to return to Jyun-Long, Man from Ngaap-Lei-Zau: For love, **you choose it then you take the responsibilities that come with it** (lit. you eat the salted fish you should bear the thirst) (AV09)

As for *sik saang coi* (食生菜), the idiom is uttered when one considers the execution of a particular action as extremely easy and effortless. The idiomaticity is associated with *saang coi* (生菜, lettuce), a crispy vegetable that can be processed and ingested with ease. *Sik saang coi* (食生菜) is most commonly used in a collocated form *ji gwo sik saang coi* (易过食生菜, easier than eating lettuce) or *sik saang coi gam ji* (食生菜咁易, as easy as eating lettuce). Example (67) reflects this usage.

- (67) 哇! 破纪录易过食生菜 啊!  
*Waa! Po geiluk ji gwo sik saang-coi aa!*

Wow! Breaking a record is so easy (lit. is easier than eating lettuce)! (OA33)

The above four idioms all instantiate the PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* metaphor through the eating-related keywords. However, the distinctive constituents that collocate with the eating-related keywords in these idioms have evoked different conceptual entailments that highlight different salient aspects of the PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* metaphor in the respective idioms.

For the three idioms that have *sik* (食) as the eating-related keyword, the conceptual saliency lies in the aspects represented by the attributive and objective constituent collocated with *sik* (食). For example, *tau sik m mat zeoi* (偷食唔抹嘴) reflects the cultural conceptualization of an unethical action through *tau sik* (偷食, sneak eating), instantiating the specific cultural metaphor CARRYING OUT AN UNETHICAL ACTION AS SNEAK EATING. The unethicity of the action is conceptualized through the shady nature of such eating action, represented by the constituent *tau* (偷, sneak, steal). The other components *m mat zeoi* (唔抹嘴) highlight the absence of the hygienic cleaning process after eating, implying the possibility of food residues or grease left on the mouth, and through which Cantonese speakers conceptualize the traits of evidence left behind an unethical action.

For *sik dak haam jyu dei dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴) and *sik saang coi* (食生菜), the specific foodstuffs consumed contribute to the specific conceptualizations of agentive actions. The Cantonese salted fish, or *haam-jyu* (咸鱼) in *sik dak haam jyu dei dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴) can cause thirst with its heavily savory taste. This attribute is mapped onto the domain of action taking, constructing the conceptualizations of POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES OR CONSEQUENCES OF AN ACTION, instantiating the specific conceptual entailments TAKING AN ACTION WITH POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES OR CONSEQUENCES AS EATING HAAM-JYU and BEARING THE DOWNSIDES OR CONSEQUENCES OF AN ACTION AS PUTTING UP WITH THE THIRST CAUSED BY EATING HAAM-JYU. Such entailments manifest the ‘affected agent’ aspect of proactive eating. As for *sik saang coi* (食生菜), the crispy texture and easy-to-process quality of lettuce is captured to conceptualize the effortless and easy-to-accomplish quality of an action, instantiating the TAKING AN EFFORTLESS ACTION AS EATING SAANG-COI culture metaphor.

*Lin zap dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋) has its semantic and conceptual focus on the special Cantonese eating act of *lou* (捞). As introduced in section 5.1, *lou* (捞) refers to the eating act of mixing the ingredients or sauce (i.e., *zap* 汁) of a dish with the staple and eating the mixture<sup>36</sup>. Many Cantonese consider the sauce of a dish as containing the essential flavor of the dish ingredients. It is, therefore, very common for Cantonese eaters to consume not only the solid ingredients of a dish but also the sauce produced through the cooking process, i.e., *lou zap* (捞汁, mix and eat the sauce). *Lou zap* (捞汁) also reflects the Cantonese value of frugality, commonly illustrated through the

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<sup>36</sup> Another idiom discussed in this study that has the eating-related constituent *lou* (捞) is *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭), as analyzed in section 4.1.3, Chapter Four.

conventional frame of thoughts on food— *sik dak m hou saai* (食得唔好嘅), i.e., ‘do not waste what is edible’<sup>37</sup>. With this understanding, *lou zap* (捞汁) is the act of treasuring food without leaving any waste. These cultural beliefs embedded in *lou zap* (捞汁) are mapped onto the domain of action taking and facilitate the cultural conceptualization MAKING THOROUGH USE OF THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES AS *LOU ZAP*, a more specific instantiation of the PROACTIVELY ACTING AS *SIK* metaphor.

The negative connotation of the idiom *lin zap dou lou mai* (连汁都捞埋) however, is not expressed directly through *lou zap* (捞汁), but through the Cantonese correlative structure *lin...dou...mai* (连.....都.....埋, *even...is involved in the action*). The *lin...dou...mai* (连.....都.....埋) syntactic structure elicits a progressive semantic relation that emphasizes the involvement of all alternatives including the most peripheral or unlikely ones in an extreme scenario. The extreme stage of progression implied in the correlative structure facilitates the entailed conceptualization of ELIMINATING ALL ROOM FOR MANEUVER OR NEGOTIATION in the idiom, and hence its negative connotation.

Cantonese speakers are likely to be highly conscious of the conceptualizations underlying the four idioms discussed above and consider them as highly figurative. For *sik dak haam jyu dei dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴), this consciousness is shown in Cantonese speakers’ active use of the expression as an aphorism about action taking. The excerpt in example (68) is taken from a news commentary concerning customer complaints about the service of a Chinese budget airline. It manifests the speaker’s conscious conceptual mapping between the source and target domains underlying the idiom. The commentator explicates the idiom’s meaning and establishes his argument through clearly projecting the metaphorical reference of ‘*haam-jyu*’ and ‘thirst’ on the discussed budget airline and its service. Confident knowledge of the idiom’s conceptualization is reflected in his argumentation.

(68) 食得咸鱼 抵得渴.....“咸鱼”是你自己选择的结果，没有人逼你吃，  
*Sik dak haam-jyu dai dak hot... ‘haam-jyu’ si nei zigei syunzaak dik gitgwo, mut-jau jan bik nei hek,*  
 吃了之后“口渴”就 没得 怨了。.....选择了咸鱼，就要忍受 咸鱼 那  
*hek liu zi-hau ‘hauhot’ zau mut-dak jyun liu. ... syunzaak liu haam-jyu, zau jiu jan-sau haam-jyu naa-*

<sup>37</sup> *Sik dak m hou saai* (食得唔好嘅) is often uttered when Cantonese speakers intend to finish eating the leftover food or make use of the sauce of a dish to make a new dish. It represents a common consensus against wasting food in the Cantonese communities. The *sik dak m hou saai* (食得唔好嘅) frame of thoughts is often found as paratexts cooccurring with the idiom *lin zap dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋) or in a textual context about the processing of food sauce, i.e., *zap* (汁). The following are two examples of the cooccurrence:

- i) 拌面仲有个特色食法，食晒所有面，可以免费追加一口白饭，连汁都捞埋，食得唔好嘅！(There is a special way to eat the dry sauce noodles. Eat all the noodles and ask for a free serve of plain rice, mix it with the sauce and eat even the sauce, don’t waste anything edible!) (OA34)
- ii) 剩咗啲辣汁唔好浪费，整个猪大肠加翼尖，又一餐，食得唔好嘅。(Don’t waste the remaining spicy sauce, use it to cook pig intestines and chicken wings, you then have another meal, don’t waste anything edible.) (SM03)

种 令 人 不 快 的 味 道。.....你 选 择 春 秋 航 空， 就 要 接 受 “春 秋  
zung ling jan bat-faai dik meidou... nei syunzaak Ceon-Cau-Hong-Hung, zau jiu zip-sau ‘Ceon-Cau  
服 务”  
fukmou’

*Sik-dak-haam-jyu-dai-dak-hot*, ‘haam jyu’ was your own choice, no one forced you to eat it, so you don’t get to complain about the thirst afterwards. You chose the *haam-jyu*, then you would need to tolerate its unpleasant taste. You chose the Spring Airlines, then you would need to accept the ‘Spring Service’. (OA35)

For the other three idioms, there are abundant examples of their creative rhetorical use in communicative contexts. Examples (69), (70) and (71) below show respectively how Cantonese speakers deliberately elicit both the literal and idiomatic meanings of the three expressions in their meaning making process. In example (69), the speaker criticizes people who cheat on their partner through a euphemistic pun of *tau sik m mat zeoi* (偷食唔抹嘴), constructing a discursive context seemingly related to sneak eating but in fact inferring the cheating behavior. Example (70) manifests a similar strategy, where the speaker builds an argument about the proper handling of available resources by first talking about the eating behavior *lou-zap* (捞汁) and then extending to the idiomatic connotation of *lin zap dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋). Example (71) on the other hand, represents an instance where the speaker literally talks about lettuce planting but intrigues readers with humor by deliberately activating the literal and idiomatic connotations of *ji gwo sik saang coi* (易过食生菜). The speakers’ full consciousness of the idioms’ underlying conceptualizations is evidenced by these clear pragmatic manipulations in the three examples.

(69) 偷 食， 固 然 系 唔 啱， 亦 都 唔 系 话 偷 食 完 抹 咗 嘴 就 OK。 之 不 过， 呢 个  
*Tau-sik, gu-jin hai m ngaam, jik dou m-hai waa tau-sik jyun mat-zo zeoi zau OK. Zi-bat-gwo, ni-go*  
世 界 有 种 人， 唔 单 止 偷 食 唔 晓 得 抹 嘴， 仲 自 己 留 低 罪 证 断 正。  
*saigaai jau zung jan, m-daan-zi tau-sik m hui-dak mat-zeoi, zung zigei lau-dai zeoi-zing tyun-zing.*  
Sneak eating is certainly not right, and it’s not like wiping your mouth after sneak eating will make it ok. However, in this world, there is a kind of people who not only don’t care to wipe their mouth after sneak eating (fig. cheating on their partner), but they also leave behind evidence of their crime to get themselves caught. (OA36)

(70) “连 汁 都 捞 埋” ..... 喺 自 己 嘅 私 家 饭 台， 捞 唔 捞 汁 系 个 人 选 择， 不 过 喺  
*‘Lin-zap-dou-lou-maai’...hai zigei ge si-gaa faan-toi, lou-m-lou-zap hai gojan syunzaak, batgwo hai*  
饭 桌 之 外.....连 “捞 汁” 都 要 考 虑 吓 人 哋， 噉 样 先 至 啱。  
*faan-coek zi-ngo...lin ‘lou-zap’ dou jiu haauleoi haa jan-dei gam-joeng sinzi ngaam.*

'*Lin-zap-dou-lou-maai*'...at your own private meal table, whether you *lou-zap* or not is your personal choice, but outside the meal table, it is only righteous that even '*lou-zap*' (fig. making use of available resources) requires considering the others. (OA37)

(71) 种生菜, 易过食生菜!

*Zung saang-coi, ji gwo sik saang-coi!*

Planting lettuce is easier than eating lettuce (fig. planting lettuce is very easy)! (OA38)

### 5.1.2.2 Cultural Metaphor: TAKING ADVANTAGE OF SOMEONE/SOMETHING AS *SIK*

The essence of the proactive eating process is the eater's active intake of substances that constitute the foodstuff. As the foodstuff is consumed, the constituting substances also undergo a process of destruction. The two aspects combined may motivate the conceptualization of taking advantage of an individual or a situation, as instantiated in some Cantonese eating-related idioms. These idioms not only illustrate the agentive action taking, but also imply the impact the action has on the patient. The following section analyzes five such idioms, including *sik dau fu* (食豆腐, eat tofu), *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食, only eat what is ripe), *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车, have eaten the opponent's chariot), *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底, eat with the bowl upright then flip it upside-down), and *sik zyu soeng* (食住上, go upward while eating).

The majority of these idioms have derogatory connotations, describing actions that gain advantages over a person through harming their interests or depriving their power. For example, *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) means to unethically take advantage of others, which nowadays often restrictively indicates sexually harassing someone. *M suk m sik* (唔熟唔食) exposes the villainy of a fraud that deceives an acquaintance, and *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车) often describes an excessively overpriced business offer or an unreasonable request that extorts resources from someone. And *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底) is similar to the English idiom *bite the hand that feeds one* and describes the despicability of accepting help then betraying the helper. Cantonese speakers often use these four idioms to condemn someone's inappropriate or socially intolerable behavior and to rebuke them for their moral deficiency. Examples (72) to (75) show how these four idioms are used in context, respectively.

(72) 阿龙 真系 一条 淫虫, 成日 食 靚女 豆腐。

*Aa-Lung zan-hai jat-tiu jam-cung, sing-jat sik leng-neoi daufu.*

Aa-Lung really is a lewd person, (he) **takes advantage of pretty women** (lit. eats pretty women's tofu) all the time. (CD04)

(73) 老友 唔熟唔食 女子 买 奶粉 冇 57 万

*Lou-jau m-suk-m-sik neoi-zi maai naaifan mou 57 maan*

Old friend **scammed old friend** (lit. only ate what was ripe), woman lost \$570,000 buying baby formula (OA39)

(74) 情人节 系 星期日, 简直 系 食咗人只车

*Cing-jan-zit hai singkei-jat, gaanzik hai sik-zo-jan-zek-geoi*

Valentine's Day is on Sunday, this is simply **an extortion of the boyfriends' money**<sup>38</sup> (lit. eating their chariot) (OA40)

(75) 滞留 湖北 的 香港男 返港 受访 诋毁 内地! 网民 闹爆:

*Zai-lau Wu-Bak dik Hoeng-Gong-naam faan-gong sau-fong daiwai noi-dei! Mong-man naau-baau:*

*食碗面 反碗底!*

*sik wun-min faan wun-dai!*

Hubei-stranded Hong Kong man slandered the mainland at interview after returning to Hong Kong! Netizens bashed (the action) harshly: **(he) was helped and now bit on the helping hand** (lit. ate with the bowl up-right then flipped it upside down). (OA41)

The only idiom that expresses comparatively more neutral connotations is *sik zyu soeng* (食住上). The idiom emphasizes the importance of taking advantage of the circumstances and proceeding with actions. When used in context, the idiom does not encode an overtly deprecatory tone. Although it can be used to describe an opportunistic action or behavior, the semantic highlight of the idiom is the action taker's capability of making the most out of the current situation. For instance, the idiom is used in example (76) below to illustrate how a Hong Kong TV channel dives into the center of public concern and launches its new program about pandemic preventions amid the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak.

(76) *ViuTV 食住上 开新节目 《今日疫情》 教授 消毒 抗疫 奇招*

*ViuTV sik-zyu-soeng hoi san-zitmuk Gam-Jat-Jik-Cing gaau-sau siu-duk kong-jik kei-ziu*

ViuTV **took advantage of the current circumstances** (lit. went upward while eating) and launched a new program 'Pandemic Today', teaching audience special tricks for sanitization and pandemic prevention. (OA42)

All the above idioms instantiate the cultural conceptualization of TAKING ADVANTAGE through the proactive aspects of eating. The central eating-related cultural metaphor embedded in the idioms is TAKING ADVANTAGE AS *SIK*, which itself is an elaboration of the cultural metaphor AN AGENTIVE ACTION AS PROACTIVE *SIK*. Other than the central cultural metaphor sourced from *sik*, there are also specific metaphorical entailments of the cultural

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<sup>38</sup> This is the title of an online article about how men have to spend a fortune to arrange a romantic date for their girlfriends on Valentine's day, which in the year 2015 happened to be on a Sunday. The author of the article used the idiom to illustrate the excessive cost of a Sunday celebration.

metaphor and subordinate-level conceptualizations at work. Together, the inter-related metaphorical mechanisms motivate the idiomatic meanings.

The TAKING ADVANTAGE AS *sik* metaphor is most salient in the idiom *sik zyu soeng* (食住上). It is the essential conceptual mechanism embedded in the idiom. The other two constituents *zyu* (住) and *soeng* (上) also conceptually contribute to the idiom's idiomaticity. *Zyu* (住) is a Cantonese particle that signifies the continuation of an action. *Sik zyu* (食住) literally indicates the continuation of *sik* while another action takes place. The collocation highlights how the eater asserts ongoing control over the foodstuff being eaten. With the particle *zyu* (住), a metaphorical entailment of grasping the current circumstances and keeping them in control for advantageous use is instantiated. As such, the idiom reflects a specific cultural metaphor ASSERTING STEADY CONTROL OVER THE SITUATION AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF IT AS MAINTAINING THE EATING ACT WHEN DOING SOMETHING ELSE. On the other hand, *soeng* (上) literally means 'up' and in the idiom, it implies a subsequent action taken according to the situation, which instantiates an orientational cultural metaphor A PROCEEDING ACTION AS UP. This metaphor facilitates the conceptual aspect of PROACTIVITY in the idiom. It is also to a high degree, consistent with the near-universal orientational metaphor FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1980), in that the upward spatial orientation is the source to conceptualize something that is going to happen.

For *sik dau fu* (食豆腐), *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食), and *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车), the consumed foodstuffs seem to be the conceptual source of their semantic negativity. The destruction of these foodstuffs can also imply the negative impact the action may bring to the patient. For example, *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) features the food tofu, which has a very fragile texture. This quality of tofu may have been a source to conceptualize the vulnerability of an individual, who is exploited or sexually assaulted and thus severely impacted or psychologically 'broken' because of the action. This metaphorical entailment then facilitates the derogatory perception of an action taker who takes advantage of a defenseless target through the cultural schema of eating tofu. Thereby, embedded in *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) are the more elaborate cultural conceptualizations of taking advantage of someone, such as UNETHICALLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A (VULNERABLE) INDIVIDUAL AS EATING TOFU and SEXUALLY HARASSING A PERSON AS EATING TOFU, which then motivate the idiomatic meaning of *sik dau fu* (食豆腐)<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> On a side note, there are several popular folk theories found about the source of the expression's idiomaticity. Some believe that the expression originated from the plot of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese literary work *Ging-Mung-Tai* (惊梦啼, 'Scream from A Nightmare'), in which men were attracted to the heroine, a charismatic female tofu seller, and would approach her using the excuse of purchasing tofu. Another record claims that the expression originated from a funeral custom of eating tofu soup in Ningbo (宁波) city of China. Strangers who snuck into the funeral reception attempting to get a free meal were referred to as 'the ones that come for the tofu soup' (吃豆腐羹的), and eventually, the expression developed its current idiomatic meaning. Analyzing the idiom based on these speculations, the conceptual foundation can be metonymic, i.e., TOFU STANDS

For *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食), the idiom originally is the second part of a Cantonese allegorical saying, the full version of which is *wong pei syu liu go—m suk m sik* (黄皮树鹈哥——唔熟唔食), i.e., ‘the mynah bird on a wampee tree—it only eats the ripe fruit’. The idiom’s negative connotation is closely related to a Cantonese/Chinese cultural keyword *suk* (熟). The adjective *suk* (熟) in modern Cantonese (and Chinese in general) has two basic senses largely equivalent to the English words ‘cooked’ and ‘ripe’, respectively referring to the status of food and fruit. It has developed across time a few more extended meanings through semantic broadening. One of such meanings is related to familiarity in interpersonal relationships. *Suk-jan* (熟人, ‘cooked/ripe person’, acquaintance<sup>40</sup>) and *saang-bou-jan* (生暴人, ‘raw/unripe abrupt person’, stranger) captures the dichotomous fundamental social categories of interpersonal relationships in the Cantonese communities. This dichotomy also holds true in the broader Chinese social context (see e.g. Ye, 2005). The connotation of *suk-jan* (熟人) is metaphorical and culturally constrained. According to Zhou (1999), it is commonly found in the ethnically Han communities and cultures that social categories are in accordance with food-related categories and manifest complex metaphorical relation to the latter. The metaphorical relation between raw/cooked food (or ripe/unripe fruit) and interpersonal strangeness/familiarity, Zhou (1999) explicates, is among the most fundamental instances. A recent study also suggests that for Chinese speakers, the metaphorical mapping between raw/cooked food and strangeness/familiarity is unconscious and automatic (Deng et al., 2017).

Chinese societies are rooted in a dynamic network of *suk-jan* (熟人) and develop through establishing *guanxi*<sup>41</sup>. Accordingly, there are tacit codes and rules people follow in social interactions, especially with *suk-jan* (熟人). The violation of these codes and rules are perceived as challenging and threatening the fundamental construct of trust and morality in the society. The action of deceiving a *suk-jan* (熟人) signified by the constituents *sik* (食) and *suk* (熟) in the idiom *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食) thereby, reflects a Chinese cultural schema DECEIVING A PERSON ONE KNOWS IS IMMORAL AND A DAMAGE TO THE ESTABLISHED *GUANXI*, AND THUS IS SOCIALLY INTOLERABLE. This cultural schema sets the derogatory tone of the idiom. Furthermore, the Cantonese double negation structure *m X m Y* (唔……唔……, not...not...) emphasizes the action *Y* will only be taken if a condition *X* is fulfilled. This constituent structure of *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食) implies that the deceiving action is intentionally targeting a *suk-*

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FOR THE TOFU SELLER, and TOFU STANDS FOR A FREE MEAL AT A FUNERAL RECEPTION. Regardless of the origin, *dau fu* (豆腐) is likely the source of the idiom’s negative connotation.

<sup>40</sup> The *saang/suk* (生/熟) dichotomy of interpersonal relationships in Cantonese and other Chinese varieties is distinctive from the English categories of ‘stranger’ and ‘acquaintance’. The two pairs are different in both their conceptual structures (i.e. dualistic for the former and linear for the latter) and their conceptual content (Ye, 2017). The ‘stranger’ and ‘acquaintance’ are applied as roughly equivalent translations to the Cantonese ‘*saang*’ and ‘*suk*’.

<sup>41</sup> We unpack this ideological aspect in Chapter Six.



*jan* (熟人), which in the Cantonese cultural context, is an even more severe violation of the social codes, and hence facilitates an even more salient negativity in the idiomatic meaning.

In terms of *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车), the ‘foodstuff’ involved is an inedible item. This is because the original meaning of the expression is not directly eating-related. It describes a tactic in a Chinese chess game, with which one captures and ‘eliminates’ the opponent’s chariot piece, i.e., the *geoi* (车) piece. The constituent *sik* (食) here means ‘to eliminate’, which is extended from its basic eating-related sense of destructing the foodstuff through ingestion (and as implied, the foodstuff disappearing from sight). Accordingly, the conceptual relation between the idiomatic meaning and the eating-related *sik* (食) in this idiom is fundamental but less direct compared to the others.

The idiomatic meaning of *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车), i.e., extorting all possible advantages from someone, is closely related to the role of a chariot in Chinese chess. In Chinese chess, the chariot is often considered as the strongest piece because it can move freely across the chess board with very few restrictions. Capturing and eliminating the opponent’s chariot would often significantly weaken the opponent’s combat effectiveness and secure one’s chance in winning the game. This tactical knowledge from Chinese chess is mapped onto the domain of advantage taking and facilitates the expression’s idiomatic meaning. Conceptually, the biggest financial capacity or the most advantageous leverage an individual holds is conceptualized through the chariot in Chinese chess. Stripping it off from someone is conceptualized through the tactic of removing the opponent’s chariot in the game. Importantly, the idiom also implies the significant loss of benefit or advantage of the patient, mapped from the loss of winning chance of the ‘chariot-deprived’ opponent, and hence the negativity in its connotation.

Different from the significant role the foodstuff plays in establishing the semantic negativity in the above idioms, the idiomatic meaning of *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底) is facilitated by two sets of underlying conceptualizations. The conceptualization of TAKING ADVANTAGE is embedded in the first part of the idiom *sik wun min* (食碗面), ‘eat from an up-right bowl’. The aspect of proactive eating is drawn upon to conceptualize the behavior of (willingly) accepting help, i.e., ‘taking advantage’ of the offered assistance, and the help provided is represented by the foodstuff the bowl contains. The underlying cultural conceptualization here is (WILLINGLY) ACCEPTING HELP AS EATING FROM A BOWL WITH FOOD, which is a specific-level elaboration of the TAKING ADVANTAGE AS *sik* metaphor. The second part *faan wun dei* (反碗底), ‘flip the bowl upside-down’, is the source that facilitates the idiom’s negativity. For the Cantonese, it is a taboo to put a bowl upside-down on the dining table. Allegedly, it is related to a traditional ritual in ancestor worship where the offerings for the deceased are retrieved from a flipped container. Putting a food container upside-down on the dining table thereby, is seen as a vicious dead curse to the eaters. This conventional belief is the source of the cultural conceptualization underlying *faan wun dei* (反碗底) in the idiom. The embedded cultural schema here is the schema of BETRAYAL: BETRAYING

A PERSON IS AS VICIOUS AND UNACCEPTABLE AS CASTING A DEAD CURSE TO A LIVING PERSON. In the idiom *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底), the conceptualizations of ACCEPTING HELP and BETRAYAL are simultaneously at work, connected and instantiated through the semantic components centering around the handling of *wun* (碗), i.e, the bowl, in an eating-related activity. The strong sentiment of contempt incorporated in the idiom is elicited through the two sets of extremely contradictory cooccurring conceptualizations.

Similar to many idioms sourced from agentive eating as discussed in section 5.1.2, Cantonese speakers clearly acknowledge that the five idioms analyzed here are not about actual eating. In other words, they are aware of the idiomaticity of the expressions. Nevertheless, Cantonese people seem to show different degrees of consciousness regarding the cross-domain conceptualizations underlying these idioms, which may imply that they acknowledge different degrees of figurativeness in the idioms.

For idioms such as *sik zo jan zek geoi* (食咗人只车) and *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食), Cantonese speakers are highly conscious of the cross-domain conceptualizations, especially the ones relating to *sik*. This is due to the glaring semantic priming of the constituents *geoi* (车) and *suk* (熟), which respectively contextualize the former expression in the setting of Chinese chess, and elicit the cultural knowledge about social rules relating to *suk-jan* (熟人) in the latter. These two idioms thereby, are clearly figurative from the speakers' perspective.

Similarly, Cantonese speakers are fully conscious of the underlying conceptualizations of *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) and consider the expression highly figurative. The cultural informant responses show that they are aware of and can clearly explicate the TAKING ADVANTAGE AS *SIK* metaphor. The explication is also highly unanimous. All consulted informants used the word *haai jau* (揩油), referring to the action of exploiting something for one's own benefits, to explain the connotation of *sik* (食) in the idiom. The cultural informant responses also show that Cantonese speakers most commonly relate the idiomatic meaning of *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) to sexual harassment particularly to a female. They attribute the development of this semantic saliency to the tender and fragile texture of tofu, associating this texture to feminine human features such as soft skin, gentle look, or feminine voice, and through which they conjure the perception of the vulnerability of a female sexual harassment victim (see PC27 in Appendix 5 for the cultural informant responses). It is also noticeable that the semantic negativity implied in *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) nowadays seems to have been lightened, and the idiomatic connotation is gradually elevated from derogatory to almost neutral. There are instances of using this idiom in casual jokes and creative advertising in the collected materials. The semantic elevation of *sik dau fu* (食豆腐) may be evidence of the changing moral landscape in contemporary China, which will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

For *sik zyu soeng* (食住上), Cantonese speakers are all highly knowledgeable about the meaning and usage of the idiom. The cultural informant responses also show Cantonese speakers' consciousness of the cross-domain

mapping between having control of the food when eating and taking advantage of the circumstances. For example, DL [GZ-F-39] observed that “‘*sik-zyu*’ is like you are eating the food, so you occupy and take hold of the food, this is like you take hold of the advantageous position and proceed to do something” (PC28); and JHJ [HK-M-22] pointed out that “‘*sik-zyu*’ means you are biting into something, which extends to grasping a chance to do something” (PC28). However, there seems to be a lack of evidence in both the collected materials and cultural informant responses to verify the speakers’ consciousness of the cultural metaphor A PROCEEDING ACTION AS UP. It appears that the informants tacitly understand *soeng* (上) as taking proactive actions and do not feel the need to clarify its meaning. This suggests that the orientational metaphor A PROCEEDING ACTION AS UP may be a worldview metaphor that reflects Cantonese speakers’ innate perception of action taking as an upward movement. Resultatively, *sik zyu soeng* (食住上) may only be partially figurative to the speakers, and the figurative usage is derived mainly from the constituent *sik* (食).

Different from the salience of *sik* (食) in the other idioms, Cantonese speakers’ conceptual processing of *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底) is quite distinctive. All consulted cultural informants agreed that the expression is figurative, but seemed to completely ignore the collocation of *sik wun min* (食碗面). After briefly acknowledging the semantic component from *sik wun min* (食碗面), i.e., ‘receiving help’, all informants provided responses that were almost solely focused on explicating the constituent *faan* (反, to flip, to make upside-down) in *faan wun dei* (反碗底). They mostly considered that the expression’s idiomaticity is motivated by the ‘flipping’ and ‘turning’ motion represented by *faan* (反), which does not necessarily relate to the patient of this action, i.e., *wun* (碗, bowl) in this idiom<sup>42</sup>. Some interpretations of *faan* (反) include “to flip upside-down (反转)” (CMK [GZ-F-36]), “to turn the face (反面, the Cantonese verb for ‘betray’)” (DL [GZ-F-38]), “a guy whose bone grows the opposite way (反骨仔, the Cantonese noun for ‘traitor’)” (PDW [GZ-F-61]), and “betray (背叛)” (JZ [GZ-F-32]). The ‘vicious curse’ connotation of *faan wun dei* (反碗底) discussed earlier is also mentioned by several informants, but the interpretations only associate with “bad luck” (CZK [GZ-M-59]) or “bad manner” (JHJ [HK-M-22]) and have a significantly lighter tone compared to its ‘vicious dead curse’ origin (see PC28 in Appendix 5 for cultural informant responses on the idiom). Cantonese speakers’ conceptual processing of the idiom shows that the fundamental or central conceptualization underlying an idiom may not necessarily be the most powerful one that

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<sup>42</sup> Cantonese speakers’ lack of conceptual focus on the semantic relation between *faan* (反) and *wun* (碗) is also reflected in a few cultural informants’ random and unconscious shift between the ‘correct’ idiom form *sik wun min faan wun dei* (食碗面反碗底) and a popular coexisting mis-collocated variant *sik wun dei faan wun min* (食碗底反碗面). The occurrence of the latter probably is due to the speakers’ frequent slips of tongue when the idiom is in use, and this variant form is semantically unintelligible. However, it does not seem to impede the interlocutors’ meaning making when used. This shows that the semantic focus of this idiom in meaning making is mostly on the constituent *faan* (反) instead of its collocation with the other lexical elements.

facilitates the speakers' comprehension. Of all the underlying conceptual mechanisms, the ones that are more culturally salient to the speakers may be the main vehicle the speakers ride on to make sense of the idiomatic connotation. This finding also attests to the Cultural Linguistics understanding of cultural cognition as a complex adaptive system (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a).

### 5.1.3 Cultural Conceptualizations of UNWILLINGLY BEARING/RECEIVING through PASSIVE SIK

Other than the agent-oriented proactive aspect of ingestion, eating can also be perceived as a process of the human body receiving and accepting the food items. In this perspective then, the agent of the eating act is also the recipient of the foodstuffs, which in turn can affect the agent both physically and psychologically. The eater is thereby, as Næss (2009) terms it, an “affected agent” of the eating act. Ye (2010) summarizes multiple ways the eating activity may affect the eater, and identifies conceptualizations of experiencing, enduring, and suffering in the *chi*-related (*eating*-related) expressions in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua). She emphasizes that the majority of figurative eating expressions in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) accentuate a negative connotation and eating is conceptualized as an unpleasant experience for the agent in general.

In Cantonese, there is also a small group of eating-related idioms that draw on the ‘affected agent’ semantic aspect of food consumption and reflect the conceptualizations of actions that involve or imply an ‘enduring’ or ‘incurring’ process. We label these idioms as *passive-eating* idioms in contrast to the agentive-eating idioms discussed in section 5.1.2. Similar to the many figurative eating expressions in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua), these idioms usually convey the idea of the agent undergoing an experience of receiving something unpleasant or bearing something unwillingly or passively. Interestingly, we have found from the survey result that the Cantonese passive-eating idioms are losing their popularity and vitality. Among the seven relevant idioms in the fundamental idiom pool, only two are acknowledged by the survey participants as known and frequently used in daily life. Other than the possible diachronic reasons for which these idioms naturally fall out of use, there may also be sociocultural factors that accelerate their obsolescence. These factors are further explored in Chapter Six. The following section elaborates on the two passive-eating idioms that still remain active, i.e., *sik sei maau* (食死猫, eat the dead cat) and *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋, eat the zero chicken egg).

*Sik sei maau* (食死猫) is often uttered to describe a situation where one unwillingly takes the blame or is made the scapegoat for the faults of others. Example (77) is how the idiom is used in context.

(77) 因为 天气 恶劣, 啲 航班 全部 delay 晒。结果 啲 空姐 食 晒 死猫,  
Yan-wai tinhei ngok-lyut, di hong-baan cyunbou dilei saai. Gitgwo di hung-ze sik saai sei-maau,  
系 噉 俾 乘客 闹。

*haigam bei sing-haak naau.*

All flights were delayed due to bad weather. In the end, the flight attendants **became the scapegoats** (lit. ate the dead cat) and had to take the heat from angry passengers. (CD05)

It is unclear how *sik sei maau* (食死猫) developed its idiomatic meaning, but one common supposition in record is that the literal composition is closely related to an almost obsolete Cantonese dietary habit of eating civet cat meat. Civet cats have a long history as a meat source in the Cantonese diet. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Cantonese scholar QU Dajun recorded in detail different types of civet cat and the flavors of their meat (Qu, 1997). Eating civet cat revitalized as a gourmet convention in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Guangdong, China<sup>43</sup>. Local restaurants sometimes used cat meat as a substitute to civet cat meat. A dish made with dead cat meat was not desired by the Cantonese who demand freshness of the ingredients, and “people familiar with the animal’s taste... would figure out that they had been given subpar meat” (A. Lo, 2019). It is believed by many that the idiomatic connotation of *sik sei maau* (食死猫) was developed from this dietary custom, extended from ‘being fed undesirable dead cat meat’ to ‘being forced to take the blame’.

The other idiom *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋) is a jocular euphemism for someone getting a zero in a test or an exam. A few variant forms include *sik ling daan* (食零蛋, eat the zero egg) and *sik daan* (食蛋, eat the egg). The idiom gives a creative illustration of the number zero for it resembles the shape of a chicken egg. The idiom is commonly used in casual contexts with an embedded hint of humor or sarcasm. One example is shown in (78) below.

(78) 吃 鸡蛋 很 健康, 但 也 要 适可而止, 而 同学们 当然 不想 考试  
*Hek gai-daan han gin-hong, daan jaa jiu sik-ho-ji-zi, ji tung-hok-mun dong-jin bat-soeng haau-si*  
“食蛋” 了。

‘*sik-daan*’ *liu.*

It is healthy to eat eggs, but it is also important not to exceed the limit (of intake), and of course students would not want to “**eat the egg**” in the exam. (OA43)

In this idiom, the unpleasant experience refers to the experience of receiving and facing failure. The failure per se is indexed by the image of the number zero, creatively referred to as ‘the zero chicken egg’. Although the

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<sup>43</sup> Allegedly, the civet cat dish first regained its reputation at the domestic ‘snake banquets’ (*se-jin*, 蛇宴) hosted by the noted Cantonese gourmet KONG Hungyun (1864-1952). As recorded by Pearl Kong (1926-2014), Kong’s granddaughter, civet cat was a major meat dish served at the banquet, following a thick soup made with snake meat, and the civet cat used for cooking was freshly slaughtered before the meal [“‘龙虎凤’似乎是蛇宴的三部曲。龙是蛇，虎是狸，凤是鸡……果狸是押席大菜，跟在蛇羹之后……”] (Kong, 2010, pp. 71,73).

experience here is not always forced upon the agent as the one in *sik sei maau* (食死猫), the idiom implies negative emotions triggered by the failure. Therefore, the metaphorical eater in this *sik* idiom is also an affected agent.

Both *sik sei maau* (食死猫) and *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋) instantiate the cultural metaphors UNWILLINGLY BEARING/RECEIVING AS *sik* and THE BEARER/RECIPIENT AS THE FOOD EATER. More specifically, embedded in *sik sei maau* (食死猫) is the cultural metaphor BEARING FORCED-UPON OR UNDERSERVED BLAME AS EATING A DEAD (CIVET) CAT based on the above introduced etymological supposition. The sentiment of grievance felt in an unfair treatment by the recipient is conceptualized through the discontentment triggered in the eater when being offered subpar meat. Furthermore, *sik sei maau* (食死猫) is often collocated with verbs such as *wat* (屈, to force), *zat* (枳, to cram), and *jiu* (要, to demand). These verbs all imply the act of forcing something onto the recipient regardless of the recipient's unwillingness. These common collocations magnify the semantic aspect of unpleasantness cast upon the eater, i.e., the agent in the *sik sei maau* (食死猫) experience, making the metaphorical entailment UNWILLINGLY BEARING more salient.

On the other hand, underlying the idiom *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋) is an example of creative cultural conceptualization. The idiomaticity is motivated by a combination of the culturally salient perception about 'agent-affected' eating and a creatively established connection based on the similarity between two unrelated entities. From the 'affected agent' perspective, the negative psychological effect an unpleasant eating experience may have on the eater is captured and mapped into conceptualizing the negative emotions one develops from experiencing failure. The cultural metaphor instantiated here is RECEIVING AN UNWANTED OR UNSATISFACTORY RESULT AS HAVING AN UNPLEASANT EATING EXPERIENCE. Also, a creative conceptual connection is constructed between the number zero and the chicken egg via the resemblance in shape, constructing the rhetorical metaphor THE NUMBER ZERO AS A CHICKEN EGG. Moreover, a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, i.e., THE FINAL RESULT (THE 'NUMBER ZERO') STANDS FOR THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE OF FAILURE is also entailed in the conceptual processing.

The figurativeness of the two idioms appears to be very clear to Cantonese speakers. When asked about the two expressions, all informants shared almost identical understanding of the idiomatic meanings and acknowledged that the 'actual' meanings of the two items are completely different from what they literally describe. However, Cantonese speakers' respective knowledge about the metaphorical or conceptual foundation of the two idioms is very different. For *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋), it seems that Cantonese speakers are highly conscious of the underlying conceptualization and can clearly address the rationale of the rhetorical creativity. All consulted informants provided a clear explanation of the resemblance between the number zero and an egg, which clearly identifies that the cultural conceptualization is a product of active linguistic creativity. They also acknowledged the connection between eating and receiving when asked about the connotation of *sik* in the idiom. This awareness is further supported by the reanalysis of the idiom identified from the collected materials.



(79)

(PI05)

Caption: 食鸡蛋 包 你有 零蛋

*sik gai-daan baau nei mou ling-daan*

eating chicken eggs guarantees you do not have zero egg (OA44)

The cartoon image and its caption in example (79) were collected from an online article about the benefits of eating eggs. The cartoon image is inspired by *sik ling gai daan* (食零鸡蛋) but illustrates an ‘opposite’ meaning. It portrays a humorous relation between eating chicken eggs and getting full scores in a test, represented by the served eggs on the test paper, and the full-score symbol ‘100’ on the test-taking cartoon figure’s headband<sup>44</sup>. This connotation is further explicated in the caption. ‘*Sik ling gai daan*’ (食零鸡蛋) is not directly elicited but implicitly involved and reanalyzed with an added and implied literal connotation of ‘not eating chicken egg (i.e., the number of the eaten egg is zero)’. The reanalysis of the idiom is evidence of Cantonese speakers’ manipulation of its linguistic elements for meaning making purposes, proving their complete knowledge of its underlying conceptualizations.

For *sik sei maau* (食死猫), most informants immediately related the constituent *sik* to the sensation of internalization and forced eating, such as “swallow into the stomach” (CZK [GZ-M-59]), “forced eating” (JHJ [HK-M-21]), and “labor and discomfort in forced swallowing” (PDW [GZ-F-60]). They then associated the discomfort of forced eating to the grievance and injustice suffered by a scapegoat. For example, JZ [GZ-F-32]

<sup>44</sup> A cultural informant JZ [GZ-F-32] also observed that the layout of the eggs and the spoon in the cartoon image resembles the figure ‘100’. This is also a creative play with the resemblance in shape between the number zero and a chicken egg.

explained, “*this expression gives out a sense of passiveness. No one will voluntarily eat a dead cat, so the whole process is forced, it is like the scapegoat is wronged*”. And CZK [GZ-M-59] elaborated, “*you swallow this thing into your stomach, and you say no more about this, it is like you swallow the blame and keep your mouth shut*”. These reflections show a conscious understanding of the conceptual processing of the UNWILLINGLY BEARING AS *SIK* metaphor (a full transcript of the responses is recorded in PC29 in Appendix 5).

However, although all cultural informants acknowledged the idiomaticity of *sik sei maau* (食死猫) and identified the underlying conceptualization of *sik*, none managed to pinpoint why ‘an undeserved blame’ is literally described as ‘a dead cat’. The speculative association with civet cat consumption was not brought up at all. It seems that *sik sei maau* (食死猫) represents an example of ‘dead metaphor’ in the traditional views of idiom. Nonetheless, all consulted informants also responded that they have always taken the expression’s idiomaticity for granted and have never given the expression’s literal construct a second thought. These responses verify the argument of psycholinguists such as Gibbs (1980, 1985, 1986) and Giora (2003), i.e., the speakers do not need to process the literal meaning to understand the meaning of an idiom. Several did conjecture the possibility of a connection between the dreadful sensation of taking undeserved blame and the revolting thought of eating (dead) cat meat (e.g., SJT [GZ-F-32], JZ [GZ-F-32], and PDW [GZ-F-60]), revealing perhaps an increasing resistance toward the cat eating convention among Cantonese nowadays. These speculative opinions indicate that speakers have the potentials to establish ‘operational’ conceptual mechanisms to ‘make sense’ of an idiom if need be and their ‘instant’ interpretation may reflect the up-to-date development of the cultural cognition, reflecting its nature as a dynamic system (Sharifian, 2011). This operational conceptual mechanism is also a further rebuttal of the ‘dead metaphor’ view of idiom.

#### **5.1.4 Cultural Metonymy: *SIK* STANDS FOR THE OUTCOME OF *SIK***

In addition to the passive-eating idioms discussed above, there are also other eating idioms that rely on the ‘affected agent’ semantic aspect of eating as the cognitive vehicle to develop their idiomaticity. Instead of emphasizing the unpleasantness or coercion the agent encounters from an eating experience, these idioms highlight the agent’s behavioral change resulted from their internalization of the foodstuffs in the idiomatic meanings.

