

## 4.8 Forms of address

In general, Chinese place more importance on address forms of all kinds than Americans, a fact that reflects the importance of status in Chinese society. We can make a distinction, on the one hand, between forms of address that take the place of names of either strangers (like English ‘sir’, ‘buddy’, ‘mac’) or intimates (like ‘sis’, ‘dad’ and ‘auntie’) and, on the other hand, titles, that can occur with surnames (eg ‘Mr.’, ‘Mrs.’ and ‘Professor’).

### 4.8.1 Forms of address used instead of names

The safest course for foreigners may be to avoid forms of address when speaking to strangers, particularly to women, and to simply begin with qǐngwèn ‘may I ask [you]’, or with the more courtly expression, lǎojià ‘excuse me; may I bother you’ [more used in northern regions and by older speakers]. Otherwise, lǎoshī can be used to address male or female clerks and civil servants (as well as teachers, of course); xiānshēng ‘sir’ may be used to address adult males of the salaried classes; and shīfu ‘master’ (or lǎo shīfu for older people) can be used to address blue collar workers. Shop-keepers, male or female, can be addressed as lǎobǎn, which is similar in tone to English ‘boss’ [of a shop or small business]. Tóngzhì ‘comrade’ [modeled on Russian usage], in use into the 80s, was never an appropriate term of address for foreigners to use to Chinese. [Nowadays, it is said to be current among male urban homosexuals.]

Xiānshēng, jièguāng, jièguāng	Sirs, can I get through? (‘borrow light’)
Lǎojià ~ qǐngwèn, xǐshǒujiān shì bu shì zài zhèi lóu?	Excuse me, is the restroom on this floor?
Shīfu, qǐngwèn, Pān yuànzhang de bàngōngshì zài nǎr?	Excuse me sir, [could you tell me] where Dean Pan’s office is?
Lǎobǎn, yǒu méiyǒu bǐjìběn?	Sir, do you have any notebooks?

In Chinese, as in English (Miss? M’am?), there is probably no really appropriate way to address a female stranger, at least not on the Mainland. Xiǎojié ‘Miss’, that had some currency there in the past, and may still survive as a term of address in overseas communities, is now rare, possibly because the term has been contaminated by association with expressions such as sānpéi xiǎojié, ‘3 [ways]-keep+company girls’.

Chinese, like many cultures often uses kin terms for address where no actual relationship exists, in the same way that English-speaking children often use the terms ‘uncle’ and ‘auntie’ for adults of their parents’ generation. In China, usage varies greatly with region and age of speaker, but some typical examples are listed below – more for reference at this point than for usage. Unless otherwise stated, these terms are not used as titles (ie not with a xìng).

shūshu	‘uncle (father’s younger brother)’, eg a child to a male of his parents’ age.
dàshū	as with <u>shūshu</u> , but by older speakers rather than children.

āyí	‘auntie; nanny’, eg a child to a woman of his parents’ age.
bófù	‘uncle (father’s elder brother)’, eg a young adult addressing the father of a good friend.
bómǔ	‘aunt (wife of father’s elder brother)’, eg a young adult addressing the mother of a good friend.
dàye lǎorénjia	‘uncle’ ( <u>yéye</u> = ‘paternal grandfather’); ‘sir’, to an elderly man. ‘Sir [to old men]’; a respectful term of address to elderly men.
dāmā	‘madam (father’s elder brother’s wife); to elderly women. <u>Dāmā</u> is more used in the north; <u>dàniáng</u> is more common in the south.
dàshěnr	‘aunty’; used more in the countryside, as an affectionate term for women near the age of one’s mother. Also after a <i>xìng</i> as: <u>Wáng shěnr</u> ‘Aunt(ie) Wang’.
xiǎo dì; xiǎo mèi<r>	‘little brother; little sister’: used by some to address young waiters or other attendants, acquaintances; can be patronizing.
xiǎo péngyou	‘little friend’ > adult to child.
gēmen	‘brother- <i>plural</i> ’; form of address used by young men amongst themselves (cf. English ‘man; buddy; dude; brother’).

#### 4.8.2 The changing scene

As noted above, there has been considerable shift in the use of titles and address forms in the Mainland since the days of Mao Zedong. When the Communist Party was taken more seriously there, tóngzhì ‘comrade’ was the common form of address, and with the prestige of the proletariat, shīfu ‘master in trade’ spread from blue collar factory workers to workers in other professions as a form of address. Now lǎoshī seems to be taking over from shīfu, spreading from being a form of address for teachers to civil servants and people in other professions.

