Bootstrap Chinese Grammar

Learn Mandarin Chinese grammar step-by-step
with 200 topics and over 2,800 examples

First Edition

Peter Vujanovic


Declan Software Ltd.

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Published by Declan Software Ltd., London, United Kingdom.

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ISBN 978-0-6455314-1-1 (paper)

For my girls

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Acknowledgments

I wish to thank a few people for advising on aspects of the book:

- Mei Yei and Zhang Wei for proofreading the Chinese and the English translations, as well as for invaluable advice on aspect of the grammar.
- Chen Zhiyu for doing a superb job recording the 2800 Chinese examples for the companion mobile application.

Any errors are, of course, entirely the responsibility of the author.

The book is dedicated to my girls, Tatiana, Ella, and Nelly, who bore with me throughout the many of hours that went into composing this grammar.

Preface

Bootstrap Chinese Grammar is a new way to learn Mandarin Chinese grammar that focuses heavily on examples. Starting from the very beginning, the idea is progress in small self-contained steps (called 'topics'). Each topic includes a brief explanation of a grammar pattern and then provides lots of examples that illustrate the grammar. Each example includes its English translation, as well as notes highlighting how the example illustrates that topic's grammar. New vocabulary is also explained in the example notes as it is encountered.

And of course, when used in tandem with the mobile application, the audio pronunciation is available for every example.

The *Bootstrap Chinese Grammar* is for English-speaking pupils and students of Chinese at the introductory stage. It assumes zero knowledge of Chinese grammar or vocabulary.

How to use this book with the companion mobile app

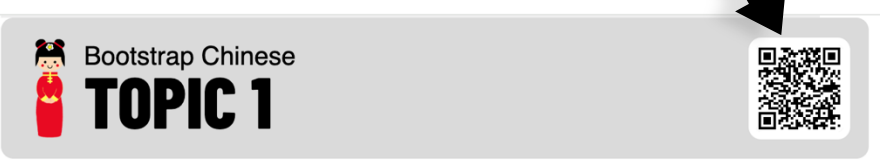
This is the companion book to the ***Bootstrap Chinese Grammar*** mobile application. The iOS (iPhone & iPad) and Android apps can be downloaded using these QR code links:

Download on the App Store

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The application contains all the same content as this book but with the addition of high-quality native speaker recordings of all examples. So, if you prefer to have the grammar set out in book form but would also like to be able to listen to the example sentences, then the book/app combination is perfect for you.

The book and app are easy to coordinate using QR codes. Just use the app to scan the QR code in the title bar of any topic in the book and the app takes you straight to the app topic where you will find high-quality audio examples matching the examples in that topic of the book.



Tones in Mandarin Chinese

Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, which means that the pitch or tone in which a word is spoken can completely change its meaning. This characteristic is one of the most challenging aspects for non-native speakers to master, but it is also one of the most essential for clear communication. Mandarin has four primary tones, and one neutral tone, each of which must be learned and practiced to achieve fluency.

The Four Tones and the Neutral Tone

1. **First Tone (Flat Tone)**: The first tone is high and level, similar to singing a note at a steady pitch. The tone remains constant throughout the entire syllable. For example, in the word "mā" (□), which means "mother," the pitch does not waver. This tone is represented by a horizontal line above the vowel in Pinyin, indicating that the pitch should be maintained evenly.

2. **Second Tone (Rising Tone)**: The second tone starts at a mid-level pitch and rises sharply, much like the intonation used in English when asking a question, such as “Really?” or “What?” An example is "yú" (鱼), meaning "fish." This tone is represented by an upward-sloping line, guiding the speaker to raise their pitch as they pronounce the syllable.

3. **Third Tone (Falling-Rising Tone)**: The third tone is the most complex, as it involves a dip in pitch followed by a rise. When pronounced correctly, it sounds like a valley where the pitch drops and then climbs back up. This tone is symbolized by a small “v” shape over the vowel in Pinyin. An example is "wǒ" (我), which means "I" or "me." It’s important to note that in natural speech, the full dip and rise of the third tone is often shortened unless the word is spoken in isolation or for emphasis.

4. **Fourth Tone (Falling Tone)**: The fourth tone is sharp and forceful, starting at a high pitch and dropping quickly. This tone can often sound similar to giving a command or expressing strong emotion, such as anger or surprise. For instance, "bù" (不), meaning "no" or "not," is pronounced with this quick, downward pitch. It’s represented by a descending line in Pinyin.

