

Varieties of Chinese

Chinese	
Sinitic	
Ethnicity:	Han Chinese
Geographic distribution:	Mainland China , Hong Kong , Macau , Taiwan , Southeast Asia and other regions with historic immigration from China
Linguistic classification:	Sino-Tibetan • Chinese
Subdivisions:	Mandarin Jin Wu Hui Gan Xiang Min Hakka Yue Ping
ISO 639-5:	zhx

Primary branches of Chinese according to the [Language Atlas of China](#)

Chinese is a branch of the [Sino-Tibetan language family](#). It has hundreds of local [languages](#), many of which are not [mutually understandable](#). There is more variation in the mountainous southeast. There are seven main groups: [Mandarin](#), [Wu](#), Min, Xiang, [Gan](#), [Hakka](#) and [Yue](#).

[Chinese](#) varieties differ most in their [phonology](#) (sounds) but have similar [vocabulary](#) and [syntax](#) (grammar). Southern varieties tend to have fewer initial consonants but more often preserve the [Middle Chinese](#) final consonants. All have tones. Northern varieties have fewer tones. Many have tone sandhi (biandao). [Zhejiang](#) coast and eastern [Guangdong](#) has some of the most complex patterns.

[Standard Chinese](#) is based on the [Beijing dialect](#). Its vocabulary is based on Mandarin group and grammar based on literature in the modern written vernacular. It is the [official language](#) of [China](#), one of the [four official languages](#) of [Singapore](#), and one of the six official languages of the [United Nations](#).

History

[\[change\]](#) | [\[change source\]](#)

In the 2nd millennium BC, a form of Chinese was spoken in around the [Huanghe](#). It then expanded east across the [North China Plain](#) to [Shandong](#) and then south towards the [Yangzi river](#) valley. It replaced former languages in the south.

During times of unity, people wanted to use a common standard language to make communication easier between people.^[1]

Evidence for dialectal variation is found in texts from the Spring and Autumn period (722–479 BC). At that time, the [Zhou](#) still defined a standard speech.^[2] The *Fangyan* (1st century CE) studies the differences in vocabulary between regions.^[3] Texts from the [Eastern Han](#) period also discuss local differences in pronunciation. The *Qieyun* rhyme book (601) noted wide variation in pronunciation between regions. It wanted to define a standard pronunciation for reading the classics.^[4] This standard is called [Middle Chinese](#).^[5]

The [North China Plain](#) was flat and easy to move around. So people in the north pretty much spoke the same language.

But South China had many mountains and rivers. So it had six major groups of Chinese languages, with great internal diversity, particularly in [Fujian](#).^[6]^[7]

Modern Standard Chinese

[\[change\]](#) | [\[change source\]](#)

Until the mid-20th century, most Chinese people spoke only their local language. But the [Ming](#) and [Qing](#) dynasties defined a common language based on Mandarin. It was known as *Guānhuà* (官话, "speech of officials"). Knowledge of guanhua was essential for a career as a government official.^[8]

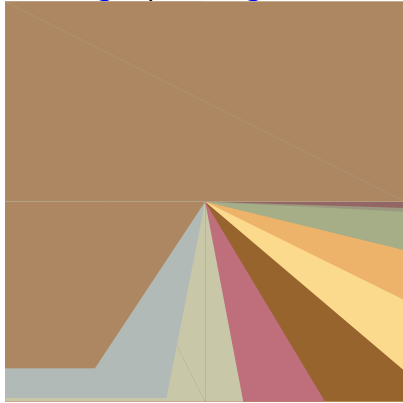
Until the 20th century, [Classical Chinese](#) was the written standard.

The [Republic of China](#) replaced as the written standard by written vernacular Chinese, which was based on northern dialects. In the 1930s a [standard national language](#) was adopted, with its pronunciation based on the Beijing dialect, but with vocabulary also drawn from other Mandarin varieties.^[9] It is the official spoken language of the [People's Republic of China](#).

Standard Mandarin Chinese now dominates public life.^[10] The only other Chinese that may be commonly taught in colleges is Cantonese.^[11]

The different Chinese languages

[\[change\]](#) | [\[change source\]](#)



Proportions of first-language speakers^[12]

	Mandarin (65.7%)
	Min (6.2%)
	Wu (6.1%)
	Yue (5.6%)
	Jin (5.2%)
	Gan (3.9%)
	Hakka (3.5%)
	Xiang (3.0%)
	Huizhou (0.3%)
	Pinghua , others (0.6%)

[Mandarin](#)

- Spoken in northern and southwestern China
- Has the most speakers
- Includes the Beijing dialect, the basis for [Standard Chinese](#)
- Includes the [Dungan language](#) of [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Kazakhstan](#) (written in [Cyrillic script](#)).

