

有 人 说 中 文 非 常
难 一 们 缘 我 了 了 正
我 当 的 方 法 来 克 服

GATEWAY to CHINESE

汉 语 入 门

分教处

GATEWAY TO CHINESE

汉语入门

Supplement to
CHINA RECONSTRUCTS
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PREFACE

THE most ancient known Chinese characters or ideographs are those on oracle bones which date back to the 14th century B.C. Originally the ideographs were pictures of the thing described. But in the subsequent development, especially in the first 1,800 years, they underwent many changes. Today there is a total of about 50,000 characters, of which some 5,000 are in general use.

The characters, as now written, have lost their pictorial quality. But their original structure has remained. A large number of them have two pictorial symbols, one showing the pronunciation and the other the meaning. For example, the character 洋, meaning "ocean", is pronounced *yang*. This pronunciation comes from the right side, 羊 *yang*, which really means "sheep" or "goat" and was written originally as 𦍋, resembling a sheep's head. The left side, or radical 氵, means "water" and was written in early times as 水. These two components combined give both the meaning and sound of the character 洋. Other characters containing 氵 are: 湖 (lake), 河 (river), 洗 (to wash), 流 (to flow), 渴 (thirsty). All these have something to do with water.

What is known in foreign countries as Chinese is actually the Han language, spoken by 94 per cent of the Chinese population. Although it has many dialects, there is a common speech which, based on the northern dialects spoken by 70 per cent of the Hans, takes the Peking pronunciation as its standard. The written form remains the same throughout the country and can be understood by everybody even though they speak different dialects. Today the common speech is taken as the standard pronunciation and is being steadily popularized throughout the country. Not only is it the common speech among all the Han people but it is also the princi-

pal means of communication among China's more than 50 minority nationalities.

After the liberation the People's Government set up the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language. The Committee has simplified many of the most constantly used characters by greatly reducing the number of strokes in them.* This has been welcomed by the broad masses of the people and has made it much easier to combat illiteracy. The Committee also drew up a programme for writing the Han language with the Latin alphabet. It was approved by the National People's Congress in 1958. The Chinese phonetic alphabet can be used to show the pronunciation of the Han characters so that primary school students and adults learning to read can recognize and pronounce the characters themselves. This makes it easier to learn them. The alphabet can also be used to spell the standard pronunciation of the common speech, thus establishing a clear norm for all to adopt.

The alphabet makes it easier for foreign friends to learn Chinese. There are no sounds specially difficult to pronounce in it; the composition of the syllables is regular. Most are formed by an initial consonant and a final which is either a vowel, a diphthong or a vowel with nasal ending. Some of the finals form a syllable by themselves. The initial consonants number 23 and the finals number 35. Altogether there are about 400 syllables and so, as most of these have four tones, there are about 1,200 tone-syllables. Once you have mastered the composition of the syllable you can go on to learn the spoken language and will be able to understand and speak it yourself. As you practise speaking, it becomes much easier to learn the characters.

As indicated by its title, this little book, *Gateway to Chinese* (汉语入门 **Hànyǔ Rùmén**), with an everyday vocabulary and some basic grammar, is intended to serve as a gateway for those who desire further studies.

* In cases where characters have been officially simplified, it is that form which is used in this booklet.

CHINESE SOUNDS

The alphabet

The Chinese phonetic alphabet uses Latin letters. The names of the letters are as follows:

| | | | | | | |
|----|----|------|-----|----|-----|-----|
| a | b | c | d, | e | f | g; |
| a | bê | cê | dê, | e | êf | gê; |
| h | i | j | k, | l | m | n; |
| ha | i | jiê | kê, | êl | êm | nê; |
| o | p | q, | r | s | t; | |
| o | pê | qiu, | ar | ês | tê; | |
| u | v | w, | x | y | z. | |
| u | vê | wa, | xi | ya | zê. | |

Most of the Chinese syllables can be divided into two parts, the initial and the final. The initial is the sound with which a syllable starts. It is actually the initial consonant. The final is the rest of the syllable, either a vowel, a diphthong or a vowel with nasal ending.

