

# INTRODUCTION

*Chinese: Communicating in the Culture* is designed for the rank beginner who wants to speak Mandarin Chinese. This set of materials starts the learner off with sufficient support to prepare for a class or to develop fundamental speaking skills in self-study. These materials include a “Performance Text” and an audio program. The text serves as a guide through the audio program where the teaching and learning occurs. The content covers three general areas: instructional expressions, people, and places.

In Unit Zero you learn instructional expressions in order to interact with your instructor in Chinese. The expressions presented here have been selected as the most frequently observed communications between teacher and student in a Chinese class that is focused on the student’s performance. Although there are alternatives to many of these expressions, a careful instructor can keep to these expressions until the student has internalized them in his or her class performance. After that, perhaps the instructor will want to use other expressions.

The unit focusing on people practices you on recognizing, addressing, and discussing a variety of persons. The point is to direct your attention on how Chinese address one another and to give you enough language resources to discuss the good and not-so-good aspects of people around you.

People in places is the focus of Unit Two. Here you can practice talking about where people are and what they are doing there.

These materials are designed for the learner who understands that learning a language entails not only what to say, but also how to say it and when to say it. We try to give the learner sufficient support to be well prepared to work with a competent instructor. But for this to happen, the learner must understand that a lot of listening, repeating, and speaking has to happen before his or her performance reaches the acceptable level.

*Chinese: Communicating in the Culture* is designed for the learner, whether that learner is part of a class or studying on his or her own. The Performance Text only works in conjunction with the audio program. Anyone using it without the audio program will be lost.

The audio program will either accompany this volume or be available on a class website. When working with this program, the learner will be exposed to recordings in all sorts of conditions. Some excerpts have been recorded on the site of the action and some have been recorded in a sound studio. Some of the speakers are trained professional broadcasters, some are not. Therefore, there is not a consistent quality of voices or of recording conditions. We have chosen this approach because we know it is the best way to prepare the learner to comprehend Mandarin outside the class. We do understand, however, that our choice will require the learner to listen somewhat longer and repeat somewhat more often.

The dialogs in *Chinese: Communicating in the Culture* have for the most part been taken from actual conversational exchanges that we have observed or recorded. As a result, the conversations you encounter here are somewhat different from those in other Mandarin textbooks. Actual spontaneous conversation, as opposed to a composed dialog, is somewhat problematic — people do not always behave the way we would like our models to behave. But we have decided that these dialogs will give the learner a better capacity to deal with the Mandarin Chinese he or she will encounter in China or in a Chinese community outside China.

The vocabulary presented in these materials is listed three ways in the appendices: by unit and stage — there you can find all the words and phrases presented in each lesson; by *pīnyīn* — there you can look up the Chinese according conventional spellings; by English — if you remember an English interpretation of a word you have learned, you can try to find the Mandarin equivalent.

## Learning Chinese

There are good reasons for you to learn Chinese. Mandarin Chinese is the first language to more speakers than any other language. It is the official language of China and the inheritor of a rich cultural tradition that can be traced back thousands of years. Throughout history, Chinese culture has directly influenced other major cultures of East Asia and contributed broadly to cultures around the world. In present times, the impact of the Chinese people is being felt throughout the world—their growing economic power affects the price of goods and commodities across the planet and Chinese movies, music, and martial arts are gaining aficionados everywhere, just to mention a couple of obvious influences. As the Chinese people encounter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, they are bringing social and scientific innovations to the international scene and are steadily establishing a record of Chinese contributions to the modern world. If you are looking at this textbook, you obviously have a sense of all this and are considering beginning the study of Mandarin. A brief introduction to this process might prove useful.

Mandarin is one of seven mutually unintelligible “dialects” of Chinese. It is spoken by approximately 70% of all Chinese speakers and is the language of education and public activities. China is a linguistically complex country: You are likely to find yourself in a bilingual environment wherever you go in the country and even Mandarin has several varieties that appear to be clearly different from one another. We are presenting *pǔtōnghuà* in these materials. We might call it “broadcast standard.” It is a version of Mandarin that you will hear on television and radio programs across China. The voices you will hear belong to professional actors and broadcasters in addition to ordinary people from all parts of the country. The reason for this diversity is to give you the opportunity to develop a general familiarity with the way the language is spoken throughout China.

