UNIT 1

Qiān lǐ zhī xíng  shǐ yú zú xià.
1000 mile’s journey  begin at foot down
*A long journey begins with a single step.*
Lǎozǐ

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1.1 Conventions
The lesson on ‘sounds and symbols’ provided the first steps in learning to associate the pinyin transcription of Chinese language material with accurate pronunciation. The task will continue as you start to learn to converse by listening to conversational material while reading it in the pinyin script. However, in the early units, it will be all too easy to fall back into associations based on English spelling, and so occasionally (as in the previous overview), Chinese cited in pinyin will be followed by a more transparent transitional spelling [placed in brackets] to alert you to the new values of the letters, eg: máng [mahng], or hěn [huhn].

In the initial units, where needed, you are provided not only with an idiomatic English translation of Chinese material, but also, in parentheses, with a word-for-word gloss. The latter takes you into the world of Chinese concepts and allows you to understand how meanings are composed. The following conventions are used to make the presentation of this information clearer.

Summary of conventions
a) Parentheses (...) enclose literal meanings, eg: Máng ma? ‘(be+busy Q)’

b) Plusses (+) indicate one-to-many, eg: hǎo ‘be+well’; nín ‘you+POL’

c) Capitals (Q) indicate grammatical notions, eg: Q for ‘question’; POL for ‘polite’. In cases where there is no easy label for the notion, the Chinese word itself is cited in capitals, with a fuller explanation to appear later: Nǐ ne? ‘(you NE)’

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1.2 Pronunciation

To get your vocal organs ready to pronounce Chinese, it is useful to contrast the articulatory settings of Chinese and English by pronouncing pairs of words from the two languages that are similar in pronunciation for many speakers (depending on their particular accent), but not identical. [No attempt is made to match Chinese tone to English intonation.]

a) kǎo cow  b) xìn sin  c) shòu show
hǎo how  qín chin  zhōu Joe
nǎo now  jīn gin  sōu so
chàochāo ‘chow’  xīn seen  ròu row
sāo sow [pig]  jīn Jean  dōu dough
bǎo bow [verb]  lín lean  tóu toe

d) pō paw  duō door  e) bīzi beads
bō bore  tuō tore  lǐzi leads
mō more  luō law  xīzi seeds

1.3 Numbering and ordering

This section contains information that can be practiced daily in class by counting off, or giving the day’s date.

1.3.1 The numbers, 1 – 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yī</th>
<th>èr</th>
<th>sān</th>
<th>sì</th>
<th>wǔ</th>
<th>liù</th>
<th>qī</th>
<th>bā</th>
<th>jiǔ</th>
<th>shí</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3.2 Beyond 10
Higher numbers are formed quite regularly around shí ‘ten’ (or a multiple of ten), with
following numbers additive (shísān ‘13’, shíqī ‘17’) and preceding numbers
multiplicative (sānshí ‘30’, qīshí ‘70):

shíyī  shí’èr  shísì  èrssì  èrshíyī  èrshí’èr  èrshísì  sānshí  sānshíyī
11  12  14  20  21  22  24  30  31

1.3.3 The ordinal numbers
Ordinals are formed with a prefix, dì (which by pinyin convention, is attached to the
following number with a hyphen):

dì-yī  dì-èr  dì-sān  dì-sì  dì-wǔ, etc.
1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th

1.3.4 Dates
Dates are presented in concentric order in Chinese, with year first (nián, think [nien]),
then month (yuè, think [yu-eh]) and day (hào). Years are usually presented as a string of
digits (that may include líng ‘zero’) rather than a single figure: yī-jìu-jìu-liù nián ‘1996’;
èr-líng-líng-sān nián ‘2003’. Months are formed regularly with numerals: yīyuè ‘January’,
èryuè ‘February’, shǐèryuè ‘December’.

èrlínglíng sān nián bāyuè sān hào  ‘August 3rd, 2003’
yǐjiùbwǔ nián èryuè shíbā hào  ‘February 18th, 1985’

Note: in the written language, rì ‘day’ (a much simpler character) is often used in place of
hào: bāyuè sān rì.

1.3.5 The celestial stems
Just as English sometimes makes use of letters rather than numbers to indicate a sequence
of items, so Chinese sometimes makes use of a closed set of words with fixed order
known as the ‘ten stems’ (shígān), or the ‘celestial stems’ (tiāngān), for counting
purposes. The ten stems have an interesting history, which will be discussed in greater
detail along with information on the Chinese calendar in a later unit. For now, they will
be used in much the same way that, in English, roman numerals or letters of the alphabet
are used to mark subsections of a text, or turns in a dialogue. The first four or five of the
ten are much more frequent than the others, simply because they occur early in the
sequence.

The ten celestial stems (tiāngān)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>甲</th>
<th>乙</th>
<th>丙</th>
<th>丁</th>
<th>戊</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

jī  gēng  xīn  rén  guī
己  戌  亥  子  卯
F  G  H  I  J
1.4 Stative Verbs

The verb is the heart of the Chinese sentence. Young urban speakers of Chinese may slip material from English or other languages into the noun position in a sentence (Wǒ yǒu lab. ‘I have a lab’), and nouns such as jītā ‘guitar’ with foreign origins have been incorporated in the language as a result of persistent contact with other cultures. But very rarely does foreign language material show up in the verb position.

Some comparisons with English also reveal the centrality of the verb to the Chinese sentence schema. In Chinese, where the context makes the participants clear, verbs do not need to be anchored with pronouns – as they do in English:

Jiā Máng ma? Are [you] busy?
Yǐ Hĕn máng. Yes, [I] am.