The initials

| Chinese Phonetic Alphabet | International Phonetic Symbol | Key |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| b | [b] | bed (voiceless) |
| p | [p'] | peak |
| m | [m] | man |
| f | [f] | fan |
| d | [d] | day (voiceless) |
| t | [t'] | team |
| n | [n] | no |
| l | [l] | law |
| g | [g] | glad (voiceless) |
| k | [k'] | kill |
| h | [x] | hard |

| | | |
|----|-------|---|
| j | [dʒ] | jeer |
| q | [tʃ] | cheer |
| x | [ç] | ship |
| z | [dʒ] | reads |
| c | [tsʰ] | that's |
| s | [s] | sound |
| zh | [dʒ] | large (tip of tongue curv- ed back, and voiceless) |
| ch | [tʃʰ] | chew (tip of tongue cur- ved back) |
| sh | [ʃ] | shrub (tip of tongue curv- ed back) |
| r | [ʒ] | leisure (tip of tongue curv- ed back) |
| y | [j] | you |
| w | [w] | way |

The finals

| Chinese Phonetic Alphabet | International Phonetic Symbol | Key |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| a | [a] | father |
| o | [o] | saw |
| e | [ə] | her (r being silent, or e in French le) |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| ê* | [ɛ] | there (r being silent) |
| i | [i] | machine |
| u | [u] | rude |
| ü | [y] | as German ü (or i and u pronounced simultaneously) |
| er | [ər] | err (tongue slightly curled) |

* ê exists only in the diphthongs **iê** and **üê**. In such cases, they are written with the **ê** omitted. ê is used for designating some of the letters in the alphabet.

Note: 1. when **i**, **u** or **ü** are used as a separate syllable, they are written as **yi**, **wu** and **yu** respectively.

2. After **j**, **q**, **x**, the umlaut on **ü** is omitted.

3. **i** after the initials **zh**, **ch**, **sh**, **r**, **z**, **c** and **s** is not pronounced as **i** but indicates that the preceding initial is prolonged and vocalized in pronunciation.

| | | |
|-----|------|---|
| ai | [ai] | i |
| ao | [au] | now |
| an | [an] | can |
| ang | [aŋ] | gang |
| ei | [ei] | eight |
| en | [ən] | omen |
| eng | [əŋ] | approximate to ung in sung |
| ou | [ou] | old |
| ong | [uŋ] | oo_ng |
| ia | [ia] | yah (or Asia) |

| | | |
|------|-----------|---------------------|
| ie | [iɛ] | yes |
| iao | [iau] | yowl |
| iu | [iou, iu] | you |
| ian | [iæn] | yen |
| in | [in] | in |
| iang | [iaŋ] | young |
| ing | [iŋ] | sing |
| iong | [iuŋ] | y _{oo} ong |

(Note: When **iu** is used as a separate syllable, it is written as **you** — *y+ou*)

| | | |
|------|-----------|--|
| ua | [ua] | waft |
| uo | [uo] | woman |
| uai | [uai] | wife |
| ui | [uɔi, ui] | way |
| uan | [uan] | oo _{ahn} (or approx- imate to <i>one</i>) |
| un | [uən, un] | went |
| uang | [uaŋ] | oo _{ahng} |
| üe | [yɛ] | ü _{eh} |
| üan | [yan] | ü _{an} |
| ün | [yn] | ü _n |

(Note: when finals starting with **ü** are used as separate syllables, **ü** is written as **yu**.)

The four tones

Each Chinese vowel has not only its proper sound (as indicated by the spelling) but also a certain tone of voice which helps to determine its meaning.

In the standard speech, there are four tones. The first one, marked —, is called the “upper even tone” because it is spoken high but the voice neither rises nor falls. The second, ˊ, starts with the voice lower but ends up as high as in the first. In the third tone, ˋ, the voice is dropped at first and then rises in rather a drawn-out way, and in the fourth, ˋˊ, the voice falls from high to low.

It is important to try and get the tones right from the beginning, because in some instances you may be misunderstood if you pronounce them incorrectly. For example, the Chinese word meaning “sell” is written 卖(*mài*), while that for “buy” is written 买(*mǎi*); both sound like the English word “my”. The difference is that the first is pronounced in the fourth or falling tone, and the second in the third or falling-rising.

Syllables that do not carry tone marks are unstressed syllables without tone distinction. E.g., in *Tāde liǎng ge dà háizi zài xiàqí* 他的两个大孩子在下棋 (His two older children are playing chess), *de*, *ge* and *zi* are unstressed syllables.

HOW TO WRITE THE CHINESE CHARACTERS

With the Chinese characters there are eight basic strokes:

1. dot



5. left stroke



2. horizontal bar



6. right stroke



3. vertical bar



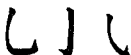
7. rising stroke



4. turning strokes



8. hooks



All the other strokes are variations of these eight.

Traditionally, people use a soft-tufted brush as their tool for writing to bring out fully the characteristics of various kinds of strokes. But nowadays for ordinary purposes it is gradually substituted by pens and pencils which are more convenient to carry about.

