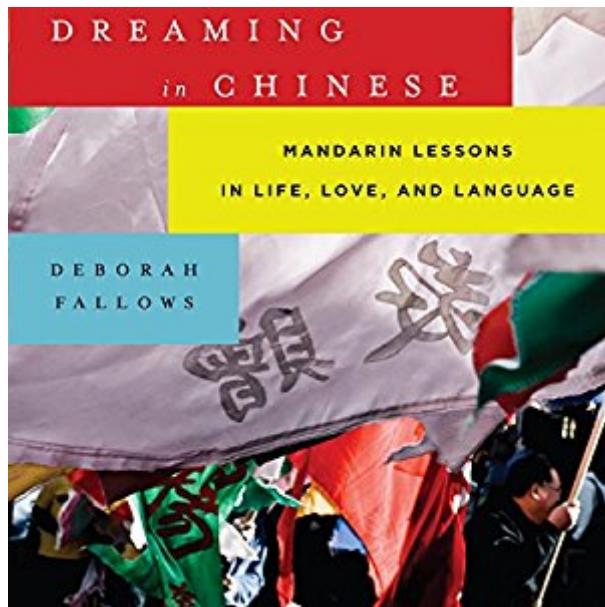


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# Dreaming In Chinese: Mandarin Lessons In Life, Love, And Language



## **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**

The book is moderately funny and informative. It should be useful to first-time travelers to China who do not know much about the Chinese language and culture. The tone of the writing is

somewhat neutral, not very passionate or too negative. Actually I think it is a good thing. Then you know the author is telling her real experiences in China, which might be pleasant or unpleasant. Eventually, China becomes more real and less abstract. On the other hand, if you have studied Chinese formally for a few months, you probably wouldn't learn much by reading this book. Many of the "surprises" that the author encountered are quite beginner-level knowledge, such as the order from big units to smaller units, the importance of tones, the lack of inflection, family name first, and the writing system. You would not have the same "surprises" as the author did if you took a formal course in college. All in all, it is a good book that you should pick up and read before going to China or on your way to China. If you only have a vague interest in studying Mandarin, this book should be a good starting point. Finally, pardon my nitpicking tendencies here. The author mentions that the street signs in Xinjiang are written in four languages: Chinese, English, Arabic and Russian. It is actually wrong. Most street signs in Xinjiang are written in both Chinese and Uyghur only, as required by the relevant laws there. The Uyghur language uses a version of the Arabic script. So just as many languages use the Latin alphabet, they are not all "written in Latin". In some tourist destinations, you can see English signs. I guess that's normal. As for Russian, it might be for tourists only. The author also tells a story about ordering takeout from a Taco Bell in Shanghai.

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