#### 4.8.3 General titles

Most of the non-professional titles have been mentioned in earlier units, so we will only summarize them here:

	<i>as title</i>	<i>general meanings</i>	<i>example</i>	<i>notes</i>
xiānsheng	Mr.	[other’s] husband; or professor [m,f]	Wáng xiānsheng	<i>general Mainland</i>
lǎoshī	Mr. or Ms.	teacher	Wáng lǎoshī	<i>general</i>
shīfu	‘Master’		Gāo shīfu	<i>Mainland</i>
tàitai	Mrs.	[other’s] wife	Wáng tàitai	<i>Taiwan</i>
fūrén	Mrs.; Lady	[other’s] wife	Wáng fūrén	<i>general</i>
nǚshì	Ms.		Téng nǚshì	<i>mostly written</i>
xiǎojie	Miss	young woman	Téng xiǎojie	<i>more Taiwan</i>

## Notes

- a) Titles such as xiānsheng can also follow full names: Wáng xiānshēng; Wáng Nǚ xiānshēng. For a time, xiānshēng was also used as a deferential title for older and eminent professors – male or female; this usage now seems rarer.
- b) Tàitai ‘Mrs. (great; grand)’ and fūrén ‘Lady’ are both used with husband’s xìng. Téng xiǎojié married to, say, Zhū xiānsheng could be addressed as Zhū tàitai, or Zhū fūrén, if appropriate.
- c) Nǚshì, a formal term for ‘Miss’, or ‘Ms’ – again always with the woman’s own xìng – might be starting to fill the gap left by the decline of xiǎojié, but at present, the preferred form of address for women without professional titles seems to be full name or míngzi (when appropriate). In certain regions, jiě ‘older sister’ is appended to the xìng to form a name used between good friends: Hóngjiě ‘sister Hong’.
- d) Fūrén is a common form of address for wives of high officials, Zhū Róngjī fūrén. Mrs. Thatcher, former Prime Minister of Great Britain is called Dài Zhuō’ěr fūrén or Sàqiè’ěr fūrén, as well as Tiě Niángzī ‘the Iron Lady’.
- e) Lǎoshī can be used for self, eg to students: Wǒ shì Liú lǎoshī. Though the expression lǎoshī, hǎo does occur as a passing greeting or acknowledgement, a more considered greeting is more appropriate – one that includes the xìng: Wèi lǎoshī, hǎo, etc.

## 4.8.4 Other terms

There are a number of other terms that fit in the category of ‘address forms’ but which beginning students, and foreigners in general, are less likely to use. Here are two examples, using the surname Chén. Later, if you get a chance to work in a Chinese enterprise, you can observe the variety of titles and forms of address in more detail.

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Chén lǎo  | used to address older people (male or female) of some eminence.  |
| Chén gōng | to engineers or others who have, or had, positions in industry; <u>gōng</u> is short for <u>gōngchéngshī</u> ‘engineer’. |

## 4.8.5 Professional titles

Professional titles are job titles, the sort that would be inscribed on a business card. They are used on first meeting, during the introductions, but later such titles are likely to be replaced by something less formal such as lǎoshī, xiānsheng or even full name (xìng+míngzi). Here is a selection of professional titles:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| jiàoshòu | ‘professor (teaching-instruct)’<br><u>Zhōu jiàoshòu</u> ; <u>Zhào Yuánrèn jiàoshòu</u> . Nowadays on the Mainland, teachers of all ranks are usually addressed, and often address each other, as <u>lǎoshī</u> . <u>Jiàoshòu</u> is more likely to be used in formal settings, eg introductions, where it is important to indicate rank explicitly. |
|----------|---|

