

Why Study Chinese?

Prepared by the Chinese Language Program

1. *What do students say is the primary reason for learning Chinese?*

Students learn Mandarin Chinese in order to--

- fulfil Columbia's foreign-language requirement
- gain competitive advantages in the job market
- better communicate with family members and relatives
- communicate with Chinese people
- understand Chinese culture
- travel in China
- make Chinese friends
- do research in China-related fields (e.g., Chinese literature, Chinese history, Chinese economics, etc.)

2. *How have past students used Chinese in their careers?*

Students use their Chinese skills in a wide range of fields: academia, government, media, banking, law, education, public health, engineering, art, among others.

3. *What opportunities does the study of Chinese give students within Columbia, either in your department or in other departments?*

Students with advanced Chinese skills may become research assistants for the studies of Chinese history or literature.

4. *What are some ways in which past students have forged personal connections, professional connections, or gained access to professional opportunities thanks to the study of Chinese?*

- a) An engineering student, who took fourth-year Chinese and Media Chinese at Columbia, was able to secure a job with a technology company right after graduation. The student's company decided to hire him on the day of the interview, and sent him to Taiwan immediately afterwards to help finalize a sale and train a group of Taiwanese engineers in how to use an instrument, simply because his language skills were crucial to finishing that sale.

- b) A former graduate student in early modern Korean literature said that the study of Chinese helped her tremendously in her own research, as Chinese was extensively used in early modern Korea. She is now an assistant professor in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton.
- c) Some of our students were selected as Rhodes scholars, thanks to their deep interest in Chinese history and politics, as well as the Chinese language education (e.g., fourth-year Chinese) they received at Columbia.

5. *What specific opportunities are available through governments and non-governmental organizations to learners who have proficiency in Chinese?*

Government:

The US Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, etc.

Non-government:

The National Committee on US-China Relations, Freedom House, Amnesty International of the USA, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Council on Foreign Relations, to name but a few.

6. *What tangible skills do learners gain by studying Chinese? What are they able to do after the period of study laid out by the language requirement?*

Students who complete two years of Chinese language study at Columbia will be able to:

- comprehend short texts on a range of familiar, non-technical topics (e.g., family, school, friends, work, travel, etc.),
- give organized oral presentations on these topics,
- express their personal views on these topics, and
- travel in China communicating with locals on these topics.

The first- and second-year curriculum also prepares students well for higher-level Chinese classes, including Chinese-for-professional-purposes classes.

7. *Are there funding and scholarship opportunities that students of Chinese can access?*

Chinese Government Scholarship

<https://www.chinesescholarshipcouncil.com/>

Confucius Scholarships

<https://www.china-scholar.com/scholarships/confucius-institute-chinese-language-scholarship/>

Critical Language Scholarship

<https://clscholarship.org/languages/chinese>

The Kathryn Davis Fellowship for Peace

<https://www.middlebury.edu/language-schools/funding/fellowships-scholarships/davis>
The MOE Huayu Enrichment Scholarship Program (HES)
https://www.tw.org/scholarships/hes_main.html
MOFA Taiwan Scholarship
<https://tafs.mofa.gov.tw/SchDetailed.aspx?loc=en&ItemId=15>

8. *How does the study of Chinese make students stand out in today's job market?*

With its growing hard power and soft power capabilities, China is increasingly seen as a global superpower. However, proficient Chinese speakers are still in short supply in most fields. Having a good command of Mandarin Chinese will thus give our students competitive advantages in today's job market, enabling them to fill positions which require knowledge of China, Chinese culture, and advanced Chinese skills.

9. *How have students paired Chinese with other areas of study at Columbia, including seemingly unrelated fields such as STEM?*

Knowledge of Chinese will be an essential part of your curriculum if you plan to major in East Asian Studies. The study of Chinese can also be paired with art history, international relations, communication, political science, and linguistics. We have had students from graduate schools in business, law, social work and medical fields as well. One former student even found knowledge of Chinese helpful in conceptualizing his research in computational linguistics. If you major in STEM, then Chinese will enable you to communicate with researchers from China.

10. *Have students of Chinese shared with you how their language study has integrated with their sense of identity? If so, what are some of these ways?*

Heritage students who already have family ties to Chinese culture often find learning Chinese language a gratifying experience because it enables them to connect with their own cultural roots, which constitutes a big part of their identity.

A non-heritage student once commented that having knowledge in Chinese is almost like having a second soul.