Preface

If you have been looking for a practical guide to learning and getting by in Mandarin, one that will give you confidence and fluency, quickly, and also enjoyably, then I hope you find this is the right book for you. *Talk Mandarin Today* is written for all types of adult learners, especially the small business person, holiday makers, and students learning Mandarin Chinese as a second language from scratch.

This first edition grew out of my lectures to beginner and intermediate learners of Chinese at Trinity College, Dublin and at King's College, London. This book has been developed in response to the rapidly changing world, which has left many of the popular Mandarin Chinese textbooks behind with an outdated vocabulary, an insular "school" emphasis and which have often failed to meet the needs of adult learners.

With the busy reader in mind, each lesson works first to bring fast acquisition and build practical ability in speaking the language. Reader confidence is the key! And I hope that by 1) cutting excessive explanations of grammar, 2) providing simple sentence structures, 3) avoiding academic hair splitting, a more intuitive understanding is imparted. This way the text helps the learner to build confidence quickly in order to speak, to try, and to put what they have learned into practice.

The dialogues in each of the 30 lessons are encounters with the real world, in everyday scenarios that a person travelling to or working in China would likely find themselves in. In designing this book I have also made an effort to include the new terms and words that are now common in speech since the advance of information technology and the widespread use of the internet.

Drawing on my experience from decades of teaching Chinese to second language learners, I have found that a lesson's simplicity, human interest and humour are the key components in bringing out the best of any language

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learning. This is what I hope this book will bring to you, the reader. I am confident that you will find learning with *Talk Mandarin Today* an enjoyable and successful experience.

Hong Xiao

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2003

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Introduction

Talk Mandarin Today is written for all types of adult learners, especially the small business person, holiday makers, and students learning Mandarin Chinese as a second language from scratch.

This first edition grew out of my lectures to beginner and intermediate learners of Chinese at Trinity College, Dublin and currently King's College, London. The draft version of this book has been trialled at King's College. The text has been revised and modified according to my observations of classroom activities and feedback from my students.

Contents The contents of each lesson are selected considering time, space and human activities. All 30 lessons are written in a form of dialogue based on real world situations. Lessons 10, 20, and 30 are reading reviews for Lessons 1–9, 11–19, and 21–29 respectively:

a). Lessons 1–10 cover topics relating to time, personal status, and communication tools (business cards, telephone, mobile phones, fax, e-mail, post);

b). Lessons 11–20 cover topics relating to space, such as location, getting about, making bookings and money matters.

c). Lessons 21–30 are about social activities. Topics covered in these lessons include making friends, making an appointment, dining out, inviting friends home, watching a play, shopping, receiving and refusal, etc. The last lesson deals with coping with emergency situations.

Sounds A Romanized Pinyin system is used to assist in using a dictionary. In the first five lessons, there are more exercises for phonetics and tones to assist the learner in their pronunciation. The most difficult sounds are stressed in each topic.

Characters Characters are an integral part of each lesson and emphasis

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is placed in learning them from the start to avoid later confusion with homophonies. A total of 730 words are collected in the textbook. The three systems of writing, the stroke, radical and character are introduced in a separate Character workbook.

Words, Phrases and Sentences Words, phrases and sentences are in the Beijing spoken style. Some colloquial words, such as 劳驾 (láo jià)，真棒 (zhēn bàng)，甭 (béng) etc. and newly developed words, such as 伊妹儿 (yīmèi-r)，打的 (dǎdī)，酷 (kù) etc. are also included so that the learner will get a vivid sense of the daily used language in Modern China. Word, rather than character, like traditional printing usually adopted, are spaced out. By doing so, I shall leave the conflict between word (词 cí) and word element (词素 císù) to linguists to argue, but provide the learners with the most straightforward, vivid, and easy way of learning.

Grammar The explanation of grammar is simple. I have tried hard to avoid redundant and meaningless terminology that means little to busy people. Instead, simple words and clear examples are used in the hope of giving the learner the real sense of the language, rather than memorizing grammatical rules. Key sentences have been constructed step by step, aimed at enabling the learner to see the internal structure of the sentences intuitively. I have tried to avoid analysing them in the traditional terminology. Short dialogues are given at the end of each lesson, to give the learner more opportunities to practice the grammar and expand the vocabulary.

Culture The dialogue and scenarios have been selected to contrast the traditional Chinese values with the western way of interaction. Culture is implicit in how the characters respond to one another in the given circumstance. The cultural aspect is more defined in later chapters that deal with protocol and refusal — where contrasts in the cultures are apparent and keys to solving them are noted. Discussion topics raise a greater cultural awareness in the learner.

