

RECORDED BOOKS™ PRESENTS

PIMSEUR®

LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

MANDARIN I



SUPPLEMENTAL
READING BOOKLET

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The Mandarin Language

Learning any language is enhanced by some knowledge of the cultural customs and beliefs of its native speakers. Developing an awareness of and a sensitivity to a language's subtleties are inherent to acquiring true fluency. The following "Notes" for Pimsleur's *Mandarin I* are meant to provide you with an introduction as to how the language and the culture are intertwined.

Mandarin

Mandarin Chinese is the state language of China, used by the government and in the schools. Although there are eight major Chinese dialects, Mandarin is native to approximately seventy per cent of the population and is the only dialect that has a corresponding written form of the language. Chinese who are educated through at least the primary grades speak Mandarin as well as local dialects. However, due to the size of China and the ethnic diversity of its inhabitants, hundreds of other dialects are spoken in different areas. The dialects spoken today are based more on geography than on ethnicity. For instance, residents of Shanghai will

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The Mandarin Language (*continued*)

speak *Wu*. In some parts of China, particularly the central and southern areas, education and official business are transacted in the locally dominant language. Although people from different parts of China generally do not understand one another's spoken language, they use the same basic set of characters for writing.

Today's Mandarin is closely based on "northern speech" which was the lingua franca of the ruling class, spoken in Beijing, the capital during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. After the Nationalists overthrew the Qing Dynasty in 1912, government officials at first considered creating a new "national language" by adopting a mixture of dialects, but in the end it was decided to retain Mandarin as the "National Language." The Communists, who defeated the Nationalists in 1949, continued this policy, but they changed the name and coined the term, *pu tong hua* or "common speech" for "Mandarin." This is the word for Mandarin used throughout mainland China. In Hong Kong, however, as in Taiwan and most overseas communities, *guo yu*, the older term, continues to be used.

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The Mandarin Language (*continued*)

Pronunciation of the national language differs slightly geographically. The Nationalists, whose capital was the southern city of Nanjing, were influenced by southern dialects, primarily Cantonese. The Communists, whose capital is Beijing, were influenced by “northern speech.”

Pictographs

It is commonly thought that every Chinese character is a picture, or “pictograph,” but only a few hundred of the several thousand characters are true pictographs. However, most of these are now written in such a way that it is difficult to immediately guess their meaning. There is also a very small group of characters called “ideographs” or “ideograms,” which represent ideas or objects directly. All other Chinese characters are combinations of these pictographs and basic ideographs.

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The Mandarin Language *(continued)*

Traditional and Simplified Script

In 1949 China's new government considered instituting an alphabet in place of the traditional characters, as a refutation of traditional or "feudal" culture. Instead, they decided to "simplify" the existing characters by reducing the number of strokes necessary to create them. By 1964, a list of 2,200 simplified characters was created for use as a "modified script." Further simplification was briefly adopted, then abandoned, at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977.

Presently, simplified characters are used in mainland China and Singapore, although there is a movement for the restoration of traditional characters, especially in southern China. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and most overseas Chinese communities continue to use the traditional characters.

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The Mandarin Language (*continued*)

Tonality

Chinese is a “tonal” language. This means that in addition to the sounds of the consonants and vowels, the tone with which a syllable is pronounced helps to determine its meaning. The Chinese languages are almost exclusively made up of one-syllable words, composed of an initial consonant sound followed by the syllable’s main vowel, sometimes in combination with another consonant or vowel. Longer words do exist, but almost all are compound words, formed by combining one-syllable words.

In order to convey meaning, Mandarin also takes into account the tone with which a syllable is pronounced. The tone is determined by the pronunciation of the syllable’s main vowel. Each tone has a name which describes the falling or rising motion. In this way, several meanings can be assigned to any one syllable, depending on the tone with which it is pronounced. For example, when pronounced using a falling-rising tone, the word *nar* means “where.” However, when this word is pronounced with just a falling tone, *nar*, it means “there.”

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The Mandarin Language (*continued*)

There are four basic tones used in speaking Mandarin: high, mid-rising, falling-rising, and falling. In addition, there is a “soft” sound which is used for the second syllable in a set of doubled characters, as well as for the final syllable (or question word) at the end of a query. For example, in the questions, *ni ne?* (How about you?) and *hao ma?* (OK?) the syllables *ne* and *ma* are pronounced using this soft, falling sound, as if the sound is fading away.

