

UNIT 1

Jiǔ céng zhī tái, qǐ yú lěi tǔ; qiān lǐ zhī xíng shǐ yú zú xià.
9 level tower, begin by piling earth, 1000 mile journey begins with foot down

A tall tower begins with the foundation; a long journey begins with a single step.

Lǎozǐ

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1.1 Conventions

The previous Unit on ‘sounds and symbols’ provided the first steps in learning to associate the pinyin transcription of Chinese language material with accurate pronunciation. The task will continue as you start to learn to converse by listening to conversational material while reading it in the pinyin script. However, in the early units, it will be all too easy to fall back into associations based on English spelling, and so occasionally (as in the previous overview), Chinese cited in pinyin will be followed by a more transparent transitional spelling [placed in brackets] to alert you to the new values of the letters, eg: máng [mahng], or hěn [huhn].

In the initial units, where needed, you are provided not only with an idiomatic English translation of Chinese material, but also, in parentheses, with a word-for-word gloss. The latter takes you into the world of Chinese concepts and allows you to understand how meanings are composed. The following conventions are used to make the presentation of this information clearer.

Summary of conventions

- a) Parentheses (...) enclose literal meanings, eg: Máng ma? (‘be+busy Q’)
- b) Plusses (+) indicate one-to-many, eg: hǎo ‘be+well’; nín ‘you+POL’
- c) Capitals (Q) indicate *grammatical notions*, eg: Q for ‘question’; POL for ‘polite’. In cases where there is no easy label for the notion, the Chinese word itself is cited in capitals, with a fuller explanation to appear later: Nǐ ne? ‘(you NE)’

- d) Spaces () enclose words, eg: hěn hǎo versus shūfu.
- e) Hyphens (-) used in standard pinyin transcription to link certain constituents, eg dì-yī ‘first’ or mǎma-hūhū ‘so-so’. In English glosses, hyphens indicate meanings of the constituent parts of Chinese compounds, eg: hǎochī (‘good-eat’).
- f) Brackets [] indicate material that is obligatorily expressed in one language, not in the other: Máng ma? ‘Are [you] busy?’ Or they may enclose notes on style or other relevant information: bàng ‘be good; super’ [colloquial].
- g) Angle brackets < > indicate optional material: <Nǐ> lèi ma? ie, either Nǐ lèi ma? or Lèi ma?
- h) Non-italic / *italic*: indicates turns in a conversation.

1.2 Pronunciation

To get your vocal organs ready to pronounce Chinese, it is useful to contrast the articulatory settings of Chinese and English by pronouncing pairs of words selected for their similarity of sound. Thus kǎo ‘to test’ differs from English ‘cow’ not only in tone, but also in vowel quality.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|----|------|--------------|----|-----|--------|----|------|-------|
| a) | kǎo | cow | b) | xìn | sin | c) | shòu | show |
| | hǎo | how | | qín | chin | | zhōu | Joe |
| | nǎo | now | | jīn | gin | | sǒu | so |
| | chǎo | chow[-time] | | xìn | seen | | ròu | row |
| | sǎo | sow[’s ear] | | jīn | Jean | | dōu | dough |
| | bǎo | [ship’s] bow | | lín | lean | | tóu | toe |
| d) | pāo | paw | | duō | doo[r] | e) | bízi | beads |
| | bō | bo[r]e | | tuō | to[r]e | | lǐzi | leads |
| | mō | mo[r]e | | luō | law | | xízi | seeds |

1.3 Numbering and ordering

This section contains information that can be practiced daily in class by counting off, or giving the day’s date.

1.3.1 The numbers, 1 – 10:

yī	èr	sān	sì	wǔ	liù	qī	bā	jiǔ	shí
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

1.3.2 Beyond 10

Higher numbers are formed quite regularly around shí ‘ten’ (or a multiple of ten), with following numbers additive (shí sān ‘13’, shí qī ‘17’) and preceding numbers multiplicative (sān shí ‘30’, qī shí ‘70’):

shíyī	shí’èr	shísì	èrshí	èrshíyī	èrshí’èr	èrshísì	sānshí	sānshíyī
11	12	14	20	21	22	24	30	31

1.3.3 The ordinal numbers

Ordinals are formed with a prefix, dì (which by pinyin convention, is attached to the following number with a hyphen):

dì-yī	dì-èr	dì-sān	dì-sì	dì-wǔ, etc.
1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th

1.3.4 Dates

Dates are presented in descending order in Chinese, with year first (nián, *think [nien]*), then month (yuè, *think [yu-eh]*) and day (hào). Years are usually presented as a string of digits (that may include líng ‘zero’) rather than a single figure: yī-jiǔ-jiǔ-liù nián ‘1996’; èr-líng-líng-sān nián ‘2003’. Months are formed regularly with numerals: yīyuè ‘January’, èryuè ‘February’, shí’èryuè ‘December’.

èrlínglíngsān nián bāyuè sān hào	‘August 3 rd , 2003’
yījiǔbāwǔ nián èryuè shíbā hào	‘February 18 th , 1985’

Notes

1. Amongst northern Chinese, yīyuè often shows the *yī* tone shift in combination with a following day: yíyuè sān hào. Qī ‘7’ and bā ‘8’, both level-toned words, sometimes show the same shift in dates (as well as in other contexts prior to a fourth toned word): qíyuè liù hào; báyùè jiǔ hào.
2. In the written language, rì ‘day’ (a much simpler character) is often used in place of hào: thus written bāyuè sān rì (八月三日), which can be read out as such, would be spoken as bā ~ báyùè sān hào (which in turn, could be written verbatim as 八月三号).

1.3.5 The celestial stems

Just as English sometimes makes use of letters rather than numbers to indicate a sequence of items, so Chinese sometimes makes use of a closed set of words with fixed order known as the ‘ten stems’ (shí gān), or the ‘celestial stems’ (tiān gān), for counting purposes. The ten stems have an interesting history, which will be discussed in greater detail along with information on the Chinese calendar in §4.6.2. For now, they will be used in much the same way that, in English, roman numerals or letters of the alphabet are used to mark subsections of a text, or turns in a dialogue. The first four or five of the ten are much more frequent than the others, simply because they occur early in the sequence.