jīnglǐ	‘manager [of a company etc.]’; <u>Qián jīnglǐ</u>		
zhǔrèn	‘director; head; chairperson (main-official+post)’ [of a company, academic department, etc.]; <u>Liào zhǔrèn</u>		
dǒngshì	‘director; trustee’; <u>Huáng dǒngshì</u>		
zǒngcái	‘director-general; CEO (overall-rule)’; <u>Cáo zǒngcái</u>		
dáoyǎn	‘director [of films or plays]’ <u>Zhāng [Yìmóu] dáoyǎn</u>		
(...)-zhǎng	‘head of; chief of (...)’		
eg	xiàozhǎng	principle of a school	(xiào ‘school’)
	yuànzǎng	dean; director of hospital etc.	(yuàn ‘public facility’)
	shìzhǎng	mayor	(shì ‘city’)
	shěngzhǎng	governor	(shěng ‘province’)
	kēzhǎng	department head (hospital)	(kē ‘section’)
	chùzhǎng	section chief (government)	(chù ‘office’)
	huìzhǎng	president of an association	(huì ‘association’)
	chǎngzhǎng	head of a factory	(chǎng ‘factory’)
zǒngtǒng	‘president’	Lǐ zǒngtǒng; Kèlìndùn zǒngtǒng; Bùshí zǒngtǒng	
zhǔxí	‘chairman (main-seat)’	Máo zhǔxí	

The titles on this list can be prefixed with fù- ‘vice; deputy; associate’. But while fù- might appear on a business card as part of the description of a person’s rank, office or function, it is not usually used in direct address. Thus a Mr. Lee who is a fùzhǔrèn ‘associate director’ would be introduced and addressed simply as Lǐ zhǔrèn. A variety of possible fù-titles are listed below:

fùjiàoshòu	associate professor	fùxiàozhǎng	vice principal
fùzhǔrèn	associate director	fùshìzhǎng	vice mayor
fùjīnglǐ	deputy manager	fùzǒngtǒng	vice president

#### 4.8.6 From title to prefix

As friendships among Chinese develop, there comes a point when address shifts from the relatively formal xìng + title to other forms, including full name, míngzì or hào ‘nickname’. One of the possibilities, common amongst males, makes use of the prefix lǎo ‘old; venerable; etc.’ So instead of Wáng xiānsheng, friends might address Wáng as lǎo Wáng (nicely translated in Yuan and Church’s *The Oxford Starter Chinese Dictionary*, as ‘my pal [Wáng etc.]’). The factors that condition this shift involve age, relative status and other aspects of the relationship. Because it involves a degree of camaraderie that is not

easily extended to non-locals, foreigners should probably wait for an explicit invitation before making such a shift.

In Cantonese speaking areas, the equivalent of lǎo is a (without tone), and so in southern regions (as well as in many communities of Southeast Asian Chinese), this prefix is borrowed into Mandarin, eg Abāo = lǎo Bāo, Améi = lǎo Méi.

Another prefix, xiǎo, is also used before xìng, as a term of endearment for young adults, particularly women (xiǎo Bì ‘young Bì’) or by contrast with another of the same surname who is older or has other features (size, maturity) that sets her or him apart.

Finally, it should be noted that intimates will (more in the northeast than south?) sometimes use xiǎo in front of the last syllable of a *given name*: thus Chén Bó might be addressed as Xiǎobó (rather than lǎo Chén or xiǎo Chén, or simply, Chén Bó).

<i>full name</i>	<i>sex</i>	<i>informal</i>	<i>intimate</i>	<i>with title (formal)</i>
Bái Sùzhēn	fem.	xiǎo Bái	Xiǎozhēn	Bái lǎoshī
Zhāng Dàmíng	male	lǎo Zhāng	Xiǎomíng	Zhāng jīnglǐ
Liáng Àimín	fem.	xiǎo Liáng	Xiǎomín	Liáng zhǔrèn

**Exercise 5.**

Greet the following people appropriately.

- |    |  |    |                       |
|----|--|----|-----------------------|
| Eg | A teacher named Zhào   | >> | Zhào lǎoshī, nín hǎo. |
| 1  | A middle-aged, married woman whose husband's surname is Bái: |    |                       |
| 2  | A young woman surnamed Guō Měifāng:                          |    |                       |
| 3  | The wife of an important official named Zhū:                 |    |                       |
| 4  | A CEO named Dèng:  |    |                       |
| 5  | The eminent Professor Xú:                                    |    |                       |
| 6  | The deputy manager of a company, named Qián:                 |    |                       |
| 7  | The principal of a school, named Yuán:                       |    |                       |
| 8  | An elderly man seated on a park bench; an elderly women:     |    |                       |
| 9  | Your bus driver, named Zhào:                                 |    |                       |
| 10 | Your teacher's husband, whose surname is Huáng:              |    |                       |

## 4.9 Introductions

Making introductions usually involves names and titles (Zhào Fāngfāng, Chén lǎoshī), pointing words (zhè, nà), set expressions of greeting (nǐ hǎo) and often, some explanation of the connection, provided in a phrase such as zhè shì wǒ de lǎoshī ‘this is my teacher’. A host may express his intention to introduce someone, using the disyllabic verb, jièshào ‘introduce’, as follows:

Zhāng lǎoshī, wǒ gěi nǐ  
jièshao jièshao! Zhè shì....

