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MANDARIN CHINESE III



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MANDARIN III

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Unit 1

China's Weather

Because of its vast size, China's weather varies a great deal from north to south, east to west. From the sub-arctic in the northeast to the subtropical in parts of Yunnan province in the southwest, China covers several climate zones. The three northeastern provinces — Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning — are bitterly cold in the winter, with temperatures often dipping to minus forty degrees Fahrenheit. The nation's capital, Beijing, receives a fair amount of snow, although heavy storms and blizzards are rare. To escape the winter weather, tourists flock to the warm, sandy beaches of Hainan Island in the South China Sea. Xishuangbanna in Yunnan is another popular winter destination for those who wish to escape the cold. Summer is the rainiest season in China. From mid-June to mid-July much of the lower Yangtze River valley is shrouded in rain. Sea resorts like Qingdao and Beidaihe in the north, and mountainous regions like Putuoshan and Lushan in the south, provide relief from the stifling heat and humidity.

Spring and autumn are probably the best times to visit China: throughout much of the country, the skies are clear, with daytime temperatures hovering between sixty and eighty degrees Fahrenheit. However, Beijing, which used to be famous for its clear, azure-blue, autumnal skies, now suffers from smog and air pollution. In addition, every spring the winds from the Gobi desert bring heavy sandstorms

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Unit 1 (*continued*)

from the north. Although the government has mounted a massive campaign to reforest northern and north-western China, Beijing is still a dustbowl from March to May. It is not unusual to see women cover their heads and faces with silk scarves for protection.

Types of Tea

Tea is the most popular non-alcoholic beverage in China. There are four types: green tea, black tea, oolong tea, and the very rare white tea. The differences among the first three lie not in the type of plant, but in the way the leaves are processed.

Green tea is the most common. It is produced from freshly picked unfermented tea leaves, which are first steamed, then dried over a charcoal fire. The most famous green tea in China is known as Dragon Well and is grown on the hillsides of Hangzhou.

Black tea — which the Chinese call “red tea” — is made from fermented tea leaves, which explains its darker color. The leaves are first allowed to wither, or dry, in bamboo trays. Next they are rolled and sifted. This process bruises the leaves, thus encouraging fermentation. With oxidation, the leaves turn even darker in color and acquire a recognizable tea odor. When the leaves have fermented to the desired level, they are roasted to stop fermentation and to destroy bacteria.

Unit 1 (*continued*)

Oolong tea is partially fermented, making it halfway between black and green tea in flavor. Once the edges of the leaves turn brown, the fermentation process is stopped by roasting the leaves in a pan.

White tea is made from the buds of a very rare type of tea plant. The tea, which is harvested for only a few days a year, is very subtle in flavor.

In addition to these four kinds of tea, there are multiple variations, including scented teas. To produce these, dried flowers are added to green and oolong teas. The most popular of the scented teas is jasmine.

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Unit 2

Careers for the Younger Generation

As China's economy develops, an increasing number of career options is open to the country's young and ambitious. Expanded options, however, often come at the cost of decreased job security. Gone are the days when a job with a state-owned company was considered an "iron rice-bowl," that is, a meal ticket for life. More and more state-owned companies are struggling to survive in the new market economy, and private enterprise is growing. Today, college graduates dream of pursuing white-collar (*bai ling*) work in banking, foreign or joint-venture enterprises, and high-tech industries. These young people represent an emerging middle class in Chinese society.

IT Industries in China

In recent years many high-tech firms have sprung up in China, especially in Beijing, Shenzhen (which lies across the border from Hong Kong), and the region around Shanghai. In Beijing, most of China's burgeoning software companies are concentrated in a small area called *zhong guan cun*. Its prominence derives from the fact that Beijing is home to many of the country's most prestigious universities and colleges, as well as to government research institutions. This vast pool of talents is the biggest asset of *zhong guan cun*. The success of Shenzhen is due

Unit 2 *(continued)*

to the city's status as a special economic zone with flexible policies (see Unit 17) and to its proximity to Hong Kong, while the greater Shanghai metropolitan area in recent years has begun to attract many chip-makers and notebook manufacturers from Taiwan.

Unit 3

Harbin

Harbin is the capital of China's northernmost province, Heilongjiang. The city derives its name from the Manchu word for "honor" or "fame." Harbin's geography and history lend it a distinctly Russian flavor. In the late nineteenth century, the Russians built a railway line from Vladivostok to Harbin. Several decades later, after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the city saw an influx of refugees from Siberia. The Russian imprint is still visible in much of the city's architecture. Today, there is flourishing trade and cross-border tourism between Harbin and the Russian far eastern region.

Harbin's main tourist attraction is its Ice Lantern Festival. This takes place every winter from January 5 to February 15. Whimsical ice sculptures are displayed in the main park and illuminated at night.