In English, ‘am’ is not a possible response to the question ‘are you busy?’. A pronoun is required: ‘I am.’ However, in the English answer, the verb ‘busy’ does not need to be repeated – ‘I am’ rather than ‘I am busy’. Chinese behaves oppositely from English, as our example shows. Pronouns are often not expressed when the context makes the meaning clear. On the other hand, verbs tend to be reiterated in the answer, without the need of an equivalent to the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ of English.

1.4.1 Types of verbs

As you encounter words in Chinese, you will find that it is useful to categorize them into groups and subgroups (the traditional parts of speech and their subclasses), such as nouns (with subtypes such as count nouns and non-count nouns), verbs (with subtypes such as transitive verbs and non-transitive), pronouns (eg, personal pronouns and demonstratives), and adverbs (eg, manner adverbs and degree). Such categories capture useful generalizations about how words behave. An adverb, for example, will always appear before a verb (or other adverb).

It is also useful to be able to talk about the components of a sentence: subjects, predicates, adverbials, modifiers, etc. A general schema for the sentence hĕn máng would be a null subject, and a predicate consisting of an adverb (hĕn) and a verb (máng). It is not necessary to be adept at using the linguistic nomenclature, but it is important to be able to understand the notion of classes of words and positions within sentence structure so that useful generalizations can be noted.

For Chinese verbs, it will be useful to distinguish a number of classes. In this lesson, we will focus on two. One resembles what are called adjectives in English and many other languages: hăo ‘be good’, măng ‘be busy’, è ‘be hungry’. As the English glosses show, these words do not require an additional form of the verb ‘to be’ (‘are, am, is, etc.’) when they are used as predicates in Chinese: Lèi ma? ‘Are [you] tired? (be+tired Q)’ / Hĕn lèi. ‘[I] am. (very be+tired)’ The difference is shown by translating the Chinese words as ‘be+tired’, ‘be+good’, etc. Because such words convey states rather than actions, they are called ‘stative verbs’, abbreviated as ‘SVs’. Strictly speaking, SVs
should always be glossed as ‘be+adjective’ (when they are being used as predicates). But once the notion is familiar, we will often fall back on the more convenient practice of glossing them with English adjectives: **máng** ‘busy’; **shūfu** ‘comfortable’.

Another general class of verbs involve actions: **chī** ‘eat’; **xǐzǎo** ‘to wash’; **zǒu** ‘to walk; leave’. These will simply be called action verbs, abbreviated \(V_{\text{act}}\).

### 1.4.2 Questions and positive responses

We can begin by learning to ask questions with SVs, and to give either positive or negative responses. Assume that the context makes explicit (subject) pronouns unnecessary. One way to ask questions that seek confirmation or denial - *yes-no* questions - is to add the final ‘question particle’ **ma** to the proposal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hǎo ma?</td>
<td>Are [you] well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Máng ma?</td>
<td>Is [she] busy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lèi ma?</td>
<td>Are [you] tired?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>È ma?</td>
<td>Is [he] hungry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kè ma?</td>
<td>Are [you] thirsty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinzhāng ma?</td>
<td>Are [they] nervous?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shūfu ma?</td>
<td>Are [you] comfortable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lēng ma?</td>
<td>Are [you] cold?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rè ma?</td>
<td>Is [it] hot?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gāo ma?</td>
<td>Is [she] tall?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dui ma?</td>
<td>Is [it] correct?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**  
**máng** [mahng];  
*lèi* rhymes with English ‘day, say’; **duì** (and **wèi**) with English ‘way’.  
è [uh]; cf. **rè** [ruh] and hēn [huhn], in which ‘e’ has the same value;  
jinzhāng [jeen-jlahng] – ! reminds you to raise the tip of your tongue. Cf. **shūfu** [sh’oofoo].

Positive responses repeat the verb, usually with an adverb. The default adverb, where no other is chosen, is **hēn**, glossed as ‘very’, but often better untranslated in English. In contexts such as these, **hēn** does little more than support the positive orientation. However, SVs such as **duì** ‘correct’, which are ‘all or nothing’, do not occur with degree adverbs, such as **hēn**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Máng ma?</td>
<td>Hēn máng. Yes, [I] am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kè ma?</td>
<td>Hēn kē. Yes, [I] am. <em>Apply the tone rule!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gāo ma?</td>
<td>Hēn gāo. Yes, [she] is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dui ma?</td>
<td>Dui. Yes, [it] is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that unlike English, where the typical positive answer indicates affirmation with ‘yes’ before going on to answer the question, Mandarin has only the direct answer.
1.4.3 Negative responses

Negative responses are usually formed with **bu** ‘not the case’— recall that the tone of **bu** is attuned to that of the following syllable.

- Máng ma? Bù máng. No, [I]’m not.
- Kè ma? Bù kě. No, [I]’m not.
- Gāo ma? Bù gāo. No, [she]’s not.
- Dui ma? Bú dui. No, [it]’s not.

As with positive answers, Chinese has no direct equivalent to ‘no’, but simply offers a negated verb.

A less abrupt negative (but, again, not with **duì**) is formed with **bú** (with tone shift) plus **tài** ‘too; very’:

- Hào ma? Bú tài hǎo. No, not very.
- Máng ma? Bú tài máng. No, not too.
- Lèi ma? Bú tài lèi.
- È ma? Bú tài è.