Prof. Zhang, let me introduce you.  
This is....

Notice how gěi shifts in meaning from its core sense of ‘give’ to ‘for [your benefit]’ when it is subordinated to the main verb, jièshào. Instead of zhè shì, the polite measure word for people, wèi will often be used: zhèi wèi shì....

#### 4.9.1 Relational information

To keep things manageable, you can provide relational information about people in the format:

Zhè <wèi> shì wǒ <de> ....

This is my....

##### a) With de

Zhè <wèi> shì wǒ de lǎoshī.

This is my teacher.

wǒ de Zhōngwén lǎoshī.

Chinese teacher.

wǒ de xuésheng

student.

wǒ de tóngxué.

classmate.

wǒ de péngyou.

friend.

wǒ de lǎo péngyou.

good friend.

wǒ de lǎobǎn.

boss [slightly jocular].

Zhāng lǎoshī de xuésheng

Prof. Zhang's student.

##### b) Usually without de

Zhè shì

wǒ fùqin.

father.

wǒ bà<ba>

Dad (intimate).

wǒ mǔqin

mother.

wǒ mā<ma>

Mum (intimate).

wǒ gēge.

older brother.

wǒ dìdì.

younger brother.

wǒ jiějie.

older sister.

wǒ mèimei.

younger sister.

wǒ àirén [not in Tw]

spouse (husband, wife).

wǒ zhàngfu

husband (neutral).

wǒ lǎogōng

husband (neutral).

wǒ xiānshēng

husband (formal).

wǒ qīzi

wife (neutral).

wǒ lǎopo ~ lǎopó

wife (informal).

wǒ xifu

wife (regional).

wǒ tàitai [more in Tw]

wife (formal).

#### 4.9.2 A note on words for husband and wife

In Chinese, as in English, words for ‘spouse’ go in and out of fashion. The use of lǎogōng for ‘husband’, for example, was probably influenced by films and TV programs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, so that the term is current among younger urban people in the Mainland. The female version of lǎogōng, lǎopó, is also quite common, though for some, it has a slightly jocular (and some would add, disrespectful) tone, along the lines of

English ‘my old lady’. (The male equivalent would be lǎotóuzi ‘my old man’.) Terms such as qīzi ‘wife’ and zhàngfu ‘husband’ are fairly neutral.

Máo Zédōng yǒu sì ge qīzi                      Mao had 4 wives.  
Máo Zédōng yǒu sì ge lǎopó.

Nèirén ‘wife (within-person)’ has a humble tone. Southerners often use xífù, a variant on xífù ‘daughter-in-law’, for wife, eg: Sǎozi shì gēge de xífù. ‘Saozi [sister-in-law] is the wife of one’s elder brother.’

The PRC used to promote the use of àirén ‘love-person’ as a egalitarian term for spouse (husband or wife), and the phrase zhè shì wǒ àirén is still current on the Mainland. The term causes some giggles among non-Mainlanders, for in Taiwan, àirén sometimes has the meaning of ‘sweetheart’. (Àirén is not the normal word for ‘lover,’ however; that is qíng rén ‘feelings-person’, the word used for the Chinese title of the French film, *The Lover*, for example.)

Another term that has come into vogue in informal situations on the Mainland is nèiwèi for ‘spouse’ (literally ‘that-one’). Peculiarly, it combines with a plural possessive pronoun even when the reference is singular: wǒmen nèiwèi ‘(our spouse) my husband/wife’. This may be because it derives from the phrase wǒmen jiā de nèiwèi ‘our family DE spouse’. Thus: Nimen nèiwèi zěnmeyàng? ‘How’s the wife / the old man?’

Foreigners, though they may hear intimate or familiar terms, should be careful not to use them unless their relationship warrants it!

#### 4.9.3 Responses

A typical response to an introduction uses an appropriate title with the surname, and a conventional expression of greeting:

A, Qí lǎoshī, nín hǎo.                      Oh, Prof. Qi, how are you?