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Unit 3 (*continued*)

Pu tong hua hen nan, or Chinese Adjectives

Chinese adjectives are inherently contrastive. For this reason, adjectives are not used on their own in Chinese when no contrast is intended. To cancel out the contrast, a qualifier such as *hen* (“very”) is added to the adjective: *Pu tong hua hen nan* (“Chinese is very difficult”) as opposed to simply, *Pu tong hua nan*. If you say *Pu tong hua nan*, you are actually saying that Mandarin is difficult *compared to some other language*, whether or not that language is mentioned. The comparison or contrast is implicit. To make a blanket statement with no comparison implied, you must add “very” or a similar qualifier, such as “extraordinarily,” “a little,” and so on. This rule of thumb applies not only to *nan*, but to most other adjectives as well — for example, *Pu tong hua hen rong yi* (“Chinese is very easy”).

Unit 4

Dialects

China is a country of many dialects. There are seven major groups: Mandarin, Wu, Xiang, Gan, Kejia or Hakka, Min, and Yue (Cantonese). The main differences among them are in pronunciation and vocabulary, although there are differences in syntax as well.

The most important and widespread of these dialects is Mandarin, which is the standard spoken language in China. Approximately 70 percent of the population speaks Mandarin. It is based on the dialect spoken by the residents of Beijing, China's capital, since the thirteenth century. Some of the so-called "dialects" — some linguists classify them as different languages — are mutually unintelligible. For example, someone from the province of Guangdong in the deep south will not understand his compatriots from the north, unless they both resort to Mandarin. It is known as "Mandarin" in English because it was the *lingua franca* among scholar-officials, or Mandarins, in pre-modern China.

Unlike Mandarin, or *pu tong hua*, the term *zhong wen* in its narrow sense refers to the written Chinese language used by about 95 percent of the population in China. It should be noted that *zhong wen* is the *written* form of Chinese; the many dialects, including Mandarin, represent a variety of *spoken* forms. (Colloquially, *zhong wen* can also refer to

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Unit 4 (*continued*)

spoken Chinese, but *wen* properly means “written language.”) Because *zhong wen* is the standard written language, it is possible for people from all over the country to communicate with one another in writing. However, with the increasing spread of education and mass media, particularly film and TV, more and more people throughout China also understand and speak Mandarin.

Purpose or Motion: *shang da xue* vs. *qu da xue*

In Unit Four, you learned “*wo shang da xue*,” meaning, “I’m a college student,” or “I go to college.” Notice that you used *shang*, rather than *qu*. In colloquial Chinese *shang* often has the meaning “to go.” The difference between *shang* and *qu*, which is the standard equivalent of “to go,” is that *shang* connotes the activity associated with a specific location rather than the simple act of going there. Therefore, *shang da xue* means to *study* at the university, whereas *qu da xue* merely suggests *movement* towards the university. The purpose of the action is left unspecified. One could go to the university (*qu da xue*) to visit a friend, for instance. For the same reason, *shang fan dian* means “to eat at a restaurant” rather than simply “to go to a restaurant.”

Unit 5

Classifiers, or “Measure Words”

A distinguishing feature of modern Chinese is its use of classifiers, also known as “measure words.” In classical Chinese they were largely absent. In modern Chinese, however, when describing quantity, you need not only the appropriate nouns and numerals, but also the corresponding classifiers. For example, to say “a book,” you say *yi ben shu*; “two people” is *liang ge ren*. The choice of measure word is usually determined by the nature of the item in question.

You’ve encountered the measure word *ge* during this course. This is perhaps the most versatile classifier. It can be used as a somewhat generic measure word with a wide variety of countable nouns, especially in colloquial Chinese; in formal Chinese, however, more specific classifiers are preferred. For instance, when speaking informally, you could say, *yi ge ren* (“a person” or “one person”), *yi ge fan dian* (“a restaurant”), *yi ge yin hang* (“a bank”). Most measure words, however, are much more restrictive and can be used only with specific nouns or categories of nouns.

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Unit 5 (continued)

Below are some common measure words. Their tones are indicated as follows:

- [1] = high level tone
- [2] = rising tone
- [3] = falling-rising tone
- [4] = falling tone

- *wei* [4]: This measure word is used to refer to people. It's more polite than *ge*. Therefore, to show respect to a friend, you say, *yi wei peng you* rather than *yi ge peng you*. The original meaning of the word *wei* is “seat” — by implication, it means the person occupying the seat of honor.
- *zhang* [1] is used to refer to objects with wide flat surfaces, such as sofas, desks, or beds: *yi zhang sha fa* (“a sofa”), *liang zhang zhuo zi* (“two desks”), *san zhang chuang* (“three beds”). The original meaning of the word is “to stretch.”
- *ba* [3] refers to objects that you can get a grip on, for instance, chairs: *liang ba yi zi* (“two chairs”). Its original meaning is “handle.”
- *tou* [2] applies to things that have heads, like animals: *yi tou niu* (“an ox,” “a bull,” or “a cow”) or *yi tou zhu* (“a pig”).
- *ben* [3] is used primarily to refer to books: *wu ben shu* (“five books”).