5. **Neutral Tone**: The neutral tone, sometimes referred to as the fifth tone, is light and unstressed. It does not have a specific pitch contour and is often used in syllables that follow a strongly stressed syllable. For example, in "bàba" (爸爸), meaning "father," the second syllable "ba" is in the neutral tone. The neutral tone is indicated in Pinyin by the absence of a tone mark.

The Importance of Tones in Mandarin

Mastering tones is crucial in Mandarin because a change in tone can change the meaning of a word entirely. For example, "mā" (□) means "mother," but "mǎ" (马) means "horse," and "mà" (□) means "to scold." These differences highlight the importance of correct tonal pronunciation. Without proper tones, communication can become confusing or even incomprehensible.

Tips for Practicing Tones

1. **Listening and Imitation**: Start by listening to native speakers and try to imitate their pronunciation. Pay close attention to how their pitch changes with each tone.

2. **Use of Visual Aids**: Visualizing the tones as shapes or using hand gestures can help remember the pitch movements. For example, some learners use a flat hand to represent the first tone, a rising hand for the second tone, and so on.

3. **Practice with Minimal Pairs**: Practice words that are identical except for their tones, known as minimal pairs, such as "mā" (□), "má" (麻), "mǎ" (马), and "mà" (□). This will help you distinguish and produce each tone accurately.

4. **Contextual Learning**: Try using tones in context rather than in isolation. Practice sentences where tones interact with each other, as this will better prepare you for real-world conversations.

One of the most common challenges learners face is tone sandhi, where the tones of words change based on the tones of the surrounding words. This is discussed in the following section.

Tone Sandhi

Tone sandhi refers to the phenomenon where the tones of certain words change depending on their placement in a sentence or the tones of surrounding words. This is especially common in Mandarin Chinese and can be a challenge for learners.

The most notable example of tone sandhi in Mandarin involves the third tone (falling-rising tone). When two third-tone syllables are spoken in succession, the first third tone typically changes to a second tone (rising tone) for ease of pronunciation. For example:

- 你 (nǐ) + 好 (hǎo) = 你好 (nǐhǎo) changes to (níhǎo), meaning "hello."

This alteration occurs naturally in conversation and helps maintain the fluidity of speech. Another example is 很好 (hěnhǎo), meaning "very good," which changes to (hénhǎo) when spoken.

Another instance of tone sandhi occurs with the neutral tone. Words that are typically pronounced with a neutral tone can have their preceding syllable's tone slightly modified or emphasized, depending on the context. For example, in the word 爸爸 (bàba), meaning "father," the first syllable is pronounced with a fourth tone (falling tone), while the second syllable is toneless.

Understanding and mastering tone sandhi is crucial for fluent speech in Mandarin. It not only affects pronunciation but also ensures that your speech sounds natural and is easily understood by native speakers. Practicing tone sandhi in phrases and sentences, rather than in isolation, is key to mastering this aspect of Mandarin. Regular exposure to spoken Mandarin, through conversation, listening exercises, or language immersion, can greatly aid in internalizing these tonal changes.

The tone sandhi rules

Here is a comprehensive list of tone sandhi rules in Mandarin Chinese:

1. **Third Tone Sandhi**: When two third tones occur in succession, the first third tone changes to a second tone.
    - Example: 你好 (nǐ hǎo) becomes (ní hǎo).

2. **Three Consecutive Third Tones**: If there are three consecutive third tones, the first two often change to second tones, and the third remains a third tone.

    - Example: **展览馆** (zhǎn lǎn guǎn) becomes (zhán lán guǎn).

3. **Tone Sandhi with 不 (bù)**: "不" changes from fourth tone to second tone when followed by another fourth tone.

    - Example: **不对** (bù duì) becomes (bú duì).

4. **Tone Sandhi with 一 (yī)**: "一" changes from first tone to fourth tone before a fourth tone, and to second tone before other tones.

    - Example: 一半 (yī bàn) becomes (yì bàn); 一个 (yī gè) becomes (yí gè).

5. **Neutral Tone Sandhi**: Words with a neutral tone can affect the tone of the preceding syllable, often lightening or shortening it.

    - Example: **妈妈** (māma), where the second "ma" is in neutral tone.

The pinyin pronunciations in this book adhere to these Tone Sandhi rules.

