

Coffee Break **Chinese**

Season 1, Lesson 1

Lesson notes



CoffeeBreak
Chinese

Introduction

Huānyíng lái dào Coffee Break Chinese - welcome to Coffee Break Chinese! In these lesson notes we'll be listing all the words and phrases covered in each lesson. The lesson notes also include material linked to the Review episode.

Coffee Break Chinese will introduce you to Mandarin Chinese and you'll learn to use the language in many situations. The aim of this course is to help you speak and understand what native speakers say to you.

Mandarin is normally written in Chinese characters, but there is also an official written version using the Roman alphabet. This romanisation system is called Pinyin, or Hànyǔ Pīnyīn, and is used throughout mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. Pīnyīn (拼音) literally means "spelled sounds". Pīnyīn uses four special marks to indicate the tone of a syllable. We'll be explaining more about tones later in this lesson.

We will be using Pīnyīn throughout the Coffee Break Chinese course to help you to learn the pronunciation of words. However, we would stress the importance of listening to how the words are pronounced in the audio episodes: some letters in Pīnyīn are quite different to their pronunciation in English. It's best to use the written version as an aid to

help you remember how words are pronounced, rather than learn the “spelling” of a Chinese word.

In addition to the Pīnyīn in the main lesson notes, we’ll also include an appendix for each lesson with the key words and phrases of the lessons written in Chinese characters.



Lesson notes

Crystal begins the lesson saying, “hello everyone”:

dàjià hǎo

hello everyone

huānyíng lái dào Coffee Break Chinese

welcome to Coffee Break Chinese

hǎo

good

kāishǐ ba

let’s get started

Saying “hello”

The most common way to say “hello” in Mandarin is:

nǐ hǎo

hello

Note that in the audio lessons we always leave a space to allow you to repeat the words. Crystal will say the word or phrase first, then leave some time for you to repeat. Mark will then repeat, and Crystal will say the word or phrase once more.

Literally, **nǐ hǎo** means “you good”. It’s useful to know this as we move on to the next section!

Asking “how are you?”

If **nǐ hǎo** literally means “you good”, we can add one word to this to make it into a question. To ask “how are you?” you ask “are you good?”:

nǐ hǎo ma?

how are you?

Note the pronunciation of **ma** in this expression: it’s very short and light!

We can run “hello” and “how are you?” together:

Nǐ hǎo. Nǐ hǎo ma?

Hello. How are you?

Let’s put this into a conversation:

Mark: Nǐ hǎo. Nǐ hǎo ma?

Crystal: Wǒ hěn hǎo, Mark.

Crystal teaches us a number of possible responses to **nǐ hǎo ma?**

wǒ hěn hǎo

I'm well

wǒ fēicháng hǎo

I'm very well

Note that Crystal uses both **hěn hǎo** (well / good) and **fēicháng hǎo** (very well / very good) as words of encouragement during the lesson. Another word she uses regularly is **duì**, meaning "correct".

wǒ hái hǎo

I'm ok / I'm not (feeling) bad

wǒ bú tài hǎo

I'm not (feeling) too good / I'm (feeling) bad

One further answer to the question **nǐ hǎo ma?** is introduced. The origin of this expression is interesting as it literally means "horse horse tiger tiger"!

mǎmǎhūhū

so-so

Tones in Mandarin Chinese

In addition to the pronunciation of the words and phrases you learn in Mandarin Chinese, you also need to be aware that the language uses different "tones" which change the meaning of a word. There are a total of five¹ tones. The best way to learn

¹ Some text books do not consider the 5th tone as a tone as it is neutral and there is no change in pitch. For the sake of simplicity we have chosen to refer to five tones.

tones is by listening carefully to how the words are pronounced, and Crystal gives a detailed explanation of the tones in the audio episode.