The response to being introduced to someone of eminence is jiǔyǎng, literally ‘long+time-look+up+to’, often repeated as jiǔyǎng jiǔyǎng ‘[I]’ve heard a lot about you’. Sometimes dà míng ‘great name’ is added: jiǔyǎng dà míng.

O, Qí lǎoshī, jiǔyǎng, jiǔyǎng.                      Oh, Prof. Qi, honored to meet you.

Children and sometimes young adults may show respect by addressing elders as shūshu ‘uncle’ or āyí ‘auntie’: Shūshu hǎo. ‘How are you, uncle.’

In English, we feel the need to confirm the worth of meeting someone by saying eg ‘nice to meet you’, either after an introduction, or at the end of an initial introduction, before taking leave. Traditionally, Chinese had no comparable expression, but nowadays, people in the more cosmopolitan cities, particularly when they are talking to foreigners, will use a phrase hěn gāoxìng rènshi nǐ (‘very happy know you’), or hěn gāoxìng jiàndào

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nǐ (‘very happy see you’), in more or less the same situations as English ‘nice to meet you’. The response may have a slightly different emphasis, expressed in the word order: Rènshi nǐ, wǒ yě hěn gāoxìng! ‘Happy to meet you too! = my pleasure!’.

A, Qí lǎoshī, hěn gāoxìng rènshi nǐ. Oh, Prof. Qi, nice to meet you.

#### 4.9.4 Dialogues

a) You [Wèi] are introducing your friend Chén Huībó to your classmate, a student from China named Cài Wénjiā. You get Cài’s attention by calling out her name, and as you guide her towards Chén, you explain to her who he is. Cài then (re)states her full name, and the two acknowledge each other.

CHÉN Huībó (m)		(CÀI) Wénjiā (f)
		*You [Wèi]
Wèi	Cài Wénjiā, wǒ gěi nǐ jièshào jièshào; zhè shì wǒ de péngyou, Chén Huībó.	Cài Wénjiā, let me introduce you; this is my friend, Chen Huibo.
Cài	Chén Huībó, nǐ hǎo; wǒ shì Cài Wénjiā.	Chen Huibo, how are you? I’m Cài Wénjiā
Chén	Cài Wénjiā, nǐ hǎo.	Cài Wénjiā, how are you.

b) Now a relatively formal introduction, between people sharing a train cabin. (Hng = xìng Huáng de, jiàoshòu; Zh. = xìng Zhōu de, jīnglǐ.) Note the word for business card, míngpiàn, literally ‘name-slice’.

Hng	Ei, nín hǎo, wǒ xìng Huáng, zhè shì wǒ de míngpiàn. Nín guìxìng?	Hi, how are you? My (sur)name’s Huang; this is my card. What’s your [sur]name?
(Looking at the card.)		
Zh	O, Huáng lǎoshī, nín hǎo. Wǒ jiào Zhōu Bǎolín – wǒ de míngpiàn.	Oh, Prof. Huang, how are you? I’m named Zhou Baolin – my card.
(He too looks at the card.)		
Hng	A Zhōu jīnglǐ, nín hǎo. O nín shì Wēiruǎn de! Wēiruǎn hěn yǒumíng a!	Ah. Manager Wang, how do you do? Oh, you’re with Microsoft! Microsoft’s famous!
Wáng	Hái xíng ba!	I guess [if you say so].

*Note*

Wēiruǎn de ‘of ~ from Microsoft (tiny-soft DE)’

**Exercise 6**

## a) Introductions:

Liáng Mínmin, a teacher, meets Dèng Lìlì also a teacher (both female) and introduces her student, Mǎ Yán (a male); fill in Dèng Lìlì's responses:

Liáng:	Nín hǎo, wǒ xìng Liáng, jiào Liáng Mímín.
Dèng:	??
Liáng:	Dèng Lìlì, nǐ hǎo. Zhè shì Mǎ Yán, wǒ de xuéshēng.
Dèng:	??
Mǎ	Dèng lǎoshī, hǎo. Rènshi nǐ, wǒ yě hěn gāoxìng.

## b) Translate:

- 1) Miss Chén, this is my classmate, Wáng Bīnbīn.
  - 2) This is my good friend, Bì Xiùqióng.
  - 3) This is my younger sister, Chén Xiùxiù.
  - 4) Professor Gāo, I've heard a lot about you.
  - 5) Let me introduce you – this is Manager Wang, he's at Intel.
  - 6) This is Li Dawei, he's been to China, and he's studying Chinese.
-