

INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE TEXT TWO

千里之行 始于足下 *Qiān lǐ zhī xíng / Shǐ yú zú xià*

This may be the most translated and quoted line from the ancient *Dào Dé Jīng* (道德经). The usual translation is something like this: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step.” This line is often quoted by people who are too sophisticated to simply tell an assembled group of potential followers to get off their duffs and get on with the program *du jour*. Although this translation is a good enough use of this venerable line, it seems to us that it misses important aspects of the original and gives a somewhat misleading view of journeying. The line could be glossed this way:

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|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 千 | 里 | 之 | 行 | 始 | 于 | 足 | 下 |
| <i>qiān</i> | <i>lǐ</i> | <i>zhī</i> | <i>xíng</i> | <i>shǐ</i> | <i>yú</i> | <i>zú</i> | <i>xià</i> |
| 1000 | li | 's | journey | begin | at | feet | beneath |

A *lǐ* is about 1/3 of an English mile, so one thousand *lǐ* is a bit of a walk. Here the classical particle 之 *zhī* functions like Mandarin 的 *de*, making “one thousand” modify “journey.” So, “a journey of a thousand miles” is fine—even if it overstates the distance by roughly two-thirds. But the second half of this line does not mention anything about a “step.” *Shǐ* 始 is a verb, “to begin.” This is followed by a classical preposition, *yú* 于 “at,” which functions like Mandarin 在 *zài* except *yú* occurs after the verb and *zài* usually occurs before (just as we practiced in Unit 2). *Zú* 足 is the ancient word for “foot” or “feet.” *Xià* 下 is the location “under (your feet).” Since you have studied the expression of location earlier in this course, you know where things are: the start of the journey is under your feet. By the time the idea of a journey emerges, you are already on the way. You have put yourself in the position for the journey, perhaps even before you realize it yourself. Whatever experience has put you on the journey of learning Chinese, here you are. And from here we are going to learn how to orient people and places in time. As we set off into new concepts of time, this is a good time to re-orient yourself to the study of Chinese. Perhaps going back and reviewing the introduction to the first performance text while reflecting on your learning experiences to this point would be useful. To keep your Chinese study moving apace, you should focus on your pattern of practice and repetition.

In this part of the course, you will focus on when things happen and how long they take. You will learn the terms for categorizing time and the kinds of things that happen at particular times of the day or calendar. In Chinese the order of things is from larger to smaller. “*Zhōngguó Běijīng*” is how you refer to “Beijing, China” when speaking Mandarin. Following this principle, we might say that time is greater than space in Chinese—if not in physics--because the time of an event usually comes before the location of an event when speaking Chinese.

In this set of materials, we will introduce you to the *hànzì* writing systems of Chinese. The first stage of this process is to accumulate an inventory of Chinese characters that you can recognize and recall. We follow the idea that you can learn to read better if we focus on a particular use of writing. We have chosen to make the first focus name cards, or business cards. These are ubiquitous cultural artifacts in China when interacting with Chinese people engaged in careers. Being able to deal with name cards will be a useful, if somewhat limited, reading skill. While still emphasizing learning to comprehend and produce spoken language, we will guide you in reading and responding to the information usually given in this medium.

When learning to read *hànzì*, it is important to exercise as many aspects of memory as you can muster by carefully noticing the composition of a graph, its pronunciation, its collocations and contexts, and by developing a mechanical memory by repeatedly tracing and then writing it meticulously following its prescribed order. We will give you repeated opportunities to do these tasks. Your best strategy is to take the time to do them in an environment where you can concentrate.

Chinese presents us with two primary writing systems in addition to *pīnyīn* and other phonetic systems. If you intend to interact with people and seek information from only one part of the Chinese speaking world, you can choose to learn only one of the primary systems: either the traditional *fántǐzì* or the simplified *jiǎntǐzì*. However, if you think you will be reading media from what people refer to as Greater China, then you should resolve to learn both *jiǎntǐzì* and *fántǐzì*. The introduction to *hànzì* presented in this volume will allow you make this decision with some advice from us offered along the way.

Learning to communicate to the significant part of humanity that uses Mandarin is a challenge, but we have observed that it is a source of great satisfaction to many of our students. Our assumption is that most of that satisfaction comes with the ever increasing ability to perform in the language and the situations that are natural to the language. Improving this satisfaction becomes continually more and more under your control as you expand your expertise as a learner of this language. We look forward to the time when we can turn the process over to you completely. Then you will be there—that place you had in mind when you realized you were on this particular journey.