More people speak Chinese than any other language in the world (English is 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and Spanish is 3\textsuperscript{rd}).

There are approximately 70,000 characters and phonetic sounds in the Chinese language.

An average person needs to know about 3,000 characters to read a newspaper.

About 5,000 characters are taught in secondary schools.

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of Taiwan.

Mandarin is also the national language of the People’s Republic of China.

Until the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, more than half of the world’s printed books were in Chinese.
The oldest texts discovered were oracular sayings inscribed on tortoise shells and cattle scapulae by Court diviners from the Shang Dynasty (1500 B.C.). These were called “oracle bone inscriptions.”

The modern Chinese dialects (from 11th century A.D.) have evolved from Old, or Archaic, Chinese (8th-3rd centuries B.C.). Sounds have been tentatively reconstructed since then.

Middle, or Ancient, Chinese (up until 11th century A.D.) was a very rich sound system from Old Chinese that had progressed far towards an extreme simplification seen in modern dialects.
The modern Mandarin syllable has what’s called a final element. This may be a vowel (a, e), semivowel (i, u), or a combination (diphthong or triphthong) with a tone (level, rising, dipping, or falling). This final consonant can only be an n, ng, or r.

Old Chinese, however, had an additional final p, t, k, b, d, g, and m.

The final element may be preceded by an initial consonant, but there can NEVER be a consonant cluster. It is thought that in Old Chinese, the use of clusters was acceptable.

Word order is more important in Chinese than in English as an indicator of relation of words to one another in the sentence. There is no inflection of nouns to show subject or object and no indication given that verbs, nouns, and adjectives agree with each other. Therefore there is a subject, verb/object, and a modifier/modified. The subject is a topic set forth to be followed by a comment rather than a performer of action, as in the English language. Verb tense is not expressed, and complicated modifier phrases precede the term being modified.

Example: Nei-ke shu yezü hen da “(As for) that tree, leaves very big.”
Jianle shu jiu mai de neige ren “Having seen book immediately buy is that man.” (That man who instantly buys every book he sees.)
The Written Language

There is a distinctive symbol, or character, for each word of vocabulary.

The writing system was originally derived from picture writing. Since then it has been standardized and stylistically altered, but principles and many symbols have fundamentally remained the same.

The language continues to work pictographically and phonetically, and sound indications have remained keyed to the pronunciations of 3000 years ago.

Through the Chou period (11th-3rd centuries B.C.) many characters had dual uses. A phonetic loan pictographs concrete words borrowed to indicate abstract words of the same or similar sounds.

Example: dustpan (ji) – this, his, her, its

dustpan and bamboo (what it was made from) – dustpan.

Other examples of words like this: home, mother, child, rice, and fire.

95% of words in the dictionary are written with phonetic compounds.
For modern concepts, the Chinese invent equivalents from native stock of meaningful syllables.

The first emperor of a unified China, Shi Huangdi, suppressed many regional scripts and enforced a simplified, standardized writing called the Small Seal.

Throughout the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) the Small Seal developed into Clerical, Running, Draft, and Regular (Standard) Scripts.

Printed Chinese is now modeled on the Standard Script.

The Cursive, Running, or Rapid Writing (Running and Draft Scripts) introduced many abbreviated characters used in artistic calligraphy and commercial or private correspondence, but yet it was banned from official documents.
The use of abbreviated characters is forbidden in Taiwan but normal in the People’s Republic of China. Abbreviated characters are also called “simplified” characters. Non-abbreviated characters are called “traditional” characters.

Since 1892, Chinese words (except personal and place names) have usually been transliterated into English according to a phonetic spelling system: the Wade-Giles system.

Since 1958, Pinyin (“spelling”) has been the official standing of phonetic Romanization in the People’s Republic of China. It is used for telegrams and primary education.

The replacement of traditional characters by Pinyin is advocated, but unlikely to be followed through completely because of the threat it poses to literature and historical documentation in classical language.

Since January 1, 1979 Xinhua (New China News Agency) has used Pinyin in all dispatches to foreign countries. The Pinyin system is also used by the U.S. government, many scholarly publications, and newspapers such as the New York Times.
The 20th century movement for language reform has 3 aims:

1) To simplify the characters of classical written Chinese by cutting down on the number and by reducing the number of strokes it takes to write a character.