[We will postpone dealing with negative questions with **ma**, such as Nǐ bù lèi ma? ‘Aren’t you tired?’, until a later unit. While such questions are easy to form in Chinese, the responses follow patterns unfamiliar to speakers of English.]

1.4.4 V-not-V questions

Another way to form yes-no questions is to present the verb and its negative - as though offering both options. The negative, **bu**, in these constructions is often toneless in normal speech: hǎo bù hǎo is usually pronounced hǎo bu hǎo, or even hǎo bu hào. While V-ma questions slightly presuppose an answer congruent with the question – ie positive for positive questions, negative for negative questions, V-not-V questions are neutral. At this stage, you can regard the two as essentially equivalent:

- Rè ma? Hěn rè.
- Rè bu rè? Hěn rè.
- Lèng ma? Bù lèng.
- Lèng bu lèng? Bú tài lèng.

Other examples

- Dui bu dui? Dui.
- Hào bu hào? Hěn hào. *With tone shift!*
- Máng bu máng? Bù máng.
- Lèi bu lèi? Hěn lèi.
- È bu è? Bú tài è.
- Kě bu kě? Hěn kě.
- Lèng bu lèng? Hěn lèng.
Rè bu rè?  Bú tài rè.
Jīn<zhāng> bu jīnzhāng?  Bú jīnzhāng.
Shū<fu> bu shūfu?  Bú shūfu.

Note
With two-syllable SVs, the 2nd syllable of the first, positive part of V-not-V questions often gets elided – as shown in the last two examples.

1.4.5 Three degrees of response
You can respond to the two kinds of yes-no questions positively, neutrally, or negatively; the typical neutral response makes use of the adverb hái (or, before other adverbs, háishi) ‘still; yet’: Hái hǎo. ‘(still okay) So so; [I’]m okay.’

SUMMARY

| SVs: hǎo, máng, lèi, è, kè, lèng, rè, gāo, shūfu, jīnzhāng, dui |
|---------------------|----------|--------|------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes-No Qs</th>
<th>-ma</th>
<th>V-not-V</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>--</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1.5 Time and tense

1.5.1 Today, yesterday and tomorrow
The notion of tense, or time relative to the time of speaking, is not a relevant category for SVs in Chinese. The time words, jīntiān ‘today’ and zuótiān ‘yesterday’ (which both share the root tiān ‘sky; day’), or dates, may be added to simple sentences containing SVs without any change in the verb:

Zuótiān rè bu rè?  Was [it] hot busy yesterday?  <Zuótiān> hěn rè!
Zuótiān hěn máng ma?  Were [you] busy yesterday?  <Zuótiān> hěn máng!
Jīntiān lèi bu lèi?  Are [you] tired today?  <Jīntiān> hái hǎo!
Èrshībā hào hěn lèng.  The 28th was quite cold.

Compare the Chinese and English: words and expressions of ‘time when’ precede the verb in Chinese. In English, they may be placed either at the head or the foot of the sentence with only a slight nuance of difference: ‘Yesterday it was quite cold’; ‘it was quite cold yesterday’.

A state in the future often does require some additional acknowledgement of the fact that, unlike the past and present, the future is uncertain. Thus a question about the weather tomorrow (míngtiān) often includes the word hui ‘can; will; likely to’: Míngtiān
hui hên lêng ma? ‘Will [it] be cold tomorrow?’ At this stage, avoid talking about future states.

1.5.2 SVs plus le
Rather than tense, what is relevant to SVs is change. Thus, a shift from a former situation, indicated by a time word such as zuótiān, or more generally by yíqián ‘formerly; before; used to [be…]’, to a new situation, indicated by words such as jǐntiān, or xiànzài ‘now’, is underscored by the presence of the small but significant sentence-final particle, le, a word with no single correlate in English:

Zuótiān bù shūfu, jǐntiān hǎo le. [I] didn’t feel well yesterday, but [I]’m okay today.

Yíqián hên jīnzhāng, xiànzài hǎo le. [I] was nervous yesterday, but [I]’m okay now.

Xiànzài bù è le! [I]’m not hungry anymore!

Jǐntiān rè le! [It]’s gotten hot today!

Yíqián bù shūfu. [It] used to be uncomfortable.

The last example underscores the fact that it is the new situation that is associated with le, not the original state! Notice that the presence of le generally cancels out the need for a supporting adverb, such as hên.

1.6 Pronouns
As many of the examples above show, Chinese often manages to keep track of people (or things) relevant to a situation without the use of pronouns. But pronouns are available where context alone might be insufficient – or where it might otherwise be more appropriate to use one. The set of personal pronouns in Chinese is relatively simple, and regular. They are presented in the following table, with notes following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
<th>singular</th>
<th>collective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǒ</td>
<td>wǒmén</td>
<td>1, me</td>
<td>we, us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nǐ</td>
<td>nǐmén</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you [all]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tā</td>
<td>tāmén</td>
<td>he, she, [it]</td>
<td>they, them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

a) Tā tends to refer only to people (or to animals being treated as if they were people); in speech, at least, it rarely refers to things – and so rarely corresponds to English ‘it’. On those occasions when tā is used to refer to things, it is more common in object position, so it is more likely to occur in the Chinese equivalent.
of the sentence ‘put it away’ than in ‘it’s in the drawer’. Chinese sometimes uses a
demonstrative (zhê ‘this’ or nà ‘that’) where English has ‘it’, but generally
Chinese has no explicit correspondence at all.