Chinese has distinctive characteristics that will influence the way you approach learning the language. It is a tonal language. This means you have to develop a perception of tones and invest them with phonological value. A tone in Chinese is as necessary as a consonant in English. If you do not get it right, you will not be easily understood.

The basic unit of sound in Chinese is the syllable. And there are relatively few of them and the tones are important in distinguishing one from the other. You will soon learn to distinguish *tāng* (soup) from *táng* (sugar), *tǎng* (to lie down), and *tàng* (scalding). Compare the small number of Chinese syllables (1282) with the English syllables that are over ten thousand. This means that each syllable in Chinese conveys much information, and that pronunciation is an important concern. The time you invest into practicing and improving your pronunciation as you learn to speak the language will yield an impressive rate of return for you as you progress in your Chinese skills.

If you come to Chinese from a background in European languages, the grammatical features of Chinese are not what you might expect. There are no gender agreements, no tense is added to verbs, nouns and pronouns do not decline, and verbs do not conjugate.

The choice of words and word order are basic to expressing your meaning. Therefore, learning vocabulary and practicing patterns of expressions and sentences are other crucial activities on your way to fluency.

Chinese culture itself is perhaps the most distinctive feature influencing communication in this language. Chinese speakers do not behave in their language the way speakers of English are apt to behave in theirs. Learning to communicate in Chinese is not only a matter of learning what to say, but also when and how to say it. In this course of study, when we present the language of a lesson, we try to put you into the situation where that particular piece of language would be used. We expect you to learn to perform the language in the context of the situation just as if you were an overpaid actor on a sitcom. Perform it as if you mean what you say enough times and, as if by magic, you will come to actually mean what you say. The secret to successfully learning to speak Chinese is this: Speak a lot of Chinese in situations you understand.

*Chinese: Communicating in the Culture* is designed to give you the best possible opportunity to speak Chinese in a way that seems natural to Chinese people. We do this by giving you an opportunity to learn to perform a role in a conversation and to practice the spoken expressions and cultural moves that were introduced in the conversation. The result should be that you are able to use these expressions and moves in new situations. Listening is the key skill. If your listening comprehension is good, you are in a position to develop accurate speech and efficient reading. Your success in this program depends on your willingness to work hard on the audio component. That should absolutely be the focus of your study.

In order to take full advantage of this program, you should pay attention to following five basic principles:

**1. The Chinese you need to learn in this course is on the audio program.** A successful learner of Chinese will develop the ability to learn it aurally. Life, culture, and language occur on the fly and without the convenience of subtitles that you can refer to when your comprehension falters. The graphic and printed versions of the language are there to help you access and keep your place while you are working with the sounds of the language.

**2. The more you perform the language, the better and faster you will learn it.** There is nothing mystical about learning Chinese: the more you do, the more you are able to do. When you get the chance, perform the conversations as if you were auditioning for a part in a play, movie, or a lucrative commercial with the possibility of long-term residuals. Get used to speaking the language in a full, natural sounding voice. If you sound strange speaking Chinese at first, that is to be expected. Hey! You're speaking Chinese! With constant performance of the language, you will soon develop a comfortable familiarity with the Chinese coming from your own voice. At that point, let others be amazed at the smooth Chinese emanating from you. No matter how little Chinese you can say, strive to say it in a way that would make someone overhearing you think you know the whole language.

**3. Use your imagination.** The more vividly you can picture yourself observing or participating in a conversation with a Chinese person, the more quickly you will recall the Chinese you have learned. If you can visualize the event in color, you will be a better student of Chinese than if you can only manage to imagine in black and white. When you learn a new structure or set of vocabulary, take the time to use them in real, virtual, or simply pretend situations.

