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At Blue Heron Holdings, we are often asked whether it's necessary to learn Chinese to be successful in China. While the benefit of learning Chinese is most apparent to those who have travelled or worked there, this holds true for any "foreign language." Chinese is a popular topic now based on China's current and projected place in global business and politics.

To compete and collaborate with China, organizations must understand and predict the actions of China as a nation and of Chinese colleagues as individuals. This entails understanding relevant culture and current events—and there is no more direct vehicle for grasping the culture of a nation, and knowing what is important at a given time, than its language.

HOWEVER, learning Chinese requires an investment—mainly of time—making time *the equalizer*. Consider recent news of *Facebook*'s Mark Zuckerberg committing to study Chinese for an hour everyday in an attempt to understand what to do about *Facebook* in China. (The site is not available to most Chinese citizens.) Regardless of a person's wealth or status, Chinese can only be learned by spending time.

So, we answer the Chinese study question by saying that learning Chinese takes time. So does watching football on TV or writing on *Facebook*. The first element to successfully studying Chinese is to make it a priority.

Ten Things To Know About the Chinese Language

1. Globally, there are approximately the same number of Mandarin Chinese speakers and English speakers, at over one billion each. This includes both native and non-native speakers.
2. Most Mandarin Chinese speakers are native speakers of the language, while the majority of English speakers DO NOT speak it as a first language. China promotes the study of Chinese as a Second Language internationally through the government-run Confucius Institutes.
3. Mandarin is one of the six official working languages of the United Nations (as are English, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and French).
4. Mandarin is the name of the most common Chinese dialect—the one spoken as a national standard in China and Taiwan. It is also widely spoken in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Flushing, New York.
5. "Chinese" most accurately refers to the written language. Because it is not a phonetic language, it is possible to read Chinese without being able to speak it. Characters represent ideas, not sounds. This is one reason Chinese seems "hard" for speakers of phonetically based languages (like English). There are thousands of Chinese characters, versus 26 letters in the English language, and the process of learning each language is different.



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6. Chinese movies and music videos usually have Chinese character subtitles because speakers of one dialect may not understand the spoken language in the movie or video (different dialect). The written word means the same in all dialects even though the way characters are pronounced may vary greatly.

7. English instruction in China is a universal part of school curriculum from middle school, on. Anecdotally, the number of people studying English in China is greater than the entire US population. In contrast, Chinese language instruction in the US, while growing, is still relatively minimal.

8. There are no verb tenses, plurals, or masculine and feminine articles to deal with in Chinese. Grammar rules are very straightforward and there are few exceptions (very different from English, which is FULL OF exceptions). The hard part is learning the characters. The spoken part is relatively simple.

9. Compared with English and other Western languages, Chinese language has received minimal influence from other cultures. This makes it a particularly useful window into understanding China, the Chinese mindset and how to do business there.

10. Learning even very elementary Chinese provides an advantage in building trust and strong working relationships in China. Being able to speak to someone in their own language has value that can not be duplicated. Keep that in mind while figuring out how to prioritize “learning Chinese.”

For more tips on learning Chinese, see *Eight Great Ways to Learn Chinese* at:

www.blueheron8.com/articles/bhArticle20081120.pdf

For info on our English- and Mandarin-language Leadership Development and Training Services, see
www.BlueHeron8.com or contact us at 1-512-565-4909.

With thanks and best wishes for success,

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