

9.1 Communication

Dialects

Mandarin - or Putonghua - is the official language or the common language of the People's Republic of China and the world's most spoken language. Over 750 million people use it as their mother tongue. It is also, to a certain extent, a contact language, since there are around 500 spoken Chinese dialects, which themselves are part of five major regional groupings. Cantonese, one of the major dialects is the main language of Hong Kong and of Guangdong (Canton) Province in South China and also of the Chinese community in the UK, which traces its ancestry to that part of China. The Hakka dialect is also widely spoken in the UK.

Other major dialects, for example, Shanghaihua (Shanghaiese) is spoken in Shanghai, Shandonghua is spoken in Shandong province and Fujianhua is spoken in Fujian province, etc. Speakers of one dialect usually do not understand speakers of another dialect.

Written Chinese language

Historically, the written Chinese language has served as a means of uniting the Chinese people behind one language. In recent times, the written language itself has undergone reform. Between the 1950's and 1970's, the Chinese government embarked on a far-reaching programme in which redundant characters were excised from the language and many others simplified, with the aim of promoting literacy and making the language generally less arcane and easier to use. Simplified character written Chinese is used in China itself and in Singapore. The old, complex form characters are still widely used in Taiwan and Hong Kong

Chinese uses characters, which are quite different from an alphabet. Characters have two functions, one of which represents the general meaning and the other the approximation of the sound. Not all characters can stand alone as a word and most Chinese words consist of two separate characters. For example "zhongguo" (China), also meaning the Middle Kingdom as ancient Chinese regarded China as the centre of the earth, has two characters. Knowledge of about 4,000 characters is necessary for reading a newspaper.

Pinyin system

At roughly the same time as the written language was being reformed; the government introduced the pinyin system of romanization, replacing the older wade-Giles system. *Pinyin* replaced the letter clusters, hyphens and apostrophes of the earlier system with single letters that bore a closer resemblance to how words are actually pronounced. This is how, for instance, Peking became Beijing and Mao Tse-tung became Mao Zedong.

Learning Chinese

Chinese is not just a different language from English but it also has a different linguistic system. In Western languages, the words used to convey meaning are entirely symbolic. Chinese characters have an innate meaning - in many cases several meanings - which are conveyed by their appearance. Additionally, spoken Chinese has a tone grammar - the same characters have different meanings when spoken in different ways.

Learning even a little Chinese can be a daunting prospect. Yet in China, the Chinese language is not only regarded as a means of transmitting culture - up until the 19th century over half the world's entire output of books was published in Chinese - but a cultural asset in itself.

While negotiations and discussions will be conducted in both languages, through an interpreter, learning a little of the language and the principles that underlie it can work in favour of the foreigner on several levels. It helps break the ice, promotes respect and helps convince the Chinese side of the sincerity and seriousness of your mission.

Your name in Chinese?

Business cards themselves should always be presented on first meetings. They are considered a mark of respect and a token of seriousness of purpose. They also establish a person's position in his or her company, enabling the Chinese to identify their counterparts in your organisation.

Additionally, your business card should be translated into Chinese, along with your position in the company. Chinese names are traditionally formed from three characters. The first character comprises the surname and precedes the given name. Deng Xiaoping is Mr Deng. The given name follows and is usually made up of two characters, though some names have only one.

Chinese names are chosen after careful thought and are meant to express desirable concepts or qualities, which the parents hope the child will develop. Western names are usually translated by taking the first syllable of the surname (if it has more than one) and the first two of the given name and transliterating these into characters that sound similar in Chinese. As well as sounding alike, these should also reflect some aspect of personality.

Foreign words are generally translated into Chinese along these lines. Names of foreign countries often sound like the originals, with the character for country following some moral quality which the natives of that country are thought to possess. England, for instance, becomes *Yingguo*, or "hero country". For other words, China imports the concept alone and gives it characters to fit. So the word telephone is translated into characters meaning "electric speech".

Should the brand name of your product be translated into Chinese, the process will work in exactly the same way.

