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Why Study Chinese?

为什么学习中文与中国文化？

What you might already know

1. China is one of the world's oldest and richest continuous cultures, over 5000 years old.
2. China is the most populous nation in the world, with 1.28 billion people.
3. One fifth of the planet speaks Chinese. Mandarin Chinese is the mother tongue of over 873 million people, making it the most widely spoken first language in the world.
4. In addition to the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, Mandarin Chinese is also spoken in the important and influential Chinese communities of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, and Mongolia.
5. China is the second largest economy in the world.
6. China is one of largest trading partners of the United States.
7. Many US companies do business in China and have long-term investments there.

Things to consider

The study of the Chinese language opens the way to different important fields such as Chinese politics, economy, history or archaeology. But to study Chinese finally means to study a culture, a people. At the heart of Chinese civilization is its rich heritage of novels, short stories, poetry, drama, and, more recently, film. They reflect the values, the struggles, the sensibility, the joys and the sorrows of this great people and often offer insights even into the most intimate feelings of people in the past or into high-level Beijing politics at the present that cannot be found anywhere else. These works help you understand what is behind the language, what makes it powerful, and how it actually functions in Chinese society. To be at ease and effective in a Chinese environment learning the language is half the battle, but knowing about the culture behind the language is the other.

Some surprising facts

Chinese has a relatively uncomplicated grammar. Unlike French, German or English, Chinese has no verb conjugation (no need to memorize verb tenses!) and no noun declension (e.g., gender and number distinctions). For example, while

someone learning English has to learn different verb forms like “see/saw/seen,” all you need to do in Chinese is just to remember one word: *kan*. While in English you have to distinguish between “cat” and “cats,” in Chinese there is only one form: *mao*. (Chinese conveys these distinctions of tense and number in other ways, of course.)

The basic word order of Chinese is subject — verb — object, exactly as in English. A large number of the key terms of Mandarin Chinese (such as the terms for state, health, science, party, inflation, and even literature) have been formed as translations of English concepts. You are entering a different culture, but the content of many of the modern key concepts is familiar.

Remember these two facts:

1. Currently Mandarin Chinese is spoken by over 1 billion people around the world, about one fifth of the global population;
2. Each year more and more students around the world whose mother tongue is not Mandarin are studying it with enthusiasm and success. *If they all can learn it, so can you!*

The study of Chinese literature and culture will help you bridge the cultural gap, better understand your Chinese counterparts, and create a platform of knowledge and understanding with them that is crucial for effective communication.

Chinese is important for your career!

1. International businesses prefer to hire people who speak more than one language. China has become a huge market, and business leaders are looking for people who can speak Chinese and operate successfully in a Chinese cultural context.
2. Knowing Chinese may give you an edge when competing for an important position.
3. China will play a major role in world affairs in the future. As China now has opened up to the West, there are opportunities for employment in all areas.
4. China is a wonderful country in which to teach English while developing your language and cultural skills. The experience is great, and it's something you will never forget.
5. [Teach in China](#) A program offered through the Council on International Education Exchange.
6. [China Employment Center](#) at China Online.
7. [Greater China Job Listings](#) from Wang & Li Asia Resources.
8. [Job Information Journal: China](#) ESL Cafe's journal of various job experiences in China, including places you should avoid when looking for employment.