The conceptual processing of these idioms is metonymic, where the eating behavior exhibited in the eater stands in for the outcome or consequences of eating. Two idioms in the study are found to reflect this particular conceptual construct. The first one is *sik sak mai* (食塞米), which is analyzed in section 4.1.1.2, Chapter Four. As previously discussed, Cantonese speakers identify a cause-effect connection between eating jamming *mai* and the eater’s unsatisfactory development in intelligence. The other idiom is *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药, have eaten gunpowder).



Cantonese speakers use this idiom to describe someone who manifests irritable facial expressions or executes aggressive behavior triggered by anger. An example of the idiom in use is shown in (80).

(80) 你食咗火药呀? 个样 黐爆爆 噉 嘅。

*Nei sik-zo-fojoek aa? Go joeng nau-baau-baau gam gei.*

Have you eaten gunpowder? You look angry. (OA45)

Conceptually, the idiom reflects the Cantonese conceptualization of ANGER. Across languages, anger is most commonly conceptualized through heat. Lakoff (1987) argues that ANGER IS HEAT is “the most general metaphor for anger” (p.383) and it is attributed to the folk theory of physiological effects triggered by anger such as increased body heat and internal pressure. Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) synthesize the cultural model of anger and identify the central metaphors ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER and ANGER IS FIRE in American English. They also specify some salient metaphorical entailments including HEAT, INTERNAL PRESSURE, and THE POTENTIAL AND DANGER OF EXPLOSION. Yu (1995) concurs that ANGER IS FIRE is a salient metaphor in Chinese (Putonghua), although instead of fluid, Chinese more commonly conceptualize anger through gas, or *qi* (气), highlighting the INTERNAL PRESSURE entailment.

The conceptualization of ANGER underlying the Cantonese idiom *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药) aligns with the ANGER IS HEAT conceptual model and is inter-related to the ANGER IS FIRE metaphor reflected in Chinese (Putonghua) expressions, mapping the heat and fire elements from the domain of gunpowder to the domain of anger. Particularly, the idiom reflects a cultural metaphor ANGER AS AN EXPLOSIVE. This specific metaphor entails all three major metaphorical aspects of the ANGER-HEAT conceptual model, and highlights especially, the entailment THE POTENTIAL AND DANGER OF EXPLOSION. The salience of this entailment is reflected in the semantic focus of the idiom, which features the aggressive expressions and behavior provoked by anger, implying the irritable status of an angry or hot-tempered individual.

In conceptualizations of emotion, the human body is generally conceptualized as a container of the emotion. This also holds true in the case of *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药). However, the development of anger here is perceived through the consumption of a heating/explosive substance i.e., gunpowder, from outside the human body ‘container’, rather than through the inflation of gas or increased temperature of hot fluid within the ‘container’ as commonly seen in other languages. In other words, heat is accumulated from an outside source and ‘placed’ in the human body ‘container’ through *sik* (食), and the verbal or behavioral exhibition of anger is attributed to this process of *sik* (食). The embedded cultural schema is EATING AN EXPLOSIVE CAUSES ANGRY BEHAVIOR. *Sik zo fo*

*joek* (食咗火药) thereby manifests a cultural metonymy *SIK STANDS FOR THE OUTCOME OF SIK*, which is a culturally-constructed specification of the CAUSE FOR EFFECT conceptual metonymy<sup>45</sup>.

The collocation of ‘*sik* + gunpowder’ may predict a high extent of figurativeness of the idiom *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药), as gunpowder is an inedible item. This is supported by the frequency with which Cantonese speakers use this expression as part of a simile; in everyday speech, *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药) commonly appears in collocation with the simile marker *gam* (噏, as such) or *houci...gam* (好似.....噏, it is like...as such), constructing a figure of speech that compares an individual’s angry outbursts to the imaginary outcome of eating gunpowder, as shown in example (81) below. This usage, as several informants pointed out, is a case of witticism (ZJT [GZ-F-33]) or a type of ridicule that implies a sense of scolding (JZ [GZ-F-32]) (see PC30 in Appendix 5).

(81) 从 咨客 到 服务员 到 部长, 每个人都好似食咗火药噏.....服务  
Cung zi-haak dou fuk-mou-jyun dou bou-coeng, mui-go jan dou **houci sik-zo fo-joek gam**...fukmou  
态度 好 晦气。  
taaidou hou fui-hei.

From the receptionist to the servers to the manager, everyone **was like they had eaten gunpowder**, the service manners were very unpleasant. (FC07)

The frequent occurrence of the simile structure proves that Cantonese speakers are conscious of the underlying metaphorical relation and its embedded rhetorical creativity. Furthermore, the five consulted cultural informants also clearly addressed the rhetorical cause-effect relation between consuming an explosive and exhibiting irritable behavior implied in the figure of speech, suggesting they are well aware of the *SIK STANDS FOR THE OUTCOME OF SIK* metonymy (see PC30 in Appendix 5).

In all, *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药) can be classified as a figure of speech Cantonese speakers created from their cultural understanding of anger. The conceptualizations of ANGER AS AN EXPLOSIVE and EATING AN EXPLOSIVE CAUSES ANGRY BEHAVIOR are instances of creative cultural conceptualizations. It is important to note that such creativity has its base in the cultural belief of human nature and temperament, which is in fact partially rooted in Confucianism. This aspect is further addressed in Chapter Six.

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<sup>45</sup> The accentuation of internalizing or ingesting a substance from an outside source is also seen in the earlier mentioned *sik sak mai* (食塞米). The same metonymy *SIK STANDS FOR THE OUTCOME OF SIK* is also embedded in *sik sak mai* (食塞米), but the specific cultural schema in this case is EATING JAMMING MAI CAUSES UNSATISFACTORY DEVELOPMENT IN INTELLIGENCE.

### 5.1.5 Cultural Metonymy: *SIK* SUBEVENT STANDS FOR THE WHOLE EVENT SEQUENCE

Eating together, or *commensality*, is a significant social practice in the Cantonese communities. Cantonese frequently eat together on various occasions for various purposes. In many social events, from the more special ones including festival celebrations, funeral services, and wedding ceremonies to the more common ones like friends gathering and romantic dates, commensality is an indispensable arrangement. Commensality as a common social practice allows Cantonese speakers to conceptualize a complete and multi-faceted event sequence through the subevent of food consumption. Two eating-related idioms in this study, i.e., *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥, have eaten the night *zuk*) and *jam dak bui lok* (饮得杯落, be able to drink a glass down) reflect this conceptualization.

The idiom *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥) illustrates a common event related to Chinese martial arts practice in the 1930s in Guangzhou, where the proteges and the master shared a meal of *zuk* together after their late-night practice. The expression later on extended to refer to people who have received training and are skillful in Chinese martial arts. With such connotations, the idiom most commonly appears in the title for articles featuring Chinese martial arts and people who practice them. Example (82) below reflects this usage. *Sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥) can also mark out an individual who is experienced and skillful in their profession, not necessarily in Chinese martial arts. For instance, in example (83), the idiom is used to describe someone who has prior knowledge and previous experiences in acting.

(82) 关子聪: 食过 夜粥 嘅 功夫 人生

*Gwaan-zi-cung: Sik-gwo je-zuk ge gungfu jansaang*

*Gwaan-zi-cung: A Kung-fu life that has undergone professional training* (lit. has eaten the night *zuk*) (OA46)

(83) 食过 夜粥 都 唔 掂! 小 占 《造星II》 被 花姐 狠 批

*Sik-gwo je-zuk dou m dim! Siu-zim Zou-Sing-II bei Faa-ze han pai*

[Performance] not satisfactory even **with professional experiences** (lit. had eaten the night *zuk*)! Siu-zim harshly criticized by Faa-ze in ‘Star Making II’ (OA47)

The other idiom *jam dak bui lok* (饮得杯落) developed its idiomatic meaning in a similar way. The eating-related keyword *jam* here is *jam*<sub>2</sub>, referring to the drinking of liquor. This expression delineates the moment of having alcoholic drinks in a celebration banquet and has extended to refer to an accomplishment that is worth celebrating. The idiom also incorporates the relief and satisfaction felt toward such accomplishment. An example of the idiom in use is presented in (84).

(84) 个仔 考试 一 百 分, 依次 真 系 饮 得 杯 落。

*Go zai haau-si jat-baak fan, ji-ci zanhai jam dak bui lok.*

My son had a 100% in his exam, this time is really **worth celebrating** (lit. able to drink a glass down). (OA48)

Looking at the semantic development of these two idioms, we can see a similar pattern where an event of food consumption is given a symbolic value to represent an inter-related sequence of events (hereby referred to as an *event sequence*) it associates with. For *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥), the event of sharing a meal of *zuk* is part of the event sequence of ‘a Chinese martial arts practice session’. as represented in figure 5.3 below. The event sequence per se consists of multiple subevents that represent different stages of interaction between the master and the proteges in the martial arts practice session. It also includes a more implicit side-tracked event of *zuk* preparation, inter-related to the subevent of late-night *zuk* consumption that concludes the event sequence.

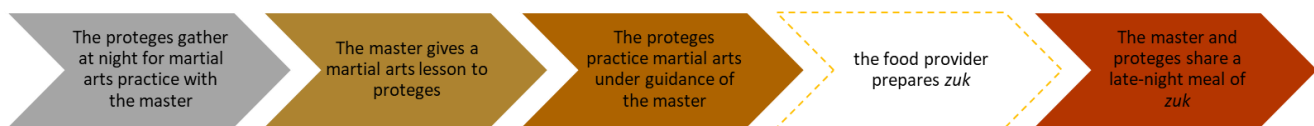


Figure 5.3 The event sequence of ‘a Chinese martial arts practice session’

Similarly, there is an event sequence complex with multi-faceted subevents inter-connected through the main theme of ‘celebration for accomplishment’ as incorporated in and represented by the idiom *jam dak bui lok* (饮得杯落). As shown in Figure 5.4 below, this event sequence complex can include subevents such as ‘the action of accomplishment’, ‘the celebration arrangement’, ‘launching a celebration banquet’, and ‘consuming food and drinks at the celebration banquet’. Each subevent may also be an event sequence itself and includes a more-specific layout of subsequent events. Within this complex construct of event sequence(s), a subevent of ‘having alcoholic drinks for celebration’ is placed under the spotlight and assumes the symbolic role of representing the whole event sequence complex. The pleasurable satisfaction felt from drinking alcohol in this case, is also transited to realize the emotional satisfaction for accomplishment in the idiomatic meaning.

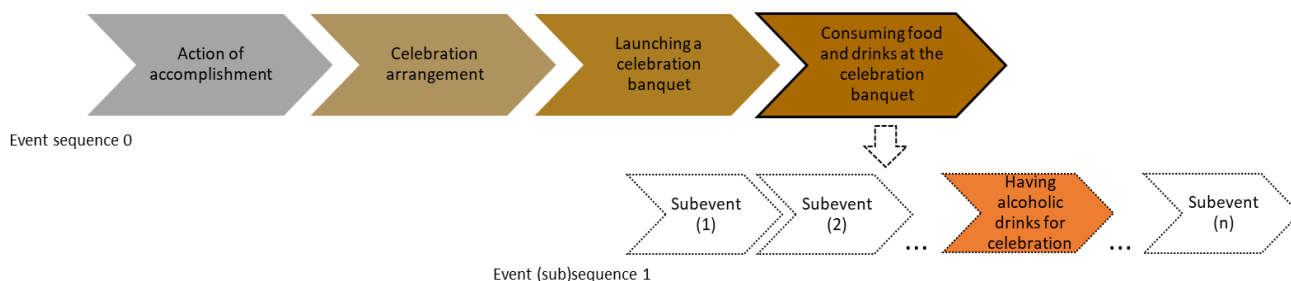


Figure 5.4 The event sequence complex of ‘a celebration for accomplishment’

The conceptual mechanism at work that motivates the above processes of idiomatic development is a metonymic relation SUBEVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT. Specifically instantiated in the two idioms is a Cantonese cultural metonymy *SIK/JAM* SUBEVENT STANDS FOR THE WHOLE EVENT SEQUENCE. The conceptual salience of the *sik/jam* subevents is likely the result of the important social and cultural meanings of eating and drinking in the Cantonese speech communities. Food and drink can build and maintain social relationships and can also manifest as unspoken standards for moral judgement. Therefore, the event of commensality can naturally come to represent an event sequence it is contextualized in.

Cantonese speakers are likely to be highly conscious of the figurativeness of the two idioms. As members of the Cantonese communities, they are well aware that there are symbolic meanings behind the consumption of a meal of *zuk* at night and a glass of drink at a celebration banquet beyond the literal actions of eating and drinking. This awareness allows them to create deliberate and playful puns with the two expressions. For example, in the Facebook post shown in (85), the author first elicits the idiomatic meaning of *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥), creating a false illusion that the post is about experienced practice; and then they supply a sudden twist, disclosing the true intension of the post, which in fact focuses on the efforts required for making a gourmet late night meal of *zuk*. The reclaiming of the expression’s literal meaning reflects the author’s knowledge of the expression and their rhetorical creativity.

- (85) "人地话食过夜粥, 人生经验也丰富!" 这句话版主只认同  
 “Jan-dei waa **sik-gwo je-zuk**, jan-saang ging-jim jaa fung-fu!” Ze-geoi waa baan-zyu zi jing-tung  
 一半, 因为这完全忽略了厨子在背后所付出的功劳! 一碗碗热  
*Jatbun, janwai ze jyun-cyun fat-loek liu cyu-zi zoi bui-hau so fu-ceot dik gung-lou! Jat-wun-wun jit-*  
*腾腾, 香喷喷的夜粥, 这可是厨师在后默默付出的心血与功夫!*  
*tang-tang, hoeng-pan-pan dik je-zuk, ze ho si cyu-si zoi-hau makmak fu-ceot dik samhyut jyu gungfu!*

“People say *sik-gwo je-zuk*, life experiences are also abundant!” I only agree with half of this statement because it completely neglects the efforts the cook invests in this at the back! These bowls of hot and fragrant night *zuk*, are the hearts and efforts the chefs contributed silently behind the scenes! (SM04)

Similarly, an example of the creative use of *jam dak bui lok* (飲得杯落) is shown in example (86) below. Viu TV Hong Kong posted a trailer of a new tourism TV show entitled ‘Let’s drink! Taiwan!’ on their official Facebook page in 2017. The expression *jam dak bui lok* (飲得杯落) is used both in the trailer slogan and the co-occurring textual post.



(86)

Trailer slogan:

真係 飲得杯落! Hailey 親試好山 好水!

Zan-hai *jam dak bui lok*! Hailey can si hou-saan hou-seoi!

(You can) really **drink a cup/glass**! Hailey tried the good mountains and good water in person!

Textual post:

.....真係 飲得杯落! Hailey Chan 返嚟 啦!

...Zan-hai *jam dak bui lok*! Hailey Chan faan-lai laa!

It's really **worth celebrating** (lit. you can really drink a glass down)! Hailey Chan is back! (SM05)

The use of *jam dak bui lok* (飲得杯落) in the trailer slogan highlights the good ‘drinkable’ quality of the Taiwan water/drinks while simultaneously implies the celebrating spirit for the return of the popular program host Hailey Chan, and the latter is then made explicit in the textual post where *jam dak bui lok* (飲得杯落) is used again, this time eliciting the idiomatic meaning. The cooccurrence and cross-reference of the literal and idiomatic meanings of *jam dak bui lok* (飲得杯落) are enabled through the deliberate punning setup by the program producers and publicists. This is an example of how Cantonese speakers, who understand both the literal sense and cultural meaning of an idiom, manipulate the expression to achieve their pragmatic purposes such as arousing the audience’s interest with deliberate punning, or eliciting humorous meaning making with ‘insider jokes’.

## 5.2 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the underlying cultural conceptualizations of 25 Cantonese eating-related idioms. Various aspects of food consumption serve as the sources for the conceptualizations of LIVING, PROACTIVELY ACTING, PASSIVELY ACTING, THE ANGER EMOTION, and A COMPLETE EVENT SEQUENCE. These conceptualizations cover most aspects of human experiences in everyday life. The fact that *sik* is the source of all these conceptualizations proves the cultural essentiality of eating and drinking in the Cantonese life. Eating and drinking are not only crucial for survival, but are also an irreplaceable medium for social and cultural meaning making. In the analysis, we have constantly made connections to the *mai* cultural conceptualizations discussed in the previous chapter and illustrated how the *sik* conceptualizations motivate the idioms’ meaning together with other incorporated cultural conceptualizations. This operation is an attempt to present the interconnected complexity of the Cantonese cultural cognition. Many of the identified cultural conceptualizations in Chapters Four and Five are culturally harnessed, reflecting underpinning ideologies of the Cantonese societies. Chapter Six will elaborate on these ideological underpinnings.

## Chapter 6 Ideological Underpinnings of Cantonese Food-related Idioms

*China is as plural and complex as the United States and any other major society. Meanings may arise from cultural texts and traditions and relate to society-wide events, but it is always the individual who remakes those collective values and explanations into the special combinations of ideas, feelings, and practices that matter.*

*Arthur Kleinman (2011, p. 265)*

Cultural Linguistics regards cultural conceptualizations of a speech community as a partial reflection of the speech community's dynamic cultural cognition. Cultural conceptualizations are heterogeneously distributed among the members of the speech community (Sharifian, 2017a). The analyses of the selected Cantonese food-related idioms in Chapter Four and Chapter Five have identified Cantonese cultural conceptualizations of various target domains. Cantonese speakers also show different degrees of consciousness of these cultural conceptualizations. The primary cultural conceptualizations often have specific and distinctive elaborations in different idioms, and yet these elaborations are often interrelated and sourced from cultural knowledge, beliefs, and traditions within the same source domain. These cultural conceptualizations are heterogeneously distributed among Cantonese speakers, as represented by the Cantonese cultural informants' varying understandings and interpretations of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

The data analyses in the previous two chapters have provided us with a glimpse of the complex and systematic Cantonese cultural cognition. In order to understand the Cantonese cultural cognition, it is necessary to trace back to the underpinning ideologies that give rise to the cultural conceptualizations. As Sharifian (2017a) explains, many cultural conceptualizations “have their roots in cultural traditions” (p.18) including cultural worldviews and philosophy, and are based on knowledge “assumed to be culturally constructed and therefore shared” (p.14). When investigating the ideological underpinnings, it is important to keep in mind that cultural cognition is emergent and everchanging. It is dynamic because “it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated across generations and through contact between speech communities” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 3). Therefore, besides examining the ideological origins of the cultural conceptualizations, it is also crucial to capture the ideological (re)negotiations, as these (re)negotiations often bring about new entailments for the existing cultural conceptualizations and trigger the process of reconceptualization. “Reconceptualization may take various forms” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 9). In the era of globalization, cross-cultural re-conceptualizations motivated by frequent contacts between different speech communities are among the most salient types of reconceptualization. Nevertheless, “[m]embers of a cultural group negotiate and renegotiate their cultural cognition across generations, vertically and horizontally, through a multitude of communicative events” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 21). Especially in a rapidly changing social environment



like that of the target Cantonese speech communities, re-conceptualizations happening within the speech communities are by no means to be neglected.

This chapter explicates the ideological underpinnings of the cultural conceptualizations identified from the previous two chapters, contextualizes the cultural conceptualizations in the everchanging social environment of contemporary China, and reveals the constant (re)negotiations of the cultural ideologies and their motivation to the re-conceptualizations of the Cantonese food-related idioms. Through combing through this vigorous process, we aim to illustrate the dynamics of the Cantonese cultural cognition and present the nexus between language, cultural conceptualizations, and societal development. In the meantime, we also depict the active role of the Cantonese speakers in this process and how the speakers, as well as the social dynamics, may affect the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

## **6.1 Livelihood, Living, and Land Attachment**

Among the selected Cantonese food-related idioms, many have their idiomatic meanings relating to aspects of Cantonese people's livelihood and ways of living. The conceptual mappings between the source domains *MAI* and *SIK* and their various target domains are motivated by cultural beliefs and knowledge Cantonese speakers gained from their experiences living in the Pearl River Delta area of China across generations. These beliefs and knowledge have been constantly renewed and renegotiated along the major social changes such as urbanization and the economic reform that have transformed the speakers' living experiences in the contemporary era. As the Cantonese cultural worldviews undergo renegotiations, the relating cultural conceptualizations are also being reconceptualized, as linguistically reflected in the semantic and pragmatic variations in the Cantonese food-related idioms.

Underpinning the cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES are the important status of rice to the Cantonese dietary traditions and the Cantonese people's long-term experiences of food shortages. Section 6.1.1 unpacks the historical factors that motivate the conceptual mappings of *MAI* onto the target domains of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES, also addressing the latest development of these cultural conceptualizations.

Interrelated with the cultural worldview of rice is Cantonese/Chinese people's ideological attachment to the land where rice is grown. The ideology of land attachment is the catalyst for the cultural conceptualizations of LIVING through the source domain of *SIK*. The continuous renegotiations of the ideology of land attachment along China's urbanization have also motivated the re-conceptualizations of LIVING. Section 6.1.2 unveils this dynamic nexus with examples from the relating idioms.

### 6.1.1 The Historical Importance of Rice to Livelihood in South China and the Cultural Conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES

The cultural conceptualizations identified from the rice-related idioms in the present study have presented the conceptual mappings between the generic source domain of *MAI* and the two major target domains of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES. Underpinning these cultural conceptualizations are the essential role of rice in the South Chinese diet and its symbolic significance to the livelihood of the Cantonese people.

China has been the largest rice producing country in the world since the 1980s (Wittwer et al., 1987), and it has a long rice planting history. Recent archaeological evidence has proven that rice was first domesticated in the Yangtze River drainage of central China as early as 8000-10000 years ago, and the Yangtze River valley is also the birthplace of rice agriculture (Anderson, 2014, p. 39; Choi et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2011). In South China, rice has long been the most essential crop. The earliest historical record of rice being South China's leading crop dated back to around 770 BC<sup>46</sup>. South Chinese have two-thirds of their calorie intake from rice and rice-based foods (Liu, 2004, p. 12; Simoons, 1991, p. 64). This is particularly the case in the Pearl River Delta area, where agriculturalists call the double-cropping rice area. The dominance of rice there is “as great as, or greater than, in any other area of South China” (Simoons, 1991, p. 64). Other than the geographical and climatic advantages for rice planting, the dominance of rice in South Chinese diet is also due to its high nutritional value compared to other cereals, its strengths in sustaining dense populations, its convenience in storage and processing, and its potential for culinary creation (Anderson & Anderson, 1977; Simoons, 1991).

The agricultural dominance of rice planting in China has given rice its symbolic cultural meanings. As Liu (2004) explains, “wherever rice can be grown, it will appear in people's daily diets, religious celebrations and wedding banquets or in the paintings and songs. The planting of rice changes sceneries in its location” (p. 14). As for the South Chinese, the dietary importance of rice is captured in Anderson's (1988) notes about the Chinese food ideology:

In South China as in much of East Asia, the phrase *chih fan* (to eat rice) also means simply ‘to eat’, and the word *fan* (cooked rice, cooked grain) also means simply ‘food’. A southerner who has not eaten rice all day will deny having eaten at all, although he or she may have consumed a large quantity of snacks. A meal without rice just isn't a meal [...] An ordinary meal is made up of cooked

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<sup>46</sup> As recorded in *Zhou Li*, i.e., *The Rites of Zhou, the southeast is called Yang Zhou...its suitable grain is dao* (稻, the Chinese name for the rice crop) [东南曰扬州……其谷宜稻]. Note: Ancient China was divided into nine regions and was called ‘the Nation of Nine States’. The State of Yang Zhou referred to the area south of the Huai River including the Yangtze River Delta area and the Pearl River Delta area, the latter of which is where the Cantonese have resided until today.

rice and *sung* (*fan*), a Cantonese word that may best be translated as ‘topping for rice’ or ‘dishes to put on the rice’ (p. 114).

The above notes explain how South Chinese, especially the Cantonese value rice in daily diets. One aspect Anderson (1988) highlights is the dichotomic categorization of the grain food, i.e., *faan* (spelt as *fan* in the above quotes) and other foods, i.e., *sung* in a Chinese meal, or as Chang (1977) puts it, “the Chinese *fan-ts’ai* (grain-dishes) principle” (p. 8). Chang (1977) explicates that the origin of this dichotomy was a distinction between grain and foods cooked with fire (primarily meat) dating back to the preliminary regime of eating in ancient China. The distinction stood as a criterion for the ancient Chinese, the ones from ‘the Middle states’, to distinguish themselves from the ‘barbarians’ surrounding them. By definition at the time, a real Chinese “ate grain and cooked his meat” (Chang, 1977, p. 42). This criterion further developed into the principle that food was categorized into grain and dishes, and “grain was superior to or more basic than the dishes” (Chang, 1977, p. 42). This principle has been carried on until today and realized as the common constitution of a Chinese meal.

The grain-dishes dichotomy consolidates the central and indispensable role of the grain food in a meal and the role of other foods as supplementary to the grains. It thereby cultivates the fundamental conceptual mapping between *MAI* and ESSENTIALS and motivates the two Cantonese cultural metonymies *FAAN IN A MEAL FOR THE MEAL* and *MAI FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES*. At the language level, the central cultural status of rice is reflected in the cluster of Cantonese idioms relating to the conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS. In these idioms, the rice-related keywords are the main semantic locus of the idioms’ meanings. As analyzed in Chapter Four, these rice-related idioms instantiate the conceptualizations of various types of essentials including basic life necessities, life experiences, intelligence, the essence of a construct, and a thoughtful decision. The fact that these diverse target domains are all conceptualized through *MAI* in turn proves the significant ideological basis of rice in the Cantonese communities.

Based on the *faan* and *sung* dichotomy, Anderson (1988) also notes that for poor-to-ordinary Cantonese households, the varieties of *sung*, i.e., dishes to put on the rice, would be no more than flavorings for the rice. Anderson’s observation not only further justifies the essential status of rice in the Cantonese diet, but also reflects the connection between the served dishes and the household’s financial affordability in their livelihood. It is highly possible that this connection is the experiential basis of the cultural metonymy *MEAL STYLE STANDS FOR LIFESTYLE*. However, we cannot neglect Cantonese people’s initiative in the development of this cultural metonymy. As analyzed in section 4.1.3 with the collected materials, the two idioms instantiating this cultural metonymy, i.e., *jyu ci lou faan* (鱼翅捞饭, *have shark fin to mix with faan*) and *cou caa daam faan* (粗茶淡饭, *coarse tea and light faan*) can also imply Cantonese speakers’ individual choice on their lifestyle, which is not necessarily restricted by their financial status but can be a personal preference. The cultural metonymy embedded in these two idioms, as it shows, has already been through negotiations among the speakers and incorporated richer entailments than its original form.

Other than being the essential component of a Cantonese meal, rice is also considered as a valuable asset to especially ordinary Cantonese households. As much as the conceptual mapping between rice and valuables is interrelated with that between rice and essentials, there are other like historical factors that contributed to its establishment. Particularly, China's long history of food shortage may well be a core factor underpinning this cultural worldview. This history has linked the possession and storage of *mai* to human survival and transformed rice from a planting crop to a valuable resource for household sustenance. The salient cultural conceptualizations of VALUABLES through *MAI*, as reflected in various rice-related idioms analyzed in Chapter Four, are to a high extent, motivated by Cantonese people's intergenerational experiences of keeping food security, a crucial matter of livelihood throughout the Chinese history.

Historical records of famine caused by natural disasters and social unrests in China can be found as early as in the Shang dynasty (16<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century BC) ("List of Famines in China," 2020). Mallory (1926) called China *the land of famine* in his early 20<sup>th</sup> century monograph and attributed the causes of famine to economic, natural, political, and social reasons diachronically. In the century that followed Mallory's publication, China experienced fundamental and revolutionary political, social, and economic reforms, during which there were also accompanying setbacks in grain production such as the Great Famine from 1959 to 1961. Today China still faces challenges in feeding its huge population on only 7% of the world's farmlands. Although the self-sufficiency rate of its three major cereal crops including rice has reached about 95% (Cui & Shoemaker, 2018), the excessive use of farmlands and strained water resources have posed substantial environmental concerns that may impact China's food production (Ghose, 2014). The effects of China's continuous urbanization such as the acquisition of cultivating lands and the increased demand of high-quality food from the urban population have also added pressure to China's food security.

The Cantonese communities have been through most historical food security crises with the rest of China. Despite its climatic advantages in rice planting, the Cantonese often faced rice shortages in history because of its dense population and thereby high demands in rice. As recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Guangdong chronicle *Guangdong Xinyu*, i.e., *The New Notes of Guangdong*, rice in the East Yue (i.e., currently Guangdong Province) was dependent on supplies from the West Yue (i.e., currently Guangxi Province), where the soil was fertile and rice production was abundant. Moreover, the chronicle also noted that Guangzhou's economic status as China's open port for international trading also promoted a shift from working in agriculture to engaging in commerce among the common Cantonese. As a result, the farmlands in Guangzhou were not properly cultivated and there was a further decline in rice production that led to rice shortages.

The historical struggles in food security directly impacted the life sustenance of the Cantonese people and cultivated their way of thinking about the importance of rice. As the staple grain, the amount of rice a household had was determinant of the household's stability and its' members' health and wellbeing, and hence the cultural schema *MAI IS AN IMPORTANT HOUSEHOLD ASSET*. Even nowadays, rice is extremely valuable for households in

poorer financial conditions. Unlike wealthier families that have more options in food choices and can afford to obtain nutrients and calories from more food varieties besides the staple, poorer families mainly have their caloric intake from the staple grain (Anderson & Anderson, 1977, pp. 320, 372–374). Therefore, for ordinary Cantonese families, it is common that a large proportion of the family income is spent on purchasing rice. In this way, the possession of rice becomes a benchmark that reflects the financial status of a family. Multiple records from the collected materials also refer to rice as a family treasure, as already analyzed in sections 4.1.2.1 and 4.1.2.2. The specific cultural metaphors MONEY AS *MAI* and BENEFITS AS *MAI* are thus consolidated.

Similar to the idioms about essentials addressed above, rice-related idioms about valuables have also shown semantic development that may have reflected renegotiated conceptualizations of VALUABLES in the contemporary Cantonese speech communities. One outstanding example is the expanding connotation of the idiom *jau mai* (有米, have *mai*). The constituent *mai* (米) in the idiom has shown traits of semantic broadening. Apart from ‘money’, the original metaphorical referent of *mai* motivated by its historical underpinning discussed earlier, Cantonese speakers nowadays seem to also include other symbolic properties or indicators of wealth as the referents of *mai*. In a Hong Kong Cantonese sample (PM06) from the collected materials, the speaker said *mai* in *jau mai* (有米) can refer to the figures of GDP, stock price index, and real estate price. In another Guangzhou Cantonese sample (OA49), the speaker also indicated that keys to a mansion or a luxurious car and passwords for a bank account or a safe box can all be instances of *mai* in *jau mai* (有米). Manifested in these examples is a more complex and multilayered understanding of the representations of personal wealth other than the possession of the currency. The cultural metaphor MONEY AS *MAI* has thus become a subordinate entailment of a broader WEALTH AS *MAI* metaphor nowadays. The reconceptualization of WEALTH is also a partial reflection of the functioning of the market economic system in contemporary China as well as the active consumer desire in a consumeristic economic environment.

### **6.1.2 The Renegotiated Ideology of Land Attachment in Urban China and the Reconceptualizations of LIVING through *sik***

The history of Chinese civilization is intrinsically agricultural, and thus the relationship between Chinese people and the land they live and work on has maintained an inherent element of the Chinese ideologies past and present. A number of *sik* idioms instantiating cultural conceptualizations relating to various aspects of living are analyzed in section 5.1.1, Chapter Five. These conceptualizations of LIVING are in a complex manner, motivated by the Cantonese worldviews closely associated with the Chinese ideology of land attachment. However, the traditional ideology of land attachment, which originally was built on the immobility of farmers and their means of living in rural China (Fei, 1992, p. 39), has taken on different forms of representation in the context of China’s urbanization. Particularly, in highly urbanized Cantonese societies such as Guangzhou and Hong Kong, the expansion of the

cities, the industrial requisition of farmlands, the socioeconomic prosperity, and the dynamic social environment have accelerated the renegotiation of land attachment. The physical attachment to the agricultural land has almost ceased to exist for many urbanites in the Cantonese speech communities, especially those of the younger generations. Instead, land attachment has become a culturally rooted rhetorical mechanism that inspires the ‘new’ usages of conventional idioms and the popularity of ‘new’ idioms, i.e., examples of *ciu jyu* (潮語), ‘the trendy language’. In the era of globalization of which mobility of people and goods is a key characteristic (Coupland, 2010, p. 3; Eriksen, 2014, p. 116), the idea of ‘living’ has also become more mobile and diverse, incorporating a new sense of creating ‘unique’ and ‘personal’ experience subjected to the individual will. In a nutshell, the traditional ideology of land attachment and its contemporary renegotiations are the cultural underpinnings of the Cantonese conceptualizations and re-conceptualizations of LIVING, which are eventually reflected in Cantonese speakers’ use of the related *sik* idioms. This section attempts to unfold this intertwined cultural-conceptual system in detail.

The cultural basis for the conceptual mapping between making a living and acquiring food, which eventually instantiates in the related linguistic expressions, such as the Cantonese idioms *wan sik* (搵食, look for food) and *san fu wan lai zi zoi sik* (辛苦搵嚟自在食, eat at ease the food sought with hard work), is the traditional Chinese worldview on working and living depicted through the inseparable tie between rural Chinese and their land. This tie is prominent in the rural society in contemporary China, but the association between land and livelihood can be traced back to the beginning of the Chinese agrarian civilization. For the early Chinese, the land symbolized life and motherhood, and the soil was the part of land that bred life (P. Wang, 2007). The ancient Oracle bone script for ‘soil’ was ‘𡗗’, a pictographic symbol illustrating the part of land where plants sprout; and ‘𠂔’, the preliminary script of 生, the modern Chinese character for ‘life’ and ‘living’, was an associative compound illustrating the growth of grass from the land. In pre-imperial and imperial China, the management of land was also essential for food production and societal stability. Early Chinese rulers and monarchs implemented various land policies in attempts of stimulating food productivity and enforcing social order. Working on the land cultivated stability among the commoners and had political significance to the ruling class. Farming was thus “a leading ingredient in an ideological narrative that propelled the Central States from a world of chaos and division to one of political unification, order, and social control” (Sterckx, 2015, p. 214).

In contemporary China, Chinese sociologist and anthropologist FEI Xiaotong was among the first pioneers in the 1940s who researched and explicated the construct of the Chinese society. He contended at the beginning of his monograph *From the soil, the foundations of Chinese society*, “Chinese society is fundamentally rural. I say that it is fundamentally rural because its foundation is rural” (Fei, 1992, p. 37). The original Chinese word Fei (2006) used for ‘rural’ is ‘*xiang-tu*’ (乡土), ‘village and soil’. These two keywords, i.e., *xiang* (乡) and *tu* (土), outline

the fundamental elements constructing the rural Chinese society, whose members practice generational grouped living in the basic unit of village and whose livelihood is deeply dependent on and rooted in the soil. For rural Chinese, their land constitutes the cycle of their life. They work on the fields, harvest food from the soil for life sustenance, and then again invest their strength back in the fields for future gains. As a result, it is part of their worldview that life is earned from working hard on the field and sustained through what they are rewarded by the land. Having their life attached to the land, on the other hand, also means the living condition of the Chinese farmers is susceptible to all the factors that may impact on the land, whether these factors are natural, social, or political. Most directly, Chinese farmers would be impacted by the yield of crop from the field which determined the abundance of survival food. This susceptibility underpins the Cantonese worldview metaphors LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE and LIVING AS *sik*, as embedded in the *sik* idioms that describe living conditions such as *sik guk zung* (食谷种, eat seed corn), *sik sai bak fung* (食西北风, eat the west-north wind), *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食, not have a mouthful of good food to eat), and *sik baau mou jau mai* (食饱无忧米, eat worriless *mai* till full).

While Chinese farmers' historical and traditional attachment to the land facilitates the worldview relating to living, China's urbanization is fundamentally changing the reality of the Chinese societies, and thus the land-related ideology. It is worth noting that the change may have happened in Guangzhou even earlier than the nationwide process of urbanization, as was initiated by China's *Reform and Opening up* in 1978. The Cantonese were said to have cultivated an urban identity by the fall of imperial China, as "with the importation of foreign goods, technology, ideas, and values, the character of the city, and the lifestyle and mentality of its citizens, were greatly, though gradually, transformed" (Ho, 2005, p. 5). As for Hong Kong and Macau, urbanization had reached a mature state long before the *Reform and Opening up* in Mainland China (Z. Zhang et al., 2016). As a result, the urban Cantonese perception of land and livelihood would have already been different from what it was in the rural areas, and the idea of 'living' would have already incorporated new-found meanings on top of living for survival. Nonetheless, the *Reform and Opening up* pulled up the curtain for China's nationwide urbanization, and the relationship between people and land has been drastically modified by national policies and the rapidly changing social environment. For the Cantonese, this process has strengthened their urban mentality, further consolidated their conceptualization of urban living, and ultimately weakened their physical bond to the land.

The rural land reform was among the first steps in the *Reform and Opening up*. Through decollectivizing the farming land from state control and introducing a Household Responsibility System, the reform significantly increased the state revenue in crop production and freed up rural labors to contribute in the development of off-farm sectors (T. Ran, 2014; Seto & Kaufmann, 2003). Many of these freed-up labors were among the first people who established small businesses, opened factories, and developed townships on their rural homeland, all of which pushed forward the process of urbanization. In the case of the Pearl River Delta area, where the Cantonese

communities reside, the overall rate of urbanization had reached 85.29% by 2017, as equivalent to that of a developed country (China Business Network, 2019). In such a highly urban and industrialized social environment, working on the land to acquire food is no longer a literal description of the way of life but a more rhetorical narrative about materialistic living, as in making money from work to support one's living. As such, the traditional ideology of people and land has been renegotiated. The physical imagery of 'land' or 'soil' and its reference to 'food source' have become less foregrounded and more figurative – inferring 'the source of income' or 'the occupation that funds one's living'. Linguistically, this renegotiated ideology is reflected in the semantic development of the idioms addressed above. These have now extended connotations relating to working in a job and gaining financial income, as extended from the literal descriptions of working on the land, seeking food, and consuming the acquired food. Accordingly, the cultural conceptualizations MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD and LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE have a new metaphorical entailment: MONEY AND COMMODITIES EARNED FROM OCCUPATIONAL WORK IS FOOD. More extensively, a certain lifestyle supported by income from work may also be the metaphorical 'food'. This corresponds to the development of the MONEY AS MAI metaphor derived from the historical importance of *mai* as discussed in the previous section.

Concurrent with the urbanization process is the continuous expansion of the cities at the expense of the cultivated land. As defined in the report of a joint study conducted by the World Bank Group and China's Development Research Center of the State Council, "China's urbanization is characterized by the continuous outward shift of urban boundaries and the expansion of territorial jurisdictions of cities, primarily through the expropriation of surrounding rural land and its integration into urban areas" (2014, p. 270). During the four decades since the *Reform and Opening up*, the city area of Guangzhou has expanded more than 9 times of its original size in the 1970s, and Hong Kong and Macau have also grown almost double (Z. Zhang et al., 2016). Requisition of cultivated land has maintained the main strategy in city expansion, and the continued loss of cultivated land has become "one of the major negative effects of urbanization" (Z. Zhang et al., 2016, p. 1944) in China.

The disappearance of cultivated land to the Cantonese urbanites means accelerating their loss of contact and access to the traditional and agricultural way of living that had cultivated the Chinese cultural values of making a living. The ideology of land attachment in the urban context is further renegotiated, and at this point, to become its own opposite, i.e., the ideological detachment from land. The changing extent of figurativeness of *sik* idioms with living-related connotations is the linguistic evidence of urban Cantonese's detachment from land. When investigating the idiom *sik guk zung* (食谷种, eat seed corn), we asked the cultural informants if this idiom somehow maintains its literal meaning nowadays. Most informants asserted that *sik guk zung* (食谷种) now is more of a rhetorical expression because "city people don't have *guk zung* anymore" (PDW [GZ-F-60], PC12), "people nowadays won't even have seen *guk zung*" (ZJT [GZ-F-32], PC15), and "no one is planting the field anymore, and my daughter's generation won't even know what famine is" (JZ [GZ-F-32], PC14). On the contrary,



idioms like *sik sai bak fung* (食西北风, eat the west-north wind) and *mou daam hou sik* (冇啖好食, not have a mouthful of good food to eat) that are supposedly highly figurative have shown regional variation in Hong Kong, where their usages seem to have become less idiomatic and more literal, as analyzed in section 5.1.1.2. The weakening of the expressions' idiomaticity may indicate a potential loss of its conceptual basis, which relates the scarceness of food to struggling living condition, conventional knowledge constructed through the traditional and rural living experiences dependent on the land.

The urbanites' on-going detachment from the farming land has also broken the immobile fixity between the people-land relation in the rural society, which was concluded in Fei's (1992) research mentioned earlier. The tie between the urban individuals and the land has become more implicit, which allows the urbanites to cultivate a mentality that places more concern on individual development and reliance. The conceptual focus of living is gradually shifting from making a living dependent on outside resources to establishing a way of living based on one's own abilities and personal decisions. Consequentially, we have witnessed the rise of the 'trendy expressions' about living such as *sik nou* (食脑, eat the brain) and *sik zi gei* (食自己, eat oneself). Again, the conceptualization of LIVING through *sik* has been re-schematized, as the 'food choice' has its extended references as 'intellectual competence' and 'individual abilities'; and living has a more salient entailment of autonomy. The cultural metaphor LIVING AS *SIK* is a metaphorical entailment of both cultural conceptualizations LIVING STATUS/CONDITION AS FOOD CHOICE and A CHOSEN WAY OF LIVING AS FOOD CHOICE; but for the latter, this entailment should probably be more accurately represented as LIVING AS AUTONOMOUSLY *SIK*.

Looking deeper, the source domain *sik* in the LIVING AS *SIK* metaphor has also been re-schematized in the present era marked by the abundance of material wealth. Cantonese metropolises like Hong Kong and Guangzhou have a long history of connecting with the outside world and engaging in global trading (Guo & Liu, 2012). China's robust economic growth driven by its *Reform and Opening up* and later joining the World Trade Organization in 2001 has allowed Cantonese city dwellers to further enjoy the abundance of goods and resources brought by the socio-economic prosperity and globalization.