❖ The verb 是 (shì) - 'to be' and personal pronouns

The Chinese word 是 means 'to be.' It is pronounced **shì**.

It can be used to equate two nouns (things), so [A] 是 [B] means '[A] is [B].'

是 is invariant with subject, unlike in English where we have various forms of 'to be' such as '[I] am,' '[He] is,' '[They] are,' etc.

The Chinese singular 'personal pronouns' are 我 (**wǒ**) = 'I,' 你 (**nǐ**) = 'you,' 他 (**tā**) = 'he,' and 她 (**tā**) = 'she.'

- 他 ('he') and 她 ('she') have the same pronunciation **tā**.

Note that Chinese does not have explicit articles like 'a' and 'the.'

EXAMPLES:

1. **我是学生。**
   `wǒ shì xuéshēng.`
   I am [a] student.
   - 是 (**shì**) is the verb 'to be'
   - 我 (**wǒ**) means 'I'
   - 学生 (**xuéshēng**) means 'student'

2. **你是老师。**
   `nǐ shì lǎoshī.`
   You are [a] teacher.
   - The verb 是 (**shì**) does not change (conjugate) for different persons so 我是… and 你是…
   - 你 (**nǐ**) means 'you'
   - 老师 (**lǎoshī**) means 'teacher'

3. **我是老师。**
   `wǒ shì lǎoshī.`
   I am [a] teacher.

4. **你是学生。**
   `nǐ shì xuéshēng.`
   You are [a] student.

5. **他是学生。**
   `tā shì xuéshēng.`
   He is [a] student.
   - 他 (**tā**) means 'he'

6 **她是老师。**

`tā shì lǎoshī.`

She is [a] teacher.

她 (**tā**) means 'she'

7 **我是中国人。**

`wǒ shì zhōngguó rén.`

I am [a] Chinese [person].

中国 (**zhōngguó**) means 'China'

人 (**rén**) means 'person'

中国人 (**zhōngguó rén**) means 'Chinese person' or literally 'China' (中国) + 'person' (人)

8 **他是中国人。**

`tā shì zhōngguó rén.`

He is [a] Chinese [person].

9 **我是美国人。**

`wǒ shì měiguó rén.`

I am [an] American [person].

美国 (**měiguó**) means 'America'

美国人 (**měiguó rén**) means 'American (person)' or literally 'America' (美国) + 'person' (人)

10 **你是美国人。**

`nǐ shì měiguó rén.`

You are [an] American [person].



❖ Negation using 不 (bù)

The negation marker 不 (bù) is used to negate most Chinese verbs, including 是 (shì).

- So 不是 (bú shì) means 'to not be', as in 'I am not…' etc.

Note that in spoken Mandarin Chinese, the tone of bù (4th tone) changes to bú (2nd tone) when it is followed by another 4th tone (such as is 是). This tone change is called 'tone sandhi' (变调, biàndiào) and is explained in the introduction to the book.

EXAMPLES:

1. **我不是学生。**
   wǒ bú shì xuéshēng.
   I am not [a] student.
   不 (bù) means 'not'

2. **你不是老师。**
   nǐ bú shì lǎoshī.
   You are not [a] teacher.

3. **他不是中国人。**
   tā bú shì zhōngguó rén.
   He is not [a] Chinese [person].

4. **我不是美国人。**
   wǒ bú shì měiguó rén.
   I am not [an] American.

5. **你不是医生。**
   nǐ bú shì yīshēng.
   You are not [a] doctor.
   医生 (yīshēng) means 'doctor'

6. **他不是工程师。**
   tā bú shì gōngchéngshī.
   He is not [an] engineer.
   工程师 (gōngchéngshī) means 'engineer'

7. **我不是老师，我是学生。**
   wǒ bú shì lǎoshī,#wǒ shì xuéshēng.
   I am not [a] teacher, I am [a] student.

8 **你不是学生，你是医生。**

nǐ bú shì xuéshēng,#nǐ shì yīshēng.
You are not [a] student, you are [a] doctor.

9 **他不是工程师，他是老师。**

tā bú shì gōngchéngshī,#tā shì lǎoshī.
He is not [an] engineer, he is [a] teacher.

10 **我不是医生，我是工程师。**

wǒ bú shì yīshēng,#wǒ shì gōngchéngshī.
I am not [a] doctor, I am [an] engineer.



❖ Chinese verbs and sentence word order

Verbs are words that express actions, states, or occurrences, like 'to be', 'to see' and 'to know'.