The ten celestial stems (tiāngān)

jiǎ	yǐ	bǐng	dīng	wù
甲	乙	丙	丁	戊
A	B	C	D	E
jǐ	gēng	xīn	rén	guǐ
己	庚	辛	壬	癸
F	G	H	I	J

1.4 Stative Verbs

The verb is the heart of the Chinese sentence. Young urban speakers of Chinese may slip material from English or other languages into the noun position in a sentence (Wǒ yǒu lab. ‘I have a *lab*’), and nouns such as jítā ‘guitar’ with foreign origins have been incorporated in the language as a result of persistent contact with other cultures. But very rarely does foreign language material show up in the verb position.

Some comparisons with English also reveal the centrality of the verb to the Chinese sentence schema. In Chinese, where the context makes the participants clear, verbs do not need to be anchored with pronouns – as they do in English:

Jiǎ	Máng ma?	Are [you] busy?
Yǐ	Hěn máng.	Yes, [I] am.

In English, ‘am’ is not a possible response to the question ‘are you busy?’. A pronoun is required: ‘I am.’ However, in the English answer, the verb ‘busy’ does not need to be repeated – ‘I am’ rather than ‘I am busy’. Chinese behaves oppositely from English, as our example shows. Pronouns are often **not** expressed when the context makes the reference clear. On the other hand, verbs tend to be **reiterated** in the answer, without the need of an equivalent to the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ of English.

1.4.1 Types of verbs

As you encounter words in Chinese, you will find that it is useful to categorize them into groups and subgroups (the traditional parts of speech and their subclasses), such as nouns (with subtypes such as countable and non-countable), verbs (with subtypes such as transitive and non-transitive), pronouns (eg, personal pronouns and demonstratives), and adverbs (eg, manner adverbs and degree adverbs). Such categories capture useful generalizations about how words behave. An adverb, for example, will always appear before a verb (or other adverb).

It is also useful to be able to talk about the components of a sentence: subjects, predicates, adverbials, modifiers, etc. A general schema for the sentence hěn máng would be a null subject, and a predicate consisting of an adverb (hěn) and a verb (máng). It is not necessary to be adept at using the linguistic nomenclature, but it is important to be

able to understand the notion of classes of words and positions within sentence structure so that generalizations can be noted.

For Chinese verbs, it will be useful to distinguish a number of classes. In this lesson, we will focus on two. One resembles what are called adjectives in English and many other languages: hǎo ‘be good’, máng ‘be busy’, è ‘be hungry’. As the English glosses show, these words do not require an additional form of the verb ‘to be’ (‘are, am, is, etc.’) when they are used as predicates in Chinese: Lèi ma? ‘Are [you] tired?’ / Hěn lèi. ‘[I] am.’ The difference is shown by translating the Chinese words as ‘be+tired’, ‘be+good’, etc. Because such words convey states rather than actions, they are called ‘stative verbs’, abbreviated as ‘SVs’. Strictly speaking, SVs should always be glossed as ‘be+adjective’ (when they are being used as predicates). But once the notion is familiar, we will often fall back on the more convenient practice of glossing them with English adjectives: máng ‘busy’; shūfu ‘comfortable’.

Another general class of verbs involve actions: chī ‘eat’; xǐzǎo ‘to wash’; zǒu ‘to walk; leave’. These will simply be called action verbs, abbreviated V_{act} .

1.4.2 Questions and positive responses

You can begin by learning to ask questions with SVs, and to give either positive or negative responses. Assuming that the context makes explicit [subject] pronouns unnecessary, then one way to ask questions that seek confirmation or denial - *yes-no* questions - is to add the final ‘question particle’ ma to the proposal:

Hǎo ma?	Are [you] well?
Máng ma?	Is [she] busy?
Lèi ma?	Are [you] tired?
È ma?	Is [he] hungry?
Kě ma?	Are [you] thirsty?
Jǐnzhāng ma?	Are [they] nervous?
Shūfu ma?	Are [you] comfortable?
Lěng ma?	Are [you] cold?
Rè ma?	Is [it] hot?
Gāo ma?	Is [she] tall?
Duì ma?	Is [it] correct?

Notes: máng [mahng]
lèi rhymes with English ‘say’; duì (and wèi), rhyme with ‘way’
è [uh]; cf. rè [ruh] and hěn [huhn]
jǐnzhāng [jeen-j!ahng]; shūfu [sh!oofoo] – ! reminds you to raise the tip of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth.

Positive responses repeat the verb, usually with an adverb. The default adverb, where no other is chosen, is hěn, usually glossed as ‘very’, however, in contexts such as these, hěn does little more than support the positive orientation of the sentence, and so is best left untranslated. SVs such as duì ‘correct’, which are ‘all or nothing’, do not occur with degree adverbs, such as hěn.

Máng ma?	Hěn máng.	Yes, [I] am.
Kě ma?	Hěn kě.	Yes, [I] am. <i>Apply the tone rule!</i>
Gāo ma?	Hěn gāo.	Yes, [she] is.
Duì ma?	Duì.	Yes, [it] is.

Notice that unlike English, where the typical positive answer indicates affirmation with ‘yes’ before going on to answer the question, Mandarin has only the direct answer.

1.4.3 Negative responses

Negative responses are usually formed with bù ‘not the case’— recall that the tone of bù is conditioned by that of the following syllable.

Máng ma?	Bù máng.	No, [I]’m not.
Kě ma?	Bù kě.	No, [I]’m not.
Gāo ma?	Bù gāo.	No, [she]’s not.
Duì ma?	Bù duì.	No, [it]’s not.

As with positive answers, Chinese has no direct equivalent to ‘no’, but simply offers a negated verb.

A less abrupt negative (but, again, not used with duì) is formed with bú (with tone shift) plus tài ‘too; very’:

Hǎo ma?	Bú tài hǎo.	No, not very.
Máng ma?	Bú tài máng.	No, not too.
Lèi ma?	Bú tài lèi.	
È ma?	Bú tài è.	

[Negative questions with ma, such as Nǐ bú lèi ma? ‘Aren’t you tired?’, will be dealt with in a later unit. While such questions are easy to form in Chinese, the responses follow patterns unfamiliar to speakers of English.]

1.4.4 V-not-V questions

Another way to form *yes-no* questions is to present the verb and its negative, as though offering both options. The negative, bu, in these constructions is often toneless in normal speech: hǎo bù hǎo is usually pronounced hǎo bu hǎo, or even hǎo bu hao. While *V-ma* questions slightly presuppose an answer congruent with the question – ie positive for positive questions, negative for negative questions, *V-not-V* questions are neutral. At this stage, you can regard the two as essentially equivalent:

Rè ma?	Hěn rè.
Rè bu rè?	Hěn rè.
Lěng ma?	Bù lěng.
Lěng bu lěng?	Bú tài lěng.

