

# Survival Chinese

Don Snow



## 生存 汉语

[美] 唐·斯诺 编著



商務印書館

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[美]唐·斯诺 编著

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商务印书馆

The Commercial Press

2002 • Beijing

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

生存汉语/(美)斯诺(Snow, Don)编著. —北京:商务印书馆, 2002

ISBN 7-100-03166-4

I. 生... II. 斯... III. 对外汉语教学-教材  
IV. H195.4

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2000)第36496号

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SHÈNGCÚN HÀNYǔ  
生 存 汉 语  
SURVIVAL CHINESE  
〔美〕唐·斯诺 编著  
Don Snow

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商 务 印 书 馆 出 版  
(北京王府井大街36号 邮政编码 100710)  
商 务 印 书 馆 发 行  
中 国 科 学 院 印 刷 厂 印 刷  
ISBN 7-100-03166-4/H·803

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2002年1月第1版

开本 787×960 1/32

2002年1月北京第1次印刷

印张 10 3/4

定价: 15.00 元

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# **Introduction : Why Another Beginning Chinese Textbook?**

Many Chinese language textbooks are intended mainly for people who study Chinese in formal Chinese classes, and are based on assumptions that are appropriate primarily for such learners. The words and phrases such textbooks introduce in early lessons are often those that help students function in a classroom setting. Such texts also assume that learners' need to learn to read and write Chinese is as pressing as their need to speak it, so they introduce oral and written skills at the same rate. Underlying many such texts is also the assumption that they will be taught by a teacher, someone who will manage and guide the Chinese learning process for students.

However, what of people who will live or work in China but do not have the opportunity to study Chinese

in a formal classroom setting? Such people usually need to become "street functional" in Chinese relatively quickly, so their most pressing need is for the words and phrases that will help them deal with daily life in China. Also, during their first weeks in China, such people often have a much greater need to learn to speak and understand basic Chinese than they have to learn Chinese characters. Finally, such learners usually need to take charge of their own language learning process, either studying with a tutor or studying on their own and then going out to practice with whatever Chinese people they encounter.

*Survival Chinese* is intended for this special category of Chinese learners, those people who are going to work or live in China for an extended period of time but who do not have the opportunity to study in a formal Chinese language program. It tries to meet the special needs of these learners in several ways:

- 1) It introduces "survival Chinese"—those words, phrases, sentence patterns and skills that are needed most often in daily life in China. The topics and content of lessons have been selected and organized so as to make learners functional on the street in China as quickly as

possible. Thus from the first day, rather than learning how to interact socially with classmates and talk about a classroom, students learn how to buy things, use the post office, get food in a restaurant, get assistance when something goes wrong, take buses and taxis, and so forth. Obviously only the most basic elements of Chinese are introduced here, and learners will need to move into other textbooks if they hope to progress beyond the minimal survival stage, but the language tools (vocabulary, phrases, and sentence patterns) presented here are sufficient to get learners through some of the most commonly encountered situations — and also to prepare them for further Chinese study.

2) *Survival Chinese* encourages learners to make their own choices as to where to focus their efforts; especially with regard to the question of how much time and attention to devote initially to learning to read and write Chinese. Some learners will initially want to ignore Chinese characters and focus all their attention on speaking and listening. Others will want to dabble a little in characters but still invest most of their time in oral skills. Yet others will want to work on both written and spoken skills right from the start. Thus each unit

has a core lesson for those interested mainly in oral skills, but also contains options for those who wish to begin characters. Material addressing Chinese tones, pronunciation, and *Pinyin* spelling (Romanization) is also presented in a separate section to serve either as an introduction or for review and reference.

3) *Survival Chinese* recognizes that learners may be studying individually with tutors or teachers who may have little experience teaching Chinese to foreigners (or whose ideas about teaching Chinese don't coincide with the learner's needs), and that an important part of Chinese study in such situations is learning how to work effectively with tutors who know Chinese but don't know how to teach it. In other words, learners need to learn how to gently turn well-meaning native speakers of Chinese into effective language teachers.

Underlying *Survival Chinese* there are several important assumptions:

1) SC assumes that learners have different needs, interests, and learning strategies, and it is thus designed to accommodate a variety of different approaches to Chinese, especially individual decisions as to how much attention learners initially wish to devote to Chinese

characters.