We have already seen the Chinese verb 是 (`shì`) which means 'to be'.

As we saw previously, unlike in English, Chinese verbs do not conjugate according to person (or tense or number).

But like in English, in a sentence Chinese verbs come between the 'subject' (who or what is doing the verb) and 'object' (the thing the verb is acting on). So the pattern is: [subject] + [verb] + [object].

- For instance: 我 [subject] + 是 [verb] + 学生 [object]
- and: 他 ('He') [subject] + 吃 ('eats') [verb] + 米饭 ('rice') [object]
- and: 她 ('She') [subject] + 喝 ('drinks') [verb] + 茶 ('tea') [object]

EXAMPLES:

1. **我是学生。**
   `wǒ shì xuéshēng.`
   I am [a] student.
   Word order: 我 [subject] + 是 [verb] + 学生 [object]

2. **我吃米饭。**
   `wǒ chī mǐfàn.`
   I eat rice.
   吃 (`chī`) means 'to eat'
   米饭 (`mǐfàn`) means 'rice'

3. **我喝茶。**
   `wǒ hē chá.`
   I drink tea.
   喝 (`hē`) means 'to drink'
   茶 (`chá`) means 'tea'

4. **他吃米饭。**
   `tā chī mǐfàn.`
   He eats rice.
   The verb 吃 (`chī`) does not change (conjugate) for different persons, so 我吃… and 他吃…

5 **她吃面条。**

tā chī miàntiáo.

She eats noodles.

面条 (**miàntiáo**) means 'noodles'

6 **我不吃米饭。**

wǒ bù chī mǐfàn.

I don't eat rice.

7 **他不吃米饭。**

tā bù chī mǐfàn.

He doesn't eat rice.

8 **中国人喝茶。**

zhōngguó rén hē chá.

[The] Chinese [person] drinks tea.

9 **他喝酒。**

tā hē jiǔ.

He drinks alcohol.

酒 (**jiǔ**) means 'alcohol' or 'liquor'

10 **她喝咖啡。**

tā hē kāfēi.

She drinks coffee.

咖啡 (**kāfēi**) means 'coffee'

11 **我不喝茶。**

wǒ bù hē chá.

I don't drink tea.

12 **老师不喝茶。**

lǎoshī bù hē chá.

[The] teacher doesn't drink tea.

13 **她不喝酒。**

tā bù hē jiǔ.

She doesn't drink alcohol.



❖ Asking questions with 吗 (ma)

Asking a question in Chinese can be as simple as adding the question particle **吗** (`ma`) at the end of a declarative statement. This turns the statement into a 'yes-no' question.

Questions can also use the negation marker **不** (`bù`) for negative questions - so for example turning 'Do you…?' into 'Don't you…?'

So the pattern for questions is: [subject] + [verb] + [object] + **吗** ?

Note that in Chinese there is no inversion of word order to form questions.

The particle **吗** typically pronounced in a neutral tone, also known as a light tone, which makes it less emphasized than other words.

EXAMPLES:

1. **你是学生吗?**
   `nǐ shì xuéshēng ma?`
   Are you [a] student?
   Pattern: 我 subject] + 是 verb] + 学生 object] + 吗 ?
2. **他是老师吗？**
   `tā shì lǎoshī ma?`
   Is he [a] teacher?
3. **你是中国人吗?**
   `nǐ shì zhōngguó rén ma?`
   Are you [a] Chinese [person]?
4. **他是美国人吗？**
   `tā shì měiguó rén ma?`
   Is he [an] American [person]?
5. **他是学生吗？**
   `tā shì xuéshēng ma?`
   Is he [a] student?
6. **你是老师吗?**
   `nǐ shì lǎoshī ma?`
   Are you [a] teacher?

7 **你不是医生吗?**

nǐ bú shì yīshēng ma?
Are you not [a] doctor?

8 **你不是中国人吗?**

nǐ bú shì zhōngguó rén ma?
Are you not [a] Chinese [person]?

9 **你喝茶吗?**

nǐ hē chá ma?
Do you drink tea?

10 **你不吃米饭吗?**

nǐ bù chī mǐfàn ma?
Don't you eat rice?

11 **中国人喝咖啡吗？**

zhōngguó rén hē kāfēi ma?
Do Chinese people drink coffee? (or Does [the] Chinese person...)

