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Beginners' Chinese: a taster course

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About this free course

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of studying at beginner's level for non-accredited language learning.

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https://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/beginners-chinese-taster-course/content-section-0

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

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Contents

Introduction

This free course, *Beginners' Chinese: a taster course*, is introductory material for absolute beginners in Chinese based on The Open University's 30-credit module Beginners' Chinese (L108). This course concentrates on Mandarin Chinese as a tool for communication, but also provides some insights into Chinese society and culture. It contains a brief introduction to the Chinese language, its scripts and sounds, and how words are formed. The language activities and audio extracts presented here are not meant for a complete course, but are samples to give you a taste of what it is like to learn Chinese online with The Open University. You will hear short conversations where people greet each other and introduce themselves, and learn how to count from one to ten. You'll learn different ways of saying your name and greeting people, as well as give your telephone number.

Before you continue with this course, make sure you have enabled the Chinese font on your computer. Video 1 gives step-by-step instructions on how to do this for both PC and Mac users.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1
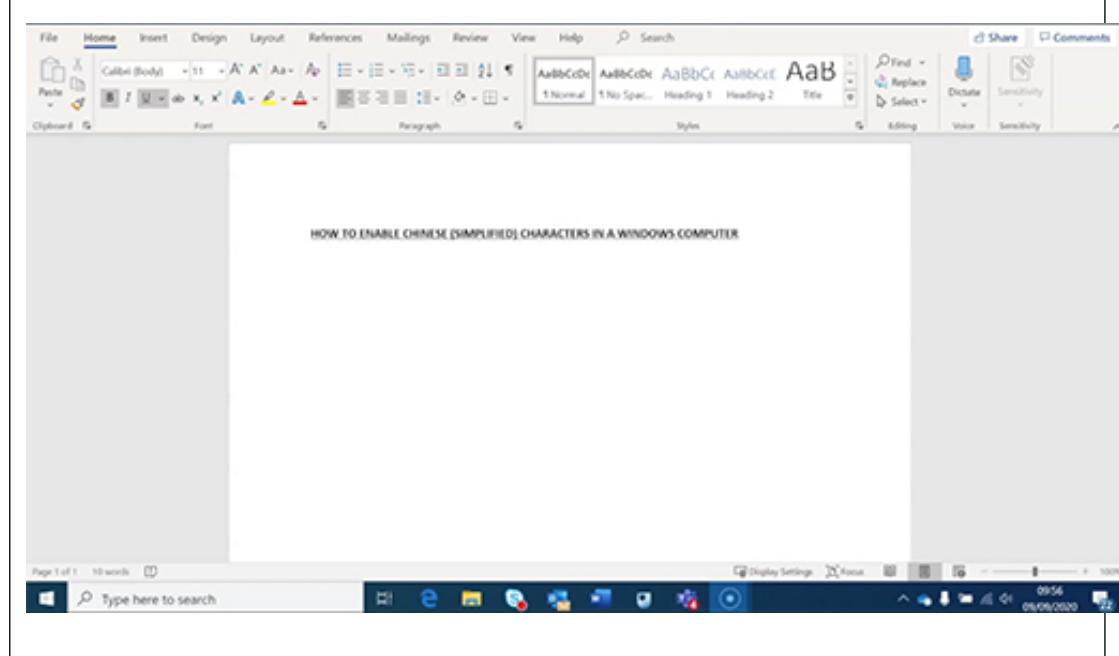
Now watch Video 2 which explains how to type words in Chinese on a computer.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2
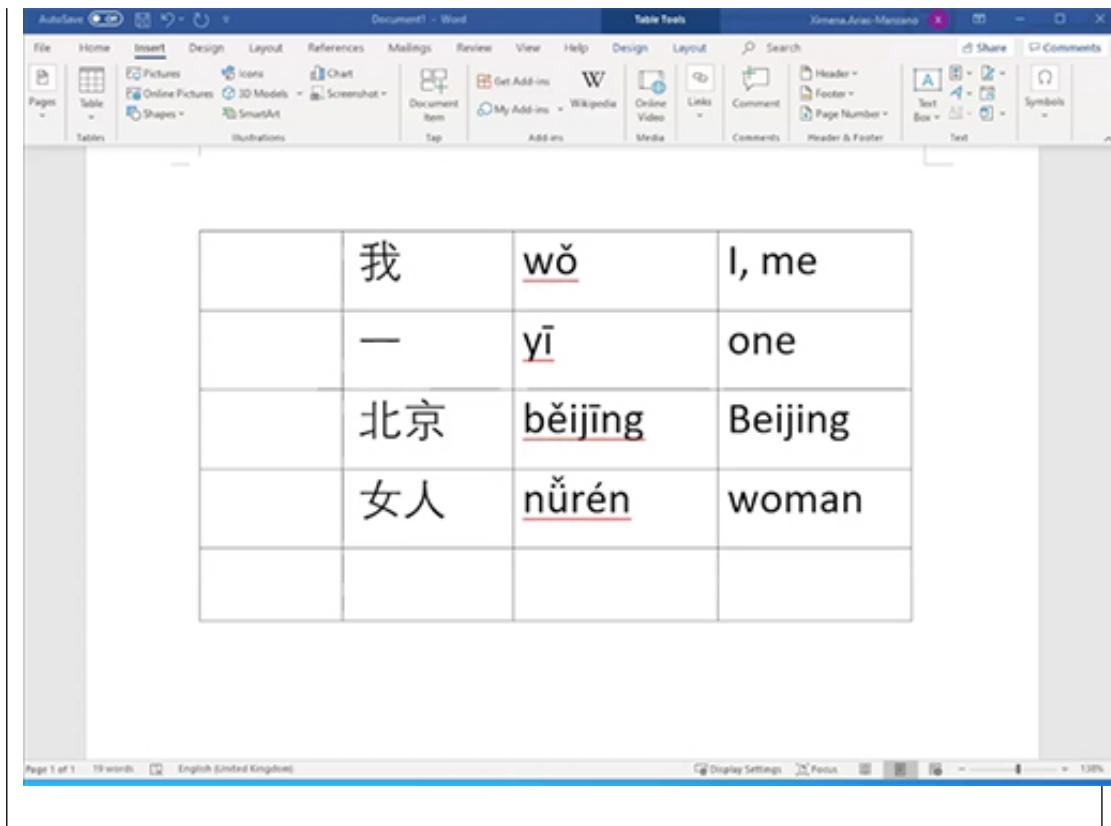
You may wish to print out the Instructions on how to enable Chinese font and type characters for your own reference. Note that Video 1 and the instructions about enabling Chinese fonts for PC were based on Windows 10. For Windows 11, see Video 3 below.