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The Mandarin Language (*continued*)

Here is an example of one sound with several different meanings, depending on the tone with which it is pronounced:

1st tone: high
shi (“poem”)

詩

2nd tone: mid-rising
shi (“ten” or “time”)

時

3rd tone: falling-rising
shi (“history”)

史

4th tone: falling
shi (all of the forms of “to be”)

是

Traditional Language Beliefs

Just as the number thirteen is traditionally regarded as unlucky in the West, the Chinese number four, *si*, is seen as ominous, because it is very similar to the pronunciation of the word for “death.” The only difference in this case is that “four,” *si*, is pronounced with a falling tone, while the word for “death,” *si*, is pronounced with a tone that falls and rises again.

Conversely, the number eight, *ba*, is regarded as lucky, since it shares the same ending sound with the character meaning “to prosper,” *fa*. In Cantonese, the mathematical form of the number two, *yi*, is considered lucky because it is pronounced the same as the word for “easy,” *yi*. Although the Mandarin word for “two,” *er*, does not share the same pronunciation as the Mandarin word for “easy,” *yi*, speakers of Mandarin still believe the number two to be good luck.

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Traditional Language Beliefs (continued)

The number nine, *jiu*, carries a positive meaning as this word sounds exactly like the Chinese word meaning “long-lasting,” *jiu*. These two words are represented in writing by two different characters, but when spoken, the distinction is made only through context.

The number “nine” is used in the city name Kowloon, *jiu long*, or literally, “nine dragons.” In China, the dragon is a symbol of royalty and good fortune. This number is also traditionally used when setting a woman’s dowry. In contemporary China, this price is largely symbolic, and therefore the amount chosen is significant not for its size, but for the numbers used to describe it. For that reason, the price will be set, for example, at “ninety-nine dollars” rather than “one hundred,” as the repetition of this number is thought to ensure longevity in the marriage.

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Color Symbolism

Colors tend to be associated with different meanings in different cultures. It's often useful to be aware of these different connotations.

In Chinese culture, the color red traditionally implies good fortune or good cheer. It is customary to use this color when decorating for such traditional occasions as the celebration of a wedding or a birth. For this reason, brides wear red, babies are clad in red, and red is used most often when decorating for the annual festivals. However, in today's China, many people are adopting more typically Western styles of dress. For instance, many brides are combining Eastern and Western traditions, choosing to wear a white gown to the wedding ceremony, and then changing into a traditional red gown for the wedding banquet.

The color green symbolizes youth and nature. However, one must never give a man a green hat or cap as a gift, as "to give a green hat" may imply that one is committing adultery with the recipient's wife.

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Color Symbolism (continued)

In the West, the prevalent color seen at a funeral is black. This color implies “ominous” in Chinese, and it may indeed be seen at funerals in China, but the main color seen at funerals is white, the Chinese color of mourning.

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Names and Titles

As in many other Asian cultures, in China the society or group is valued more highly than the individual. Your importance is measured by your value to the group, rather than by those qualities which distinguish you from others.

This can be seen in the way a person is named in Chinese. The most important element of the person's name is thought to be the family of which he or she is a member, and so the family name is spoken first. The given name, which sets the person apart even from others within the same family, is the final element. For example, in the name *wang zhuo hua*, *wang* is the family name, or surname, and *zhuo hua* the given name. Some surnames have a specific meaning: *wang*, a very common Chinese surname, means "king."

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Names and Titles (continued)

The given, or first, name is represented by either one or two one-syllable characters. A child's given name is usually chosen very carefully, to represent the parents' hopes for and expectations of the child. In the given name *zhuo hua*, *zhuo* means "outstanding" or "remarkable," while *hua* can mean "magnificent" or "extravagant."

Westerners are usually referred to by a phonetic representation of their names, and a few Western names have been adopted by some Chinese parents. Among these are the names "David," *da wei*; "Mary," *ma li*; and "Charlie," *cha li*.

Children usually take their fathers' last names; occasionally the mother's last name may also be used. Most last names are written using single characters. There are a few two-character last names in use: among these, *situ* and *ouyoung* are two of the most common.