12 **他喝酒吗？**

tā hē jiǔ ma?
Does he drink alcohol?

13 **美国人不吃米饭吗？**

měiguó rén bù chī mǐfàn ma?
Don't American[s] eat rice?

14 **她不喝酒吗?**

tā bù hē jiǔ ma?
Doesn't she drink alcohol?

15 **他吃肉吗？**

tā chī ròu ma?
Does he eat meat?

肉 (**ròu**) means 'meat'

16 **你喝啤酒吗?**

nǐ hē píjiǔ ma?
Do you drink beer?

啤酒 (**píjiǔ**) means 'beer'



❖ Personal pronouns as verb objects

In Chinese, personal pronouns do not change with their function in a sentence - whether they are the subject or the object. They are non-declinable (invariant).

- In English, personal pronouns are declinable: we have 'I' ⇒ 'me', 'he' ⇒ 'him' etc.

So in Chinese, whether they function as the subject or object of a verb, the singular personal pronouns are always 我, 你, 他 and 她.

EXAMPLES:

1. **我爱你。**
   `wǒ ài nǐ.`
   I love you.
   Here the pronoun 你 is the object of the verb
   爱 (`ài`) means 'to love'

2. **你爱他吗?**
   `nǐ ài tā ma?`
   Do you love him?
   Here the pronoun 他 is the object of the verb

3. **她看他。**
   `tā kàn tā.`
   She looks at him.
   看 (`kàn`) means 'to look at'

4. **他找你。**
   `tā zhǎo nǐ.`
   He is looking for you.
   找 (zhǎo) means 'to look for' or 'to search'

5. **你教他。**
   `nǐ jiāo tā.`
   You teach him.
   教 (`jiāo`) means 'to teach'

6. **你看我吗?**
   `nǐ kàn wǒ ma?`
   Do you see me?

7 **我看你。**

wǒ kàn nǐ.
I see you.

8 **你听我。**

nǐ tīng wǒ.
You listen to me.

听 (**tīng**) means 'to listen'

9 **我等你。**

wǒ děng nǐ.
I wait for you.

等 (**děng**) means 'to wait'

10 **你找我。**

nǐ zhǎo wǒ.
You look for me.

11 **我教你中文。**

wǒ jiāo nǐ zhōngwén.
I teach you Chinese.

中文 (**zhōngwén**) means 'Chinese language'

12 **你问我问题。**

nǐ wèn wǒ wèntí.
You ask me a question.

问 (**wèn**) means 'to ask'

问题 (**wèntí**) means 'question' or 'problem'

13 **我听你吗？**

wǒ tīng nǐ ma?
Do I listen to you?

14 **你等我吗?**

nǐ děng wǒ ma?
Do you wait for me?

15 **我找你吗？**

wǒ zhǎo nǐ ma?
Do I look for you?

16 **你教她中文吗?**

nǐ jiāo tā zhōngwén ma?

Do you teach her Chinese?



❖ 'This (thing)' and 'that (thing)' using 这 (zhè) and 那 (nà)

In Chinese, the demonstrative pronouns 这 (zhè) and 那 (nà) are used to refer to a thing or object - like 'this (thing) or 'that (thing)' in English.

- 这 is used for a thing close to the speaker.
- 那 is used for a thing further from the speaker.

In this form 这 and 那 can 'not' be used alone as adjectives (such as 'This book is..'). So 这书 ('this book') is incorrect.

- How to use them in this way (as adjectives) will be covered in a later topic.

EXAMPLES:

1. 那是你吗？
   nà shì nǐ ma?
   Is that you?
   …in this photo…

2. 那不是我。
   nà bú shì wǒ.
   That is not me.
   …in that photo…

3. 这是书。
   zhè shì shū.
   This is [a] book.
   书 (shū) means 'book'

4. 那是笔。
   nà shì bǐ.
   That is [a] pen.
   笔 (bǐ) means 'pen'

5. 这不是椅子。
   zhè bú shì yǐzi.
   This is not [a] chair.
   椅子 (yǐzi) means 'chair'

TOPIC 6 ❖ 'This (thing)' and 'that (thing)' using 这 (zhè) and 那 (nà)

6 **那是桌子。**

nà shì zhuōzi.
That is [a] table.

桌子 (zhuōzi) means 'table'

7 **这是山。**

zhè shì shān.
This is [a] mountain.