Unit 5 (*continued*)

- *jia* [1]: The original meaning of the word is (“home”). As a measure word, it is used with the names for institutions and establishments closely associated with the physical structures that house them, such as banks, restaurants, or libraries.

Chinese has well over one hundred fifty measure words. Of these, at least a hundred are relatively common, and dozens are used in daily conversation.

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Unit 6

bai jiu

Bai jiu is the generic name for many different types of distilled spirits. They are called *bai jiu*, or “white liquor,” because they are colorless. Most are made from grains — often sorghum, a type of millet. The grains are steamed and yeast is added, to aid in the fermentation process.

Most of the liquor consumed by the Chinese is made in the Sichuan province. The most famous *bai jiu* from Sichuan is known as *wu liang ye*, meaning “five grain liquid” or “five grain nectar.” As its name suggests, it is made from five varieties of grains: “regular” rice, glutinous rice, wheat, sorghum, and corn. It is slightly sweet and highly fragrant.

Shanxi province, near Beijing, is famous for its *fen jiu*, which is made from local sorghum. Yeast made from wheat and peas is added, and the sorghum is steamed and buried underground for twenty-one days to allow fermentation. More yeast is then added, and the mixture is fermented and distilled again. After blending, the liquor is ready to bottle.

Another well-known variety of *bai jiu* is called *er guo tou*. It’s particularly popular with the working class in northern China. The most famous of all the white liquors is *mao tai*, which is named after the town in Guizhou Province where it is produced.

Unit 6 (*continued*)

Peking Duck

Perhaps the most famous dish associated with the capital of China, Peking duck is prepared in several steps, all of which ensure its unique flavor. The duck is raised on farms around Beijing (formerly called “Peking”) on a diet of grain and soybean paste. The mature fattened duck is slaughtered, then lacquered with molasses; air is pumped under the skin to separate it from the carcass, after which the duck is boiled, dried, and finally roasted over a fruitwood fire.

Quan ju de Restaurant in Beijing, which dates back to 1864, is *the* place to try this delectable dish. The entire feast consists of two main stages. First the boneless meat and skin are served with a plum sauce, scallions, and crepes. Then comes the duck soup, made from the bones and other parts of the duck. Although the most authentic version can be had only at *quan ju de*, Peking duck is widely available throughout Beijing.

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Unit 7

Hotels

There is a wide range of tourist accommodations in China, all the way from budget guesthouses to luxurious five-star hotels. In most big cities, prices are comparable to those in Europe and North America. Only in the interior is it possible to find cheaper rates, although these, too, are rising. The high-end market is dominated by familiar international chains such as Hilton, Sheraton, Ritz-Carlton, and Four Seasons. For the frugally-minded, it's possible to find university dormitories and government-run guesthouses. However, many, although not all, are off-limits to international travelers. Western-style youth hostels and bed-and-breakfasts are still rare.

For travelers in the know, it is sometimes possible to stay at one of the five-star hotels while avoiding the exorbitant rate. Some of them have discounts available for the asking, but you must inquire, as these discounts are neither advertised nor offered.

Unit 7 (*continued*)

Restaurants

As the Chinese standard of living continues to rise, dining out is becoming increasingly common. Many, if not all, of the popular restaurants in the big cities are privately owned. These range from mom-and-pop holes-in-the-wall to vast, opulently-decked-out multi-story gastronomical emporia. In fact, size seems in direct proportion to flash and price. Many of the glitzy restaurants feature live orchestras and private banquet rooms. Patrons are invited to inspect live seafood in water tanks on the first floor while waitresses, most of whom come from the provinces, take the orders.

There is a vast array of food to be had, from regional cuisine to international fare. In Beijing and Shanghai, virtually all types of Chinese and foreign food can be found, although Chinese dishes are still the most popular. Two trends, regionalism and cosmopolitanism, are emerging in the restaurant scene. Authentic regional cuisine is on the rise, but so is fusion food. Foie gras and sashimi have both made their way onto some of the fancier restaurant menus.

