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### **Chinese: The Language of Business?**

As China continues to be globally prominent, interest in learning Chinese comes up frequently with the question of “which Chinese” to learn: Mandarin or Cantonese? In fact, China has seven major dialect groups. Mandarin and Cantonese are two of them.

Given variations in pronunciation and vocabulary, the seven main dialects are often like separate languages: they may be mutually unintelligible, or dissimilar in the way that English and Swedish are. What links them is the common written Chinese language.

(Attention: hiring managers in China! It is critical to hire key local personnel who can speak the dialect of the area where they work).

For those interested in studying Chinese as a second language, we recommend the following:

1. Concentrate on Mandarin. It is the national language spoken in China, Taiwan, Singapore, and increasingly, Hong Kong, as well as the main language of education in these areas. Where dialects are prevalent it will often exist as a secondary language.
2. Attempt to learn the written Chinese characters in conjunction with learning to speak. To many learners, linking the character (which is actually a picture) to the Chinese spoken word helps lock in the sound. Chinese is not phonetic, so it is not possible to “sound out” words. They must be memorized.
3. Prepare to spend a significant amount of time. There is no “quick fix” to learning Chinese – or any second language – though in Eight Great Ways to Learn Chinese we suggest some non-traditional approaches.

In answer to a very popular topic on “Doing Business in China” discussion groups, we give a resounding YES to the importance of gaining at least minimal Chinese fluency. In China, non-native speakers of Chinese may be perceived as more trustworthy, more interested, and more capable. True or not, this is a good reputation to foster.

Blue Heron Holdings provides advisory services, executive briefings, and global leadership development for organizations competing in the US-China arena. For more about how to succeed in China, review our [free articles](#) or [contact us directly](#).

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