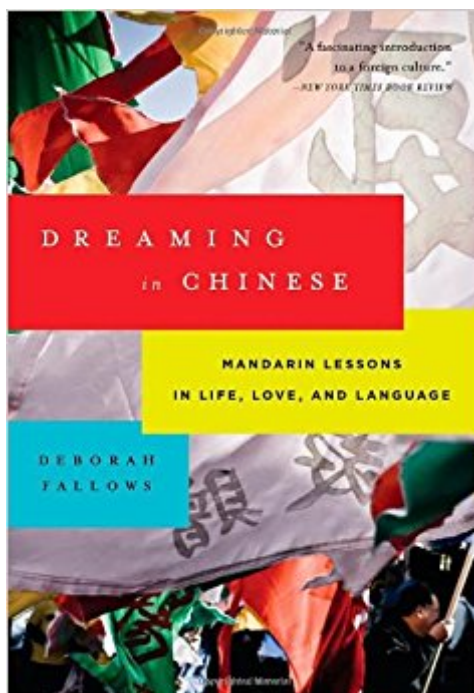


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# Dreaming In Chinese: Mandarin Lessons In Life, Love, And Language



## Synopsis

Deborah Fallows has spent a lot of her life learning languages and traveling around the world. But nothing prepared her for the surprises of learning Mandarin, China's most common language, or the intensity of living in Shanghai and Beijing. Over time, she realized that her struggles and triumphs in studying learning the language of her adopted home provided small clues to deciphering behavior and habits of its people, and its culture's conundrums. As her skill with Mandarin increased, bits of the language - a word, a phrase, an oddity of grammar - became windows into understanding romance, humor, protocol, relationships, and the overflowing humanity of modern China. Fallows learned, for example, that the abrupt, blunt way of speaking which Chinese people sometimes use isn't rudeness, but is, in fact a way to acknowledge and honor the closeness between two friends. She learned that English speakers' trouble with hearing or saying tones-the variations in inflection that can change a word's meaning-is matched by Chinese speakers' inability not to hear tones, or to even take a guess at understanding what might have been meant when foreigners misuse them. *Dreaming in Chinese* is the story of what Deborah Fallows discovered about the Chinese language, and how that helped her make sense of what had at first seemed like the chaos and contradiction of everyday life in China.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Fallows manages to take the relatively dry subject of translation and create a warm and witty memoir. Dwelling less on her own feelings than on the intricacies of language mastery, she shares experiences after she and her husband moved to China that taught her just how complex Mandarin

can be. Such as the fact that there are 400 syllables in Mandarin as opposed to 10 times that number in English, making tone crucial in conversation. Fallows makes all this fascinating by writing in a thoroughly engaging manner that not only invites readers into her experiences, but also delights them with her discoveries. There is confusion with a Cantonese cab driver, the manicurist who envisioned “almost perfect happiness” and the employee at Taco Bell who thought Fallows wanted to hug him (she was inquiring about takeout). From observations about maps, naming children, and the struggle over one language for a nation where over 300 million speak something other than Mandarin, Fallows takes readers on a ride through Chinese culture that is as entertaining as it is informative. --Colleen Mondor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Dreaming in Chinese is chatty and colloquial, with helpful photographs and drawings, as well as a pronunciation guide. The eager student will learn a fair bit about the history of the language and how its array of characters and tones were systematized, all the while gathering insights into the country’s customs and culture. Rather than draw sweeping conclusions Fallows sticks to her own experiences and observations, which makes her book all the more valuable. China hands will have many moments of recognition. For others, Dreaming in Chinese will be a fascinating introduction to a foreign culture.” --Lesley Downer, New York Times Book Review  
“You don’t have to know Mandarin to be captivated by Deborah Fallows’s Dreaming in Chinese. Forget Berlitz that just teaches words. Deborah Fallows shows us that the cultural implications of those words teach us about each other.” --Sara Nelson, O: The Oprah Magazine  
“Fallows has a good ear for aspect, the way of stressing certain words and syllables to change or add layers of meaning to a simple word or phrase. She veers to the gentle, seeing the generosity behind brusque gestures, the intimacy and friendship behind rudeness and the priorities that language reveals. Playfulness, respect, affection and the virtues of solidarity with the common people -- a different traveler might miss all these but not Fallows.” --Susan Salter Reynolds, Los Angeles Times  
“While it isn’t necessary to know the language of a foreign country when you live abroad, studying that language can infinitely ease and illuminate your entrance there. Deborah Fallows underscores this lesson again and again in this compelling account of her own trials and triumphs with studying Mandarin while residing in Shanghai and Beijing. A linguist by training, Fallows shows how even small advancements such as mastering a single word or phrase can unlock grammatical and cultural secrets. Over the course of her three-year immersion, her ever-deepening insights

immeasurably enrich her engagement with China--and ours as well.