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Unit 8

Hainan and Sanya

Hainan is a large tropical island off the coast of southern China. Its yearly average temperature is seventy-eight degrees Fahrenheit. From March to November the island is shrouded in heat and humidity. Hainan is famous for its tropical plants and crops: coconuts, pepper, coffee, and rubber, among others. Many of the farms on Hainan were founded by ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia, the descendants of emigrants who resettled in their ancestral homeland after the waves of anti-Chinese feeling in Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1960s. Since there is little heavy industry, pollution is minimal. Until 1988 Hainan was part of Guangdong Province. The island was elevated to provincial status when the Chinese government decided to open it up to foreign investors. Its capital city is Haikou, on the northern coastline. During peak season, Hainan is a favored site for tourists.

The most popular tourist destination, however, is Sanya in the south. Blessed with miles of excellent beaches, it's one of the most well-known winter resorts in China.

Unit 9

“Hotel” - *jiu dian* vs. *lü guan*

As you know, Chinese has multiple dialects, which can result in several names for the same thing. Here, you learned a second word for “hotel” — *lü guan* rather than *jiu dian*. *Lü guan* is more common in the north, *jiu dian* in the south. Their connotations may differ as well.

In Mandarin *lü guan* is the generic word for “hotel.” This term covers the whole range of tourist accommodations from the simplest inn to the glitziest five-star hotel.

Jiu dian, on the other hand, almost always refers to big, fancy establishments. In addition, it generally occurs as part of a hotel name. *Jiu dian* literally means “wine shop”; it originally designated a traditional Chinese-style pub where rice wine or other kinds of alcohol and simple food are served, and customers sit on long narrow benches around rectangular tables. Then, in the 1980s, developers from Hong Kong built the first modern international tourist hotels in China. Since these hotels were located in the south, the term *jiu dian* was often applied to them. For this reason, *jiu dian* sounds vaguely Cantonese to Mandarin speakers, although today they may use it as well, to refer to a top-quality hotel.

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Unit 10

Chang'an Avenue and Tian'anmen Square

Chang'an Avenue is Beijing's answer to the Champs Elysées. It is one of the main thoroughfares in Beijing. Government offices, monuments, and museums sit side-by-side along this multi-lane artery. The retail epicenter Wangfujing is a stone's throw away. At the heart of Chang'an Avenue is the immense windswept Tian'anmen Square. Both the avenue and the square were created by Mao Zedong in the 1950s. The square is named after the Tian'anmen Gate in the Forbidden City (see Unit 22), from which Chairman Mao proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Tian'anmen Square is fraught with economic and political significance, as many momentous events in modern Chinese history took place there and in the surrounding area.

Unit 11

Embassies

China has diplomatic relations with more than one hundred countries. Most foreign embassies in Beijing are concentrated in two areas: Jianguomenwai and Sanlitun, east and northeast of the Forbidden City, respectively. It is not unusual to see long lines of Chinese outside the tightly-guarded compounds, waiting for visas to study or work abroad.

Sanlitun is also home to Beijing's well-known "bar street" — or rather "streets," as there is now a "Sanlitun North Street" and a "Sanlitun South Street," both of which are highly popular among tourists. Scores of bars and nightclubs line the sides of these narrow dusty roads. Because of their proximity to the diplomatic quarters, the variously-themed bars and clubs cater to a largely foreign clientele.

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Unit 12

Wangfujing Avenue

Along with Chang'an Avenue, Wangfujing is one of the most famous street addresses not only in Beijing, but all over China. Most of the older department stores, traditional shops, boutiques, and bookstores can be found on this block. After a recent makeover, however, the street is now almost unrecognizable to those who visited it even a few years ago. Locals and tourists throng the area, especially on weekends. Part of Wangfujing has been closed to vehicular traffic. Life-size sculptures depicting old Beijing urban life dot the pedestrian zone. While it's no longer the most prestigious or fashionable shopping area in the city, it's still the most famous.

Unit 13

Beihai Park

Lying northwest of the Forbidden City, Beihai Park is the former playground of the Manchu emperors. Artificial hills, picturesque pavilions, and colorful temples compose the landscape. Half of the park is a man-made lake. The most prominent landmark of the park is the bulbous White Pagoda. Built in a Tibetan architectural style, it commemorates a visit by the Dalai Lama. Another well-known feature of the park is the Painted Gallery. Idyllic sceneries are depicted on the beams of the winding covered walkway. Equally well known is the Nine Dragon Screen, whose sixteen by eighty-eight foot wall is made of colored glazed tiles. Beihai Park is also famous for its restaurant, which serves the favorite recipes of the Manchu emperors and empresses. Prices, as one can imagine, are high.

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Unit 14

The Particles *guo* and *le*

Note the following sentence: *Wo shang ge xing qi lai guo zhe jia fan dian.* (“I came to this restaurant last week.”) In this statement you used *guo* instead of *le* because you were explaining why you know the food is good at the restaurant — it’s because you’ve tried it. You were at the restaurant last week. The word *guo* suggests the *experience* of having done something. In other words, with *guo* the emphasis is on the present implication of a past action rather than on its completion. On the other hand, if you say: *Wo shang ge xing qi lai le zhe jia fan dian,* the focus is on the *completion* of the action. Perhaps it was something you were supposed to do, and you did it. You completed the task.