Other examples

Duì bu duì?	Duì.
Hǎo bu hǎo?	Hěn hǎo. <i>With tone shift!</i>
Máng bu máng?	Bù máng.
Lèi bu lèi?	Hěn lèi.
È bu è?	Bú tài è.
Kě bu kě?	Hěn kě.
Lěng bu lěng?	Hěn lěng.
Rè bu rè?	Bú tài rè.
Jǐn<zhāng> bu jǐnzhāng?	Bù jǐnzhāng.
Shū<fu> bu shūfu?	Bù shūfu.

Note

With two-syllable SVs, the 2nd syllable of the first, positive part of *V-not-V* questions often gets elided, as indicated by < > in the last two examples.

1.4.5 Three degrees of response

You can respond to the two kinds of *yes-no* questions positively, neutrally, or negatively; the typical neutral response makes use of the adverb hái (or, before other adverbs, háishi) ‘still; yet’: hái hǎo ‘so so; [I]’m okay (still okay)’.

SUMMARY

SVs: hǎo, máng, lèi, è, kě, lěng, rè, gāo, shūfu, jǐnzhāng, duì				
Yes-No Qs		+	0	--
-ma	V-not-V			
Lèi ma?	Lèi bu lèi?	Hěn lèi.	Hái hǎo.	Bú lèi. Bú tài lèi.
Jǐnzhāng ma?	Jǐn bu jǐnzhāng?	Hěn jǐnzhāng.	Hái hǎo.	Bù jǐnzhāng. Bú tài jǐnzhāng.

1.5 Time and tense**1.5.1 Today, yesterday and tomorrow**

Speakers of English and other European languages take the verbal category of tense for granted: speaking of the past generally requires past tense. For Chinese (as well as many other languages), this is not so. Time words such as jīntiān ‘today’, zuótiān ‘yesterday’ (both of which share the root tiān ‘sky; day’), or dates (bā hào), may be added to simple sentences containing SVs without any change to the form of the verb, or any other addition to the sentence:

Zuótiān lěng ma?	Was [it] cold yesterday?	<Zuótiān> bú tài lěng.
Zuótiān rè bu rè?	Was [it] hot yesterday?	<Zuótiān> hěn rè!
Zuótiān hěn máng ma?	Were [you] busy yesterday?	<Zuótiān> hěn máng!

Jīntiān lèi bu lèi? Are [you] tired today? <Jīntiān> hái hǎo!
Èrshíbā hào hěn lěng. The 28th was quite cold.

Note the differences in word order between the English and the Chinese in the previous examples:

Was it cold? > It was cold. Lěng ma? > Hěn lěng.
Was it cold *yesterday*? Zuótiān lěng ma?

The appearance of a time word such as míngtiān (or a date) can be sufficient to indicate that an event is certain to occur in the future – something that is also true of English.

Wǒ míngtiān hěn máng. I'm busy tomorrow.

However, at times, Chinese does require some additional acknowledgement of the fact that, unlike the past and present, the future is uncertain. Thus, in talking about future weather, the word huì 'can; will; likely to' is in many cases added to the statement of futurity: Míngtiān huì hěn lěng ma? 'Will [it] be cold tomorrow?' Huì, while it does correspond to English 'will' in this example, is not actually as common as the latter. For the time being, you should be wary of talking about future states.

1.5.2 SVs plus le

Rather than the static notion of past versus present (or, more accurately, past versus non-past), Chinese is more sensitive to a dynamic notion of 'phase', or 'change'. For example, if a speaker wishes to underscore the relevance of a *new situation*, he can signal it by the addition of the sentence-final 'particle', le:

Zuótiān bù shūfu, jīntiān
hǎo le. [I] didn't feel well yesterday, but [I]'m
okay today.

An explicit contrast between an earlier situation (zuótiān) and a current one (jīntiān) typically triggers this use of le. However, it is quite possible state the situation at both times without underscoring the change with le, too, as the examples below show.

Other words that can signal prior or current time include:

earlier

yǐqián 'formerly; before; used to [be]'
běnlái 'originally; at first';
cóngqián 'before; in the past'

current

xiànzài 'now; a present'
zuìjìn 'recently; lately (most-near)'
mùqián 'at present; currently (eyes-
before)'

Examples

Yǐqián hěn jǐnzhāng, xiànzài hǎo le.	[I] was nervous yesterday, but [I]’m okay now.
Xiànzài bú è le!	[I]’m not hungry anymore!
Yǐqián bù shūfu.	[It] used to be uncomfortable.
Jīntiān rè le!	[It]’s gotten hot today!
Zuótiān hěn lèi, jīntiān hěn máng.	[I] was tired yesterday [and] I’m busy today!
Běnlái hěn máng, xiànzài hǎo le.	[I] was busy at first, but now [I]’m okay.
Mùqián hěn lěng, hěn bù shūfu.	It’s quite cold at present, [I]’m not comfortable.
Běnlái hěn lěng, zuìjìn rè le.	It used to be cold, but lately it’s gotten hot.
Cóngqián wǒ bù shūfu, zuìjìn hái hǎo.	In the past, I wasn’t comfortable, but recently, [I]’m okay.

Observe that it is the *new situation* that is associated with le, not the original state! The presence of le generally cancels out the need for a supporting adverb, such as hěn.

