

## **Mandarin**

The term Mandarin is generally believed to be a translation of Chinese *guanhua*—literally "official talk" (hence "Mandarin"), which originated as a form of common language between speakers of different Chinese dialects. Out of this interdialectal koine, the term grew to mean also the historical period dominated by this koine and the dialects descended from it. Finally, in the 20th century, Beijing Mandarin, as the official language of the Chinese-speaking world, came to be equated with the term Mandarin in lay usage. Thus, in linguistic terms, there are four different views of Mandarin: Mandarin as a Chinese *lingua franca*, Mandarin as a branch of the northern Chinese dialect family, Mandarin as Pre-Modern Chinese, and Mandarin as Modern Standard Chinese, also known as *putonghua* in mainland China, *guoyu* in Taiwan, and *huayu* in Singapore. In the following sections, each of these senses of the term Mandarin will be examined in detail.

### **Mandarin as a Chinese *Lingua Franca***

Mandarin (*la lingua mandarina*) is a late 16<sup>th</sup> century European translation of Chinese *guanhua*—literally "official talk". The language is also described in European sources as a "court language" (*la lingua cina della corte, la lingua cortegiana*) or a "judicial language" (*la lingua della corte forense, la lingua forense*), and is transcribed variously by European missionaries as *quonhoa*, *cuonhoa* or *kuōnhoá*.

Mandarin is believed to have originated as a form of common language between speakers of different Chinese dialects, loosely based on some form of northern Chinese—the precise locale of this prestige northern dialect is not clear, but Beijing, Nanjing and Luoyang have all been suggested as likely candidates. Historical references to this interdialectal koine are many: Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, for instance, wrote in his travel journals (1583–1610) of "a spoken language shared by the whole Empire, known as the Quonhoa, an official language for civil and forensic use". "The Quonhoa dialect", he further added, "is used between visitors and natives of the provinces they visit." In a way, the status of *guanhua* is similar to that of the "cultivated pronunciation" of the American Atlantic states existing alongside the local vernacular, with each state having their own version—what is probably their best approximation of the prestige dialect.

### **Mandarin as Modern Standard Chinese**

The second meaning of Mandarin focuses on the Beijing area—the Chinese capital for the past 500 years. Beijing being the nation's capital, its local speech presumably had some kind of prestige—this prestige conflicted with the prestige status of the *guanhua* koine. Eventually, the koine was drawn closer to the vernacular speech of Beijing. By the end of the 19th century, the two competing

norms were extremely similar. The remnant of the old *guanhua* became known as the "literary stratum" of Beijing Mandarin, and the local vernacular as the "colloquial stratum". There are minute phonological differences between the literary and colloquial strata: the colloquial stratum changes certain categories of Middle Chinese syllable-final stops into homorganic glides, whereas the literary stratum deletes the same segments. An example would be the word "to learn", which is pronounced *xue* in the literary stratum, but *xiao* in colloquial Beijing. Also, velar palatalization occurs later in the literary stratum than in the colloquial, yielding variant pronunciations in a small group of characters: the word for "night-watch", for example, is pronounced *geng* in literary Beijing, but *jing* in colloquial Beijing. Differences exist also in vocabulary, with *guanhua* leaning towards classical Chinese, and colloquial Beijing being more abundant in localisms.

From the demise of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) through to the early days of the Republican era (1912–) however, the recognition of Beijing Mandarin as a national standard took a more convoluted route. The uncertainty surrounding the status of Beijing Mandarin at the time is highlighted by a meeting of linguists in 1913 to decide upon the new official language, at which the standard of choice was not the speech of the capital, but an artificial language incorporating the maximum number of distinctions found in the major dialects (including voiced stops, the entering tone, and the apical/laminal distinction before the palatal glide), envisaged as a compromise between north and south. But it soon became clear that no one, not even the linguists themselves, were capable of speaking this linguistic Frankenstein, and the movement failed miserably. It was up to Nanjing professor Shiyi Zhang in 1920 to call for replacement of the man-made standard with "the speech of Beijing locals educated to the level of secondary school". Zhang's proposal initially met with resistance from the original committee, but as the pieced-together national language crumbled, Beijing Mandarin more than ever took over as the *de facto* national standard, and in 1926, when the national language was revised, pronunciations were largely based on the literary readings of Beijing. The new national language, up to this point, had been known as *guoyu* "national language", to borrow a Japanese usage, and still goes by this name in Taiwan. On the mainland, however, the national language underwent a second revision in 1955, and switched to the name *putonghua* "commoners' language", what is normally translated now as Modern Standard Chinese. Differences between *putonghua* and *guoyu* are few, mainly in the adoption of colloquial pronunciations in the case of *putonghua* where *guoyu* retains the 1926 literary norms. But what the 1955 revision managed to do, and successfully so, is to define the nature of the national language, which, according to the 1955 National Language Reform Committee, "bases its pronunciation on the speech of Beijing, its lexicon on the core vocabulary of Northern Chinese, and its syntax on the norms of exemplary vernacular literature". In many ways it is not a revision, but a restatement of *de facto* rules that have governed the language since its conception in 1926.