Here’s another example: You know that Sam has been to Beijing, so you think he should know what the weather is like there. You could then say, *Sam, ni qu guo bei jing. Bei jing de tian qi zen me yang?* (“Sam, you have been to Beijing. How is Beijing’s weather?”) The particle *le* would be incorrect here. *Le* would merely indicate that Sam has made the trip; it would not indicate that he had the experience of being there. However, if Sam is a traveling salesman and was supposed to stop in Beijing and you’d simply like to know whether he’s done that, then you would ask, *Sam, ni qu bei jing le ma?* (“Sam, did you go to Beijing?”)

Unit 15

More on *le*

For an English speaker, it may take some getting used to the fact that Chinese has no tenses. Many grammatical features that English speakers take for granted, such as tenses (past, present, future), number (singular or plural), and articles (“the,” “a,” “an,”), do not apply to Chinese. Instead, Chinese has its own unique set of grammatical characteristics. One is the aspect marker *le*.

Le is easily confused with the equivalent of the English past tense. Rather, *le* signifies the completion of an action *regardless of time*. In other words, it is possible to use *le* to refer to the future completion of an action — for example, *ming tian wo kan le dianying qu kan wo de pengyou* (“Tomorrow after I see the film — literally, after I *complete* seeing the film — I’m going to see my friend.”)

By the same token, one does not automatically use *le* when describing past actions. Native speakers of Chinese distinguish between background and foreground information. *Le* is used for foreground, but not for background. In conveying background information, the speaker is merely setting the scene of a past event, and *le* is omitted. In a description of foreground information, *le* is needed. For example, consider the pair of Chinese sentences and their English equivalents on the following page:

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Unit 15 (*continued*)

Zuo tian wan shang wo men qu fan dian chi fan.
“Last night we went to a restaurant to eat.”

*Fan dian li ren hen duo, suo yi wo men deng le
hen jiu.*
“There were many people in the restaurant, so
we waited a long time.”

Notice the absence of *le* in the first Chinese sentence (“Last night we went to a restaurant to eat”) and the presence of *le* in the second (“... we waited a long time”). “We waited a long time” is the focus of the narration, or the foreground information. That is why the speaker uses *le*. Everything prior to that clause is the background information. The act of going to a restaurant is *not* the emphasis of the speaker’s narration. Therefore the particle *le* is omitted.

Unit 16

Gan bei!

In China as elsewhere, large quantities of alcohol are sometimes consumed on various festive occasions. The level of formality and the elaborateness of the toasts depend on the status and the number of the guests. Generally, the more elevated the guests' status, or the greater their number, the more formal and elaborate the toasts will be. The most common toast at Chinese banquets is probably *Gan bei!* or, "Bottoms up!" (literally, "Make the cups dry"). Highly formulaic and literary Chinese is often used to add dignity to the occasions. Speeches frequently end with an exhortation to raise the cup and down the drink, which is often *mao tai*, one of the "white liquors." Cognac or other kinds of foreign liquor are also popular.

Omission of Pronouns

The Chinese language is highly dependent on context. One example of this characteristic is the omission of pronouns. English-speakers may occasionally omit pronouns when speaking very informally. For example, they may ask, "Need any help?" or, "Want some dessert?" However, this is much more common in Chinese. In Chinese, pronouns can usually be omitted as long as there is no possibility of confusion. For example, if someone asks you in Chinese where you are going, you can leave out the pronoun "I" in your answer without

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Unit 16 (*continued*)

causing any misunderstanding. Likewise, if you are clearly addressing just one person, you can ask, “Have a fever?” without any ambiguity as to whom is meant.

Pronouns are also omitted for social reasons. When addressing one’s superior, it is a good idea to use his or her title rather than the pronoun *ni* (“you”). The more formal *nin*, however, is perfectly respectful and can be used in place of the title.

Unit 17

Special Economic Zones and Industrial Parks

One of the most important engines driving the Chinese economy in the last twenty years has been the formation of so-called “special economic zones” along China’s coast. Such zones were given tax breaks and other preferential treatment to enable them to attract investment from overseas. The infusion of capital and technology, along with the abundant supply of cheap labor, became a foolproof recipe for success. The most spectacular example is Shenzhen, located between Mainland China and Hong Kong. Once a sleepy border crossing, it was transformed into a thriving metropolis almost overnight. Thanks to many such zones, today Chinese products can be found on department store shelves all over the world.