Please note, to revert back to an English (or your primary language) keyboard on a

Windows PC you will need to click on the Chinese character , which appears in the bottom right hand corner of your computer screen next to the date and time and where you will have originally switched from an English to Chinese keyboard. Once you have clicked on this character you will then be given the option to select the English keyboard.

The same rules apply for reverting back to English on a Mac, however the character will be found in the top right hand corner or your computer screen, again in the position where you originally switched your keyboard to Chinese.

Watch the video below for adding Chinese keyboard and typing on Windows 11, MacOS, Android and iOS.

View at: youtube:iELOd_sGans

Video 3

You can also consult Windows Support page for adding the Chinese keyboard for both Windows 10 and Windows 11.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand how to enable the Chinese keyboard and type characters on a western keyboard
- demonstrate an awareness of the varieties of the Chinese language
- understand how the sound system of Mandarin Chinese (pinyin and tones) works
- understand that there are simplified and traditional forms of Chinese characters and have an awareness of how they are combined together to form new meanings
- demonstrate basic vocabulary and pronunciation related to greetings, numbers, names and nationalities
- demonstrate a cultural understanding of how professional titles are used to address people.

1 The Chinese language

The Chinese language, in its various forms, is spoken by the Han Chinese and is known in China as 汉语 *hàn yǔ* (literally, Han language). The Han Chinese constitutes about 94 percent of China's population. About 70 percent of the Han people speak Mandarin Chinese; the remaining 30 percent speak other related Chinese languages or dialects. Speakers of non-Chinese languages (e.g. Mongolian, Tibetan) make up about 6 percent of China's population.

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, and one of the official languages of Singapore. It is also one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Mandarin and other forms of Chinese are spoken by many expatriate Chinese communities, both in Southeast Asia and overseas. The map below shows how the Chinese language has spread around the world.
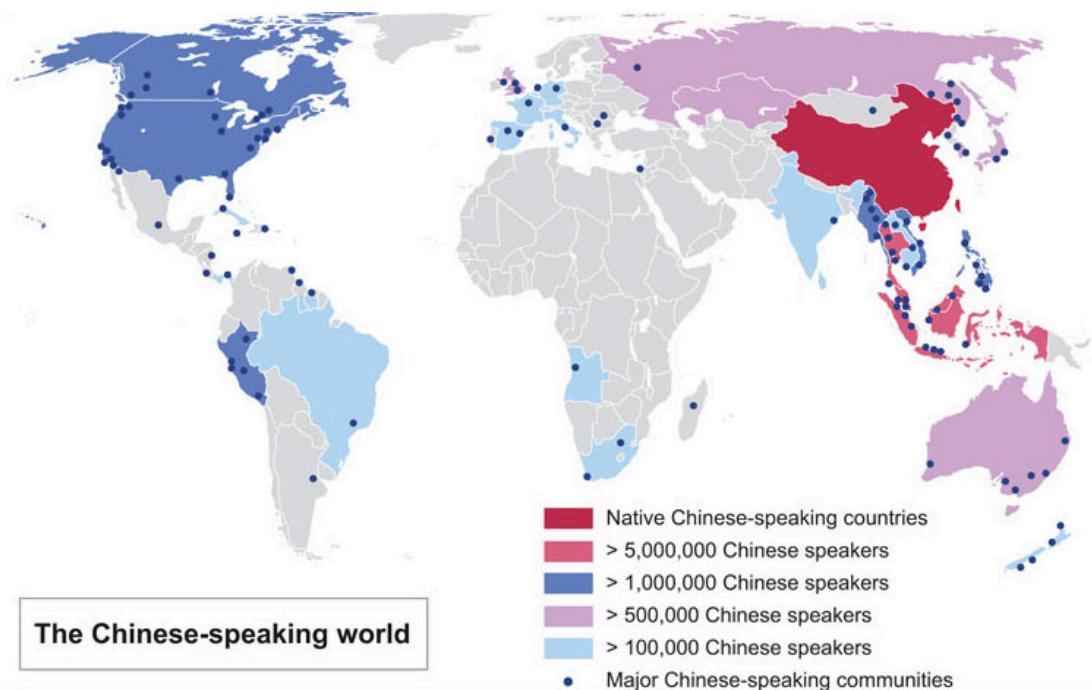
Figure 1 The Chinese-speaking world

(Adapted from ASDFGHJ, 'A map of the Sinophone world', 24 January 2009, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ File:New-Map-Sinophone_World.PNG, last accessed 29 May 2009)