1.6 Pronouns

As many of the examples above show, Chinese often manages to keep track of people (or things) relevant to a situation without the use of pronouns. But pronouns are available where context alone might be insufficient – or where it might otherwise be more appropriate to use one. The set of personal pronouns in Chinese is relatively simple, and regular. They are presented in the following table, with notes following:

<i>singular</i>	<i>collective</i>	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
wǒ	wǒmen	I, me	we, us
nǐ nín	nǐmen	you you [polite]	you [all]
tā	tāmen	he, she, [it] him, her	they, them

Notes

a) Tā tends to refer only to people (or to animals being treated as if they were people); in speech, at least, it rarely refers to things, and so rarely corresponds to English ‘it’. On those occasions when tā is used to refer to things, it is more common in object position, so it is more likely to occur in the Chinese equivalent

of the sentence ‘put it away’ than in ‘it’s in the drawer’. Chinese sometimes uses a demonstrative (zhè ‘this’ or nà ‘that’) where English has ‘it’, but generally it has no explicit correspondence at all.

b) The form nínmen (‘you+POL-MEN’) is rare, but does sometimes occur in letters, or in formal speech. The -men suffix (not usually toned, though sometimes cited in isolation with a rising tone) is most often found with pronouns, as shown. With nouns designating people, it can also occur as a ‘collective’ eg lǎoshī ‘teacher’, lǎoshīmen ‘teachers’. But even in such cases, -men should not be thought of as a plural marker, for it never co-occurs with numerals: sān ge lǎoshī ‘three teachers’, with no -men possible. In faster speech, wǒmen often becomes wǒm, tāmen, tām, and so on.

c) Mandarin speakers from Beijing and the northeast, also make a distinction (found in many languages) between wǒmen ‘we’ that includes speaker, addressee and others, and zán or zánmen (pronounced ‘zámen’, as if without the first ‘n’) ‘the two of us; we’. The latter includes the speaker and the person spoken to, but excludes others. Eg Zánmen zǒu ba! ‘Let’s leave [us, but not the rest of them]’ – a phrase worth storing away as a prototype example for zánmen.

1.6.1 Names

Where the identification or status of a person requires more than a pronoun, then of course, Chinese has recourse to personal names, or names and titles (cf. §1.9.1). For now, suffice it to say that Chinese students often refer to each other either by personal name (at least two syllables), or by surname (xìng) prefixed by a syllable such as xiǎo ‘young’. Thus, Liú Guózhèng may be addressed by friends as Guózhèng or xiǎo Liú; Lǐ Dān, as Lǐ Dān (full name of two syllables) or xiǎo Lǐ.

1.6.2 The particle ne and the adverb yě

The particle ne, placed after subject nouns, has a number of uses. It may signal a pause for reflection, something particularly useful for learners:

Zuótiān ne, zuótiān hǎn rè.	Yesterday -- yesterday was hot.
Tā ne, tā hǎn jīnzhāng.	[As for] him, he’s quite anxious.

It may also be used to signal follow-up questions. The response to a follow-up question often contains the adverb yě ‘also; too; as well’. Recall that adverbs are placed before verbs (including SVs) or other adverbs (such as bù):

Jiǎ	Yī
Jīntiān lèi ma?	Hǎn lèi, nǐ ne?
Wǒ yě hǎn lèi.	

Jīntiān rè bù rè? Zuótiān ne?	Hěn rè. Zuótiān yě hěn rè.
Nǐ jǐnzhāng ma? Wǒ hái shì hěn jǐnzhāng.	Bù jǐnzhāng le. Nǐ ne? Ng.
Xiǎo Wáng zuótiān bù shūfu. Jīntiān hǎo le.	Jīntiān ne? Ng.

Notes

1. Háishi ‘still’; cf. §1.7.1.
2. Spoken Chinese makes use of variety of ‘interjections’. Ng (with pronunciation ranging from a nasalized ‘uh’ to ‘n’) is one of them. On the falling tone, it indicates agreement, or as in the above example, understanding.

Exercise 1.

Write down, and recite, what you would say under the circumstances; be prepared to shift roles:

1. Ask him if [he] was busy yesterday?
2. Note that [it]’s quite cold today.
3. Remark that [it]’s gotten cold today.
4. Find out if young Li’s nervous.
5. Respond that [she] is [nervous].
6. Say that you are too.
7. Say [you] didn’t feel well yesterday.
8. Say that you’re better now.
9. Tell your friend [you]’re not very hungry.
10. Tell him that you’re okay today, [but] you were quite nervous before.
11. Ask your friend if [she]’s thirsty [or not].
12. Find out if your classmate is comfortable.
13. Say that [you]’re not hungry anymore.
14. Say that he was wrong.

1.7 Action verbs

While SVs attribute emotional or physical states to people or things, V_{act} involve deeds such as ‘eating’ or ‘going to class’. V_{act} are often subdivided into ‘transitive’, ie those that generally presuppose an object (‘read > a book’; ‘eat > a meal’); and ‘intransitive’, ie those that do not presuppose an object (‘walk’; ‘kneel’). However, languages differ as to how this distinction is actually realized. In English for example, when the verb ‘eat’ means ‘eat a meal’, English has the option of either not expressing an object (‘When do we eat?’), or using the generic noun ‘meal’ (‘We had a meal earlier’).

Chinese adopts a different strategy. In comparable sentences, rather than not mentioning an object for lack of a particular one, Chinese only has the option of providing a generic object like ‘meal’: Nǐ chīfàn le ma? ‘Have you eaten? (you eat-rice

LE Q)’. The core meaning of fàn, as shown in the gloss, is ‘cooked rice’, but in this context, its meaning is extended to ‘food’ or ‘meal’. When a particular kind of food is mentioned, then fàn will be replaced by specific words: chī miàn ‘eat noodles’, chī bāozi ‘eat dumplings’; chī zǎodiǎn ‘eat breakfast’, etc.

Another case in which Chinese provides a generic object where English has either an intransitive verb or one of a number of specific options is xǐzǎo ‘to bathe; take a bath/shower, etc.’ Xǐzǎo is composed of the verb xǐ ‘wash’ and zǎo, an element that no longer has independent status, but which is treated like an object. So while English uses an intransitive verb ‘to bathe’ or a specific object ‘take a bath’, Chinese provides a generic object, zǎo. When a specific object is needed, it substitutes for zǎo: xǐ yīfu ‘wash clothes’; xǐ liǎn ‘wash [one’s] face’, etc.

The following table gives verbs or verb+objects for events that tend to happen in the course of a day. [Polite inquiries about bathing are appropriate in tropical or subtropical climates.]

VERB	OBJECT	V-O
zǒu ‘leave’		
qǐlai ‘get up; rise’		
shuì ‘sleep’	jiào <i>bound form</i>	shuìjiào ‘go to bed; sleep’
chī ‘eat’	fàn ‘cooked rice’	chīfàn ‘eat; have a [proper] meal’
xǐ ‘wash’	zǎo <i>bound form</i>	xǐzǎo ‘bathe; take a bath etc.’
kàn ‘look at’	bào ‘newspaper’	kànbào ‘read the paper’
shàng ‘ascend’ xià ‘descend’	kè ‘class’	shàngkè ‘teach a class; attend class’ xiàkè ‘finish class; get out of class’
shàng ‘ascend’ xià ‘descend’	bān ‘job; shift’	shàngbān ‘go to work; start work’ xiàbān ‘get out of work’

1.7.1 Negative statements, with méiyou

With action verbs, the plain negative with bu usually indicates intention:

Wǒ bù zǒu.	I’m not leaving.
Tāmen bù xǐzǎo.	They’re not going to bathe.
Tā bù chī le.	He won’t eat anymore.