In Pīnyīn, the tones are indicated by diacritic marks, similar to accents in other languages. You'll already have seen that many words are written in Pīnyīn using these diacritic marks. See the table below for more details on the tones and their pronunciation:

The five tones of Mandarin Chinese	
mā	1st tone: a high-pitched flat tone
má	2nd tone: a rising tone
mǎ	3rd tone: a falling then rising tone
mà	4th tone: a falling tone
ma	5th tone: a short, light, neutral tone

Note that even though they do sound similar, each of the words above mean something different: while **mā** can mean "mother", **má** means "linen", **mǎ** is "a horse" and **mà** can mean "to scold". We've already seen the word **ma** (neutral tone) as the question particle in the question **nǐ hǎo ma?** which means "how are you?".



Cultural Notes: transcript

Mark: We are talking about "Coffee Break Chinese" here, but I suppose we should really be talking about "Coffee Break Mandarin Chinese". Can you tell us a bit

about the difference between what we call “Chinese” and what we would refer to as “Mandarin”?

Crystal: Yes, Mark. We are teaching Mandarin here. Mandarin is the standard, official, national language in China. Chinese could have other dialects as well including, for example, Cantonese, which is widely spoken in Canton (Guangzhou) and Hong Kong, but Mandarin is the standard spoken language all over mainland China. It’s also spoken in other Chinese communities, for example in Singapore, Malaysia and also in the UK and USA too.

Mark: What would your own, “personal” dialect be? Which kind of Chinese would you speak, for example with your family back home?

Crystal: I come from the southwest of China, Guìzhōu province, so we have our own dialect called **Guìzhōuhuà**. But within Guìzhōu province you have “sub-regional dialects”. I come from Dūyún, so I speak Dūyún dialect, **Dūyúnhuà**. However in China everybody learns to speak Mandarin. Literally it means “standard language”: **Pǔtōnghuà**.

Mark: I guess this is just really like English: I speak English but I speak with my Scottish accent, and when I’m with my family in Ayrshire, in the south west of Scotland, then I will speak in a more Ayrshire way than I would when I’m speaking in a presentation or something like that, but ultimately what we’re learning here on Coffee Break Chinese is Mandarin, it’s the official “version”, if you like, of Chinese, and we will be able to be understood anywhere in China. That’s what you’re saying?

Crystal: That’s correct! **Duì!**

Saying “goodbye”

We also need to know how to say “goodbye” and “thank you”:

zàijiàn

goodbye

xièxie

thank you



Review lesson notes

In the bonus lesson we review the words and phrases we learned in the main lesson and introduce some bonus vocabulary:

wǒ lèi le

I'm tired

wǒ hěn lèi

I'm (very) tired

wǒ hǎo jí le

I'm extremely good

jīntiān

today



Bonus episode: translation test

1. Nǐ hǎo ma, Crystal?
2. Wǒ hěn hǎo, xièxie.
3. Wǒ bú tài hǎo.
4. Xièxie. Zàijiàn.
5. Wǒ jīntiān hěn hǎo.
6. How are you?
7. Hello, Zhāng Míng.
8. I'm not feeling too well.
9. I am feeling great.
10. Today I am tired.

Answers

1. How are you, Crystal?
2. I'm well, thank you.
3. I'm not feeling great / I'm not well / I'm feeling bad.
4. Thank you. Goodbye.
5. I'm well today.
6. Nǐ hǎo ma?
7. Nǐ hǎo, Zhāng Míng.
8. Wǒ bú tài hǎo.
9. Wǒ fēicháng hǎo / wǒ hǎo jí le.
10. Jīntiān wǒ lèi le.

Appendix: lesson vocabulary with Chinese characters

你好

nǐ hǎo

hello

你好吗？

nǐ hǎo ma?

how are you?

我很好

wǒ hěn hǎo

I'm well

我非常好

wǒ fēicháng hǎo

I'm very well

我还好

wǒ hái hǎo

I'm quite well

我不太好

wǒ bú tài hǎo

I'm not feeling so well / I'm feeling bad

马马虎虎

mǎmǎhūhū

so-so

再见

zàijiàn

goodbye

谢谢

xièxie

thank you

我累了

wǒ lèi le

I'm tired

我很累

wǒ hěn lèi

I'm very tired

我好极了

wǒ hǎo jí le

I'm extremely good/well

今天

jīntiān

today



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