

4.10 Dialogue: on the bus to Miányáng



Dào Miányáng le ma? [JKW 2004]

Méi Tàidé (Theo Meyering), a foreign student traveling by bus from Chéngdū to Miányáng [about 111 kms. to the northeast], is attempting to read the local paper; the man sitting next to him, who has been watching him for a while, breaks into conversation:

Ōu-y Kàndedǒng ma?

Can you read [it]?

Méi: Néng kàndǒng yìdiǎnr.

I can read a bit.

Ōu-y: Hànzì hěn duō ya!

Chinese has a *lohhht* of characters!

Méi: Shì, tài duō le!

Yes, too many!

Ōu-y: Wǒ xìng Ōuyáng – zhè shì wǒde míngpiàn.

My name's Ouyang – here's my card.

Méi: A, Ōuyáng xiānsheng... Ōuyáng jīnglǐ, nín hǎo! Hěn gāoxìng rènshi nín.

Oh, Mr. Ouyang... Manager Ouyang, how do you do! Nice to meet you.

Ōu-y: Zhè shì wǒ àiren, Xiǎo Měifāng.

This is my wife, Xiao Meifang.

<i>Méi</i>	<i>Nín hǎo. Wǒde míngzi shì Theo Meyering, Méi Tàidé: Tàiguó de Tàì, Déguó de Dé. Duìbuqǐ, xiànzài wǒ yǐjīng méiyǒu míngpiàn le.</i>	<i>Hello. My name's Theo Meyering, Mei Taide: the tai of Taiguo, the de of Deguo. I'm sorry, I'm already out of business cards.</i>
<i>Xiāo:</i>	<i>Méi Tàidé, Méi xiānsheng, nǐ hǎo. Nǐ Zhōngwén jiǎng+de zhēn bàng!</i>	<i>Mei Taide, Mr. Mei, how do you do? You speak Chinese reeeally well!</i>
<i>Méi:</i>	<i>Nǎlǐ, nǎlǐ, jiǎng+de māmāhūhū. Wǒ hái zài xué ne, wǒ zài Sìchuān Dàxué xuéxí.</i>	<i>Nice of you to say so [but] I speak poorly. I'm still studying [it] – I'm studying at Sichuan University.</i>
<i>Ōu-y:</i>	<i>Qǐngwèn nǐ shì cóng nǎ ge guójiā lái de?</i>	<i>May I ask what country you're from?</i>
<i>Méi:</i>	<i>Wǒ shì Hólán rén; wǒ shēng zai Hólán. Kěshì xiànzài wǒ shì Měiguó Mìxīgēn Dàxué de xuéshēng.</i>	<i>I'm from Holland; I was born in Holland. But at present, I'm a student at Michigan University.</i>
<i>Ōu-y</i>	<i>O, Mìxīgēn Dàxué, hěn yǒumíng. Nǐ shì jǐniánjí de xuéshēng?</i>	<i>Oh, Michigan University, it's famous. What year are you?</i>
<i>Méi:</i>	<i>Wǒ shì sìníánjí de.</i>	<i>I'm a senior.</i>
<i>Ōu-y</i>	<i>Nǐ shì Zhōngwén xì de ma?</i>	<i>Are you in the Chinese department?</i>
<i>Méi</i>	<i>Bù, wǒ shì Jīngjì xì de, wǒ xué Zhōngguó jīngjì... Ōuyáng xiānsheng, nín zài Chángchūn gōngzuò a?</i>	<i>No, I'm in economics, I'm studying Chinese economics. [So] you work in Changchun, Mr. Ouyang.</i>
<i>Ōu-y</i>	<i>Duì, wǒ zài Chángchūn gōngzuò, búguò wǒ shì Shěnyáng rén.</i>	<i>Yes, I work in Changchun, but I'm from Shenyang.</i>
<i>Méi:</i>	<i>Dōu zài Dōngběi, duì ba?</i>	<i>Both in the Northeast, right?</i>
<i>Ōu-y</i>	<i>Duì, Chángchūn zài Jílín shěng, Shěnyáng zài Liáoníng. Shěnyáng lí Běijīng bù yuǎn.</i>	<i>That's right, Changchun is in Jilin province, Shenyang is in Liaoning. Shenyang isn't far from Bj.</i>
<i>Měi:</i>	<i>Shěnyáng hěn dà, shì bu shì?</i>	<i>Shenyang's big, isn't it?</i>
<i>Ōu-y</i>	<i>Shì, yǒu chàbùduō wǔbǎiwàn rén ... Nǐ chīguò zhōngfàn le ma?</i>	<i>It is, it has about 5 million inhabitants...Have you had lunch?</i>
<i>Méi:</i>	<i>Chī le, zài Chéngdū chī le.</i>	<i>I have – in Chengdu.</i>