**4. Recall the story of a conversational exchange.** Something happens in a particular situation every time two or more persons converse. Keep that event in mind as you practice and review expressions, questions, and responses. Remember newly studied language as a part of communicating with a Chinese person — real or imagined. When you have the opportunity to interact with Chinese people, notice how things are done--what they are like when speaking Chinese or English and how their behavior is similar to or different from your expectations.

**5. Look for opportunities to experiment and observe the result.** If you are around Mandarin speakers, practice doing with them what you have learned in this program and learn to accurately observe the response. Languages are complex, so do not be disturbed if the responses are not according to the scripts you have learned, and be delighted when they are. Enjoy both the successes and the failures. Your ability to appreciate the process of gaining skills in a new language is a strong indicator of your eventual success. In learning to actually communicate with Chinese, you can learn as much from failure as from success. As you experiment more and learn more Chinese, you will steadily increase the number of successful exchanges. Samuel Beckett encouraged his actors with good advice: “Try. Fail. Try again. Fail better.”

*Chinese: Communicating in the Culture* has different components that are designed to give you opportunities to observe how communication occurs in a specific context, to understand it, and to practice communication moves that are recognized by most Chinese speakers. Some of the activities are easy and some are really hard. However, we have tried to make sure that you know what is going on as you learn to communicate in Chinese culture. This audio program and accompanying textbook are divided into “units” and “stages”. A unit focuses on a particular area such as “people” (Unit One). A stage is basically one lesson. There are ten stages in each unit. Most of the stages consist of a dialog and a set of drills, but there are also stages focused on pronunciation and romanization, and on reading and writing. The final stage in a unit is a self test. It is there for you to check out your comprehension and general command of the materials presented in the unit.

In the stages consisting of a dialog and drills, the audio program will have a “coaching” version with extensive English explanations and a “rehearsal” version that presents the Chinese without the explanations. Once you understand the lesson from the coaching, go to the rehearsal audio and concentrate on the Chinese. Do a lot of listening and repeating. Get used to hearing Chinese and hearing yourself speak Chinese. Below are introductions to the various components in these materials.

## **Instructional Expressions**

These are presented in Unit Zero. The time you are together with your instructor is extremely valuable. It should be spent with you speaking as much Chinese as possible and your instructor reacting, responding, and correcting your performance. Whether you study in a classroom or individually, you need to leave your session with the impression that you experienced an intensive Chinese workout and you have an accurate idea of how well you did that. These instructional expressions will help you experience these kinds of sessions. Learn them by listening to the audio program and repeating after the models. From time to time you will have a drill to check out your understanding.

## **Dialog Coaching**

Dialogs are provided for you to see and hear how people communicate in particular situations and to give you the opportunity to assume the roles of those people. In the presentation of a dialog, you will hear a number of different voices belonging to standard Mandarin speakers from different regions of China.

Coaching is on the audio program. Here you are talked through a conversation with descriptions of conversational situations, new expressions, new grammatical concepts, and tips on pronunciation. Listen to the explanation and repeat the new expressions. You should work with the coaching until you are familiar with the dialog. That means until you can place everything you hear in a social context and basically understand what is being said. The dialogs are close to natural conversational performances. Some are more difficult to hear because they were recorded on site with background noise. In such cases, our advice is to listen more carefully and a few more times.

Coaching concludes with a presentation of vocabulary of the expressions introduced in each stage. The vocabulary items are grouped into categories by either part of speech or meaning. You can listen as each item is pronounced, given an English explanation or gloss. When we think it is useful, we will add a few examples of the expression in sentences or exchanges.

## Role Play Rehearsals

At the end of the coaching, you will have an opportunity to act out the dialog with the players on the tape. This lets you put yourself into a conversation by assuming the roles of each participant. The idea is to be able to fit your part into the flow of the conversation. You will probably need a number of repetitions to perform a conversation smoothly. Accuracy in pronunciation and delivery takes time. The way to shorten that time is to develop a self-critical ear by noticing where your performance deviates significantly from the native speakers and where it is spot on.