Don George, National Geographic Traveler

“Reading *Dreaming in Chinese*, we follow an intelligent, analytical, sympathetic -- and humorous -- guide who knows it's the journey, not the destination, that counts.

Patricia Hagen, Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

“For anyone with a connection to China (and particularly for anyone who has attempted Mandarin) her book is a gift: it's all the thoughts that escaped you in your travels and studies. It's as revealing of the way a Western, English-speaking mindset perceives China as it is of what "makes a billion people tick." For readers hoping to truly journey in China (rather than just plant your feet firmly on the Great Wall), *Dreaming in Chinese* is mandatory reading.

KJ Dell'Antonia, Double X

“Thinking of learning Mandarin? Read this. For beginners, *Dreaming in Chinese* is an easy entry into an ancient land.

Tish Wells, McClatchy Newspapers

“Fallows manages to take the relatively dry subject of translation and create a warm and witty memoir. [taking] readers on a ride through Chinese culture that is as entertaining as it is informative.

Colleen Mondor, Booklist

“Any traveler who shudders at the prospect of deciphering Chinese should be armed with a copy of this book.

Evan Osnos, former Chicago Tribune Beijing bureau chief, and staff writer at the New Yorker

“China seems an impossible mountain to climb, yet Deborah Fallows takes a less traveled path, climbing the mountain from the inside. She recounts her journey with a perfect balance of wise observation and wit. To follow her climb yields startling insights about the Chinese people and culture, the kind of insights lugubrious China essays rarely yield. *Dreaming in Chinese* is both vital and a joy to read.

Ken Auletta

“*Dreaming in Chinese* is a little gem, sparkling with wonderful tales about China, its language and its people.

Rob Gifford, former NPR Beijing correspondent, and author of *China Road*

“In *Dreaming in Chinese*, Deborah Fallows opens up a window onto Chinese urban life through its notoriously difficult language. A charming and insightful book.

Susan Shirk, author of *China: Fragile Superpower*

“While all too many books on China try to make sense of this infinitely provocative country from the top down, Deborah Fallows looks at it from the bottom up, trying to figure out what makes the place work through personal encounters, the language and everyday occurrences. She has written a refreshing and insightful book.

Orville Schell, director of the Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations

“*Dreaming in Chinese* is original, entertaining, gracefully written and provides important insights into life and culture in contemporary China. Deborah Fallows is a gifted linguist who helps her readers understand the complexities of the Chinese language. But she does much more. She is an astute observer and

through simple yet compelling anecdotes she helps her readers experience everyday life in China. This is a terrific book for anyone who wants to improve their understanding of this extraordinary country.

—Laura D. Tyson, Professor of Global Management, Haas School of Business, University of California at Berkeley

“Deborah Fallows’ sparkling memoir of her three years in China makes us feel we are on the streets with her in Shanghai and Beijing—haggling with merchants and cops and learning to be rude and friendly, Chinese-style. The joy of this book is its sense of humor and adventure: Deborah decided to live outside the expatriate ghetto: learning the language, drinking the water, living the real Chinese life like a *laobaixing* (ordinary person). Whether it’s learning not to say ‘please,’ or understanding why Chinese hate the number ‘4’ or ordering take-away at a Chinese Taco Bell, Deb jumps in head-first and makes us laugh at her often comical embrace of this culture. I can’t think of a better book for someone who wants to understand the lovable, infuriating and hilarious country that is China.”

—David Ignatius, columnist for the Washington Post and author of *Body of Lies*

This book is perfect for those who intend to learn Chinese or who have been exposed already to its everyday vagaries. Deborah Fallows has a linguist’s background and she writes beautifully and movingly about the experience of living in China. It is more well-written than almost any other account to date (though the absolute best writer of this genre is still Nora Waln -- her book, *House of Exile*, is beyond compare). Also, as a bonus, Deborah’s husband is the famous James Fallows, and in some ways, this is the rare glimpse of a husband-wife team discovering China (Peter Hessler-Leslie Chang is the only other I know of and they almost don’t count because I’m reasonably sure they met in China!). This memoir is wonderful in many ways, not the least of which are the charming stories about sneaking chocolate snacks into the Olympics and remembering how Premier Wen Jiabao comforted young earthquake victims. If you’ve ever had a terrible foreign name or felt out of breath by the sheer rudeness of an interaction -- culture shock sometimes has a sharp, personal bite -- then this is the book for you. And if you have been idly contemplating learning a language from a culture that is at least 5,000 years old, then this is also your book. Debbie will let you know what a treat and a trial you are in for.

