

Languages of China

Prologue

China (or the People's Republic of China (PRC)) is one of the world's oldest civilizations. With over 1.3 billion people, China is a leader in world trade, and it's major spoken languages of China are Mandarin and Cantonese. During this post, we'll explore what you need to know about Chinese languages.



With over 3.7 million square miles (or 9.7 square km), China is one of the largest countries in the world.

Firstly, three hundred living languages are spoken in China. The languages occur geographically. Luckily, the languages group into 7 major dialects. For instance, the dialects include Mandarin, Wu, Yue, Min, Xiang, Hakka, and Gan.

Various legal entities govern the use of language in China (see List of Language Regulators)

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Standard Chinese

Secondly, as a form of Mandarin, standard Chinese serves as lingua franca in Mandarin speaking regions. Known as Putonghua, which loosely translates as ‘common speech,’ it’s the language of business and government throughout the country. As such, official work is completed in this dialect.

Cantonese

Thirdly, with over 80 million speakers, residents of Hong Kong, Macau and Guangxi speak Cantonese. For example, Cantonese comprises three dialects: Guangzhou dialect, Hong Kong dialect, and Macau dialect.

English in China

Fourthly, English is the most common international language spoken in China, followed by Japanese and Portuguese. Macau’s official languages are Cantonese and Portuguese; however, the use of Portuguese is in decline since Portugal transferred Macau to the PRC.

In conclusion, China is a fascinating country with fascinating cultures and history. Importantly, the unification of the country’s regions led to the standardization of language which serves this entire country.

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