Two decades ago, when the country was still trying to shake off the communist orthodoxy of the planned economy, the special economic zones were an important, albeit sometimes controversial, testing ground for an alternative economic system. Essentially, they were experiments in a free-market economy. Now, many of the special economic zones are seeking to upgrade from manufacturing to high tech business. Gleaming office buildings and immaculate industrial parks, many built with Taiwanese capital, stand as a symbol of China’s ever increasing economic importance.

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Unit 18

Women in Business

Since it was founded in 1949, the People's Republic of China has officially embraced gender equality. Practices such as prostitution and concubinage were outlawed, and the new constitution provided for equal rights for women in all areas of life. Chairman Mao famously said, "Times have changed. Men and women are equal. Women can accomplish whatever men can," and even more famously, "Women hold up half the sky." Women were encouraged to work outside the home. As a result, women can be found in all walks of life. In certain professions, for instance medicine, there are equal numbers of women and men. In others, such as elementary and secondary education, women generally outnumber men.

One exception is the business world. While some successful, high-profile businesswomen can be found, most women still occupy entry-level or subsidiary positions. Women, mostly young and attractive, requisite qualities as described in want ads, fill the ranks of secretaries and receptionists. The business culture in China is still very much male dominated.

Unit 19

Suzhou Revisited

Along with Hangzhou, which lies at the end of China's Grand Canal, Suzhou is one of the most popular tourist cities in China. Its many Buddhist and Daoist temples, historic sites, traditional scholar-gardens, and canals attract busloads of tourists every day. Both Hangzhou and Suzhou are located in China's prosperous Yangtze River delta, which is known as China's "land of fish and rice." The natural abundance and material affluence of the two cities gave rise to the old Chinese saying, "[there's] heaven on high and Suzhou and Hangzhou on earth."

Suzhou is especially renowned for its many traditional gardens. Not as grand as the vast imperial parks in Beijing, the small gardens in Suzhou were the retreats of the city's scholar-officials during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Much thought went into the design of these gardens, which often featured pavilions, ponds, and stone bridges. Fantastically eroded stones for rock gardens were harvested from the bottom of nearby Lake Tai. Daoist philosophy, Chinese landscape painting, and Chinese poetry were major influences on the aesthetics of the traditional scholar-garden. Unlike in western gardens, plantings did not play a predominant role in the design. Many of Suzhou's historic gardens have survived to the present.

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Unit 20

Interpreters

As more and more international companies invest in China, the demand for interpreters is growing accordingly. Most interpreters in China are graduates of foreign-language departments at Chinese colleges and universities. The curriculum for foreign-language majors can be quite rigorous, with heavy emphasis on grammar and theoretical knowledge of the target languages. Twenty years ago many students went through their course of study without having ever met a single native speaker. This situation has improved considerably during the past two decades. Today, many so-called “foreign experts” are hired to teach foreign languages, and Chinese students have more opportunities to study abroad.

Foreign-language programs have also become quite common on Chinese television. These changes have resulted in a higher level of competence among Chinese interpreters. In addition to colleges and universities, many “evening schools” — as continuing education is called in China — offer foreign-language classes. Their graduates can also be found among the ranks of interpreters. Besides English and Japanese, interpreters of Korean are also in great demand, especially in Shandong Peninsula and Jilin Province, a reflection of the growing presence of Korean businesses in China.

Unit 21

Flower Appreciation

Every year, as various kinds of flowers come into bloom, people in China go on excursions to admire them. The suburbs of Nanjing and Suzhou are especially famous for their plum blossoms, which blanket the surrounding hills each spring. Farther to the north, Luoyang attracts many tourists when the peonies are in bloom in April. In the fall, parks put on chrysanthemum shows. The flowers are trained or arranged to form spectacular topiaries and abstract patterns. Plum blossoms, peonies, and chrysanthemums are popular in China partly because of the qualities associated with them. Plum blossoms symbolize nobility and purity; showy peonies, prosperity; and hardy chrysanthemums are particularly respected for their endurance.

In traditional China, flowers also inspired many poets and painters. The scholar literati, of course, did not need to venture far to appreciate flowers. Their carefully laid-out gardens provided the ideal setting for them to get together, drink rice wine, and compose poetry. These occasions often contained an element of competition, as difficult or obscure rhymes were chosen and friends attempted to outdo one another in poetic virtuosity. If a friend was absent, the poems would be sent to him. Many court painters specialized in the “flower and bird” genre, which, unlike literati painting, was known for its attention to realistic detail.