## Practice Drills

Drills are designed to generalize your ability to use the new items presented in each dialog conversation. The goal is to prepare you to use these items in a variety of situations. In addition to practicing the items introduced in the conversations, the drills will introduce variations on these items. For example, if you learn to use adjectives to describe what people look like in a conversation, the drills will lead you to practice how to ask about a person's appearance. Some drills are easy and some are very difficult. Be sure you understand what you are to do in the drill and what it means before you spend a lot of time on it. Listen carefully to the examples and the introduction to the drill and review the points focused on there.

You may want to first go through all the drills to get an idea of what is covered in the Stage you are studying. Then go back and perform in each drill repeatedly until you have the response pattern down. After that, repeat the entire set of drills until you reach a sense of familiarity with all the items practiced in the drills. The ability to perform competently in the drills will assure you of success in learning to speak the language.

## Pronunciation and Romanization (P&R)

As you begin to learn to communicate in Chinese, you will be encouraged to pay attention to pronunciation. After you have practiced a number of expressions and situations, you will encounter the first P&R. These six stages distributed over three units will present the sounds of Mandarin in a systematic way. Go through them carefully and return to them from time to time to “recalibrate” your perception and pronunciation of particular syllables and combinations.

Chinese is represented in the Roman alphabet in a system called *pīnyīn*. This is the way you will first be introduced to the language in this program of study. *Pīnyīn* uses most of the letters of the English alphabet, lacking only *V v*, and adding an umlaut *Ü ü*. The tones in Mandarin are indicated by the following marks above the main vowel of each syllable: *ā á ǎ* *à*. The absence of such a mark indicates a neutral tone.

As you embark on your study of Chinese, learning *pīnyīn* is important—reference works such as dictionaries use it, publications in English represent Chinese by using it, and it is a popular input method for typing Chinese on computers. However, in the early stages, it is best to focus your attention on the audio program and to think of that venue as the source of your Mandarin. The more you train yourself to hear and discriminate Chinese sounds, the faster your listening and reading comprehension develops and the more accurate your speaking becomes.

## Reading and Writing

After you have been introduced to the sound system and have had enough time to become familiar with the way Mandarin sounds, we will introduce you to the writing system of Chinese. On your way to becoming a fluent reader of Chinese, you will learn 3000-4000 graphs or *hànzì* (Chinese characters). Each graph represents one morpheme, or a unit of meaning, and one syllable. Words in Chinese are usually written with more than one *hànzì*. There are two versions of *hànzì* (Chinese characters) with which beginning learners of Chinese have to contend—traditional and simplified. Simplified (or *jiǎntǐzì*) is the version used in the People's Republic of China and Singapore. The traditional characters (or *fǎntǐzì*) are used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and in Chinese communities throughout the world. Most foreign students of Chinese need to know both versions, especially if they are interested in reading documents from an earlier time than mid-Twentieth Century; however, it is common for a student of the language to be more familiar with one form or the other. In this program of study we offer the option to choose either *jiǎntǐzì* or *fǎntǐzì*. Decades of observation of students of Chinese and some research indicates that beginning with the traditional and then picking up the simplified results in more learners developing that ability to use both forms. But the choice of which version one starts with most often depends on one's instructor or on what part of the Chinese speaking world one intends to travel to.

In this program the first things you learn to read are name cards. Name cards are very common in Chinese speaking society. They function as a reminder of a person's name and their social status. Most importantly they indicate the title one should use when addressing someone in Chinese. From this simple beginning, we will launch you on a reading career that will open onto a vast landscape of possibilities.

## Concluding the Introduction

Learning Chinese is a brave and serious undertaking. Chinese culture represents a huge part of human experience on this planet and often is the major cultural alternative to the Western perspective. Being consistent, patient, and persevering is important here. If you learn to communicate in Chinese culture, it will change the way you see the world and change the way you see yourself. Such transformations are not quick and easy. So plan for the long march.