
To the Student

The main purpose of this textbook is to use interesting, modern short stories to increase your Chinese language skills. Having progressed from the intermediate to the advanced level, you have passed the state of reading, say, ordering food in a restaurant, to that of reading for reinforcement of everyday spoken vocabulary, or understanding newspaper headlines. At the advanced level, you finally have the linguistic ability to study Chinese by reading sophisticated and enjoyable stories written by famous Chinese writers. After you finish studying this textbook, you will be able to talk beyond travelogue or daily chitchat and will find writing Chinese letters or e-mail no task at all.

The second purpose of this textbook is to develop your critical thinking abilities by comparing your own culture with Chinese culture through text- and life-related study topics. Every story was carefully chosen based not only on its linguistic feasibility for you at the advanced level, but on whether it reflects the society of China and on its ability to make available to you the lives of various Chinese people. At the advanced level, I want to let you know China beyond a superficial level, how to use the Chinese language, examining why Chinese people are doing what they do by knowing their growing-up background and hearing their inner voices. At the end of the textbook, you will confront the speeches of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and read a work written by the most prestigious writer of the 20th century--Lu Xun, in the 1920s. I want to conclude the selection by showing you that human nature and human desire may indeed be everywhere the same, but human institutions and systems are impressively different in different cultures and at different times.

To improve your Chinese-language skills you should know the stories on the conceptual as well as the linguistic level. Each author has used extensive and subtle vocabulary, and complex and exact syntax to tell his or her story; you need to work hard to perfect your Chinese ability by doing the exercises and learning how they use language. The inclusion of comprehension exercise, class exercises, and the homework is to make sure you have the opportunities to use the new words and patterns. At home, you should familiarize yourself with the vocabulary, listen to the audio tape, and read the story aloud in order to hear yourself speaking Chinese. In class try to express yourself in error-free Chinese, exchange ideas with your classmates, and welcome the teacher's correction of your mistakes. When reading, ask yourself to recognize the vocabulary, understand the text; in speaking and writing, ask yourself to solidify the vocabulary and structures and practice, expressing your ideas from sound and sound-meaning association to the production of characters and ideas.

Selecting stories and designing exercises are only the first step toward success in learning Chinese. You must practice on your own. To master a foreign language well, there is no shortcut--practice makes perfect. I welcome all of you across campus to experience the stories and advance your language skills with me, with the characters in the stories, with your teachers, and classmates.

Good luck, and enjoy it!

Mien-hwa Chiang

August 30, 2000