

Complete Lesson Transcript – Lesson 1 [Traditional]

Hosts: Adam Menon / Kirin Yang

Adam: Hello everyone. And welcome to the first lesson of the Chineselearnonline.com Podcast series teaching Mandarin Chinese. My name is Adam. I will be your host for much of the series. Now our course is a little bit different from other courses in that it is progressive. What that means is that each lesson continues where the previous left off. So as we teach you new words we are going to use them in later lessons. This also means that in later lessons the amount of English being spoken will be reduced while the amount of Chinese spoken increases. So for example now I am the one introducing the lesson but in the future it will be our Chinese speakers doing the introduction. Don't worry, however, since there are a couple of rules that we follow. Apart from the new words taught in each lesson we are only allowed to use Chinese taught in earlier lessons within the lesson. This way you will be forced to review what was taught earlier. That is also why I am the only speaker in English now because we haven't taught you any Chinese yet. So there are no Chinese words available for me to use.

Now, when we refer to the Chinese language on this podcast and on our website, we are indeed referring to the Mandarin version of Chinese which is the most common version of the language. With more than eight hundred million speakers around the world it is by far the most spoken language out there so we hope that by listening regularly to our podcasts you will be able to converse with other Mandarin Chinese speakers wherever you are. Now with me today is a special guest who will be with us throughout the course.

Kirin: Hello everyone. My name is Kirin from Taiwan. Thank you for listening.

Adam: Ok, thank you Kirin. I think we're ready to get started here. We'll begin with some basics about the Chinese language. The biggest difference between Chinese and English is that Chinese is a tonal language – there are four tones that are used to distinguish words from each other. Really, that's the key to learning the language for if you can master those four tones – you've mastered the hardest part of learning Chinese. In English even if you change tones, the general meaning of a word is still the same. For example with the word "pig" – you could say "pīg, píg, pǐg and pìg" and they'd all be referring to the same thing. In Chinese though if you were to use the word for pig and used those same four different tones you'd actually be saying four completely different words with completely unrelated meanings as you'll hear in a moment. Now because it's so important to get these tones right I highly encourage our listeners to try and repeat the Chinese words as you hear them – we leave a pause for you to do just that. If it's not possible for you to repeat the words out loud try to do so in your mind. It will make a big difference in the long run.

I'll now proceed to describe the four tones with Kirin helping me sound them out. Now, how do you say “pig” in Chinese, Kirin?

Kirin: 豬.

Adam: Now that's the first tone, which is a high tone. Please repeat that for us again, Kirin.

Kirin: 豬.

Adam: Alright. Now that just happens to be the word for “pig” in Chinese. The second tone is a rising tone. Kirin will now demonstrate the second tone with our example.

Kirin: 竹.

Adam: Ok, one more time...

Kirin: 竹.

Adam: Now that means “bamboo.” So you can see the difference between 豬 and 竹. Imagine if you were in a restaurant and were trying to order meat from a pig but you instead asked for meat from a bamboo – that might be a little embarrassing, wouldn't it? Now, the third tone is what we call a falling rising tone. How does that sound, Kirin?

Kirin: 煮.

Adam: Alright, again?

Kirin: 煮.

Adam: Ok, and that means “to cook.” So wow, completely different meaning again. Now, it's sometimes hard to differentiate between the second tone and the third tone. Now the difference is that third tone usually lasts a bit longer. So listen to the two tones again and see if you can hear the difference. So first you have the second tone...

Kirin: 竹

Adam: ...and the third tone...

Kirin: 煮.

Adam: So I hope you can hear the difference there. The latter is definitely just a little bit longer. Now the last tone is what we call a falling tone. How does that go, Kirin?

Kirin: 住.

Adam: Alright. Can we hear it again?

Kirin: 住.

Adam: Great, and that is the verb “to live.” Isn’t that interesting? So let’s repeat the four tones again, a couple of times each so we can distinguish between them. Again, please try and say these words out aloud or in your head just so you can get the feel for the different tones. So the first tone was a high tone.

Kirin: 豬, 豬.

Adam: The second one was the rising tone.

Kirin: 竹, 竹.

Adam: The third one was the falling, rising tone.

Kirin: 煮, 煮.

Adam: And the last one was the falling tone...

Kirin: 住, 住.

Adam: Excellent! So as you can see from the great difference in meaning between those how important it is to master those tones. Don’t worry though, we’ll let you know which tones we are using for all new vocabulary introduced until you get to the level where you are comfortable enough to determine for yourself. So as long as you try to repeat the words exactly as you hear them, it shouldn’t cause too much trouble in the long term.

Now, for those of you using newer generation iPODS or MP3 players that can read lyrics, we’ve included lesson summaries in our podcasts. So by pushing the center button on your iPOD or viewing lyrics or descriptions on your mp3 players you may be able to see our lesson summaries and the tone marks involved while you’re listening. This is just another tool that we feel should help in your learning.

Now before we go Kirin, why don’t you pick a few Chinese words and pronounce them for us. We will then try and identify which tone one to four they are.

Kirin: Ok... 起, 起.

Adam: Ok, so do you know what tone that was? That was the third tone, falling rising. Let's try another one.

Kirin: 聽, 聽.

Adam: So what tone does that sound like? It was...the high tone. Let's try another one.

Kirin: 看, 看.

Adam: So that was...the fourth tone, falling. And let's do one more.

Kirin: 來, 來.

Adam: And that was a rising tone.

Ok, thank you Kirin. I hope that helps you see the difference between the tones. Now that's all the time we're going to take for today's show. We do try to keep our lessons short and sweet so you can review them often. Also please try and visit our website: ChineseLearnOnline.com where you can get detailed transcripts of our podcasts to help you follow along. So please join us again for our next lesson.

Kirin: Goodbye!