As food shortage is no longer a major social concern, gourmet food seeking has become a trendy leisure activity for the Cantonese. Eating has moved away from its primary function as satisfying the basic need for survival and has cultivated a new meaning as a means of leisure enjoyment. Linguistically, the popular use of the idiom *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味, have eaten and returned to seek the taste) which conceptualizes living as an enjoyable experience is the proof of this movement. Furthermore, we also see *wan sik* (搵食, look for food), the symbolic idiom for making a living, has manifested a trend of reclaiming its literal meaning, i.e., looking for food, with a minor shift in meaning, from looking for food to eat to survive, to looking for food to eat to have a good leisure time. This reclamation not only exists among daily interaction of the Cantonese people, but also occurs in

the use of the expression in official governmental publications. For example, *wan sik* (搵食) is used as the heading for the gourmet food section in Guangzhou Daily (see PI03 in Appendix 5), the official newspaper of the Guangzhou municipal party committee. It is also in the Cantonese title of a tourist brochure, which outlines the locations of the local gourmet restaurants and was published by the Tourism Promotion Center of Liwan District, Guangzhou in 2014 (see PI04 in Appendix 5). Conceptually, the metaphorical basis of LIVING AS *sik* has seemed to be weakening, or it has derived a variant form that represents an important part of the Cantonese urban life, which is probably more metonymic than metaphoric, i.e., *sik* STANDS FOR HAPPILY LIVING.

In all, the set of cultural conceptualizations of LIVING through *sik* were developed at different times and spaces across the developing Chinese society. They share a primary cultural anchor relating to the Chinese ideology of land attachment rooted in rural China, while at the same time reflect the special social dynamics of the urban Cantonese communities. This ever-evolving set of conceptualizations is a partial instantiation of the dynamic Cantonese cultural cognition.

## 6.2 *Guanxi*, Cultural Worldviews, and Social Norms

While the land-related ideologies constitute the cultural anchors of the Cantonese conceptualizations of LIVING, the cultural conceptualizations in relation to social norms that harness Cantonese people's behavior are confined by *guanxi*. *Guanxi* is a complex and multifaceted network of interpersonal relations with its ideological origin in the Confucian school of thoughts. It functions as the building blocks of Chinese societies and diasporas. *Guanxi* was not studied as a sociological and anthropological concept until the 1980s. CHIAO Chien is the first social scientist who proposed to localize the 'social network' concept in China as *guanxi* (spelt as *kuanhsi* in Chiao's work) and studied it systematically (X. Zhang, 2015). He defines *guanxi* as a social system that has the following features: It is ego-centric and dynamic; it requires constant human interactions to maintain its social and economic values; it is a path that carries with *renqing* (人情, reciprocal favor); and multiple paths of *guanxi* can form a *guanxi* network (Chiao, 1982).

Many cultural conceptualizations identified from the Cantonese food-related idioms reflect the codes of conduct in a specific *guanxi* context and entail the speech community's collective judgement of whether certain behavior in this context is morally acceptable or appropriate. The intrinsic connection between living and food acquisition and consumption, as unfolded in the previous section, motivates Cantonese speakers to project their ways of thinking about social conduct onto behavior and manners relating to food and eating.

According to Sharifian (2017a, pp. 14, 18), cultural traditions and worldviews of a speech community can be the roots of cultural conceptualizations identified from its language and from the enactment of speech acts. In Cantonese speech communities, the Confucian school of thoughts underpins the *guanxi* system, which regulates

the social behavioral norms and motivates the related cultural conceptualizations. Eventually, these cultural conceptualizations are instantiated in linguistic expressions, which in this case, are some of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

*Guanxi* has its ideological origin in the Confucian philosophical values of *renlun* (人倫), or ‘human relationships’. The Confucian ideology of *renlun* has a self-centered quality and stresses order-based social classifications and hierarchical differentiations as referenced and compared to the *self* (Fei, 1992). Accordingly, in different binary relationships between the self and the others, one has to abide by tacit behavioral norms and virtues that are deemed appropriate for the differentiations, so as to maintain the ‘order’, or *lun* (倫) of the social structure. In the Confucian system of thoughts, family plays a fundamental role in shaping the state and the world (D. Liu, 2002), and THE ORDER OF THE WORLD IS ROOTED IN EVERY FAMILY is a significant proposition schema (Z. Xu & Sharifian, 2017). Familial or kinship relation is seen as the starting point of all interpersonal relationships in societies influenced by Confucianism, and *guanxi* is regarded as an interfamilial or non-familial extension of the familial relation (Hsiung, 2013; C. Zhang & Hong, 2017). Therefore, cultural worldviews derived from the traditional Chinese familial relation are the driving force that cultivates the conceptualizations relating to action taking and personal behavior in a broader *guanxi* network, as instantiated in the Cantonese food-related idioms. These frames of mind are elaborated in section 6.2.1.

Despite the long-time standing of the traditional values underpinning the Cantonese food-related idioms, the rapidly changing Chinese society has promoted the renegotiation of *guanxi* and the transformation of these cultural values built on the traditional *guanxi* system. In particular, the rapidly transitioning economic and social environment in China has motivated a transforming perception of *self* among individuals. This transformation of self-perception has then brought change to the moral landscape in contemporary China. Overall, the ideological renegotiations have motivated the re-conceptualizations of social behavioral norms in the Cantonese speech communities. Linguistically, the re-conceptualizations are reflected in the emergent use of some Cantonese food-related idioms and Cantonese speakers’ new interpretations of the idiomatic connotations. Section 6.2.2 unpacks this process of renegotiation and reconceptualization with examples.

### **6.2.1 The Traditional Worldviews in *Guanxi* and the Embedded Social Norms in Cantonese Food-related Idioms**

Among the analyzed Cantonese food-related idioms, many describe appropriate or inappropriate action taking or imply moral judgement on daily behavior. Underpinning these idioms and their embedded cultural conceptualizations are the cultural worldviews that confine the social norms members of the Cantonese speech communities acknowledge and follow to successfully maintain social relationships.

Chiao's (1982) definition of *guanxi* as introduced above is a partial succession of Fei's (1992, 2006) viewpoint of the social relationship construct in Chinese society. Specifically, Fei (1992) points out that social relationships in China are significantly influenced by the Confucian school of thoughts,

[s]ocial relationships in China possess a self-centered quality. Like the ripples formed from a stone thrown into a lake, each circle spreading out from the center becomes more distant and at the same time more insignificant. With this pattern, we are faced with the basic characteristic of Chinese social structure, or what the Confucian school has called *renlun* (human relationships). (p.65)

Based on Fei's argument, Chinese society is built on "social spheres" (1992, p. 74) formed by differential personal connections that extend from the self and follow different paths of order-based classification, i.e., the Confucian idea of *lun* (倫). He contends that different from the "organizational mode of association" (p. 62) in Western societies<sup>47</sup>, Chinese society has the "differential mode of association" (p. 68), with which each individual plays a differential role in their personal connection to another individual, abiding by the rules classified by their place in this relationship. Such personal connection then creates a social sphere. Each sphere is regulated by a specific set of "social ethic(s)" (Fei, 1992, p. 74) or "cardinal virtues" (Hsiung, 2013, p. 21). For example, in a father-son connection, the father is hierarchically distinctive from the son, and the hierarchical differentiation classifies the rules the father and the son should follow in the sphere of their relationship, respectively.

Among these various paths of forming social spheres, the most basic one is through kinship. The Chinese kinship system is "the most important relationship" (Fei, 1992, p. 63) in Chinese society. Confucianism considers a family, or a clan formed through kinship is the foundation of a state, and a well-governed state is built on a harmonious family<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, ethical values and behavioral norms implied in binary kinship relations such as husband-wife, father-son, and elder brother-younger brother, are the core of the social morality. They are expanded from the familial dimension and applied to other social relationships that represent the leader-follower, superior-inferior, and senior-junior differentiations, i.e., *guanxi*, and develop into the cultural worldviews that motivate cultural conceptualizations relating to social conduct and personal behavior in the Chinese speech communities. The following paragraphs further unpack the types of *guanxi* and the related cultural worldviews embedded in some Cantonese food-related idioms.

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<sup>47</sup> In an organizational mode of association, as Fei (1992) explains, individuals form an organization and respectively build the same relationship with it except for the priorly agreed upon differences (e.g., all family members share the same relationship with the familial construct except for the mutually agreed upon differences in for example, family duties).

<sup>48</sup> As recorded in *Da Xue* (大學), i.e., *The Great Learning* in the Confucian classic *Li Ji* (禮記), i.e., *The Book of Rites*, "[t]he ancients who wanted to manifest their bright virtue to all in the world first governed well their own states. Wanting to govern well their states, they first harmonized their own clans" (*Great Learning* 大學, n.d.).

Filial piety, or *xiao* (孝) is an essential virtue in the *guanxi* system, especially for regulating the father-son relationship in the traditional Chinese patrilineal family structure. The idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过你食米, have eaten more salt than [you] have eaten *mai*) has its idiomatic connotation built on the notion of filial piety. Xu and Fang (2021) review the Confucian Classic *Xiao Jing* (孝经), i.e., *Classic of Filial Piety*, and summarize various cultural schemas of FILIAL PIETY from the Classic. Honoring and respecting one's parents as well as the quality of humbleness, courtesy, and loyalty are among the most prominent entailments of FILIAL PIETY. From a narrower and more explicit perspective, filial piety sustains the traditional father-son relation in a familial context and denotes appropriate behavior an individual should maintain towards their parents. Filial piety also extends to regulate an individual's behavior towards the senior in a wider social context.

The norms associated with filial piety to an extent, bestow the senior referent in a binary social encounter the privileged authority to demonstrate and claim superiority. Accordingly, the junior referent in this encounter is expected to behave in accordance with the virtue of filial piety, that is, to be humble and obedient towards the senior as a demonstration of honor and respect. Quoting Hsiung (2013), "the one on the lower end is to be deferential and obedient to the one on the higher end, in attitude as well as use of resources" (p.21). The cultural worldview cultivated by filial piety is the motivation of the SENIOR AUTHORITY schema underlying the idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过你食米). The behavioral norms in a senior-junior relationship tacitly accepted by the general public in the Cantonese speech communities also refine the pragmatic function of the idiom, that is, this idiom is often used by a senior interlocuter to demonstrate authority to a junior interlocuter and claim righteousness for their argumentation.

Another cultural worldview derived from the traditional familial relation is the differential social expectations of male and female society members. The idioms *sik jyun faan* (食软饭, eat soft *faan*) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭, eat slippers *faan*) portray an unfavorable image of a male figure who lives on the income of his female partner. The negative connotations of these two idioms are facilitated by the implied violation of the *lun* (伦) that regulates the behavioral norms in the husband-wife relation. In Confucianism, the husband-wife relation is the foundational relation that constructs a household and is the cornerstone for other familial relations. *Yi Jing* (易经, also spelt as *I Ching*), i.e., *Classic of Changes*, explicates the classified places respectively for the wife and the husband,

the wife has her correct place in the inner (trigram), and the man his correct place in the outer. That man and woman occupy their correct places is the great righteousness shown (in the relation and positions of) heaven and earth (*Book of Changes: Tuan Zhuan: Jia Ren- Chinese Text Project*, n.d.).

Accordingly, for each of the places, there is a specific set of ethics. As recorded in *Li Ji* (礼记), or *The Book of Rites*, “[t]he men should not speak of what belongs to the inside (of the house), nor the women of what belongs to the outside” (*Liji: Nei Ze - Chinese Text Project*, n.d.). The wife’s duty is in the domestic affairs of a household while the husband’s responsibility lies in outside the household.

These Confucian thoughts in contemporary Chinese society has developed into the traditional cultural worldview that in a marital relationship, the husband is expected to be the family leader who earns financial income from ‘the outside’, e.g., from occupational work, instead of staying home to manage inner household affairs, which should be the expected responsibility of the wife. And hence, the development of the worldview schema of CHINESE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP. The idioms *sik jyun faan* (食软饭, eat soft *faan*) and *sik to haai faan* (食拖鞋饭, eat slippers *faan*) came into being in this conservative social environment, describing a situation that is the opposite of the social expectations, and thereby, acquiring a negative connotation instantiating the opposite of the MARITAL RELATIONSHIP conceptualization. This negative connotation, as analyzed in section 4.1.2.3, Chapter Four and elsewhere (J. Chen, forthcoming), is simultaneously motivated by instantiating stereotypically female-related cultural schemas such as SOFTNESS and DOMESTIC SHOE WARES in linguistic expressions that describe a male. These two cultural schemas being stereotypically female-related are also a product of the traditional male-female and husband-wife differentiations.

Other than the senior-junior and husband-wife relations, there are a number of Cantonese food-related idioms that encode the social norms of treating friends and acquaintances. The set of *sik* idioms instantiating the cultural conceptualizations relating to taking advantage of a person or a situation is among the most outstanding. As analyzed in section 5.1.2.2, Chapter Five, most of these *sik* idioms have derogatory connotations. Taking advantage of others is not only disapproved by the Cantonese, but also by people from many other speech communities. However, for the Cantonese, or the Chinese in general, taking advantage of people they know is considered more despicable and intolerable than doing the same thing to a stranger (X. Zhou, 1999). The analyzed *sik* idioms mostly describe such behavior towards an acquaintance, and hence their negative implications. One salient cultural schema entailed in the Chinese/Cantonese cultural conceptualization of TAKING ADVANTAGE is that THE BEHAVIOR OF TAKING ADVANTAGE OF PEOPLE BECOMES MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE WHEN IT IS DONE TO A FRIEND OR AN ACQUAINTANCE. The ideological underpinning of such conceptualization is associated with the cultural worldview about *guanxi* among friends and acquaintances in Chinese society.

Chinese society is often regarded as a *suk-jan se-wui* (熟人社会, *shu-ren she-hui* as in Putonghua), a ‘society of acquaintances’. In the earlier discussion of land attachment, we mentioned that Fei (1992) regards *xiang* (乡, village) and *tu* (土, soil) as the fundamental keywords that outline the rural Chinese society. While *tu* (土) encodes the land-related ideology, *xiang* (乡) portrays a symbolic social unit in rural China, which is formed by the

proximate residence of multiple households whose residents are acquainted with each other usually across generations through extended clanship or long-term agricultural cooperation. Fei (1992) describes the rural Chinese society as “a society without strangers, a society based totally on the familiar” (p.41), and further contends that “trust derives from familiarity. This kind of trust has very solid foundations, for it is rooted in customary norms” (p.43), and “to follow these norms is to follow one's own heart and mind (*xin*, 心)” (p.42). Such familiarity-based structure of the rural Chinese society has also found its way to the modern Chinese society, which is unlike what Fei described in 1947 as a society “composed of strangers” (1992, p. 43). Chiao (1982) argues that the *guanxi* network in modern China can be established and maintained through various ways, and cultivating *guanxi* through these ways is in fact a process of transforming strangers to acquaintances, or recapping the relationship between acquaintances who had grown distant (see also Ye, 2005). Zhou (1999) concurs that stranger and acquaintance are two basic categories of human differentiation in Chinese society and the relationship between acquaintances is the standing point of the Chinese social network. Hsiung (2013) on the other hand, considers *guanxi* as an extension of familial relations and familial relations as a reference framework for *guanxi*.

The notion of Chinese society as a society of acquaintance has brought about a set of codes of conduct that Chinese people comply with in social intercourse. The codes of conduct can be traced back to the Confucian school of thoughts, where friend-friend relation is regarded as one of the five cardinal human relationships. The principal code of conduct is based on the virtues of *zhong* (忠, loyalty) and *xin* (信, sincerity). Confucius' disciple Zengzi (also spelt as Tseng-tzu) said in *Lun Yu* (论语), i.e., *The Analects*,

I daily examine myself on three points: whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful; whether, in intercourse with friends, I may have been not sincere; whether I may have not mastered and practiced the instructions of my teacher” (*The Analects : Xue Er - Chinese Text Project*, n.d.).

Confucius also advised his disciples to “hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles” (*The Analects - Zhu Zhong Xin- Chinese Text Project*, n.d.) when treating friends.

In Chinese speech communities, individuals involved in a *guanxi* with friends and acquaintances are expected to have implicit mutual trust and share reciprocal obligation to help each other as a demonstration of reliability and sincerity (Davison et al., 2018). The set of *sik* idioms relating to taking advantage provides linguistic evidence of Cantonese speakers' moral criticism cast upon the violation of these expectations. The idiom *m suk m sik* (唔熟唔食, only eat what is ripe) is the most salient instance of violating mutual trust among acquaintances. Embedded in the idiom is Cantonese speakers' disdainful and worrisome sentiment towards the deliberate deception of a friend. Such behavior is called *saat suk* (杀熟) in Cantonese (*zai-shou* 宰熟 in Putonghua), literally ‘to slaughter the

acquainted'. As Zhou (1999) indicates, 'slaughtering the acquainted' can trigger public fear because it is a challenge to Chinese society's human ethics and its most fundamental structure of trust. Another idiom *sik wun min faan wun dai* (食碗面反碗底, eat with the bowl upright then flip it upside-down) on the other hand, is an example of violating the code of reciprocity among acquaintances. The idiom illustrates the act of betrayal, which is in fact two-fold. Other than the more explicit action of sabotaging a helping friend, the betrayal actually starts with not returning the expected favor after accepting a friend's help.

When cultivating *guanxi*, the involved parties often hope to maintain the harmony and avoid conflict in the relationship so as to establish a long-term reciprocal connection (c.f., K. Leung et al., 2002). The interworking, where ones regulate their behavior to meet the moral expectations and at the same time expect the others to do the same to maintain a harmonious relationship can be seen as a modern practice of the Confucian virtue of *ren* (仁, benevolence). In the Confucian school of thoughts, *ren* is a complex concept and can have different meanings in different contexts. Largely, *ren* can be seen as an inclusion and the perfect ideal of all virtues. One prominent teaching of *ren* found in *The Analects* explicates *ren* as follows,

the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others. To be able to judge of others by what is nigh in ourselves - this may be called the art of virtue (*The Analects - Yong Ye - Chinese Text Project*, n.d.).

Q. Zhang (2010) interprets the Confucian *ren* as a similar concept to 'humanity' but particularly encompasses notions such as compassion, justice, and human dignity. Fei (1992) contextualized the virtue of *ren* in the rural Chinese society and contended that *ren* is "a logical synthesis, a compilation of all the ethical qualities of private, personal relationships" (pp.75-76). Underlying the Confucian virtue of *ren* is the hypothesized premise that all men are good in nature and therefore *ren* is an inherent value (Q. Zhang, 2010). This prior assumption may have influenced the Cantonese conceptualization of negative emotions such as anger. As highlighted in section 5.1.4, Chapter Five, the idiom *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药, have eaten gunpowder) conceptualizes ANGER as the outcome of the consumption of a substance from outside the body, i.e., the metaphorical gunpowder, instead of an innate physiological reaction to a certain anger trigger in social exchange.

In contemporary Chinese society, the understanding of *ren* is by no means identical to its Confucian origin. Nonetheless, the Confucian teaching of *ren* has left its traits in the behavioral norms in *guanxi* cultivation today. The behavioral norms applied to maintaining harmony in a *guanxi* such as showing compassion and honoring the dignity of the self and the others have represented similar mindset to the virtue of *ren*. Pragmatically, the enactments of the modern *ren* are often motivated by the attempt to save and protect each other's face, or *mianzi* (面子), in Chinese interpersonal relationships.



*Mianzi* is the concentration of an individual's character and ego as they present themselves in a social system. It is a product in concert with the Confucian notion of differentiation and order-based classification of human relationships we discussed earlier. The norms and propriety an individual follows in a particular relationship sustains the *mianzi* of their own and that of the other members in the relationship. Earley (1997) gives a rather precise explanation of the correlation between regulating *mianzi* and practicing *ren* to maintain a harmonious relationship. He says,

individuals follow particular rules or norms of interaction regulating *mianzi* in order to maintain a balance, or harmony, in their relationships. They are not simply a normative imposition of society; rather, they reflect an internal desire to maintain the proper balance in these [...] relationships (Earley, 1997, pp. 67–68).

The idea of giving or protecting the *mianzi* of the others is “the ultimate confirmation of the important role of ‘other’ in Chinese social interactions” (G. Gao, 2010, p. 183). Protecting each other's *mianzi* also cultivates “a degree of emotional warmth between group members” (Davison et al., 2018, p. 226).

The worldview of practicing *ren* and protecting the *mianzi* of members in a *guanxi* is underpinning a variety of Cantonese food-related idioms that reflect cultural conceptualizations relating to how individuals process and distribute resources in daily conduct. For example, the idiom *tai sung sik faan* (睇餸食飯, watch the dishes to eat *faan*) illustrates the conduct of considering all involved parties and available resources in decision making so that all resources are properly used and everyone gets the best benefits. Embedded in this idiom is the socially encouraged or well-seen style of decision making, in which the *mianzi* of all members involved is protected and all resources are put to their best use. On the contrary, the idioms *lin zab dou lou maai* (连汁都捞埋, mix even the sauce) and *sik zo jan zek goei* (食咗人只车, have eaten the opponent's chariot) imply the unseemly conduct of exhausting all resources and room for maneuver, or exploiting someone's value to the maximum in social exchange. These acts are often seen as unkind and not a *ren* practice in a *guanxi*. The former damages the *mianzi* of other individuals by dishonoring their right and flexibility to use the resources and fulfill their reciprocal obligations. In the latter, the action taker does not show compassion to respect and maintain the others' dignity when benefiting from the exchange. Ultimately, it is believed that these actions would break the harmony of the *guanxi*.

The cultural worldviews and related idioms discussed in this section only give us a glimpse but not the full picture of how traditional cultural values and social norms govern Cantonese speakers' behavior and moral judgement in social interactions. Apart from the traditional values derived from the Confucian school of thoughts, we cannot deny that there may be other ideological forces that co-facilitate the conceptual mapping of the discussed Cantonese food-related idioms. We have only highlighted the essence of their ideological underpinnings here. It

is also worth emphasizing that the Cantonese cultural conceptualizations identified and discussed cannot be isolated from the broader Chinese social reality and social system. They reflect the special construct of the Cantonese cultural cognition; and at the same time, they are the heterogeneously distributed instances of the broader Chinese cultural cognition. Furthermore, in the Chinese social reality nowadays, developing cultural values are cooccurring with the traditional ones, which are motivated by Chinese individuals' transforming perceptions of their role and behavior in the social system as well as the changing moral landscape in China. Inevitably, the cultural conceptualizations about social conduct and morality underlying Cantonese food-related idioms may be undertaking a process of renegotiation among the Cantonese speech communities.

### **6.2.2 The Transforming Perceptions of *Self*, the Changing Moral Landscape, and the Negotiations of Ethical Values**

As analyzed in the previous section, the behavioral norms Cantonese people follow in social intercourse are often harnessed by the traditional cultural worldviews rooted in the Confucian virtues of human relationships. Social norms are embodied in the cultural conceptualizations embedded in some Cantonese food-related idioms, and the use of these idioms in turn reflects the underpinning worldviews. As we gain a structural understanding of the Chinese social system through breaking down the traditional worldviews, we cannot neglect the changes brought to the system and to people's ways of thinking and acting by the rapidly changing economic and social environment in contemporary China. These changes have promoted the renegotiations of traditional values and the development of new values.

Nowadays, Chinese individuals tend to reconsider their place in the society, reevaluating the relationship between the self and the others, and that between the self and the various social spheres where they respectively assume a designated role. Accordingly, they have the agency to adjust their daily conduct and behave in a way that corresponds to their developing frame of thoughts. Fleischer (2018) highlights a dynamic point of view about the traditional institution of *guanxi*, its interaction with the emerging ideologies in contemporary China, and people's modification and adaptation of these values in daily practice:

[T]his [the institution of *guanxi*] has produced a very instrumental, economistic, and structural understanding of Chinese social relations. What is lacking in this picture are the flexibility, agency, and contradictions in people's ideas and actions—even more so in the contemporary period, with its proliferation of new ideologies and lifestyles [...] Social relationships and the associated behaviors are both culturally specific and influenced by structural conditions in which social actors are situated. Yet in any given society, there exist multiple, and at times contradictory, organizational norms and ideologies. Moreover, these rules do not determine behavior but rather form webs of

meaning or guiding principles; they have to be interpreted and translated into everyday practice. But they can also be ignored or challenged. (p.29)

Fleischer's point of view is in alignment with the observation of cultural cognition in the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics. Cultural cognition of a speech community is regarded as a complex adaptive system with emergent properties and "emerges from the interactions between members of a speech community across time and space" (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 4). When examining the role of an individual in the dynamics of cultural cognition, Sharifian considers the individual as "the locus of cultural cognition and can have an initial causal role in its development, dissemination, and reinforcement" (p.5), apart from the simultaneous influence the individual receives from the cultural cognition itself. To a significant degree, what shapes the renegotiation process of the cultural cognition is how individuals perceive themselves in the speech community, how they interpret and integrate the traditional and emerging social norms, and how they navigate their behavior in everyday practice and interactions with other individuals. Therefore, unpacking Chinese individuals' transforming perceptions of *self* in contemporary Chinese society is a good starting point to examine the renegotiation of the *guanxi* system, the reconceptualizations of the related social norms, and how they are eventually reflected in the linguistic instances.

The traditional Chinese perception of *self* and the *guanxi* system share the same root in Confucianism. Scollon (1997) investigates the Chinese conceptual metaphors of self and communication in contrast to the Western counterparts through their manifestations in Cantonese idiomatic expressions collected from Hong Kong individuals' oral narratives in the 1990s. She concludes that the Chinese SELF is "an interdependent self in communication with other socially organized bodies" (Scollon, 1997, p. 1). Different from the Western notion of *self*, which Scollon categorizes as a psychological entity with its natural rights and freedom independent of physical and social constraints, the traditional Chinese *self* primarily identifies with the body and the family or home, and emphasizes its integration into the social system as a "mediator between the individual body and its social relations" (Scollon, 1997, pp. 2, 22). Lu (2017, 2019) in her study about cultural conceptualizations of self-representation of overseas Chinese also identifies salient INSIDER schemas and a collective self-identity, as represented by the frequent use of inclusive collective self-reference such as *wo-men* (我们, we) found in overseas Chinese speakers. Both Lu's (2017, 2019) and Scollon's (1997) findings about the traditional Chinese conceptualizations of SELF synchronize with the outstanding features of the traditional *guanxi* social system and the expectations of an individual's place and role in this system, as we analyzed in the previous section.

The traditional perception of the Chinese *self* also affects the behavior around communication. As the realization of harmony is the primary goal in conventional Chinese communication and the interdependent *self* is the mediator to achieve this goal, an individual's silence and action are preferred, while excessive talking and self-expression that asserts independence are not encouraged (Scollon, 1997). Cantonese food-related idioms that give moral teaching or executive advice on daily conduct often imply this traditional conceptualization of SELF and

COMMUNICATION. For example, the idiom *sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot* (食得咸鱼抵得渴, eat the salted fish, have tolerance for the thirst) discourages individuals from voicing their concern about the potential downside of a decision they have made. The expression of dismay or dissatisfaction is the manifestation of uncooperativeness and is considered in conflict with the smooth execution of a decision. The idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食盐多过[你]食米, have eaten more salt than [you] have eaten *mai*) discussed previously also imposes on the junior interlocutor the significance of obedience to the senior instead of disagreeing or expressing doubts.

The late 1990s witnessed “the rise of the individual” (Y. Yan, 2010, p. 1) in China. Alongside China’s transition from a central planning economy to a market-oriented economy, state control over private households had significantly shifted, which indirectly allowed individuals to shift more focus to personal development and well-being. The perception of *self* thereby, started a transformation from representing the collective-oriented values to embracing individual realizations. The process of transformation is still ongoing today. Yan (2009, 2010) considers this process as the individualization of Chinese society, in which some symbolic features include the individual’s becoming the basic unit of social discourse and the increasing awareness of individual rights and the pursuit of individual happiness.

The transforming perception of *self* has brought changes to the traditional structure of social relations, i.e., *guanxi*, especially in the foundation of establishing and maintaining the relations. As analyzed earlier, the traditional *guanxi* system is developed and sustained by individuals’ designated role and conduct constrained by the Confucian virtues. In today’s China, however, the maintenance of social relations can also be out of personal will and preference. Fleischer (2018) conducts an in-depth study on social relations and support system in Guangzhou, and finds that social relationships in Guangzhou have been highly individualized. He explains,

[r]eadily acknowledged and easily observable, social relationships remain important in Guangzhou [...] What has changed, however, is the more individualized nature of meaningful social relations; they are based less on membership in the same collectives and more on shared interests and personal preferences (Fleischer, 2018, p. 63).

With this transformation, we can see that behavioral norms associated with *guanxi* are undergoing a process of re-conceptualization. Concurrent with the original conceptualization of these norms as rules framed by traditional worldviews, the contemporary social norms can also be a collective product of individuals’ personal choice. As a result, individuals can perform these norms out of various intentions and have the agency to follow or challenge them.

From the Cantonese food-related idioms, we can also capture this increasing awareness of individual agency in social relations, especially in the speakers’ creative use of such idioms. The idiom *sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai* (食

盐多过[你]食米, have eaten more salt than [you] have eaten *mai*) can once again be a good example. As we discussed in the previous section, the idiom is regulated by the Confucian virtue of filial piety, and conventionally implies the privileged authority of the senior interlocutor and the expected humbleness and obedience from the younger interlocutor. Nevertheless, there are more than one instance from the collected materials where Cantonese speakers creatively reanalyze the idiom to challenge this traditional order of filial piety. In one such example, a speaker says,

*the senior has indeed eaten more salt than we have eaten mai, but what they did not realize is, our generation is practicing a 'low-salt, low-sugar' diet, it is not my business how much salt you (the senior) have eaten (the original Cantonese text see OA53 in Appendix 5).*

This younger speaker, although he shows respect towards the more experienced senior interlocutor, takes a critical stance towards the traditional mindset of senior authority. He explicates the limited value of senior experiences due to intergenerational differences in daily practice. Interestingly, the speaker voices his opinion through literalizing part of the idiom i.e., 'have eaten more salt', and creating a contrastive figurative implication for the phrase 'low-salt, low-sugar diet'. In this way, he protects the senior interlocutor's face through the effect of humor. In the example, the speaker constructs a renegotiated norm he intends to follow in a senior-junior relation. This norm is more self-willed and critical than the traditional expectations. We can see an individualistic *self* that stands out and differentiates from the interdependent *self* that sustains the traditional senior-junior relation. However, the speaker's pragmatic strategy still indicates the effort to maintain the harmony in the relationship. The linguistic output here shows evidence of the transforming perceptions of *self* and reflects the mingling of traditional worldviews and new individualistic values.

The changing perceptions of *self* are also transforming the moral landscape in China. The term *moral landscape* was coined by Harris (2010), who visualizes cultural meanings, values, and morality into a hypothesized space, where the peaks and valleys correspond to the outcomes of different ways of thinking and behaving. Yan (2011) borrows this term to illustrate how individuals' negotiations of their moral beliefs and social conduct can affect the society. He compares this dynamic to the liveliness of nature:

In nature, growing plants, blossoming flowers, flowing creeks, and floating clouds animate the earth and the sky. In a similar vein, the new ideas, ideals, and actions of individuals and the constant negotiations about their appropriateness bring life to the norms, values, and behavioral patterns in a society: this is the moral landscape. (Y. Yan, 2011, p. 36)

In contemporary China, the moral landscape is constantly changing along the process of marketization and individualization. As individuals reexamine their standing in the social system and reconceptualize the social norms and values, they develop new moral judgement and decisions on their behavior. One prominent change as

Yan (2011) points out, is individuals' shift from prioritizing the collective ethics of responsibilities to emphasizing the ethics of individual rights and development. Before the restoration of DENG Xiaoping's market reform in the 1990s after his second South China tour, collective values were prioritized over individual interests in both the state economy and the social system of China. Selfless dedication to the nation's political and economic cause was promoted as the greatest virtue. In contrast, seeking individual advantages and pursuing self-interests were not recognized as righteous acts. The freed-up market environment in the late 1990s triggered a wave of private business venture, in which pursuing personal wealth and materialistic lifestyle became a social trend, and thus promoted the social acceptance of achieving individual success apart from contributing to the nation's collective values. The marketization of China has ideologically legitimized the attention paid to self-interests and the growing awareness of individual rights.

The above ethical shift is reflected in the semantic change of symbolic idioms that derived from China's collective-central planned economy era. The semantic development of the idiom *daai wok faan* (大鑊飯, big wok *faan*) is a typical example. As analyzed in section 4.1.2.3, Chapter Four, *daai wok faan* (大鑊飯) nowadays has a negative connotation. The implication of the idiom has deteriorated from promoting an egalitarian employment system that emphasizes solidarity and provides workers with fair and unbiased remuneration, to criticizing such an employment system for diminishing individual differences and disregarding individual capabilities. The semantic deterioration reflects individuals' increasing appeal to be seen and recognized as an independent identity apart from their responsibilities in a collective group.

Furthermore, the *faan*-related cultural metaphor underlying *daai wok faan* (大鑊飯) has also developed variations that incorporate richer entailments in the cultural category of VALUABLES. As shown in the collected materials, Cantonese speakers not only use the idiom to repudiate the undistinguished payment system at workplaces, but they also use it to critique the lack of personalization and differentiation in sectors such as education. For instance, in an online education commentary that advocates individualized teaching, the traditional non-differential schools are referred to as *daai wok faan schools* (大鑊飯學校, see example OA50 in Appendix 5). The specific cultural metaphor embedded in this instance is EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AS *FAAN*, an extended subordinate entailment of the generic VALUABLES AS *MAI* metaphor. The target category of VALUABLES has extended to outside the monetary scope, including sub-categories of various social resources individuals believe they are entitled to. The enriched conceptualizations of VALUABLES reflect Chinese individuals' growing consciousness of securing and protecting social resources beneficial for their self-development. Underpinning this re-conceptualization is a developing cultural belief, with which highlighting individual needs and seeking social resources to meet individual needs are no longer considered unethical.

The ethical acceptance of pursuing individual success has allowed individuals more freedom to explore pathways and make use of available assets and resources to achieve their goals. Globalization and the market economy have also nourished an environment for competition. Moreover, the nation-wide encouragement of consumerism and promotion of both patriotic and individualistic values are the ideological evidence of acknowledging and supporting individualization at the state level (Y. Yan, 2009, 2010, 2011). However, in such a multilayered social environment where traditional and developing ethical values intertwine and sometimes become entangled, individuals are also faced with constant challenges in deciding if their thoughts and behavior are morally appropriate or acceptable. The individuals' negotiations and renegotiations of their appropriateness are in fact another aspect of reconceptualizing the social norms in Chinese society. This aspect of reconceptualization is evident in people's language use, especially when the use of a particular linguistic item triggers a controversial subject that facilitates debates and discussions among the members of the speech communities. The following case about the controversial use of the Cantonese idiom *sik daau fu* (食豆腐, eat tofu) in a commercial campaign is an example that reflects this conflicting trend of reconceptualization.

In May 2019, IKEA Hong Kong released an advertisement on its Facebook page for their new tofu flavored dessert<sup>49</sup>, which caused a social media frenzy over its controversial use of the idiom *sik daau fu* (食豆腐, eat tofu) in the advertisement. As shown in Image 6.1 below, this advertisement featured a tofu flavored ice cream cone in a pink background, accompanying Cantonese texts that read “*as long as you like it, you can come eat my tofu anytime*”.



Image 6.1 IKEA beancurd (tofu) flavored dessert advertisement (PI06)

<sup>49</sup> The word ‘bean curd’ instead of ‘tofu’ was used in the English texts of the advertisement.

The idiom *sik daau fu* (食豆腐), as analyzed in section 5.1.2.2, refers to the act of sexually harassing someone (who is usually female). The incorporation and purposeful manipulation of this idiom in a food advertisement aroused heated discussions regarding its appropriateness among Hong Kong Cantonese speakers. Opponents including some social activists and academics critiqued that the advertisement was crass and disrespectful, drawing public attention through deliberately creating inappropriate sexual implications with the linguistic and visual elements. Supporters on the other hand, saw it as a creative marketing idea and regarded the critics as being over-sensitive (see e.g., <https://mothership.sg/2019/05/ikea-hk-ice-cream-ad-sexual-backlash/> for more details of the debate). We showed the advertisement to two Guangzhou female informants, DL [GZ-F-39] and JZ [GZ-F-33] and asked for their opinions. Both informants were impressed by the creative use of *sik daau fu* (食豆腐) in the advertisement, and considered it a clever and successful commercial strategy that would attract consumption instead of an inappropriate offense (see PC27 in Appendix 5). Specifically, JZ [GZ-F-33] found the creative use of the idiom amusing, and DL [GZ-F-39] elaborated that the deliberate pun connecting the idiomatic implication of *sik daau fu* (食豆腐) and the tofu flavored product is to the point, as the sexually active adults are the main consumers in the market of IKEA.

The above example of *sik daau fu* (食豆腐) has revealed a fuzzy ethical boundary of the enterprise and its marketing team. The manipulation of the idiom proves that the marketing team was highly conscious of its (im)moral implication, and the release of the advertisement implies their deliberate intention to stimulate a moral debate. In this case, the distinctive reactions and heated discussions from the public were in fact linguistic capitals the enterprise used to make profits. Nonetheless, from both the advertisement and the public reactions, we can see evidence of individuals' negotiating ethical beliefs and norms in intimate relationship, have a glimpse of the complex moral landscape in China today, and witness how it motivates the development of the Cantonese/Chinese cultural cognition.

### **6.3 Social Dynamics, Speakers' Initiative, and the Vitality of Cantonese Food-related Idioms**

The theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics presents the nexus between language, cultural conceptualizations, and cultural cognition, in which language and cultural conceptualizations are viewed as two intrinsic aspects of cultural cognition (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a). This framework has thus cultivated a unique angle for understanding language change. In particular for the present study, the life cycle of Cantonese idioms or more generally, that of the Cantonese lexicon, mirrors the development of the Cantonese cultural cognition, which itself progresses along the ideological development of the Cantonese speech communities. Cantonese speakers play an active and crucial role in this cycle by being the members of the speech communities, users of the language, and carriers and enactors of the cultural cognition. Therefore, the semantic development of the Cantonese food-related



idioms and the vitality of this idiom system can be dependent on both the social dynamics and the speakers' initiative. Section 6.3 examines factors that affect the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms and explores the possible gateways for the preservation and maintenance of the Cantonese food-related idioms through multimodal cultural conceptualizations manifested in social spaces.

Semantic development in the lexicon of a language is attributed to multiple factors including socio-cultural factors, psychological factors, and linguistic factors (Burrige & Bergs, 2016). These factors reflect the speakers' relationships with the surrounding world, with their own psychological reactions and retrospections, and with the language itself. They all contribute significantly to the life cycle of the lexicon and can take effects both independently and concurrently.

The shaping force of socio-cultural factors on the semantic variations of the Cantonese food-related idioms has been proven prominent in the previous sections when we discussed the interrelation between social dynamics and cultural conceptualizations. In an ever-changing social environment like that of China, idioms emerge to satisfy the communicative needs, and then maintain their vigor by constantly evolving along the society and developing adjusted or shifted meanings. For those that cannot adapt to changes or are no longer applicable to the social reality and the working cultural conceptualizations, they gradually die out. Trendy expressions like *sik nou* (食脑, eat the brain) and *sik zi gei* (食自己, eat oneself) are newborns of the idiom family, riding the tide of China's social trend of individualization; whereas the longstanding employment-related idioms *tit faan wun* (铁饭碗, iron *faan* bowl) and *daai wok faan* (大鑊饭, big wok *faan*) are examples of survivors following the above mentioned 'law of the jungle'. They both came into use alongside the dominance of state-owned enterprises in the planned economy era and have remained active through respectively semantic narrowing and deterioration, adapting to meaning making in today's competitive market-oriented economy (see sections 4.1.2.3 and 6.2.2). In contrast, the light of life is dimming for another idiom within the same semantic field relating to employment, *sik mou cing gai* (食无情鸡, eat ruthless chicken). This idiom describes the situation where an employee is notified of his immediate dismissal by the employer who makes the decision at will. The survey result shows that only 35% of the participants know the idiom and almost half of them do not use it at all in daily communication. The enforcement of the PRC Labor Law in the mid-1990s may be one cause behind the loss of ground of *sik mou cing gai* (食无情鸡). The Labor Law has regulated the legal procedures for recruitments and dismissals and has increased the legal awareness of both the employers and the employees. As a result, the cases of dismissal the idiom describes are less likely to happen nowadays, and hence the idiom faces a lack of pragmatic context and the risk of becoming obsolete.

Like the socio-cultural factors, psychological factors are also pushing the wheel of life of the Cantonese food-related idioms. One such factor is related to how Cantonese speakers describe unpleasant feelings or experiences. It appears to be in the human nature that people do not want to disclose information that may trigger negative

emotions or undesired public reactions. They tend to turn to euphemisms when announcing bad news. Among the Cantonese food-related idioms, the passive-eating idioms discussed in section 5.1.3 are euphemistic choices for Cantonese speakers to illustrate an unpleasant experience that occurred to or was forced upon them. All these idioms draw on the ‘affected-agent’ aspect of the eating behavior and instantiate the UNWILLINGLY BEARING/RECEIVING AS *SIK* cultural metaphor, which links to the mutual eating-related keyword *sik* (食, eat).

As much as the *sik*-related cultural metaphor is crucial for these idioms’ meaning making, various euphemistic strategies catering to the psychological preference of Cantonese speakers are what infuse the idioms with vigor. For example, *sik baak gwo* (食白果, eat ginkgo fruit, a futile result) implies efforts made in vain by reanalyzing the constituent *baak gwo* (白果), reinterpreting the Cantonese name for the ginkgo fruit as ‘blank result’, the selected senses of the characters *baak* (白) and *gwo* (果). *Sik maau min* (食猫麵, eat cat noodles, be scolded) on the other hand, is in fact a homophonic substitute for *sik maau min* (识貌面, be alert to an unfriendly face). These two examples reflect the euphemistic strategies applied to the linguistic forms. There are also euphemistic strategies applied through the conceptual dimension. *Sik ning mung* (食柠檬, eat lemon, be rejected) performs a synesthetic transference of the embarrassment and frustration associated with experiencing rejection to the sour and bitter taste of a lemon, instantiating the cultural metaphor NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AS BAD TASTE IN FOOD. And both *sik lo si* (食螺丝, eat screws, stutter in public speaking) and *sik mou cing gai* (食无情鸡, eat ruthless chicken, be dismissed from work) are metonymic references to an unpleasant experience, instantiating respectively the CAUSE FOR EFFECT and ACTION FOR RESULT metonymies, in which the unpleasant effect or outcome is intentionally left out.