In writing each word the strokes are put together according to the following rules of order:

1. Strokes on the left are written before those on the right. Examples:

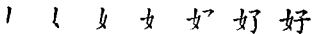
人 rén (person)



他 tā (he)



好 hǎo (good)

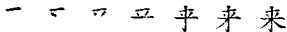


2. Higher strokes are written before lower ones. Examples:

是 shì (verb "to be")



来 lái (to come)



3. Outer strokes are written before the inner ones, except for the concluding one closing a frame. Examples:

中 zhōng (middle) 丶 冂 口 中

国 guó (country) 丨 冂 月 月 月 用 国 国 国

(When these two words are put together, they mean "China".)

Characters may have from one to as many as 33 strokes. But they take up the same space on the printed page. Draw a square round each of the seven characters given above and you will find that no stroke reaches beyond it. For this reason Chinese characters may be set one below the other, which is the old style, or across the page from left to right as people generally do with all publications today.

Lesson One

我的家庭 Wǒde Jiāting My Family

我是上海人。

Wǒ shì Shànghǎi rén.
I am (a) Shanghai man.

我家有六个人：父亲，母亲，爱人，

Wǒ jiā yǒu liù ge rén: fùqin, mǔqin, àiren,
My family has six people: (my) father, mother, (my) wife,

两个孩子和我。

liǎng ge háizi hé wǒ.
two children and I.

两个孩子，一个是男的，一个

Liǎng ge háizi, yíge shì nánde, yíge
(Of the) two children, one is (a) (boy), one

是女的。

shì nǚde.
is (a) (girl).

男孩子今年十岁，女孩子八

Nánháizi jīnnián shí suì, nǚháizi bá
(The) boy this year (is) ten years old, (the) girl (is) eight

岁。他们都在学校唸书。

sui. Tāmen dōu zài xuéxiào niànshū.
years old. They all in school study.

我在一家商店工作。我爱人是一个

Wǒ zài yí jiā shāngdiàn gōngzuò. Wǒ àiren shì yíge
I in a shop work. My wife is a

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|-----------------|--------|-------|-------|
| 女工。 | 父亲， | 母亲 | 年纪 | 大了。 | 他们 |
| nǚgōng. | Fùqin, | mǔqīn | niánjì | dàle. | Tāmen |
| woman worker. | Father, | mother (are in) | age | old. | Their |

身体 很好。
 shēntǐ hěn hǎo.
 health (is) very good.

Reworded Translation

My Family

I am a native of Shanghai. There are six people in my home: my father, mother, wife, two children and myself.

One of my children is a boy and one a girl.

The boy is ten and the girl is eight. They both go to school.

I work in a shop. My wife is a worker.

My father and mother are advanced in years. Their health is very good.

Grammar

1. Word order

Word order is an important element in Chinese. Some grammatical relations are determined by it. There are four general rules governing this:

(a) The subject should precede the predicate, e.g.:

Wǒ shì Shànghǎi rén 我是上海人 (I am a man from Shanghai); **Wó jiā yǒu liù ge rén** 我家有六个人 (My family has six people).

(b) The verb should precede its object, e.g.: **yǒu liù ge rén** 有六个人 (have six people).

(c) An adjective or adjectival modifier should be placed before the noun it modifies, e.g.: **Shànghǎi rén** 上海人 (here **Shànghǎi** is used as an adjective modifying **rén**).

(d) An adverb or adverbial phrase should be placed before the verb or adjective it modifies, e.g.: **hěn hǎo** 很好 (very good); **zài xuéxiào niànshū** 在学校唸书 (study in school).

2. Classifiers

In Chinese, a numeral or a demonstrative pronoun like **zhè** 这 (this) and **nà** 那 (that) cannot directly precede a noun. There should always be a classifier between such parts of speech and the noun. For example, **liù ge rén** 六个人 (six people); **liǎng ge hái zi** 两个孩子 (two children); **zhè ge xué xiào** 这个学校 (this school).

Many nouns have specific classifiers. For example, **jiā** 家 is the classifier for “shop” or “factory”. **Ge** 个 is the most common classifier. When the numeral **yí** — (one) and the classifier **ge** 个 appear together, they are often linked up as **yí ge** 一个.

With some nouns which themselves embody the idea of a unit, no classifier is used, e.g., **sān nián** 三年 (three years), **wǔ tiān** 五天 (five days). An exception is **yuè** 月 (month), which always takes the classifier **ge**, as **sān ge yuè** 三个月 (three months), **wú ge yuè** 五个月 (five months). If the classifier is omitted the meaning is changed. For example, **sān yuè** 三月 means “March” and **wǔ yuè** 五月 “May”.

3. The verb “to be”

Shì 是 is the verb “to be”. It does not vary in person, number or tense. For instance, **wǒ shì** 我是 means “I am” or “I was”; **nǐ shì** 你是 means “you are” or “you were”; **tāmen shì** 他们是 “they are” or “they were”, etc. The same holds true for all Chinese verbs.

4. Chinese pronouns do not vary in form in the nominative, possessive or objective cases. To form the possessive case, we generally place the particle **de** 的 after the pronoun, such as **wǒ de** 我的 (my), **nǐ de** 你的 (your), **tā de** 他的 (his), **wǒmen de** 我们的 (our). However, when the object of the possessive pronoun has an intimate relationship, **de** can be omitted, e.g., **wó jiā** 我家 (my home), **wó mǔqin** 我母亲 (my mother), **wó mèimei** 我妹妹 (my younger sister).

Notes

1. When the word **rén** 人 (person) follows the name of a place, it indicates that the person is a native of that place. For example, **Shànghǎi rén** 上海人 (a man from Shanghai), **Húběi rén** 湖北人 (a man from Hupeh), **Zhōngguó rén** 中国人 (a Chinese), **Yīngguó rén** 英国人 (an Englishman).

2. **Àiren** 爱人. The original meaning of **àiren** is “sweetheart”. It is now used for “husband”, “wife” or “sweetheart”. The conventional word for “husband” is **zhàngfu** 丈夫 and the word for “wife” is **qīzi** 妻子.

3. **Nánde** 男的, **nǚde** 女的 mean “male” and “female” respectively, but in **yíge shì nánde, yíge shì nǚde** 一个是男的, 一个是女的 **nánde** actually means “boy” (written as **nánhái** 男孩 in Chinese) and **nǚde** means “girl” (**nǚhái** 女孩).

4. **Suì** 岁 is used instead of **nián** 年 (year) to express age. For instance, **shí suì** 十岁 (ten years old); **bā suì** 八岁 (eight years old).

5. **Niánjì dàle** 年纪大了. The word **dà** 大 means “big” but here it means “old” in the sense of “big in years”. **Le** 了 is a suffix often put after an adjective or at the end of a sentence to indicate completion of some happening. So **niánjì dàle** 年纪大了 means “already old”.

6. **Shēnti** 身体 means “body”. But it is also used to mean “health”, as in **Tāmen shēnti hěn hǎo** 他们身体很好 (Their health is very good).

Exercise

Translate the following into English:

1. **Wǒ jiā yǒu bá ge rén.**
2. **Tā mǔqīn shēnti hěn hǎo.**
3. **Wǒde nánhái jīnnián shí suì.**
4. **Tā zài xuéxiào niànshū.**

Lesson Two

我们的 学校

Wǒmende Xuéxiào

Our School

我 在 北 京 一 个 中 学 里 教 书。

Wǒ zài Běijīng yíge zhōngxué lǐ jiāoshū.

I in Peking a middle school teach.

我 们 学 校 很 大, 学 生 很 多。

Wǒmen xuéxiào hěn dà, xuésheng hěn duō.

Our school (is) very big, students (are) very many.

我们 学校 有 一个 大 操场, 有 一个
Wǒmen xuéxiào yǒu yíge dà cāochǎng, yǒu yíge
Our school has a big sports ground, has a

图书馆 和 三个 实验室。 每天 早上,
túshūguǎn hé sān ge shíyànshì. Měi tiān zǎoshang,
library and three laboratories. Each day morning, (the)

学生们 在 操场 上 做 早操。
xuéshengmen zài cāochǎng shàng zuò zǎocāo.
students sports ground on do morning exercises.

学生们 有 时候 到 人民 公社 去
Xuéshengmen yǒu shíhou dào rénmin gōngshè qù
(The) students sometimes to (the) people's communes go (to)

劳动, 有 时候 在 学校 里 劳动。
láodòng, yǒu shíhou zài xuéxiào lǐ láodòng.
do physical work, sometimes in (the) school do physical work.

Reworded Translation

Our School

I teach in a middle school in Peking.

Our school is very big and has many students.

The school has a big sports ground, a library and three laboratories.
Every morning the students do exercises on the sports ground.

Sometimes the students go to the people's communes to take part in physical work; sometimes they do such work in school.

Grammar

1. Chinese nouns generally have no plural form. The plural is indicated by the context, e.g., sān ge shíyànshì 三个实验室 (three laboratories), xuésheng hěn duō 学生很多 (students are many). In both the singular and plural, the nouns shíyànshì 实验室 and xuésheng 学生 remain unchanged.