山 (shān) means 'mountain'

8 **这是椅子吗?**

zhè shì yǐzi ma?
Is this [a] chair?

9 **那不是笔吗？**

nà bú shì bǐ ma?
Isn't that [a] pen?

10 **这是啤酒。**

zhè shì píjiǔ.
This is beer.

11 **那不是肉吗？**

nà bú shì ròu ma?
Isn't that meat?

12 **那不是茶。那是咖啡。**

nà bú shì chá.nà shì kāfēi.
That is not tea. That is coffee.

13 **这是面条。那是米饭。**

zhè shì miàntiáo.nà shì mǐfàn.
This is noodles. That is rice.



❖ 'What?' Asking questions with 什么 (shénme)

Another way to ask questions in Chinese is to use the interrogative pronoun 什么 (`shénme`) which means 'what'.

It can be used to pose questions about objects, concepts, and actions.

When asking 'what?', 什么 replaces the question particle 吗 and always comes after the verb - typically at the end of a sentence.

- So in Chinese, we ask 'This is what?' and not 'What is this?'

EXAMPLES:

1. 这是什么?
   `zhè shì shénme?`
   What is this (thing)?

2. 那是什么？
   `nà shì shénme?`
   What is that (thing)?

3. 你吃什么?
   `nǐ chī shénme?`
   What do you eat?

4. 他吃什么？
   `tā chī shénme?`
   What does he eat?

5. 老师吃什么？
   `lǎoshī chī shénme?`
   What does [the] teacher eat?

6. 美国人吃什么？
   `měiguó rén chī shénme?`
   What does [the] American eat? (or What do Americans eat?)

7. 你看见什么?
   `nǐ kànjiàn shénme?`
   What do you see?

   看见 (`kànjiàn`) means 'to see'

8 **他喝什么？**

`tā hē shénme?`

What does he drink?

9 **工程师是什么？**

`gōngchéngshī shì shénme?`

What is [an] engineer? (or What does [an] engineer do?)



❖ Plurals and the plural marker 些 (xiē)

Chinese does not typically mark nouns for number. So the same form of a noun is used regardless of whether it refers to one or multiple items.

That said, in many instances there are plural forms. One such case is the demonstrative pronouns 这 (zhè) and 那 (nà).

The plural marker 些 (xiē) is used with 这 (zhè) and 那 (nà) to refer to plurals of 'this' and 'that' forming 'these' and 'those'.

- 这些 (zhèxiē) means 'these (things)' close to the speaker.
- 那些 (nàxiē) means 'those (things)' further from the speaker.

EXAMPLES:

1. **这些是苹果。**
   zhè xiē shì píngguǒ.
   These are apples.
   Note 苹果 (píngguǒ) here refers to plural 'apples'
   苹果 (píngguǒ) means 'apple'

2. **那些是桌子。**
   nà xiē shì zhuōzi.
   Those are tables.
   Note 桌子 (zhuōzi) here refers to plural 'tables'

3. **这些不是椅子。**
   zhè xiē bú shì yǐzi.
   These are not chairs.
   Note 椅子 (yǐzi) here refers to plural 'chairs'

4. **这些是橙子吗?**
   zhè xiē shì chéngzi ma?
   Are these oranges?
   Note 橙子 (chéngzi) here refers to plural 'oranges'
   橙子 (chéngzi) means 'orange'

5 **那些不是柠檬吗？**

nà xiē bú shì níngméng ma?
Aren't those lemons?

Note 柠檬 (**níngméng**) here refers to plural 'lemons'

柠檬 (**níngméng**) means 'lemon'

6 **这些是什么?**

zhè xiē shì shénme?
What are these (things)?

什么 (**shénme**) can be used to refer to plural objects

7 **那些是什么？**

nà xiē shì shénme?
What are those (things)?

8 **那些是山吗？**

nà xiē shì shān ma?
Are those mountains?

9 **那些是山。**

nà xiē shì shān.
Those are mountains.



❖ Numbers in Chinese

Chinese numbers are generally straightforward:

- Chinese has unique characters for the numbers 1 through 10.
- After 10, numbers are formed by combining the word for ten 十 (`shí`) with another digit.
- Larger numbers in Chinese follow a similar pattern:
  - 百 (`bǎi`) means 'hundred'
  - 千(`qiān`) means 'thousand'
  - 万 (`wàn`) means 'ten thousand'

The word 零 (`líng`) is used for the number zero.