b) The form nínm en (‘you+POL-MEN’) is rare, but does sometimes occur in
letters, or in formal speech. The -men suffix (not usually toned, though sometimes
cited in isolation with a rising tone) is most often found with pronouns, as shown.
With nouns designating people, it can also occur as a ‘collective’ eg lâoshî ‘teacher’, lâoshîmen ‘teachers’. But even in such cases, -men should not be
thought of as a plural marker, for it never co-occurs with numerals: sâng ge lâoshî ‘three teachers’ – no -men possible. In faster speech, wômen often becomes wôm, tâmén, tâm, and so on.

c) Mandarin speakers from Beijing and the northeast, also make a distinction
(found in many languages) between wômen ‘we’ that includes speaker, addressee
and others, and zân or zânmen (pronounced ‘zámen’, as if without the first ‘n’) ‘the two of us; we’. The latter includes speaker and the person spoken to, but
excludes others. Eg Zânmen zǒu ba! ‘Let’s leave [us, but not the rest of them]’ – a
phrase worth storing away as a prototype example for zânmen.

1.6.1 Names
Where the identification or status of a person requires more than a pronoun, then of
course, Chinese has recourse to personal names, or names and titles (cf. §1.9.1). For now,
suffice it to say that Chinese students often refer to each other either by personal name, or
by surname (xîng) prefixed by a syllable such as xiâo ‘young’. Thus, Lî Dân (full name),
or xiâo Lî.

1.6.2 The particle ne and the adverb yé
The particle ne, placed after subject nouns, has a number of uses. It may signal a pause
for reflection – something of particular use to learners:

Zuótiánn ne, zuótiánn hên rè.      Yesterday…, yesterday was hot.
Tâ ne, tâ hên jînzhâng.            [As for] him…, he’s anxious.

It may also be used for a follow-up question. The response to a follow-up question often
contains the adverb yé ‘also; too; as well’. Recall that adverbs are placed before verbs
(including SVs) or other adverbs (such as bû):

Jiá                                 Yî
Jîntiánn lêi ma? Hên lêi, nî ne?
Wô yê hên lêi.
Jîntiánn rè bû rè? Hên rè.
Zuótiánn ne? Zuótiánn yé hên rè.
Nǐ jīnzhāng ma? Bú tài jīnzhāng. Nǐ ne?
Wǒ hěn jīnzhāng. Ng.
Xiǎo Wáng zuótiān bù shūfú. Jīntiān ne?
Jīntiān hǎo le. Ng.

Notes
Spoken Chinese makes use of variety of exclamatory particles. Ng is one of them. On the falling tone, it indicates agreement, or as in the above example, understanding.

Exercise 1.
Write down, and recite, what you would say under the circumstances – be prepared to shift roles:
1. Ask him if [he] was busy yesterday?
2. Note that [it]’s quite cold today.
3. Remark that [it]’s gotten cold today.
4. Find out if young Li’s nervous.
5. Respond that [she] is [nervous].
6. Say that you are too.
7. Say [you] didn’t feel well yesterday.
8. Say that you’re better now.
9. Tell your friend [you]’re not very hungry.
10. Tell him that you’re okay today, [but] you were quite nervous before.
11. Ask your friend if [she]’s thirsty [or not].
12. Find out if your classmate is comfortable.
13. Say that [you]’re not hungry anymore.
14. Say that he was wrong.

1.7 Action verbs
While SVs attribute emotional or physical states to people or things, V_{act} involve deeds such as ‘eating’ or ‘going to class’. V_{act} are often subdivided into ‘transitive’, ie those that generally presuppose an object (‘read > a book’; ‘eat > a meal’); and ‘intransitive’, ie those that do not presuppose an object (‘walk’; ‘talk’). However, languages differ as to how this distinction is actually realized. In English for example, when the verb ‘eat’ means ‘eat a meal’, English has the option of either not expressing an object (‘When do we eat?’), or using the generic noun ‘meal’ (‘We had a meal earlier’).

Chinese adopts a different strategy. In comparable sentences, rather than not mentioning an object for lack of a particular one, Chinese only has the option of providing a generic object like ‘meal’: Nǐ chīfàn le ma? ‘(you eat-rice LE Q) Have you eaten?’ The core meaning of fàn, as shown in the gloss, is ‘cooked rice’, but in this context, its meaning is extended to ‘food’ or ‘meal’. When a particular kind of food is
mentioned, then fàn will be replaced by specific words: chī miàn ‘eat noodles’, chī bāozi ‘eat dumplings’; chī zăodiăn ‘eat breakfast’, etc.

Another case in which Chinese provides a generic object where English has either an intransitive verb or one of a number of specific options is xǐzăo ‘to bathe; take a bath/shower/scoop water out of a cistern and pour it on yourself, etc.’ Xǐzăo is composed of the verb xǐ ‘wash’ and zăo, an element that no longer has independent status, but which is treated like an object. So while English uses an intransitive verb ‘to bathe’ or a specific object ‘take a bath’, Chinese provides a generic object, zăo. When a specific is needed, it substitutes for zăo: xǐ yīfu ‘wash clothes’; xǐ liăn ‘wash [one’s] face’, etc.