2) To provide a single means of spoken communication throughout the whole of China by popularizing a Beijing-based variety.

3) To introduce a phonetic alphabet which would gradually replace Chinese characters in everyday use.

China has tried to reform since 2nd century B.C.
The Wen-yan ("literary speech" or "body of classical writing") is a cultivated literary language recorded from 1500 B.C. It was a traditional unifying medium for all varieties of Chinese. It differs greatly from everyday speech, especially in grammatical style. It specialized in literary vocabulary. It is less widely used because of the success of current reform for written Chinese.

The Bai-hua ("colloquial language") is the simplified vernacular style of writing introduced by Hu Shih in 1917 to make language more widely known to the public and to permit the expression of new ideas. It was the national language in 1922.
Putonghua ("common language") is a variety chosen for the whole of China and was widely promulgated under this name after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. It embodies the pronunciation of Beijing, with the grammar of Mandarin dialects, and the vocabulary of the colloquial Chinese literature. It is now the official language of the government and used in education. Everyone is expected to learn and speak it.

Pinyin was adopted in 1958 to help facilitate the spread of Putonghua and ease the learning of Chinese characters. It has a 58 symbol writing system and is now in widespread use. It represents the spoken sounds of Putonghua. It is an oral representation of its’ characters.
Different Dialects and Pronunciations

Chinese belongs to the Sino Tibetan (major language) family.
Chinese relies on tone to give different meanings to otherwise identical words.

Similar to English, vowel sounds of words alter with changes in meaning.

Mandarin is spoken by more than 600 million people in Asia, while Cantonese is only spoken by 50-100 million people.

Mandarin is spoken in the People’s Republic of China, Singapore, and Taiwan.
Cantonese is spoken in the province of Canton within the PRC and in Hong Kong.

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of Taiwan and the Beijing Dialect of Mandarin is the national language of the PRC. It is taught in schools throughout China and is written in ideographs, or characters, that carry the same meaning despite how one pronounces the word represented.
## Pronunciation Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pinying</th>
<th>Wade-Giles</th>
<th>Pronounced As</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b as in “be”, aspirated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>ts</td>
<td>ts as in “its”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>as in “church”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d as in “do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g as in “go”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ian</td>
<td>ien</td>
<td>j as in “jeep”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>k as in “kind”, aspirated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>p as in “par”, aspirated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ong</td>
<td>ung</td>
<td>ch as in “cheek”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>approx. like “j” in the French “je”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>s as in “sister”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>sh as in “shore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>s, ss, sz</td>
<td>t as in “top”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td>sh as in “she”-thinly sounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si</td>
<td>szu</td>
<td>z as in “zero”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>j as in “jump”</td>
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<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>sh</td>
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<td>yi</td>
<td>l</td>
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<td>z</td>
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<td>zh</td>
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<tr>
<td>zi</td>
<td>tzu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Chinese characters are divided into six types (liu shu “six scripts”)

Hsing Sheng: most characters contain two elements - a semantic “radical” combined with a phonetic to remind the reader of how a word is to be pronounced

Ex: mother - woman, ma scold – ma, mouth

Chih Shih: a character is represented as an abstract idea. It is closest to an ideogram

Hui I: a compound character in which elements have a semantic connection


Chuan Chu: a character is formed by modifying the shape or orientation of a character to produce a word of related meaning

Chia Cheh: a character is borrowed from those of similar pronunciations

Hsiang Hsing: a small group of characters that retain close connection with original pictograms
Basics About Chinese Characters

For an English word, the Chinese translation, or word, has two or more characters. You would read them together, and from left to right. If they are listed vertically, the leftmost character is the one on top.

One pinyin usually represents many Chinese characters.

Chinese is not alphabetic so the writing is not related to phonetics.

There are two forms of Chinese characters: simplified and traditional.

Simplified characters are a standard form of writing in mainland China.

Traditional characters are mainly used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.
And now to teach us a little more...

http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/real_chinese/
Credits:


5. **Basics About Chinese Characters.** [http://chineseculture.about.com](http://chineseculture.about.com)

6. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/real_chinese/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/real_chinese/)