The Concept of *mian zi* (“face”)

Language is not an isolated phenomenon, but a vibrant, flexible form of communication loaded with social and cultural information. Chinese culture is structured around such values as honor, loyalty, and respect. In fact, the respect with which a person’s community regards him or her can serve as an important part of that person’s identity. In Mandarin, this is often referred to as *mian zi*, or “face.” Here are some common phrases illustrating this concept:

you mian zi, “to have face,” means to be shown respect in a certain social situation. For example, when attending a banquet, those seated near the host at the head of the table can be said “to have face,” *you mian zi*.

Similarly, *gei mian zi*, “to give face,” means to show someone the respect due him or her. When you attend a formal dinner, the host and hostess might greet you by saying, “Thank you for giving face,” which is equivalent to saying, “Thank you for coming.”

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The Concept of *mian zi* (“face”) (continued)

diu lian,” “to lose face,” means “to lose dignity.” For example, you are thought to lose face if you are the only one of a certain group who is passed over for a promotion or who fails to receive an invitation to a sought-after event.

Compliments

Modesty is seen as an essential virtue in Chinese culture. This humility is shown by some typical responses a Chinese person will give when complimented. For example, a woman who is told *ni zhen piao liang*, (“You are really very beautiful”) could answer, *na le?* This literally means, “Where is it?” Used in this way, it is the same as saying, “Where do you get that?”

Another common response to a compliment might be, *kua jiang le!* This means something like, “Excessive praise!” and it’s used to say, “You’re exaggerating,” or “You’re flattering me.” Either of these can be used as a polite, modest response to almost any compliment. Some more Westernized people may also answer simply, *xie xie ni* or “thank you” when complimented, but this is less common.

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Chinese Cuisine and Tea

A traditional Chinese saying, “Food is the first necessity of the people,” is reflected in the great variety of Chinese food and its importance in traditional celebrations. There are eight schools of cuisine, each associated with a particular geographic region: *Beijing*, *Guandong*, *Sichuan*, *Jiangsu*, *Zhejiang*, *Hunan*, *Anhui*, and *Fujian*. Knowledge and mastery of all eight cuisines is known as the “ninth art.”

The staple of a Chinese meal is *fan* or grain. In the agricultural south, the *fan* may be rice or rice products. In Northern China, noodles, dumplings, and other staples made from flour are the basis of the daily diet. The meat and / or vegetables that accompany the *fan* are called *cai*, or accompanying dishes.

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Chinese Cuisine and Tea (continued)

The custom of drinking tea is also an important part of Chinese culture. The Chinese were the first to discover the tea leaf. A proverb states that it is “better to be deprived of food for three days, than tea for one.” When a guest arrives, it is traditional that a cup of tea will be brewed for him or her. The preparation of tea is regarded as an art form; the method of brewing it and the utensils used are very important.

People throughout the country drink tea daily, often in a local tea house, where one may meet informally with friends or associates, or hold a banquet or reception.

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The Chinese Zodiac

The Chinese have a system of astrology dating back thousands of years. The Chinese zodiac differs from the Western in that each sign represents an entire year, rather than one month.

According to ancient Chinese legend, Buddha summoned all the animals. He honored those who came by naming a year for them. Thereafter, the characteristics of each animal were given to people born in its year.

Year of the Rat	—	<i>shu</i>
Year of the Ox	—	<i>niu</i>
Year of the Tiger	—	<i>hu</i>
Year of the Rabbit	—	<i>tu</i>
Year of the Dragon	—	<i>long</i>
Year of the Snake	—	<i>she</i>
Year of the Horse	—	<i>ma</i>
Year of the Goat	—	<i>yang</i>
Year of the Monkey	—	<i>hou</i>
Year of the Rooster	—	<i>ji</i>
Year of the Dog	—	<i>gou</i>
Year of the Boar	—	<i>zhu</i>

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The Chinese Zodiac (continued)

Here is the list of animals associated with each year, along with a list of the qualities traditionally associated with each.

Anyone born during the Year of the **Rat** is expected to be imaginative, charming and generous, with a tendency to be quick-tempered and somewhat critical. Recent Years of the Rat have been 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, and 1996. The next one will be in 2008. Among famous people born in the year of the Rat are William Shakespeare and George Washington.

