

## Chinese Written Forms

- a guide by GoLanguages.com

When producing work in Chinese, it is important to know where it is going to be used as this will affect the written form that it will be produced in.

The spoken variants of Chinese are merely regional dialects and of these there are two main forms:

**Mandarin:** which comprises a wide range of localised dialects in the northern, central and western regions of China. North Mandarin, as spoken in Beijing, is the basis of modern standard Chinese and is the official dialect of China, Taiwan and Singapore.

**Cantonese:** which is mainly spoken in southern China (principally in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi), Hong Kong, Macau and in overseas Chinese communities.

**The main area of confusion** arises from the fact that not only are there various spoken dialects but there are also two written forms of Chinese: Simplified and Traditional, both of which are written in the form of ideographs which consist of a number of strokes.

**SIMPLIFIED Chinese** is also known as Modern Chinese. It was developed from the Traditional form in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the late 1950s in the hope of increasing literacy levels within the country. The use of the more complex Traditional form was limiting and it was only understood and used by about half of the population. Simplified Chinese was developed using two main methods.

1. Difficult and awkward characters were changed into much simpler characters.
2. One simple character was used to replace three or four Traditional characters.

By doing this, some 13,500 Traditional characters were replaced by approximately 7,000 Simplified characters.

When the People's Republic of China was recognised by the United Nations in 1971, Simplified Chinese became the official Chinese language used in China. In addition, Singapore also adopted it as the official Chinese state language. Elsewhere in the Chinese world, Traditional tends to be the norm.

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**TRADITIONAL Chinese** is also called Complex Chinese. As indicated by its name, it is the traditional and more complex form of the written language and is used by all the Chinese communities outside mainland China, with the exception of Singapore. Traditional users tend to be proud of it and often consider it to be a more sophisticated form of Chinese. It is partly for this reason of superior sophistication that the Taiwanese refuse to use the Simplified form; another reason is that as claimants to being the true rulers of China, the Taiwanese could not endorse a system sanctioned by Mainland China.

**ROMANISATION** - the idea of writing Chinese characters phonetically - was introduced into the People's Republic of China during the 1950s and is called Pinyin. Originally, it was hoped that it would be the first step on the way to superseding Chinese characters, but this aim has virtually been abandoned. It is now widely used in Western countries as a common standard for Romanising Chinese names. Before this, the most widespread system in the English-speaking world was the Wade-Giles system, and this is still frequently used in the USA, although Pinyin is now becoming more popular. Wade-Giles is normally used for the Romanisation of Taiwanese names.

**Chinese (Simplified or Traditional) can be read** either in the traditional way of top to bottom, or right to left, or in the slightly more modern way of left to right in the same way that English and other Latin based languages are read. Commercial texts are commonly written from left to right.

**On average** there are 2.3 Chinese characters to one English word.

COUNTRY	MAIN DIALECT	WRITTEN FORM
China	Mandarin	Simplified
Singapore	Mandarin	Simplified
Hong Kong	Cantonese	Traditional
Macau	Cantonese	Traditional
Taiwan (ROC)	Mandarin	Traditional
UK/Overseas Communities	Cantonese	Traditional

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(Traditional Text)

一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十

廣 為 開 發 會 軟 寫 個 點 處 產 與 對 層

(Simplified Text)

一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十

广 为 开 发 会 软 写 个 点 处 产 与 对 层

(Traditional Text)

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