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Introduction to Mandarin Chinese

1. Mandarin and Other Dialects

A unique and united language, the Chinese language is used in the vast part of China. However its people speak at least eight different dialects. These main dialects include:

	Dialect		Standard sound		Spoken by population
1	普通话	Mandarin	北京	Běijīng	70%
2	吴	Wú	上海	Shànghǎi	8.4%
3	湘	Xiāng	长沙	Chángshā	5%
4	赣	Gàn	南昌	Nánchāng	2.4%
5	客家	Kèjiā	梅县	Méixiàn	4%
6	粤	Yuè	广州	Guǎngzhōu	5%
7	闽北	Mǐnběi	福州	Fúzhōu	1.2%
8	闽南	Mǐnnán	厦门	Xiàmén	3%

Mandarin, or Pǔtōnghuà (Common speech, the term is used in Mainland China, Hong Kong), Guóyǔ (National language, the term is used in Taiwan, Malay, Singapore), is based on Northern dialect. Mandarin takes the Beijing dialect as its standard pronunciation, and the grammar in well-known works of modern language and literature as its model.

2. Phonetic System and Tones

One of the distinctive features of modern Chinese phonetics is that most words exist in a form of double syllables, e.g. 妈妈 māma, in which m is initial and a is final. "-" the little mark above the a is the tone of the character. All initials, finals and tones are as follows:

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a. Initials

Group 1	b	p	m	f
Group 2	d	t	n	l
Group 3	z	c	s	
Group 4	zh	ch	sh	r
Group 5	j	q	x	
Group 6	g	k	h	

b. Finals

a	ai	ao	an	ang					
o	ou	ong							
e	er	ei	en	eng					
i	ia	iao	ie	iu	ian	in	iang	ing	iong
u	ua	uo	uai	ui	uan	un	uang	ueng	
ü	üe	üan	ün						

c. Tones

First tone	Second tone	Third tone	Fourth tone	Neutral tone
–	ˊ	ˇ	ˋ	·

Note that some combinations of initial and final do not exist in actual speech.

Tone is the other distinctive feature of Chinese phonetics. In theory, Mandarin has four tones. However, at practical level, a neutral tone is also used. Musical instruments can play these tones, therefore (when properly pronounced) they can be quite pleasant to the ear. Mandarin has been called the French of Oriental languages pcoduce. Mind you, an adult learner will need a lot of practice to accurately produce these tones.

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3. Characters

Characters rather than phonetics are in use in China. Both simplified (used in Mainland China) and traditional systems (used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc.) are used. An example of the simplified system 妈妈 māma, and traditional system 媽媽。

There are about over 40,000 characters, in which more than 3,000 are frequently used. All characters consist of radicals (about 188 in total), and in turn, all radicals consist of strokes (8 basic strokes). Characters look quite difficult to learn at first glance and you may find writing these characters from memory a difficult task, more so than reading or copying them. However, characters are like jigsaw puzzles that have pieces that can be reconstructed at different positions in different characters. This makes them easier to recognize than you would expect. It is recommended that you attempt to learn some characters as you learn to speak the language in order to avoid any confusion over homophones.

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Survival Phrases

1.	您 好！	Nín hǎo	How do you do?
2.	再见！	Zài jiàn	Good-bye!
3.	多 谢！	Duō xiè	Thanks a lot!
4.	对不起，我 不 懂。	Duìbuqǐ, wǒ bù dǒng.	Sorry, I do not understand.
5.	请问，您讲 英语 吗？	Qǐngwèn, nín jiǎng Yīngyǔ ma?	Excuse me, do you speak English?
6.	很 抱歉！	Hěn bàoqiàn.	I am sorry!
7.	劳驾， 请 帮帮 忙。	Láojià, qǐng bāngbang máng.	Excuse me, please help.
8.	请 您 稍 等。	Qǐng nín shāo děng.	Please wait for a while.
9.	请 再 说 一 遍。	Qǐng zài shuō yí biàn.	Please say once more.
10.	请 慢 一点儿 说。	Qǐng màn yìdiǎn-r shuō.	Please say it slowly.
11.	我 迷路 了。	Wǒ mílù le.	I am lost.
12	劳驾，厕所 在 哪儿？	Láojià, cèsuǒ zài nǎ-r?	Excuse me, where is the toilet ?
13.	这 个 多少 钱？	Zhèi ge duōshao qián?	Excuse me, how much is this?
14.	我 想 喝 点儿 水。	Wǒ xiǎng hē diǎn-r shuǐ.	I want to drink some water.
15.	我 想 吃 点儿 东西。	Wǒ xiǎng chī diǎn-r dōngxi.	I want to eat something.
16.	我 有点儿 冷。	Wǒ yǒudiǎn-r lěng.	I feel a little bit cold.
17.	我 病 了。	Wǒ bìng le.	I am not feeling so well.
18.	救命 啊！救命 啊！	Jiùmìng a! Jiùmìng a!	Help! Help! (In an emergency)

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