Despite the euphemistic functions of these passive-eating idioms, their popularity seems to be in gradual decline. Their downfall may be a testimonial to the argument “euphemisms are doomed to be short-lived” (Burrige & Bergs, 2016, p. 60). Euphemisms are short-lived for various reasons including semantic pejoration, where the euphemistic expressions are contaminated by the concepts they initially emerge to shield; and linguistic routinization, through which the euphemistic expressions become mundane and lose their charm (Burrige, 2012). These reasons are also intersecting with other factors. For example, socio-cultural factors like societal change may lead to the obsolescence of euphemisms, such as in the case of *sik mou cing gai* (食无情鸡, eat ruthless chicken) discussed earlier. For the dying out of most passive-eating idioms, the speakers also seem to play a very significant role.

Firstly, some of these idioms may wear out naturally as most members of the speech communities do not recognize or use them anymore. *Sik maau min* (食猫麵, eat cat noodles) and *sik lo si* (食螺丝, eat screws) are among these cases. Less than half of the participants know these two idioms, and almost half of those who do know them do not use them. It seems that the phonological association, i.e., the phonetic play of homophones in *sik maau min*

(食猫麵 vs. 识貌面) and the metonymic imagery encoded in *sik lo si* (食螺丝) are not strong or stable enough to sustain the natural tear and wear. As more and more speakers fail to recognize the euphemistic strategies, the idioms also lose their vitality.

Secondly, speakers may consciously or subconsciously choose not to use certain idioms, despite their full knowledge about them. For example, 90.5% of the survey participants are familiar with the idiom *sik baak gwo* (食白果, eat ginkgo fruit), but almost half of these speakers admit that they do not use it in daily communication. One reason may be that expressions including euphemisms that describe a futile attempt are plenty. The informant responses<sup>50</sup> show that Cantonese speakers tend to choose the ones that are more popular/expressive (e.g., *dak go gat* 得个桔, get a tangerine, another euphemism of the same meaning) or more explicit (e.g., *baak zou* 白做, work in vain). *Sik baak gwo* (食白果) seems to be less competitive in terms of its popularity and effectiveness in meaning making, and resultatively, it is losing its charm and going down the track of obsolescence.

Furthermore, speakers may also facilitate a semantic shift in an idiom or part of it so that its initial meaning becomes obsolete. That is the case for *sik ning mung* (食柠檬, eat lemon). In early 2019, young Chinese netizens created a new usage for the word *ning mung* (柠檬, lemon, *ning meng* in Putonghua), using it as a self-mocking verb to openly express the emotion of envy (e.g., 我柠檬了, I lemon-ed) or an adjective to describe an envious person (e.g., 柠檬精, a lemon demon) (“Ning-meng-Jing: the 2019 new hit of social media,” n.d.). The meaning of the idiom *sik ning mung* (食柠檬) has since shifted from experiencing rejection to feeling jealous. This is possibly a combined effect of a ‘clang association’, in which the idiom shares key constituents with the trendy *ning mung* (柠檬, lemon) expressions, and the speakers’ convenient decision to involve the idiom as one of the trendy *ning mung* phrases. While its conventional usage becomes less popular, the speakers have ignited a new life cycle for the idiom.

The obsolescence of many passive-eating idioms demonstrated above may reflect Cantonese speakers’ natural or unintentional choices/preferences, as a result of their innate instincts on using the language. But simultaneously, Cantonese speakers also have the awareness and agency to manipulate the language to meet their semantic and

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<sup>50</sup> Responses were collected from five informants: WSM [GZ-F-33], SJT [GZ-F-32], JZ[GZ-F-33], CZK[GZ-M-59], and PDW[GZ-F-61]. Most informants (80%) responded that they usually do not use the idiom *sik baak gwo* (食白果). Instead, they prefer to use other terms that are more common. Synonyms or near-synonyms of *sik baak gwo* (食白果) that are offered and preferred by the informants include *baak zou* (白做, work in vain), *mou gei wui* (冇机会, no chance), *m dak* (唔得, no gain), and euphemisms such as *taat cue* (撻 cue, slipped billiard cue) and *dak go gat* (得个桔, got a tangerine). Here *gat* 桔 is a homophone of *gat* 吉, ‘fortune’, which itself is the opposite and substitute for a taboo word *hung* 凶, ‘misfortune’. The latter then is a homophone of *hung* 空, ‘void/empty’, the actual semantic locus of the hidden expression for futility, i.e., *dak go hung* 得个空, got nothing). *Baak zou* (白做) and *dak go gat* (得个桔) seem to be the most popular among the lexical choices.

pragmatic needs. This functional mechanism partially reflects the speaker-language relationship and its effect in the semantic development of Cantonese food-related idioms. The linguistic interactions “provide a space for speakers to construct and co-construct meanings about their experiences” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 5), and thus also become a crucial means to develop cultural conceptualizations.

Cantonese speakers can creatively reanalyze an idiom to build humor, sarcasm, puns, or insider-jokes so as to fulfill the communicative purposes. The reanalysis often creates new meanings for the idiom distinguished from its conventional meaning. We have seen multiple examples from the previous analyses: *sik ling daan* (食零蛋, eat the zero egg) becomes part of a slogan to promote a healthy egg eating diet (see section 5.1.3); *jam dak bui lok* (饮得杯落, be able to drink a glass down) becomes a criterion indicator for good drinking water quality (see section 5.1.5); and *sik gwo je zuk* (食过夜粥, have eaten the night *zuk*) becomes a compliment given to the chef that cooks a good pot of *zuk* (see section 5.1.5). This kind of reanalysis may well be a one-off practice and short-lived, but it to an extent, opens new semantic possibilities for the involved idioms, and evinces in part the social trend or popular culture the speakers engage in. For instance, the three examples of semantic manipulation here reflect Cantonese urbanites’ awareness of personal health and well-being from the perspectives of food choice and food safety. This type of awareness is very likely a product of a social environment with a high level of food security and life stability, which gives rise to the social trend of pursuing a better quality of life on top of meeting the basic needs. In this case, the reanalysis of these idioms is in fact an instantiation of the developing cultural conceptualizations of HEALTH AND WELL-BEING in the contemporary Cantonese speech communities.

The creativity Cantonese speakers show in promoting the semantic development of Cantonese food-related idioms is also represented by their initiative in facilitating blending of idioms that are proximate in structural constitution or conceptual mappings. For example, we analyzed two idioms that draw on the conventional knowledge of *zuk* making, i.e., *bou mou mai zuk* (煲冇米粥, boil *zuk* without *mai*) in section 4.1.1.3 and *bou nung zuk* (煲焮粥, boil burned *zuk*) in section 4.1.2.2. In fact, there is another idiom *bou din waa zuk* (煲电话粥, boil telephone *zuk*) which refers to making an interminable phone call, that we have left out of the data analysis due to the limited scope of the present study (see section 3.1.5 about data selection). It is not rare to see the blending of these *bou zuk* (煲粥) idioms in various contexts. For instance, *bou nung din waa zuk* (煲焮电话粥, boil burned telephone *zuk*, OA51), a blend of *bou nung zuk* (煲焮粥) and *bou din waa zuk* (煲电话粥) is in the lyrics of a Cantonese pop song to illustrate the endless phone calls between a romantic couple. And a 2017 online commentary critiquing the Hong Kong Chief Executive’s political measures was entitled *Leung Chun-ying Boiled and Burned the Laborers’ Zuk without Mai* (梁振英煲焮劳工冇米粥, OA52), blending the two idioms *bou mou mai zuk* (煲冇米粥) and *bou nung zuk* (煲焮粥) and incorporating both idiomatic meanings to critique the Chief Executive for disadvantaging the Hong Kong laborers on top of offering them an empty promise.

The blending of the *bou zuk* (煲粥) idioms have added new members to the Cantonese idiom family. Particularly, it has expanded the semantic field of the idiomatic expressions derived from the Cantonese *zuk* making tradition and strengthened the role of *BOU ZUK* as a source domain for the conceptual mapping underlying the blended forms. When separate and independent, the three idioms share distinctive semantic and conceptual salience, of which the loci are on the modifying elements before the constituent *zuk* (i.e., 冇米 *without mai*, 焗 *burned*, and 电话 *telephone*). However, when blended, the underlying conceptualizations are primarily sourced from *bou zuk* (煲粥, boil *zuk*), as the blending process is realized through keeping the overlapped constituents *bou* (煲) and *zuk* (粥) as the skeleton and then fusing together all or part of the remaining constituents from the idioms in between. Through this process, the blended forms instantiate a salient cultural metaphor INVESTING TIME AND EFFORTS IN PLANNING AND ACTING AS BOILING *ZUK*, which is not a salient or central conceptualization in the original idioms. As a result, the *zuk*-relating idioms are equipped with a better chance to stay as active components of the Cantonese lexicon.

The examples of semantic changes and lexical creation in Cantonese food-related idioms have shown how social dynamics and the speakers' initiative work together to affect the vitality of the idioms. This opens the possibility to preserve or prolong the life cycle of Cantonese food-related idioms through the speakers' active enactment of the idioms, catching the waves of the social trends. The enactment of the idioms is indeed the presentation of the underlying cultural conceptualizations, and it is not limited to the linguistic dimension. According to Sharifian (2017a), cultural conceptualizations can be instantiated in various aspects of people's lives including but not limited to "cultural art, cultural events, folk songs, ritual, non-verbal behavior, and emotion" (p.6). In other words, the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the Cantonese food-related idioms can have multimodal and/or non-linguistic instantiations, which in turn can help strengthen their link to the linguistic instantiations, i.e., the idioms. Cantonese speakers can play an active role in promoting or building these multimodal cultural conceptualizations to sustain the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

In fact, in the contemporary era that values innovation and creativity, instances of successful attempts are not lacking. Many examples are found in especially catering industry, where local Cantonese restaurant owners who take pride in the Cantonese culture incorporate Cantonese food-related idioms in their menus and make links between the idioms and the dining experiences. For example, Image 6.2 below is the menu of a *yum cha* restaurant in Guangzhou. Cantonese food-related idioms with keywords relating to the *dim sum* items and other Cantonese food specialties are introduced and explained.



Image 6.2 Menu at a *yum cha* restaurant in Guangzhou

The restaurant creates a multimodal setting that promotes the food-related idioms and activates the underlying cultural conceptualizations. The customers are physically ‘contextualized’ in an environment, i.e., the restaurant, where they have access to the food items of which the names constitute part of the idioms, and where their eating experience is related to some idioms’ literal meaning. At the same time, the linguistic presentation and explanation of the idioms on the menu elicit the idiomatic meaning, which can refresh the memory for those who already have the knowledge and cultivate an understanding for those who do not know. For example, for the idiom *nin maan zin deoi, jan jau ngo jau* (年晚煎堆, 人有我有, *zin deoi* at the year-end, people have it I too have it), the customers understand the idiom through eating the Cantonese food *zin deoi* (煎堆, a fried dough stuffed with various ingredients), seeing and tasting its multiple ingredients, reading the explanation on the menu, and then making links to the underlying cultural schemas HAVING THE SAME POSSESSION AS THE OTHERS IS GOOD and ABUNDANCE IS THE POSSESSION OF VARIETIES. With this multimodal experience, the customers are likely to develop a solid understanding of the idiom and possibly use it in future communication. The related cultural conceptualizations also become more salient as the speakers reactivate or learn about the cultural beliefs embedded in the tradition of eating *zin deoi* when a year draws to an end. The restaurant in this case, may well have contributed to keeping this idiom alive.

Multimodal instantiations of the Cantonese food-related idioms are also captured in behavioral activities. During the 2020 *Gaokao* (高考), China’s National College Entrance Examination, a group of Cantonese parents in

Guangzhou were spotted to enact the Cantonese idiom *dim gwo luk ze* (掂过碌蔗, straighter than a sugarcane, to progress smoothly), an idiom instantiating the cultural conceptualization of SUCCESS, by holding a straight sugarcane at the entrance of the exam venue wishing for their children's success in the exam (see Image 6.3 below).



Image 6.3 Enactment of *dim gwo luk ze* (掂过碌蔗, straighter than a sugarcane) (PI07)

This example not only instantiates the cultural conceptualization of SUCCESS, i.e., SUCCESS IS STRAIGHT UP, but does so through physically enacting the linguistic idiom. The enactment has (re)vitalized the idiom *dim gwo luk ze* (掂过碌蔗), as the speakers, i.e., the Cantonese parents in this example, took their initiative to do it on the particular occasion of *gaokao* (高考), a primary annual event in national education that is given utmost significance both nationally and locally. Such behavioral enactment of the idiom attracted huge public attention, including the publication of the photo on the local municipal newspaper Guangzhou Daily and heated discussions over the social media. The original intention of the Cantonese parents may be a gesture of best wishes to their children, but the multimodal exposure of the idiom and its underlying cultural conceptualizations have no doubt boosted the strength of the idiom.

In this section, we have discussed the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms and how Cantonese speakers as well as the social dynamics amongst other factors can be determinants to the life cycle of these idioms. The active engagement of the speakers in using the Cantonese food-related idioms and enacting the underlying cultural conceptualizations in dimensions beyond the linguistic instantiations have established more possibilities to sustain the livelihood of these idioms.



## 6.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has investigated the ideological underpinnings of the Cantonese food-related idioms. The cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES and those relating to LIVING have their roots in China's agrarian civilization and the traditional living experiences of the Chinese farmers. The agricultural way of living cultivated the Chinese ideological attachment to the land, and the dietary traditions of the South Chinese as well as their constant concerns of food security constructed the Cantonese worldviews about the essential and valuable *mai*. Societal development and Cantonese speakers' initiative in language use have enriched the entailments of the cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES. Simultaneously, the related cultural conceptualizations of LIVING are also re-conceptualized as the ideology of land attachment undergoes renegotiations along China's urbanization.

For Cantonese food-related idioms instantiating various cultural conceptualizations relating to social norms, they are motivated by the Confucian school of thoughts, of which the virtues and values of *renlun* (人伦, human relationships) build the foundation of *guanxi*, the Chinese social network. The economic and societal development in contemporary China has facilitated the individualization of Chinese individuals, who are developing new perceptions of *self* and thus transforming China's moral landscape. The cultural conceptualizations relating to social norms are constantly being renewed, as the behavioral norms and social code of conduct are experiencing significant and constant changes along the (re)negotiations of ethical values and beliefs.

The development of the Cantonese cultural cognition also affects the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms. Both social dynamics and the speakers' initiatives are crucial to the semantic development of these idioms. Some idioms stay vigorous through semantic changes that adapt to the social trends, while some others become obsolete for various reasons. The multimodal enactments of the related cultural conceptualizations by Cantonese speakers may help sustain the livelihood of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

In all, exploring the nexus between Cantonese food-related idioms, the underlying cultural conceptualizations, and the ideological underpinnings has proven to be significant and effective for unveiling the Cantonese cultural cognition and understanding the life cycle of the culturally constructed Cantonese lexicon.



## Chapter 7 Conclusion and Implications

The present project aims to establish a cultural-conceptual understanding of Cantonese food-related idioms and to explore the role of Cantonese cultural cognition in Cantonese speakers' understanding and application of these idioms. It is a project designed and progressed within the theoretical framework and analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a). The study begins with identifying the underlying cultural conceptualizations of 22 rice-related idioms and 25 eating-related idioms that are most commonly known and used by contemporary Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau of China. Examples of these idioms in use collected from various online and offline sources are coded and analyzed. Subsequently, the study investigates the speakers' degree of consciousness of the identified cultural conceptualizations through analyzing multimodal materials and cultural informant responses, and then examines how it corresponds to the extent of figurativeness the speakers acknowledge in the idioms. Finally, the study explores the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations, and endeavors in the process to unveil the dynamics of the Cantonese cultural cognition by featuring the ongoing re-conceptualizations brought by the constant ideological (re)negotiations in the Cantonese societies. Building on the findings of the data analysis, the study also discusses the interworking between the Cantonese speakers, the Cantonese cultural cognition, and the dynamics in the Cantonese societies, and elaborates on how this nexus affects the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms. This chapter summarizes the major findings of the project by answering the proposed research questions in section 7.1, presents the contributions and implications of the study in sections 7.2 and 7.3, and addresses the limitations and potential future work of the study in section 7.4.

### 7.1 Major Findings of the Study

As the project commences, four research questions are proposed according to the aims of the study. Throughout the course of the project, findings corresponding to the research questions are discovered. This section summarizes the major findings in response to each of the research questions.

#### **1. What are the cultural conceptualizations underlying the Cantonese rice-related and eating-related idioms?**

The first stage of the analysis focuses on identifying cultural conceptualizations embedded in Cantonese speakers' use of the food-related idioms. This stage of analysis sets out to answer the first research question. The starting point of the analysis is to unfold the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of the idioms in the Cantonese communicative context, as “[c]ultural cognition is largely...transmitted through language...it is also instantiated in the content and the use of language” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 29).

As outlined in the operational idiom model in section 2.5, the idioms selected for analysis have food-related literal meanings and non-food-related idiomatic meanings. In particular, the rice-related idioms have literal meanings that center around the description and processing of the three rice products, i.e., *mai* (米, the raw rice grain), *faan* (飯, the cooked rice) and *zuk* (粥, the rice congee). The eating-related idioms on the other hand, mostly have literal meanings related to the experience and behavior of food consumption *sik* (食, to eat) and *jam* (飲, to drink), describing various aspects including the physical ingestion of foodstuffs, the manners of the eater, and the physiological and/or psychological impact on the eater brought by the foodstuffs. A few eating-related idioms collocate the eating-related verbs with inedible objects, illustrating scenarios that are unlikely to happen in realistic human experiences.

The literal meanings of these food-related idioms reflect the culturally structured dietary experiences of the Cantonese people and their linguistic creativities inspired by these experiences. They provide the fundamental sources for the development of the idiomatic meanings and the conceptual raw materials for the construction of the embedded cultural conceptualizations. In contrast, the idiomatic meanings conclude the speakers' meaning-making process and reveal the conceptual targets Cantonese speakers aim to present, finalizing the conceptual mappings of the cultural conceptualizations. Idiomatically, the analyzed expressions mainly have meanings within a number of domains, including the significant status of an entity or a construct; the condition and means of living; the attributes and impact of an action or an event; and the emotional or psychological state of a person.

Pragmatically, the food-related idioms are linguistic resources Cantonese speakers make use of to achieve one or more communicative purposes. The discussed idioms demonstrate various and often overlapping pragmatic functions. Cantonese speakers use these idioms to describe the components of an entity or the procedures of an action; to give implicit or euphemistic reference to the state of affairs; to provide moral teaching or cast personal judgement; to indirectly express emotions and sentiments; to deliberately cultivate rhetorical effects such as humor and sarcasm; and/or to actively build creative puns or elicit insider jokes.

The understanding of the semantic meanings and pragmatic functions contextualizes the target idioms in use at the linguistic level and lays the foundation for the more in-depth inquiry at the conceptual level. Multiple sets of cultural conceptualizations are identified from the rice-related and the eating-related idioms. Figure 7.1 presents an inter-related and multi-dimensional synopsis of the cultural conceptualizations identified from the discussed idioms in this study.

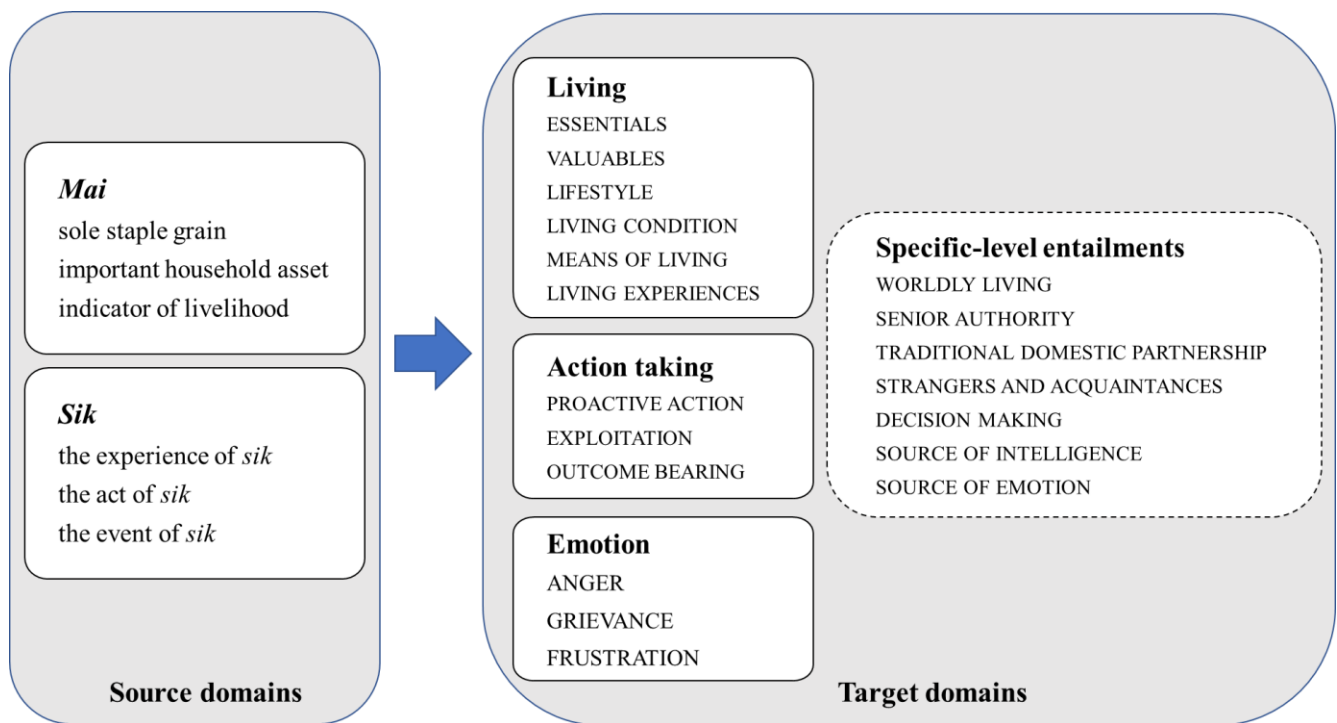


Figure 7.1 A synopsis of the identified cultural conceptualizations from the analyzed idioms

At a macro level, *mai* (rice) and *sik* (food consumption) are the two fundamental source domains, corresponding to the key constituents of the analyzed idioms, i.e., linguistic instances of the cultural categories of *MAI* and *SIK*. Cantonese cultural beliefs and conventional knowledge within these two source domains are drawn and mapped onto three general target domains, namely, the domains of living, action taking, and emotion. Cultural conceptualizations within these three target domains are among the most fundamental, derived from the embodied and lived experience of the Cantonese people. They incorporate the common Cantonese values, which are paramount to the formation of the Cantonese cultural cognition.

In each of the general target domains, cultural conceptualizations that represent particular aspects of the Cantonese life are identified from the analyzed idioms. In the domain of living, cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES, and those of LIVING CONDITION, MEANS OF LIVING, LIFESTYLE and LIVING EXPERIENCES are the most salient and are instantiated in both rice-related and eating-related idioms. In the domain of action taking, cultural conceptualizations of PROACTIVE ACTION, EXPLOITATION and OUTCOME BEARING are found embedded in a number of eating-related idioms. As for the domain of emotion, cultural conceptualizations reflected in the analyzed idioms are mostly of negative emotions and sentiments such as ANGER, GRIEVANCE, and FRUSTRATION.

At a more micro dimension, specific-level cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural metonymies are identified in distinctive idioms. These specific-level conceptualizations are elaborations or entailments of the macro-level establishments and are as much culturally structured as the latter. They reflect nuanced understandings

or collective perceptions that are harnessed and shaped by particular lived experiences accumulated in the Cantonese speech communities across time and space. For example, the cultural schemas of *WORLDLY LIVING* are at the core of most cultural conceptualizations related to living, and the cultural schemas about different interpersonal relations such as those of *SENIOR AUTHORITY*, *TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP*, and *STRANGERS AND ACQUAINTANCES* are entailed in the cultural conceptualizations related to action taking. They refine and supplement the conceptual mappings between the source and target domains and enrich the culturally special details of the cultural conceptualizations.

## **2. To the Cantonese speakers, how figurative are the target idioms in use?**

The second research question inquires about the extent of figurativeness of the analyzed idioms as acknowledged by the Cantonese speakers. In this study, the term ‘figurativeness’ is employed to represent the speakers’ understanding of the meaning processing of the target idioms, i.e., the emic understanding, as distinguished from ‘idiomaticity’, which incorporates the etic understanding that an idiom has both a literal and idiomatic meaning and is metaphoric in nature (see literature review in section 2.3). This research question is proposed partially corresponding to the theoretical basis of Cultural Linguistics, on which an emic perspective is considered indispensable in identifying and understanding cultural conceptualizations of a speech community (Sharifian, 2011, p. 13). Looking at the analysis of figurative language from this standpoint, the meaning of a figurative expression may be processed differently between members and non-members of the speech community. The speakers can have different degrees of consciousness of the underlying cultural conceptualizations of the expression, depending on how much the conceptual mappings are rooted in the speakers’ worldview. As a result, the speakers may or may not acknowledge an expression as metaphoric and can have insights on how figurative an expression is when it is in use.

There are altogether three identified cultural conceptualizations that attest to the notion of *worldview metaphor*, or *worldview metonymy* in the case of metonymic relations, i.e., the cultural metaphors *MONEY AS MAI*, and *MAKING A LIVING AS LOOKING FOR FOOD*, and the cultural metonymy *MAI STANDS FOR BASIC LIFE NECESSITIES*. Cantonese speakers appear to understand the cultural metaphors/metonymy as literal statements about their lived experiences, and they seem entirely unconscious of the conceptual mappings. Accordingly, they regard the related idioms, i.e., *jau mai* (有米, to have *mai*), *wan sik* (搵食, to look for food), *san fu wan lai zi zoi sik* (辛苦搵嚟自在食, eat at ease the food sought with hard work) and *caai mai jau jim* (柴米油盐, firewood, *mai*, cooking oil, and salt) as entirely non-figurative but simply literal representations of their everyday life.

Except for the above instances, Cantonese speakers are generally conscious of the cultural conceptualizations underlying the majority of the analyzed idioms, but the degrees of consciousness vary (revisit figures 4.1 and 5.2). This variation occurs between different idioms and is also reflected in the interpretation of the same idiom between

different speakers. The rationale behind the speakers' various degrees of consciousness is multi-layered and complicated. Despite the complexity, one outstanding reason may be that the underlying cultural conceptualizations of most of the analyzed idioms are motivated mutually by the Cantonese worldviews and conventional knowledge and the near-universal understandings of human experiences. Cantonese speakers share different degrees of awareness and understanding of these motivating factors. As a result, they can also have discrepant interpretations about the semantic/idiomatic development of the idioms. The complexity and variations in fact reflect the heterogeneous distribution of the collective Cantonese cultural cognition among individual members of the Cantonese speech community.

Corresponding to the finding that Cantonese speakers are to different degrees conscious of the cultural conceptualizations, they also acknowledge that most of the analyzed idioms are figurative. Similarly, this acknowledgement is nuanced and differentiates between different idioms. Some idioms are considered more figurative than the others, and the literal and idiomatic meanings of one idiom can interact in a different manner than those of another. Moreover, based on the informant responses, there are also variations among Cantonese speakers as to how much figurativeness they perceive in the same idiom and their interpretations about why it is figurative. The only exception is for the idioms that instantiate creative cultural metaphors. These conceptualizations are intentionally created by Cantonese speakers through drawing on both their linguistic resources and cultural knowledge. The speakers are not only consciously engaged in establishing the cross-domain mappings, but they also actively put the related idioms to creative use to generate rhetorical effects in communication. These few idioms per se are commonly recognized as highly figurative and as examples of a figure of speech. Their metaphoric nature is more rhetorical than conceptual.

### **3. What are the ideological underpinnings of the identified cultural conceptualizations?**

In order to understand the part of Cantonese cultural cognition as reflected in the Cantonese food-related idioms, it is significant to move deeper than the linguistic and conceptual dimensions and retrace the ideological roots that underpin the identified cultural conceptualizations. The third research question is proposed to fulfill this aim.

What underpins the identified cultural conceptualizations is a system of ideologies that evolve from shared history, and constantly renegotiate through economic and societal development of the Cantonese speech communities. They shape the frames of thought and behavioral norms of the community members, and thus motivate the collective Cantonese cultural cognition.

The cultural conceptualizations of ESSENTIALS and VALUABLES have their roots both in the agricultural history of South China where rice has remained the leading crop, and in the Cantonese food ideology, where rice is the indispensable staple grain as distinguished from the other foodstuffs. Chinese farmers' historical attachment to the land together with the value of *mai* and importance of food-consumption in livelihood sustenance on the other

hand, cultivate the cluster of cultural conceptualizations of LIVING. As for the cultural conceptualizations of ACTION TAKING and those of negative emotions such as ANGER, they are restrained by the Confucian school of thoughts, especially derived from various teachings about cardinal virtues in maintaining interpersonal relations in traditional Chinese society.

One of the most important findings in the ideological investigation is the revelation of how negotiations and renegotiations of the ideologies can trigger the process of reconceptualization. The most salient sets of reconceptualization identified from the data include the cultural conceptualizations related to living and those related to social conduct. Living has been conceptualized as more than merely acquiring food from the field or getting income from work to ensure food sustenance. Conceptual entailments such as HAPPINESS and AUTONOMY are incorporated in the developing cultural understanding of living. The reconceptualized notion of living is motivated by the renegotiated ideology of Cantonese speakers' attachment to and detachment from the land, which in turn is fueled by urbanization and economic development of the Cantonese societies in the broader context of contemporary China. As for the cultural conceptualizations related to social conduct, the emerging reconceptualization is closely associated with the developing perception of an independent *self* among the Cantonese youths, as distinctive from the interdependent *self* in the traditional Confucian construct of social relations, i.e., the traditional *guanxi*. This conceptual development reflects the process of individualization in China, in which Chinese individuals take more initiative in evaluating the standard of morality and governing their behavior in social exchanges. The findings of the interplay between the ideological development in the society and the reshaping of the related cultural conceptualizations have proven evident the emergent property of the Cantonese cultural cognition and its nature as a complex adaptive system, in that it results from "the interactions between the members...across time and space", and has its own "unique history of interactions that constantly construct and reconstruct the system" (Sharifian, 2011, p. 23).

#### **4. How does the development of the Cantonese cultural cognition affect the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms?**

As the cultural conceptualizations evolve and reshape, adapting to the developing social ideologies, the linguistic instantiations of these cultural conceptualizations, i.e., the Cantonese food-related idioms can also experience semantic changes that eventually affect their vitality. The fourth research question completes the circle of investigation by moving back up to the linguistic dimension and inquires about how the deeper-level conceptual interworking and ideological evolution is reflected in language use, navigating the life cycle of the Cantonese food-related idioms.

It is evident that the socio-cultural factors contribute directly to sustaining or demolishing the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms. The idioms that remain active in social discourse are those representing the salient

cultural conceptualizations and those incorporating the emerging cultural conceptualizations through semantic changes. Idioms that do not fit to reflect the social dynamics and the contemporary frames of thought gradually decline in popularity and wither. The socio-cultural factors are also a powerful drive to the emergence of trendy idioms, adding new blood to the family of food-related idioms.

Besides the socio-cultural factors, it appears that psychological factors are also crucial to the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms. A cluster of ‘passive-eating’ idioms in the fundamental data pool gained popularity to cater for the speakers’ need to provide euphemistic reference to unpleasant experiences and negative emotions. These idioms reflect part of the Cantonese cultural cognition that conceptualizes negative emotion as sourced from outside the human body. However, we have found in the data selection survey that this particular set of idioms is losing their vitality. An explication of the rationale behind this phenomenon uncovers the determinant role Cantonese speakers play in the life cycle of the idioms. As much as an idiom reflects the cultural cognition, if the speakers fail to recognize it, choose not to use it, or induce a semantic shift, the life trajectory of the idiom per se may well be reshaped.

This furthermore brings attention to the discussion of how Cantonese speakers can actively take initiative in sustaining the vitality of the Cantonese food-related idioms. We have found examples that illustrate Cantonese speakers’ active engagement in enacting one or more idioms and establishing multimodal presentation of the underlying cultural conceptualizations, which can be an effective means to maintain or revitalize the popularity of the target idioms. The social dynamics, the emergent cultural cognition, and the speakers are intrinsic elements to the vitality of Cantonese food-related idioms and that of Cantonese figurative language in general.

## **7.2 Contributions of the Current Project**

The current project has revealed the cultural-conceptual interworking underlying the Cantonese food-related idioms and has provided insights on understanding the dynamic cultural cognition of the Cantonese speech communities. It has thus presented a novel angle, supplementing the existing approaches in the research of Cantonese language and culture and that of figurative language in general. The particular contributions of the current project are outlined as below.

The most outstanding merit of this project lies in its contribution to the discipline of Cultural Linguistics. Firstly, the study expands the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics by identifying cultural metonymies from the target idioms. Cultural metonymy has rarely been explored in the existing Cultural Linguistics studies. The identification of cultural metonymies has shown that cultural conceptualizations of a speech community not only include cross-domain conceptualizations but also have intra-domain mappings that are culturally harnessed and structured. Based on the findings from the data analysis, idioms motivated by cultural metonymies seem to allow

more semantic and pragmatic flexibility compared to those motivated by cross-domain conceptualizations, i.e., cultural metaphors. One reason may be that the speakers usually have full awareness and understanding of the cultural knowledge within the domain where the mapping occurs. Therefore, they can freely manipulate the expressions to meet their purpose of meaning making with other members of the speech community, especially to create rhetorical effects and instances such as puns and insider jokes. Linguistic expressions that instantiate cultural metonymies appear to have facilitated in-group communication and negotiation of the heterogeneously distributed cultural cognition. Cultural metonymy thereby, has the potential to be the fourth analytical tool for researchers of cultural cognition, in addition to cultural category, cultural schema, and cultural metaphor.

Secondly, the present study elaborates on the research of reconceptualization. Studies of reconceptualization emerge as contacts between different speech communities become frequent in the era of globalization, and cross-cultural reconceptualization has been a main research focus in these studies. In comparison, intra-cultural reconceptualizations within a speech community have drawn less academic attention. By discussing the ideological underpinnings of the Cantonese food-related idioms, the current project has unveiled the dynamics of the Cantonese cultural cognition, in which intra-cultural re-conceptualizations are at least as common as cross-cultural re-conceptualizations. The analysis has shown that in rapidly developing societies, social ideologies are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Therefore, the cultural cognition heterogeneously distributed among members of the speech community is also constantly evolving. Looking into reconceptualization induced by intra-cultural interactions is an effective pathway that leads to a better understanding of the development of the cultural cognition.

Other than the discipline of Cultural Linguistics, the current project also contributes to the linguistic study of figurative language, especially the study of idioms. The operational idiom model established to define and classify idioms to meet the aims of the present study has demonstrated the possibility to avoid rigidity in defining and classifying idioms while at the same time maintain the fundamental principles that compose the general criteria for idiom definition and classification.

More importantly, the study sheds light on a better understanding of the culturally structured lexicon such as idioms in the Cantonese speech communities through investigating the substantial nexus between the idioms, the underlying cultural conceptualizations, and the societal development. It cultivates the possibility to look at idioms from an emic perspective, in terms of how the idioms are understood and interpreted by the speakers and how their meanings are processed conceptually by the speakers, as motivated by the underlying cultural conceptualizations. The emic perspective compensates for the possible lack of first-hand input from members of the target speech community when the data is analyzed from the etic perspective of the researchers under a theoretical hypothesis. The combination of both etic and emic perspectives can provide an effective ethnographic approach to the research of figurative language in general.



### 7.3 Implications for Areas of Study

Apart from the contributions addressed above, the current project has implications for World Englishes research, especially for the investigation of Cantonese-influenced Englishes. It can also inspire studies of translanguaging practice and intra-/intercultural communication.

The Cantonese societies have been in contact with English since as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century when British traders landed in Macau and Canton, and a Canton-English pidgin was developed; this preceded the British colonization of Hong Kong between 1842 and 1997, during which English spread in Hong Kong through the colonial education system (Bolton, 2000b). In the postcolonial era, English continues to play a significant role in the Cantonese life. Hong Kong English has been widely recognized as an Asian English variety over the past two decades (Bolton, 2000a; c.f., Sewell & Chan, 2017). In Macau, English is a *de facto* governmental working language, a major medium of instruction in education, and is developing into an important language variety of media and commerce (Moody, 2008; X. Yan & Moody, 2010; Young, 2007). In the case of Guangzhou, despite the lack of a recognized and codified Guangzhou English variety, the instrumental functions of English are widely recognized by Cantonese speakers in Guangdong Province of China (D. F. Ng & Zhao, 2015). Guangzhou residents also hold a more positive attitude towards English than Mandarin Chinese, especially in terms of its practicality in communication and its social impact, and they tend to receive English education at a younger age (Shan & Li, 2018).

Although the findings of the present study are based on the analysis of Cantonese language data from Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau, it is very likely that some of the cultural conceptualizations are also embedded in the English(es) spoken in the three major Cantonese societies. In fact, a number of Cultural Linguistics studies (e.g., Latić & Wolf, 2017; Wolf & Chan, 2016; Z. Xu & Sharifian, 2017) have identified cultural conceptualizations that are prominent instances of the Cantonese cultural cognition from Hong Kong English expressions, including a Hong Kong English dictionary that explicates the underlying cultural conceptualizations of its word entries (Cummings & Wolf, 2011). The cultural conceptualizations discussed in these studies are highly relevant to and consistent with many of those identified in the current project from the Cantonese idioms, sharing the same or inter-related cultural and ideological roots. It is implied from this inter-connectedness that like other varieties of World Englishes, English spoken in the Cantonese societies is being localized, through which process Cantonese speakers “have ... adapted [English] to their own use, to encode and express their own cultural conceptualizations and worldview” (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 85). Therefore, the findings of the present study and the understanding of the Cantonese cultural cognition thus cultivated are valuable resources for future investigations of Cantonese-influenced Englishes, especially in terms of explaining the localized lexicogrammatical features, the semantic extensions, and the pragmatical functions of these English varieties from a cultural-conceptual perspective.

On the other hand, the present study also implies the possibility to explore a pluricentric variety of Cantonese English. As demonstrated in the analysis, the three major Cantonese speech communities, i.e., Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau to a very high extent, have a shared system of cultural cognition. Although inter-regional variations exist, the variations often result from the heterogeneous distribution of cultural cognition (Sharifian, 2011, 2017a). Therefore, it is plausible to infer that cultural conceptualizations shared by speakers of all three communities can motivate the production of localized English expressions that are understood and adopted by all the speakers and spread across the three communities.

It is not to be overlooked that there are discrepancies in the development of English in these three communities, if evaluated with for example, Schneider's (2003, 2007) five-phase dynamic model. The three English varieties are likely to be at distinctive phases of structural nativization, especially in terms of lexical productivity and creativity. Moreover, the differences in history, socio-political realities, and the linguistic landscapes may also lead the Englishes in the three societies to a crossroads. Nevertheless, these Englishes appear to share many phonological and syntactical similarities, as all are primarily influenced by Cantonese (see e.g., Ge et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2015; M. L. Ng & Chen, 2011; Y. Ran et al., 2020). Cantonese as a *lingua franca* as well as the cultural proximity in the three communities also encourages constant social interactions, which is likely to promote convergence of the Englishes.

All in all, it is worth exploring whether the similarities in linguistic features and the shared cultural-conceptual underpinnings of these Englishes are sufficient to recognize Hong Kong English, Macau English, and a potential Guangzhou English as dialectal varieties of a pluricentric Cantonese English, with the three cities/regions as the respective central locality for each variety. Following this frame of thought, it is also worth looking beyond the geographical restrictions at the Cantonese diaspora worldwide, especially at the translanguaging practice, to gain a better understanding of how Cantonese bilingual/multilingual speakers create social spaces and construct their transcultural identity through instantiating Cantonese cultural cognition in their linguistic exchanges.

From an even broader multilingual point of view, the current project can be a starting point of further inquiries into intra-cultural (mis)communication between speakers of different Cantonese or Cantonese English varieties. It can also inspire the research of intercultural communication between Cantonese and non-Cantonese English speakers, especially from the perspective of cultivating meta-cultural competence (Sharifian, 2013) built on an awareness and understanding of distinctive cultural conceptualizations.

## **7.4 Limitations and Future Work**

Contributions and implications aside, the current project is not without its shortcomings. Due to the limited scope of the study, we have only analyzed idioms with rice-related and eating-related keywords. There are more sub-

categories of food-related idioms, such as the ones that have linguistic constituents that reflect the Cantonese ways of cooking, and the ones that involve foodstuffs other than rice. A further investigation of these sub-categories can supplement the system of cultural conceptualizations identified in this study and draw a more comprehensive picture of the Cantonese cultural cognition from the perspectives of Cultural Linguistics and World Englishes.

Data-wise, a more accurate understanding of how the Cantonese perceive and acknowledge the figurativeness of the target idioms requires more empirical data and evidence, especially in the investigation of Cantonese speakers' conceptual consciousness of the cultural conceptualizations. For example, a more detailed and comprehensive record is needed to document the speakers' understanding and interpretation of the idiom data. A systematic focus-group interview would fulfill the purpose of outlining the collective cultural conceptualizations on top of the heterogeneous distributed conceptualizations among individuals by also documenting the *ad hoc* interactions among the speakers. Such an interview would thereby help situate an idiom along the conceptual processing continuum, more accurately reflecting the extent of its figurativeness relative to other idioms.

Similarly, more in-depth research is needed to understand Cantonese speakers' initiative in using the food-related idioms and enacting the cultural conceptualizations, and the impact it has on the vitality of the idioms. Such research would include inquiring about the specific mechanisms through which Cantonese speakers enact the cultural conceptualizations and investigating the degrees of effectiveness of these mechanisms. This is also closely associated with the exploration of multimodal cultural conceptualizations, which looks at other related cultural artifacts that instantiate the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the food-related idioms as well as the constructed linguistic landscapes where the idioms are elicited and incorporated.

