

Chinese for Principals

and Other Pedagogical Bigwigs

校长（与教育界的其他大腕儿）汉语

通

Aims

This text is premised on an axiom – the more spoken Chinese you learn, the more meaningful your experience in China. Mastering these five lessons will enable you to navigate common social situations and, combined with nonverbal communication, construct the contours of your personality. It will also delight your hosts.

Chinese Basics

A syllable in spoken Mandarin Chinese corresponds to a character in written Chinese. Each syllable is spoken in one of four tones. These tones give oral Chinese its sing-song quality. More than anything else, tones make Chinese hard: if you don't speak with tones you will be not be readily understood.

In this text, syllables will be rendered using Chinese pinyin, the phonetic system currently used in Mainland China. Though pinyin uses the Roman alphabet, it takes some getting used to. For example, *mi* is actually pronounced like the English “me.” *Li* is pronounced like the English “lee.” Pay attention to unintuitive pronunciations when listening to the CD.

The four tones are indicated using the following symbols:

- 1st tone – mā (a high, flat tone)
- 2nd tone – má (rising tone)
- 3rd tone – mǎ (dip, followed by a rise)
- 4th tone – mà (short, forceful)

Hear these pronounced on track 1 of the CD.

Pinyin Practice

Listen to track 2 and repeat each letter/tone combination.

1 st Tone	2 nd Tone	3 rd Tone	4 th Tone
qī	qí	qǐ	qì
gē	gé	gě	gè
xiān	xián	xiǎn	xiàn
wū	wú	wǔ	wù
dū	dú	dǔ	dù
zhōu	zhóu	zhǒu	zhòu

A “word” is a combination of one or more syllables. Again, tones are crucial: mǎ (马) means “horse,” while mà (骂) means the verb “to curse.” Syllables that together form a single word will generally be kept together. For example, bānmǎ means zebra (斑马, lit. horse with stripes). Other examples:

qìchē (car) xiàwǔ (afternoon) dúshū (study) zhōusì (Thursday)

Lesson 1 – Meetings New Friends

Vocabulary

nín hǎo	hello (lit. “you good”)
wǒ	I, me
jiào	vb. to be called ¹
shì	vb. to be
xiàozhǎng	principal
xuéxiào	school
de	possessive article (takes no tone)
hěn	very
gāoxìng	happy
rènshi	vb. to meet, to know (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
yě	also
zàijiàn	goodbye
shénme	what (2 nd syllable takes no tone)

Model Sentences

	Pinyin	English
1.	Nín hǎo, wǒ jiào Joel Stembridge.	Hello, my name is Joel Stembridge.
2.	Wǒ shì xiàozhǎng.	I am a principal.
3.	Wǒ de xuéxiào jiào Newton South High School.	The name of my school is Newton South High School.
4.	Stembridge xiàozhǎng, hěn gāoxìng rènshi nín.	Principal Stembridge, ² (I am) very happy to meet you.
5.	Wó ³ yě shì.	As am I (happy to meet you).
6.	Nín jiào shénme?	What’s your name?
7.	Zàijiàn, Li xiàozhǎng.	Goodbye, Principal Li.

Exercise

Say these sentences in Chinese.

1. My name is Mary Scott.
2. I am a principal.
3. Principal Ma, (I am) very pleased to meet you.
4. What’s the name of your school?
5. My school’s name is Milton High School.

¹ Verbs are not conjugated in Chinese. ☺

² In Chinese, bigwigs such as principals are identified by their surname followed by their title. If your name is Tom Jones, you would be addressed as “Jones xiàozhǎng.”

³ With two consecutive 3rd tones (e.g., wǒ and yě), the first of these changes to a 2nd tone.

Lesson 2 – Basic Needs/Wishes

Vocabulary

lěng	cold
rè	hot
è	hungry
kě	thirsty
lèi	tired
xiǎng	vb. would like to (do something)
mǎi dōngxi	vb. to go shopping (“xi” takes no tone here)
xīuxi	vb. to rest (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
shuìjiào	vb. to go to bed/sleep
chī fàn	vb. to eat (lit. eat rice)
hē kāfēi	vb. to drink coffee
shàng cèsǔo	vb. to go to the restroom
bù	no, not