The Year of the **Ox** follows. Someone born during an Ox year is both intelligent and perceptive as well as one who inspires confidence. Napoleon and Vincent Van Gogh were born in the year of the Ox.

A person born in the Year of the **Tiger** is traditionally courageous and considerate of others, as well as stubborn and emotional. Marco Polo and Mary, Queen of Scots were born in the Year of the Tiger.

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The Chinese Zodiac (continued)

If a person is born in the Year of the **Rabbit**, he or she will be affectionate and obliging, successful in the business world despite being shy. Some well-known people born in this year were Confucius, Albert Einstein, and Rudolph Nureyev.

A **Dragon** is a perfectionist who is full of vitality and enthusiasm. Pearl Buck, Joan of Arc, and Sigmund Freud were all born in the Year of the Dragon.

Someone born in the Year of the **Snake** is wise and beautiful, with a good sense of humor. Famous Snakes were Charles Darwin, Abraham Lincoln, and Edgar Allan Poe.

If you were born in the Year of the **Horse**, you will be intelligent, hard-working, and very independent. Some famous Horses were Rembrandt, Chopin, and Teddy Roosevelt.

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The Chinese Zodiac (continued)

Someone born in the Year of the **Goat** will be charming and artistic, but be relatively uncomfortable in a leadership role. Among famous people born in this year were Michelangelo and Mark Twain.

A person born in the Year of the **Monkey** is clever and witty, with a gift for detail. Famous people born in this year were Julius Caesar, Leonardo da Vinci, and Harry Truman.

A **Rooster** is shrewd and outspoken, as well as extravagant. Rudyard Kipling, Enrico Caruso, and Groucho Marx were all born in this year.

Someone born in the Year of the **Dog** is loyal and honest, although demanding of those around him or her. Famous Dogs were Benjamin Franklin and George Gershwin.

A person born in the Year of the **Boar** is sincere, tolerant, and honest, with an ability to carry out difficult goals. Albert Schweitzer and Ernest Hemingway were born in this year.

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Hospitality

During your travels, you may find yourself invited to dinner in a Chinese home. Here are some customs which relate to hospitality and correct behavior as a dinner guest.

It is both appropriate and polite to bring a small gift such as a bottle of wine or a tea set. However, remember never to bring four of anything, as the number four, *si*, is considered unlucky because it is similar to the word meaning death, *si*. Also, a time-piece of any kind would be inappropriate since the words *song zhong*, meaning “give clock,” are very similar to the words meaning “attend someone’s funeral.”

When greeting your host or hostess, you should bow slightly and say *ni hao*, a greeting which means “you (are) good,” or “you (are) well.” A Chinese “hello,” therefore, is a well-wishing hello. One never says *ni hao ma*, or “How are you?” which is used only by relatives or close friends as an expression of concern.

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Hospitality (continued)

As in the West, it's considered rude to immediately begin eating when served. Rather, you should wait until everyone has been seated and all of the dishes have been served. Once this has been done, it's customary for the host or hostess to say, "Eat rice!" or *chi fan*. This is similar to such American expressions as, "Dig in!" or "Enjoy your meal." After the host or hostess has greeted their guests in this way, they in turn may address one another using the same phrase. *chi fan* having been said all around, everyone begins to eat.

At a more formal dinner party, you may hear the host and hostess greet the guests with the longer, more polite phrase, *ge wei qing yong fan*, which means, "Everyone please eat rice."

At this kind of occasion, a toast is frequently offered before the food is served. The person offering the toast could say, *gan bei* or "dry the cup." Another common toast is *zhu ni jian kang*, meaning, "I wish you health."

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Hospitality (continued)

When serving yourself during dinner, you will need to remember to serve yourself only those portions nearest you at the edge of the plate. It's considered rude to stir the food in any dish. If you have finished while others are still eating, you should say *qing man yong* ("Please, slowly eat") meaning, "Take your time, enjoy your dinner." After this you can leave the table.

When you are leaving the home of your host and hostess, they may say to you, *man man zou!* This literally means, "Slowly slowly walk!" and in this situation, it's like saying, "Have a safe trip home!"