Many mainland Chinese students in the UK offer informal tuition in basic mandarin along with some instruction of how Chinese works as a language and its origin and history. In the context of building business relationships in China a few words of Chinese can go quite a long way.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication plays an important part in Chinese daily life. For example, when you are greeting someone senior, it is expected to lower your head and bend slightly to show respect. Shaking hands is not commonly practised between people of very different social status, but between equals.

In the West, silence is considered as an awkward moment during conversations. In China silence can be interpreted as a sign of politeness and of thought, there is no rush to fill the silence with words.

The Chinese do not normally show signs of affection in public and in many instances the Chinese may avoid direct eye contact to show respect to another. In the West straightforward gestures may be regarded as signs of sincerity and confidence.

(To find out more, see <http://www.zhongwen.com>)

9.2 Useful Phrases

This section of the course provides translations of phrases that may be of use to you if you are traveling within China.

The table below consists of 4 columns of information. The first column is obviously the English phrase, the second is this phrase written in Chinese. Column 3 is a pronunciation of the Chinese text that you may find useful and hopefully (with a little practice), quite easy to use.

The last column is the Pinyin version of the phrase. Pinyin is a scheme of Latinised spelling, derived from the phonetic transcription of Chinese characters - the true version of this should have various accents over a number of the characters and this can be downloaded as a PDF file if you click here.

English	Chinese	Pronunciation for English visitors	Hanyu Pinyin
Hello	你好	Knee How	Ni Hao
Hello (on the phone)	喂	Way	Wei
I am...	我是...	War-Sh	Wo Shi
Please take me to ... (show the address)	请带我到...	Ching Di War Do	Qing Dai Wo Dao
How do I get there?	怎么去	Ger Mer Chu-E	Zen Me Qu

9.3 Aesthetics and culture

Aesthetics and culture are not normally the main focus of business. However, China has an intricate body of what sociologists call "cultural signifiers." Colours, numbers and animals, for instance, each have a specific meaning or significance in Chinese culture. This in turn can impact on the foreigner's relations with Chinese partners in various minor but significant ways.

Business apparel is a good example. White is the colour of death in China, and while a white shirt is acceptable the colour should not be predominant in clothing. A combination of blue and yellow can also mean death. Red is considered to be a lucky colour, suggestive of wealth and good fortune. Yellow, in different shades, has been traditionally reserved for emperors or monks.

Numbers between one and ten also have significance. Even numbers are considered feminine, and odd numbers masculine. Eight represents prosperity, while four is associated with death (of a person or project) and considered to be extremely unlucky. Three represents vigour or capability and nine stands for longevity.

Animal symbols include the tortoise for longevity, the horse for strength and speed, and the tiger for leadership and domination. The fox is considered a smart animal. It can even help you find lost documents!

Foreigners will not be expected to believe in these things, any more than their Chinese counterparts. Knowledge of cultural and aesthetic signifiers, however, is considered respectful and in practical terms they make a good icebreaker and topic for small talk. It is important not to be overbearing in

displaying this knowledge. Knowing about it is fine, knowing more about it than a Chinese person can be considered rude or disrespectful.

9.4 Holidays

The Chinese special holidays are based on the Chinese Lunar Calendar and they vary each year within the Western calendar.

- **Chinese New Year (29th of January, 2006 for Year of the Dog)**
This is one of the most important holidays celebrated in China. It falls in the weeks of late January and early February. It is important to check in advance, to avoid arranging a trip during this period, as comparatively little business activity takes place. Whilst you would undoubtedly enjoy yourself, from the point of view of doing business, it would result in a largely wasted trip.
- **The Lantern Festival (12th of February, 2006)**
This is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first month of the Lunar Calendar and closes the New Year festivities.
- **Ching Ming Festival (also called Pure Brightness Day, 5th of April, 2006)**
This is celebrated in April and is a Chinese Memorial Day to honour those who have passed away.
- **The Dragon Boat Festival (31st of May, 2006)**
This is celebrated on the fifth day of the lunar fifth moon of the Lunar Calendar.
- **Mid-Autumn Festival (6th of October, 2006)**
This is celebrated during mid autumn, which is the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Lunar Calendar.
- **Chongyang Festival (also called Double Ninth Day, 30th of October, 2006)**
It is celebrated on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, so it is also known as the Double Ninth Festival.
- **October 1st**
This is the Chinese National day.