1.1 Varieties of Chinese

Apart from Mandarin, the other six major varieties of spoken Chinese are Cantonese, Gan, Hakka, Min, Wu and Xiang. The map below shows the areas of China in which they are spoken and by approximately how many people, as well as the parts of China where non-Chinese languages are predominantly spoken.
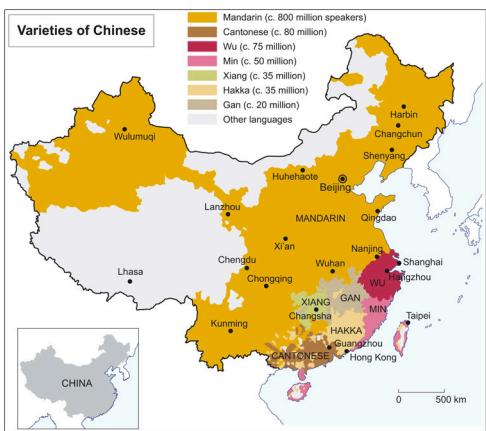
Figure 2 Varieties of Chinese

(Adapted from 'Chinese dialects in China', 1987, www.rcl.cityu.edu.hk/atlas/20/A2_20.jpg, last accessed 29 May 2009, and Wu Yue, 'Map of the Sinitic languages', 2004, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_si-nitic_languages-en.svg, last accessed 29 May 2009)

There is some debate among linguists about whether the different varieties of Chinese should be regarded as dialects or as languages in their own right. Interpretations depend on how 'language' and 'dialect' are defined. Furthermore, each dialect group consists of many sub-dialects, several of which are spoken widely enough to be categorised by some linguists as major dialects (or languages) that could justifiably be added to the list above.

The samples presented here teach Mandarin Chinese in its standardised modern form. Standard Mandarin Chinese is commonly referred to as 普通话 *pǔ tōng huà* (common speech) in the People's Republic of China, 国语 *guó yǔ* (national language) in Taiwan and 华语 *huá yǔ* (Chinese language) in Singapore. In this course, Mandarin Chinese will simply be referred to as 'Chinese'.

Chinese is often perceived in the West as a difficult language, mainly because of its different character script and the fact that it is a tonal language – i.e. it uses tones to distinguish meanings. Chinese grammar, on the other hand, is quite simple compared to that of many European languages. There is no conjugation, number agreement or case change, so you only ever have to learn a word in one form.

To start, test your knowledge of the Chinese language with a quiz in Activity 1. You will then move on to learn about it in more depth by exploring pinyin, tones and word formation.

Activity 1 Chinese language general knowledge quiz

Answer true or false.

1. Mandarin Chinese is the official language of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, and one of the official languages of Singapore and the United Nations.

○ True

○ False

. . . .

Discussion

True. Mandarin Chinese is the official language of China, Taiwan, one of the official languages in Singapore and one of the six official languages in the United Nations.

2. The Han Chinese (who speak !Warning! SimSun not supported汉语 *hàn yǔ*) constitute about 70 percent of China's population.

○ True

○ False

....

Discussion

False. The Han Chinese constitute about 94 percent of China's population. About 70 percent of the Han people speak Mandarin Chinese; the remaining 30 percent speak other related Chinese languages or dialects.

3. Apart from Mandarin, there is only one more variety of spoken Chinese called Cantonese.

○ True

○ False

....

Discussion

False. Apart from Mandarin, the other six major varieties of spoken Chinese are Cantonese, Gan, Hakka, Min, Wu and Xiang.

4. Chinese is a non-alphabetic script and is a tonal language.

○ True

○ False

....

Discussion

True. Chinese is often perceived in the West as a difficult language, mainly because of its different character script and the fact that it is a tonal language.

5. The word for 'China' in Mandarin Chinese is !Warning! not supported中国 *zhōng guó*, which means 'middle kingdom'.

○ True

○ False

1.2 Pinyin

There are various systems for transcribing Chinese sounds into the Roman alphabet. Pinyin was adopted as the official system in the People's Republic of China in 1958, and has since become the standard and most-used form of transcription in schools, the media and elsewhere. This course uses pinyin in the teaching of pronunciation.

Watch the video below to learn more about how pinyin was created.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 4

Read the language note below about pinyin sounds and then, in the activity that follows, listen to how each one is pronounced.

Language note: single finals and initials

Chinese is a vowel-dominated language. In total, there are 35 vowel sounds, known as 'finals' because they occur at the end of syllables. The six vowel sounds you will hear in Activity 2 are called 'single finals' and are written in pinyin as *a* , *e* , *i* , *o* , *u* and *ü* . These simple vowel sounds are put together in various combinations to form 29 'compound finals', which are beyond the scope of this course.

There are 23 consonant sounds in Chinese, called 'initials' because they appear at the start of syllables. Here are the 23 initials:

Table 1 Initials

b	p	m	f	d	t	n	l
g	k	h	w	y	j	q	x
z	c	s	zh	ch	sh	r	

Activity 2 Finals and initials

When you listen to the audio track below you will hear six single vowels, known as **finals** in Chinese. Repeat after each sound.

a e i o u ü

You will then combine these vowels with some consonants, known as **initials** in Chinese. Note how similar they sound to some English consonants. Repeat after each sound.

ba pa ma fa de te ne le gu ku hu wo yi

You will then hear some consonants, or **initials**, combined with the final i. Listen and repeat.

ji qi xi zi ci si zhi chi shi ri

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 1

1.3 Tones

Chinese is a tonal language. In Mandarin Chinese, there are four tones (five if you include the neutral tone). Tones are marked in pinyin as follows:

1st tone: ¯
2nd tone: ′
3rd tone: ˇ
4th tone: `

The 1st tone is a high level tone, the 2nd rises from medium to high, the 3rd falls from low medium to low and then rises to high, and the 4th falls from high to low (see Figure 3). The tone marks are put over the single finals a, e, i, o, u and ü. There are some syllables that do not have a tone mark (e.g. some particle words or last syllable in a word), and they are called 'neutral tone'. The neutral tone is low and flat with no stress.
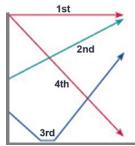
Figure 3 The tones used in Mandarin Chinese

Each syllable has a definite tone. So syllables with different tones mean different things. For example, 王 *wáng* with the 2nd tone means 'king' and is also a common family name, whereas 忘 *wàng* with the 4th tone means 'to forget'.