2)SC assumes that people learn any language by first mastering that which is simple and only gradually moving into that which is more complex, so in the initial stages of Chinese language study, it is less important that explanations be thorough than that they be clear and easy to understand. SC keeps explanations brief and relies heavily on examples to illustrate points of sentence construction and word order.

3)Finally, and most importantly, SC operates under the assumption that as a language learner you are most likely to succeed if you take charge of your own learning program. In practice this means that *you* need to choose the goals that are appropriate to your needs, *you* need to choose the study methods that fit your situation and learning style, *you* need to actively seek out and take advantage of opportunities to practice your Chinese, and *you* need to learn how to give direction to your teachers and tutors.

### ***Acknowledgements***

This material has developed over the past several years as part of an orientation program conducted for

foreign language teachers newly arrived in China, and I owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers and staff of both the Amity Foundation and Nantong Teachers College. In particular, Tong Su and Cao Jingxin checked portions of early drafts for infelicities in the Chinese, and Huang Huixin and Hong Yuan made valuable editing suggestions based on their use of the material. Holly Herrin provided a Chinese menu that was useful in Lesson 13, and Joy Hilbun contributed the list of medicines available in China that is found in Lesson 18. Thanks to Ian Groves for a variety of contributions and suggestions, and to Caroline Fielder for interviewing a number of users of early drafts of this book. Many teachers working in China through the Amity Foundation and its partner groups have been gracious enough to provide feedback on early drafts of the book: Berit Aspegren, Georgina Baisley, Sandy and Christine Balfour, Helge Berge, Richard Brunt, Julie Chrystal, David Conkey, Sandy Cullers, Bill Davis, Julie Dennison, Ann Fishwick, Pamela Gordon, Stephen Graham, Melvena Green, Kay Grimmesey, Jean and Jostein Gronset, Hannah Henry, Lynne and Jon Hilton, Martin Johnson, Anne Kavanagh, Brit-Marie Lundback, Kay

Martin, Debbie Nicholson, Randi Nordby, Clayton Olson, Mary Carol Perrott, Julie Petrie, Kevin Plunkett, Fiona Pollard, Jonathan Robinson, Mirzah Rodriguez, Judy Scheckel, Mark Scott, Margareta Skov, Susan Smith, Esther Snader, Marit and Aril Sto, Eileen Summerville, Jane Thompson, Heina van Beijnum, Johanna and Landon van Dyke, Bill Voelker, Edith Warner, Robbie Wellington, Zandra Wells, Christina Wiklund, and Mike Williams. Thanks also to the many Nantong Teachers College students who have made suggestions as they used this material to tutor Amity teachers over the last few years. Last but not least my gratitude to Wei Hong Snow, who was always willing to provide emergency editorial services when I made last minute changes to the Chinese texts.

# Studying Chinese With This Book

## *How Each Lesson Is Organized*

Underlying each lesson in *Survival Chinese* is a set of daily life communication problems — such as how to buy a stamp or get something to eat at a noodle stand — of the kind that you will face from your very first day living in China. The goal of each lesson is to provide you with the basic language tools (vocabulary, phrases, sentence patterns, and strategies) that will enable you to cope with these daily life situations using rudimentary (but ever improving) Chinese.

Each lesson is divided into four basic parts:

**Part 1: Core Lesson.** This part of the lesson introduces the basic language tools — vocabulary, phrases, and sentence patterns — that you need in order to cope with whatever daily life situation the particular



lesson deals with. This part of each lesson contains several sections:

*Dialogue*: Each Dialogue portrays a common daily life situation and the basic language tools and strategies you need for coping with the situation. The Dialogue is presented in both *Pinyin* (Romanization) and Chinese characters, and English translation is provided for each Chinese sentence. Eyebrows may be raised by the fact that the English translations are very literal — even to the point of being pidgin English. The danger in this is that the English translations may appear to caricature or even mock the Chinese. Please be assured that this is not at all my intent. I have used such literal translations because their word-by-word nature preserves Chinese sentence structure and wording as much as possible, and previous users have found that this helps them more quickly develop a feel for Chinese word order. (A more natural translation of the Dialogue appears at the end of each lesson.)

*Dialogue Vocabulary*: This is a listing of all new Chinese words that are used in the Dialogue, each with a simple gloss in English.

*Additional Vocabulary*: This is a listing of new