

# INFO SHEET – Mandarin Chinese



## Why you should study Mandarin Chinese

Maybe you've heard it's too hard to learn Chinese. Maybe you get intimidated at the thought of having to learn all those cryptic signs and symbols you've seen on Chinese food menus. And it's true, learning Chinese is not easy. But it can be done and every year students who graduate from Carleton with a minor in Chinese find themselves using their language skills (and their curiosity) to find jobs and/or higher education opportunities in various Chinese cities.

In addition to offering a minor in Mandarin Chinese, Carleton also has exchange agreements with institutions across China.

## About the Language

Even though the Chinese language may at first appear cryptic, there is a curious logic and efficiency that underlies it. The days of the week, for example, are "star period one...star period two...star period three..." etc. It is the same for months. And the written language, which may seem so arbitrary, is actually, in some cases, made up of stylized shapes from the real world. Check out the character for "horse" below.<sup>1</sup>



Ancient Seal



Traditional



Simplified



Speaking of written language, Chinese has influenced other languages too; like Japanese. In fact, **Kanji**, one of three Japanese writing systems, is made up entirely of Chinese characters.

Fortunately, you don't need to read Mandarin in order to speak it. **Pinyin** is a Roman writing system that represents Chinese sounds and tones and allows you to sound out a word without knowing characters.

Here are some other fun facts about the language:

- more than 1 billion speakers worldwide<sup>2</sup>
- one of the six official languages of the United Nations
- more than 50,000 characters, but you only need 2500 to read 90% of everyday language
- a form of texting shorthand is evolving in Chinese. For example, "3" is "san", so "3Q" sounds like "thank you" in English. "8" is "ba", so "88" sounds like "ba ba" or "bye bye".<sup>3</sup>
- China is the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest country, but only has one time zone.

[carleton.ca/slals/languages/](http://carleton.ca/slals/languages/)

<sup>1</sup> Photo Credit: "Knotty Pines Farm 2013" by Kate Gardiner. Saved 8 July, 2015 from Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0  
<sup>2</sup> Ethnologue, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> thechairmansbao.com/10-interesting-facts-figures-mandarin-chinese/