[Wu](#)

- Spoken in [Shanghai](#), most of [Zhejiang](#) and the southern parts of [Jiangsu](#) and [Anhui](#).
- Hundreds of different spoken forms, many of which are not [mutually intelligible](#).^[13]
- Uses [stops](#), [affricates](#) and [fricatives](#)^[14]

[Gan](#)

- Spoken around [Jiangxi](#)
- Closely related to [Hakka](#); used to be "Hakka-Gan dialects"^{[15][16]}

Xiang

- Spoken in [Hunan](#) and southern [Hubei](#)
- Some varieties significantly influenced by Southwest Mandarin^[17]

Min

- Spoken in [Fujian](#) and eastern [Guangdong](#)
- Most conservative language and closest to [Middle Chinese](#)
- Most diverse^[18]
- Varieties from the coast of Fujian around Xiamen have spread to [Southeast Asia](#) (where it is called [Hokkien](#)) and Taiwan (where it is called Taiwanese Hokkien).^[19]
- Also spoken in [Hainan](#), Leizhou Peninsula, and throughout southern China.^[20]

Hakka

- The [Hakka](#) ("guest families") live in the hills of Guangdong, Fujian, Taiwan, and many other parts of southern China. They have also moved to [Singapore](#), [Malaysia](#) and [Indonesia](#).^[21]
- Words end with -m -n -ŋ and endings -p -t -k.^[22]

Yue

- Spoken in [Guangdong](#), [Guangxi](#), [Hong Kong](#) and [Macau](#)
- Common among migrants to Southeast Asia and many other parts of the world.
- The prestige variety and by far most commonly spoken variety is Cantonese from the city of [Guangzhou](#) (historically called "Canton")
- Cantonese is also the native language of the majority in [Hong Kong](#) and [Macau](#).^[23]
- Use the same endings as Hakka (/p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/)
- Many tones (typically 6 - 9)^[22]

Relationships between groups

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

The different Chinese varieties are sometimes divided into three groups: Northern (Mandarin), Central (Wu, Gan, and Xiang) and Southern (Hakka, Yue, and Min).

The Southern Group may come from the Yangzi River during the [Han dynasty](#) (206 BC - 220 AD). This is sometimes called the Old Southern Chinese.

The Central group was transitional between the Northern and Southern groups.^[24]

Citations

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

1. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 183, 185.
2. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 183.
3. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 185.
4. ↑ [Ramsey \(1987\)](#), pp. 116–117.
5. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 24–25.
6. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 183–190.
7. ↑ [Ramsey \(1987\)](#), p. 22.
8. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 136.
9. ↑ [Ramsey \(1987\)](#), pp. 3–15.
10. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 247.
11. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 187.
12. ↑ [Chinese Academy of Social Sciences \(2012\)](#), pp. 3, 125.
13. ↑ [Yan \(2006\)](#), p. 90.
14. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 199–200.
15. ↑ [Kurpaska \(2010\)](#), pp. 46, 49–50.
16. ↑ [Yan \(2006\)](#), p. 148.
17. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 207–209.
18. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 188.
19. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 232–233.
20. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 233.
21. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 224.
22. ↑ [22.0 22.1 Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 217.
23. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), p. 215.
24. ↑ [Norman \(1988\)](#), pp. 182–183.

Works cited

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Languages of China		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> y t e 		
Official • Standard Mandarin		
Regional	ARs / SARs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cantonese^{HK/MC} English^{HK} Mongolian^{NM} Portuguese^{MC} Tibetan^{XZ} Uyghur^{XJ} Zhuang^{GX}
	Prefecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hmong Kam Bouyei Tujia

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Korean• Qiang• Yi• Kyrgyz• Kazakh• Tai Nüa• Tai Lü• Zaiwa• Lisu• Bai• Hani• Zhuang
	Counties/Banners	numerous	
Indigenous	Sino-Tibetan languages		
	Lolo-Burmese	Mondzish	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kathu• Maang• Manga• Mango• Maza• Mondzi• Muangphe
		Burmish	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achang• Xiandao• Pela• Lashi• Chashan• Lhao Vo• Zaiwa
		Loloish	Hanoish <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Akeu• Akha• Amu• Angluo• Asuo• Baihong• Bisu• Budu• Bukong• Cosao• Duoni• Duota

- [Enu](#)
- [Habei](#)
- [Hani](#)
- [Honi](#)
- [Jino](#)
- [Kabie](#)
- [Kaduo](#)
- [Lami](#)
- [Laomian](#)
- [Laopin](#)
- [Mpi](#)
- [Muda](#)
- [Nuobi](#)
- [Nuomei](#)
- [Phana'](#)
- [Piyo](#)
- [Qidi](#)
- [Sadu](#)
- [Sangkong](#)
- [Suobi](#)
- [Tsukong](#)
- [Woni](#)
- [Yiche](#)