Along the research pathway, it is worth investigating how Cantonese cultural conceptualizations can be part of the linguistic repertoire for members of the global Cantonese diaspora to facilitate their translanguaging practice. Through this investigation, we may well be able to explore the future of Cantonese English as a pluricentric and diasporic variety that inspires transcultural experiences and translingual creativity.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 The Fundamental Data Pool of Cantonese Food-related Idioms

The Cantonese food idioms in the fundamental data pool are collected from the following Sources:

- Hutton, C., & Bolton, K. (2005). *A dictionary of Cantonese slang: The language of Hong Kong movies, street gangs and city life*. Honolulu, HA: University of Hawai'i Press.
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| serial # | Idiom          | Literal translation  | documented # in sources |
|----------|----------------|--|-------------------------|
| 1        | [有乜] 冬瓜豆腐      | [in case of] white gourd (and) tofu                                  | 8                       |
| 2        | 食死猫            | eat a dead cat   | 8                       |
| 3        | 食七噉食           | eat like eating the seventh  | 8                       |
| 4        | 咸鱼翻生           | salted fish coming back to life                                      | 7                       |
| 5        | [煲] 冇米粥        | [boil] <i>zuk</i> with no <i>mai</i>                                 | 7                       |
| 6        | 苦瓜干[噉嘅面口]/苦瓜噉面 | [face and mouth be like] dried bitter gourd / face like bitter gourd | 7                       |
| 7        | 炒鱿鱼            | stir-fry squid   | 7                       |
| 8        | 食猫面/食猫麵        | eat cat noodles  | 7                       |
| 9        | 一镬熟            | cooked in one wok  | 7                       |
| 10       | 食过夜粥           | have eaten the night- <i>zuk</i>                                     | 7                       |
| 11       | 食拖鞋饭           | eat slippers <i>faan</i>   | 7                       |
| 12       | 食软饭            | eat soft <i>faan</i>   | 7                       |



|    |                |  |   |
|----|----------------|--|---|
| 13 | 唔嗅米气           | not smell the odor of <i>mai</i>                         | 7 |
| 14 | 倒泻箩蟹           | overturn a bamboo basket of crab                         | 7 |
| 15 | 割死牛            | butcher a dead cow                                       | 7 |
| 16 | 饮头啖汤           | drink the first sip of soup                              | 7 |
| 17 | 饱死荷兰豆          | the plump-to-death Dutch pods                            | 6 |
| 18 | 食得禾米多          | have eaten plenty of un-hulled <i>mai</i>                | 6 |
| 19 | 糖藕豆[水罉油]       | sugar sticking to beans [water mixing with oil]          | 6 |
| 20 | 神台桔/神前桔        | tangerine on the altar/ tangerine placed in front of god | 6 |
| 21 | 剥花生            | shuck peanuts  | 6 |
| 22 | 食咗人只车          | have eaten another's chariot                             | 6 |
| 23 | 食得咸鱼抵得渴        | eating salted fish, have tolerance for thirst            | 6 |
| 24 | 食过返寻味          | have eaten and return to look for the taste              | 6 |
| 25 | 食碗面反碗底         | eat with the bowl upright then flip it upside-down       | 6 |
| 26 | 食人唔露骨          | eat a man without spitting the bones                     | 6 |
| 27 | 睇餸食饭           | watch the dishes to eat <i>faan</i>                      | 6 |
| 28 | 食谷种            | eat the seed corn  | 6 |
| 29 | 一嚟饭[噉]         | [be like] a lump of <i>faan</i>                          | 6 |
| 30 | 食塞米            | eat jamming <i>mai</i>                                   | 6 |
| 31 | 卖生藕/抛生藕        | sell raw lotus root/ throw raw lotus root                | 6 |
| 32 | [食]无情鸡         | [eat] merciless chicken                                  | 6 |
| 33 | 炒虾拆蟹           | stir-fry shrimps and break crabs                         | 6 |
| 34 | [砌]生猪肉         | [pile] raw pork  | 6 |
| 35 | 一镬泡            | one wok of foam  | 6 |
| 36 | 一啖砂糖一啖屎        | one mouthful of sugar and another of shit                | 6 |
| 37 | [当]食生菜/食生菜[噉食] | [eat like] eating lettuce                                | 6 |
| 38 | 掂过碌蔗           | straighter than a sugarcane                              | 6 |
| 39 | 炖冬菇            | braise shiitake mushrooms                                | 6 |
| 40 | 唔汤唔水           | neither soup nor water                                   | 6 |
| 41 | 掙煲             | throw the pot  | 6 |
| 42 | 冷手执个热煎堆        | pick up a hot sesame seeds ball with a cold hand         | 6 |
| 43 | 誓愿当食生菜         | swear an oath as if eating lettuce                       | 6 |
| 44 | 食白果            | eat ginkgo   | 5 |
| 45 | 煲[电话]粥         | boil [telephone] <i>zuk</i>                              | 5 |
| 46 | 箩底橙            | oranges put at the bottom of the bamboo basket           | 5 |
| 47 | 生骨大头菜          | bony turnip  | 5 |
| 48 | 糯米屎窟           | glutinous <i>mai</i> buttocks                            | 5 |
| 49 | 食枉米            | eat useless <i>mai</i>                                   | 5 |

|    |            |   |   |
|----|------------|---|---|
| 50 | 豆丁         | tiny pea  | 5 |
| 51 | 死鸡撑饭盖      | dead chicken pushing back the lid of the <i>faan</i> cooker                         | 5 |
| 52 | 花心萝卜       | flowery-heart radish  | 5 |
| 53 | 一蟹不如一蟹     | each crab worse than the one before   | 5 |
| 54 | 唔食羊肉一身臊    | get the odor of mutton without eating it  | 5 |
| 55 | 呷醋         | sip vinegar   | 5 |
| 56 | 莲子蓉[口面]    | lotus seeds paste [mouth and face]  | 5 |
| 57 | 同枱食饭, 各自修行 | eat <i>faan</i> at the same table while each cultivates themselves in their own way | 5 |
| 58 | 隔篱饭香       | neighbor's <i>faan</i> fragrant   | 5 |
| 59 | 半咸半淡/唔咸唔淡  | half salted half insipid/neither salted nor insipid                                 | 5 |
| 60 | 反转猪肚[就系屎]  | turn a pig's stomach inside out [and there appears shit]                            | 5 |
| 61 | 年晚煎堆       | deep-fried sesame seeds balls at year's end   | 5 |
| 62 | 大番薯        | big sweet potato  | 5 |
| 63 | 同捞同煲       | mix on the same plate and boil in the same pot                                      | 5 |
| 64 | 食[咗]火药     | [have] eat[en] gun powder   | 5 |
| 65 | 食[西北]风     | eat the [west-north] wind   | 5 |
| 66 | 冇啖好食       | not even a mouthful of good (food) to eat   | 5 |
| 67 | 食屎屙饭       | eat feces and excrete <i>faan</i>   | 5 |
| 68 | 定过抬油       | steadier than carrying oil  | 5 |
| 69 | 挂腊鸭        | hang up a preserved duck  | 5 |
| 70 | 茶瓜送饭       | eating tea cucumber with <i>faan</i>  | 5 |
| 71 | 倒米         | pour <i>mai</i>   | 5 |
| 72 | 卖大包        | sell big Chinese buns   | 5 |
| 73 | 卖剩蔗        | the sugarcane leftover unsold   | 5 |
| 74 | 煲老藕        | boil old lotus root   | 5 |
| 75 | 咸猪手        | salted pig trotter  | 5 |
| 76 | 隔夜油炸鬼      | deep-fried flour dough strips left overnight  | 5 |
| 77 | 饮得杯落       | be able to drink a glass (of liquor) down   | 5 |
| 78 | 煞食/杀食      | eat unreservedly  | 5 |
| 79 | 餐搵餐食/搵餐食餐  | meal found, meal eaten  | 5 |
| 80 | 穿煲         | pierce the pot  | 5 |
| 81 | 爆大镬        | blast open a big wok  | 5 |
| 82 | 爆煲         | blow off a pot  | 4 |
| 83 | 软脚蟹        | soft-legged crab  | 4 |
| 84 | 炒埋一碟       | stir-fry together and put on one plate  | 4 |

|     |           |  |   |
|-----|-----------|--|---|
| 85  | 搵食        | look for food  | 4 |
| 86  | 本地姜[唔辣]   | local gingers [not spicy]                                | 4 |
| 87  | 一个饼印[噉]   | [be like] out of the same cake mold                      | 4 |
| 88  | 一镬粥       | one wok of <i>zuk</i>                                    | 4 |
| 89  | 熟口面/熟口熟面  | cooked mouth and cooked face                             | 4 |
| 90  | 十月芥菜      | October mustard cabbage                                  | 4 |
| 91  | 豉油捞饭      | mix <i>faan</i> with soy sauce                           | 4 |
| 92  | 得米        | have got the <i>mai</i>                                  | 4 |
| 93  | 倒米寿星      | the God of longevity who throws<br>away <i>mai</i>       | 4 |
| 94  | 食饱无忧米     | eat worriless <i>mai</i> till full                       | 4 |
| 95  | 一砖豆腐想升仙   | want to become immortal after eating<br>one cube of tofu | 4 |
| 96  | 得个桔       | gain a tangerine   | 4 |
| 97  | 挂羊头卖狗肉    | put up a sheep's head but sell dog<br>meat               | 4 |
| 98  | 饮咗门官茶     | have drunk the tea offered to the god<br>of door         | 4 |
| 99  | 食屎食着豆     | while eating feces find a bean                           | 4 |
| 100 | 生虾噉跳      | hop like a living shrimp                                 | 4 |
| 101 | 焗熟狗头      | a well-boiled dog's head                                 | 4 |
| 102 | 猪头骨       | pig's skull  | 4 |
| 103 | 加盐加醋      | add salt and vinegar                                     | 4 |
| 104 | 煮到嚟就食     | eat what(ever) is cooked and served                      | 4 |
| 105 | 食盐多过[你]食米 | have eaten more salt than [you] have<br>eaten <i>mai</i> | 4 |
| 106 | 老茭茄       | old but not fully-grown eggplant                         | 4 |
| 107 | 大头虾       | big-head prawn   | 4 |
| 108 | [做]大闸蟹    | [become] a big tied-up crab                              | 4 |
| 109 | 牛肉干       | dried beef   | 4 |
| 110 | 混桔/运桔/混吉  | mix tangerines/transport tangerines                      | 4 |
| 111 | 倒挂腊鸭      | preserved duck hung upside down                          | 4 |
| 112 | 蒸生瓜       | under-steamed gourd                                      | 4 |
| 113 | 煲水[新闻]    | boil water [news]  | 4 |
| 114 | 卖咸鸭蛋      | sell salted suck eggs                                    | 4 |
| 115 | 落汤鸡       | chicken fallen into soup                                 | 4 |
| 116 | 唔熟唔食      | not ripe not eat   | 4 |
| 117 | 拜神唔见鸡     | lose the chicken when worshipping the<br>gods            | 4 |
| 118 | 滚热辣       | boiling hot  | 4 |
| 119 | 倒瓢冬瓜      | white gourd with rotten pulp                             | 4 |
| 120 | 辛苦搵嚟自在食   | eat at ease the food sought with hard<br>work            | 4 |
| 121 | 生水芋头      | watery taro  | 3 |
| 122 | 食自己       | eat oneself  | 3 |

|     |              |   |   |
|-----|--------------|---|---|
| 123 | 食皇家饭         | eat royal <i>faan</i>                               | 3 |
| 124 | 茅根竹          | Rhizoma Imperatae and sugarcane<br>(water)          | 3 |
| 125 | 酸姜           | sour ginger and Chinese onion                       | 3 |
| 126 | 易过食生菜        | easier than eating lettuce                          | 3 |
| 127 | 食豆腐          | eat tofu  | 3 |
| 128 | 食柠檬          | eat lemon   | 3 |
| 129 | 食螺蛳/食螺丝      | eat screw/eat sea snail                             | 3 |
| 130 | 箍煲           | repair the pot                                      | 3 |
| 131 | 补镬           | repair the wok                                      | 3 |
| 132 | 有辣有唔辣        | some are spicy and some are not                     | 3 |
| 133 | 炒冷饭          | stir-fry cold <i>faan</i>                           | 3 |
| 134 | 掙豆           | get the beans                                       | 3 |
| 135 | 攞弓虾米         | bending bows and dry shrimps                        | 3 |
| 136 | 滚水焯猪肠        | boil the pig's intestines with boiling<br>water     | 3 |
| 137 | 连汁都捞埋        | mix even the sauce/gravy                            | 3 |
| 138 | 煮[重]米        | cook [heavy] <i>mai</i>                             | 3 |
| 139 | 大镬饭          | big wok <i>faan</i>                                 | 3 |
| 140 | 食饱饭等屎屙       | eat <i>faan</i> to the full and wait to<br>defecate | 3 |
| 141 | 搵米路          | find the route to <i>mai</i>                        | 3 |
| 142 | 米饭班主         | <i>mai faan</i> master                              | 3 |
| 143 | 豆泥           | mashed peas   | 3 |
| 144 | 喊包           | crying bun  | 3 |
| 145 | 姜越老越辣        | the older the ginger the hotter                     | 3 |
| 146 | 大冬瓜          | big white gourd                                     | 3 |
| 147 | 一次生两次熟       | first time raw second time cooked                   | 3 |
| 148 | 一镬起          | scratch up with one wok                             | 3 |
| 149 | 女人汤圆/女人汤丸    | woman's sweet dumpling                              | 3 |
| 150 | 肉随砧板上        | meat on the chopping board                          | 3 |
| 151 | 金菠萝          | gold pineapple                                      | 3 |
| 152 | 拼死食河豚        | risk life to eat globefish                          | 3 |
| 153 | 芋头点糖/芋头煲糖水   | taro dipped in sugar/boil sugar water<br>with taro  | 3 |
| 154 | 偷食唔抹嘴/偷食唔会撬嘴 | not wipe the mouth after stealing food              | 2 |
| 155 | 热气饭          | heated <i>qi faan</i>                               | 2 |
| 156 | 煲焮粥          | boil burned <i>zuk</i>                              | 2 |
| 157 | 填鸭           | (Peking) crammed duck                               | 2 |
| 158 | 近厨得食         | near the kitchen, get the food                      | 2 |
| 159 | 开斋           | break fast  | 2 |
| 160 | 和味           | harmonious flavor                                   | 2 |
| 161 | 冷饭菜汁         | cold <i>faan</i> and left-over dish sauce           | 2 |
| 162 | 有米           | have <i>mai</i>                                     | 2 |

|     |               |  |   |
|-----|---------------|--|---|
| 163 | 豆腐脍           | tofu liver   | 2 |
| 164 | 洗大饼           | wash big cakes   | 2 |
| 165 | 鸡肠            | chicken's intestine  | 2 |
| 166 | 够姜            | enough ginger  | 2 |
| 167 | 咸鱼白菜/咸鱼青菜     | salted fish and green vegetables/bok choy                    | 2 |
| 168 | 搵两餐/为两餐       | (look) for two meals   | 2 |
| 169 | 食住上           | eating and up  | 2 |
| 170 | 长期饭票          | long term <i>faan</i> ticket                                 | 2 |
| 171 | 食零鸡蛋          | eat zero chicken egg   | 2 |
| 172 | 食脑            | eat the brain  | 2 |
| 173 | 饮咖啡           | drink coffee   | 2 |
| 174 | 鱼腩[部队兵团]      | fish belly [army/troop]                                      | 2 |
| 175 | 过冷河           | cross cold river   | 2 |
| 176 | 蛀米大虫          | big <i>mai</i> borer   | 2 |
| 177 | 指冬瓜话葫芦        | point at a white gourd and say a bottle gourd                | 2 |
| 178 | 辣椒仔           | small pepper   | 2 |
| 179 | 一味靠滚          | only relying on boiling                                      | 2 |
| 180 | 煮鬼            | cook a ghost   | 2 |
| 181 | 食砒霜杜狗/食砒霜毒老虎  | eat arsenic to kill/poison a dog/tiger                       | 2 |
| 182 | 食葱送饭          | eat <i>faan</i> with green onion                             | 2 |
| 183 | 食爷饭, 着𩚑衣      | eat <i>faan</i> given by father, wear clothes made by mother | 2 |
| 184 | 大辘藕           | big chunk of lotus root                                      | 2 |
| 185 | 翻炒            | flip and stir-fry  | 2 |
| 186 | 热煮不能热食/热饭唔得热食 | cannot eat boiling hot <i>faan</i>                           | 2 |
| 187 | 实食冇𩚑牙         | be sure to eat without sticking food to the teeth            | 2 |
| 188 | 豉椒炒鱿          | stir-fry squid with soybean and pepper                       | 2 |
| 189 | 白糖炒苦瓜         | bitter gourd stir-fried with white sugar                     | 2 |
| 190 | 补镬唔见枳         | lose a cotton cork while mending a wok                       | 1 |
| 191 | 铁饭碗           | iron <i>faan</i> bowl  | 1 |
| 192 | 鱼翅捞饭          | shark fin mixing with <i>faan</i>                            | 1 |
| 193 | 粗茶淡饭          | coarse tea and light <i>faan</i>                             | 1 |
| 194 | 柴米油盐[酱醋茶]     | firewood, <i>mai</i> , oil, salt [, sauce, vinegar, tea]     | 1 |
| 195 | 剥壳鸡蛋          | an egg with its shell removed                                | 1 |
| 196 | 芝麻绿豆          | sesame seeds and green beans                                 | 1 |
| 197 | 豆腐渣           | tofu residue   | 1 |
| 198 | 脰过豆腐          | softer than tofu   | 1 |
| 199 | 大鸡三味          | three dishes made with a big chicken                         | 1 |
| 200 | 老油条           | old deep-fried dough strip                                   | 1 |

|     |              |   |   |
|-----|--------------|---|---|
| 201 | 油炸蟹          | deep-fried crab   | 1 |
| 202 | 砒霜浸辣椒        | soak chili in arsenic                                   | 1 |
| 203 | 海鲜价          | seafood price   | 1 |
| 204 | 烧猪           | roasted pig   | 1 |
| 205 | 三文治[阶级]      | the sandwich [class]                                    | 1 |
| 206 | 上面蒸松糕, 下面卖凉粉 | steam rice cake upstairs and sell bean jelly downstairs | 1 |
| 207 | 赚粒糖, 蚀间厂     | earn a piece of candy but lose a factory                | 1 |
| 208 | 食唔饱又饿唔死      | neither die of being full nor suffer from hunger        | 1 |
| 209 | 甜酸苦辣         | sweet, sour, bitter and spicy                           | 1 |
| 210 | 老姜           | old ginger  | 1 |

The following table is a breakdown on the documentation of food-related idioms in the eight dictionaries and reference books. It also presents the original form an idiom is documented in each source.

| serial # | Lo-Tam, F. (2007) | Lo, W. W., & Tam, F. Y. (1996) | Tsang, Ch. (2008) | Kwan, K. C. (2010) | Ouyang, J., Zhou, W., & Rao, B. (2009) | Rao, B., Ouyang, J., & Zhou, W. (2009) | Hutton, C., & Bolton, K. (2005). | So, S. S. (2002) | Total Tags |
|----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1        | 冬瓜豆腐              | 冬瓜豆腐                           | 冬瓜豆腐              | (有乜) 冬瓜豆腐          | (有乜) 冬瓜豆腐                              | (有乜) 冬瓜豆腐                              | 冬瓜豆腐                             | (有乜) 冬瓜豆腐        | 8          |
| 2        | 食死猫               | 食死猫                            | 食死猫               | 食死猫                | 食死猫                                    | 食死猫                                    | 食死猫                              | 食死猫              | 8          |
| 3        | 食七咁食              | 食七咁食                           | 食七咁食              | 食七咁食               | 食七噉食                                   | 食七噉食                                   | 食七咁食                             | 食七咁食             | 8          |
| 4        | 咸鱼翻生              | 咸鱼翻生                           |                   | 咸鱼翻生               | 咸鱼翻生                                   | 咸鱼翻生                                   | 咸鱼翻生                             | 咸鱼翻生             | 7          |
| 5        | 煲冇米粥              |                                | (煲) 冇米粥           | 煲冇米粥               | 煲冇米粥                                   | 煲冇米粥                                   | (煲) 冇米粥                          | 煲冇米粥             | 7          |
| 6        | 苦瓜干               |                                | 苦瓜 (干) 噉面 (口)     | 苦瓜干 (噉嘅面口)         | 苦瓜 (噉嘅面)                               | 苦瓜 (干) (噉嘅面)                           | 苦瓜干 (噉样)                         | 苦瓜 (干) (噉嘅面)     | 7          |
| 7        | 炒鱿鱼               | 炒鱿鱼                            | 炒鱿鱼               |                    | 炒鱿鱼                                    | 炒鱿鱼                                    | 炒 (老细) 鱿鱼                        | 炒鱿鱼              | 7          |

|    |               |       |            |                      |                 |             |                      |             |   |
|----|---------------|-------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|---|
| 8  | 食猫面<br>(麵)    |       | 食猫面<br>(麵) | 食猫面<br>(麵)           | 食猫面             | 食猫面         | 食猫面                  | 食猫面<br>(麵)  | 7 |
| 9  | 一镬熟           |       | 一镬熟        | 一镬熟                  | 一镬熟             | 一镬熟         | (炒)一镬<br>熟           | 一镬熟         | 7 |
| 10 | 食过夜粥          |       | 食过夜粥       | 食过夜粥                 | 食夜粥             | 食夜粥         | 食夜粥                  | 食过夜粥        | 7 |
| 11 | 食拖鞋饭          |       | 食拖鞋饭       | 食拖鞋饭                 | 食拖鞋饭            | 食拖鞋饭        | 食拖鞋饭                 | 食拖鞋饭        | 7 |
| 12 | 食软饭           |       | 食软饭        | 食软饭                  | 食软饭             | 食软饭         | 食软饭/食烂<br>饭          | 食软饭         | 7 |
| 13 | 唔嗅米气          |       | 唔嗅米气       | 唔嗅米气                 | 唔嗅米气            | 唔嗅米气        | 唔臭米气                 | 唔嗅米气        | 7 |
| 14 | 倒泻箩蟹          |       | 倒泻箩蟹       | 倒泻箩蟹                 | 倒泻箩蟹            | 倒泻箩蟹        | 倒泻箩蟹                 | 倒泻箩蟹        | 7 |
| 15 | 割死牛           |       | 割死牛        | 割死牛                  | 割死牛             | 割死牛         | 割死牛                  | 割死牛         | 7 |
| 16 | 饮头啖汤          |       | 饮头啖汤       | 饮头啖汤                 | 饮头啖汤            | 饮头啖汤        | 头啖汤                  | 饮头啖汤        | 7 |
| 17 | 饱死荷兰豆         | 饱死荷兰豆 |            | 饱死荷兰豆                | 饱死荷兰豆           | 饱死荷兰豆       |                      | 饱死荷兰<br>豆   | 6 |
| 18 | 睇餸食饭          |       |            | 睇餸食饭<br>(, 睇焯喃<br>嚟) | 睇餸食饭            | 睇餸食饭        | 睇餸食饭<br>(, 睇焯喃<br>嚟) | 睇餸食饭        | 6 |
| 19 | 糖藕豆, 水<br>沟油  |       |            | 糖藕豆                  | 糖藕豆, 水<br>(搵) 油 | 糖藕豆         | 糖藕豆                  | 糖藕豆         | 6 |
| 20 | 神前桔           |       |            | 神前桔                  | 神台桔             | 神台桔         | 神台桔/橘                | 神台桔         | 6 |
| 21 | 剥花生           |       |            | 剥花生                  | 剥花生             | 剥花生         | 剥花生                  | 剥花生         | 6 |
| 22 | (想) 食咗<br>人只车 |       |            | 食咗人只车                | 想食人只车           | 食人只车        | 食人只车                 | 食咗人只<br>车   | 6 |
| 23 | 食得咸鱼抵<br>得渴   |       |            | 食得咸, 就<br>要抵得渴       | 食得咸鱼抵得<br>渴     | 食得咸鱼抵得<br>渴 | 食得咸鱼抵<br>得渴          | 食得咸鱼<br>抵得渴 | 6 |

|    |         |        |         |         |         |        |         |           |   |
|----|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---|
| 24 | 食过返寻味   |        |         | 食过返寻味   | 食过番寻味   | 食过返寻味  | 食过返寻味   | 食过番寻味     | 6 |
| 25 | 食碗面，反碗底 |        |         | 食碗面，反碗底 | 食碗面反碗底  | 食碗面反碗底 | 食碗面反碗底  | 食碗面，反碗底   | 6 |
| 26 | 食人唔髻骨   |        |         | 食人唔髻骨   | 食人唔髻骨   | 食人唔髻骨  | 食人唔髻骨   | 食人唔髻骨     | 6 |
| 27 | 一嚟饭     |        | 一嚟饭（噉）  | 一嚟饭噉    | 一嚟饭     |        | 一嚟饭     | 一嚟饭噉      | 6 |
| 28 | 食谷种     |        | 食谷种     | 食谷种     | 食谷种     | 捱/食谷种  |         | 食谷种       | 6 |
| 29 |         |        | 食塞米     | 食塞米     | 食塞米     | 食塞米    | 食塞米     | 食塞米       | 6 |
| 30 |         |        | 抛生藕     | 抛生藕     | 卖/抛生藕   | 卖/抛生藕  | 卖/抛生藕   | 卖/抛生藕     | 6 |
| 31 |         | （食）无情鸡 | 食无情鸡    |         | 无情鸡     | 无情鸡    | 无情鸡     | （食）无情鸡    | 6 |
| 32 | 炒虾拆蟹    |        | 炒虾拆蟹    |         | 炒虾拆蟹    | 炒虾拆蟹   | 炒虾拆蟹    | 炒虾拆蟹      | 6 |
| 33 | 生猪肉     |        | 砌生猪肉    |         | （砌）生猪肉  | （砌）生猪肉 | （砌）生猪肉  | 砌生猪肉      | 6 |
| 34 |         |        | 一镬泡     | 一镬泡     | 一镬泡     | 一镬泡    | 一镬泡     | 一镬泡       | 6 |
| 35 | 一啖砂糖一啖尿 |        | 一啖砂糖    | 一啖砂糖一啖尿 | 一啖砂糖一啖尿 |        | 一啖砂糖一啖尿 | 一啖（沙）糖一啖尿 | 6 |
| 36 |         |        | 食（生）菜咁食 | 食生菜（咁食） | 食生菜     | 食生菜    | （当）食生菜  | 食生菜（咁食）   | 6 |
| 37 |         |        | 掂过碌蔗    | 掂过碌蔗    | 掂过条蔗    | 掂过（条）蔗 | 掂过碌蔗    | 掂过碌蔗      | 6 |
| 38 | 炖冬菇     |        | 炖冬菇     |         | 炖冬菇     | 炖冬菇    | 炖冬菇     | 炖冬菇       | 6 |
| 39 | 唔汤唔水    |        | 唔汤唔水    | 唔汤唔水    | 唔汤唔水    |        | 唔汤唔水    | 唔汤唔水      | 6 |
| 40 |         |        | 掙煲      | 掙煲      | 掙煲      | 掙煲     | 掙煲      | 掙煲        | 6 |



|    |             |            |                     |             |             |             |             |            |   |
|----|-------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|---|
| 41 | 定过抬油        |            | 定过抬油<br>(定过抬<br>炸弹) | 定过抬油        | 定过抬油        |             | 定过抬油        | 定过抬油       | 6 |
| 42 | 卖大包         |            | 卖大包                 | 卖大包         | 卖大包         |             | 卖大包         | 卖大包        | 6 |
| 43 |             |            | 卖剩蔗                 | 卖剩蔗         | 卖剩蔗         | 卖剩蔗         | 卖剩蔗         | 卖剩蔗        | 6 |
| 44 |             |            |                     | 食得禾米多       | 食得禾米多       | 食得禾米多       | 食得禾米多       | 食得禾米多      | 5 |
| 45 | 冷手执个热<br>煎堆 |            |                     | 冷手执个热<br>煎堆 | 冷手执个热煎<br>堆 | 冷手执个热煎<br>堆 | 冷手执个热<br>煎堆 |            | 5 |
| 46 | 誓愿当食生<br>菜  |            |                     | 誓愿当食生<br>菜  | 誓愿当食生菜      | 誓愿当食生菜      | 誓愿当食生<br>菜  |            | 5 |
| 47 | 食白果         |            | 食白果                 |             | 食白果         | 食白果         | 食白果         |            | 5 |
| 48 | 煲电话粥        |            | 煲(电话/<br>咸)粥        |             | 煲电话粥        | 煲电话粥        | 煲电话粥/煲<br>粥 |            | 5 |
| 49 | 箩底橙         |            | 箩底橙                 | 箩底橙         |             | 箩底橙         | 箩底橙/桔       |            | 5 |
| 50 | 生骨大头菜       |            |                     | 生骨大头菜       | 生骨大头菜       | 生骨大头菜       |             | 生骨大头<br>菜  | 5 |
| 51 |             |            |                     | 糯米屎窟        | 糯米屎窟        | 糯米屎窟        | 糯米屎窟        | 糯米屎窟       | 5 |
| 52 |             |            |                     | 食枉米         | 食枉米         | 食枉米         | 食枉米         | 食枉米        | 5 |
| 53 | 豆丁          | 豆丁         |                     | 豆丁          |             |             | 豆丁          | 豆丁         | 5 |
| 54 | 死鸡撑饭盖       |            |                     | 死鸡撑饭盖       |             | 死鸡撑饭盖       | 死鸡撑饭盖       | 死鸡撑饭<br>盖  | 5 |
| 55 |             |            |                     | 花心萝卜        | 花心萝卜        | 花心萝卜        | 花心萝卜        | 花心萝卜       | 5 |
| 56 | 一蟹不如一<br>蟹  | 一蟹不如一<br>蟹 |                     | 一蟹不如一<br>蟹  |             |             | 一蟹不如一<br>蟹  | 一蟹不如<br>一蟹 | 5 |

|    |           |    |        |           |           |         |           |           |   |
|----|-----------|----|--------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|---|
| 57 | 唔食羊肉一身臊   |    |        | 唔食羊肉一身臊   | 唔食羊肉一身臊   |         | 唔食羊肉一身臊   | 唔食羊肉一身臊   | 5 |
| 58 | 呷醋        | 呷醋 |        | 呷醋        |           |         | 呷醋/呷干醋    | 呷醋/呷干醋    | 5 |
| 59 | 莲子蓉       |    |        |           | 莲子蓉（口面）   | 莲子蓉（口面） | 莲子蓉（噉口）   | 莲子蓉（噉嘅面）  | 5 |
| 60 | 同台食饭，各自修行 |    |        | 同枱食饭，各自修行 | 同枱食饭，各自修行 |         | 同枱食饭，各自修行 | 同枱食饭，各自修行 | 5 |
| 61 |           |    |        | 隔篱饭香      | 隔篱饭香      | 隔篱饭香    | 隔篱饭香      | 隔篱饭香      | 5 |
| 62 | 半咸半淡/唔咸唔淡 |    |        |           | 半咸淡       | 唔咸唔淡    | 半咸半淡/唔咸唔淡 | 唔咸唔淡      | 5 |
| 63 | 反转猪肚就係屎   |    | 反转猪肚   | 反转猪肚就係屎   | 反转猪肚就係屎   |         |           | 反转猪肚就係屎   | 5 |
| 64 | 年晚煎堆      |    | 年晚煎堆   | 年晚煎堆      | 年晚煎堆      |         |           | 年晚煎堆      | 5 |
| 65 |           |    | 大番薯    | 大番薯       | 大番薯       |         | 大番薯       | 大番薯       | 5 |
| 66 |           |    | 同捞同煲   | 同捞同煲      | 同捞同煲      |         | 同捞同煲      | 同捞同煲      | 5 |
| 67 | 食咗火药      |    | 食火药    | 食咗火药      |           |         | 食咗火药      | 食咗火药      | 5 |
| 68 | 食西北风      |    | 食（西）北风 | 食西北风      |           |         | 食（西北）风    | 食西北风      | 5 |
| 69 |           |    | 冇啖好食   |           | 冇啖好食      | 冇啖好食    | 冇啖好食      | 冇啖好食      | 5 |
| 70 | 食屎屙饭      |    | 食屎屙饭   |           | 食屎屙饭      |         | 食屎屙饭      | 食屎屙饭      | 5 |
| 71 | 挂腊鸭       |    | 挂腊鸭    | 挂腊鸭       |           | 挂腊鸭     |           | 挂/吊腊鸭     | 5 |
| 72 |           |    | 茶瓜送饭   | 茶瓜送饭      | 茶瓜送饭      |         | 茶瓜送饭      | 茶瓜送饭      | 5 |
| 73 | 倒米        |    | 倒米     | 倒米        |           |         | 倒米        | 倒米        | 5 |

|    |       |      |         |         |           |      |          |       |   |
|----|-------|------|---------|---------|-----------|------|----------|-------|---|
| 74 |       |      | 煲老藕     | 煲老藕     |           | 煲老藕  | 煲老藕      | 煲老藕   | 5 |
| 75 | 咸猪手   |      | 咸猪手     |         |           | 咸猪手  | 咸猪手      | 咸猪手   | 5 |
| 76 | 隔夜油炸鬼 |      | 隔夜油炸鬼   | 隔夜油炸鬼   |           |      | 隔夜油炸鬼    | 隔夜油炸鬼 | 5 |
| 77 |       |      | 饮得杯落    |         | 饮得杯落      | 饮得杯落 | 饮得杯落     | 饮得杯落  | 5 |
| 78 | 煞食    |      | 煞/杀食    |         |           | 杀食   | 煞/杀食     | 煞食    | 5 |
| 79 |       |      | 餐搵餐食    |         | 搵餐食餐/餐搵餐食 | 餐搵餐食 | 餐搵餐食     | 餐搵餐食  | 5 |
| 80 |       |      | 穿煲      | 穿煲      |           | 穿煲   | 穿煲       | 穿煲    | 5 |
| 81 |       |      | 蒸生瓜     | 蒸生瓜     | 蒸生瓜       | 蒸生瓜  |          | 蒸生瓜   | 5 |
| 82 |       |      | 爆大镬     |         | 爆大镬       |      | 爆大镬      | 爆大镬   | 4 |
| 83 |       |      | 爆煲      |         |           | 爆煲   | 爆煲       | 爆煲    | 4 |
| 84 | 软脚蟹   |      |         |         | 软脚蟹       | 软脚蟹  | 软脚蟹      |       | 4 |
| 85 | 炒埋一碟  |      |         |         | 炒埋一碟      | 炒埋一碟 | 炒埋一碟     |       | 4 |
| 86 |       |      |         | (出嚟)搵食  | 搵食        | 搵食   | 搵食       |       | 4 |
| 87 | 本地姜唔辣 |      |         | 本地姜唔辣   | 本地姜唔辣     |      | 本地姜唔辣    |       | 4 |
| 88 | 一个饼印  |      | 一个饼印(噉) | 一个饼印(噉) |           | 一个饼印 |          |       | 4 |
| 89 |       |      | 一镬粥     |         | 一镬粥       | 一镬粥  | 一镬粥      |       | 4 |
| 90 |       |      | 熟口熟面    |         | 熟口熟面      | 熟口熟面 | 熟口面/熟口熟面 |       | 4 |
| 91 |       |      |         | 十月芥菜    | 十月芥菜      |      | 十月芥菜     | 十月芥菜  | 4 |
| 92 |       | 豉油捞饭 |         | 豉油捞饭    | 豉油捞饭      |      |          | 豉油捞饭  | 4 |

|     |                 |        |     |            |         |         |        |             |   |
|-----|-----------------|--------|-----|------------|---------|---------|--------|-------------|---|
| 93  | 得米              |        |     | 得米         |         | 得米      |        | 得米          | 4 |
| 94  | 倒米寿星            |        |     | 倒米寿星       | 倒米寿星    |         |        | 倒米寿星        | 4 |
| 95  | 食饱无忧米           |        |     | 食饱无忧米      | 食饱无忧米   |         |        | 食饱无忧米       | 4 |
| 96  |                 |        |     | 一砖豆腐想升仙    | 一砖豆腐想升仙 | 一砖豆腐想升仙 |        | 一砖豆腐想升仙     | 4 |
| 97  | 得个桔             |        |     | 得个桔<br>(吉) | 得个桔 (吉) |         |        | 得个桔         | 4 |
| 98  | 挂羊头卖狗肉          | 挂羊头卖狗肉 |     | 挂羊头卖狗肉     |         |         |        | 挂羊头卖狗肉      | 4 |
| 99  |                 |        |     | 饮咗门官茶      | 饮咗门官茶   | 饮咗门官茶   |        | 饮咗门官茶       | 4 |
| 100 | 食屎食着豆           |        |     | 食屎食着豆      | 食屎食着豆   |         |        | 食屎食着豆       | 4 |
| 101 | 生虾噉跳            |        |     | 生虾噉跳       |         |         | 生虾噉跳   | 生虾噉跳        | 4 |
| 102 | 焗熟狗头            |        |     | 焗熟狗头       |         |         | 焗熟狗头   | 焗熟狗头        | 4 |
| 103 | 猪头骨             |        |     | 猪头骨        |         |         | 猪头骨    | 猪头骨         | 4 |
| 104 | 加盐加醋            |        |     | 加盐加醋       |         |         | 加盐加醋   | 加盐加醋        | 4 |
| 105 | 煮到嚟就食           |        |     | 煮到嚟就食      |         |         | 煮到嚟就食  | 煮到嚟就食       | 4 |
| 106 | (我) 食盐多过 (你) 食米 |        |     | 食盐多过食饭     |         |         | 食盐多过食米 | 食盐多过 (你) 食米 | 4 |
| 107 |                 |        |     |            | 老煲茄     | 老煲茄     | 老煲茄    | 老煲茄         | 4 |
| 108 |                 | 大头虾    | 大头虾 |            | 大头虾     |         |        | 大头虾         | 4 |

|     |         |     |           |              |              |           |        |        |   |
|-----|---------|-----|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------|--------|---|
| 109 | 大闸蟹     |     | 大闸蟹       |              |              |           | 大闸蟹    | (做)大闸蟹 | 4 |
| 110 | 牛肉干     |     | 牛肉干       |              |              |           | (食)牛肉干 | (派)牛肉干 | 4 |
| 111 | 运桔      |     | 混吉(运桔/混橘) | 混吉(运桔?)      |              |           |        | 混吉     | 4 |
| 112 |         |     | 倒挂腊鸭      | 倒挂腊鸭         | 倒挂腊鸭         |           |        | 倒挂腊鸭   | 4 |
| 113 |         |     | 煲水        |              | 煲水新闻         |           | 煲水新闻   | 煲水     | 4 |
| 114 | 卖咸鸭蛋    |     | 卖咸鸭蛋      |              |              |           | 卖咸鸭蛋   | 卖咸鸭蛋   | 4 |
| 115 | 落汤鸡     |     | 落汤鸡       |              |              |           | 落汤鸡    | 落汤鸡    | 4 |
| 116 |         |     |           | (黄皮书鹌哥,)唔熟唔食 | (黄皮书鹌哥,)唔熟唔食 |           | 唔熟唔食   | 唔熟唔食   | 4 |
| 117 | 拜神唔见鸡   |     |           | 拜神唔见鸡        | 拜神唔见鸡        |           |        | 拜神唔见鸡  | 4 |
| 118 |         |     | 滚热辣       |              | 滚热辣          | 滚热辣(未录喻义) |        | 滚热辣    | 4 |
| 119 | 滚水焯猪肠   |     |           | 滚水焯猪肠        | 滚水焯猪肠        |           |        | 滚水焯猪肠  | 4 |
| 120 |         |     |           |              | 生水芋头         | 生水芋头      | 生水芋头   | 生水芋头   | 4 |
| 121 |         |     |           | 倒瓢冬瓜         | 倒瓢冬瓜         | 倒瓢冬瓜      |        |        | 3 |
| 122 | 辛苦搵嚟自在食 |     |           |              | 辛苦搵嚟自在食      | 辛苦搵嚟自在食   |        |        | 3 |
| 123 |         |     |           |              | 食自己          | 食自己       | 食自己    |        | 3 |
| 124 |         |     | 食皇家饭      |              |              | 食皇家饭      | 食皇家饭   |        | 3 |
| 125 |         | 茅根竹 | 茅根竹       |              | 茅根竹          |           |        |        | 3 |

|     |            |     |       |            |       |       |       |             |   |
|-----|------------|-----|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|---|
| 126 |            | 酸姜芥 |       |            | 酸姜菹   |       |       | 酸姜芥         | 3 |
| 127 |            |     | 易过食生菜 |            | 易过食生菜 | 易过食生菜 |       |             | 3 |
| 128 |            |     | 食豆腐   |            |       | 食豆腐   | 食豆腐   |             | 3 |
| 129 | 食柠檬        |     | 食柠檬   |            |       |       | 食柠檬   |             | 3 |
| 130 | 食螺丝        |     | 食螺蛳   |            |       |       | 食螺蛳   |             | 3 |
| 131 |            |     | 籐煲    |            |       | 籐煲    | 籐煲    |             | 3 |
| 132 |            |     | 补镬    |            |       | 补镬    | 补镬    |             | 3 |
| 133 | 有辣有唔辣      |     |       |            |       |       | 有辣有唔辣 | 有辣有唔辣       | 3 |
| 134 | 炒冷饭        |     |       | 炒冷饭        |       |       |       | 炒冷饭         | 3 |
| 135 |            | 擦豆  |       | 擦豆         |       |       |       | 擦豆          | 3 |
| 136 | 孳弓虾米       |     |       |            |       | 孳弓虾米  |       | 孳弓虾米        | 3 |
| 137 |            |     |       |            | 连汁捞埋  | 连汁捞埋  |       | 连汁<br>(都)捞埋 | 3 |
| 138 |            |     |       | 煮重米        | 煮重米   |       |       | 煮米          | 3 |
| 139 | 食大镬饭       |     |       |            |       | 大镬饭   |       | 大镬饭         | 3 |
| 140 | 食饱饭等屎<br>屙 |     |       | 食饱饭等屎<br>屙 |       |       |       | 食饱饭等<br>屎屙  | 3 |
| 141 |            |     |       |            |       | 搵米路   | 搵米路   | 搵米路         | 3 |
| 142 | 米饭班主       |     |       |            |       |       | 米饭班主  | 米饭班主        | 3 |
| 143 | 豆泥         |     |       |            |       |       | 豆泥    | 豆泥          | 3 |
| 144 | 喊包         |     |       |            |       |       | 喊包    | 喊包          | 3 |

|     |               |    |             |         |        |       |        |         |   |
|-----|---------------|----|-------------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------|---|
| 145 | 大冬瓜           |    |             |         |        |       | 大冬瓜    | 大冬瓜     | 3 |
| 146 |               |    |             | 一次生，两次熟 |        |       | 一次生两次熟 | 一次生，两次熟 | 3 |
| 147 |               |    |             | 一镬鑊起    |        |       | 一镬炒起   | 一镬跳起    | 3 |
| 148 | 女人汤圆/<br>女人汤丸 |    |             |         |        |       | 女人汤圆   | 女人汤圆    | 3 |
| 149 | 肉在砧板上         |    |             | 肉随砧板上   |        |       |        | 肉随砧板上   | 3 |
| 150 | 金菠萝（筍<br>箩）   |    | 金菠萝<br>（筍箩） |         |        |       |        | 金菠萝     | 3 |
| 151 |               |    |             |         | 拼死食河豚  | 拼死食河豚 |        | 拼死食河豚   | 3 |
| 152 |               |    | 芋头点糖        |         | 芋头煲糖水  |       |        | 芋头点糖    | 3 |
| 153 |               |    | 大碌藕         | 大碌藕     |        |       |        | 大辘藕     | 3 |
| 154 | 姜越老越辣         |    |             |         |        |       |        | 姜越老越辣   | 2 |
| 155 |               |    |             |         | 偷食唔会插嘴 |       | 偷食唔抹嘴  |         | 2 |
| 156 |               |    |             | 热气饭     |        | 热气饭   |        |         | 2 |
| 157 |               |    |             |         | 煲濃粥    | 煲濃粥   |        |         | 2 |
| 158 | 填鸭            | 填鸭 |             |         |        |       |        |         | 2 |
| 159 |               |    |             | 近厨得食    | 近厨得食   |       |        |         | 2 |
| 160 | 开斋            |    |             | 开斋      |        |       |        |         | 2 |
| 161 | 和味            |    |             | 和味      |        |       |        |         | 2 |
| 162 | 冷饭菜汁          |    |             |         |        |       | 冷饭菜汁   |         | 2 |

|     |       |  |           |    |        |     |       |          |   |
|-----|-------|--|-----------|----|--------|-----|-------|----------|---|
| 163 |       |  |           |    |        | 有米  | 有米    |          | 2 |
| 164 | 豆腐腩   |  |           |    |        |     | 豆腐腩   |          | 2 |
| 165 | 洗大饼   |  |           |    |        |     | 洗大饼   |          | 2 |
| 166 | 鸡肠    |  |           |    |        |     | 鸡肠    |          | 2 |
| 167 | 够姜    |  |           |    |        |     | 够姜    |          | 2 |
| 168 | 咸鱼青菜  |  |           |    |        |     | 咸鱼白菜  |          | 2 |
| 169 |       |  |           |    |        | 搵两餐 | 搵/为两餐 |          | 2 |
| 170 |       |  | 食住上       |    |        |     | 食住上   |          | 2 |
| 171 | 长期饭票  |  | 长期饭票      |    |        |     |       |          | 2 |
| 172 | 零(鸡)蛋 |  | (食)零鸡蛋    |    |        |     |       |          | 2 |
| 173 |       |  | 食脑        |    |        |     | 食脑    |          | 2 |
| 174 |       |  | 饮咖啡       |    |        |     | 饮咖啡   |          | 2 |
| 175 | 鱼腩    |  | 鱼腩(部队/兵团) |    |        |     |       |          | 2 |
| 176 | 过冷河   |  | 过冷河       |    |        |     |       |          | 2 |
| 177 | 蛀米大虫  |  |           |    |        |     |       | 蛀米大虫     | 2 |
| 178 |       |  |           |    | 指冬瓜话葫芦 |     |       | 指冬瓜(画)葫芦 | 2 |
| 179 | 辣椒仔   |  |           |    |        |     |       | 辣椒仔      | 2 |
| 180 | 一味靠滚  |  |           |    |        |     |       | 一味靠滚     | 2 |
| 181 |       |  |           | 煮鬼 |        |     |       | 煮鬼       | 2 |



|     |             |  |      |             |  |       |      |             |   |
|-----|-------------|--|------|-------------|--|-------|------|-------------|---|
| 182 |             |  |      | 食砒霜杜狗       |  |       |      | 食砒霜毒老虎      | 2 |
| 183 |             |  |      | 食葱送饭        |  |       |      | 食葱送饭        | 2 |
| 184 | 食爷饭，着<br>罍衣 |  |      |             |  |       |      | 食爷饭，<br>着罍衣 | 2 |
| 185 |             |  | 翻炒   | 翻炒          |  |       |      |             | 2 |
| 186 |             |  |      | 热煮不能热<br>食  |  |       |      | 热饭唔得<br>热食  | 2 |
| 187 |             |  |      | 实食冇孺牙       |  | 实食冇孺牙 |      |             | 2 |
| 188 |             |  | 豉椒炒鱿 |             |  |       | 豉椒炒鱿 |             | 2 |
| 189 | 食唔饱又饿<br>唔死 |  |      | 食唔饱又饿<br>唔死 |  |       |      |             | 2 |
| 190 |             |  |      |             |  |       |      | 白糖炒苦<br>瓜   | 1 |
| 191 |             |  |      | 补镬唔见枳       |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 192 |             |  |      |             |  |       | 铁饭碗  |             | 1 |
| 193 | 鱼翅捞饭        |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 194 |             |  |      | 粗茶淡饭        |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 195 | 柴米油盐酱<br>醋茶 |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 196 | 剥壳鸡蛋        |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 197 | 芝麻绿豆        |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 198 | 豆腐渣         |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |
| 199 | 脍过豆腐        |  |      |             |  |       |      |             | 1 |

|     |         |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  |   |
|-----|---------|--|-----|--|-----------------|--|-------|--|---|
| 200 | 大鸡三味    |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 201 |         |  | 老油条 |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 202 |         |  | 油炸蟹 |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 203 |         |  |     |  |                 |  | 砒霜浸辣椒 |  | 1 |
| 204 | 海鲜价     |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 205 | 烧猪      |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 206 | 三文治（阶级） |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 207 |         |  |     |  | 上面蒸松糕，<br>下面卖凉粉 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 208 | 赚粒糖，蚀间厂 |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |
| 209 |         |  |     |  |                 |  | 老姜    |  | 1 |
| 210 | 甜酸苦辣    |  |     |  |                 |  |       |  | 1 |

## **Appendix 2 Questionnaires for Data Selection**

This appendix presents the eight questionnaires used to select data for analysis from the fundamental data pool. In this appendix, an English translation of each questionnaire section is presented followed by the original Chinese version. However, only the Chinese version is displayed on the online survey platform Wenjuanxing (<http://www.wjx.cn>) and used for sampling. Included here are 1) the cover page with the introductory information, 2) the first page that collects the participant's demographic information are identical in all questionnaires, 3) a sample of the core section of the questionnaires that contains questions about participant's knowledge and frequency of use of the idioms, and 4) a summary of idioms surveyed in each questionnaire. In the online survey, the second question of each target idiom will only be displayed when a participant answers "yes" to the first question.

