



# Historical Linguistics of Mandarin Chinese

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# Dialect overview

**Beijing Dialect** - known to be the dialect of prestige and spoken in the urban areas of Beijing. It is the phonological basis for standard Mandarin.

**Wuhan Dialect** - Spoken in Wuhan, also known as Hankou dialect. Still mutually intelligible with Mandarin, but having distinct characters that make it different.

**Shanghai Dialect** - Spoken in Shanghai, and actually has limited intelligibility with Mandarin. It has a lot of distinct qualities that make it very unique.

# Beijing Dialect

- It is slowly dying out because of the migration and increase of non-locals that are coming and through Beijing.
- There are key features about it, specific terms and phrases that are used that are not used by standard Chinese speakers.
  - Sa ya zi - to leave.
  - Cuo huo - to be angry.
- A Key thing about the Beijing dialect, as well as other northern dialects is the 'er' sound that is put at the end of words.
  - Wan'er - play.
  - Deng yi xia'er - wait a moment
    - The Beijing dialect adds this 'er' sound at the end more than Mandarin, which actually takes away the last sound in the word and replaces it making play sound like 'wa'er'



# Wuhan Dialect

- Increased use of second tone, or rising tone, and a decreased use of the fourth tone, or the falling tone.
- Not only is this true, but the tones are switched around from Mandarin as well. 2 > 3. 3 > 4. 4 > 2. 1 = 1. Although the words are still pronounced the same, the tones are all switched around.
- Key lexical words are completely different
  - Shenme - what > mosi
  - zuo - to do > gao
- Regarding phonemes, [n] [l] and [r] are typically all pronounced as an [l].
- ‘Zh’ and ‘sh’ are pronounced as ‘z’ and ‘s’.



# Shanghai Dialect

- This technically is a Wu language and is not a dialect of Mandarin Chinese, though it is often considered to be one.
- This dialect has a total of 30 consonants, compared to the 24 of Mandarin because they have voiced initials. It has 14 pure vowels, no diphthongs. They have preserved all middle Chinese initials, but have dropped the majority of finals, making the syllables very short and quick.
- Only the leading character has a clear tone and it determines the tone of the whole word.
- Many think this sounds kind of like Japanese, this is largely because of its lack of consonant finals.



# Naming conventions for China

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China = 中国

middle country

Chinese = 中国人

middle country people

This is very interesting because it shows the perspective that they are coming from, being that when named China saw themselves as being in the center and middle of the world.

# Naming Conventions within China

- When it comes to how China has labeled places, it is a very directional language and bases a lot of names of cities and provinces off of geographical locations.
- Looking at this zoomed in picture of the east coast, we have shandong and shanxi. The meaning of these are 'mountains east' and 'mountains west', which are referring to the provinces east and west of the mountains.
- For the city of Shanghai, this means 'upon sea' because it is right on the ocean.
- Though they do not title every city and province in this way, it helps in remembering!



# Naming Conventions for People

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- In Chinese, names are based on meaning.
  - This could be a name that means beauty or grace for a girl or strength for a boy.
  - This could also be being named after the time of year they were born, like if they were born during spring.



# Details about the Chinese Writing System

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- Chinese is currently a logographic written language, though it was originally pictographic.
  - It uses characters as words or morphemes that have meaning.
- In 1892, the creation of a romanization of Chinese characters, called Wayde-Giles, was finished but this is more for non-Chinese speakers. This is known as pinyin.
  - Characters in Chinese = 中国. Pinyin = zhongguo.
- It is the oldest continuously used system of writing in the world.
- The modern day Chinese person knows between 3,000 and 4,000 characters.

# Ancient Chinese Writing



- Chinese has been found to have been written on turtle shells and animal bones then used in divination, so they have been given the title 'oracle bones'
- Bones have been found from approximately 1500 BC and 1000 BC
- They were originally pictographic, illustrating the word that they were talking about. But as can be seen in the photo, they did not stay that way over time.

# Chinese Writing Development

- in 221 BC, Chinese was standardized across the country in an attempt to create uniformity under the rule of the Qin dynasty. This is what we now see to be the script known as traditional characters.
- Later, in 1949 AD, under the control of the PRC, they created a simplified version of written characters.
- There has been talk of wanting to alphabetize Chinese, but it is unlikely.

Traditional		Simplified
愛	love	爱
馬	horse	马
麵	noodle	面

# Structure of Chinese Characters

80% of chinese characters follow a pattern of one part of the character being a semantic component and and the other being a phonetic component.

Semantic Component	Phonetic Component
Could stand on the left (说, 讠), top (茶, 艹), or bottom (想, 心), of the phonetic component	Could stand on the right (红, 工) or bottom (苹, 平) of the semantic component. Could sound the same as in 平/苹(ping), or different but very similar as in 工/红(gong/hong)

The characters are written top to bottom, left to right, and outside to inside.



## Contact-induced changes over time

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- The biggest changes that seem to be present are loan words being taken from other languages into Mandarin.
  - From Japanese during the 30s and 40s, a lot of scholars studied abroad in Japan and brought back different words and phrases from Japan.
  - Because of English's influence and global presence, many words have been adopted because of media, technology, etc.
    - Tixushan - tshirt.
  - Another that has been mentioned are words borrowed from Sanskrit, which is largely for religious purposes because of the spread of Buddhism from India.
    - 共产主义 kyosan shugi or gongchan zhuyi