				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eka• Hlersu• Kua-nsi• Kuamasi• Laizisi• Lalo• Lamu• Lavu• Lawu• Limi• Lipo• Lisu• Lolopo• Mangdi• Micha• Mili• Sonaga• Toloza• Xuzhang• Yangliu• Zibusi
				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alingpo• Alugu• Aluo• Axi• Azha• Azhe• Bokha• Gepo• Khlula• Lope• Moji• Muji• Muzi• Nasu• Nisu• Nuosu• Phala• Phola• Phowa• Phukha• Phuma• Phupa• Phupha

				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phuza• Samei• Sani• Thopho• Zokhuo
				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gokhy• Katso• Kucong• Lahu• Naruo• Other Namuyi• Naxi• Nusu• Samu• Sanie• Zauzou
		Qiangic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baima• Choyo• Ersu• Guiqiong• Horpa• Japhug• Khroskyabs• Laze• Lizu• Na• Muya• Namuyi• Naxi• Pumi• Northern Qiang• Southern Qiang• Shixing• Situ• Tshobdun• Zbu• Zhaba	
		Tibetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amdo• Baima• Basum• Central Tibetan	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choni• Dao• Dongwang• Drugchu• Groma• Gserpa• Khalong• Khams• Kyirong• Ladakhi• Tseku• Zhongu• Zitsadegu
	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bai• Caijia• Derung• Jingpho• Longjia• Nung• Tujia• Waxianghua
	Other languages	
	Austroasiatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bit• Blang• Bolyu• Bugan• Bumang• Hu• Kuan• Mang• Man Met• Muak Sa-aak• Palaung• Riang• U• Va• Wa
	Hmong-Mien	Hmongic <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A-Hmao• Bu-Nao• Gejia

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guiyang• Hm Nai• Hmong• Hmu• Huishui• Kiong Nai• Luobohe• Mashan• Pa-Hng• Pa Na• Pingtang• Qo Xiong• Raojia• She• Small Flowery• Xixiu• Younuo
		Mienic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biao Min• Dzao Min• Iu Mien• Kim Mun
	Mongolic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bonan• Buryat• Daur• Eastern Yugur• Kangjia• Khamnigan• Monguor• Oirat• Ordos• Santa• Torgut	
	Kra-Dai	Zhuang	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bouyei• Dai• Min• Ningming• Nong• Tai Dam• Tai Dón• Tai Hongjin• Tai Lü

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tai Nüa• Tai Ya• Yang• Yei
			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ai-Cham• Biao• Buyang• Cao Miao• Chadong• Cun• Gelao• Hlai• Jiamao• Kam• Lakkja• Mak• Maonan• Mulam• Naxi Yao• Ong Be• Paha• Qabiao• Sui• Then
		Tungusic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evenki• Manchu• Nanai• Oroqen• Xibe
		Turkic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Äynu• Fuyu Kyrgyz• Ili Turki• Lop• Salar• Western Yugur
		Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sarikoli (Indo-European)• Tsat (Austronesian)• Formosan languages (Austronesian)

Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kazakh • Korean • Kyrgyz • Russian • Tatar • Tuvan • Uzbek • Vietnamese (Kinh) • Wakhi
Varieties of Chinese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandarin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Northeastern ◦ Beijing ◦ Ji-Lu ◦ Jiao-Liao ◦ Zhongyuan ■ Lan-Yin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Jin ◦ Southwestern ■ Sichuanese <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Southeastern • Gan • Hakka • Hui • Min <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Southern ■ Hokkien ■ Teoswa ■ Hainanese <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Eastern ◦ Puxian ◦ Central ◦ Northern ◦ Shaojiang • Wu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Northern ◦ Auish • Xiang <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ New ◦ Old • Yue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Cantonese ◦ Ping

Creole/Mixed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E • Hezhou • Lingling • Macanese • Maojia • Qoqmončaq • Sanqiao • Tangwang • Wutun
Extinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ba-Shu • Jie • Khitan • Old Yue • Ruan-ruan • Saka • Tangut • Tocharian • Tuoba • Tuyuhun • Xianbei • Zhang-Zhung
Sign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Sign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Northern (Beijing) Sign ◦ Southern (Shanghai) Sign ■ Hong Kong Sign^{HK/MC} • Tibetan Sign^{XZ}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • 	<p>GX = Guangxi</p> <p>HK = Hong Kong</p> <p>MC = Macau</p> <p>NM = Inner Mongolia</p> <p>XJ = Xinjiang</p> <p>XZ = Tibet</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • v • t • e 	Chinese language
	Sinitic languages