Such declarations, while possible, are in fact more likely to be cast in some less abrupt form, using verbs such as yào ‘want’ or xiǎng ‘(think) feel like’. We will get to such verbs quite soon, but at this stage, rather than talking about intentions, we will focus on whether events have happened or not. In such cases, the negation is formed with the negative of the verb yǒu ‘have; exist’. This is méiyou, or simply méi. [Yǒu is the one verb in Mandarin whose negative is not formed with bu – the one *irregular* verb, you might say.]

Méi chīfàn.	[We] didn't eat; [we] haven't eaten.
Méiyou xǐzǎo.	[I] didn't bathe; [I] haven't bathed.
Méi shàngbān.	[She] didn't go to work; [she] hasn't started work.

Since the action verbs introduced in this lesson involve events that can be expected to take place regularly over the course of the day, the adverb hái (háishi before other adverbs) 'still; yet' is common in negative answers. Hái<shi> is frequently accompanied by the sentence-final particle, ne, which in general, conveys a tone of immediacy or suspense (as well as being associated with follow up questions, cf. §1.6.2).

Hái méi chīfàn ne.	[We] haven't eaten yet.
Hái méiyou xǐzǎo ne.	[I] haven't bathed yet.
Hái méi shàngbān.	[She] hasn't started work yet.

1.7.2 Positive statements, with le

As noted in §1.5.2, le with SVs signals a newly relevant state: jīntiān hǎo le. With V_{act} , the function of le is more diffuse, or at least it seems so from a learner's perspective. Le with V_{act} , much as it does with SVs, may signal a newly relevant situation – or phase. But with V_{act} what is relevant may be the initiation of the action, or it may be the conclusion of the action.

a) Initiation:

Zǒu le.	[They]'re off.
Chīfàn le	[They]'ve started [eating].
Shàngkè le.	[They]'re starting class.

b) Conclusion:

Zǒu le.	[They]'ve gone; they left.
Chīfàn le.	[We]'ve eaten; we ate.
Shàngkè le.	[They]'ve gone to class; [they] went to class.

'Conclusion' may seem like another way of saying 'past tense'; but there are reasons for avoiding any identification of le with [past] tense. You have already seen that with SVs, it is not the past situation that is marked with le, but the current one: Zuótiān bù shūfu, jīntiān hǎo le. And you will see many other cases where past tense in English does not correspond to the presence of le in Chinese. But more to the point: injecting the notion of past tense into our description of le suggests a static function quite at odds with that other, well-established dynamic function of le, to signal what is newly relevant.

For the time being, then, note that le has two faces: it signals the current relevancy of a new state or situation; and it signals the current relevancy of a completed event. While in the first case, le can appear with the negative, bu (bù lěng le 'it's not cold anymore'), in the second, it cannot – it can only be replaced by méi<you>, to form the negative (hái méi chī ne).

Lěng le	[It]'s gotten cold.
Bù lěng le.	[It]'s not cold anymore.
Shàngkè le.	Class is beginning; [they]'ve gone to class.
Bú shàngkè le.	[They]'re not going to class anymore.
Hái méi<you> shàngkè ne.	[They] haven't gone to class yet.

Confusion about the several senses of le with V_{act} can often be resolved by the addition adverbs, such as yǐjīng 'already':

Tāmen yǐjīng zǒu le.	They've already left.
Wǒ yǐjīng chīfàn le.	I've already eaten.
Yǐjīng xiàbān le.	[He]'s already quit [for the day].

1.7.3 Questions

Actions can be questioned with ma:

Chīfàn le ma?	Have [you] eaten [a meal]?
Xǐzǎo le ma?	Have [you] bathed?
Shàngbān le ma?	Has [she] started work?

Or with the *V-not-V* pattern, with the negative option reduced to méiyǒu (or just méi):

Chīfàn le méi<you>?
Xǐzǎo le méi<you>?
Shàngbān le méi<you>?

1.7.4 Summary of *le*-patterns

positive	negative
Rè le. It's gotten warm.	Bú rè le. It's not warm anymore.
Chī le. Shàngkè le. [We]'ve started. Let's begin.	Wǒ bù chī le. I'm not eating anymore.
<Yǐjīng> zǒu le. [He]'s <already>left.	<Hái> méi<you> zǒu <ne>. [She] hasn't left <yet>.
Tāmen <yǐjīng> chīfàn le. They've <already> eaten.	Tāmen hái méi<you> chīfàn <ne>. They haven't eaten <yet>.

1.7.5 Mini-conversations

The near synonyms kěshi and dànshi, used in the following two conversations, are both comparable to English ‘but’.

A.

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Jiǎ: | Xǐzǎo le ma? | Have [you] bathed? |
| Yǐ: | Xǐzǎo le, kěshì hái méi chīfàn! | I have, but I haven't eaten yet. |
| Jiǎ: | È ma? | Hungry? |
| Yǐ: | Hěn è, nǐ ne? | Sure am; you? |
| Jiǎ: | O, wǒ – wǒ yǐjīng chī le. | Oh, me – I've already eaten. |
| Yǐ: | Xiǎo Bì ne? | And young Bì? |
| Jiǎ: | Yǐjīng zǒu le, shàngbān le. | [She]'s gone, [she]'s at work. |
| Yǐ: | O, shàngbān le. | Oh, [she]'s gone to work! |

B.

