SUMMARY

This seven-chapter dissertation attempts to provide an in-depth study of the trisyllabic Guan-Yong-Yu (三字 格 惯用语), or the trisyllabic Chinese idiom.

The verbal idiom has a vigorous and dynamic life-spring and its popularity has been widely increasing in recent years. Yet, unlike other kinds of idiomatic expression, the norm of this category of Chinese idiom matured relatively late, perhaps less than two decades ago. To date, it is still always being incorporated into other domains of idiomatic language and not been studied extensively, let alone its trisyllabic form which is the main form of the idiom.

This dissertation aims to cast lights on the importance of the Chinese idiom in the language. This starts with a comprehensive overview on the Chinese idiom in the opening chapter which intends to clear the confusions in terminology and differing concepts and analyses the structure and nature of this kind of catchy phrases. In the following chapters, the dissertation narrows down to the theme – the trisyllabic form which reflects most of the distinctive features of the Chinese verbal idiom.

Chapter Two explores the resilience of the trisyllabic form by looking into the nature of its structure and analysing the variant phenomena. Chapter Three then makes a comparison between the trisyllabic Chinese idiom and ordinary three-character phrases as well as trisyllabic words, and distinguish one from another.

Chapters Four and Five delve into the grammatical and rhetorical functions of the trisyllabic Guan-Yong-Yu expressions. Examples are used extensively to prove that the trisyllabic idiom is very active and colourful in the Chinese language. Grammatically, it serves as subject, predicate or complement and sentence constituents. Rhetorically, it produces ironical and sarcastic effects with abundant and accurate contents condensed in just three characters.

In the sixth chapter, the dissertation looks at the usage of the Chinese idiom in Singapore with a survey on the usage in the three Chinese newspapers. From this survey, it has been found, for the first time, that the use of Guan-Yong-Yu in Singapore is not as extensive as that of another main kind of idiomatic expression Cheng-Yu (成语), while in native China Guan-Yong-Yu is always the most commonly used idiom.
The concluding chapter sums up advantages and disadvantages in the development of this idiomatic expression. It points out that the traits of the Chinese idiom, to a certain extent, have also been its restrictions, that is its nature of colloquialism. Nevertheless, being so vivid, useful and efficient in carrying and expressing meanings, Guan-Yong-Yu unquestionably is an important part of the Chinese language and deserves more attention.