Mandarin III

Unit 22

The Palace Museum in Beijing

Most museums in China derive their core collections from archeological finds. One of the notable exceptions is the Palace Museum in Beijing. The Palace Museum is housed in the vast Forbidden City, home and administrative center of the Ming and Qing emperors for well over five hundred years. During this time (1368-1911), it was occupied by not only the emperors and their families, but hundreds of court ladies and palace eunuchs. It was, however, forbidden to the common people; even the highest civil and military leaders could not enter without good reason. All four sides were protected by a moat and high walls, almost 33 feet high, that slant inward from the base, making them extremely difficult to climb. The entire complex covers 182 acres and contains 9,999 buildings, palaces, halls, and courtyards. After China's last emperor abdicated from the throne and vacated the palace in the early 1900s, the Forbidden City became a museum and was opened to the public.

Today, both the architectural ensemble and the former imperial collection of art are crowd-pleasers. The art works, which consist of bronzes, paintings, ceramics, and decorative objects, reflect the tastes of China's former rulers. UNESCO has designated the entire complex a World Heritage Site.

Unit 22 *(continued)*

In addition to the better-known original in Beijing, Taipei also has a National Palace Museum. This curious coexistence and rivalry is a product of China's turbulent modern history. On the eve of its retreat to Taiwan, the Nationalist government removed thousands of crates of relics belonging to the Palace Museum in Beijing to the outskirts of Taipei. A complex of pale yellow buildings in traditional Chinese style was built, and the National Palace Museum opened in 1965. Today the museum boasts of having a collection superior to its rival in Beijing.

Mandarin III

Unit 23

Luoyang

Luoyang, in Henan province, is one of the most ancient cities in China. It was the capital of thirteen dynasties. During Buddhism's heyday, Luoyang was also home to thirteen hundred Buddhist temples. Today, however, the city's past glory lingers mainly in historical records. Although there are some sites to be seen within the city limits, tourists invariably flock to the Longmen Caves on the outskirts of the city. There, more than one hundred thousand Buddhist images and statues were carved into the cliff overlooking the Yi River. Most of the Buddhist art works in the Longmen Caves date from the fifth through ninth centuries.

Luoyang is also famous throughout China for its peonies. The city has a long history of growing these flowers, and their sheer variety is unrivaled throughout the world. Every year from April 15 to April 25, the city holds a peony festival.

Unit 24

Gift-Giving / Hospitality

Gift-giving in China is traditionally associated with specific festivals or social occasions. For instance, at Chinese New Year it is customary to give small children pocket-money wrapped in red paper embossed with gold characters. During the Mid-Autumn Festival, elaborately packaged moon-cakes are exchanged among friends and relatives. To celebrate the birthday of an elderly person, well-wishers traditionally give noodles, as their long stringy shape symbolizes longevity. Some items, however, are not appropriate as gifts; clocks, for example, are considered highly unsuitable, because the phrase for “giving the gift of a clock” — *song zhong*, sounds exactly the same as the phrase meaning “attending upon a dying parent or senior family member.”

Chinese people are less inclined to invite casual friends home than Americans, simply because most city-dwellers live in small apartments. They are therefore more likely to socialize in restaurants or other public spaces. In this case, the standard gesture of hospitality is to argue over the check after a meal or before a show. To the more traditionally-minded Chinese, the practice of splitting a check is a foreign concept, although it is gaining acceptance among westernized young people. When Chinese people do invite guests over, a common hostess gift is a basket of fresh fruit.

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Unit 25

Books and Bookstores

If you walk into a bookstore in China, you're likely to see swarms of elementary and high school students with their parents in tow looking for various kinds of study guides, which they hope will help them get into the school of their choice. Indeed, some smaller bookstores seem to carry nothing but reference works aimed at those preparing for the all-important and very competitive high school and college entrance exams. Sometimes an entire floor of a bookstore is devoted to these books. School-age children probably represent the most lucrative demographic group for the Chinese publishing industry.

Other children's books sell very well, too. Harry Potter has an enthusiastic readership among Chinese children. Their parents, however, are another matter. Often they forbid their children to waste their time on "idle" reading materials. It seems likely that even Harry Potter is outsold by the ubiquitous study guides.

Other popular categories of books include computer references and stock investment guides, which are always very prominently displayed. The book trade used to be dominated by the state-owned *xinhua* (New China) group, but in recent years, private bookstores have appeared all over China. They vary greatly in size, quality of service, and range of merchandise.

Unit 26

Classical Music

When people say *gu dian yin yue*, they are usually referring to western classical music. It is considered “high, elegant art,” or *gao ya yi shu* in Chinese. Therefore, it enjoys considerable cachet and popularity among the urban educated classes. Western orchestras can be found in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Beijing and Shanghai each have several orchestras. Shanghai, in fact, boasts of having the oldest western orchestra in East Asia, a legacy of its semi-colonial past. The municipal council in the so-called International Settlement in Shanghai set up this orchestra at the end of the nineteenth century. The first generation of classical musicians in China was trained under the tutelage of western conductors.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), western classical music was labeled “decadent bourgeois art” and was in effect banned. When the Philadelphia Orchestra visited China at the invitation of Chairman Mao’s wife in 1973, it was the first western orchestra to do so. The visit was considered big news, and both Chinese and American politicians dubbed the orchestra the “symphony ambassador.” After the Cultural Revolution, western classical music made a comeback and is now more popular than ever. The Chinese government actively promotes it and is especially proud of the fact that young Chinese musicians routinely win prizes at international competitions.