Here are words for events that tend to happen in the course of a day. (Polite inquiries about bathing are common in tropical or sub-tropical climates.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
<th>V-O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>zōu</td>
<td>‘leave’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qǐlái</td>
<td>‘get up; rise’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuì</td>
<td>‘sleep’</td>
<td>shuǐjiào ‘go to bed; sleep’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chī</td>
<td>‘eat’</td>
<td>chīfăn ‘eat; have a [proper] meal’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xǐ</td>
<td>‘wash’</td>
<td>xǐzăo ‘bathe; take a bath etc.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kăn</td>
<td>‘look at’</td>
<td>kănbaō ‘read the paper’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shàng</td>
<td>‘ascend’</td>
<td>shàngkè ‘teach a class; attend class’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xià</td>
<td>‘descend’</td>
<td>xiàkè ‘finish class; get out of class’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shàng</td>
<td>‘ascend’</td>
<td>shàngbăn ‘go to work; start work’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xià</td>
<td>‘descend’</td>
<td>xiàbăn ‘get out of work’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7.1 **Negative statements, with méiyou**

With action verbs, the plain negative with bu usually indicates intention:

| Wǒ bù zōu. | I’m not leaving. |
| Tāmen bù xízăo. | They’re not going to bathe. |
| Tā bù chī le. | He won’t eat anymore. |

Such declarations, while possible, are in fact more likely to be cast in some less abrupt form, using verbs such as yào ‘want’ or xiăng ‘(think) feel like’. While we will get to such verbs quite soon, at this stage, rather than talking about intentions, we will focus more on whether events have happened or not. In such cases, the negation is formed with the negative of the verb yǒu ‘have; exist’. This is méiyou, or simply méi. [Yǒu is the one verb in Mandarin whose negative is not formed with bu – the one irregular verb, you might say.]

| Méi chīfăn. | [We] didn’t eat; [we] haven’t eaten. |
| Méiyou xízăo. | [I] didn’t bathe; [I] haven’t bathed. |
| Méi shàngbăn. | [She] didn’t go to work; [she] hasn’t started work. |
Since the action verbs introduced in this lesson involve events like eating and bathing, that can be expected to take place regularly, the adverb hái (háishi before other adverbs) ‘still; yet’ is common in negative answers. Hái<shi> is frequently accompanied by a sentence ending ne, another function of the particle introduced in §1.6.2.

Hái méi chīfàn ne.  [We] haven’t eaten yet.
Hái méiyòu xǐzǎo ne.  [I] haven’t bathed yet.
Hái méi shàngbān.  [She] hasn’t started work yet.

1.7.2 Positive statement, with le
When the event has happened, positive statements are frequently marked with a sentence final le:

Chīfàn le.  [We] ate; [we]’ve eaten.
Xǐzǎo le.  [I] bathed; [I]’ve bathed.
Shàngbān le.  [She]’s started work; [she]’s gone to work.

It is difficult to relate this use of le, which from an English point of view seems to be associated with a past event, to the ‘new situation’ use, seen with both SVs (jīntiān hǎo le ‘we’re okay now’) and V<act> (zǒu le ‘[we]’re off’), in which le is associated with the current situation, not the earlier one. However, both uses involve a shift of phase: ‘we were eating, but now we’re done’; ‘we weren’t eating, but now we are’; ‘we weren’t feeling well, but we’re okay now’. For the time being, note that le has these two faces, one signaling a new situation, and compatible with bu, and the other signaling a situation that is over; in the latter case, the méi<you> replaces le in the negative.

Zǒu le.  [He]’s leaving [now].  [He]’s gone.
Shàngkè le.  [We]’re starting class.  [They]’ve gone to class.
Xiàkè le.  Class is over [now].  [They]’re out of class.
Chīfàn le.  [They]’ve started eating.  [They]’ve eaten.

An latter use commonly attracts the adverb yǐjing ‘already’:

Tāmen yǐjing zǒu le.  They’ve already left.
Wǒ yǐjing chīfàn le.  I’ve already eaten.
Yǐjing xiàbān le.  [He]’s already quit [for the day].

1.7.3 Questions
Actions can be questioned with ma:

Chīfàn le ma?  Have [you] eaten [a meal]?
Xǐzǎo le ma?  Have [you] bathed?
Shàngbān le ma?  Has [she] started work?
Or with the *V-not-V* pattern, with the negative option reduced to *méiyou* (or just *méi*):

Chīfàn le méi<you>?  
Xízǎo le méi<you>?  
Shàngbān le méi<you>?

**1.7.4 Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>positive</th>
<th>negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rè le.</td>
<td>Bú rè le.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s gotten warm.</td>
<td>It’s not warm anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chǐ le.</td>
<td>Wǒ bù chǐ le.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[We]’ve started.</td>
<td>I’m not eating anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shàng kè le.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s begin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;Yìjìng&gt; zǒu le.</td>
<td>&lt;Hái&gt; méi&lt;you&gt; zǒu &lt;ne&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[He]’s &lt;already&gt; left.</td>
<td>[She] hasn’t left &lt;yet&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tāmen &lt;yìjìng&gt; chīfàn le.</td>
<td>Tāmen hái méi&lt;you&gt; chīfàn &lt;ne&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’ve &lt;already&gt; eaten.</td>
<td>They haven’t eaten &lt;yet&gt;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1.7.5 Mini-conversations**

The near synonyms kěshì and dànshì, used in the following two conversations, are both comparable to English ‘but’.

A.

Jiǎ: Xízǎo le ma?  
Have [you] bathed?

Yī: Xízǎo le, kěshì hái méi chīfàn!  
*I have, but I haven’t eaten yet.*

Jiǎ: È ma?  
Hungry?

Yī: Hěn è, nǐ ne?  
*Sure am; you?*

Jiǎ: Hái hào, hái hào, wǒ yìjìng chī le.  
[I]’m fine, I’ve already eaten.

Yī: Xiǎo Bì ne?  
*And young Bí?*

Jiǎ: Yìjìng zǒu le, shàngbān le.  
[She]’s gone, [she]’s at work.

