

1.8 Conventional Greetings

1.8.1 The addition of guò (untoned)

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.
	Méiyou.	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.)

- ask your friend if she's eaten yet (3 ways).
- announce that she's already left work [for the day].
- explain that it was cold yesterday, but that it's gotten hot today.
- announce that she hasn't gone to class yet.
- explain that they've bathed, but they haven't eaten.
- explain that you were all unwell yesterday, but today you're fine.
- explain that the first's already gone, but the second and third still haven't.
- 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)
Yìhuǐr ~ 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)
Huítou jiàn.	<i>friendly</i>	See [you] shortly. (return-head see)
Màn zǒu.	<i>friendly</i>	Take it easy. (slowly walk)

Notes

- 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 yìhuǐr ~ yíhuìr, the final $-r$ affects the quality of the preceding vowel, so that it is pronounced [yìhuě̃r ~ yíhuè̃r] rather than [yìhuǐr ~ yíhuìr].
- The alternate pronunciation yíhuìr is often said to be ‘southern’.
- Students of all kinds, and other urban youth, often end a series of farewells with English bàibài.
- 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-yàng ba, zǒu le. ‘Okay then, that’s it, [I]’m off! (okay, in+that+case then this-way BA, leave LE)’

Bù zǎo le, wǒ gāi zǒu le. ‘[It]’s late, I’d better be off. (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.

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