Model Sentences

	Pinyin	English
1.	Wǒ _____ lěng rè è kě lèi	I am ⁴ _____. cold hot hungry thirsty tired
2.	Wó xiǎng _____. mǎi dōngxi xīuxi shuìjiào chī fàn hē kāfēi shàng cèsǔo	I would like to _____. go shopping rest go to bed/sleep get something to eat drink coffee use the restroom
5.	Wǒ bù xiǎng hē kāfēi.	I don't want to drink coffee.
6.	Wǒ bù xiǎng chī fàn.	I don't want to eat.
7.	Wǒ lèi, xiǎng shuìjiào.	I am tired, (and) would like to sleep. ⁵
8.	Wǒ è, xiǎng chī fàn.	I am hungry, (and) would like to eat.
9.	Zhao xiàozhǎng, wó hěn lèi, xiǎng xīuxi.	Principal Zhao, I am really very tired, (and) would like to rest.
10.	Nín xiǎng hē shénme?	What would you like to drink?

⁴ In this sentence structure, the verb “to be” is implied, not stated.

⁵ Conjunctions are often implied, rather than stated, in Chinese.

Lesson 3 – Likes/Dislikes

Vocabulary

xǐhuān	vb. to like
zhōngguó	China
zhōngguó fàn	Chinese food
zhōngguó wénhà	Chinese culture
liáotiān	vb. to chat/shoot the breeze
zhège	this (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
zhīdào	vb. to know (something)
duìbùqǐ	sorry
jiǔ	alcohol
xièxiè	thank you

Model Sentences

	Pinyin	English
1.	Wó xǐhuān _____. zhōngguó zhōngguó fàn zhōngguó wénhà liáotiān zhège	I like _____. China Chinese food Chinese culture chatting this
2.	Wǒ bù xǐhuān jiǔ.	I don't like alcohol.
3.	Wǒ bù zhīdào.	I don't know.
4.	Duìbùqǐ, wǒ bù xiǎng chī zhège.	I'm sorry, (but) I would prefer not to eat this. ⁶
5.	Wǒ bú ⁷ lèi, bù xiǎng xiūxi. Xièxiè.	I'm not tired, (and so) don't want to rest. Thank you.
6.	Wǒ bù xǐhuān mǎi dōngxi.	I don't like shopping.

Exercise

Say these sentences in Chinese.

1. I like Chinese food, (and) also like Chinese alcohol.
2. I'm not tired, (and so) would like to chat.
3. I'm sorry, (but) I don't know.
4. Principal Li, I like your school.
5. I'm very hungry, (and so) want to eat.
6. Thanks! I like this.

⁶ Only say this if you are really adamant about not eating something. Otherwise, you might hurt feelings.

⁷ Bù changes to bú when followed by 4th tone.

Lesson 4 – On Schools

Vocabulary

xiǎoxué	elementary school
chūzhōng	middle school
gāozhōng	high school
zhíyè xúexiào	vocational school
tā	he, she, it
lǎoshī	teacher
xúeshēng	student
péngyou	friend (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
xúejīān	superintendent
dà	big
piàoliang	beautiful (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
xiàndài	modern
ma	placed at the end of any declarative sentence to make it a question (takes no tone)

Model Sentences

	Pinyin	English
1.	Wǒ de xúexiào shì _____. xiǎoxué chūzhōng gāozhōng zhíyè xúexiào	My school is a _____. elementary school middle school high school vocational school
2	Tā shì _____. xiàozhǎng lǎoshī xúeshēng péngyou xúejīān	He/she is a _____. principal teacher student friend superintendent
3.	Nín de xúexiào hěn _____. dà piàoliang xiàndài	Your school is very _____. big beautiful modern
4.	Tā shì lǎoshī ma?	Is he/she a teacher?
5.	Nín shì xiàozhǎng ma?	Are you a principal?
6.	Zhège xúexiào shì xiǎoxué ma?	Is this an elementary school?
7.	Tā shì xúeshēng ma?	Is he/she a student?
8.	Shì, tā shì xúeshēng. ⁸	Yes, he/she is a student.

⁸ Shì, the verb “to be,” is also used to respond in the affirmative to a question.

9.	Bù, tā bú shì xúeshēng. Tā shì lǎoshī.	No, he/she is not a student. He/she is a teacher.
10.	Nín hǎo ma?	How are you?
11.	Wǒ de xúexiào shì gāozhōng. Tā jiào Newton North.	My school is a high school. It is called Newton North.
12.	Tā de xúexiào bú dà.	His/her school is not large.
13.	Tā de xúexiào hěn piàoliang ma?	Is her school beautiful?
14.	Shì, shì hěn piàoliang.	Yes, it is very beautiful.
15.	Nín de xúexiào jiào shénme?	What's the name of your school?