EXAMPLES:

1. 一
   yī
   1, one
   一 (`yī`) means 'one'
2. 二
   èr
   2, two
   二 (`èr`) means 'two'
3. 三
   sān
   3, three
   三 (`sān`) means 'three'
4. 四
   sì
   4, four
   四 (`sì`) means 'four'
5. 五
   wǔ
   5, five
   五 (`wǔ`) means 'five'

6 六
liù
6, six
六 (**liù**) means 'six'

7 七
qī
7, seven
七 (**qī**) means 'seven'

8 八
bā
8, eight
八 (**bā**) means 'eight'

9 九
jiǔ
9, nine
九 (**jiǔ**) means 'nine'

10 十
shí
10, ten
十 (**shí**) means 'ten'

11 十一
shí yī
11, eleven
十 ('ten') plus 一 ('one') gives 十一 ('eleven')

12 十二
shí èr
12, twelve

13 十五
shí wǔ
15, fifteen

14 二十
èr shí
20, twenty
二 ('two') times 十 ('ten') gives 二十 ('twenty')

15 **二十三**

èr shí sān

23, twenty-three

16 **七十七**

qī shí qī

77, seventy-seven

17 **一百**

yì bǎi

100, one hundred

百 (**bǎi**) means 'hundred'

18 **一百二十三**

yì bǎi èr shí sān

123, one hundred twenty-three

19 **二百五十**

èr bǎi wǔ shí

250, two hundred fifty

20 **九百九十九**

jiǔ bǎi jiǔ shí jiǔ

999, nine hundred ninety-nine

21 **一千**

yì qiān

1,000, one thousand

千 (**qiān**) means 'thousand'

22 **三千二百一十一**

sān qiān èr bǎi yī shí yī

3,211, three thousand two hundred eleven

23 **七千四百五十六**

qī qiān sì bǎi wǔ shí liù

7,456, seven thousand four hundred fifty-six

24 **一万**

yí wàn

10,000, ten thousand

万 (**wàn**) means 'ten thousand'

25 **一万二千三百四十五**

yí wàn èr qiān sān bǎi sì shí wǔ

12,345, twelve thousand three hundred forty-five

26 **五万五千五百五十五**

`wǔ wàn wǔ qiān wǔ bǎi wǔ shí wǔ`

55,555, fifty-five thousand five hundred fifty-five

27 **七万**

`qī wàn`

70,000, seventy thousand

28 **九万九千九百九十九**

`jiǔ wàn jiǔ qiān jiǔ bǎi jiǔ shí jiǔ`

99,999, ninety-nine thousand nine hundred ninety-nine



❖ The counter or measure word 个 (gè)

In Chinese 'counters' or 'measure words' (also known as 'classifiers') are words used to specify the type and number of a noun.

As we saw previously, nouns are typically not marked as plural in Chinese. It is these counters that serve to specify the number of nouns (whether singular or plural).

There are numerous counters in Chinese, depending on the type of object being counted, according to its shape, function, or other characteristics.

The most common counter is 个 (gè) which is used for people and many other objects.

- In addition to people, 个 is used as a counter for round fruits, days, countries, cities, houses and questions.
- It is also the default (genera)l counter that is used when the exact type of noun being referred to is unknown.

Note that when we use a counter for two objects, rather than 二 (èr) we use the special numeral 两 (liǎng)

EXAMPLES:

1. 一个人
   yí gè rén
   one person

2. 两个人
   liǎng gè rén
   two people
   Rather than 二 (èr), 两 (liǎng) should be used for the number 'two' when coupled with a counter (measure word)

3. 三个苹果
   sān gè píngguǒ
   three apples

4. 四个橙子
   sì gè chéngzi
   four oranges

5. 五个柠檬
   wǔ gè níngméng
   five lemons

6 **六天**

liù tiān

six days

天 (**tiān**) means 'day', 'sky', or 'heaven'

7 **七个国家**

qī gè guójiā

seven countries

国家 (**guójiā**) means 'country'

8 **八个城市**

bā gè chéngshì

eight cities

城市 (**chéngshì**) means 'city'

9 **九个问题**

jiǔ gè wèntí

nine questions

10 **十个学生**

shí gè xuéshēng

ten students

11 **十一个中国人**

shíyī gè zhōngguó rén

eleven Chinese people

12 **十二个美国人**

shíèr gè měiguó rén

twelve Americans