Yī: O, shàngbān le.  
*Oh, [she]’s gone to work!*

B.

Jiǎ: Jǐntiān hěn rè!  
It’s hot today.

Yī: Ng, hěn rè. Ni chīfàn le ma?  
Yeah, sure is. Have you eaten?

Yǐ: Jízhāng ma? Anxious?

Jiǎ: Xiànzài hǎo le -- dànshi yīqián hěn jīnzhāng! [I’m fine now—but I was before!]

Yǐ: Chén Bó yǐjīng zǒu le ma? Has Chen Bo already left?

Jiǎ: Yǐjīng zǒu le, shàngkè le. Yes, he has, he’s gone to class.

1.8 Greetings about eating
1.8.1 The addition of guò (usually untoned)
Questions about eating are often used ‘phatically’ in Chinese – to be sociable, rather than to seek actual information. There are quite a number of variants on the basic chīfàn le ma that may serve this purpose. One that is particularly common with verbs that describe regularly occurring events (such as having meals, going to work) involves the addition of a post-verbal guò (usually untoned), whose root meaning is ‘to pass by, over, through’. Guò can occur in both the question and in responses (both positive and negative), but it can also be dropped from the responses, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chīguò &lt;fàn&gt; le ma?</td>
<td>Chī&lt;guò&gt; le.</td>
<td>I’ve eaten my meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hái méi &lt;chī&lt;guò&gt;&gt; ne.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8.2 Reductions
In context, utterances are likely to reduced, along the following lines: méiyǒu > méi; chīfàn > chǐ (but xǐzǎo does not reduce to xǐ, since xǐ alone means to ‘wash’ rather than ‘bathe’). Thus, the following are all possible – though the more elliptical questions are likely to produce more elliptical answers. (The English glosses for the responses only suggest the differences.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chīfàn le ma?</td>
<td>Chīfàn le.</td>
<td>I’ve eaten my meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīguò fàn le ma?</td>
<td>Chīguò fàn le.</td>
<td>I’ve had my meal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chǐ le ma?</td>
<td>Chǐ le.</td>
<td>I have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīguò le ma?</td>
<td>Chīguò le.</td>
<td>I’ve had it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīfàn le méiyǒu?</td>
<td>Hái méi chī fàn ne.</td>
<td>I haven’t eaten my meal yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīguò fàn le méiyǒu?</td>
<td>Hái méi chīguo ne.</td>
<td>I haven’t had my meal yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīfàn le méi?</td>
<td>Hái méi chǐ ne.</td>
<td>I haven’t eaten yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chīguò fàn le méi?</td>
<td>Hái méi chīguo ne.</td>
<td>I haven’t had it yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chǐ le méi?</td>
<td>Hái méi ne.</td>
<td>Not yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Méiyǒu.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Méi.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary (showing typical expanded and reduced forms):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done?</th>
<th>Chīfàn le ma?</th>
<th>Chī le ma?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Done [or not]?</td>
<td>Chīfàn le méiyou?</td>
<td>Chī le méi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done.</td>
<td>Chīfàn le.</td>
<td>Chī le.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done?</td>
<td>Chīguō fàn le ma?</td>
<td>Chīguō le ma?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done [or not]?</td>
<td>Chīguō fàn le méiyou?</td>
<td>Chīguō le méi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done.</td>
<td>Chīguō fàn le.</td>
<td>Chī le.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 2.**

*a) Ask and answer as indicated:*

1. Read the paper?   Not yet.
2. Started work?   Yes, I have.
3. They’ve gone?   No, not yet.
4. Was it cold?   No, not very.
5. Have [they] got off work yet? Yes, [they] have.
6. [We]’re not nervous anymore.   [You] were yesterday.
7. [I]’ve eaten.   Are [you] still hungry?
8. Bathed?   Yes, it was nice [comfortable].
12. Has class started?   Not yet.
13. Nervous?   I am now!
14. Young Wang’s in bed?   Yes, he’s already in bed.
15. Are they up?   Yes, but they haven’t eaten yet.

*b) What would you say? (Use pronouns where needed.)*

1. ask your friend if she’s eaten yet (3 ways).
2. announce that she’s already left work [for the day].
3. explain that it was cold yesterday, but that it’s gotten hot today.
4. announce that she hasn’t gone to class yet.
5. explain that they’ve bathed, but they haven’t eaten.
6. explain that you were all unwell yesterday, but today you’re fine.
7. explain that the first’s already gone, but the second and third still haven’t.
8. explain that it was warm yesterday, and that it is today as well.

---

**1.9 Greeting and taking leave**

**1.9.1 Names and titles**

Because even perfunctory greetings tend to involve a name and title, you need to have some rudimentary information about forms of address before being introduced to the
language of greeting and leave taking. Below are five common Chinese surnames, followed by a title which means, literally, ‘teacher’, and the SV  hǎo, which in this environment, serves as a simple acknowledgement. Lǎoshī, which has no exact correspondence in English, can be applied to both males and females, as well as to all ranks of teachers, and even other types of white-collar workers.

Zhāng lǎoshī, hǎo.  ‘Hello, Professor Zhang.’
Wáng lǎoshī, hǎo.
Lǐ lǎoshī, hǎo.  [with tone shift]
Zhào lǎoshī, hǎo.
Chén lǎoshī, hǎo.