Major groups	<u>Mandarin</u>	Northeastern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changchun • Harbin • Shenyang • Taz
		Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beijing • Taiwan
		Jilu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tianjin • Jinan
		Jiaoliao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dalian • Qingdao • Weihai
		Central Plains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dongping • Gangou • Guanzhong ◦ Xi'an • Luoyang • Xuzhou • Dungan • Lanyin • Xinjiang
		Southwestern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sichuanese ◦ Chengdu-Chongqing ◦ Minjiang ■ Leshan ◦ Renshou-Fushun ■ Zigong • Kunming • Nanping • Wuhan • Gui-Liu ◦ Wuming
		Huai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nanjing • Nantong
	<u>Wu</u>	Taihu	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shanghai• Suzhou• Wuxi• Changzhou• Hangzhou (?)• Shaoxing• Ningbo• Jinxiang• Jiangyin• Shadi
	Taizhou Wu	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taizhou• Tiantai
	Oujiang	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wenzhou• Rui'an• Wencheng
	Wuzhou	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jinhua
	Chu-Qu	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quzhou• Jiangshan• Qingtian
	Xuanzhou	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Xuancheng
	Gan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chang-Du◦ Nanchang• Yi-Liu• Ying-Yi• Da-Tong

	Xiang	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changyi◦ Changsha• Loushao◦ Shuangfeng◦ Xiangxiang◦ Wugang• Ji-Xu• Yong-Quan◦ Qiyang				
		Min	Eastern	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fuzhou• Fuqing• Fu'an• Manjiang		
				Southern	Hokkien	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quanzhou• Zhangzhou• Amoy• Taiwan• Philippine• Pedan• Penang• Singapore• Malaysian
			Teochew			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swatow• Hoklo
						Zhongshan
			Other			
			Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Northern◦ Jian'ou◦ Jianyang• Central• Pu-Xian• Shao-Jiang		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leizhou<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Zhanjiang• Hainan
	Hakka	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meixian• Wuhua• Huizhou• Tingzhou◦ Changting• Taiwanese◦ Sixian◦ Hailu◦ Raoping
	Yue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guangzhou<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Hong Kong• XiguanYuehai • Jiujiang• Shiqi• Weitou• Dapeng
		Siyi • Taishan • Xinhui
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gao-Yang• Goulou• Wu-Hua• Yong-Xun• Luo-Guang• Qin-Lian
	Pinghua	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Northern<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Tongdao◦ Younian• Southern<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Yongjiang◦ Guandao◦ Rongjiang
	Hui	• Ji-She [zh]

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xiu-Yi [zh] • Qi-De [zh] • Yanzhou Dialect [zh] • Jing-Zhan [zh]
	Jin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zhangjiakou-Hohhot • Zhi-Yan
	Unclassified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badong Yao • Danzhou • Junjiahua • Mai • Shaozhou Tuhua • She • Waxiang • Xiangnan Tuhua • Yeheni
Standard forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Chinese ◦ Sichuanese ◦ Taiwanese ◦ Philippine ◦ Malaysian ◦ Singaporean ■ Standard ■ Singdarin • Cantonese • Hokkien • Hakka 	
Phonology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical ◦ Old • Old National • Cantonese • Northern Wu • Mandarin • Literary and colloquial readings 	
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerals • Classifiers • Honorifics • Cantonese grammar 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical grammar 	
Idioms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chengyu • Xiehouyu 	
Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biaoxingma • Boshiamy • Cangjie ◦ Simplified • CKC • Dayi • Pinyin ◦ Google ◦ Microsoft ◦ Sogou • Stroke count • Wubi (Wang Ma) • ZhengMa 	
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Chinese • Eastern Han • Middle Chinese • Old Mandarin • Middle Mandarin • Proto-Min • Ba-Shu • Gan 	
Literary forms	<div>Official</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical ◦ Adoption ◦ in Japan ◦ in Vietnam • Vernacular 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Cantonese • Written Dungan • Written Hokkien • Written Sichuanese 	
Scripts	<div>Logographic</div>	<div>Script styles</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oracle bone • Bronze • Seal

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clerical • Semi-cursive • Cursive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese characters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Simplified ◦ Traditional • Punctuation
	Braille	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cantonese • Mainland Chinese • Taiwanese • Two-cell
	Phonetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyrillization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Dungan Cyrillic • Romanization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Gwoyeu Romatzyh ◦ Hanyu Pinyin ◦ MPS II ◦ Postal ◦ Tongyong Pinyin ◦ Wade-Giles ◦ Yale • Bopomofo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Cantonese Bopomofo ◦ Taiwanese Phonetic Symbols • Taiwanese kana • Taiwanese Hangul • Xiao'erjing • Nüshu
List of varieties of Chinese		

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