Chinese Festivals

Chinese New Year

Chinese festivals are based on the traditional lunar calendar. The Chinese New Year, known as the Spring Festival or *chun jie*, is the most important festival of the year and usually occurs between January 21st and February 19th, according to the Western solar calendar. The entire family is present and a great deal of preparation is involved in cooking special foods which have a symbolic value. Dumplings, *jiao zi*, are considered lucky and will be a part of the northern Chinese meal, while a southern household will have a multi-course banquet with more meat served than usual. Fish balls represent a reunion, and eating turnips will bring good fortune. The traditional New Year's cake, made with sticky rice and brown sugar, is also eaten.

The family stays up through the night to watch fire-works which will scare away demons and bad luck. Households are brightly lit and fragrant with incense which is burned in order to welcome the return of the gods that left heaven at the end of the

Mandarin I

Chinese Festivals (continued)

previous year. Gifts such as paper money, tinfoil shapes, and fruit are prepared for New Year's Day.

Pure and Bright Day

Another important festival is *qing ming*, or “Pure and Bright Day,” which is celebrated around April 5th. Families visit cemeteries to honor their ancestors and beautify their graves. As this festival occurs in spring, it is also a day for sporting contests, kite flying, and other outdoor activities.

Dragon Boat Festival

The festival of *duan wu* is celebrated between late May and early June. The legend connected with this day has to do with the great ancient poet *Qu Yuan*, who lived more than 2000 years ago in the Kingdom of *Chu* in southern China. As legend has it, the poet was deeply patriotic and proposed to the ruler of *Chu* that only honest and able people should be employed by him, and not those who were his

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Chinese Festivals (continued)

favorites. *Qu Yuan* was thereafter banished from *Chu*. Upon learning that *Chu* had fallen to a rival army, he threw himself into the *Miluo* River in *Hunan* province. The people of *Chu* rushed to the river to try to save him, but it was too late. They threw bamboo shafts filled with rice as a sacrifice to him, so that the fish would eat the rice and not the poet's body. So on this day, people throw rice dumplings into a river to recreate the sacrifice. It is also customary to eat *zong zi*, a glutinous rice wrapped in reed leaves.

Today, the celebration also includes dragon-boat races to commemorate the “people's poet.” Dragons are regarded as supernatural creatures and symbols of good luck. Many weeks are spent creating elaborate dragon boats, which are similar to canoes. Teams then race the “dragons” to mark the festival of *duan wu*.

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Chinese Festivals (continued)

Mid-Autumn Day

Mid-Autumn Day, *zhong qiu*, is the most important holiday after the Chinese New Year. Despite the name, it is celebrated in August, during that month's full moon. In Chinese culture, the full moon symbolizes "completeness, perfection, reunion." On this day, people eat round "moon cakes" and fruits with a round shape, such as watermelons, oranges, or grapefruits. Traditionally, a person exchanges moon cakes with his or her friends, as well as other gifts. The gift of a moon-cake has a ritual significance to the Chinese which is similar to the exchange of Christmas gifts in the West.

Mandarin I

Proverbs

“The sky is high, the emperor is far away.” *shan gao huang di yuan*. The Chinese routinely include such sayings in their everyday conversation and have done so since ancient times. This proverb means that a powerful figure is far away, and one can relax and enjoy a measure of freedom.

Proverbs are generally four to eight characters long, and like any common speech, or slang, in a foreign language, they can be nearly incomprehensible to a foreigner. In a society that reveres its elders, respects authority, and is always aware of *mian zi*, or “face,” proverbs provide a subtle way by which to avoid criticisms of any kind or to explain an unpleasant action or truth.

Most Chinese proverbs originated from oft-told tales that taught a lesson, much the same as in *Aesop's Fables*. The moral of the story is what became the proverb. The following is simply a small selection of the many examples of Chinese proverbs:

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Proverbs (continued)

Proverb: “When one man finds the way, his chickens and dogs ascend to heaven.” *yi ren de dao, ji quan sheng tian.*

Meaning: When a man is promoted to a position of authority, all his friends and relatives benefit.

Proverb: “Feeling stones while crossing a river.” *guo he tan shi.*

Meaning: Feeling out the situation as one goes.

Proverb: “Never pull on your shoes in a melon patch; never adjust your cap under a plum tree.” *gua tian li xia.*

Meaning: Don't act suspiciously if you want to avoid being suspected.