Activity 3 Tones

Listen to the examples of the four tones on the audio track below, and repeat. You can follow the pinyin in Table 2 as you go. Don't worry about the meaning of the words at this stage.

> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
>
>
> **Audio 2**

Table 2 Examples of the four tones in Mandarin Chinese

1	mā	má	mǎ	mà
2	tā	tá	tǎ	tà
3	zhī	zhí	zhǐ	zhì
4	jī	jí	jǐ	jì

1.4 Chinese characters

Speakers of different dialects, especially the southern dialects, often cannot understand each other when they speak. However, literate Chinese people can communicate with each other in writing, as they share a common script: 汉字 *hàn zì* (lit. Han characters).

The Chinese character script is believed to have originated from stylised pictures of physical objects, which evolved over the centuries into characters formed from strokes. The total number of Chinese characters is estimated at about 50,000, of which roughly 3000 are used for everyday purposes. This course teaches simplified characters, which were introduced by the Chinese government in the 1950s in an attempt to increase literacy.

Each character in written Chinese represents a syllable. A word in Chinese can consist of one character (e.g. 中 *zhōng* , central), two characters (中国 *zhōng guó* , China) or three characters (中国人 *zhōng guó rén* , Chinese person/people). In Chinese texts, there is no

spacing between characters. Traditionally there was no punctuation either, but this has since been adopted.

There is no obvious correlation between how characters are written and how they are pronounced. For example, the following three characters, made up of very different strokes, are all pronounced *jing*, albeit with different tones: 京 (1st tone) means 'capital'; 井 (3rd tone) means 'well' (as in a water well); and 净 (4th tone) means 'clean'.

1.5 Simplified and traditional forms of Chinese characters

In this section you will learn about traditional and simplified characters and work on some activities.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government introduced a range of 'simplified characters' (简体字 *jiǎn tǐ zi*) in an effort to improve the literacy level in the population. About 2,000 characters have been simplified and the rest of the characters remain the same. It is useful to be aware of traditional forms (sometimes referred to as 'complex characters') (繁体字 !Warning! Palatino Linotype not supported*fǎn tǐ zì*), as they are still used in Hong Kong, Taiwan and other overseas Chinese communities.

In most cases, the simplification of the 2000 characters involved reducing the number of strokes, while also preserving either the overall shape of the character or of one part of the character. Table 3shows some examples of characters in both simplified and traditional form, and the number of strokes that these forms comprise.

Table 3 Examples of traditional characters

		简体字 *jiǎn tǐ zi*	Strokes	繁体字 *fǎn tǐ zì*	Strokes
xué	to learn	学	8	學	16
yī	medical	医	7	醫	18
mén	[plural suffix to make pronouns such as 'we']	们	5	們	9
guó	country	国	8	國	11

Now have a go at identifying simplified and traditional characters in Activity 4.

Activity 4 Identifying simplified and traditional characters

Open Google Translate in a separate browser and select Chinese (Simplified) on the left side and Chinese (Traditional) on the right side. Then copy and paste the characters from the Simplified column in Table 4 into Google Translate to see how the same word looks in traditional Chinese.

Table 4 Simplified and traditional characters

English	Pinyin	Simplified	Traditional
to love; love	ài	!Warning! not supported爱	*Provide your answer...*
book	shū	!Warning! not supported书	*Provide your answer...*
to meet	jiàn	!Warning! not supported见	*Provide your answer...*

Answer

Table 4 Simplified and traditional characters (completed)

English	Pinyin	Simplified	Traditional
to love; love	ài	!Warning! not supported爱	!Warning! not supported爱
book	shū	!Warning! not supported书	!Warning! not supported書
to meet	jiàn	!Warning! not supported见	!Warning! not supported見

1.6 Word formation

In this section and Section 1.7 you will look at combining characters to form new words. Begin by reading the language note below.

Language note: word formation

Words in Chinese are formed by one or more characters. For example, when you say 'hello' you use two characters '!Warning! not supported*nǐ hǎo*' !Warning! not supported你好 (simplified Chinese). This literally translates as 'you good' and means 'hello' when greeting one person (i.e. not a group). To greet a group of people you use a combination of three characters !Warning! not supported*nǐ men hǎo* !Warning! not supported你们好 (simplified Chinese), which literally translates to 'you all good' and means 'hello all'.

Another example is the word 'China', which is formed by combining two characters !Warning! not supported*zhōng*!Warning! not supported中 and !Warning! not supported*guó*!Warning! not supported国. !Warning! not supported中 !Warning! not supported*zhōng* has multiple meanings such as middle, centre, inside. Similarly !Warning! not supported国 !Warning! not supported*guó* can mean state, country,

nation. Combined, '!Warning! not supported*zhōng guó* !Warning! not supported中国' literally translates to 'central kingdom'.

The free Chinese character learning app, Chinese@OU, is a useful resource to help you write, recognise visually and aurally, and memorise the most frequently-used characters, as well as form phrases and sentences in Chinese. Download the app from Apple Store or Google Play to your mobile device following these instructions and then explore the word searches in the even-numbered lessons to see how characters form words and expressions.