- | | | |
|------|---|----------------------------------|
| Jiǎ: | Jīntiān hěn rè! | It's hot today. |
| Yǐ: | Ng, hěn rè. Nǐ chīfàn le ma? | Yeah, sure is. Have you eaten? |
| Jiǎ: | Hái méi, wǒ bú è. | Not yet – I'm not hungry. |
| Yǐ: | Jǐnzhāng ma? | Anxious? |
| Jiǎ: | Xiànzài hǎo le -- dànshi yǐqián hěn jǐnzhāng! | [I]'m fine now—but I was before! |
| Yǐ: | Chén Bó yǐjīng zǒu le ma? | Has Chen Bo already left? |
| Jiǎ: | Yǐjīng zǒu le, yǐjīng shàngkè le. | Yes, he has, he's gone to class. |

1.8 Conventional Greetings

1.8.1 The addition of guò (untuned)

Questions about eating are often used ‘phatically’, to be sociable rather than to seek actual information. There are quite a number of variants on the basic Chīfàn le ma? that may serve this purpose. One, that is particularly common with verbs that describe regularly occurring events (such as having meals, going to work), involves the addition of a post-verbal guò (usually untuned), whose root meaning is ‘to pass by, over, through’.

Guò can occur in both the question and in responses (both positive and negative), but it can also be dropped from the responses, as shown below.

Chīguo<fàn> le ma?

Chī<guo> le.

Hái méi <chī<guo>> ne.

1.8.2 Reductions

In context, utterances are likely to be reduced, along the following lines: méiyou > méi; chīfàn > chī (but xǐzǎo does not reduce to xǐ, since xǐ alone means to ‘wash’ rather than ‘bathe’). Thus, the following are all possible – though the more elliptical questions are likely to produce more elliptical answers. (The English glosses for the responses only suggest the differences.)

Q	A	(A)
Chīfàn le ma?	Chīfàn le.	I’ve eaten my meal.
Chīguo fàn le ma?	Chīguo fàn le.	I’ve had my meal.
Chī le ma?	Chī le.	I have.
Chīguo le ma?	Chīguo le.	I’ve had it.
Chīfàn le méiyou?	Hái méi chī fàn ne.	I haven’t eaten my meal yet.
Chīguo fàn le méiyou?	Hái méi chīguo ne.	I haven’t had my meal yet.
Chīfàn le méi?	Hái méi chī ne.	I haven’t eaten yet.
Chīguo fàn le méi?	Hái méi chīguo ne.	I haven’t had it yet.
Chī le méi?	Hái méi ne.	Not yet.
	Méiyǒu.	No.
	Méi.	No.

Summary (showing typical expanded and reduced forms):

<i>Done?</i>	Chīfàn le ma?	Chī le ma?
<i>Done [or not]?</i>	Chīfàn le méiyou?	Chī le méi?
<i>Done.</i>	Chīfàn le.	Chī le.
<i>Not done.</i>	Méiyou chīfàn.	Méi chī.
<i>Done?</i>	Chīguo fàn le ma?	Chīguo le ma?
<i>Done [or not]?</i>	Chīguo fàn le méiyou?	Chīguo le méi?
<i>Done.</i>	Chīguo fàn le.	Chī le.

Exercise 2.

a) Ask and answer as indicated:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Read the paper? | Not yet. |
| 2. Started work? | Yes, I have. |
| 3. They’ve gone? | No, not yet. |
| 4. Was it cold? | No, not very. |
| 5. Have [they] got off work yet? | Yes, [they] have. |
| 6. [We]’re not nervous anymore. | [You] were yesterday. |
| 7. [I]’ve eaten. | Are [you] still hungry? |
| 8. Bathed? | Yes, it was nice [comfortable]. |

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 9. Are they out of class yet? | Not yet. |
| 10. Thirsty? | Not anymore. |
| 11. Hungry? | Not anymore, I've eaten. |
| 12. Has class started? | Not yet. |
| 13. Nervous? | I am now! |
| 14. Young Wang's in bed? | Yes, he's already in bed. |
| 15. Are they up? | Yes, but they haven't eaten yet. |

b) What would you say? (Use pronouns where needed.)

1. ask your friend if she's eaten yet (3 ways).
2. announce that she's already left work [for the day].
3. explain that it was cold yesterday, but that it's gotten hot today.
4. announce that she hasn't gone to class yet.
5. explain that they've bathed, but they haven't eaten.
6. explain that you were all unwell yesterday, but today you're fine.
7. explain that the first's already gone, but the second and third still haven't.
8. explain that it was warm yesterday, and that it is today as well.

1.9 Greeting and taking leave

1.9.1 Names and titles

Because even perfunctory greetings tend to involve a name and title, you need to have some rudimentary information about forms of address before being introduced to the language of greeting and leave taking. Below are five common Chinese surnames, followed by a title which means, literally, 'teacher', and the SV hǎo, which in this environment, serves as a simple acknowledgement. Lǎoshī, which has no exact correspondence in English, can be applied to both males and females, as well as to all ranks of teachers, and even other types of white-collar workers.

Zhāng lǎoshī, hǎo.	'Hello, Professor Zhang.'
Wáng lǎoshī, hǎo.	
Lǐ lǎoshī, hǎo.	[with tone shift]
Zhào lǎoshī, hǎo.	
Chén lǎoshī, hǎo.	

1.9.2 Hello

Using specialized greetings such as 'hi' or 'bonjour' to acknowledge or confirm the worth of a relationship on every encounter is not a universal feature of cultures. The practice seems to have crept into Chinese relatively recently. Whereas in the past, and even now in the countryside, people might acknowledge your presence by asking where you are going, or if you have eaten (if they say anything at all to a stranger), nowadays urban Chinese often make use of phrases like nǐ hǎo in ways similar to English 'hi' or 'hello'. Most people would probably regard nǐ hǎo as the prototypical neutral greeting, but there are other common options such as the ones listed below:

Nǐ hǎo!		Hi; Hello!
Nín hǎo!	<i>Deferential.</i>	How do you do?
Hei!	<i>Exclamation</i>	Ey! Hi!
Hǎo!		Hi! Hello!
Hǎo ma?		You well?
Nǐ hǎo a!	<i>Informal.</i>	How're you doing?

A version of ‘good morning’, based on the verb zǎo ‘be+early’, has been common usage in Taiwan, and is now becoming more current on the Mainland as well:

Zǎo!	Morning! (be+early)
Zǎo ān.	Good morning. (early peace)
Nǐ zǎo.	
Nín zǎo.	etc.

Expressions comparable to English ‘good afternoon’ or ‘good evening’ are also starting to be used in modern China: thus xiàwǔ ‘afternoon’ and wǎnshàng ‘evening’ are sometimes used in the expressions xiàwǔ hǎo ‘good afternoon’, wǎnshàng hǎo ‘good evening’. Wǎn ān ‘good night (late peace)’, as a sign off at the end of the day, has a longer pedigree, and is now commonly used by staff in larger hotels, for example.