1.9.2 Hello

Using specialized greetings such as ‘hi’ or ‘bonjour’ to acknowledge or confirm the worth of a relationship on every encounter is not a universal feature of cultures. The practice seems to have crept into Chinese relatively recently. Whereas in the past, and even now in the countryside, people might acknowledge your presence by asking where you are going, or if you have eaten (if they say anything at all to a stranger), nowadays urban Chinese (at least) make use of phrases like nǐ hǎo in ways similar to English ‘hi’ or ‘hello’. Most people would probably regard nǐ hǎo as the prototypical neutral greeting, but there are other common options such as the ones listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ hǎo!</td>
<td>Deferential</td>
<td>'How do you do'?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nín hǎo!</td>
<td></td>
<td>'How're you doing'?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hei!</td>
<td>Exclamation</td>
<td>'Ey! Hi!'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hǎo!</td>
<td></td>
<td>'Hi! Hello!'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hǎo ma?</td>
<td></td>
<td>'You well?'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ hǎo a!</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Taiwan at least, a version of ‘good morning’, based on the verb zǎo ‘be+early’, has become common usage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zǎo!</td>
<td>Morning! (be+early)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zǎo ān.</td>
<td>Good morning. (early peace)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ zǎo.</td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expressions comparable to English ‘good afternoon’ or ‘good evening’ are also starting to be used in modern China: thus xiàwǔ ‘afternoon’ and wǎnshāng ‘evening’ are sometimes used in the expressions xiàwǔ hǎo ‘good afternoon’, wǎnshāng hǎo ‘good evening’. Wǎn ān ‘good night (late peace)’, as a sign off at the end of the day, has a longer pedigree, and is now commonly used by staff in larger hotels, for example.

In general, greetings of the sort listed above are used more sparingly than their English counterparts. Colleagues or classmates passing each other, for example, are less likely to use a formulaic greeting such as nǐ hǎo – though novelties such as fast food
counters and toll booths (where toll collectors can sometimes be heard to greet each passing driver with nǐ hǎo) may encourage broader use. In general, though, a greeting to someone known should be preceded by a name, or name and title (as in §1.9.1).

1.9.3 Goodbye
Many cultures have conventional phrases for taking leave. Often blessings serve the purpose (eg ‘bye’, from ‘good bye’, supposedly derived from the phrase ‘God be with you’). Here are some Chinese ‘goodbyes’, beginning with the standard, zàijiàn, literally ‘again-see’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zàijiàn.</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>Goodbye. (again-see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yīhuīr ~ yīhuīr jiàn.</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>See [you] soon. (awhile see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Míngtiān jiàn.</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>See [you] tomorrow. (tomorrow see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hūjiàn.</td>
<td>informal</td>
<td>See [you] later; bye. (return-see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huitou jiàn.</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>See [you] shortly. (return-head see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Màn zōu.</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>Take it easy. (slowly walk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

a) The addition of final –r to the written pinyin syllable represents a complex of phonetic effects that will be considered more fully later. In the case of yīhuīr ~ yīhuīr, the final –r affects the quality of the preceding vowel, so that it is pronounced [yīhuěr ~ yīhuĕr] rather than [yīhuīr ~ yīhuīr].

b) Students of all kinds, and other urban youth, also use English ‘bye’ or ‘byebye’ [pinyin bàibài] – often added after one of the other forms.

c) As with greetings, when saying goodbye to a person of rank, it is normal to mention name and title, eg: Wèi lǎoshī, zàijiàn. / Hào, zàijìàn, zàijìàn.

1.9.4 Smoothing the transitions

a) Prior to asking a question
Personal questions are often prefaced with the expression qǐngwèn, literally ‘request-ask’, but idiomatically equivalent to ‘may I ask’, or ‘excuse me’. Qǐngwèn may also be preceded by a name and title.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qǐngwèn, nǐ chīfān le ma?</td>
<td>qǐng wèn, nín è bu è?</td>
<td>Excuse me, have you eaten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhào lǎoshī, qǐng wèn, nín è bu è?</td>
<td>Prof. Zhao, mind if I ask: are you hungry?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qǐng ‘request; invite’ also occurs in the common phrase qǐng zuò ‘have a seat (invite sit)’ and the expression, qǐng jìn ‘won’t you come in? (invite enter)’.

b) Prior to leaving
In the normal course of events, just a goodbye is too abrupt for closing a conversation. One way to smooth the transition is to announce that you have to leave, before saying goodbye. Here are four ways to do this, all involving the verb zǒu ‘leave; go’. These expressions are a complicated to analyze; some notes are provided below, but otherwise, they should be internalized as units.
Hǎo, nà wǒ zōu le. ‘Okay, I’m off then. (okay, in+that+case, I leave LE)’

Hei, wǒ gāi zōu le. ‘Say, I should be off. (hey, I should leave LE)’

Hǎo, nà jiù zhěi- yàng ba, zōu le. ‘Okay then, that’s it – [I]’m off! (okay, in+that+case then this-way BA, leave LE)’

Bù zǎo le, wǒ gāi zōu le. ‘[It]’s late, I’d better be off. (not be+early LE, I should leave LE)’

Notes
Gāi or yīnggāi ‘should; must’; nà ‘in-that-case; well; then’; jiù ‘then’; ba is a particle associated with suggestions; le [here] signals a new situation, as seen earlier. Taking leave obviously involves a broad range of situations, including seeing someone off on a journey (which, in China, is an extremely important event). To begin with, we limit ourselves just to these ways of closing an informal conversation.