As I am writing this, I am aware that at least 48 folks reviewed this before me...well covering the various features, themes, problems, and / or points of contention for *Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love, and Language* by Deborah Fallows. Their words and the book’s own title

inspired me to try it! :) I am so glad that I did. So, now I'll add my own voice to the mix. I encourage others to examine the book's page and reviews to see if this book appeals to them too! For me, this book provides a satisfying, unique insight into Chinese culture through the eyes of someone who actually put feet on ground in the country and observed the everyday people with keen, penetrating eyes...the eyes of someone who looks beyond the normal Western tourist views into something far deeper, lasting, and important. The content structure of the book is part of its charm. Progressing through each chapter, the reader encounters bits of Chinese language (Characters and Pinyin) which are connected to larger concepts and themes. Pictures are sprinkled throughout the book to add a bit of flavor to topics being discussed. The book includes a Pronunciation Guide for the Chinese words in each chapter, which is helpful, giving the reader an approximate sense of how the language sounds. There is also a quick question and answer section with Deborah Fallows at the back of the book--allowing the reader to explore the author's inspirations and thoughts about the book and China. (I wish this part had been longer and more detailed!)

What I Like-->Favorite Passages & Concepts from the Book: The Beijing expression "Walk Slowly" / mǎ fǎ n z'ou offered as a "goodbye" (Pages 32-33). / I was not aware of this bit of culture before this book, and I enjoyed learning about it. Item note: IMDb lists a cultural exploration movie called Man Zou: Beijing to Shanghai, and I am interested in watching it as a result of reading this book. The DVD appears to be available for purchase on Amazon! :) Quotable Quote: "It is difficult to avoid a crowd in a country of 1.3 billion people" (Page 63). I just found that to be an amusing comment. Of course, I know the country has a huge population, but I never thought about what it might be like to live, to study, to survive there on a day to day basis. Quotable Quote: "With the one-child policy, which began in 1980, Wang Ming Yuan's will be the last generation where it is normal to have siblings. Her children will have cousins, but her children's children probably won't" (Page 81). / I knew about this policy, but I had never thought what it might mean beyond a simple family unit...for the country and people as a whole. Quotable Quote: "...my language teachers all taught us to think of Chinese as moving the focus from big to small: addresses telescope in from country, to city, to street, to number, to apartment. Personal names are ordered to start big with the family name and end small with the personal name. Dates are referenced from year to month to day" (Page 93). / I find this to be a true, defining statement of China's culture, history, philosophy, etc as I've studied it to date from my beginner's point of view. I also believe that this will help me with my own learning of the Chinese language. The Chinese concept of balance / opposing forces--yin yang--is expanded in this book to introduce useful compound words from Chinese (Pages 119-122). / Language shapes people's thinking and expression, so this chapter offers some insights into the Chinese mind. For some

readers, especially those who have in-depth knowledge of Chinese or Mandarin, this book will seem simple, light on content, perhaps, even stating what is obvious. For beginners like me, though, this is a great collection of thought-provoking experiences, even if the author may use poetic license in certain areas as some have suggested. Deborah Fallows is the storyteller, and this is HER personal narrative. The reader is looking at Chinese and China through her lens. I accept her story, her narrative as is. The book, in my opinion, is actually more about observation and appreciation rather than a hard and fast Mandarin 101. It's an appetizer that prepares one for the main dishes. :) The book prompts me to search out other personal narratives about China...to travel more paths in this fascinating genre.If you want a personal, beginning commentary of Chinese culture, read this book. If you plan to travel to China, read this book. If you enjoy personal narratives that offer cultural nuggets and insights, read this book. If, however, you are looking for a strict, academic analysis of the language or people, look for another book. If you are wanting a formal beginning in Mandarin, look for another book or other materials.Overall, I am well-pleased with this book, and I find myself re-reading parts of it, especially where Chinese vocabulary words are introduced and discussed. I believe it would make an interesting supplemental text to a Chinese culture and / or informal language class.

Dreaming in Chinese was a wonderful, cunningly conceived, look at China and the Chinese language through the eyes of an expat living there. Having lived in China as an expat myself, I was pleased to find an intimate portrait of expat existence. The approach taken by Ms. Fallows was to use the Chinese language both as the framework for her book and as a springboard for understanding so much of the minutiae one encounters in one's daily life there.Even after many years away, I learned after the fact the explanations for so many personal experiences, and even more about the culture I so came to love and in many ways respect.My only criticism is that in the Kindle edition I read, the printed Chinese characters were much too small to be seen and examined for all the strokes being discussed in the text. Certainly not the fault of the author!Dreaming in Chinese is highly recommended for travel buffs, armchair travelers, and for people who are interested in foreign languages and their influence on their cultures. Very good stuff.

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