In general, greetings of the sort listed above are used *more sparingly* than their English counterparts. Colleagues or classmates passing each other, for example, are less likely to use a formulaic greeting such as nǐ hǎo – though novelties such as fast food counters and toll booths (where toll collectors can sometimes be heard to greet each passing driver with nǐ hǎo) may encourage broader use. In general, though, a greeting to someone of higher status should be preceded by a name, or name and title (as in §1.9.1).

1.9.3 Goodbye

Many cultures have conventional phrases for taking leave. Often blessings serve the purpose (eg ‘bye’, from ‘good bye’, supposedly derived from the phrase ‘God be with you’). Here are some Chinese ‘goodbyes’, beginning with the standard, zàijiàn, literally ‘again-see’.

Zàijiàn.	<i>neutral</i>	Goodbye. (again-see)
Yihuǐr ~ yíhuìr jiàn.	<i>friendly</i>	See [you] soon. (awhile see)
Míngtiān jiàn.	<i>neutral</i>	See [you] tomorrow. (tomorrow see)
Huíjiàn.	<i>informal</i>	See [you] later; bye. (return-see)
Huítóu jiàn.	<i>friendly</i>	See [you] shortly. (return-head see)
Màn zǒu.	<i>friendly</i>	Take it easy. (slowly walk)

Notes

a) The addition of final -r to the written pinyin syllable represents a complex of phonetic effects that will be considered more fully later. In the case of yihuǐr ~ yíhuìr, the final -r affects the quality of the preceding vowel, so that it is pronounced [yihuǐr ~ yíhuèr] rather than [yihuǐr ~ yíhuìr].

- b) The alternate pronunciation yíhuìr is often said to be ‘southern’.
- c) Students of all kinds, and other urban youth, often end a series of farewells with English bàibài.
- d) As with greetings, when saying goodbye to an older person, or a person of rank, it is normal to mention name and title first, eg: Wèi lǎoshī, zàijiàn.



Yílù-píng'ān [JKW 1982]

1.9.4 *Bon Voyage*

This is as good a time as ever to get familiar with a few phrases that are used to wish people well when they leave on a journey, or to greet them when they arrive. The most common expression for ‘bon voyage’, is:

Yílù-píng'ān. ‘Whole-journey peaceful.’

This expression applies to almost any journey, whether by air, ship or bus. Yílù-shùnfēng ‘whole-journey favorable-wind’, has much the same meaning, but is not used for journeys by air. Chinese are superstitious about effect of words, and would deem it ill advised to mention the word fēng ‘wind’ before a flight. Notice that both expressions contain four syllables, a favored configuration in the Chinese lexicon.

In greeting someone returning from a long journey, instead of the question ‘how was the flight/journey/voyage’, Chinese generally utter a variant of an expression that reflects the traditional discomforts of travel:

<Lù shàng> xīnkǔ ba. ‘Tough journey, huh? (<road on> bitter BA)’

An analysis of these expressions is provided above, but at this stage, they should simply be memorized (by repetition) and kept in storage for greeting visitors or seeing people off.

1.9.5 Smoothing the transitions

a) Prior to asking a question

In more formal situations, questions are often prefaced with the expression qǐngwèn, literally ‘request-ask’, but idiomatically equivalent to ‘may I ask’ or ‘excuse me’.

Qǐngwèn may also be preceded by a name and title.

Qǐngwèn, nǐ chīfàn le ma? Excuse me, have you eaten?
Zhào lǎoshī, qǐngwèn, nín è bu è? Prof. Zhao, mind if I ask: are you hungry?

Qǐng ‘request; invite’ also occurs in the common phrase qǐng zuò ‘have a seat (invite sit)’ and the expression, qǐng jìn ‘won’t you come in (invite enter)’.

b) Prior to leaving

In the normal course of events, just a goodbye is too abrupt for closing a conversation. One way to smooth the transition is, before saying goodbye, to announce that you have to leave. Here are four ways to do that, all involving the verb zǒu ‘leave; go’. These expressions are complicated to analyze; some notes are provided below, but otherwise, they should be internalized as units.

Hǎo, nà wǒ zǒu le. ‘Okay, I’m off then. (okay, in+that+case, I leave LE)’

Hei, wǒ gāi zǒu le. ‘Say, I should be off. (hey, I should leave LE)’

Hǎo, nà jiù zhèi- ‘Okay then, that’s it, [I]’m off! (okay, in+that+case
yàng ba, zǒu le. then this-way BA, leave LE)’

Bù zǎo le, wǒ gāi ‘[It]’s late, I’d better be off.
zǒu le. (not be+early LE, I should leave LE)’

Notes

Gāi or yīnggāi ‘should; must’; nà ‘in-that-case; well; then’; jiù ‘then’; ba is a particle associated with suggestions; le [here] signals a new situation. Taking leave obviously involves a broad range of situations, including seeing someone off on a journey (which, in China, is an extremely important event). The four options listed in this section serve well for closing an informal conversation.

1.10 Tones

1.10.1 Tone combos (the first 6)

Tones are easier to perceive and assimilate in pairs. Four tones form 16 possible combinations of two, but because of the restriction on combinations of low tones (3+3 > 2+3), only 15 pairs are distinctive. The six sets below are mostly made up of words already encountered. They should be memorized so that they can be recited by number: dì-yī: lǎoshī, jǐnzhāng; dì-èr: xǐzǎo, hěn hǎo, etc.

1 lǎoshī	2 xǐzǎo	3 zàijiàn
jǐnzhāng	hěn hǎo	kànbào
4 bú rè	5 hěn máng	6 bù gāo
bú lèi	hěn nán <i>difficult</i>	shàngbān

Tones in combination tend to accommodate each other to some degree, though not to the point of shifting to another tone. In the above sets, the most salient adjustment is probably that of 4+4, (zàijiàn) where the tone of the first syllable is not so steeply falling as that of the last. The first of the two is some times referred to as the ‘modified-4th’ tone.