### **The Cover Page of All Questionnaires**

#### **A Survey on the Knowledge and Frequency of Use of Cantonese Food Idioms**

Survey Participation Notice:

Hi! As restricted by the data selection method of the present study, each participant is only allowed to participate in the survey once and submit one questionnaire of the "survey on awareness and frequency of use of Cantonese food idioms" questionnaire series. If you already completed and submitted any one of the questionnaires of the survey before (including questionnaire 1-1, 1-2, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-6), please close the browser window and terminate your participation. Thank you very much for your support in the present study!

Dear survey participant:

Thank you for your time and patience in participating in this survey!

This survey is designed to satisfy the purpose of data selection for my thesis fulfilling the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Monash University, Australia. My thesis explores the cultural conceptualizations of Cantonese food idioms and the survey aims to investigate Cantonese speakers' awareness and frequency of use of food idioms. Through distributing and collecting results from the following survey questionnaire, I will select the most frequently used Cantonese food idioms as data and perform an in-depth analysis of the cultural conceptualizations underlying these idioms in my doctoral thesis. From this survey, you will gain a better awareness of Cantonese food idioms and your status of using them in daily life. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes of your time and will collect some of your personal information including your gender, age, place of birth and residence, language spoken at home, and level of education. All data and information collected from this survey will be stored and kept confidential on the Wenjuanxing platform and my computer at the Monash

University workstation, and they will only serve the analytical purpose for my doctoral thesis and will not be put to any other uses. During the survey, you reserve the rights to withdraw from participation any time by closing the survey window. If you withdraw from participation, all your previous input will not be recorded. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact Ms. Jingwen Chen via [jingwen.chen@monash.edu](mailto:jingwen.chen@monash.edu). Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the survey, you are welcome to contact the Wenjuanxing customer service via +86 731 8555 6942 or [tousu@wjx.cn](mailto:tousu@wjx.cn).

**Instruction:**

Following is an instruction for completing the questionnaire. Please read it in full before starting the survey.

1. All idioms in the questionnaire have two meanings: 1) **Literal meaning** (i.e., the combined literal meanings of the idiom constituents, e.g. the literal meaning of the idiom “chicken feathers and duck blood” is “the feathers of the chicken and the blood of the duck”); 2) **Idiomatic meaning** (i.e., actual meaning the idiom conveys in use, e.g. the idiomatic meaning of the idiom “chicken feathers and duck blood” is “suffer severe loss”).
2. For each idiom, you will answer maximum **two** questions. **The first** is a dichotomous question that asks whether you know the meaning of the idiom, **by “meaning” it refers to the idiomatic meaning instead of the literal meaning.** You need to provide a yes/no response. If you answer “yes” to the first question, you will be directed to the second question. You do not need to answer the second question if you answer “no” to the first question. **The second** question asks you to confirm the frequency of using the idiom under relevant conversational settings (e.g., if you would say “chicken feathers and duck blood” when talking about topics related to “suffering loss”). You will be asked to choose **one** that best suits you from the provided five choices, which are: 1) I don’t use it at all; 2) I seldom use it; 3) I use it neither frequently nor rarely; 4) I use it quite often; and 5) I use it very frequently.
3. In some idiom examples, certain constituents of the idiom are put into round brackets “()”. This means in daily use of the idiom, the part in the brackets may be optional (e.g., “**eat (west-north) wind**” can be uttered as both “eat west-north wind” and “eat wind” in daily use). For polyphones and rare characters, Cantonese Romanization is provided in brackets following the character. The Romanization method used in the questionnaire is the **Jyutping**. You can check the list of syllables and tones via this link: <https://cantolounge.com/jyutping-chart/>

## 粤语饮食熟语辨识度与常用度调查

问卷参与说明:

您好! 由于本人研究数据筛选规定, 每人只能参与及提交“粤语饮食熟语辨识度与常用度调查”系列问卷的其中一份且只能参与及提交一次, 如果您在此之前已参与并提交过“粤语饮食熟语辨识度与常用度调查”问卷系列的任意问卷(包括问卷 1-1, 1-2, 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-6), 请关闭窗口中止参与。感谢您对该研究的大力支持!

亲爱的受试者您好! 感谢您百忙中抽空填写这份问卷。

该问卷用于本人题为“粤语饮食熟语的文化概念化”的博士论文的数据筛选, 撰写该论文旨在满足申请澳大利亚蒙纳士大学(Monash University, Australia)文科博士学位的要求。该问卷的目的是调查粤语母语者对粤语饮食熟语的辨识度与使用频率。通过一定量的问卷发放与反馈, 本人将从中筛选出最常用的饮食熟语作为研究数据, 在博士论文中进行粤语饮食熟语文化概念化的深入分析。通过这份问卷, 您将对粤语饮食熟语及您在日常谈话中使用饮食熟语的情况有更好的了解。填写这份问卷将需要大约 10 分钟的时间, 问卷的开头将会收集您的一些个人信息, 这些信息包括性别, 年龄, 出生与常住地区, 在家是否使用粤语, 以及受教育程度。该问卷收集的所有数据和信息将会储存在问卷星平台及本人于蒙纳士大学的工作电脑, 所有数据与信息将严格保密且仅用于本人的博士论文研究, 绝不用于任何其他用途。在填写问卷时, 您可以随时通过关闭问卷窗口中止参与。如果您中止参与, 您此前录入的所有信息将不会被记录。如果您希望了解本人博士项目的更多信息, 欢迎发送电子邮件至 [jingwen.chen@monash.edu](mailto:jingwen.chen@monash.edu) 与陈静雯女士联系。如果您对于此问卷的发放和调查过程有任何疑问与不满, 可致电+86 731 8555 6942 或发送电子邮件至 [tousu@wjx.cn](mailto:tousu@wjx.cn) 与问卷星客服中心联系。

**以下是问卷填写须知, 请务必认真阅读:**

1. 该问卷中的熟语均有两层意思: 1) **字面意义**(熟语各字词成分的字面意思, 如“鸡毛鸭血”的字面意义为“鸡的毛鸭的血”); 2) **隐喻意义**(熟语在应用时表达的实际意思, 如“鸡毛鸭血”的隐喻意义为“损失严重”)。
2. 针对每个熟语, 受试者将会回答最多**两个**问题。**第一个问题**询问受试者是否知道这个熟语的意思, **这里指的是熟语的隐喻意义, 而不是字面意义**, 请受试者在“是”与“否”选项中二选一, 如受试者选择“是”则页面将出现**第二个问题**。**第二个问题**要求受试者确认**自己在合适的语境下选择使用该熟语的可能性**

（如在谈论表示“损失严重”的话题时，是否经常会说“鸡毛鸭血”），请受试者从五个选项中选择最符合的一项，五个选项分别为：1 完全不使用，2 用得比较少，3 一般，即不特别少用也不特别常用，4 比较常用，5 十分常用。

3. 一些熟语中的成分用括号框起，表示日常应用中，括号内的部分可说可不说，如“食（西北）风”，表示日常应用中，既可以说“食西北风”，也可以说“食风”。一些多音字或生僻字将会在字后用括号标注粤语拼音，本问卷使用 **粤拼** 标音，拼音音节与声调对照表可于此链接查阅：

<https://cantolounge.com/jyutping-chart/>

## The First Page of All Questionnaires (Demographic Information Collection)

Your gender:

Male

Female

Your age:

18-35

36-55

56-75

76 and above

You were born in:

Guangzhou old districts (Yuexiu district, Liwan district, Haizhu district)

Guangzhou Tianhe district, Baiyun district, Huangpu district, Nansha district

Guangzhou new districts (Panyu district, Huadu district, Conghua district, Zengcheng district)

Hong Kong S.A.R.

Macau S.A.R.

Your usual place of residence:

Guangzhou old districts (Yuexiu district, Liwan district, Haizhu district)

Guangzhou Tianhe district, Baiyun district, Huangpu district, Nansha district

Guangzhou new districts (Panyu district, Huadu district, Conghua district, Zengcheng district)

Hong Kong S.A.R.

Macau S.A.R.

Your level of education:

Middle school and below

High school (including vocational schools)

Junior college

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Language you speak at home (allow multiple selections):

Cantonese

Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua)

Other dialect(s) and/or language(s) (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_



您的性别：[单选题]\*

- 男
- 女

您的年龄段：[单选题]\*

- 18~35岁
- 36~55岁
- 56~75岁
- 76岁以上

您出生于[单选题]\*

- 广州市老三区（越秀区 荔湾区 海珠区）
- 广州市天河区 白云区 黄埔区 南沙区
- 广州市新四区（番禺区 花都区 从化区 增城区）
- 香港
- 澳门

您常住于[单选题]\*

- 广州市老三区（越秀区 荔湾区 海珠区）
- 广州市天河区 白云区 黄埔区 南沙区
- 广州市新四区（番禺区 花都区 从化区 增城区）
- 香港
- 澳门

您的受教育程度为[单选题]\*

初中及以下

高中（包括高职类）

大专

本科

硕士

博士

您在家主要使用 [多选题] \*

粤语（广东话）

汉语普通话

其他方言或语言（请注明） \_\_\_\_\_ \*

## A Sample of the Survey Questions

1. Do you know the meaning of the idiom “find the route to *mai*”?

Yes

No

Under relevant conversational settings, do you use the idiom “find the route to *mai*”?

1) I don't use it at all

2) I seldom use it

3) I use it neither frequently nor rarely

4) I use it quite often

5) I use it very frequently

1. 您知道熟语“搵米路”的意思吗？ [单选题] \*

是（指熟语的隐喻意义）

否（指熟语的隐喻意义）

在谈论符合该熟语语义的话题时，您会使用熟语“搵米路”吗？ [单选题] \*

完全不使用

用得比较少

一般

比较常用

十分常用

## Idioms Surveyed in Each Questionnaire

(English Translations see Appendix 1)

| Survey 1-1   | Survey 1-2  |  |
|--|---|--|
| 搵米路<br>长期饭票<br>煮重米<br>[煲]冇米粥<br>倒米<br>食饱无忧米<br>煲[电话]粥<br>冇米<br>死鸡撑饭盖<br>隔篱饭香<br>柴米油盐酱醋茶<br>食屎屙饭<br>茶瓜送饭<br>大镬饭<br>炒冷饭<br>糯米屎窟<br>睇餸食饭<br>粗茶淡饭<br>食盐多过[你]食米<br>食得禾米多<br>煲浓粥<br>食拖鞋饭 | 食爷饭, 着罽衣<br>冷饭菜汁<br>食枉米<br>豉油捞饭<br>食皇家饭<br>米饭班主<br>一镬粥<br>鱼翅捞饭<br>食葱送饭<br>食软饭<br>唔嗅米气<br>热煮不能热食/热饭唔得热食<br>一嚟饭[噉]<br>铁饭碗<br>食过夜粥<br>倒米寿星<br>热气饭<br>食饱饭等屎屙<br>食塞米<br>得米<br>同枱食饭, 各自修行<br>蛀米大虫 |  |
| Survey 2-1   | Survey 2-2  | Survey 2-3   |
| 倒挂腊鸭<br>开斋<br>生骨大头菜<br>挂腊鸭<br>焗熟狗头<br>甜酸苦辣<br>易过食生菜<br>食猫面/食猫麵<br>大头虾<br>食豆腐<br>食得咸鱼抵得渴  | 一镬鑊起<br>食人唔鑊骨<br>赚粒糖, 蚀间厂<br>十月芥菜<br>[食]无情鸡<br>一镬泡<br>食谷种<br>三文治[阶级]<br>[食]九大簋 <sup>51</sup><br>笏底橙<br>偷食唔抹嘴/偷食唔会搵嘴   | 填鸭<br>穿煲<br>一次生两次熟<br>指冬瓜话葫芦<br>冷手执个热煎堆<br>[有乜]冬瓜豆腐<br>倒泻箩蟹<br>脰过豆腐<br>爆煲<br>酸姜芥<br>上面蒸松糕, 下面卖凉粉 |

<sup>51</sup> [食]九大簋 is included in the survey but later excluded from the idiom pool, as both the literal and idiomatic meanings are later categorized as 'food-related', which does not meet the idiom selection criteria for this thesis.

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>豉椒炒鱿<br/>豆腐渣<br/>过冷河<br/>半咸半淡/唔咸唔淡<br/>白糖炒苦瓜<br/>卖咸鸭蛋<br/>爆大镬<br/>煮鬼<br/>烧猪<br/>近厨得食<br/>餐搵餐食/搵餐食餐<br/>饱死荷兰豆<br/>糖藕豆[水媾油]<br/>食自己<br/>剥花生<br/>咸鱼翻生<br/>呷醋</p>   | <p>食[西北]风<br/>补镬唔见枳<br/>一蟹不如一蟹<br/>豆丁<br/>一啖砂糖一啖屎<br/>饮得杯落<br/>隔夜油炸鬼<br/>煲老藕<br/>煲水[新闻]<br/>割死牛<br/>牛肉干<br/>掙煲<br/>肉随砧板上<br/>唔熟唔食<br/>芋头点糖/芋头煲糖水<br/>拼死食河豚<br/>老姜</p>  | <p>咸鱼白菜/咸鱼青菜<br/>茅根竹<br/>大鸡三味<br/>一砖豆腐想升仙<br/>大冬瓜<br/>老油条<br/>卖生藕/抛生藕<br/>海鲜价<br/>食螺蛳<br/>滚水焯猪肠<br/>搵两餐/为两餐<br/>唔汤唔水<br/>炒鱿鱼<br/>豆腐腩<br/>莲子蓉[口面]<br/>誓愿当食生菜<br/>实食冇齁牙</p>   |
| Survey 2-4   | Survey 2-5   | Survey 2-6  |
| <p>食过返寻味<br/>砒霜浸辣椒<br/>芝麻绿豆<br/>翻炒<br/>有辣有唔辣<br/>连汁[都]捞埋<br/>洗大饼<br/>食碗面反碗底<br/>鱼腩[部队/兵团]<br/>卖大包<br/>同捞同煲<br/>食唔饱又饿唔死<br/>食[咗]火药<br/>得个桔<br/>掂过碌蔗<br/>生水芋头<br/>滚热辣<br/>大番薯<br/>鸡肠<br/>拜神唔见鸡<br/>喊包<br/>饮头啖汤<br/>炒埋一碟<br/>一味靠滚</p> | <p>大辘藕<br/>饮咖啡<br/>冇啖好食<br/>食脑<br/>食咗人只车<br/>孿弓虾米<br/>定过抬油<br/>金菠萝<br/>落汤鸡<br/>食砒霜杜狗/食砒霜毒老虎<br/>煞食/杀食<br/>卖剩蔗<br/>辛苦搵嚟自在食<br/>食七噉食<br/>苦瓜干[噉嘅面口]/苦瓜噉面<br/>食屎食着豆<br/>本地姜唔辣<br/>姜越老越辣<br/>混桔/运桔/混吉<br/>[做]大闸蟹<br/>炒虾拆蟹<br/>年晚煎堆<br/>煮到嚟就食<br/>补镬</p> | <p>和味<br/>食白果<br/>油炸蟹<br/>加盐加醋<br/>生虾噉跳<br/>食住上<br/>掙豆<br/>剥壳鸡蛋<br/>神台桔/神前桔<br/>熟口面/熟口熟面<br/>咸猪手<br/>箍煲<br/>饮咗门官茶<br/>挂羊头卖狗肉<br/>豆泥<br/>[当]食生菜/食生菜[噉食]<br/>倒瓢冬瓜<br/>一镬熟<br/>辣椒仔<br/>女人汤圆<br/>软脚蟹<br/>[砌]生猪肉<br/>蒸生瓜<br/>猪头骨</p> |

一个饼印[噉]  
食柠檬  
花心萝卜  
老豕茄

炖冬菇  
食死猫  
够姜  
唔食羊肉一身臊

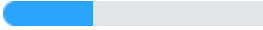
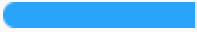
搵食  
[食]零[鸡]蛋  
反转猪肚[就係屎]

## Appendix 3 A Survey Report Excerpt with English Translation


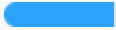


The following is the English translation of a survey report (excerpt) automatically generated by the survey platform Wenjuanxing (<http://www.wjx.cn>). Only the demographic questions and the first 3 idiom questions are translated and presented here. The remaining sections of the report follow the same fashion with the translated excerpt. The original report excerpt in Chinese is also presented in this appendix following the English translation.

### A Survey on the Knowledge and Frequency of Use of Cantonese Food-related Idioms (2-1) [excerpt]


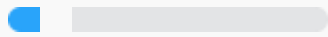
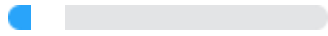
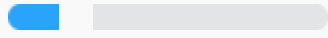
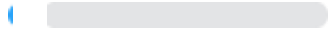
Your gender: [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option                           | Sum | Percentage  |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| Male                             | 43  |  32.09% |
| Female                           | 91  |  67.91% |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |   |


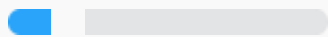
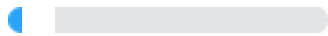
Your age: [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option                           | Sum | Percentage  |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| 18~35                            | 60  |  44.78% |
| 36~55                            | 52  |  38.81%  |
| 56~75                            | 21  |  15.67%  |
| 76 and above                     | 1   |  0.75%   |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |   |

Your place of birth: [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option  | Sum | Percentage   |
|---|-----|--|
| Guangzhou old districts (Yuexiu, Liwan, Haizhu)                               | 82  |  61.19% |
| Guangzhou Tianhe district, Baiyun district, Huangpu district, Nansha district | 15  |  11.19% |
| Guangzhou new districts (Panyu, Huadu, Conghua, Zengcheng)                    | 11  |  8.21%  |
| Hong Kong   | 24  |  17.91% |
| Macau   | 2   |  1.49%  |
| Valid responses to this question  | 134 |  |


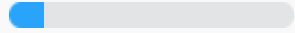
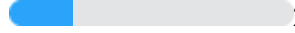
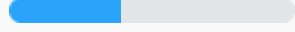
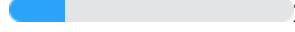
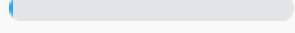
Your usual place of residence: [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option  | Sum | Percentage   |
|---|-----|--|
| Guangzhou old districts (Yuexiu, Liwan, Haizhu)                               | 78  |  58.21% |
| Guangzhou Tianhe district, Baiyun district, Huangpu district, Nansha district | 20  |  14.93% |
| Guangzhou new districts (Panyu, Huadu, Conghua, Zengcheng)                    | 6   |  4.48%  |


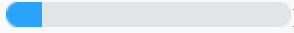


|                                  |     |   |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| Hong Kong                        | 26  |  19.4% |
| Macau                            | 4   |  2.99% |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |   |

Your level of education [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option                                     | Sum | Percentage  |
|--|-----|---|
| Middle school and below                    | 4   |  2.99%    |
| High school (including vocational schools) | 17  |  12.69%   |
| Junior college                             | 31  |  23.13%  |
| Bachelor's degree                          | 53  |  39.55% |
| Master's degree                            | 27  |  20.15% |
| Doctoral degree                            | 2   |  1.49%  |
| Valid responses to this question           | 134 |   |

Language you speak at home [\[allow multiple selections\]](#)

| Option                       | Sum | Percentage  |
|------------------------------|-----|---|
| Cantonese                    | 134 |  100%   |
| Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) | 17  |  12.69% |

|  |     |       |
|--|-----|-------|
| Other dialect(s) and/or language(s) (please specify) | 3   | 2.24% |
| Valid responses to this question                     | 134 |       |

1. Do you know the meaning of the idiom “preserved duck hung upside down”?

[single selection]



| Option                           | Sum | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Yes                              | 49  | 36.57%     |
| No                               | 85  | 63.43%     |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |            |

Under relevant conversational settings, do you use the idiom “preserved duck hung upside down”? [single selection]

**Mean value: 2.1**






| Option                                 | Sum | Percentage |
|--|-----|------------|
| I don't use it at all                  | 10  | 20.41%     |
| I seldom use it                        | 27  | 55.1%      |
| I use it neither frequently nor rarely | 9   | 18.37%     |
| I use it quite often                   | 3   | 6.12%      |
| I use it very frequently               | 0   | 0%         |
| Valid responses to this question       | 49  |            |

2. Do you know the meaning of the idiom “break fast”? [\[single selection\]](#)


| Option                           | Sum | Percentage  |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| Yes                              | 125 |  93.28% |
| No                               | 9   |  6.72%   |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |   |

Under relevant conversational settings, do you use the idiom “break fast”? [\[single selection\]](#)

**Mean value: 3.1**

| Option                                 | Sum | Percentage   |
|--|-----|--|
| I don't use it at all                  | 9   |  7.2%   |
| I seldom use it                        | 35  |  28%   |
| I use it neither frequently nor rarely | 30  |  24%    |
| I use it quite often                   | 37  |  29.6% |
| I use it very frequently               | 14  |  11.2%  |
| Valid responses to this question       | 125 |  |

3. Do you know the meaning of the idiom “bony turnip”? [\[single selection\]](#)

| Option | Sum | Percentage   |
|--------|-----|--|
| Yes    | 95  |  70.9% |

|                                  |     |       |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|
| No                               | 39  | 29.1% |
| Valid responses to this question | 134 |       |

Under relevant conversational settings, do you use the idiom “break fast”? [\[single selection\]](#)

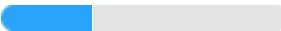
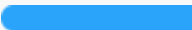
**Mean value: 2.84**

| Option                                 | Sum | Percentage |
|--|-----|------------|
| I don't use it at all                  | 7   | 7.37%      |
| I seldom use it                        | 36  | 37.89%     |
| I use it neither frequently nor rarely | 24  | 25.26%     |
| I use it quite often                   | 21  | 22.11%     |
| I use it very frequently               | 7   | 7.37%      |
| Valid responses to this question       | 95  |            |


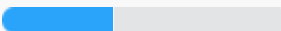


...

粤语饮食熟语辨识度与常用度调查 (2-1) [excerpt]

您的性别： [单选题]

| 选项       | 小计  | 比例  |
|----------|-----|---|
| 男        | 43  |  32.09% |
| 女        | 91  |  67.91%  |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 134 |   |

您的年龄段： [单选题]


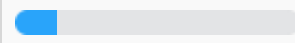

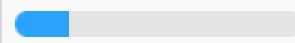
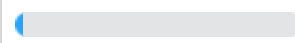
| 选项       | 小计  | 比例  |
|----------|-----|---|
| 18~35 岁  | 60  |  44.78% |
| 36~55 岁  | 52  |  38.81% |
| 56~75 岁  | 21  |  15.67%  |
| 76 岁及以上  | 1   |  0.75%   |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 134 |   |

您出生于 [单选题]

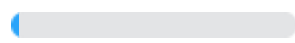
| 选项                   | 小计 | 比例   |
|----------------------|----|--|
| 广州市老三区 (越秀区 荔湾区 海珠区) | 82 |  61.19% |

|                         |     |   |
|-------------------------|-----|---|
| 广州市天河区 白云区 黄埔区 南沙区      | 15  |  11.19% |
| 广州市新四区（番禺区 花都区 从化区 增城区） | 11  |  8.21%  |
| 香港                      | 24  |  17.91% |
| 澳门                      | 2   |  1.49%  |
| 本题有效填写人次                | 134 |   |

您常住于 [\[单选题\]](#)

| 选项                      | 小计  | 比例  |
|-------------------------|-----|---|
| 广州市老三区（越秀区 荔湾区 海珠区）     | 78  |  58.21%   |
| 广州市天河区 白云区 黄埔区 南沙区      | 20  |  14.93% |
| 广州市新四区（番禺区 花都区 从化区 增城区） | 6   |  4.48%  |
| 香港                      | 26  |  19.4%  |
| 澳门                      | 4   |  2.99%  |
| 本题有效填写人次                | 134 |   |

您的受教育程度为 [\[单选题\]](#)

| 选项    | 小计 | 比例   |
|-------|----|--|
| 初中及以下 | 4  |  2.99% |

|           |     |  |        |
|-----------|-----|--|--------|
| 高中（包括高职类） | 17  |  | 12.69% |
| 大专        | 31  |  | 23.13% |
| 本科        | 53  |  | 39.55% |
| 硕士        | 27  |  | 20.15% |
| 博士        | 2   |  | 1.49%  |
| 本题有效填写人次  | 134 |  |        |

您在家主要使用 [\[多选题\]](#)

| 选项           | 小计  | 比例 |        |
|--------------|-----|----|--------|
| 粤语（广东话）      | 134 |    | 100%   |
| 汉语普通话        | 17  |    | 12.69% |
| 其他方言或语言（请注明） | 3   |    | 2.24%  |
| 本题有效填写人次     | 134 |    |        |

1. 您知道熟语“倒挂腊鸭”的意思吗？ [\[单选题\]](#)

| 选项 | 小计 | 比例 |        |
|----|----|----|--------|
| 是  | 49 |    | 36.57% |
| 否  | 85 |    | 63.43% |

|          |     |
|----------|-----|
| 本题有效填写人次 | 134 |
|----------|-----|

在谈论符合该熟语语义的话题时，您会使用熟语“倒挂腊鸭”吗？ [单选题]

**本题平均分： 2.1**

| 选项       | 小计 | 比例     |
|----------|----|--------|
| 完全不使用    | 10 | 20.41% |
| 用得比较少    | 27 | 55.1%  |
| 一般       | 9  | 18.37% |
| 比较常用     | 3  | 6.12%  |
| 十分常用     | 0  | 0%     |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 49 |        |

2. 您知道熟语“开斋”的意思吗？ [单选题]

| 选项       | 小计  | 比例     |
|----------|-----|--------|
| 是        | 125 | 93.28% |
| 否        | 9   | 6.72%  |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 134 |        |

在谈论符合该熟语语义的话题时，您会使用熟语“开斋”吗？ [单选题]



本题平均分：3.1

| 选项       | 小计  | 比例    |
|----------|-----|-------|
| 完全不使用    | 9   | 7.2%  |
| 用得比较少    | 35  | 28%   |
| 一般       | 30  | 24%   |
| 比较常用     | 37  | 29.6% |
| 十分常用     | 14  | 11.2% |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 125 |       |

3. 您知道熟语“生骨大头菜”的意思吗？ [单选题]

| 选项       | 小计  | 比例    |
|----------|-----|-------|
| 是        | 95  | 70.9% |
| 否        | 39  | 29.1% |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 134 |       |

在谈论符合该熟语语义的话题时，您会使用熟语“生骨大头菜”吗？ [单选题]

本题平均分：2.84

| 选项 | 小计 | 比例 |
|----|----|----|
|----|----|----|

|          |    |        |
|----------|----|--------|
| 完全不使用    | 7  | 7.37%  |
| 用得比较少    | 36 | 37.89% |
| 一般       | 24 | 25.26% |
| 比较常用     | 21 | 22.11% |
| 十分常用     | 7  | 7.37%  |
| 本题有效填写人次 | 95 |        |

.....

## Appendix 4 Survey Results

### Results of Surveys 1-1 and 1-2

#### A Demographic Profile of the Survey Participants (1-1 and 1-2)

| Participants                      |                         | Survey 1-1 | Survey 1-2 | Total |         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|-------|---------|
|                                   |                         | 71         | 76         | 147   |         |
| Demographic Features              |                         | Survey 1-1 | Survey 1-2 | Total | Total % |
| <b>Gender</b>                     | Male                    | 25         | 39         | 64    | 43.537% |
|                                   | Female                  | 46         | 37         | 83    | 56.463% |
| <b>Age</b>                        | 18-35                   | 22         | 27         | 49    | 33.333% |
|                                   | 36-55                   | 15         | 30         | 45    | 30.612% |
|                                   | 56-75                   | 32         | 18         | 50    | 34.014% |
|                                   | 76 and above            | 2          | 1          | 3     | 2.041%  |
| <b>Place of birth</b>             | Guangzhou               | 61         | 64         | 125   | 85.034% |
|                                   | Hong Kong               | 7          | 4          | 11    | 7.483%  |
|                                   | Macau                   | 3          | 8          | 11    | 7.483%  |
| <b>Regular place of residence</b> | Guangzhou               | 57         | 65         | 122   | 82.993% |
|                                   | Hong Kong               | 11         | 3          | 14    | 9.524%  |
|                                   | Macau                   | 3          | 8          | 11    | 7.483%  |
|                                   | Middle school and below | 4          | 5          | 9     | 6.122%  |
| <b>Level of education</b>         | High school             | 23         | 22         | 45    | 30.612% |
|                                   | Junior college          | 14         | 22         | 36    | 24.490% |
|                                   | Bachelor's degree       | 24         | 20         | 44    | 29.932% |
|                                   | Master's degree         | 5          | 5          | 10    | 6.803%  |
|                                   | Doctoral degree         | 1          | 2          | 3     | 2.041%  |
|                                   |                         |            |            |       |         |

| Language spoken at home   |    |    |     |         |
|---|----|----|-----|---------|
|   |    |    |     |         |
| Cantonese only  | 64 | 69 | 133 | 90.476% |
| Cantonese + Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua)  | 4  | 6  | 10  | 6.803%  |
| Cantonese + other Chinese variety(-ies) and/or non-Chinese language(s)                                | 1  | 0  | 1   | 0.680%  |
| Cantonese + Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) + other Chinese variety(-ies) and/or non-Chinese language(s) | 2  | 1  | 3   | 2.041%  |

### Idioms that Meet the Data Selection Criteria Based on the Survey Results

All idioms are displayed in the Romanized form followed by the original characters. In some idioms, certain constituents are put into square brackets “[ ]”. This means in daily use of the idiom, the bracketed part may be optional constituents (e.g., [bou] mou mai zuk can be uttered as both bou mou mai zuk and mou mai zuk in daily use).

| # | Idiom                    | Literal translation    | MEAN VALUE |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1 | [bou] mou mai zuk [煲]冇米粥 | [boil] zuk without mai | 3.239      |

|     |  |   |       |
|-----|--|---|-------|
| 2   | <i>dou mai</i> 倒米                                    | <i>pour mai</i>   | 3.605 |
| 3   | <i>sik baau mou jau mai</i> 食饱无忧米                    | eat worryless <i>mai</i> till full                          | 3.343 |
| 4*  | <i>bou [din waa] zuk</i> 煲[电话]粥                      | boil [telephone] <i>zuk</i>                                 | 4.198 |
| 5   | <i>jau mai</i> 有米                                    | have <i>mai</i>   | 4.210 |
| 6*  | <i>sei gai caang faan goi</i> 死鸡撑饭盖                  | dead chicken pushing back the lid of the <i>faan</i> cooker | 3.746 |
| 7   | <i>gaak lei faan hoeng</i> 隔篱饭香                      | neighbor's <i>faan</i> fragrant                             | 3.897 |
| 8   | <i>caai mai jau jim [zoeng cou caa]</i><br>柴米油盐[酱醋茶] | firewood, <i>mai</i> , oil, salt [, sauce, vinegar, tea]    | 3.638 |
| 9   | <i>daai wok faan</i> 大镬饭                             | big wok <i>faan</i>   | 3.620 |
| 10  | <i>caau laang faan</i> 炒冷饭                           | stir-fry cold <i>faan</i>                                   | 3.802 |
| 11  | <i>tai sung sik faan</i> 睇餸食饭                        | watch the dishes to eat <i>faan</i>                         | 3.954 |
| 12  | <i>cou caa daam faan</i> 粗茶淡饭                        | coarse tea and light <i>faan</i>                            | 4.052 |
| 13  | <i>sik jim do gwo [nei] sik mai</i><br>食盐多过[你]食米     | have eaten more salt than [you] have eaten <i>mai</i>       | 4.040 |
| 14  | <i>bou nung zuk</i> 煲焗粥                              | boil burned <i>zuk</i>                                      | 3.563 |
| 15  | <i>sik to haai faan</i> 食拖鞋饭                         | eat slippers <i>faan</i>                                    | 3.142 |
| 16  | <i>mai faan baan zyu</i> 米饭班主                        | <i>mai faan</i> master                                      | 3.602 |
| 17  | <i>yat wok zuk</i> 一镬粥                               | one wok of <i>zuk</i>                                       | 3.640 |
| 18  | <i>jyu ci lou faan</i> 鱼翅捞饭                          | shark fin mixing with <i>faan</i>                           | 3.174 |
| 19  | <i>sik jyun faan</i> 食软饭                             | eat soft <i>faan</i>  | 3.272 |
| 20  | <i>jat gau faan [gam]</i> 一嚙饭[啲]                     | [be like] a lump of <i>faan</i>                             | 3.602 |
| 21  | <i>tit faan wun</i> 铁饭碗                              | iron <i>faan</i> bowl                                       | 4.090 |
| 22* | <i>sik gwo je zuk</i> 食过夜粥                           | have eaten the night- <i>zuk</i>                            | 3.373 |
| 23  | <i>sik sak mai</i> 食塞米                               | eat jamming <i>mai</i>                                      | 3.199 |
| 24  | <i>dak mai</i> 得米                                    | have got the <i>mai</i>                                     | 3.373 |
| 25  | <i>zyu mai daai cung</i> 蛀米大虫                        | big <i>mai</i> borer  | 3.410 |

Note: The idioms *bou [din waa] zuk* 煲[电话]粥 and *sei gai caang faan goi* 死鸡撑饭盖 are not analyzed in this thesis, and the idiom *sik gwo je zuk* 食过夜粥 is analyzed in Chapter Five.

