

PREFACE

There have been considerable achievements in the field of Chinese teaching in the United States over the past thirty years, in terms of both the production of teaching materials and pedagogical research. Generally speaking, the trend of this development can be summarized in the following two aspects: first, Chinese pedagogy has been significantly influenced by Western theories of second language acquisition; second, the focus of Chinese teaching has been transformed from the traditional drill of sentence patterns and grammar to the more practical approach of language use. During the process of this transition, the training of listening and speaking abilities has been emphasized, and the instructional procedure of “listening and speaking taking the leading role, and reading and writing following right after” has gradually been accepted. The early stages of direct translation from Chinese to English in the classroom found their resting place in a part of the last century’s history. Chinese language teaching is no longer subordinate to Sinology, but has become an independent discipline. Such developments in Chinese language pedagogy help to answer the needs and motivations of American students.

In this transformation, however, demands for speed and utility are in order. Elementary courses no longer pay attention to the accuracy of students’ pronunciation and the establishment of a solid foundation of grammar and sentence structure, but solely emphasize whether students can put the language to practice by completing a certain “task” or “assignment.” Such an approach neglects the fact that both communication and task completion are possible only after one becomes familiar with the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammatical structure.

First Step takes into account the accuracy, fluency, structure, and functionality of the language and applies all of these aspects to the teaching process. The entire book focuses on introducing the basics of modern Chinese phonology and grammatical structure, which are conveyed to students through everyday topics. The dialogues are lively and interesting and represent real-life situations. Furthermore, characteristics of Chinese culture and some special customs, which are reflected in the language, are accompanied by additional explanatory notes. It is our goal that students will have an accurate grasp of pronunciation and a basic understanding of grammar upon completing the lessons in this book, so that they will be able to meet the challenges of practical daily communication in a Chinese environment.

The compilation of *First Step* was initiated four years ago. The content was gradually enhanced with additional materials and field-tested in the classrooms of Princeton University. To facilitate students’ and instructors’ use of this textbook, it is divided into two volumes: the textbook includes lessons, vocabulary, and grammar; the workbook provides exercises. In the process of preparation and field-testing, teachers from the Chinese language program at Princeton University provided many valuable suggestions, with Teng-Kuan Ng, Noelle Lyle, Cara Healey, and Jenny Yu carefully editing the English sections along the way. We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to them. Nonetheless, the authors take full responsibility for any errors that may come to light upon usage.

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