Mandarin III

Unit 27

The Chinese Educational System

Primary education in China lasts six years, junior and senior high another six. In addition to regular school hours, additional sessions are held in the evenings and on weekends. These classes are not for the academically challenged, everyone takes them. A Chinese student's schedule, therefore, can be quite grueling. Newspaper editorials routinely call for schools to lessen the burden on students, but these appeals have little effect. Parents and students may complain about the workload, but that does not stop them from hiring tutors and cramming evening classes and extracurricular activities into the schedule.

Primary and secondary education are subsidized by the state, but schools often charge "sponsorship fees," which can be quite high. Higher education is no longer free, either. To help college students and their parents, various scholarships and loans are available. A fairly recent development is the rise of private schools. They have sprung up all over China, but particularly along China's prosperous eastern seaboard. Compared with public schools, private schools often enjoy superior facilities and attract better qualified teachers. However, the most prestigious schools are the so-called "key schools," which are all public. Only the most academically gifted need apply. Admission is extremely competitive and is widely viewed as a ticket to future success at the college level and beyond.

Unit 28

Exercising, Chinese-style

If you go to China, the chances are that every morning you'll see armies of people in parks, in schoolyards, or on street corners, doing their daily exercises, usually to the accompaniment of rather loud music. Various types of *tai ji* are particularly popular with older people and women. School-age children, factory workers, and company employees often get a mid-morning exercise break, during which they do calisthenics. Students also perform a set of exercises designed to protect their eyesight; to this end, they massage the various acupuncture pressure points around the eyes for about five to ten minutes. Jogging and weight-training, by contrast, are not nearly as popular or common as they are in America. Aerobics is. Many western-style gyms have sprung up in big cities. Young urban professionals, who are often health-conscious and have the requisite disposable income, flock to these fashionable health clubs.

Despite what a casual visitor to the country may see, obesity, coronary conditions, and diseases such as diabetes are on the rise. Ironically, as the country becomes more prosperous, certain health problems have also become more prevalent. For this reason, diabetes and heart conditions are known as *fu gui bing*, or “diseases of affluence.”

Mandarin III

Unit 29

Tourist Souvenirs

Unless they are “off the beaten track,” travelers to China will find it hard to avoid tourist shops. Antique stores and souvenir stands often overflow into the streets. Increasingly, tourism is becoming an important source of revenue.

The souvenirs available depend on the locales. In Xi’an, for example, it is difficult to miss reproductions of Tang dynasty pottery. The brightly colored earthenware is known as *tang san cai*, or Tang-style tricolored glazed ware. The name *san cai* stems from the predominant glazes of brown, yellow, and green. Camels with bearded Central Asian merchants on their backs are a frequent theme. Hand-embroidered shoes and pouches are also common.

In Suzhou, silk scarves and sandalwood fans are ubiquitous. Suzhou is also famous for its fine embroidery, particularly its *shuang mian xiu*, or “double-embroidery.” A highly skilled artisan can embroider two different designs, one on each side of the fabric, which is usually silk — for instance, a Persian cat on one side, and a Pekingese on the other.

Of course, handicrafts are not the only thing for sale. In Beijing, T-shirts emblazoned with pictures of the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, or other famous sights are offered by the many souvenir peddlers plying their business around the capital.

Unit 30

Saying Good-bye

Bidding someone farewell is an elaborate social ritual in China. A considerable length of time may elapse between the time one says good-bye and the time one actually leaves. The host or hostess's first response is invariably, "Oh, please stay a bit longer." And no host or hostess would be content just seeing guests to the door. In fact, that would be perceived as downright cold and inhospitable. More often than not, the host will insist on accompanying his or her guest to the bus stop or waiting with the guest for a taxi. In fact, most hosts go even further and wait until the guest is out of sight — that is, until the bus or taxi has driven away.

In traditional China, leave-taking for a long separation was even more ceremonious. Often a series of farewell banquets was hosted in the departing friend's honor, and heartfelt poems were exchanged. When the actual day of departure arrived, people would travel a significant distance with the departing friend, until final farewells were exchanged. Classical Chinese poetry abounds in works depicting poignant moments when one's most intimate friends are departing for distant destinations, perhaps never to return. Today, of course, departures are less likely to be final, and communication is much easier; nevertheless, leave-taking is still much more formal than in the West.

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