1.10 Unit 1 scenario
After you have practiced asking questions and giving responses, as well as acknowledging people with simple greetings and goodbyes, you can try composing conversational scenarios with the following sorts of material:

Greetings  Development   Leaving
Nǐ hǎo.   Máng ma?   Hǎo, zài jiàn, míngtiān jiàn.
              Bú è le.   Míngtiān jiàn.

Tā hái méi xìzào. Dui ma?
Nǐ ne? Yě hěn lèi.  Tā yǐjīng qǐlái le méiyǒu?
Zuótiān hěn rè ma? Xiànzāi ne? Shàng kè le méiyǒu?

1.11 Tones

1.11.1 Tone combos
Tones are easier to perceive and assimilate in pairs. Four tones form 16 possible combinations of two, but because of the restriction on combinations of low tones (3+3 > 2+3), only 15 pairs are distinctive. The six sets below are mostly made up of words already encountered. They should be memorized so that they can be recited by number: di-yī: lǎoshī, jīnzhāng; di-èr: xīzào, hěn hǎo, etc.
Tones in combination tend to accommodate each other to some degree, though not to the point of shifting to another tone. In the above sets, the most salient adjustment is probably that of 4+4, (zàijiàn) where the tone of the first syllable is not so steeply falling as that of the last. The first of the two is some times referred to as the ‘modified-4th’ tone.

1.11.2 Tone lock
In these first weeks of learning Chinese, you may find yourself unable to pronounce a tone, even unable to mimic your teacher – a situation that might be called ‘tone lock’. Tone lock can occur for many reasons, but one common one is that as a beginner, you will often be tentative, and tentativeness in English is accompanied by a rising contour. That’s fine if you are trying to say the name, Wáng, with rising tone. But it won’t work if you want to say Wèi, which is falling. Other strange conditions may occur: you may hear rising as falling, and falling as rising (flip-flop); your falling may refuses to fall (‘fear of falling’), your level, refuse not to fall (‘fear of flying’). Regardless of the symptoms, the best cure is to figuratively step back, and make use of your tone concepts: level is ‘sung out,’ rising is ‘doubtful’ (Wáng? máng?), low is ‘low’ (despite the contoured symbol), and falling is ‘final’ or ‘confidant’ (‘Wáng, Chén, Wèi; or ‘I said Wèi’).

1.11.3 The first ‘rule of 3’
If you find that the tonal cues, ‘sung out’, ‘doubt’, ‘low’ and ‘final’ do not serve you well, there are others that have been used in the past. Walter C. Hillier, in his English-Chinese Dictionary of 1953 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.) proposed ‘languid assertion’ for the first tone, ‘startled surprise’ for the second, ‘affectionate remonstration’ for the third, and ‘abuse’ for the fourth. Whatever the label, the important point is to follow the rule of three: develop a concept for each tone, know what tone the word has, and monitor yourself when you speak.

1. conceptualize the tones (sung out etc.);
2. learn the tone with the word;
3. monitor your speech.
**Exercise 3.**

a) Read out the following sets – recall your tone concepts:

- dá  dā  dǎ  dà  bù  bǔ  bú  bú
- kǒu  kòu  kōu  kòu  jǐn  jǐn  jǐn  jǐn
- pán  pān  pān  pán  guō  guō  guó  guò
- wèi  wěi  wéi  wēi  hǎi  hái  hǎi  hài

b) Tone shifts: Read the following sequences aloud, supplying the tones that are omitted:

- bu máng  bu è  yi tǎo  yi tiáo
- bu lèi  bu shì  yi kuai  di-yì
- bu jǐnzhāng  bu kè  yi wèi  yi zhāng
- bu hǎo  bu cuò  yi běn  yi kè

ii  hen hǎo  hen máng  hen zǎo  hen wǎn
hen lèi  hen nan  hai hǎo  hen kě

late

- duo  dou  fo  kuo  cou  zhou  zhuo  zou  zuo
- bo  guo  ruo  shou  gou  shuo  suo  po  you

- gui  shuí  rui  chuī  zui  dui  (wèi)
- liú  niú  xiū  qiú  diū  jiù  (yǒu)
- guǐ - jiǔ  liù - duì  cuī - qiú  liú - shuí
1.12 Rhymes and Rhythms

Rote learning, very highly prized in traditional and even modern China, and highly valued at other times in our own past, is not, in the post-modern West, generally considered a beneficial educational method. Outside class, however, people still learn parts for plays, and they often recall song lyrics, advertising jingles and slogans without much self-conscious effort. So we take advantage of these predilections by providing some suitable Chinese rhymed and rhythmic material at the end of each lesson. This material ranges from doggerel to poetry, from jingles to nursery rhymes and from satirical verse to songs and poems. It is selected for easy recall, and eventually it will form a useful repertoire that can be tapped for information about pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical patterns. What is more, you will have something to recite when you are asked to ‘say something in Chinese’ or when you are in China and asked to sing or perform for an audience. And closer to home, you may be asked to atone for being late to class by reciting some short piece in front of your classmates.

The first rhyme – a nursery rhyme - tells the story of a young entrepreneur and his struggle to set up a business. The word-for-word gloss provided will guide you towards the meaning.

**Dà dùzi**

Dà dùzi, big tummy
kāi pùzi, open shop
méi běnqián, not+have root-money
dàng kùzi. pawn trousers

The second, also a nursery rhyme, has a shifting rhythm but a more mundane subject matter: the tadpole, denizen of village ponds and urban drainage systems.

**Xiǎo kēdōu**

Xiǎo kēdōu, small tadpole
shuǐ lǐ yòu, water in swim
xìxì de wēiba, tiny-DE tail
dàdà de tóu. big DE head