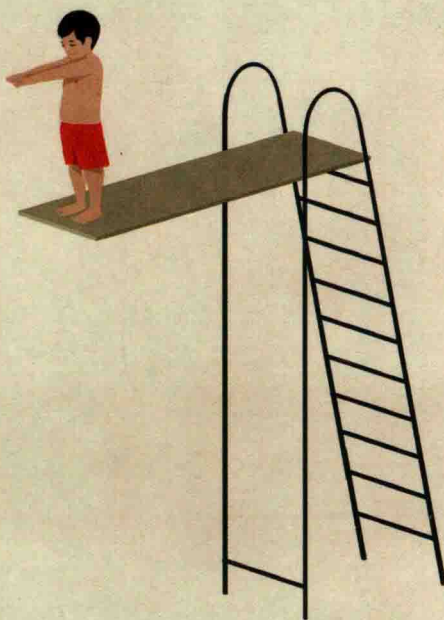




 China Simplified

LANGUAGE EMPOWERMENT

Demystify Chinese culture and fire up your Mandarin



Stewart Lee Beck
Katie Lu

Shanghai Translation Publishing House



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Written by

Stewart Lee Beck and Katie Lu

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In memory of
Zhou Youguang, the Father of Pinyin
1906 – 2017

Portions of this book have appeared in different forms on China Simplified and other online platforms. This book was previously released in e-book and audiobook formats under the title *China Simplified: Language Gymnastics*.

For more information, please visit www.chinasimplified.com.

Also available from China Simplified:
China Simplified: History Flashback

Praise for *China Simplified: Language Empowerment*

"I suddenly feel as if the scales have been lifted from my eyes. You truly demonstrate how understanding the language unveils so much about the culture."

— Carol Potter, Executive Vice Chairman at Edelman

"A lively and original approach to navigating the bottomless mysteries of Chinese language and culture. Stewart Lee Beck is a knowledgeable guide on how to understand China better, and how to have fun along the way."

— David Brooks, Chairman,
Coca-Cola Greater China and Korea

"With humor and clarity, Language Empowerment weaves together rich cultural and linguistic background information of the Chinese language with practical implications for daily communication."

— Michael Volz, Chinese Program Coordinator,
University of Missouri

"China Simplified does an excellent job demystifying what can often feel like an impenetrable place. I wish a book like this existed when I moved to China."

— Dan Washburn, Chief Content Officer, Asia Society;
author of *The Forbidden Game: Golf and the Chinese Dream*

"Totally authentic. I am encouraging my local Chinese friends to read this book to understand how to more effectively relate to non-Chinese speakers."

— Christine Ng, Managing Director, BBH China

"China Simplified takes seemingly intimidating and incomprehensible pieces of Chinese culture and makes them easy and fun. For someone with a thirst for learning about things Chinese, this series is a great entry point."

— Joe Tatelbaum, former Vice President Li & Fung;
China resident since 1982

"Language Empowerment is a well-written and entertaining guide to Chinese language and culture, revealing insights that many teachers and textbooks overlook. It should be recommended reading not only for language students, but also for anyone else who wants to understand how Chinese people think, act and talk."

— Olle Linge, Mandarin Language Educator,
Founder Hacking Chinese

"There is nothing that scares me more than another China book written by a laowai who thinks he/she knows the secret to this land. Language Empowerment is anything but this. It is ridiculously funny, uncomfortably accurate and totally memorable!"

— Grant Horsfield, Founder, naked Group

"A highly accessible introduction to the Chinese language through the eyes of a foreigner, whose great affection for the language, respect for its beauty, and enthusiasm for its study is both evident and infectious."

— Louise Goss-Custard, former Managing Director,
Russell Reynolds Associates China

"China Simplified is by no means a dumbing-down of China—it is a delightfully insightful speeding up of a topic everyone should know something about. Absolutely brilliant...leaves you wanting more."

— Andrew Ballen, CEO/Founder at AVD Digital Media

“Katie and Stewart have done a great job of pulling together all the best ideas that are shared by China lifers and putting them in a book. It’s fun, but you’ll also be far better prepared for the challenge ahead.”

— Owen Caterer, Founding Partner, Caterer Goodman Partners

“They’ve cracked the code! China Simplified demystified Mandarin for me, and now many of my clients.”

— Mary Rezek, Executive Coach and Founder, Saatori, Ltd.

“Having lived in China for nearly 20 years, I found myself nodding in agreement throughout the book. The authors grasp very well that their audience varies from expert Mandarin speakers to total newbies. Well done!”

— Mark Secchia, Founder, Sherpa’s Food Delivery

“I love China Simplified. What I would have given for this no-nonsense, elegantly simple advice on China when I was there.”

— Louise Ardagh, Head of Small Business at Bankwest

“An entertaining and easy read with a twist of humor. I’ve learned an enlightening cache of information about the country, its people and its language from a non-native speaker.”

— Paul Chin, CEO, Bacardi Greater China,
North Asia & Oceania

“Language does indeed offer a key to the gates of China. This book makes people feel like an Old China Hand in a flash!”

— Rudi Messner, Partner/Director, Zotter Shanghai

“This book should be required reading for every foreigner before getting on the plane to China.”

— Miao Jun, former HR Director,
Asia-Pacific, Milliken Inc.

*“Complexity is your enemy.
Any fool can make something complicated.
It is hard to make something simple.”*

— Richard Branson

*“To attain knowledge, add things every day.
To attain wisdom, remove things every day.”*

— Laozi (Lao-Tzu)

*“Learning is the only thing that the mind
never exhausts, never fears, and never regrets.”*

— Leonardo da Vinci

Why China Simplified?