Proverb: “One step, ascend heaven.” *yi bu deng tian.*

Meaning: This is said of someone who has a meteoric rise in fame or fortune.

Proverb: “Come and not go not polite.” *lai er bu*

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Proverbs (continued)

wang fei li ye.

Meaning: It is impolite not to reciprocate.

Proverb: “Victories, defeats, are a general’s ordinary things.” *sheng bai nai bing jia chang shi.*

Meaning: Another victory or defeat doesn’t mean much, it’s only one part of a whole.

Proverb: “Sit, eat, mountain empty.” *zuo chi shan kong.*

Meaning: Sit idle and eat: in time your whole fortune will be used up.

Proverb: “Use egg to strike rock.” *yi luan ji shi.*

Meaning: To grossly overestimate one’s own strength.

Proverb: “Map unrolled, dagger revealed.” *tu qiong bi xian.*

Meaning: Someone’s real intention is revealed in the end.

Mandarin I

Proverbs (continued)

Proverb: “Zhang’s cap on Li’s head.” *zhang guan li dai.*

Meaning: To confuse one thing with another.

Proverb: “A fox assumes a tiger’s prowess.” *hu jia hu wei.*

Meaning: To bully others by flaunting one’s powerful connections.

Proverb: “You never know at whose hand a deer will die.” *lu si shei shou.*

Meaning: There is no way to predict what will happen in the future.

Mandarin I

Measure Words

It is important to remember that in Mandarin, unlike in English, there are many “measure” words used when describing quantity. The word to be used in each case is determined largely by the nature of the item in question. For example, in the phrase *na tiao lu* for “which road” (meaning which one road), *tiao* is the “measure” word. *tiao* is used to indicate long things such as roads, belts, dresses, lines, etc. *ge* is the measure word used for people, for objects such as a cup or a room, or for an hour. To describe flat objects or things such as a bed, tables, or paper, you use *zhang*. *bei* is the measure word used for liquids, such as soup, tea, or beer. *kuai* is the measure word used with currency.

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Questions

In Mandarin, there are two ways to ask yes / no questions: by using *ma*, a spoken question word, at the end of the question, or by using a verb / negative form of the verb combination. *ma* is more often used, especially in conversation, as it is perceived as a faster way to pose a question. For example, you can ask either *ni xiang he cha ma?*, meaning, “Would you like to drink tea,” or *ni xiang bu xiang he cha?*, “You would / wouldn’t like to drink tea?” Either form is equally correct.

Mandarin I

Climate

Mainland China is slightly larger than the United States. Due to its large land mass, the climate ranges from sub-arctic in the north, to tropical in the south. Consequently, the Chinese are likely to experience everything from monsoons and droughts to tsunamis and earthquakes. China's population of 1.2 billion (five times that of the United States) is largely centered in the eastern part of the country. The terrain in the west consists largely of mountains and deserts. Although China boasts some of the world's longest rivers, only land in the east is fertile enough to support agriculture.

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Currency

Currency in China is called *renminbi*, or the “people’s currency,” the *yuan* being the standard unit of *renminbi*. Only in recent years has the government allowed *renminbi* to be taken out of the country and exchanged for foreign currency.

Transportation and Communication

For most of the Chinese, travel is done on bikes, buses, trains, or on foot; very few people own cars. Domestic air travel is expensive and is used primarily by businessmen. The government is creating a network of highways that will eventually link the major cities.

Communication systems exist in the major cities and in some less urban areas. All TV channels are operated by the government; local stations as well as radio stations must have official approval. The telephone system is also government owned and operated and continues to expand. Computers, fax machines, electronic mail, and other modern forms of communication are largely available only to well-to-do urbanites.

Education

In 1978, China adopted an education policy that mandates compulsory education for nine years. This policy requires students to finish primary school and middle school. Each family is charged a fee per term to send a child to school. Thereafter, students who wish to pursue further education must pass rigorous exams for the high school level and beyond. Entrance to a national university or college requires passing an exam which takes place every July. Due to the exam's difficulty and the harsh weather in that month, students have nicknamed it "black July." Most of the students who complete a higher education are trained as specialists in fields such as engineering and the sciences in order to further China's development.

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MANDARIN I, 2nd Ed.

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