- Ōu-y Nǐmen zhōngfàn dōu chī sānmíngzhì, shì bu shì? You eat sandwiches for lunch, right?
- Méi: Bù yídìng. Kěshì zài Zhōngguó, wǒ dāngrán chī Zhōngguó fàn. Not necessarily. But in China, I eat Chinese food of course.
- Ōu-y Zhōngguó fàn nǐ chīdeguàn ma? Are you accustomed to eating Chinese food?
- Méi: Dāngrán chīdeguàn, zài Hélán, zài Mèiguǒ, wǒ yě chángcháng chī Zhōngguó fàn. ...Dào Miányáng le ma? Of course I am, I often eat Chinese food in Holland and in the US. Have we reached Mianyang?
- Ōu-y Hái méi dào ne. Zhè shì Déyáng. Wǒmen zài zhèr xiàchē. Dàgài yì diǎn bàn dào Miányáng. Not yet. This is Deyang. We get off here. [You] get to Mianyang at about 1:30.
- Méi: Oh, nǐmen zài Déyáng xiàchē? Oh, you get off at Deyang?
- Ōu-: Duì, wǒ yǒu ge jiějie zhù zài Déyáng. Yes, I have an older sister living in Deyang.
- Méi: Nǐmen de xíngli duō bu duō? Do you have a lot of bags?
- Ōu-: Bù duō – zhǐ yǒu yí jiàn. Hǎo, wǒmen xiàchē le. Zàijiàn! No, just one. Okay, we're getting off. Good bye.
- Méi: Hǎo, zàijiàn, zàijiàn! Okay, goodbye.

Notes

kàndědǒng ‘can understand [by reading] (look-able+to-understand)’. Kàndědǒng is an example of what is sometimes known as the ‘potential construction’ (cf. §7.1), which involves an action (kàn) and result (dědǒng) and an intervening +de (able to) or bu (unable to). Thus kànbudědǒng ‘cannot understand [by reading]’. Other examples: chīdeguàn, appearing later in this dialogue, ‘be in the habit of eating (eat-get-accustomed)’; and earlier, in the rhyme at the end of Unit 2, shuāibudǎo ‘won’t fall down (slip-not-fall)’. The response to Ouyang’s question might have been kàndědǒng ‘I do’ but Méi is more modest, and wishes to use yìdiǎnr ‘a little’. Kàndědǒng or kànbudědǒng do not permit gradations – either you do, or you don’t; so the response with yìdiǎnr has to be néng kàndědǒng yìdiǎnr ‘can understand a bit’.

néng ‘able to; can’ [not usually for learned abilities]

- Ōuyáng An example of one of the 40 or so disyllabic surnames. Tā xìng Ōuyáng. Méi Tàidé re-addresses him with jīnglǐ after reading his business card.
- Xiāo Měifāng Notice the Méi Tàidé refrains from addressing Ōuyáng's wife with title or name. Neither tàitai nor xiǎojie is appropriate, and using her name might seem too familiar. So he just says nǐ hǎo.
- àirén 'spouse; wife; husband'. This is typical usage.
- zhēn bàng bàng is a noun, meaning 'club' or 'cudgel'; but in colloquial speech, it has come to function as a SV with the meaning 'good; strong'; cf. English 'smashing'. The expression is more common in certain regions than others, and probably certain age groups than others.
- chīdeguàn 'in the habit of eating (eat-get-accustomed)'
- jiàn M-word for 'luggage' (and, paradoxically, for 'clothes' and 'business affairs' as well).

4.11 Food (1)

In China, meals are central to social life. But for the student of Chinese, who may have to eat most meals out, learning how to read the menu and order meals takes a long time. Eating at Chinese restaurants overseas may give the impression that there is a set of basic dishes at the heart of every Chinese regional cuisine. But within China, menus start to seem infinitely variable. And what is more, you will find that rather than consulting the menu, Chinese customers are just as likely to base their orders on a conversation with the waiter about what is seasonal or fresh, or what the restaurant's specialties are. So we will have to build up competence about Chinese food incrementally. We will begin with elementary categories.

The basic distinction in food is between fàn and cài. Both words have core and extended meanings, as follows:

fàn	cooked rice	>	staples
cài	vegetables	>	dishes; courses

Fàn in its extended meaning includes cooked rice, wheat, millet and other grains that – at least in less affluent times – formed the main caloric intake. Cài in its extended meaning would normally have been vegetables, with some dry or fresh fish, and very occasionally, a small amount of pork. Now, of course, cài includes the vast repertoire of dishes that can be served alongside the staples. Any ambiguity between core and extended meanings can be eliminated through compounding:

báifàn; mǐfàn	cooked rice [as opposed to other staples]
qīngcài	vegetables [as opposed to other dishes]

Rice is the staple of southern China where it is eaten cooked (mǐfàn), or ground into flour for noodles (mǐfěn) and dumpling wraps. In the north, wheat is the staple and forms the basis of wheat noodles (miàn ~ miàntiáo) and wheat dumpling-wraps. At breakfast and lunch, Chinese often eat a rice gruel or ‘congee’ (xīfàn ‘watery rice’ or zhōu), to which can be added various kinds of vegetables, meats and sauces, as well as broken up yóutiáo ‘fried dough sticks’.

