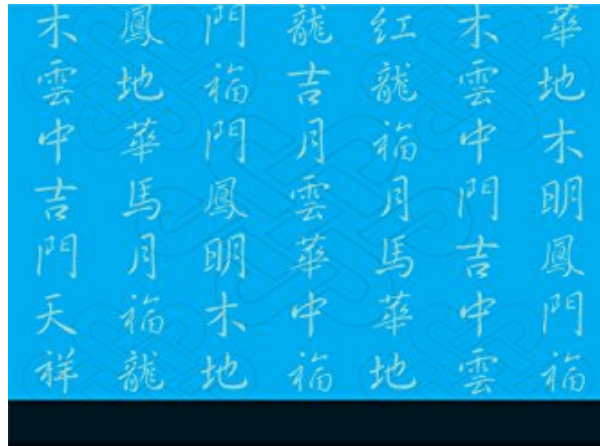


THE CHINESE LANGUAGE: ITS HISTORY AND CURRENT USAGE BY DANIEL KANE



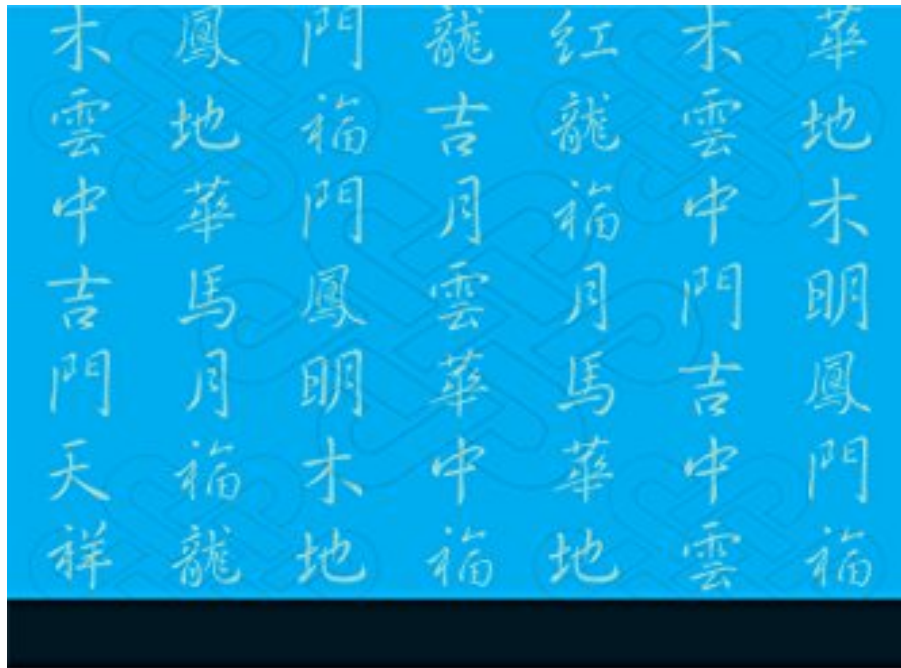
The Chinese Language

Its History and Current Usage

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Review

"A brief introduction to the main characteristics of Chinese, written to be accessible to beginning students as well as anyone with a general interest in Chinese language and culture. Provides a demystifying overview of Chinese from a linguistic, historical and social perspective." —Omniglot.com blog

"Excellent overview of the Chinese language. It's perfect for a reader with some knowledge of linguistic terms, but it's definitely written for a layman. It has tons of examples and really whetted my appetite to learn more." —Goodreads

About the Author

Dr. Daniel Kane is Professor of Chinese and Head of the Asian Studies Department at Macquarie University. He was Cultural Counselor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing in 1996, and has broad interests in the field of Chinese Studies, including linguistics, politics, intellectual history and current affairs.

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This is an introductory book about the history and contemporary usage of the Chinese language.

Chinese is generally considered a difficult language. It is also a fascinating and important language that cannot be ignored. A growing number of English speakers are learning the Chinese language to the enrichment of their lives and the admiration of their friends. Chinese does, however, present a number of challenges. Written Chinese looks like a random set of stroke, dots and dashes. In its handwritten form it looks like a series of undifferentiated squiggles. Spoken Chinese sounds like a rapid series of almost identical monosyllables with rising and falling intonations.

This book is a contemporary introduction to the modern Chinese language as it is used in China during the first few years of the twenty-first century. China has changed so much and so dramatically over the past century, and indeed over the past twenty years, and these changes are reflected in the language. Textbooks written only twenty years ago are now quite quaint. Much information on the actual use of putonghua (Mandarin Chinese), the use of dialects or various romanization systems is now out of date. The aim of this book is to present current realities. China is a country with a long history, and to understand modern China we must know something of its past. The same applies to the language. Earlier stages of Chinese still have a deep influence on the current language, and we should at least be aware of such influences.

This book is not a language textbook for those wishing to learn Chinese. It does not try to teach the Chinese language. It is a book about Chinese. It has been written for people who are thinking of taking up Chinese and would like some insights into what they are letting themselves in for. As the Chinese strategist Sunzi said, "zhi ji zhi bi, bai zhan bai sheng."—"Know yourself and know the other: a hundred battles, a hundred victories." The same applies to learning Chinese.

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Most helpful customer reviews

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

of wide-ranging interest

By T. M. Bosley

I have studied Chinese for 17 years and have read many, many books on Chinese. This is not a classroom book for learning Chinese. But it is a wonderful adjunct. Beginners and advanced students alike would find it of interest, as would any linguistically oriented person wanting an introduction to this remarkable language.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Really excellent depth for reference

By philipmerrill

For most enthusiasts of the Chinese language, this recently published book is a must-have. The scope and depth of coverage are perfect for light browsing and careful reading, by those who don't know "Ni hau ma?" to those who have studied in school. Very many important specifics are nicely summarized and presented in an order that makes sense. For anyone who wants to master the language, this book will inevitably be helpful. It even briefly lists all the complicated basics of referring to family relatives!

PHIL :)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

it's pretty good, but not exactly true to the title

By dhydavid

It is a good light book for the general reader. It even has lots of tips for studying Chinese, like how to memorize Chinese characters, and what reference books to get at what level. It is relatively up-to-date, with some very nice new words and new usage. I think it should benefit beginners and intermediate students who need some pointers and directions. Also the part about the methodology of simplifying characters is very informative too.

The only thing that I am a little disappointed with is the historical sketch of the development of Chinese. As its title suggests, it should be a book that contains at least a decent amount of history of the language. You see that in the subtitle, it says "its history and current usage". But actually there isn't much history in it. The author only gives a few paragraphs to each period in the history of the language, introducing a few key characteristics in each period. Admittedly, history of the Chinese language is a "notoriously" difficult subject that calls for extensive knowledge of linguistics and Classical Chinese on the reader's side. The author probably does not want to scare away the general-interest readers by talking about the nitty-gritty of historical reconstruction. But a more systematic description that strips away the technicality would be better.

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