## Results of Surveys 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, and 2-6

### A Demographic Profile of the Survey Participants (2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, and 2-6)

| Participants               |   | Survey 2-1 | Survey 2-2 | Survey 2-3 | Survey 2-4 | Survey 2-5 | Survey 2-6 | Total |         |
|----------------------------|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|---------|
|                            |   | 134        | 139        | 152        | 133        | 154        | 263        | 975   |         |
| Demographic Features       |   | Survey 2-1 | Survey 2-2 | Survey 2-3 | Survey 2-4 | Survey 2-5 | Survey 2-6 | Total | Total % |
| Gender                     | Male  | 43         | 53         | 61         | 49         | 55         | 96         | 357   | 36.615% |
|                            | Female  | 91         | 86         | 91         | 84         | 99         | 167        | 618   | 63.385% |
| Age                        | 18-35   | 60         | 93         | 99         | 79         | 116        | 188        | 635   | 65.128% |
|                            | 36-55   | 52         | 35         | 31         | 31         | 24         | 43         | 216   | 22.154% |
|                            | 56-75   | 21         | 11         | 22         | 21         | 13         | 31         | 119   | 12.205% |
|                            | 76 and Above  | 1          | 0          | 0          | 2          | 1          | 1          | 5     | 0.513%  |
| Place of birth             | Guangzhou   | 108        | 132        | 139        | 123        | 135        | 252        | 889   | 91.179% |
|                            | Hong Kong   | 24         | 6          | 5          | 10         | 14         | 9          | 68    | 6.974%  |
|                            | Macau   | 2          | 1          | 8          | 0          | 5          | 2          | 18    | 1.846%  |
| Regular place of residence | Guangzhou   | 104        | 131        | 138        | 119        | 135        | 251        | 878   | 90.051% |
|                            | Hong Kong   | 26         | 7          | 6          | 13         | 13         | 9          | 74    | 7.590%  |
|                            | Macau   | 4          | 1          | 8          | 1          | 6          | 3          | 23    | 2.359%  |
| Level of education         | Middle school and below   | 4          | 2          | 4          | 3          | 2          | 8          | 23    | 2.359%  |
|                            | High school   | 17         | 14         | 14         | 10         | 18         | 33         | 106   | 10.872% |
|                            | Junior college  | 31         | 21         | 24         | 23         | 25         | 36         | 160   | 16.410% |
|                            | Bachelor's degree   | 53         | 65         | 92         | 60         | 86         | 147        | 503   | 51.590% |
|                            | Master's degree   | 27         | 27         | 16         | 34         | 20         | 34         | 158   | 16.205% |
|                            | Doctoral degree   | 2          | 10         | 2          | 3          | 3          | 5          | 25    | 2.564%  |
| Language spoken at home    | Cantonese only  | 114        | 114        | 131        | 106        | 129        | 197        | 791   | 81.128% |
|                            | Cantonese + Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua)  | 17         | 19         | 14         | 19         | 19         | 52         | 140   | 14.359% |
|                            | Cantonese + other Chinese variety(-ies) and/or non-Chinese language(s)                                | 3          | 2          | 4          | 2          | 1          | 7          | 19    | 1.949%  |
|                            | Cantonese + Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) + other Chinese variety(-ies) and/or non-Chinese language(s) | 0          | 4          | 3          | 6          | 5          | 7          | 25    | 2.564%  |

### Eating-related Idioms Selected Based on the Data Selection Criteria and the Survey Results

| Serial# | Idiom                             | Literal translation       | MEAN VALUE |
|---------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| 1       | <i>wan sik</i><br>搵食              | look for food             | 4.680      |
| 2       | <i>sik sai bak fung</i><br>食[西北]风 | eat the [west-north] wind | 4.120      |
| 3       | <i>sik zi gei</i>                 | eat oneself               | 4.113      |

|    |  |  |       |
|----|--|--|-------|
|    | 食自己  |  |       |
| 4  | <i>m suk m sik</i><br>唔熟唔食                     | not ripe not eat                                       | 4.061 |
| 5  | <i>sik sei maau</i><br>食死猫                     | eat a dead cat   | 4.006 |
| 6  | <i>sik nou</i><br>食脑                           | eat the brain  | 3.883 |
| 7  | <i>sik dak haam jyu dai dak hot</i><br>食得咸鱼抵得渴 | eating salted fish, have tolerance for<br>thirst       | 3.832 |
| 8  | <i>tau sik m mut zeoi</i><br>偷食唔抹嘴             | not wipe the mouth after stealing food                 | 3.802 |
| 9  | <i>lin zap dou lou maai</i><br>连汁都捞埋           | mix even the sauce/gravy                               | 3.734 |
| 10 | <i>sik [zo] fo jeok</i><br>食[咗]火药              | [have] eat[en] gun powder                              | 3.702 |
| 11 | <i>jam tau daam tong</i><br>饮头啖汤               | drink the first sip of soup                            | 3.694 |
| 12 | <i>mou daam hou sik</i><br>冇啖好食                | not even a mouthful of good (food) to<br>eat           | 3.662 |
| 13 | <i>sik ling gai daan</i><br>食零鸡蛋               | eat zero chicken egg                                   | 3.636 |
| 14 | <i>jam dak bui lok</i><br>饮得杯落                 | be able to drink a glass (of liquor)<br>down           | 3.581 |
| 15 | <i>sat sik mou ci ngaa</i><br>实食冇齙牙            | be sure to eat without sticking (food)<br>to the teeth | 3.491 |
| 16 | <i>sik zyu soeng</i><br>食住上                    | eating and up  | 3.414 |
| 17 | <i>sik wun min faan wun dai</i><br>食碗面反碗底      | eat with the bowl upright then flip it<br>upside-down  | 3.372 |
| 18 | <i>sik saang coi</i><br>食生菜                    | eat lettuce  | 3.364 |

|    |   |   |       |
|----|---|---|-------|
| 19 | <i>san fu wan lai zi zoi sik</i><br>辛苦搵嚟自在食 | eat at ease the food sought with hard<br>work | 3.322 |
| 20 | <i>sik zo jan zek geoi</i><br>食咗人只车         | have eaten another's chariot                  | 3.319 |
| 21 | <i>saat sik</i><br>煞食                       | eat unreservedly                              | 3.296 |
| 22 | <i>sik gwo faan cam mei</i><br>食过返寻味        | have eaten and return to seek the taste       | 3.206 |
| 23 | <i>sik dau fu</i><br>食豆腐                    | eat tofu                                      | 3.196 |
| 24 | <i>sik guk zung</i><br>食谷种                  | eat the seed corn                             | 3.124 |



## Appendix 5 A Summary of the Used Materials and Their Sources

| Abbreviation for Material Type | Type of Material  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| AV                             | transcription of audio and video content  |
| CD                             | corpus and database data  |
| FC                             | forum and chatroom response and comment   |
| OA                             | online article (including blog and news articles and other articles published and displayed on webpages)  |
| OF                             | accessible online file (including all sorts of files uploaded online with public download access, e.g. PDF files, Microsoft Word documents, etc.) |
| PC                             | transcription from personal communication with native Cantonese speakers and/or cultural informants   |
| PM                             | printed material  |
| PI                             | pictorial material and image  |
| SM                             | social media post   |

Sample Referencing Code Reading:

PC01: This material is collected and transcribed from the researcher's personal communication with first language Cantonese speakers and/or cultural informants and it is the first of its type in sequence to be used for analysis.

Note: English translations are provided in square brackets following the original material if they are not already included in the text of the thesis.

## Audio and Video Materials



(AV01) 黃毓民：全部嘅米飯，食塞米！

[00:00:22-00:00:30]

头先刘慧卿议员提到李波事件，噉你哋嗰啲内地办事处做咩啊，食塞米，通报唔到嘅，咩事都未知嘅。

(2018, June 6) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkBLcTWk9bQ>



(AV02)

[00:04:57]

(2018, June 10) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4Pm9ZqCp1A>

(AV03) [00:00:07-00:00:25] 喺广东，米饭係最主要嘅粮食，所以“米”可以话係旧时每家每户嘅重要财富，又因为唔係每家人都买得起米或者好多米，所以屋企“有米”嘅人就属于有钱人啦。(2018, June 12) Retrieved from <http://www.ximalaya.com/jiaoyu/4011068/17871502>



(AV04) 港女餐厅大闹男友食“拖鞋饭”：几百蚊都俾唔起，正垃圾！ 2018年04月05日

港女餐厅大闹男友食拖鞋饭：几百蚊都俾唔起，正垃圾！(2019, February 12) Retrieved from <https://www.51r.cn/video/428014/view.html>



(AV05) 鄭中基隊band叫「嚟飯咁」？ 當年嘅無賴已經變咗廢中

[00:02:07-00:02:25] 之前睇过一个电视节目，叫做“范后感”，噉但系嗰两个主持呢，好呆啊，噉但系又要用佢地两个个名摆喺个节目度，噉我就话，不如叫“嚟饭噉”啦，哈哈讲笑姐！(2019, May 30) Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaDqrjxt\\_Jk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaDqrjxt_Jk)

(AV06) [00:00:17-00:00:56] 今日我哋要介绍嘅呢个词叫做食谷种。咩时候先要食谷种呀？平时呢我哋就系食米嘅，噉如果...譬如话，我哋冇晒米食，粥都食唔起了，噉呢个时候你总要搵啲嘢食嘎，噉食乜嘢呢？食谷种啦。谷种呢就系指啲啲我哋原来搵嚟种水稻啊一啲初始啲啲种子。啲米你都有得食喇，噉你唯有食返原先啲啲种啦，所以就唯有食谷种啦。所以食谷种呢就代表一个人要食老本喇，撑唔落去了，冇嘢食，行唔通呀，呢个时候我哋只可以食谷种。

(2019, September 5) Retrieved from <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/%E7%8C%B4%E5%A1%9E%E9%9B%B7%E7%B2%A4%E8%AF%AD-%E9%A3%9F%E8%B0%B7%E7%A7%8D%E7%B3%BB%E5%92%A9%E6%84%8F%E6%80%9D/id1217677657?i=1000382883960>



(AV07)

[00:00:07-00:00:11] 我谗呢次去美国实食冇齁牙喇喂！ (2020, April 16) Retrieved from <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av54097553/?rt=V%2FymTlOu4ow%2Fy4xxNWPUZ04jJKiXYmmZgTg8UoHBfs%3D>



(AV08)

[00:02:50-00:02:58] 广府人就钟意用食嘢嚟做比喻嘅，所谓实食冇鬍牙，就系话估计呢嗰件事会做得好顺利。(2020, April 16) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv9tLRNcta0>



(AV09)

來回4個鐘送女友返元朗 鴨脷洲男：食得鹹魚抵得渴

Video title: 來回 4 個鐘送女友返元朗 鴨脷洲男：食得鹹魚抵得渴

[00:03:49-00:03:52]: 愛情呢集家嘢，食得鹹魚抵得渴啦！(2020, April 30) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6dRN8L6IGc>



## Corpus and Database Data

(CD01) 00:26:12-00:26:22 C: 冇。我同头先发过毒誓我话，我一定唔会去做呢个餐馆，因为我嗰时呢我觉得係嗯……（即係）我觉得呢个底线嚟嘅。

00:26:22-00:26:31 C: 我觉得哎，如果我有其他嘅选择，如果我有其他嘅能力去做其他嘅嘢嘅话，食脑嘅话，嗯我就唔，唔，唔同其他人一样我做餐馆嘢。

(2019, November 8) Dialogue transcript retrieved from the Spoken (Guangzhou) Cantonese Audio Corpus [广州话 口 语 有 声 语 料 库 ]

[https://huayu.jnu.edu.cn/corpus6/PlaySound.aspx?name=liukouyu%2fkouyu%2fICY\(2\)8.wav&content=C%ef%bc%9a%e6%88%91%e8%a7%89%e5%be%97%e5%93%8e%ef%bc%8c%e5%a6%82%e6%9e%9c%e6%88%91%e6%9c%89%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e9%80%89%e6%8b%a9%ef%bc%8c%e5%a6%82%e6%9e%9c%e6%88%91%e6%9c%89%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e8%83%bd%e5%8a%9b%e5%8e%bb%e5%81%9a%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e5%98%a2%e5%98%85%e8%af%9d%ef%bc%8c%e9%a3%9f%e8%84%91%e5%98%85%e8%af%9d%ef%bc%8c%e5%97%af%e6%88%91%e5%b0%b1%e5%94%94%ef%bc%8c%e5%94%94%ef%bc%8c%e5%94%94%e5%90%8c%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e4%ba%ba%e4%b8%80%e6%a0%b7%e6%88%91%e5%81%9a%e9%a4%90%e9%a6%86%e5%95%b0%e3%80%82&info=%e3%80%90%e8%8a%82%e7%9b%ae%e3%80%91ICY%ef%bc%9b+%e3%80%90%e4%ba%ba%e7%89%a9%e3%80%91+L%ef%bc%9a%e7%94%b7%ef%bc%8c31-35ef%bc%9b+C%ef%bc%9a%e7%94%b7%ef%bc%8c31-35](https://huayu.jnu.edu.cn/corpus6/PlaySound.aspx?name=liukouyu%2fkouyu%2fICY(2)8.wav&content=C%ef%bc%9a%e6%88%91%e8%a7%89%e5%be%97%e5%93%8e%ef%bc%8c%e5%a6%82%e6%9e%9c%e6%88%91%e6%9c%89%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e9%80%89%e6%8b%a9%ef%bc%8c%e5%a6%82%e6%9e%9c%e6%88%91%e6%9c%89%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e8%83%bd%e5%8a%9b%e5%8e%bb%e5%81%9a%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e5%98%85%e5%98%a2%e5%98%85%e8%af%9d%ef%bc%8c%e9%a3%9f%e8%84%91%e5%98%85%e8%af%9d%ef%bc%8c%e5%97%af%e6%88%91%e5%b0%b1%e5%94%94%ef%bc%8c%e5%94%94%ef%bc%8c%e5%94%94%e5%90%8c%e5%85%b6%e4%bb%96%e4%ba%ba%e4%b8%80%e6%a0%b7%e6%88%91%e5%81%9a%e9%a4%90%e9%a6%86%e5%95%b0%e3%80%82&info=%e3%80%90%e8%8a%82%e7%9b%ae%e3%80%91ICY%ef%bc%9b+%e3%80%90%e4%ba%ba%e7%89%a9%e3%80%91+L%ef%bc%9a%e7%94%b7%ef%bc%8c31-35ef%bc%9b+C%ef%bc%9a%e7%94%b7%ef%bc%8c31-35)

(CD02) 00:25:38-00:25:48 L: 同埋呢样嘢係，係啱你去法国嘅，嘅嘴形嘅嘛，因为你就係谗住去食自己嘅嘛。噉如果去到舒舒服服，奢奢华华噉又好似唔係好啱你 style 嘢。

00:25:48-00:26:02 C: 係呀。包括，包括我，我，我临走之前我都同我爸爸妈妈讲，你唔使担心我，（即係）我，（即係）全，所有嘅钱都係我出嘅，噉同埋我去到之后呢，因为佢哋都话啊，到时候有乜嘢困难你要打电话翻嚟呀，我哋 send 钱畀你定点，

00:26:02-00:26:10 C: 我，其实我最后都有，冇问佢哋<才罗>过一分钱嘢。係嘢，我都……我都同我自己发过毒誓——

(2019, November 8) Dialogue transcript retrieved from the Spoken (Guangzhou) Cantonese Audio Corpus [广州话 口 语 有 声 语 料 库 ]

[https://huayu.jnu.edu.cn/corpus6/PlaySound.aspx?name=liukouyu%2fkouyu%2fICY\(2\)3.wav&content=L%ef%bc%9a%e5%90%8c%e5%9f%8b%e5%91%a2%e6%a0%b7%e5%98%a2%e4%bf%82%ef%bc%8c%e4%bf%82%e5%95%b1%e4%bd%a0%e5%8e%bb%e6%b3%95%e5%9b%bd%e5%98%85%ef%bc%8c%e5%98%85%e5%98%b4%e5%bd%a2%e5%98%85%e5%98%9b%ef%bc%8c%e5%9b%a0%e4%b8%ba%e4%bd%a0%e5%b0%b1%e4%bf%82%e8%b0%82%e4%bd%8f%e5%8e%bb%e9%a3%9f%e8%87%aa%e5%b7%b1%e5%98%85](https://huayu.jnu.edu.cn/corpus6/PlaySound.aspx?name=liukouyu%2fkouyu%2fICY(2)3.wav&content=L%ef%bc%9a%e5%90%8c%e5%9f%8b%e5%91%a2%e6%a0%b7%e5%98%a2%e4%bf%82%ef%bc%8c%e4%bf%82%e5%95%b1%e4%bd%a0%e5%8e%bb%e6%b3%95%e5%9b%bd%e5%98%85%ef%bc%8c%e5%98%85%e5%98%b4%e5%bd%a2%e5%98%85%e5%98%9b%ef%bc%8c%e5%9b%a0%e4%b8%ba%e4%bd%a0%e5%b0%b1%e4%bf%82%e8%b0%82%e4%bd%8f%e5%8e%bb%e9%a3%9f%e8%87%aa%e5%b7%b1%e5%98%85)

<https://words.hk/zidin/v/90501/%E9%A3%9F%E9%81%8E%E8%BF%94%E5%B0%8B%E5%91%B3/%E9%A3%9F%E9%81%8E%E7%95%AA%E5%B0%8B%E5%91%B3>

**(CD03)** 佢買股票贏咗啲錢之後，食過返尋味，點知跟住就輸晒啲錢喇。(2019, July 18) Retrieved from Words.hk Online Crowd-sourcing Cantonese Dictionary and Database <https://words.hk/zidin/v/90501/%E9%A3%9F%E9%81%8E%E8%BF%94%E5%B0%8B%E5%91%B3/%E9%A3%9F%E9%81%8E%E7%95%AA%E5%B0%8B%E5%91%B3>

**(CD04)** 阿龍真係一條淫蟲，成日食靚女豆腐。(2020, May 16) Retrieved from Words.hk Online Crowd-sourcing Cantonese Dictionary and Database <https://words.hk/zidin/%E9%A3%9F%E8%B1%86%E8%85%90>

**(CD05)** 因為天氣惡劣，啲航班全部 delay 晒。結果啲空姐食晒死貓，係噉比乘客鬧。(2020, April 13) Retrieved from Words.hk Online Crowd-sourcing Cantonese Dictionary and Database <https://words.hk/zidin/%E9%A3%9F%E6%AD%BB%E8%B2%93>

## Forum and Chatroom Responses and Comments

**(FC01)** 我所关心嘅只不过系柴米油盐酱醋茶，至于乜嘢“普世价值”，乜嘢“天下大同，人人平等”，我并唔知道。(2018, June 1) Retrieved from <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/3288859862?traceid>

**(FC02)** 何谓“煲冇米粥”，……？

游客回复：“煲冇米粥”，就是讲空话，不办实事。

游客回复：“煲冇米粥”，就是要计划的事，还没有丁点眉目，不知有没有结果，但就从可心办得妥的方向去谈论。

游客回复：对“煲冇米粥”，就是讲空话。受骗，浪费时间。

游客回复：空头支票，兑现不了。

游客回复：煲冇米粥：一些只留于空谈的商议。明知不会成功，也姑且试试。‘粥’是用米来煮的，没有米便煮不成粥。如：等我听日同业主煲下有米粥，睇下佢肯唔肯减租。（待我明天跟业主聊聊，看看他肯不肯减租。）

游客回复：煲无米粥的意思是得个讲，无实际。(2018, June 22) Retrieved from <http://guangzhou.ne18.com/89063.html>

**(FC03)** 某本 magazine 報導黎姿,佢好有米呀! (2018, June 12) Retrieved from <https://m.baby-kingdom.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=3035765>

**(FC04)** 喂，呢篇古仔年幾兩年前出過啦啲，而家玩炒冷飯呀？(2019, March 22) Retrieved from <https://www.discuss.com.hk/viewthread.php?tid=25561514&extra=page%3D1&page=6>

**(FC05)** 搵到客就好，搵到客，賣到一個單位分幾萬蚊佣。搵唔到客就食谷種。係超難搵，米聽咩努力就搵到，努力搵同搵到根本就兩件事。(2019, September 5) Retrieved from <https://lihkg.com/thread/324303/page/1>

**(FC06)** 食左 50 分鐘西北風,啲串燒野食就開始黎,但 50 分鐘得個少少串燒 (2019, September 30) Retrieved from <https://www.openrice.com/zh/hongkong/review/%E9%A3%9F%E8%A5%BF%E5%8C%97%E9%A2%A8-e2415981>

**(FC07)** 从咨客到服务员到部长，每个人都好似食咗火药嘍，爱理不理，服务态度好晦气。(2020, March 10) Retrieved from <https://www.dianping.com/review/412111531>



## Online Articles

(OA01) 遺憾的是，身為學聯秘書長的周永康，在整整 79 天的違法「佔領」行動中，只能顯示他自己無後顧之憂，食飽無憂米，不食人間煙火，與社會脫節的一面，至於連小學生都懂的「同理心」，筆者卻從不認為周永康具有這項優點。(2018, June 1) Retrieved from <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2014/12/31/PL1412310005.htm>

(OA02) 做足 8 年蛀米大虫唔做家务 纽约父母入禀法院逐无业子 (2018, June 2) Retrieved from [http://hk.on.cc/int/bkn/cnt/news/20180524/bknint-20180524060217620-0524\\_17011\\_001\\_cn.html](http://hk.on.cc/int/bkn/cnt/news/20180524/bknint-20180524060217620-0524_17011_001_cn.html)

(OA03) 經常聽老人家講：「我食鹽多過你食米啦！使你教我？！」這句比喻相當抵死，也十分貼切，只是，言者沾沾自喜，聽者耿耿於懷，因為這句說話背後的潛台詞是：「我識嘅嘢多過你！」「你唔識嘢！」「我唔使你教！」很不客氣，甚至帶點敵意。(2018, June 4) Retrieved from <https://topick.hket.com/article/1911636/%E9%84%AD%E4%B8%B9%E7%91%9E%EF%BC%9A%E9%A3%9F%E9%B9%BD%E5%A4%9A%E9%81%8E%E4%BD%A0%E9%A3%9F%E7%B1%B3%E5%B7%B2%E4%B8%8D%E7%AE%A1%E7%94%A8>

(OA04) 不堪拉城壓力 永利在澳設總部成冇米粥 (2018, June 21) Retrieved from [http://www.job853.com/MacauNews/news\\_list\\_show\\_macao.aspx?type=3&id=14013](http://www.job853.com/MacauNews/news_list_show_macao.aspx?type=3&id=14013)

(OA05) Stephy 結婚冇米粥 (2018, June 21) Retrieved from <http://hittt.blogspot.com/2014/01/stephy-stephy.html>

(OA06) 我地剩返好少錢咋，陣間買嘢要睇餸食飯。(2018, June 10) Retrieved from [http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/www.gd.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2018-05/22/c\\_1122864894.htm](http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/www.gd.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2018-05/22/c_1122864894.htm)

(OA07) 與學生相聚，同學甲即將出國升學，一面擔憂：「果度人生路不熟，到時都唔知點去學校。」同學乙說：「你唔識睇餸食飯咩！有咩車就搭咩車啦！問人都得嘎！」(2018, June 10) Retrieved from [http://stedu.stheadline.com/sec/sec\\_news.php?aid=1039&friendly\\_print=1](http://stedu.stheadline.com/sec/sec_news.php?aid=1039&friendly_print=1)

(OA08) 搞好人際你就得米 5 大溝通為王上位絕招 (2018, June 14) Retrieved from <https://www.edigest.hk/workplace/%E6%90%9E%E5%A5%BD%E4%BA%BA%E9%9A%9B%E4%BD%A0%E5%B0%B1%E5%BE%97%E7%B1%B3-%E5%A4%A7%E6%BA%9D%E9%80%9A%E7%82%BA%E7%8E%8B%E4%B8%8A%E4%BD%8D%E7%B5%95%E6%8B%9B/>

(OA09) .....米作为一种食物，最经常被人用来比喻“衣食、利益”， .....如果事情得心应手，好多人会高兴噉讲一声“得米”，噉就自然得心应手，丰衣足食啦。(2018, June 18) Retrieved from [http://m.xinhuanet.com/gd/2017-11/18/c\\_1121936635.htm](http://m.xinhuanet.com/gd/2017-11/18/c_1121936635.htm)

(OA10) 第二件好大鑊既事就係聽日要測 LAW，以我既死人性格當然就係未溫過啦！雖然 MANDY 已經幫我將範圍縮到好細.....ANNA CHAN.....你次次都係臨急抱佛腳.....唉！！你今次真係煲焗粥大煲夾“杰”啦！(2018, June 17) Retrieved from <https://annachan.wordpress.com/2006/04/12/%E4%BB%8A%E6%AC%A1%E5%A4%A7%E9%91%8A%E5%95%A6%EF%BC%81/>

(OA11) 舊時粵諺，煲焗粥乃棹忌之事，形同燒壞瓦。貧家少米，煮一煲粥，為一家之食，煲焗了便無可食。(2018, June 20) Retrieved from <https://www.am730.com.hk/column/Lifestyle/%E6%9F%B4%E9%AD%9A%E8%8A%B1%E7%94%9F%E7%B2%A5-49214>

(OA12) “国考”热咁多年嚟持续升温，因乜解究？想做公务员，争铁饭碗争到头崩额裂都系因为特权思想同埋“学而优则仕”嘅传统观念作祟咯。(2019, January 28) Retrieved from [http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/C/html/2014-05/13/content\\_3243058.htm?div=-1](http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/C/html/2014-05/13/content_3243058.htm?div=-1)

(OA13) 港台必须引入“衡工量值”机制，电台收听率、电视收视率、网站浏览率，是审核港台是否达标的重要指标，任何不达标的节目及制作人，必须有惩处机制。否则，与食“大鑊饭”有何区别？(2019, January 31) Retrieved from <http://www.takungpao.com/news/232109/2018/1129/212648.html>

(OA14) 食軟飯已經係男人最痛，可以去到（呢个）階段嘅男人，基本上心理陰影非常大，已經係接近無晒面。(2019, February 12) Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/news/%E6%88%80%E6%84%9B%E7%B3%BB-%E9%A3%9F%E8%BB%9F%E9%A3%AF%E5%98%85%E7%94%B7%E4%BA%BA-%E6%AF%94%E5%81%B7%E9%A3%9F%E7%94%B7%E4%BA%BA%E6%9B%B4%E5%8A%A0%E6%81%90%E6%80%96-1901974645686326.html>

(OA15) 一個自稱已經移居台灣的女人多次在 fb 留言斥責我無知，不知道日本有核輻射，台灣也有黑心食物，常常讚「隔離飯香」，不好好珍惜香港自己所有的。(2019, May 21) Retrieved from <https://hk.lifestyle.appledaily.com/lifestyle/realtime/article/20170729/57011974>

(OA16) 男人總覺得自己老婆點衰點衰，別人老婆就點好點好，正是俗語所云隔離飯香也。(2019, April 30) Retrieved from <http://design0027.wixsite.com/family/single->

[post/2015/03/23/%E7%95%B6%E7%9C%9F%E9%9A%94%E7%B1%AC%E9%A3%AF%E9%A6%99%E7%BC%9F%E7%94%B7%E4%BA%BA%E4%B8%8D%E6%BB%BF%E8%87%AA%E5%B7%B1%E8%80%81%E5%A9%86%E5%A4%A7%E6%8B%86%E8%A7%A3%EF%BC%88%E4%B8%8A%EF%BC%89](http://post/2015/03/23/%E7%95%B6%E7%9C%9F%E9%9A%94%E7%B1%AC%E9%A3%AF%E9%A6%99%E7%BC%9F%E7%94%B7%E4%BA%BA%E4%B8%8D%E6%BB%BF%E8%87%AA%E5%B7%B1%E8%80%81%E5%A9%86%E5%A4%A7%E6%8B%86%E8%A7%A3%EF%BC%88%E4%B8%8A%EF%BC%89)

**(OA17)** “佢屋企嘅饭好好食啊”，细路去邻居小朋友屋企竊餐，总会带住满意嘅心情返来。“梗系啦，隔篱饭香呀嘛”，大人总会咁样总结一下。隔篱饭香，系一句广州俗语，就来源于呢个情景，后来俾人引申为，总会羡慕人咁，或者距离创造美感之类。(2019, April 30) Retrieved from [http://news.ifeng.com/a/20160606/48921464\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/a/20160606/48921464_0.shtml)

**(OA18)** 無綫嘅《2018 香港國際影視展》展示多部計劃開拍嘅綜藝節目，引來大批網民批評有新意兼炒冷飯，既然無綫都有咁多套炒冷飯綜藝，你地仲有邊套想翻炒呢？(2019, March 26) Retrieved from <https://hk.celebrity.yahoo.com/%E7%84%A1%E7%B6%AB%E7%B6%9C%E8%97%9D%E7%AF%80%E7%9B%AE%E7%B9%BC%E7%BA%8C%E7%82%92%E5%86%B7%E9%A3%AF-%E4%B8%8D%E5%A6%82%E8%80%83%E6%85%AE%E5%9F%8B%E5%91%A2%E5%95%B2-090850979.html>

**(OA19)** 炒冷飯唔係問題，周星馳都話自己係炒冷飯；但係一餐飯要食十碟唔同味嘅炒飯，真係會好想反枱。(2019, March 22) Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@chaaak/gung-hei-bitch-fc9c6d5143f9>

**(OA20)** 雖有獲利，看破股市無常，股民不再魚翅撈飯 (2019, April 8) Retrieved from <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/daily/article/20070920/10180091>

**(OA21)** 高 Ling 形容當時只有 21 歲的自己如「一嚙飯」沒有特別技能，只好性感示人。(2019, May 30) Retrieved from <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2019/05/29/EN1905290002.htm>

**(OA22)** 其實自從施丹突然劈炮唔撈之後，皇馬不斷向外尋找新帥人選，但由於施丹成績太勁，球隊又有咗 C 朗拿度，好多教練都耍手擰頭，例如普捷天奴、阿基里、高普同埋勒夫，都拒絕皇馬聘約，最尾搵到洛佩特吉肯落搭，搞到一鑊粥，洛佩特吉成為代罪羔羊。(2019, June 6) Retrieved from [https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/sport/20181029/bkn-20181029050703373-1029\\_00882\\_001.html](https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/sport/20181029/bkn-20181029050703373-1029_00882_001.html)

**(OA23)** 客貨車油門當腳掣 剷入舖「一鑊粥」 (2019, June 5) Retrieved from <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2017/12/03/HK1712030017.htm>

**(OA24)** 辛苦搵嚟自在食，星期六啲下食餐好，调剂一下好正常。(2020, January 21) Retrieved from <https://jet.my-magazine.me/article/detail/leisure/9501>

**(OA25)** “辛苦搵来自在食”，代表广州人的价值理想。他们把工作叫做“搵食”，直解就是“找吃”，来来去去折腾不过为了两餐，一定要吃好。(2019, July 9) Retrieved from <https://travel.qunar.com/p-pl5426503>

- (OA26) 內地經濟繼續沒精打彩，香港人亦只得食西北風，勒緊褲頭過緊日子！ (2019, October 1) Retrieved from [https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/finance/20190717/bkn-20190717080014360-0717\\_00842\\_001.html](https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/finance/20190717/bkn-20190717080014360-0717_00842_001.html)
- (OA27) 對有吞嚥困難/牙齒狀況不佳的長者來說，每日每餐都「冇啖好食」 (2019, October 7) Retrieved from <https://www.csrtimes.com.hk/feature/【銀世代】軟餐%e3%80%80讓長者不再「冇啖好食」/>
- (OA28) 佢真系犀飛利，中學畢業之後都係食自己。 (2019, October 21) Retrieved from [http://m.xinhuanet.com/2017-07/28/c\\_1121390428.htm](http://m.xinhuanet.com/2017-07/28/c_1121390428.htm)
- (OA29) 这是广府文化主题餐厅，这里的传统韵味总能让人“食过返寻味”！ (2020, January 24) Retrieved from [http://news.ycwb.com/2017-10/27/content\\_25627480.htm](http://news.ycwb.com/2017-10/27/content_25627480.htm)
- (OA30) 广博今天恢复开放部分区域 晨运市民饮“头啖汤” (2020, April 16) Retrieved from [https://news.dayoo.com/guangzhou/202003/15/139995\\_53201651.htm](https://news.dayoo.com/guangzhou/202003/15/139995_53201651.htm)
- (OA31) 做歌手要兼顾声色艺，唱得睇得就最煞食啦！ (2020, April 16) Retrieved from <https://today.line.me/hk/pc/article/Oppo+3%E6%9C%88%E6%97%A5%E7%99%BC%E5%B8%83Find+X2%E3%80%80%E5%B1%8F%E5%B9%95%E6%9C%80%E7%85%9E%E9%A3%9F%EF%BC%9F-GvGapy>
- (OA32) 盜版侵權乜都齊 偷食竟然唔抹嘴 (2020, April 30) Retrieved from [https://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20171013/00190\\_001.html](https://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20171013/00190_001.html)
- (OA33) 嘩！破纪录易过食生菜啊！ (2020, April 30) Retrieved from [https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/sport/20151015/bkn-20151015113231891-1015\\_00882\\_001\\_cn.html](https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/sport/20151015/bkn-20151015113231891-1015_00882_001_cn.html)
- (OA34) 拌面仲有个特色食法，食晒所有面，可以免费追加一口白饭，连汁都捞埋，食得唔好嘍！ (2020, May 1) Retrieved from <https://www.openrice.com/zh/hongkong/article/%E6%9D%B1%E4%BA%AC%E7%89%9B%E8%82%89%E6%B2%B9%E6%8B%8C%E9%BA%B5%E5%B0%88%E9%96%80%E5%BA%97-10cm%E9%AB%98%E9%87%8D%E9%87%8F%E7%B4%9A%E7%89%9B%E8%82%89%E4%B8%BC-a5032>
- (OA35) “咸鱼”是你自己选择的结果，没有人逼你吃，吃了之后“口渴”就没得怨了。如果把“国”字头的航空公司比作“旗舰店”，春秋航空无疑就是“路边摊”，……选择了咸鱼，就要忍受咸鱼那种令人不快的味道。吃咸鱼还抱怨太咸，没有鱼翅的感觉，岂不怪哉？同理，你选择春秋航空，就要接受“春秋服务”…… (2020, May 3) Retrieved from [http://views.ce.cn/view/ent/201207/21/t20120721\\_23512371.shtml](http://views.ce.cn/view/ent/201207/21/t20120721_23512371.shtml)

(OA36) 偷食，固然係唔啱，亦都唔係話偷食完抹咗嘴就 OK。之不過，呢個世界有種人，唔單止偷食唔曉得抹嘴，仲自己留低罪證斷正。(2020, May 3) Retrieved from <https://hk.sports.appledaily.com/sports/realtime/article/20160701/55301193>

(OA37) “连汁都捞埋”，唔单只讲食，仲用来形容一啲自私、贪婪嘅人或行为。譬如，分配利益时，自己攞晒着数，冇考虑过留俾人啲。同样嘅俗语，包括“渣都有得剩”，亦大致有同样意思。喺自己嘅私家饭台，捞唔捞汁系个人选择，不过喺饭桌之外，同人合作与利益分配上就要十分均真，连“捞汁”都要考虑下人啲，噉样先至啱。(2020, May 3) Retrieved from [http://epaper.wsqejt.com/html/content/2018-11/05/content\\_785936.html](http://epaper.wsqejt.com/html/content/2018-11/05/content_785936.html)

(OA38) 种生菜，易过食生菜！(2020, May 3) Retrieved from <http://www.pinlue.com/article/2017/05/1521/281691353928.html>

(OA39) 老友唔熟唔食 女子買奶粉冇 57 萬 (2020, May 16) Retrieved from <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/breaking/realtime/article/20140224/52218661>

(OA40) 情人節係星期日，簡直係食咗人隻車 (2020, May 16) Retrieved from <https://hkwriterhub.tumblr.com/post/139777116711/%E6%83%85%E4%BA%BA%E7%AF%80%E4%BF%82%E6%98%9F%E6%9C%9F%E6%97%A5%E7%B0%A1%E7%9B%B4%E4%BF%82%E9%A3%9F%E5%92%97%E4%BA%BA%E9%9A%BB%E8%BB%8A>

(OA41) 滯留湖北的香港男返港受访诋毁内地！网民闹爆：食碗面反碗底！(2020, May 20) Retrieved from <https://wemp.app/posts/7337a940-f0d0-4aa6-9cf5-9776673619bf>

(OA42) ViuTV「食住上」開新節目《今日疫情》 教授消毒抗疫奇招 (2020, May 16) Retrieved from <https://www.msn.com/zh-hk/entertainment/news/%E3%80%90%E6%AD%A6%E6%BC%A2%E8%82%BA%E7%82%8E%E3%80%91viutv%E3%80%8C%E9%A3%9F%E4%BD%8F%E4%B8%8A%E3%80%8D%E9%96%8B%E6%96%B0%E7%AF%80%E7%9B%AE%E3%80%8A%E4%BB%8A%E6%97%A5%E7%96%AB%E6%83%85%E3%80%8B-%E6%95%99%E6%8E%88%E6%B6%88%E6%AF%92%E6%8A%97%E7%96%AB%E5%A5%87%E6%8B%9B/ar-BBZCUGk>

(OA43) 吃雞蛋很健康，但也要適可而止，而同學們當然不想考試「食蛋」了 (2020, April 13) Retrieved from <https://paper.hket.com/article/94859/%E6%89%93%E9%9B%B6%E8%9B%8B>

(OA44) 食鸡蛋包你有零蛋 (2020, April 13) Retrieved from <https://hk.news.yahoo.com/%E9%A3%9F%E9%9B%9E%E8%9B%8B%E5%8C%85%E4%BD%A0%E5%86%87%E9%9B%B6%E8%9B%8B-20120710.html>

(OA45) 你食咗火药啊？个样𦉳爆爆噉嘅。(2020, February 24) Retrieved from [http://epaper.xxsb.com/html/content/2019-07/25/content\\_838056.html](http://epaper.xxsb.com/html/content/2019-07/25/content_838056.html)

(OA46) 关子聪：食过夜粥嘅功夫人生 (2020, February 18) Retrieved from <http://www.gznf.net/event/13197.html>

(OA47) 食过夜粥都唔掂！小占《造星 II》被花姐狠批 (2020, February 18) Retrieved from [https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/entertainment/20191008/bkn-20191008202550036-1008\\_00862\\_001\\_cn.html](https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/entertainment/20191008/bkn-20191008202550036-1008_00862_001_cn.html)

(OA48) 个仔考试一百分，依次真系饮得杯落。(2020, February 24) Retrieved from [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_aeae19480101hdyw.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_aeae19480101hdyw.html)

(OA49) 今天说“有米”，那“米”，可以是一些钥匙——别墅的和豪华房车的，也可以是一些密码——银行储蓄卡的和保险柜的。[Today when we say *jau mai*, the *mai* can be keys of mansions and luxurious cars, it can also be the passwords of debit cards and safes in the bank.] (2018, June 13) Retrieved from <http://jane-0406.blog.163.com/blog/static/93374422008049251549/>

(OA50) 傳統「大鑊飯」學校的教學進度，往往令資優者感到沉悶、學習落後者感到挫折疏離。[The traditional teaching curriculum of the traditional ‘*daai wok faan*’ school often make advanced students feel bored and make those falling behind frustrated and distanced.] (2019, March 8) Retrieved from <https://www.ibm.com/blogs/think/hk-en/2019/02/ai%E6%95%99%E5%AD%B8%E5%B9%B3%E5%8F%B0-%E9%82%81%E5%90%91%E3%80%8C%E6%9C%89%E6%95%99%E7%84%A1%E9%A1%9E%E3%80%8D/>

(OA51) 資訊泛濫裡有心也沒空多講一句懷緬你與我煲燴了電話粥 [In the flood of information, even if we want to we have no time to say more words, I miss the time when you and I made those long-time phone calls (lit. when you and I burned the telephone *zuk*)] (2021, March 01) Retrieved from <https://www.kkbox.com/hk/tc/song/gR8rU1d-9D44AfhW4AfhW0PL-index.html>

(OA52) 梁振英煲燴勞工無米粥 (2018, June 20) Retrieved from <https://www.pentoy.hk/%E6%A2%81%E6%8C%AF%E8%8B%B1%E7%85%B2%E7%87%B6%E5%8B%9E%E5%B7%A5%E7%84%A1%E7%B1%B3%E7%B2%A5/>

**(OA53)** 大人的確食鹽多過我哋食米，但係佢哋無發覺到，原來我哋呢一代已經實行少鹽少糖，你食過幾多鹽，同我無關，呢個亦都可能係點解我哋永遠無辦法坐埋一齊好好傾偈嘅原因。(2018, June 6)

Retrieved

from

<https://topick.hket.com/article/1911636/%E9%84%AD%E4%B8%B9%E7%91%9E%EF%BC%9A%E9%A3%9F%E9%B9%BD%E5%A4%9A%E9%81%8E%E4%BD%A0%E9%A3%9F%E7%B1%B3%E5%B7%B2%E4%B8%8D%E7%AE%A1%E7%94%A8>



## Accessible Online Files

**(OF01)** 在全球經濟一體化下，這個所謂高工資的地方，即使我住公屋也要繳交二千多元租金，交通費每天三四十元，一個月便要千多元，還有柴米油鹽，每月四千多元工資，生活已過得很困難，但在低工資當中，收取這水平工資的，已屬很高的職位。(2018, June 4) Retrieved from <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/chinese/counmtg/hansard/cm0614-translate-c.pdf>

**(OF02)** 如果一個工人因為工資太低而憂柴憂米，便會影響他的工作情緒及生產力，但將香蕉割價求售，並不會令香蕉由好吃變為不好吃。(2018, June 4) Retrieved from <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr01-02/chinese/counmtg/hansard/cm0424ti-translate-c.pdf>

**(OF03)** 你要认真啲做，因住煲焗粥呀！(2018, June 17) Retrieved from <http://www.doc88.com/p-9595450818420.html>

**(OF04)** 政府會向一羣靠自己雙手“搵食”的“打工仔”給予支持。(2020, January 20) Retrieved from <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/counmtg/hansard/cm1117-translate-c.pdf>

**(OF05)** 漁民亦多次提出燃油費用大幅上升，已經令漁民“雞毛鴨血”和“無啖好食”，每出海一次便虧蝕一次。(2019, October 1) Retrieved from <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/hansard/cm0619-translate-c.pdf>



## Personal Communication

(PC01) PDW [GZ-F-60]: 柴米油盐系嗰啲日常嘅琐碎事同埋生活必需品。即系柴米油盐呢啲必需品就系生活嚟。人最基本嘅要生存就系要食嘢嘅，我哋南方人就系要食米嘎嘛，噉起码有米食生活先好嘎。如果你冇米食，忧柴忧米，噉你生活点会好呀？食饱无忧米就系你食饱米嘞，生活就好嘞，我系噉理解嘅。蛀米大虫就系话啲人有破坏冇建设，但系唔系讲虫，系讲人，系比喻嚟。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat<sup>52</sup> at 16:41, AEST, Dec 15, 2020)

(PC02) WSC [GZ-F-57]: 你谗下，如果一个人嘅年纪大，食餐饭就落好少盐咋嘛，噉你起码年纪好大你先食咗好多盐，噉米呢，你就餐餐食嘅，噉就肯定多啦，但系就算食得多米都唔够我食得多盐，噉我系咪经验多你好多？(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 20:34, AEST, June 7, 2018)

(PC03) PDW [GZ-F-59]: 本来你人食嘢嘅时候盐嘅数量就好少咋嘛，食一餐餸放少少盐就得喇，食一餐饭要放几多米吖！噉你食盐多过食米梗系你老过佢啦嘛，经历多过佢啦嘛！(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 21:16, AEST, June 7, 2018)

(PC04) Researcher: 噉系咪话如果食饭消化吸收得好人就唔蠢？PDW [GZ-F-59]: (笑) 唔系噉讲嘅！呢个系比喻嚟咋嘛！(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 21:31, AEST, June 7, 2018)

(PC05) WSC [GZ-F-57]: 即系老窦老母擦咁多米嚟养你，食埋咁多你都唔识你都咁蠢，噉系咪浪费粮食吖？系咪食塞米吖？就系噉形容喇！(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 21:08, AEST, June 7, 2018)

(PC06) Informant responses to the comprehension of [bou] mou mai zuk ([煲]冇米粥, [boil] zuk without mai)

R: researcher I: informant

Informant 1: CZK [GZ-M-57]

R: (煲)冇米粥你点理解？

I: 倾嚟倾去都系冇希望嘅事情

R: 有冇例子？

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<sup>52</sup> WeChat is a popular Chinese multi-purpose social media application developed by Tencent Holdings Limited, China. It can be used for exchanging textual and audio messages, making video calls, sharing media files and hyperlinks, and making and collecting payments.

I: 譬如我同你买一样嘢或者同你倾一样嘢，倾咗成日都有落实，都买唔成或者得唔到，噉咪广州人咪话倾嚟倾去都系冇米粥嚟。得个倾字，都落实唔到。

Translation:

R: How do you understand (*bou*) *mou mai zuk*?

I: It's something that has been talked about repeatedly but not promising.

R: Any example?

I: For example, I want to buy something from you or discuss something with you, but we have talked for a whole day without action, without making a deal or getting the thing, that's what Guangzhou people say, "it's all *zuk* without *mai* after repeated conversations". It's just talks without any concrete action.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 16:56, AEST, October 26, 2018)

Informant 2: WSC [GZ-F-57]

R:[煲]冇米粥你点理解?