There are several other applications and online tools which you can use to explore the meanings of characters on their own or combined with others and which can help you improve your Chinese vocabulary. The Further reading section at the end of this course includes links to resources which you may find helpful.

1.7 How to memorise and combine characters

In Chinese, some characters can look a bit like the objects they represent and so often a good way to memorise the characters is to imagine them pictorially.

For example, the character for a person '!Warning! not supported*rén*' is !Warning! not supported人, which looks like a person walking:

Figure 4 The character '!Warning! not supported*rén* 人', meaning person, looks like a person walking.

To learn how to write this character, download the Chinese@OU app to your mobile device and go to Lesson 3, writing section.

A second example of how Chinese characters can be turned into an image that relates to its meaning is the word for 'big'. Imagine a person with their arms wide open to signal something is big; the character for big, '!Warning! not supported*dà* !Warning! not supported大, looks just like that.

Figure 5 The character '!Warning! not supported*dà* 大' , meaning big, looks like a person standing with their arms wide open.

To learn how to write this character, download the Chinese@OU app to your mobile device and go to Lesson 6, writing section.

Activity 5 Word combinations

Based on what you have learned so far in this course, select the correct word combination for the definitions given.

Adult/Big person (*dà rén*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文
○ 我 + 们

We (*wǒ mén*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文

○ 我 + 们

China (*zhōng guó*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文
○ 我 + 们

A power (a dominant country) (*dà guó*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文
○ 我 + 们

Doctor (*yī shēng*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文
○ 我 + 们

Study Chinese (*xué zhōng wén*)
○ 大 + 人
○ 大 + 国
○ 中 + 国
○ 医 + 生
○ 学 + 中 + 文
○ 我 + 们

2 Greetings

In this section you will learn how to say some basic greetings in Chinese.

Expressions used for greetings

- !Warning! not supported*nǐ hǎo* !Warning! not supported你好 (lit. 'you good/
  well') is the most commonly used greeting in Mandarin Chinese which can be
  used throughout the day. It is equivalent to 'hello' in English.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 3

- !Warning! not supported*nín hǎo* !Warning! not supported您好 (lit. 'you good/
  well') is a polite greeting because 'nín' is the polite form for 'you' (singular),
  similar to the French pronoun 'vous'. It is used to greet someone you meet for
  the first time, or who is senior either in terms of age or status. It can be loosely
  translated as 'How do you do?'

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 4

- Not too long ago when food was in short supply, the phrase 'Have you eaten?'
  (!Warning! not supported*nǐ chī le ma?* !Warning! not supported你吃了吗？)
  was a common greeting amongst neighbours. An appropriate response is to
  say '!Warning! not supported*chī le*' !Warning! not supported吃了 for 'Yes' or
  '!Warning! not supported*méi chī*'!Warning! not supported 没吃 for 'No'.
- !Warning! not supported*zǎo ān* !Warning! not supported早安 (lit. morning
  peace) is a common greeting in the morning in Taiwan.

When parting from people, you say:

- !Warning! not supported*zài jiàn* !Warning! not supported再见 (lit. again see)
  meaning goodbye.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 5

Note that although there are expressions in Chinese for 'good morning', 'good
afternoon', 'good evening' and 'good night', they are not often used. Also,

handshaking is seen as appropriate when greeting someone, however Chinese people do not feel comfortable being hugged or kissed in public.

Activity 6 Greetings

Listen to these different short expressions and select their English equivalents. You can listen to them as many times as you need to: just click on each one again to repeat it. If it is helpful, you can also look at the pinyin at the same time by clicking on 'Transcript'.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 6

○ Hello (informal)
○ How do you do? (formal)
○ Goodbye
○ None of the above

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 7

○ Goodbye
○ Thank you/Thanks
○ Not at all
○ None of the above

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 8

○ Hello (informal)
○ How do you do? (formal)
○ Goodbye
○ None of the above

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 9

- ○ Hello (informal)
- ○ How do you do? (formal)
- ○ Goodbye
- ○ None of the above

3 Introducing oneself

In this section, you will learn about Chinese names, how Chinese people address each other and how profession titles are used.

When a Chinese name is given in full, the family name always precedes the given name. To take the former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping as an example, the family name 邓 *dèng* goes before the given name 小平 *xiǎo píng*.

It is very common for Chinese people to address each other by their full names, even amongst friends or family. The most common Chinese family names have only one character. Chinese given names typically consist of two characters.

The titles 先生 *xiān sheng* (Mr), 小姐 *xiǎo jie* (Miss) and 女士 *nǚ shì* (Madam) are popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and since the 1980s have been catching on in mainland China, too, especially in the business sector. They tend to be used on formal occasions when you are unsure of another person's position or profession. The term 太太 *tài tai* (Mrs) is also used to address a married foreign woman but is not an appropriate way to address a married Chinese woman because Chinese women do not change their family names after marriage.

To say 'My name is' you say: !Warning! not supported*wǒ jiào*… !Warning! SimSun not supported我叫...

Audio content is not available in this format.
Audio 10

To ask a person's name you can say:

- *nǐ jiào shén me?* !Warning! SimSun not supported你叫什么?

Audio content is not available in this format.
Audio 11

or:

- *nǐ jiào shén me míng zi?* !Warning! SimSun not supported你叫什么名字?

Audio content is not available in this format.
Audio 12

Practice these expressions a few times to consolidate it and then move on to Activity 7.

Activity 7 Names

Part A

Listen to the audio track below to hear how these two people say their names, and how they address each other, then answer the following questions.

> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
> **Audio 13**

What is the woman's full name?
- ○ a) Wang Xiaoying
- ○ b) Wang Jing
- ○ c) Li Xiaoying

Part B

What is the man's full name?
- ○ a) Wang Xiaoying
- ○ b) Wang Jing
- ○ c) Li Xiaoying

Part C

Read the transcript of a different short exchange. Can you guess which words are the equivalent of the English 'be called'?

Female speaker: !Warning! not supported你 好 *nǐ hǎo!* ！

Male speaker: !Warning! not supported你 好！ *nǐ hǎo!*

Female speaker: !Warning! not supported你 叫 什 么？ *nǐ jiào shén me?*

Male speaker: !Warning! not supported 我叫李京。 *wǒ jiào lǐ jīng.*

- ○ 1. !Warning! not supported李京 *lǐ jīng*
- ○ 2. !Warning! not supported你好! *nǐ hǎo* ！
- ○ 3. !Warning! not supported叫 *jiào*
- ○ 4. !Warning! not supported什么? *shén me?*

Activity 8 Translating foreign names

Language note: translating foreign names into Chinese

Foreign names are translated into Chinese for two main reasons: so that they can be written in Chinese characters and because their original sounds can be difficult to pronounce for Chinese speakers. When translating a foreign name, there are a few common practices to follow. In no particular order:

- use characters that match the original meanings (rather than their sound)

  Jasmine → 茉莉 *mò lì* (which means 'jasmine')

- use characters that sound like the name when pronounced in its original language

  玛丽 居里 *mǎ lì·jū lǐ*, which sounds similar to 'Mary Curie'

- use characters that have nice meanings, even though they don't sound very much (or at all) like the original name.

  The first name of Chris Patten (the last British governor of Hong Kong) is 定康 *ding kāng*: 定 *ding* ('stability') and 康 *kāng* ('prosperity'; 'healthy').

- use characters that partially translate the meaning (and/or have nice meanings) and partially keep the original sound.

  Jim King → 王京 *wáng jīng*: 京 *jīng* sounds like 'Jim' and 王 *wáng* is a common Chinese surname that also means 'king'.

- Note that when Western family names are matched with common Chinese family names, they are used in the Chinese order; that is, the family name comes before the given name. If a match is not found, the normal practice is to keep the Western order. For example, David Brown is 大卫•布朗 *dà wèi bù lǎng*, with a dot inserted between the given name and surname.

The same translation strategies for personal names are also used for other types of names – for example, the names of foreign companies. Look at the following Chinese names for international companies and decide which principle lies behind its Chinese name: literal translation or sound similarity. You don't need to learn these characters, but it might be useful for you to recognise these names and to know how names of international companies are translated into Chinese. Focus on the Pinyin.

1. Amazon 亚马逊 *yà mǎ xùn*

○ a. literal or partial translation

○ b. sound similarity

2. Apple 苹果 *píng guǒ*

○ a. literal or partial translation

○ b. sound similarity

3. Coca-Cola 可口可乐 *kě kǒu kě lè*

○ a. literal or partial translation

○ b. sound similarity

4. Ikea 宜家 *yí jiā*

○ a. literal or partial translation

- o   b. sound similarity

5. McDonalds !Warning! Microsoft YaHei not supported麦当劳 *mài dāng láo*
   - o   a. literal or partial translation
   - o   b. sound similarity

6. Microsoft !Warning! Microsoft YaHei not supported微软 *wēi ruǎn*
   - o   a. literal or partial translation
   - o   b. sound similarity

7. Volkswagen !Warning! Microsoft YaHei not supported大众 *dà zhòng*
   - o   a. literal or partial translation
   - o   b. sound similarity

3.1 Nationalities

In Chinese, many countries can be identified as they have '*guó* !Warning! not supported国' at the end. For example:

- *zhōng guó* !Warning! not supported中国 = China
- *yīng guó* 英国 = Britain
- *fā guó* 法国 = France
- *dé guó* 德国 = Germany

There are, however, other countries and cities that do not have 'guó !Warning! SimSun not supported国' at the end, such as:

- *xī bān yá* !Warning! SimSun not supported西班牙 = Spain
- *yì dà lì* !Warning! SimSun not supported意大利 = Italy
- *lúnd ūn* !Warning! SimSun not supported伦敦 = London
- *běi jīng* !Warning! MS Gothic not supported北京 = Beijing

Once you know the name of the country, nationalities in Mandarin Chinese are quite easy to learn. To say the nationality you only need to add the word 'rén' – which, as you've already learned, means 'person' – to the country name.

To find out someone's nationality you would ask:

- !Warning! MS Gothic not supported你是哪国人? *nǐ shì nǎ guó rén?* = Where are you from?

Audio content is not available in this format.
🎧
Audio 14

The reply to this question would then be:

- !Warning! MS Gothic not supported我是中国人 *wǒ shì zhōng guó rén* = I'm Chinese.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 15

- !Warning! MS Gothic not supported我是英国人 *wǒ shì yīng guó rén* = I am British.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 16

- !Warning! SimSun not supported我是西班牙人 *wǒ shì xī bān yá rén* = I'm Spanish.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 17

Then, if you want to know the specific area in the country someone is from you would ask:

- !Warning! MS Gothic not supported你是中国什么地方人？ *nǐ shì zhōng guó shén me dì fang rén?* = What place in China are you from? (lit. you are China what place person?)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 18

- !Warning! not supported您是英国什么地方人？ *nín shì yīng guó shén me dì fang rén?* = Whereabouts in the UK are you from? (lit. You are UK what place person?)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 19

In response to this, you may hear Chinese people say:

- !Warning! MS Gothic not supported我是北京人 *wǒ shì běi jīng rén* = I'm from Beijing (lit. I'm Beijing person).