## **Mandarin as a branch of Northern Chinese**

In Chinese dialectology, Mandarin or *guanhua* refers to a branch of Northern Chinese which includes dialects used throughout most of northern and southwestern China, the majority of which are descended from or have had extensive contact with the *guanhua* lingua franca. Mandarin, in this context, refers to an entire dialect family, the largest family in the Chinese branch of Sino-Tibetan in fact, in terms of both geographical distribution and number of speakers.

The Mandarin family is distinguished from other dialects of Chinese by way of five shared innovations: velar palatalization, spirantalization of initial /m/, merger of final /m/ with /n/, loss of initial /ng/, and the development of voiced obstruents into voiceless aspirated and unaspirated initials depending on tone. The exhaustive application of /m/ spirantalization, /m/-/n/ coda merger, and velar palatalization before high vowel /i/ serves to separate Mandarin together with the northcentral dialects Xiang, Gan and Wu from the southern dialects Min, Yue and Hakka; full application of the remaining changes—loss of /ng/, loss of voiced obstruents via special tonal patterns, and the palatalization of velars before low vowel /æ/ — serves to distinguish Mandarin from Xiang, Gan and Wu within the northern grouping.

Within the Mandarin family, there are three main divisions comprising eight subdialects: (1) Southern Mandarin includes the Yangtze (*Jianghuai guanhua*) and Southwestern (*Xinan guanhua*) subdialects; (2) Central Mandarin includes the Central Plains (*Zhongyuan guanhua*) and Northwestern (*Lanyin guanhua*) varieties, and finally (3) Northern Mandarin includes Northeastern (*Dongbei guanhua*), Northcentral (*Jilu guanhua*), Peninsular (*Jiaoliao guanhua*), and Beijing Mandarin (*Beijing guanhua*).

## **Mandarin as Pre-Modern Chinese**

From the demise of the Tang dynasty (618–907) onward, the homeland of the northern Chinese koine was successively occupied by peoples of Turkic, Mongol, and Tungus–Manchu stock, resulting in the drastic simplification of Middle Chinese (265–1269). The end product of this simplification is described by Chinese historical phonologists also as *guanhua* or Mandarin. Thus Mandarin, as a historical phonological entity, is synonymous with what historical lexicographers call Pre-Modern Chinese, and refers to the language of northern China from the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) to the present day.

Historical phonologists further divide the Mandarin period into three parts: Early Mandarin (1269–1455) is typified by Zhou Deqing's (1277–1365) opera manual *Zhongyuan Yinyun* (1324); Middle Mandarin (1455–1795) is preserved in Chinese–Korean pedagogical texts such as *Hongmu Chongyun Yôkhun* (1455)

and *Sasông T'onghae* (1517), as well as the *Yunlue Huitong* (1642) and other Chinese rhyme manuals. Mandarin from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to the present is considered to have changed very little, and is referred to as Modern Mandarin or Modern Chinese.

So far four senses of the term Mandarin have been given: Mandarin as an interdialectal koine throughout the history of Chinese, Mandarin as a northern Chinese dialect family, Mandarin as a period in the history of Chinese characterized by foreignization, and Mandarin as Modern Standard Chinese, also known as *putonghua* in mainland China, *guoyu* in Taiwan, and *huayu* in Singapore. Out of a historical interdialectal koine, the term Mandarin grew to mean also the historical period dominated by this koine and the dialects descended from it. Finally, in the last century, Beijing Mandarin, as the most prominent dialect of the Mandarin family and the official language of the Chinese-speaking world, came to be equated with the term Mandarin in lay usage.

Chris Wen-Chao LI

### Bibliography

- Ao, Benjamin Xiaoping. 1996. "On the Subgrouping of Chinese Dialects". Paper given at the 206<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society.
- Chen, Ping. 1999. *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheng, Robert Liang-Wei. 1985. "A Comparison of Taiwanese, Taiwan Mandarin, and Peking Mandarin". *Language* 61: 352–377.
- Coblin, Weldon South. 1997. "Notes on the Sound System of Late Ming *Guanhua*". *Monumenta Serica* 45: 261–307.
- Coblin, Weldon South. 2000. "A Brief History of Mandarin". *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (4).
- Gallagher, Louis Joseph. 1953. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583–1610*. New York: Random House.
- Kim, Kwangjo. 1991. "A Phonological Study of Middle Mandarin Reflected in Korean Sources of the Mid Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries". Ph.D. diss., University of Washington.
- Li, Rong. 1989. "Hanyu Fangyan de Qufen" [Classification of the Chinese Dialects]. *Fangyan* 1989 (4): 241–259.
- Li, Wen-Chao. 1999. *A Diachronically-Motivated Segmental Phonology of Mandarin Chinese (Berkeley Insights in Linguistics & Semiotics 37)*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Liu, Xunning. 1995. "Zailun Hanyu Beifanghua de Fenqu" [Dialect Regions of Northern Chinese Revisited]. *Zhongguo Yuwen* 1995 (6): 447–454.
- Norman, Jerry. 1988. *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.