1.10.2 Tone lock

In these first weeks of learning Chinese, you may find yourself unable to pronounce a tone, even unable to mimic your teacher – a situation that might be called ‘tone lock’. Tone lock can occur for many reasons, but one common one is that as a beginner, you will often be tentative, and tentativeness in English is accompanied by a rising contour. That’s fine if you are trying to say the name, Wáng, with rising tone. But it won’t work if you want to say Wèi, which is falling. Other strange conditions may occur: you may hear rising as falling, and falling as rising (flip-flop); your falling may refuse to fall (‘fear of falling’), your level, refuse not to fall (‘fear of flying’). Regardless of the symptoms, the best cure is to figuratively step back, and make use of your tone concepts: level is ‘sung out,’ rising is ‘doubtful’ (*Wáng? máng?*), low is ‘low’ (despite the contoured symbol), and falling is ‘final’ or ‘confidant’ (*Wáng, Chén, Wèi*; or ‘I said *Wèi*’).

1.10.3 The first ‘rule of 3’

If you find that the tonal cues, ‘sung out’, ‘doubt’, ‘low’ and ‘final’ do not serve you well, there are others that have been used in the past. Walter C. Hillier, in his *English-Chinese Dictionary* of 1953 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.) proposed ‘languid assertion’ for the first tone, ‘startled surprise’ for the second, ‘affectionate remonstrance’ for the third, and ‘abuse’ for the fourth. Whatever the label, the important point is to follow the rule of three: develop a concept for each tone, know what tone the word has, and monitor yourself when you speak.

1. conceptualize the tones (*sung out etc.*);
2. learn the tone with the word (*eg hao has low tone*);
3. monitor your speech.

Exercise 3.

a) Read out the following sets – recall your tone concepts:

1	dá	dǎ	dā	dà	bù	bǔ	bú	bù
2	kǒu	kòu	kōu	kòu	jīn	jín	jǐn	jìn
3	pán	pàn	pān	pán	guō	guǒ	guó	guò
4	wèi	wěi	wéi	wēi	hǎi	hái	hāi	hài

b) Tone shifts: Read the following sequences aloud, supplying the tones that are omitted:

1	bu máng	bu è	yi tàò	yi tiáo
2	bu lèi	bu shì	yi kuài	dì-yi
3	bu jǐnzhāng	bu kě	yi wèi	yi zhāng
4	bu hǎo	bu cuò	yi běn	yi kè
5	hen hǎo	hen máng	hen zǎo	hen wǎn <small>late</small>
6	hen lèi	hen nan	hai hǎo	hen kě

c) Students often feel that the tones that are the most difficult to distinguish are the rising and the low. Here is a discrimination exercise that focuses on those two. In the disyllabic words below, the final syllables all contain either a rising tone or a low. Have a Chinese speaker read them to you twice each (from the characters), then see if you can correctly identify the missing tone in the pinyin versions of the words.

1. 英勇	2. 天才	3. 当年	4. 大米	5. 英语
6. 橡皮	7. 书法	8. 黑板	9. 加强	10. 冰球

11. 号码	12. 重叠	13. 开展	14. 开头	15. 多余
16. 孙女	17. 天然	18. 跳舞	19. 构成	20. 思想

1. yīngyong	2. tiāncái	3. dāngnián	4. dàmi	5. Yīngyu
6. xiàngpi	7. shūfa	8. hēiban	9. jiāqiang	10. bīngqiú
11. hàoma	12. chóngdié	13. kāizhan	14. kāitou	15. duōyu
16. sūnnü	17. tiānrán	18. tiàowu	19. gòucheng	20. sīxiang

d) Select a tone for all, then practice reading out these syllables (across), all of which contain pinyin ‘o’ as main vowel:

duo dou fo kuo cou zhou zhuo zou zuo
bo guo ruo shou gou shuo suo po you

e) Read out the following syllables that contain the -ui or -iu rhymes – these are toned:

guì shuí ruì chuī zuì duì (wèi)
liú niú xiū qiú diū jiǔ (yǒu)
guǐ - jiǔ liù - duì cuì - qiú liú - shuí

1.11 Summary

Main patterns

Nǐ lèi ma?	+	Hěn lèi.
	0	Hái hǎo.
	--	Bú tài lèi.
Nǐ máng bu máng?		
Nǐ chīfàn le ma?	+	Chī le.
Nǐ chīfàn le méiyóu?	--	Hái méi ne.
Nǐ chīguo fàn le ma?	+	Chī<guo> le.
Nà, jiù zhèiyàngr ba. Zhāng lǎoshī, hǎo.		Hǎo, jiù zhèiyàngr! Wáng Jié, zàijiàn..

Conversational scenarios

<u>Greetings</u>	<u>Development</u>	<u>Leaving</u>
Nǐ hǎo.	Máng ma?	Hǎo, zàijiàn, míngtiān jiàn.
Wèi lǎoshī, hǎo.	Chīfàn le ma? Bú è le.	Chén lǎoshī, zàijiàn. Míngtiān jiàn.

Tā hái méi xǐzǎo. Duì ma?

Nǐ ne? Yě hěn lèi. Tā yǐjīng qīlai le méiyóu?

Zuótiān hěn rè ma? Xiànzài ne? Shàng kè le méiyóu?

1.12 Rhymes and Rhythms

Rote learning, very highly prized in traditional and even modern China, and highly valued at other times in our own past, is no longer generally considered a beneficial educational method in the West. Outside class, however, people still learn parts for plays, and they often recall song lyrics, advertising jingles and slogans without much self-conscious effort. So we take advantage of these predilections by providing some suitable Chinese rhymed and rhythmic material at the end of each lesson. This material ranges from doggerel to poetry, from jingles to nursery rhymes and from satirical verse to songs and poems. It is selected for easy recall, and eventually it will form a useful repertoire that can be tapped for information about pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical patterns. What is more, you will have something to recite when you are asked to ‘say something in Chinese’ or when you are in China and asked to sing or perform for an audience. And closer to home, you may be asked to atone for being late to class by reciting some short piece in front of your classmates.

The first rhyme – a nursery rhyme - tells the story of a young entrepreneur and his struggle to set up a business. The word-for-word gloss provided will guide you towards the meaning.

Dà dùzi

Dà dùzi,	big tummy
kāi pùzi,	open shop
méi běnqián,	not+have root-money
dàng kùzi.	pawn trousers

The second, also a nursery rhyme, has a shifting rhythm but a more mundane subject matter: the tadpole, denizen of village ponds and urban drainage systems.

Xiǎo kēdǒu

Xiǎo kēdǒu,	small tadpole
shuǐ lǐ yóu,	water in swim
xìxì de wěiba,	tiny-DE tail
dàdà de tóu.	big DE head

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