Exercise

Say these sentences in Chinese.

1. I am a principal; she is a teacher.
2. He is a student; his name is Peter.
3. I like your school. It is very large and modern.
4. She is my friend. She is a superintendent. Her name is Amy.
5. Is Principal Zhang's school large?
6. Yes, it is large, (and) also very beautiful.

Lesson 5 – Bargain Hunting

Vocabulary

bàng	excellent
zhōngguó huà	Chinese language
yīfu	clothing (2 nd syllable takes no tone)
dūoshǎo	how much
qián	money
kuài	unit of currency in China; formally known as yuan, or RMB
taì	too (as in “too much”)
guì	expensive
shá lǎowài	dumb foreigner
hǎo	good, well
piányì	cheap
yìdiǎn	a little
OK	okay (known by all in China; use it to affirm or query anything)

Counting⁹

yī – 1	èr – 2	sān – 3	sì – 4	wǔ – 5
liù – 6	qī – 7	bā – 8	jiǔ – 9	shí - 10
shí yī – 11	shí èr – 12	shí sān – 13	shí sì – 14	shí wǔ – 15
shí liù – 16	shí qī – 17	shí bā – 18	shí jiǔ – 19	èr shí – 20
èr shí yī – 21	èr shí èr – 22	èr shí sān – 23	èr shí sì – 24	èr shí wǔ – 25
èr shí liù – 26	èr shí qī – 27	èr shí bā – 28	èr shí jiǔ – 29	sān shí – 30
sì shí – 40	wǔ shí – 50	liù shí – 60	qī shí – 70	bā shí – 80
jiǔ shí – 90	yì bǎi – 100	èr bǎi – 200	sān bǎi – 300	sì bǎi - 400
wú bǎi – 500	liù bǎi – 600	qī bǎi – 700	bā bǎi – 800	jiú bǎi – 900

Model Dialog

Principal: Nín hǎo.

(Hello)

Vendor: Nín hǎo. Nín de zhōngguó huà hěn bàng!

(Hi. Your Chinese is great!)

Principal: Xièxiè. Zhège yīfu dūoshǎo qián?

(Thanks. How much for this clothing?)

Vendor: Sì bǎi kuài.¹⁰

(400 yuan)

Principal: Sì bǎi kuài! Tài guì!

(400 yuan! That’s far too expensive!)

Vendor: Zhège yīfu hén hǎo...

(This clothing is very good...)

Principal: Piányì yīdiǎn, OK? Wǒ bú shì shá lǎowài.

(A bit cheaper. I’m not a dumb foreigner.)

Vendor: (laughing) OK, sān bǎi wǔ shí kuài.

(OK, 350 yuan.)

Principal: Hěn guì, hěn guì... èr bǎi.

(Still too much... 200 yuan.)

Vendor: Sān bǎi.

(300 yuan)

Principal: Bu, bu, èr bǎi kuài (begins to walk away).

(No, no, 200 yuan)

Vendor: OK, OK, OK, èr bǎi.

(200 yuan it is.)

⁹ Learning numbers is recommended, but optional. Often vendors will simply use a calculator to show product prices to shá lǎowài.

¹⁰ At touristy shops or markets, it is safe to assume that the first price given is at least twice what the vendor will ultimately accept.

Exercise Answers

Lesson 1

1. Wǒ jiào Mary Scott.
2. Wǒ shì xiàozhǎng.
3. Mā xiàozhǎng, hěn gāoxìng rènshi nín.
4. Nín de xúexiào jiào shénme?
5. Wǒ de xúexiào jiào Milton High School.

Lesson 3

1. Wó xǐhuān zhōngguó fàn, yé xǐhuān zhōngguó jiǔ.
2. Wǒ bú lèi, xiǎng liáotiān.
3. Duìbùqǐ, wǒ bù zhīdào.
4. Lǐ xiàozhǎng, wó xǐhuān nín de xúexiào.
5. Wó hěn è, xiǎng chī fàn.
6. Xièxiè! Wó xǐhuān zhège.

Lesson 4

1. Wǒ shì xiàozhǎng; tā shì lǎoshī.
2. Tā shì xúeshēng; tā jiào Peter.
3. Wó xǐhuān nín de xúexiào. Tā hěn dà, hěn xiàndài.
4. Tā shì wǒ de péngyou, shì xúejiān, jiào Amy.
5. Zhang xiàozhǎng de xúexiào hěn dà ma?
6. Shì, shì hěn dà, yé hěn piàoliang.