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 20

The question !Warning! MS Gothic not supported什么地方... *shén me dì fang* means 'What part of'. As you can see, the word order in Chinese differs to that of English, but you will learn more of that as you develop further learning of the language.

> Learn more countries and nationalities in Lesson 3 of the [Chinese@OU app](#).

Activity 9 Names and nationalities

Listen to the audio extract below in which Mr Wang (王先生 *wáng xiān sheng*) and Miss Li (李小姐 *lǐ xiǎo jie*) talk about their places of origin. Identify their nationalities and the name of the city you hear, in the order you hear them. Do not worry if you do not understand the whole conversation

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Interactive content is not available in this format.

You can find the full transcript by clicking on 'Reveal answer'.

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Answer

Well done!

> 中国 zhōng guó (China) - is first
> 北京 běi jīng (Beijing) - is second
> 英国 yīng guó (UK/Britain) - is third
> 伦敦 lún dūn (London) – is fourth

The transcript is available below:

wang jing:	您好，我叫王京。 *nín hǎo, wǒ jiào wáng jīng. (*Hello, my name is wáng jīng)
li xiao ying:	您好，我叫李小英。 *nín hǎo, wǒ jiào lǐ xiǎo yīng.* (Hello, my name is lǐ xiǎo yīng)
wang jing:	李小姐, 您是哪国人？ *lǐ xiǎo jie, nín shì nǎ guó rén?* (lǐ xiǎo jie, where are you from?)

li xiao jing:	我是中国人。
	*wǒ shì **zhōng guó rén**.* (I am **Chinese**)

wang jing:	您是中国什么地方人？
	nín shì zhōng guó shén me dì fang rén? (What part of China are you from?)

li xiao jing:	我是北京人。王先生 ， 您是不是英国人？
	*wǒ shì **běi jīng rén**. wáng xiān sheng, nín shì bu shì **yīng guó rén**?* (I am from **Beijing**. Mr Wáng, are you **English**?)

wang jing:	是，我住在伦敦。
	shì, wǒ zhù zài lún dūn. (Yes, I live in London)

3.2 Professional titles and basic professions

Read the culture note and the reflection note that follows. Then reflect on your own culture.

Culture note: professional titles

China is very much a hierarchical society, where titles are important. Chinese people like to address each other by attaching professional titles or official positions, such as 老师 *lǎo shī* (teacher) or 医生 *yī shēng* (doctor), to a family name. So you might hear someone being addressed as 李老师 *lǐ lǎo shī* (Teacher Li) or 王医生 *wáng yī shēng* (Doctor Wang), for example.

Reflection point (想一想 xiǎng yi xiǎng)

In what contexts would you address people by their professional titles in your own culture? 'Minister, could you clarify…'; 'Madam Chairman, it is clear that…'; 'Doctor, could you tell me…' Can you think of any other titles that you would use in everyday life? Does the use of professional titles indicate respect for some professions above others, or is it just a matter of convention? Do you think that forms of address are becoming less formal?

4 Basic numbers

In this section you will learn the basic numbers from 1–10 and how to form more complex numbers from these. You will also learn the hand gestures for these basic numbers.

The numbers 0–99

!Warning! SimSun not supported零 *líng* 0
!Warning! SimSun not supported一 *yī* 1
!Warning! SimSun not supported二 *èr* 2
!Warning! SimSun not supported三 *sān* 3
!Warning! SimSun not supported四 *sì* 4
!Warning! SimSun not supported五 *wǔ* 5
!Warning! SimSun not supported六 *liù* 6
!Warning! SimSun not supported七 *qī* 7
!Warning! SimSun not supported八 *bā* 8
!Warning! SimSun not supported九 *jiǔ* 9
!Warning! SimSun not supported十 *shí* 10

Once you know the numbers 1–10 in Chinese, it is easy to form the rest of the numbers up to 99. For example:

!Warning! SimSun not supported十一 !Warning! not supported*shí yī* 11 (ten one)
!Warning! SimSun not supported十二 !Warning! not supported*shí'èr* 12 (ten two)
!Warning! SimSun not supported二十 !Warning! not supported*èr shí* 20 (two ten)
!Warning! SimSun not supported三十 !Warning! not supported*sān shí* 30 (three ten)
!Warning! SimSun not supported四十 !Warning! not supported*sì shí* 40 (four ten)
!Warning! SimSun not supported二十一 !Warning! not supported*èr shí yī* 21 (two ten one)
!Warning! SimSun not supported二十二 !Warning! not supported*èr shí'èr* 22 (two ten two)

When you come to read Chinese, you will notice that Chinese people frequently write down numbers in Arabic numerals (0, 1, 2, etc.) – a habit that has become increasingly widespread in recent years. The numeral '0' is used particularly often because the Chinese character for zero (!Warning! SimSun not supported零) is so complicated.

In the next activity you will practise saying the numbers from zero to ten.

Activity 10 Numbers

Listen to the numbers from 0 to 5 in Chinese. After each number, pause and repeat.

0   !Warning! SimSun not supported零 *líng*

1 一 *yī*
2 二 *èr*
3 三 *sān*
4 四 *sì*
5 五 *wǔ*

> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
> **Audio 21**

Now listen to numbers 6-10 in Chinese. After each number, pause and repeat.

6 六 *liù*
7 七 *qī*
8 八 *bā*
9 九 *jiǔ*
10 十 *shí*

> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
> **Audio 22**

Good and bad numbers

As in most cultures, numbers have specific connotations in Chinese. For instance, Chinese regard eight as a lucky number because it sounds very similar to the word for 'get rich' *(fā)* or 'good fortune' in Cantonese. More importantly, eight lies at the heart of an ancient Chinese belief system, built around an eight-sided diagram called 八卦 *bā guà*. It has often been seen as providing a guide to life and has been applied to contexts as diverse as urban planning and diagnosis in traditional Chinese medicine. Because eight is a lucky number, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games opened at 8 p.m. on the 8th day of the 8th month in 2008! Four, on the other hand, is not a good number in Chinese culture as 四 *sì* sounds similar to the word 死 *sǐ* meaning 'death' or 'to die'.