miàn ~ miàntiáo	noodles	miànbāo	bread (wheat-bun)
mǐfěn	rice-flour noodles	dòufu	toufu
zhōu; xīfàn	rice porridge; congee	yóutiáo	fried dough sticks
bāozi	steamed stuffed buns		
guōtiē	pot stickers	jiǎozi	dumplings
tāng	soup	jīdàn	chicken eggs
ròu	meat	yā<ròu>	duck
zhūròu	pork	jī<ròu>	chicken
niúròu	beef	yáng ròu	lamb
yú	fish	hǎixiān	seafood
xiārén<r>	shrimp meat	hǎishēn	sea cucumber

Notes

- In combinations, parts of these citation forms are often dropped. In most cases, it is the second element: niúròu-miàn[tiáo] ‘beef noodles’. But in some cases, it is the first: niúròu-chǎo [mǐ]fěn ‘beef fried rice-noodles’.
- On a menu, unspecified ròu usually means ‘pork’.
- Many Chinese avoid eating beef because of Buddhist tradition, and because of taboos about killing work animals.
- Xiā is ‘shrimp’, rén<r> is ‘kernel’, so xiārénr ‘shrimp meat’.
- Sea cucumber is a euphemistic name for a kind of slug that lives on the bottom of the sea; eaten fresh, or dried, it is considered a delicacy.



Qīngzhēn xiānjī 'Muslim fresh chicken' at a street stall in Kunming. [JKW 1997]

4.11.1 Short narratives

a) Zhōngguó rén zuì xǐhuan hē shénme?

Yǒu péngyou wèn wǒ Zhōngguó rén zuì xǐhuan hē shénme. Wǒ shuō chuántǒng de Zhōngguó rén xǐhuan hē chá huòzhě báikāishuǐ, kěshì xiànzài hěn duō Zhōngguó rén yě xǐhuan hē qìshuǐ, kělè, hé niúǎi. Zhōngguó nánrén yě xǐhuan hē píjiǔ. Qīngdǎo píjiǔ shì zuì yǒumíng de Zhōngguó píjiǔ. Wǒ yě xǐhuan hē píjiǔ, kěshì bù néng hē tài duō, yì píng jiù gòu le! Zǎoshàng, wǒ yě hē kāfēi – hē yì bēi wǒ jiù bú huì juéde lèi!

b) Zuì xǐhuan chī shénme?

Nà, Zhōngguó rén zuì xǐhuan chī shénme? Zhè hěn nán shuō. Yīnwèi Zhōngguó rén chī de dōngxī tài duō le. Kěyǐ shuō běifāng rén bǐjiào xǐhuan chī miànshí, jiùshì yòng xiǎomàifěn zuò de shípǐn; nánfāng rén ne, tāmen bǐjiào xǐhuan chī mǐfàn. Měitiān dāngrán chī qīngcài, yě chī yìdiǎnr ròu, xiàng zhūròu, jīròu, niúròu. Ménggǔrén yě tèbié xǐhuan chī yáng ròu. Zhōngguó rén yě cháng chī hǎixiān, xiàng yú, xiārénr, hǎishēn. Yě xǐhuan chī bāozi, jiǎozi; zhèi lèi dōngxī kěyǐ shuō shì Zhōngguó chuántǒng de kuàicān. Língshí ne, tǐng duō de! Yǒu niúròugānr, guāzǐ<r>, huàméi.

Notes

yǒu péngyou	While English comfortably begins a sentence with an indefinite phrase such as ‘a friend’ or ‘someone’, Chinese makes use of the existential <u>yǒu</u> ‘there is/are...’: <u>Yǒu rén wèn wǒ</u> ...; <u>Yǒu rén shuō</u> .
chuántǒng	SV ‘traditional’.
báikāishuǐ	‘clear boiled water’
miànshí	‘cooked wheaten food’; cf. <u>shípǐn</u> . In Mandarin <u>shí</u> is a combining root that appears in compounds having to do with food, eg <u>shípǐn</u> , <u>língshí</u> , below. It is cognate with Cantonese <u>sìhk</u> , the verb ‘to eat’.
jiùshì	[in this context] ‘ie’
xiǎomài	‘wheat’; cf. <u>dàmài</u> ‘barley’, <u>yànmài</u> ‘oats’, <u>qiámài</u> ‘buckwheat’
shípǐn	‘food; comestibles’
Ménggǔ	Mongolia; cf. <u>Nèi Ménggǔ</u> ‘Inner Mongolia’.
tèbié	SV ‘special’; ADV ‘especially’.
zhèi lèi	‘this type’, and particularly in the expression <u>zhèi lèi dōngxī</u> ‘these sorts ~ categories of things’; cf. <u>zhèi zhǒng</u> ‘this kind’.
kuàicān	‘fast-food’
língshí	‘nibbles; snacks (zero; incidental-food)’
niúròugānr	‘beef jerky’; <u>yí dài</u> ‘a bag’
guāzǐ<r>	‘water melon seeds’
huàméi	‘preserved plums’; <u>yì bāo</u> ‘a packet’

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