

# How to learn to read Medical Chinese and Why

Welcome!

An inductive exploration of, and guide to, using 中文 to better understand 中醫



# Welcome to TCM Hub!

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# Welcome to TCM Hub!

Our mission is twofold:

1. To provide the highest quality education for the Chinese medicine field. Our content is designed specifically to be clinically-relevant for the modern patient base and simplified so that you can easily integrate it into your practice immediately.
2. To support clinicians in their quest for not only professional advancement, but also personal development, well-being, and self-care. We proudly lead the way in helping Chinese Medicine physicians not only become competent and confident in their practices, but also grounded and fulfilled in their lives.

For more  
educational offerings  
please visit us at

[www.tcm-hub.com](http://www.tcm-hub.com)

## Have you checked out the Hub Community yet?

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### Tired of crowdsourcing for help on social media?

Yeah. We are too. Which is why we created a community where doctors like you can get your case questions answered personally by select leaders in the Chinese medicine field. This means no more sifting through threads of unhelpful and contradictory “answers” on social media that devolve into internet fights. Get help on cases while building your diagnostic skills and becoming the best doctor you can be... drama-free.

Not only that, as a Hub Community supporter you will receive discounted rates on all webinars and have access to live Round Table case discussions led by experienced clinicians, Breaking Down the Pharmacy video segments, specialty webinars, access to the new and growing library of S.M.A.R.T. classes and so much more. You are also privy to certain content for FREE before everyone else. So what are you waiting for?

<https://www.tcm-hub.com/join-the-hub>

# Welcome! What this course is and isn't:

Isn't:

A course in modern spoken/conversational Chinese.

Broad

Is:

A course in reading medical Chinese.

Narrow, specialized, focused

Geared towards self-study and giving you the tools.



# Encouragements!

1. Learning characters through building blocks, components, and etymology. Useful mnemonic material and insight.
2. Pronunciation and tones easier and less important than you might think.
3. Relatively few characters needed to get started. Focused, high frequency, high value vocabulary.
4. The narrower your focus, the faster you learn. Leverage what you know.
5. Able to see it in action and use it right away.
6. Immediate deepening of understanding when it comes to terms and concepts you already know.
7. Literacy rates and speed of language acquisition.



# Easier than other languages?!? It's true!

No verb conjugation of any sort

No noun declension

No endings to memorize, ever

No grammatical gender

Word order is a big part of grammar

Useful particles, but fewer than English

Words are one syllable, expressions two or, rarely, three

Highly patterned

Modern apps help enormously with character recognition and look-up



# Spoken Chinese vs. written Chinese

Tones, dialects, and accents

Changes over time

Code-switching in text

Vocabulary, grammar, expressions, and style

Love of quotations, citations, and proverbs

Other readers with other languages



# Romanization and pronunciation

Peking vs. Beijing  
Zheng Manqing

Cheng Man Ch'ing vs.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan vs. Taijiquan

Kan Ts'ao vs. Gan Cao

I Ching vs. Yijing  
Daodejing

Tao Te Ching vs.

Wade-Giles: pros and cons.

Pinyin: pros and cons. Most important pro: mostly (and more) intuitive for English speakers, absolutely consistent, and no apostrophes! Defacto standard.

# Classical Chinese, Literary Chinese, and Modern Chinese

古文 guwen: From the classical period

文言 wenyan: In a classical style

白話 baihua: transcription of current speech



# Traditional vs. simplified characters

陰/阴 醫/医

陽/阳 湯/汤

氣/气 經/经

What they are.

Where they come from.

Why we're focusing on traditional (but why you'll want to look at simplified as well).

(a note on Japanese)

# Chinese characters in languages other than Chinese

A) Japanese: 2 alphabets (syllabaries) + characters

A) Korean: Alphabet, rare use of characters in modern sources, but exclusively Chinese until the 1500's.

C) Vietnamese: Originally adapted Chinese characters, now romanization with diacritics.

All though had or have a tradition of reading classical and literary Chinese (guwen and wenyan)

# Characteristics of Medical Chinese

A written, professional, dialect.

- a) Specialized topic
  
- a) Specific vocabulary
  
- a) Specific use of ordinary vocabulary (c.f. Biomedical “hypochondriac”)
  
- a) Liberal borrowing of classical vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures.

# Inductive vs. Deductive approach

Both have value, but why the inductive approach is particularly suited to learning to read classical, literary, and medical Chinese.

- a) Recognizes you're already in practice
  
- a) Uses what you already know
  
- a) Suited to the nature of Chinese grammar (see below)

# Chinese grammar: making it work for you

a) Surprising ways in which it's similar to English.

a) Working with set forms

a) Reasonable goals

a) Narrow focus



# Making grammar work for you, continued

a) Word order

a) Particles

a) Fluid parts of speech

a) Expressions

a) The power of context





# Conclusions and on to Lesson 2

Read: Van Norden introduction and preface, PDF

Listen: Poetry links in PDF

Download: Pleco (don't need add-ons yet, but will probably want later)

Practice with terminology and translation: Wiseman and Bensky

Explore: What do you want to read and why: the universe in a single character, or brushstroke.