Activity 11 Phone numbers

Telephone numbers are read out digit by digit. Listen to this telephone number. Can you write down the number you hear? Listen as many times as you want.

Audio 23

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Answer

021 8549 3677

In some northern dialects, when saying telephone numbers, the number one is usually pronounced *yāo* to avoid confusion between the numbers one (*yī*) and seven (*qī*). Telephone numbers are always given digit by digit in Chinese: e.g. 77 would be 'seven seven', rather than 'double seven'.

Activity 12 Lottery numbers

Imagine you are taking part in a sports lottery while visiting China, and it's now time for the announcement of the winner. Listen to the audio clip to find out whether yours are the winning numbers. From the following ten numbers, select the six winning numbers that you hear in the announcement.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 24

What are the six numbers you hear?

☐   1

☐   7

☐   14

☐   19

☐   33

☐   40

☐   56

☐   64

☐   78

☐   99

Culture note: hand gestures

Until now, you have studied the writing of Chinese numerals. But there is a way to gesture them, too. It is extremely common in China to signal numbers one to ten with one hand. Watch the following video, and practise gesturing these numerals on your

own. You can pause the video and repeat after each number, saying aloud the Chinese word for each numeral.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 5
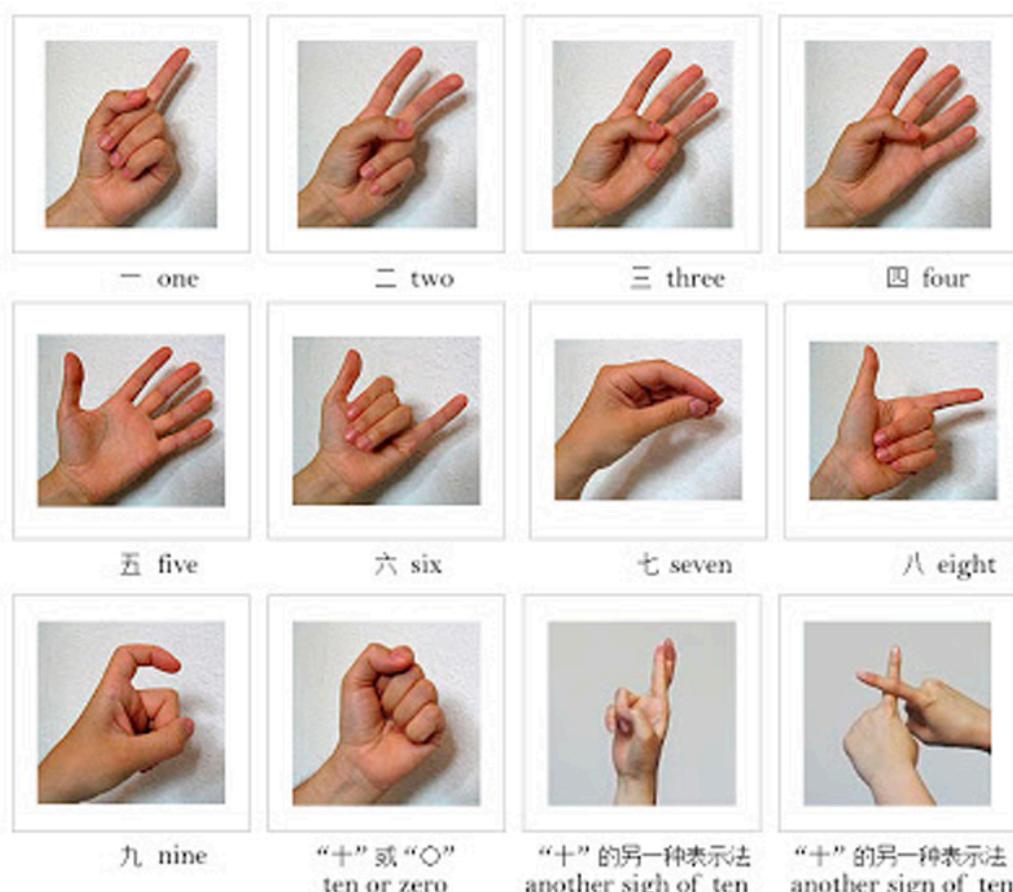
Figure 6 Hand gestures for numbers one to ten.

Conclusion

We hope you enjoyed this short taster course. You should now have some understanding about the structure of the Chinese language, the pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese, pinyin and characters and a few cultural practices of the use of professional titles and lucky numbers. Now that you have learned how to greet, say your name, nationality and numbers in Chinese, you may wish to progress your learning further by following The Open University's Beginners' Chinese module (L108, 30 credits) and/or the brand new Intermediate Chinese (L118, 30 credits). Registration for both modules starts in March for October start.

Further reading

Here you can find some additional resources on Chinese language.

- Chinese@OU app:
  - [Instructions for download](#)
  - [Why is an app an ideal way to learn a new language?](#)
- [Chinese Numbers: Learn How to Count 0–10 in Mandarin](#)
- [Chinese characters animation](#)
- [TedTalk: Learn to Chinese with ease](#)

Acknowledgements

Don't miss out

If reading this text has inspired you to learn more, you may be interested in joining the millions of people who discover our free learning resources and qualifications by visiting The Open University – www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses.