

中文

MANDARIN FOR SOCIAL LIFE

Out & About

中文 · 便利店 · 餐厅 · 酒吧

From the shop counter to buying someone a drink. Short, real phrases for shops, restaurants and bars — order, pay, and open a conversation.

LESSON 6 OF 7

1 At the Shop 便利店

The shop counter is the lowest-stakes conversation in the country — a few set phrases and a smile do the whole thing. Nail these and you'll never freeze when the cashier rattles something off.

CHINESE	PINYIN (TONES)	ENGLISH	NOTE
这个多少钱?	<i>zhège duōshao qián?</i>	How much is this?	Point at the item
这个 <i>zhège</i> this 多少 <i>duōshao</i> how much 钱 <i>qián</i> money			
这个, 谢谢	<i>zhège, xièxie</i>	This one, please	Point and nod
这个 <i>zhège</i> this one 谢谢 <i>xièxie</i> thanks			
要一个袋子	<i>yào yíge dàizi</i>	A bag, please	dàizi = bag
要 <i>yào</i> want 一个 <i>yíge</i> one 袋子 <i>dàizi</i> bag			
可以刷卡吗?	<i>kěyǐ shuākǎ ma?</i>	Can I pay by card?	
可以 <i>kěyǐ</i> may/can 刷卡 <i>shuākǎ</i> swipe a card 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			
能微信吗?	<i>néng wēixìn ma?</i>	WeChat pay OK?	Mobile pay everywhere
能 <i>néng</i> can 微信 <i>wēixìn</i> WeChat 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			
不用袋子	<i>búyòng dàizi</i>	No bag, thanks	
不用 <i>búyòng</i> no need 袋子 <i>dàizi</i> bag			

JUST POINT AND PAY

You almost never need a full sentence at a counter. Set your item down, say the short phrase, and let the cashier guide you — a nod handles everything you didn't catch.

2 Ordering 点餐

Pointing plus one polite word gets you fed anywhere. You don't need the menu memorised — “this one, please” and a finger covers most of it, and asking what's good opens an actual chat.

CHINESE	PINYIN (TONES)	ENGLISH	NOTE
两位	<i>liǎng wèi</i>	Table for two	Hold up two fingers
两 <i>liǎng</i> two 位 <i>wèi</i> (people, polite)			
我要这个	<i>wǒ yào zhège</i>	I'll have this	Point at the menu
我 <i>wǒ</i> I 要 <i>yào</i> want 这个 <i>zhège</i> this			
有什么推荐?	<i>yǒu shénme tuījiàn?</i>	What do you recommend?	Opens a chat
有 <i>yǒu</i> have 什么 <i>shénme</i> what 推荐 <i>tuījiàn</i> recommendation			
一样的	<i>yíyàng de</i>	The same, please	Order what they had
一样 <i>yíyàng</i> the same 的 <i>de</i> (particle)			
不要辣	<i>búyào là</i>	Not spicy, please	Worth knowing!
不要 <i>búyào</i> don't want 辣 <i>là</i> spicy			
水, 谢谢	<i>shuǐ, xièxie</i>	Water, please	
水 <i>shuǐ</i> water 谢谢 <i>xièxie</i> thanks			

A FINGER IS FLUENT

Point at the dish — on the menu, on the next table, on your phone — and add the polite word. Staff would much rather you point than stay silent.

3 Paying 买单

Asking for the bill and paying cleanly is its own tiny social skill. Get it smooth and you walk out looking like you've done it a hundred times — and “it's on me” is a warm little offer.

CHINESE	PINYIN (TONES)	ENGLISH	NOTE
买单	<i>mǎidān</i>	The bill, please	Also: jiézhàng
买 <i>mǎi</i> buy/settle 单 <i>dān</i> bill			
能扫码吗?	<i>néng sǎomǎ ma?</i>	Can I scan to pay?	QR is king
能 <i>néng</i> can 扫码 <i>sǎomǎ</i> scan a QR code 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			
可以分开付吗?	<i>kěyǐ fēnkāi fù ma?</i>	Can we pay separately?	
可以 <i>kěyǐ</i> can 分开 <i>fēnkāi</i> separately 付 <i>fù</i> pay 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			
我请客	<i>wǒ qǐngkè</i>	It's on me	A warm offer
我 <i>wǒ</i> I 请客 <i>qǐngkè</i> treat / pick up the bill			
不用找了	<i>bùyòng zhǎo le</i>	Keep the change	
不用 <i>bùyòng</i> no need 找 <i>zhǎo</i> give change 了 <i>le</i> (particle)			
谢谢, 很好吃	<i>xièxie, hěn hǎochī</i>	Thanks, it was great	Leaves a good impression
谢谢 <i>xièxie</i> thanks 很 <i>hěn</i> very 好吃 <i>hǎochī</i> delicious			

PAY BY PHONE

Tipping isn't expected at most places. Mobile pay (WeChat / Alipay) rules — having your QR ready is smoother than fumbling for cash.

4 At the Bar 酒吧

The bar is where a phrase becomes a moment. “What are you having?” and “may I buy you a drink?” are tiny lines that can open a whole evening — say them light, smile, and let the drink do the rest.

CHINESE	PINYIN (TONES)	ENGLISH	NOTE
你喝什么？	<i>nǐ hē shénme?</i>	What are you having?	The easy opener
你 <i>nǐ</i> you 喝 <i>hē</i> drink 什么 <i>shénme</i> what			
我可以请你喝一杯吗？	<i>wǒ kěyǐ qǐng nǐ hē yì bēi ma?</i>	May I buy you a drink?	Light and warm
我 <i>wǒ</i> I 可以 <i>kěyǐ</i> may 请 <i>qǐng</i> treat 你 <i>nǐ</i> you 喝 <i>hē</i> drink 一杯 <i>yì bēi</i> one glass 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			
再来一杯？	<i>zài lái yì bēi?</i>	One more?	
再 <i>zài</i> again 来 <i>lái</i> bring 一杯 <i>yì bēi</i> one glass			
干杯！	<i>gānbēi!</i>	Cheers!	Lit. “dry the cup”
干 <i>gān</i> dry 杯 <i>bēi</i> cup			
敬你	<i>jìng nǐ</i>	To you	A little toast
敬 <i>jìng</i> toast / honour 你 <i>nǐ</i> you			
你常来吗？	<i>nǐ cháng lái ma?</i>	Do you come here often?	Classic, and it works
你 <i>nǐ</i> you 常 <i>cháng</i> often 来 <i>lái</i> come 吗 <i>ma</i> (question)			

OFFER, DON'T PRESSURE

“May I buy you a drink?” lands as a light, easy offer — not a transaction. Ask, smile, and be just as happy with a no. The relaxedness is the attractive part, not the drink.

YOU

你喝什么？

nǐ hē shénme?

What are you having?

HER

一杯红酒。

yì bēi hóngjiǔ.

A glass of red wine.

YOU

我可以请你喝一杯吗？

wǒ kěyǐ qǐng nǐ hē yì bēi ma?

May I buy you a drink?

HER

好啊，谢谢。

hǎo a, xièxie.

Sure, thanks.

YOU

干杯！你常来这儿吗？

gānbēi! nǐ cháng lái zhèr ma?

Cheers! Do you come here often?

★ Pocket Lines 口袋词

When your brain blanks, these are the words that still come out. One or two syllables each — impossible to fumble. Keep them on the tip of your tongue.

CHINESE	PINYIN (TONES)	ENGLISH	WHEN TO USE IT
这个	<i>zhège</i>	This one	Point and you're understood
这 <i>zhè</i> this 个 <i>ge</i> (item)			
一样的	<i>yíyàng de</i>	The same	Order what they had
一样 <i>yíyàng</i> the same 的 <i>de</i> (particle)			
多少钱?	<i>duōshao qián?</i>	How much?	Works anywhere
多少 <i>duōshao</i> how much 钱 <i>qián</i> money			
干杯!	<i>gānbēi!</i>	Cheers!	Glasses up
干 <i>gān</i> dry 杯 <i>bēi</i> cup			
好吃!	<i>hǎochī!</i>	Yum!	Say it mid-bite
好 <i>hǎo</i> good 吃 <i>chī</i> eat			
买单	<i>mǎidān</i>	Check, please	Catch the waiter's eye
买 <i>mǎi</i> buy/settle 单 <i>dān</i> bill			

SMALL WORDS, BIG EASE

One confident word with a smile beats a perfect sentence mumbled. These six get you through almost any counter, table or bar — lean on them when your mind goes blank.