I: 即系倾嚟倾去都得个倾，实质上乜嘢都有，就叫冇米粥喇！得就最好啦，唔得都去煲下水噉 嚟，唔得都去倾下，噉嚟。

R: 如果我俾个例句俾你，你觉得呢个句子里面煲冇米粥嘅意思同你啱啱嗰个例子系咪一样噉呢？“等我听日同业主煲下冇米粥，睇下佢肯唔肯减租”

I: 好似觉得又唔似嘅，反正意思就系“倾下噉噉，唔系实质上嘅嘢嚟嘅”。又或者系我好多事，或者人哋介绍呢样嘢有得做喔，我又觉得有得做喔，噉就去倾下睇下有冇得做啦噉噉嘅意思，我就觉得系噉噉意思喔。

Translation:

R: How do you understand [*bou*] *mou mai zuk*?

I: It is to talk about something repeatedly but there is nothing but talking, there is no concrete essence of it, that is what is called *mou mai zuk*. It is the best if it comes true, but even if it doesn't, we will still go and talk about it.

R: If I give you a sample sentence, do you think the meaning of *bou mou mai zuk* in this sentence is the same as what you just said? Example: *Dang ngo ting-jat tung jib-zyu bou haa mou-mai zuk, tai-haa keoi hang m hang gaam-zou.*

I: It doesn't seem very much alike. Anyway, the meaning (of the idiom) is "it's only talking, it's nothing concrete". Or there are things... or someone introduces something (to me) and says it's doable, and I think the same, then I go talk with the person and see if it's actually doable, it's what it means, I think.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 16:57, AEST, October 26, 2018)

Informant 3: PDW [GZ-F-59]

R: 你点理解[煲]冇米粥?

I: 即係白做。

R: 有冇具体例子?

I: 譬如冇几个人喺度倾啲乜嘢计划, 或者乜嘢, 但系呢就讲埋啲唔等使嘅嘢, 讲来讲去就“嘿, 倾埋晒啲冇米粥”嘅囉。

R: 唔等使即係唔实际或者无法实行?

I: 对

Translation:

R: How do you understand [*bou*] *mou mai zuk*?

I: It's doing something for nothing.

R: Is there any example?

I: For example, there are several people talking about some plan, or something, but what they are talking about is all useless (lit. *m dang sai*), and they are talking about it repeatedly, then (others will say) “hey what you are discussing is nothing but *mou mai zuk*”.

R: when you said *m dang sai*, did you mean not practical or not actionable?

I: Yes.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 17:47, AEST, October 26, 2018)

Informant 4: JZ [GZ-F-31]

R: [煲]冇米粥你知唔知乜意思?

I: 唔知道确切, 但如果有人用大概明。系冇钱又想办大事嘅意思?

R: 如果有个新闻标题“辟步行街再煲冇米粥”, 你觉得个新闻要讲乜?

I: 唔系好确定, 应该系讲步行街有咩投入或者有咩人去?

R: 辟系开辟开建嘅意思。

I: 哦我知喇, 即系开辟新步行街可能系政府嘅空头承诺, 冇具体嘅嘢俾到嚟。

R: 再嚟一个, 邓丽欣结婚冇米粥?

I: 流嘢?

Translation:

R: Do you know what [*bou*] *mou mai zuk* means?

I: I can't say for sure, but if someone uses it I can understand it mostly. Does it mean “wanting to do something big but not having the money”?

R: If there is this news title “*Pik bou-hang gaai zoi bou mou-mai zuk*”, what do you think the news is about?

I: I am not sure. It should be something about the walking street not being invested or no one going there?

R: *Pik* means to open and to build here.

I: Oh, then I know, it means opening a new walking street is the government's empty promise, and there is nothing concrete in action.

R: Another example: *Dang-lai-jan (Stephy) git-fan mou mai zuk*.

I: Fake news?

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 17:00, AEST, October 26, 2018)

Informant 5: JZK [GZ-F-30]

R:[煲]冇米粥你知唔知乜意思?

I: 搵嚟搞?

R: 如果有个新闻标题“辟步行街再煲冇米粥”，你觉得个新闻要讲乜?

I: 晒时间整条步行街?

R: 再嚟一个，邓丽欣结婚冇米粥?

I: 假嘅嚟。

Translation:

R: Do you know what [*bou*] *mou mai zuk* means?

I: Making efforts for nothing?

R: If there is this news title “*Pik bou-hang gaai zoi bou mou-mai zuk*”, what do you think the news is about?

I: Opening up the walking street is a waste of time?

R: Another one: *Dang-lai-jan (Stephy) git-fan mou mai zuk*

I: It's a fake news.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 13:30, AEST, October 27, 2018)

Informant 6 WLJ [GZ-F-50s]

R:[煲]冇米粥你知唔知乜意思?

I: 佢煲嚟煲去都系冇米粥，即系成日都系得个讲，都有实际嘢嘅，有时用喺自谦上面，比如“都系冇米粥嚟噶嘛，谗住系啲噶嘛”。

Translation:

R: Do you know what [*bou*] *mou mai zuk* means?

I: What he has been boiling repeatedly is *zuk* without *mai*, meaning all he has are empty talks, and there is no concrete essence. Sometimes it can be used to express modesty, for example “it's all *mou mai zuk*, it's just a thought”.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 13:49, AEST, October 27, 2018)

Informant 7 CMK [GZ-F-34]

R: 你点理解“[煲]冇米粥”啊?

I: 意思系咪话做无用功嘅意思啊? 即系你煲粥但系又有米嘅, 即系冇用啦, 即系做出嚟嘅嘢都唔系真系有结果嘅。

R: 如果有个新闻标题“辟步行街再煲冇米粥”, 你觉得个新闻要讲乜?

I: 可能系话想搞活经济整条步行街出嚟, 但系又有生意嘅冇用嘅嘞。意思系咪即系话, 呢条路本身已经有咩生意嘅喇, 噉而家再学人咁噉开条步行街, 但系呢度水静河飞嘅, 就算你开条步行街都系冇米粥嚟嘅嘛, 都系冇用嘅, 得个空讲嘅, 或者开咗都系冇用嘅嘞。

R: 你嘅理解系咪话一啲商业项目冇盈利?

I: 我系觉得系步行街开咗都做唔到生意, 救唔番呢个地方。系啊, 我嘅理解就系开咗都有钱收嘞样嘅。

R: 再嚟一个, “Stephy 结婚冇米粥”又系讲咩呢?

I: 噉意思系咪即系话讲结婚讲咁耐又结唔成嘞啊?

R: 噉“我听日去同业主煲下冇米粥, 睇佢肯唔肯减租”呢?

I: 即系我哋去 talk 一啲其实唔一定有结果嘅嘢, 吹下水, 睇下顺便可唔可以讲到价, 呢个用法比较好接受。

Translation:

R: How do you understand [*bou*] *mou mai zuk*?

I: Does it mean “making useless efforts”? It’s like you are boiling *zuk* but there is no *mai* in it, which means it’s useless, it means whatever you have done doesn’t yield any outcome.

R: If there is this news title “*Pik bou-hang gaai zoi bou mou-mai zuk*”, what do you think the news is about?

I: It probably means (the government) opens a walking street to boost the economy but there is no business, it’s useless. I think it means that the location originally had no business and now (the government) learned from others and opened a walking street, but it has been so quiet here, even if you open up a walking street is *zuk* without *mai*, it’s useless, it’s only an empty talk, or it’s useless even if you open it.

R: So, what you understand is it refers to business projects that have no profit?

I: What I think is there will not be business even if the walking street is opened, and (this action) cannot save this place. Yes, what I understand is there won’t be any incoming money even if the walking street is opened.

R: Another one, what do you think “*Stephy git-fan mou mai zuk*” is about?

I: Does it mean that (they) have been talking about getting married but it never happened?

R: How about “*Dang ngo ting-jat tung jib-zyu bou haa mou-mai zuk, tai-haa keoi hang m hang gaam-zou*”?

I: It means we are going to talk about something that doesn't necessarily yield any outcome. Just talk casually and see if there is a chance for bargain. I think this usage is more acceptable.

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 17:37, AEST, October 26, 2018)

(PC07) WSC [GZ-F-50]: 家庭系以米为主，米系生活所需，系必不可少嘅，钱又系生活所需，所以有米同有钱嘅比喻就好恰当囉。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 13:23, AEST, June 12, 2018)

(PC08) CZK [GZ-M-57]: 有米就系有钱嘅意思，一个人有钱就可以买米，就有米。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 15:42, AEST, June 12, 2018)

(PC09) CZK [GZ-M-57]: 一向广州人都系讲有米就有钱嘎啦。乡下以前就派米噶嘛，派米就系代表有钱嘅意思囉。以前喺祠堂就叫“太公分猪肉”，而家广州就叫派米，米即系粮，粮就系以前嘅钱，以前嘅官员俸禄唔系按钱，系按几多石米嚟计噶嘛，可能引申到钱同米嘅关联囉，所以而家广东话有钱就系有米囉。

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 13:25, AEST, June 12, 2018)

(PC10) CZK [GZ-M-57]: “得米”即系成功咗搞掂咗嘅意思，按米系钱嘅解释呢，“得米”即系发咗达，或者系得到咗财富，即系做一件事搞掂咗，有得着嘞。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 19:29, AEST, June 14, 2018)

(PC11) JHJ [GZ-M-21]: 粤语入边有“搵两餐饭食”代表工作同赚钱，所以饭碗代表人最重要嘅活动——食，而“食”又链接到赚钱，有钱先有得食，所以饭碗俾我感觉就系工作，“铁”代表坚固，即系稳定，我第一反应就系公务员。我觉得我大部分朋友同我理解应该一致。我前两日同班朋友食饭，有个朋友讲起佢老窦老母想佢考公务员，因为稳定，但系佢自己唔想，我哋一班人就讲起公务员系铁饭碗。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with a Guangzhou informant via WeChat at 14:19, AEST, January 28, 2019)

(PC12) PDW [GZ-F-60]: 本来谷种系留返掙嚟种嘅，但系穷到都乜都有得食喇连谷种都食埋咯。连谷种都食埋，冇得种，种边有得翻身。形容穷到窿咯！

Researcher: 姐唔系真系食谷种？

PDW [GZ-F-60]: 城市人边度有谷种？即系将家底都掙埋出来了。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 15:46, AEST, September 25, 2019)

(PC13) CZK [GZ-M-57]: 广州人讲食谷种，就系将身家都清理嘅意思。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 16:03, AEST, September 25, 2019)

(PC14) JZ [GZ-F-32]: 谷种就系来年嘅种子，将未来嘅种子都食埋，即系自己以后嘅希望都破，灭埋，呢种系自杀式行为。应该算系一种比喻意义吧？谷种虽然系实物，但系而家唔种田都唔会有了吧？冇人种田都唔会留明年嘅种子啦，阿爽呢一代可能唔知来年嘅种子有几重要，毕竟冇经历过饥荒，我哋呢一代可能都仲听过。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 14:18, AEST, October 4, 2019)

(PC15) ZJT [GZ-F-32]: 冇得食，连谷种都要食，诅咒人家冇得翻身。而家嘅人连谷种都未见过啦，更多系比喻老底吧。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 14:19, AEST, October 4, 2019)

(PC16) ZJT [GZ-F-32]: 市道唔好，冇啖好食，我觉得系“恶啃”嘅意思。啲嘢唔好食会直接讲唔好食，唔会用呢个词。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 14:19, AEST, October 4, 2019)

(PC17) Researcher: 你觉得“冇啖好食”可唔可以佢字面嘅意思呢？

CMK [GZ-F-35]: 我个人认为系好少噉用嘅，基本上系冇嘅。如果今晚啲嘢唔好食，我都系话“唔好食”或者“冇好嘢食”，唔会讲“冇啖好食”嘅。“冇啖好食”可能.....即便其他意思唔讲，譬如话就算今晚有好多好嘢食，但系今晚啊个仔唔听话做功课唔认真搞到我有啖好食，即系食饭食得唔安乐，可能仲有呢个意思嘍。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 15:32, AEST, October 4, 2019)

(PC18) CZK [GZ-M-57]: 食脑就系凭聪明嘅脑袋去解决问题，养活自己，脑系聪明灵活。食自己就系凭自己嘅积蓄及剩余价值去搞掂问题。食就系凭，广州话就系噉理解，广州话好多都系只可意会不可言传，唔能够完全用语法去理解，一般大家都知道系咩意思。

[*Sik nou* is to rely on the clever brain to solve problem and sustain yourself. *Nou* is clever and agile. *Sik zi gei* is to rely on your own savings and surplus value to take care of problems. *Sik* is to rely on. This is simply the straightforward Cantonese way to talk about self-reliance, it's just how it's understood in Cantonese.]

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 01:55, AEST, December 4, 2019)

(PC19) WSC [GZ-F-57]: 食脑呢又可以讲佢系聪明啦，又可以讲佢古惑啦，广州话嘅理解就系啲喇。呢个人好食脑噶，就系聪明。褒义词就系聪明、灵活，贬义词就古惑。食自己就好贴切，广州人嘅话语就好直接，就系话边个都依靠唔到喇，只能够依靠自己，就系食自己嚟。

[*Sik nou* can mean he is clever, and it can also mean he is cunning, that is how it's understood in Cantonese. This person is very *sik nou*, means clever. Positively, it's clever and agile; negatively, it's cunning. *Sik zi gei* is very apropos. The Guangzhou people are very straight-forward, it means you cannot rely on anyone but only yourself, that is *sik zi gei*.]

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via Iphone Voice Memos at 00:41, AEST, December 7, 2019)

(PC20) CSM[GZ-F-29]: 食脑就系要开动脑筋思考，一般赞人 idea 新颖，对方会答“梗系啦，食脑噶嘛”。脑，代表脑力思考，延伸到智慧，知识、经验都喺脑度。所以食脑就系使用脑力，使用智慧。食自己，食饭，食自己嘅饭，自己嘅饭要自己准备，要靠自己努力先可以食到自己嘅饭，延伸出来就系事情要靠自己努力佢完成。自己就系指自己嘅能力，自己能嘅一切资源同办法。我觉得两个食都系一个意思，从食饭开始到使用某种嘢。

[*Sik nou* is to use your brain to think, it's usually used to compliment an innovative idea, then the complimented party will say “of course, I ate my brain!” *Nou* stands for thinking with your brain power, and it extends to mean wisdom, knowledge, experience, which all store in the brain. So *sik nou* is to use the brain power, to use the wisdom. *Sik zi gei*, *sik faan* (eat rice), *sik* your own *faan*, you need to prepare your own *faan*, you need to rely on your own efforts to eat your own *faan*, so it extends to mean you need to rely on your efforts to accomplish something. *Zi gei* is your own *nang-lik* (abilities), all the resources and methods you can use. I think the two *sik* mean the same, originating from *sik faan* and extending to mean using something.]

(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 01:24, AEST, December 4, 2019)

(PC21) JHJ [HK-M-22]: 食脑就系动脑筋，我会话“呢只游戏好食脑”，即系话呢只游戏需要动脑筋才能玩。即系动脑筋思考。除左动脑筋，食脑仲有要靠聪明才智嘅意思。比较聪明、善于思考嘅人。无论系动脑筋定系聪明才智，都要消耗脑力，噉用“食”就好形象，消耗紧食紧个脑。食自己就系靠自己，自力更生。系经济意义上有啲似经济独立，譬如话“你老窦老母唔俾钱你，你以后要食自己喇”。呢个“自己”包含好多嘢，佢更加似一种状态嘅陈述，即系话呢个时候只有你自己一个，冇其他人。食我觉得系一种修辞。好似类比噉，将“食”呢个动作类比“消耗”、“花费”。食饭系真系用口去食某啲嘢，动脑筋唔系真系去食咩嘢，只不过系消耗紧一啲嘢，好似你都可以话“呢部车好食油”，呢个食都系一种修辞。(Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 16:18, AEST, December 5, 2019)

(PC22) Selected informant responses and sample sentences of *sik gwo faan cam mei* (食过返寻味)



All responses and sample sentences are collected and transcribed from personal communication with informants via WeChat at different times on January 22, 2020

Researcher: “食过返寻味”可唔可以用喺讲同食物或者食嘢无关嘅事情? 举个例子? [Can you use *sik gwo faan cam mei* to talk about things non-related to food or eating? Can you give an example?]

CZK [GZ-M-57]: 我知道可以用喺其他地方。譬如做一件事或者偶然碰到一样嘢, 佢又心思, 再试下, 噉我哋广州人都可以话食过返寻味。 [I know we can use it somewhere else. For example, someone does something or runs into something, and he thinks about it and wants to try again, then we Guangzhou people can say *sik gwo faan cam mei*.]

PDW [GZ-F-60]: 又譬如讲嗰个贼去偷嘢, 哇第一次偷到好多嘢噉, 噉就食过返寻味, 过一段时间第二次又再去, 点知就俾人捉住喇, 噉又可以噉讲话佢食过返寻味噉。 [You can also say for example, a thief went to steal something, wow the first time he stole many things, then he *sik gwo faan cam mei*, and went for a second time some time later, but then he got caught this time. Then you can say he *sik gwo faan cam mei*.]

ZJN [GZ-F-38]: 可以啊, 你睇港剧有时妈妈桑会对客人讲呢句话呢.....去夜总会啦, 偷情啦, 赌博赢咗再赌啦, 都可以用。 [Yes, you see in those Hong Kong TV series the procuress will say this to the customers...you talk about going to clubs, cheating, winning from gambling and doing it again, you can use the expression in all these scenarios.]

WSM [GZ-F-32]: 可以, 譬如有贼偷窃, 第一次好容易得手, 再次到同一个地点作案, 就叫食过返寻味, 之前睇电视节目有噉用, “食”系指之前做过嘅某一件事, 系比喻用法。 [Yes, for example, there was a thief stealing, it was easy the first time, so he went back to the same place to commit the crime, then this is *sik gwo faan cam mei*, I saw this usage when watching TV. ‘*Sik*’ is something you did before, it’s a usage of analogy.]

ZJT [GZ-F-32]: 如果唔系讲食, 感觉多数用喺做坏事。 [If it’s not talking about eating, I feel likt it’s used for bad things most of the time.]

JHJ [HK-M-22]: 我觉得可以, 娱乐项目, 比如玩咩游戏或者去边个地方玩, 主题公园, 我可能会用。“食”本身可以唔系指“吃食物”, “食仔”“食女”好容易会用“食过返寻味”。即系体验好好, 再嚟一次, 好明显系一种比喻。 [I think yes, entertainment program such as playing a game or visiting a place for fun, a theme park, I may use it. ‘*Sik*’ itself can mean something that’s not ‘eating food’, you can easily use *sik gwo faan cam mei* when you ‘*sik zai*’ ‘*sik neoi*’ (the investigator’s notes: these two expressions mean ‘hook up with a guy’ and ‘hook up with a girl’). It means the experience is very good, you do it again. It’s obviously an analogy.]

LJL [GZ-F-32]: 可以啊, 比如话阿强前排买股票赚咗一笔, 而家佢食过返寻味, 又重手入咗一笔。 [Sure, for example, Aa-Koeng earlier bought in the stock and profited from it, now he *sik gwo faan cam mei*, invested a big amount of money in it again.]

**(PC23) WSC [GZ-F-57]:** 饮头啖汤就系敢为天下先。一煲汤人人未饮你饮先，用嚟比喻所有新鲜事物，人不敢你敢，只能是比喻句，因为系话你试汤最快，就系敢为天下先囉。而且呢个系讲人做事主动，要够胆识，怕死嘅人系唔会先试嘅。实食冇齁牙即系十拿九稳。广州人讲饮讲食，好多比喻都系比较贴切而易懂。 [*Jam tau daam tong* means someone is bold enough to be the first to do something. A pot of soup, you drink when no one else has drunk it. This is a metaphor to refer to new things, and how you dare to try them when others don't. This can only be a metaphor. You are the quickest to try the soup, so you are bold to be the first. Also, this expression is to describe how people are proactive in doing things, and that requires bravery. Those who are afraid of death will not try it first. *Sat sik mou ci ngaa* means you are certain about something. Guangzhou people talk about eating and drinking. Many metaphors are very well-put and easily comprehensible.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 18:42, AEST, April 19, 2020)

**(PC24) JZ [GZ-F-33]:** 饮头啖汤即系第一个尝试新嘢，而且因此赚唔少。第一啖汤比较好味啦。而且你知啦，广东人煲汤，根本睇唔出咩原料嘎嘛，啲颜色都系混混浊浊嘅，所以其实说明咗啲风险性喺度囉，你唔知啲汤系咪真系好味嘎嘢。 [*Jam tau daam tong* is to be the first one to try something new, and usually can profit from it by doing so. The first sip of soup is tastier. And as you know, when we Cantonese make soup, you can't really tell the ingredients, the soup is not clear, so that implies certain kinds of risk, because you don't know if the soup is actually tasty.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 19:09, AEST, April 19, 2020)

**(PC25) CZK [GZ-M-59]:** 饮头啖汤即系话做一件事或者发生一件事嘅时候，可能好彩可能唔好彩，你系第一个上咗榜嘅，第一个系你嘞，噉就叫你饮咗头啖汤囉。系泛指嘅，唔系真系话食嘢饮汤，系泛指生活入便嘅事，即系咩事发生嘅时候你做咗第一个，一般系好事嚟嘅。实食冇齁牙即系话一个人做事实搞掂嘅，佢有专长嘅，做咩事都实搞掂嘅，就系话呢个人好把炮囉。譬如我哋喺工厂做机械零件，如果搵一个好叻嘅师傅去做，就话呢个人上去做就实食冇齁牙嘎喇。但系如果搵个茄哩啡去做呢，就会系哇呢个人得唔得嘎。所以实食冇齁牙就系话呢个人好叻嘅，佢做嘢实搞得掂嘅。 [*Jam tau daam tong* means when you do something or when something happens, it may be lucky or unlucky, but you are the first one on the list, you are the first one to do it, then we say you drank the first sip of soup. This is a general reference, it's not really saying you have soup when eating, it's a general reference to things in life, meaning when something happens, you are the first one to do or experience it, it's usually a good thing. *Sat sik mou ci ngaa* means someone just nails it, he is good at it, he can handle anything, it's to say this person is very outstanding. For example, when we make mechanical parts at the factory, if you ask a very skillfull master to make it, you will say this guy *sat sik mou ci ngaa*. But if you ask a green hand to do it, you will be like 'is this guy going to get it done?' So *sat sik mou ci ngaa* is to say someone is very good at things, and he can always handle stuff.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 19:40, AEST, April 19, 2020)

**(PC26) Cultural informant responses on *saat sik* (煞食)**

JZ [GZ-F-33]: 煞食一般话女仔好靚女嚟，哇条女好煞食喔！不过究竟字面系咩意思就唔知嘞。 [*Saat sik* is commonly used to say a girl is pretty. ‘wow that girl is very *saat sik*!’ But I don’t really know its literal meaning.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 20:46, AEST, April 19, 2020)

CZK [GZ-M-59]: 煞食即系话做嘢有过人之处，有独门秘技，一上嚟就可以搞掂，即系比较犀利啲。譬如讲做一件事人咁做唔到嘅或者好难做到嘅，但经过佢手做佢好快就搞掂又做得到，比人咁叻，做嘢又好快趣，做到人咁做唔到嘅嘢。点解系呢两个字就唔知嘞。 [*Saat sik* is to say someone has his exceptional skills, better than others. he can immediately handle something once he gets his hands to it, it’s to say someone is very capable. For example, there is something that’s impossible or very difficult for the others, but this person can handle it quickly and can manage it, smarter than the others, and efficient at work. He can do something that others can’t. As to why these two characters, I have no idea.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 22:48, AEST, April 17, 2020)

WSC [GZ-F-57]: 煞食即系做乜事都做得好。即系能干。煞即系横扫一切事物啲。但系点解系煞食就唔知嘞，可能广州人讲乜都会讲到食字。 [*Saat sik* means no matter what you do, you do it well, meaning you are capable. *saat* is to fiercely sweep away everything. But I don’t know why it’s *saat sik*. Maybe because Guangzhou people talk about *sik* no matter what they are saying.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 19:23, AEST, April 19, 2020)

LJW [GZ-M-27]: 煞食我知呀，好掂嚟。不过真系唔知点解啲讲，第一反应就系啲用。 [I know *saat sik*, it means something is very good. But I really don’t know why we say it like that, it’s my instinct that it’s used in this way] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 22:34, AEST, April 17, 2020)

SJM [GZ-F-40s]: 煞食就系奏效，搞得掂，但系点解冇研究过。 [*Saat sik* is something that works, something manageable, but I never researched on why it’s like that.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 22:52, AEST, April 17, 2020)

PGJ [GZ-F-35]: 我听讲的用法系，呢个人好做得嘢，可以独当一面，好煞食。 [What I heard was, this person is very capable, he can manage something independently, he is very *saat sik*] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 00:34, AEST, April 18, 2020)

ZJN [GZ-F-38]: 所向披靡哈哈，不过我都唔知点解系煞食，要谗谗。 [It means invincible ha ha. But I don’t know why it’s called *saat sik*, I need to think about it.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 22:59, AEST, April 17, 2020)

**(PC27) Cultural informant responses on *sik dau fu* (食豆腐)**

JHJ [HK-M-22]: 食豆腐系揩油，占异性便宜。食系拿取或者偷取噉解，好似获取利益噉嘅意思。[*Sik dou fu* is ‘*haai jau*’, exploiting others, taking advantage of the other sex. *Sik* is to take or to steal, it’s like to benefit from something.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 23:11, AEST, May 20, 2020)

DL [GZ-F-39]: 食豆腐即系揩油哈哈，通常对象都系异性，用呢个书面啲嘅话讲应该系性骚扰。点解系豆腐呢，我第一感觉系因为豆腐系软软糯糯嘅质感，有种好光滑又脆弱嘅感觉，好靚又柔弱嘅嘢，所以好似女仔嘅美好特质嘢，可以引起异性兴趣同情欲嘅嘢。(Informant was shown the image of PI06 and asked for opinion) 佢取咗呢个蛋筒雪糕类似嘅质地，软糯香甜嘅，小姑娘嘅质地，再同消费联系埋一齐，呢个时候食豆腐就唔系白食啦，食一个甜筒畀一个甜筒嘅钱，都几巧妙。我自己觉得呢个创意 OK，唔觉得我自己受到侵犯。如果有人觉得受到侵犯，一定系佢哋对呢个用语有非常清晰嘅定位，所以佢哋觉得受到侵犯。呢啲有成人话题嘅广告容易吸引注意，而成年人系消费嘅主体，噉呢个广告借此达到宣传嘅目的，作为广告，好成功噉达到呢个目的。[*Sik dou fu* is ‘*haai jau*’ haha, usually targeting at the other sex, to say it in a more written way, is sexual harass. Regarding why is tofu, my first instinct is because tofu has a soft texture, it’s smooth and fragile, pretty and vulnerable, it’s like a representative of all the good traits of a girl, it’s something that can arouse the interest and sexual desire of the other sex. (Informant was shown the image of PI06 and asked for opinion) The ad took a similar texture of the icecream, soft and sweet, like little girls, and connect it to consumption. At this time *sik dau fu* is not free, you need to pay for each icecream cone you eat, it’s quite witty. I personally found this idea acceptable. I don’t feel offended. If anyone who finds it offensive, they must be very clear about the implication of this expression. These ads with adult-only content are prone to attract attention, and adults are the main consumer group, then this ad has achieved its purpose of promoting sales successfully.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 14:23, AEST, May 21, 2020)

JZ [GZ-F-33]: 食豆腐咪即系揩油，其实类似于性骚扰。因为豆腐又嫩又滑哈哈。(Informant was shown the image of PI06 and asked for opinion) 个广告化用得几好我觉得，唔会觉得有冒犯嘅意思。睇得明应该要知道食豆腐嘅意思。不过我明点解有人觉得系有性骚扰嘅意思，但系话引起好大争议就夸张得滞吧？我自己觉得纯粹系小玩笑，唔会觉得被冒犯，我畀咗个北方女仔睇，解释咗畀佢听，佢都唔觉得有咩问题。如果我系一个消费者，见到呢个广告，我会觉得咦几得意喔，我会想去试下噉。[*Sik dau fu* is to *haai jau*, actually it’s like sexual assault, because tofu is tender and soft haha. (Informant was shown the image of PI06 and asked for opinion) I think the ad makes very good use of the idiom, I don’t find it offensive. But you will need to know what *sik dau fu* means to understand the ad. But I do understand why some people think it implies the meaning of sexual assault, but it will be exaggerative if we say it’s a big controversy. I personally think it’s purely

a small joke, I won't be offended. I showed it to a Northern girl and explained the meaning to her, she also found it acceptable. If I am a consumer and see this ad, I will find it quite interesting and will want to try the icecream.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 20:11, AEST, May 21, 2020)

**(PC28) Cultural informant responses on *sik zyu soeng* (食住上)**

DL [GZ-F-39]: 食住上我自己嘅感觉就系嗰种乘住之前个势, 唔肯罢休, 要打蛇随棍上嘅意思。呢度个食就系指咬住原先嘅势头, 原先抓到对方嘅把柄, 乘住自己占嘅上风, 嚟以此扩大胜算乘胜追击, 我哋旧底都话食住个势上嚟, 食呢个词又有占有嘅意思, 到咗你口入面嘅嘢, 就系你占有咗嘅喇, 然后再乘胜追击。 [*Sik zyu soeng* I personally think is the feeling of seizing the gained advantage, not giving up, and going forward with it. *Sik* here is to bite and seize on the initial 'tide', using what you have from the others to stay in advantage, using it to strike for more advantages. We used to say eat the tide up, so *sik* also has the meaning of occupation, '*sik-zyu*' is like you are eating the food, so you occupy and take hold of the food, this is like you take hold of the advantageous position and proceed to do something.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 23:05, AEST, May 20, 2020)

JHJ [HK-M-22]: 食住上即系抓住机会做某事? 个食字就好似你咬住乜嘢嘞, 就系控制住你而家嘅时势。 [*Sik zyu soeng* is to grasp the chance to do something? The character *sik* is like you are biting into something, so it's like you are taking control of the situation.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 22:47, AEST, May 20, 2020)

CSM [GZ-F-30]: 食住上第一反应就系打蛇随棍上, 趁势而为, 食住, 趁住现在嘅势头, 上, 继续做想做嘅食, 所以应该系话趁住有利嘅势头继续做想做嘅事。 [*Sik zyu soeng*, my first instinct is to go with the flow, *sik zyu*, to seize the current tide, *soeng*, to continue what you want to do, so it's to say to ride the advantageous tide to continue what you are doing.] (Collected and transcribed from personal communication with informant via WeChat at 01:46, AEST, May 21, 2020)

**(PC29) Cultural informant responses on *sik sei maau* (食死猫)**

All responses are collected and transcribed from personal communication with informants via WeChat at different times on April 12-13, 2020)

Researcher: 你知唔知食死猫系咩意思呀? 点解系嘅意思? [Do you know the meaning of *sik sei maau*? Why do you think it means what it means?]

CZK [GZ-M-59]: 自己做错一件事, 为咗转嫁畀人哋, 自己唔使承担责任, 就将件事压咗喺人哋度, 就叫食死猫。食嘅广州话里面即系吞咗落个肚度, 食死猫嘅食即系你吞咗落个肚度就算喇, 呢件事已经屈咗你喇, 你食咗落个肚度就唔好出声喇。 [You did something wrong yourself. In order to blame someone so you

don't need to take the responsibility, you pressured this thing onto someone else, that is *sik sei maau*, *Sik* in Cantonese is to swallow something into the stomach. *Sik* in *sik sei maau* is you swallow this thing into your stomach and then you say no more about this, it is like you swallow the blame and keep your mouth shut.]

PDW [GZ-F-60]: 食嘢本身系好舒服嘅, 但系嗰只系死猫嚟噶啫! 我就觉得你要夹硬吞只死猫落去好辛苦, 畀人屈你吞落去, 你会好辛苦好唔舒服。[Eating itself is comfortable, but that is a dead cat! I think it's very hard to forcefully swallow a dead cat, you are forced by someone to swallow something, you will feel the extreme labor and discomfort.]

JHJ [HK-M-21]: 食死猫系被冤枉、背黑锅。但系我唔知点解有呢个意思。我都唔知边度学返嚟, 反正就知道佢咩意思。食系承受, 有啲似“硬食”, 即系有种勉强承受、顶住嘅意思。[*Sik sei maau* is to be wronged and take the underserved blame, but I don't know why it has this meaning. I don't know where I learned this expression, but I know its meaning anyway. *Sik* is to bear, it's like forced eating, it has the meaning of bearing it reluctantly and hanging in there.]

JZ [GZ-F-32]: 被冤枉, 而且不能反驳嘅感觉, 有种好被动嘅意思。冇人会主动去食死猫呢种嘢, 所以就冇种被动加强迫嘅感觉。[It means to be wronged and can't fight back, it's very passive. This expression gives out a sense of passiveness. No one will voluntarily eat a dead cat, so the whole process is forced, it is like the scapegoat is wronged.]

SJT [GZ-F-32]: 被冤枉、背黑锅。但系我唔知点解系呢个意思。不过食猫本身就好可怕。[It means to be wronged and take the undeserved blame, but I don't know why it has this meaning. But eating cat is a horrible thing itself.]

WSM [GZ-F-33]: 我知食死猫系咩意思, 但系唔知点解叫食死猫。[I know what *sik sei maau* means, but I don't know why it's called *sik sei maau*.]

CMK [GZ-F-36]: 我知食死猫系咩意思, 但系点解我真系唔知。不过我绝对清楚佢讲嘅唔系字面嘅意思。[I know what *sik sei maau* means, but I really have no idea why it means what it means. But I am absolutely clear it doesn't refer to what it is literally.]

### (PC30) Cultural informant responses on *sik zo fo joek* (食咗火药)

All responses are collected and transcribed from personal communication with informants via WeChat at different times on March 10, 2020) (R: Researcher I: Cultural informant)

Informant 1: CZK [GZ-M-59]

R: 食咗火药同暴躁有乜关系? 点解话人暴躁会话人食咗火药? [What is the relationship between *sik zo fo joek* and hot-tempered? Why would you say someone has eaten gunpowder when you want to say they are hot-tempered?]

I1: 即系话个人有啲神经质噃嘛，食咗火药就系失惊无神就闹人咁噃样。[You are saying this person is a bit hysterical and unpredictable. *Sik zo fo joek* (is like) you just yell at people all of a sudden for no reason.]

R: 噃你觉得呢个词嘅意思同火药嘅一啲特性有冇关系？[Then do you think there is a certain connection between the connotation of the expression and the quality of gunpowder?]

I1: 有啲啦，因为火药系爆炸噃嘛，噃食咗火药咪爆炸噃，火药系燃烧品爆炸品，你食错咗火药，噃你咪又爆炸噃，咪闹人噃。[A little bit. Because gunpowder is explosive, so (if) you ate gunpowder, you explode. Gunpowder is an explosive, and if you mistakenly ate gunpowder, then you become an explosive, then you yell at people.]

Informant 2: JZ [GZ-F-32]

R: 你觉得点解话人脾气暴躁或者𨵿会话系食咗火药？[Why do you think *sik zo fo yoek* is used to say someone who is hot-tempered or angry?]

I2: 因为佢好似会喷火噃，就系食咗火药，喷火出嚟。我觉得食火药系指一种一次性嘅行为，唔系一个人本身嘅脾气。[Because it's like he can spit fire, it's (because) he ate gunpowder so he spits fire. I think *sik fo joek* refers to a one-time action, not really a person's natural temperament.]

R: 所以你觉得食咗火药嚟形容一个人嘅行为好似有种因果嘅感觉？[So you are saying you think using *sik zo fo joek* to describe a person's action feels like a cause-effect relation?]

I2: 嗯有少少，我认同呢种理解，呢种修辞好似有种揶揄嘅感觉，而且其实有啲责备嘅意味，听到会莫名觉得唔舒服。[Yes a little bit, I agree with this kind of understanding and this kind of figure of speech feels like it's a kind of ridicule, and it actually implies a bit of scolding, when I hear it I feel uncomfortable for some reason.]

Informant 3, 4, and 5: SJT [GZ-F-32], WSM [GZ-F-33], ZJT [GZ-F-33] (this was a group conversation)

R: 你觉得点解话人脾气暴躁或者𨵿会话系食咗火药？[Why do you think *sik zo fo yoek* is used to say someone who is hot-tempered or angry?]

I3: 爆炸！[(It is like) an explosion!]

I4: 应该系形容啲人表现出来嘅情绪同话语好凶，令人躲避不及，好似爆炸噃，有种不可控性。[I think it describes people who show fierce emotion verbal expressions and people cannot escape from them, it is like an explosion, it is uncontrollable.]

R: 噃你觉唔觉得用食咗火药嚟话一个人暴躁，好似系用一个“原因”，当然系修辞上嘅，唔系真系食火药，嚟指代表现出来嘅后果或者效果？[Then do you think using *sik zo fo joek* to describe a person's hot temper is like using a 'cause'—of course it is a figure of speech, not really eating gunpowder—to represent the demonstrated outcome or effect?]

I4: 嗯嗯，系。[Yes, it is.]

15: 我觉得有种歇后语或者俏皮话嘅感觉。 [I think it feels like a sort of allegorical saying or a witticism.]



## Pictorial Materials and Images



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@jerseyleung  
东海海鲜酒家 (流花店)  
5 months ago 2 likes 0 comments  
东海既 煲粥好好食 miss. #鱼翅煲饭 #food  
#rich #woo #东海 #delicious



@mikiyeung  
2 years ago 798 likes 11 comments  
Hubby making soup for friends, I get the benefit 😊  
#我最鐘意煲飯 #清茶淡飯好幸福 #他說這是全世界最  
好飲既青紅薏白粥 #我好贊成

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## Printed Materials

(PM01) 他的弱點是，易被業主欺騙，經常把精神浪費在無償的設計，行內人叫“煲冇米粥”，我卻間接學會鑒貌辨色。(Fung, 2016, p. 30)

(PM02) 呢個經理講嘅嘢好似喺度倒佢老闆米。(L. Zoeng & Zoeng, 2014, p. 40)

(PM03) “米”代表糧食，把糧食倒掉，就是把財富拋棄掉。引申為拆台、捅婁子、趕走顧客、幫倒忙。(L. Zoeng & Zoeng, 2014, p. 40)

(PM04) 最後我一定要多謝我而家嘅老闆黑妹姐李麗霞。黑妹姐系我米飯班主，我 2007 年識佢，佢好錫我，經常帶住我周圍表演，同我接好多工作，有演唱會、街頭騷、婚宴、公司春茗、周年晚宴、義工，以至美國、加拿大嘅都有。(Singh, 2016, p. 142)

(PM05) 我叫你專心食飯啊！係唔係要我熄電視啊！一望住個電視就呆晒型嘞！連電視汁都撈埋，以後食啦，唔好食飯啊！(J. Zoeng et al., 2019, p. 56)

(PM06) 難道元朗絲苗米絕跡之後，香港有的米就必要淪為本地生產總值、股價、樓價這些人造的數字？[Does that mean after the extinction of the *Yuen Long Si-miu-mai, mai* in Hong Kong has to be inevitably reduced to artificial figures like GDP, stock price index, and property price?] (Editorial Department, 2013, p. 29)

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Singh, G. M. P. (2016). *Hoeng Gong zai-zou [Made in Hong Kong]*. Red Publish.

Zoeng, J., Cin, P., & Lau, G. (2019). *P-paai baa-maa 2 zi gaa-zoeng fu-dou-jyun saucaak [Parents with a pass, volume 2: The instructor manual]*. Red Publish.

Zoeng, L., & Zoeng, M. (2014). *Jyut-pou faai jik tung [Cantonese-Mandarin swift translation]*. Chung Hwa Book Co.

## Social Media Posts

(SM01) 只要兩個人有同一個信念，就算「粗茶淡飯」依然食得咁開心；如果有咗對方，就算食珍饈百味都唔會笑得出。(2019, April 9) Retrieved from [http://picdeer.com/media/1957302287634734309\\_8232821200](http://picdeer.com/media/1957302287634734309_8232821200)

(SM02) 有谷种食至少都仲有得食，未去到最坏嘅情况，凄惨程度点都唔及得上食西北风囉。(2019, September 5) Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/shifiles/posts/2097767083826825/>

(SM03) 麻辣豬大腸併翼尖🐷🐔 剩左啲辣汁唔好浪費,整個豬大腸+翼尖,又一餐!😊 #建仔小廚 #麻辣豬大腸 #麻辣雞翼尖 #食得唔好睇 (2020, May 2) Retrieved from <https://www.picuki.com/media/2081977552238801451>

(SM04) "人地话食过夜粥，人生经验也丰富!"这句话版主只认同一半，因为这完全忽略了厨子在背后所付出的功劳!一碗碗热腾腾，香喷喷的夜粥，这可是厨师在后默默付出的心血与功夫!要煮一碗好的靚粥，可一点都不简单!(2020, March 9) Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/8hannels/posts/2352902741592350/>

新節目  
真係飲得杯落!  
Hailey親試好山好水!

viuTV

《喝吧!台灣》 7月29日起(星期六) 晚上10:15

ViuTV  
22 July 2017

【全新節目《喝吧!台灣》】  
真係飲得杯落! Hailey Chan 返嚟啦! 🍷🍷  
去到台灣親身試好山好水好茶好酒!  
一於同你飲多幾ROUND!  
#喝吧台灣 #心心眼 #飲得杯落 #睇酒

116  
6 comments 24 shares 19K views

(SM05)

Video slogan: 真係飲得杯落! Hailey 親試好山好水!

Textual post: 【全新節目《喝吧!台灣》】

真係飲得杯落！ Hailey Chan 返嚟啦！ 🍷🍷

去到台灣親身試好山好水好茶好酒！

一於同你飲多幾 ROUND！

#喝吧台灣 #心心眼 #飲得杯落 #賜酒

(2020, March 10) Retrieved from  
[https://www.google.com/search?q=%E9%A5%AE%E5%BE%97%E6%9D%AF%E8%90%BD&newwindow=1&rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enAU845AU845&sxsrf=ACYBGNSPS0FipRkN8axgR8iITcjkIhxkHw:1582000180045&ei=NGhLXrmkAoLC3LUPrpW1yAQ&start=20&sa=N&ved=2ahUKEwi5jpD2odrnAhUCIbcAHa5KDUk4ChDw0wN6BAgLEEE&biw=1920&bih=937](https://www.google.com/search?q=%E9%A5%AE%E5%BE%97%E6%9D%AF%E8%90%BD&newwindow=1&rlz=1C1GCEA_enAU845AU845&sxsrf=ACYBGNSPS0FipRkN8axgR8iITcjkIhxkHw:1582000180045&ei=NGhLXrmkAoLC3LUPrpW1yAQ&start=20&sa=N&ved=2ahUKEwi5jpD2odrnAhUCIbcAHa5KDUk4ChDw0wN6BAgLEEE&biw=1920&bih=937)