The journey began with a series of questions we couldn't answer: Why do so many people seem to know so little about China? What is it about China that intrigues us, and captures our imaginations? And, with all that's been written and said about it, why is China still so misperceived and misunderstood? This was the genesis of the China Simplified project.

China Simplified explores and demystifies the country and its people for the rest of the world. By shifting our collective attention beyond the 1% (hot-button issues in the mass media) to the other 99% (relevant conversations about history, language, business, and more), we hope to raise cultural awareness and increase mutual understanding.

Be Careful What You Wish For

I didn't arrive in China speaking advanced Chinese. Far from it: I came here with zero, zilch, nada.

My dream-in-progress was to learn Portuguese and Spanish in South America, but I was interrupted by an unexpected detour to East Asia. On that trip, I made the spontaneous decision to sell everything and move to China. That was 25 years ago.

Chinese characters intrigued me from the moment I immersed in the culture. I headed to the local bookstore and bought a two-inch thick "portable" paper dictionary with characters so tiny that even an ant would need glasses to read them. I sensed this was going to be a long, hard slog.

One of my early Chinese language classroom experiences in Shanghai was with two Japanese students who could read most Chinese written characters, yet spoke nearly incomprehensible Chinese. I remember thinking: if two of China's smarter neighbors are struggling to *speak* a language they can already *read*, how could I, a neophyte Westerner, ever expect to speak decent Mandarin?

Then something miraculous happened. I gave up. I stopped trying. I surrendered my fight against the language and committed myself, every time I studied, to find something entertaining, unexpected or intriguing in the universe of Mandarin. In short, I started having fun. That little change of focus made all the difference in the world.

"You don't learn a language, you get used to it.

You don't get good at a language, you get used to it.

You're not bad at a language, you're just not used to it."

— Khatzumoto

Unless you aspire to make your living as a translator or in professional broadcast, attempting to learn to speak, read, and write perfect Chinese from scratch as an adult is a venture in futility. Most people quit, which is sad because buried somewhere in all that frustration is the spark of genuine interest. And that, my dear readers, is what this book is all about: sharing my many personal disasters (and a few triumphs) to help make the Chinese language and culture more accessible to a wider audience.

Stop Laughing, This is Serious

Five years ago, I told my Mandarin teacher, Katie Lu, that I wanted to write a book with her. She nearly fell off her chair.

As a language professional, Katie overflows with talent and enthusiasm for her students, and, well...let's just say I wasn't on her short list for most likely to succeed.

I explained that many of my overseas friends are curious about China, yet still perceive the culture as impenetrable and the people as inscrutable. My plan was for us to collaborate on a fast-read book full of lighthearted stories, that is, to use the language as a window into the culture.

Much later, after she read the first draft, Katie told me something that made all the work worthwhile. She said, "I never knew my language was so beautiful."

*"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those
who cannot read and write, but those who cannot
learn, unlearn, and relearn."*

— Alvin Toffler

The actress Helen Hayes once said, "The expert in anything was once a beginner." So my best advice for language students at any level is: let go of your fear and persevere, and have some fun along the way!

The future of our world is interconnected with that of the people of China. Wouldn't it be great if we could all communicate a little better with one another?

Stewart Lee Beck

Shanghai, September 2019

Foreword

My first real job in China, 11 years ago, was as academic director and host of a language-learning podcast called ChinesePod. Each podcast contained a short, practical Chinese dialog that helped learners communicate information crucial to daily life in China. But simply covering the vocabulary and grammar was never enough; what gave ChinesePod its charm was the way we delved into the culture behind the language, through the lens of our own individual experiences. Although we saw ourselves as language teachers, I came to discover that some of our listeners, far from being on the fast track to fluency, were listening precisely for the cultural insights. For them, it wasn't about building a massive vocabulary or achieving one hundred percent comprehension; it was about the direct human connection made possible through the language.

China Simplified: Language Empowerment is all about the experience: enabling you, the reader, at any skill level, to get more benefit and pleasure from speaking Chinese. This book is not a textbook or a language course, however. Authors Stewart and Katie impart plenty of encouragement, spinning story after story about the many pitfalls of learning Mandarin, and urge you to forego the paralysis by analysis which holds back many students.

*“The authors are the grinning pilots who take you
up in a plane for a good look at the lay of the land,
and then ask you to jump!”*

— John Pasden

For many future language students, this book will mark the beginning of a lifelong adventure into the rich terrain of the Chinese language (or better said, *family* of languages) which is as unique and varied as the land it embodies. And just as you can't see every part of China on your journey, you can't expect to learn the language through books alone. Mandarin itself offers a stunning array of territory any learner can delve into, even with only a smattering of words and phrases as a starting point. And that's the key, isn't it? To get started somewhere.

No matter whether you're already serious about your Chinese studies, or simply hope to improve your cultural awareness before your next interaction with Chinese friends, *China Simplified: Language Empowerment* will point you in the right direction. It provides just enough knowledge for you to be dangerous, and entertains you the whole way. This is precisely how any good China adventure should begin: with a big smile on your face.

John Pasden
Founder and CEO, AllSet Learning
Shanghai, September 2019

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The Sound of Somebody Falling Down

Why Mandarin is the easiest (and hardest) language
in the world

船到桥头自然直。

Chuán dào qiáotóu zìrán zhí.

The boat will straighten before it hits the bridge.

