

‘Legends and Tales of China’,
A new way to learn about the Chinese language



New Zealand Chinese Language Association

A recent Victoria University, Wellington, PhD thesis has brought a new idea to the acquisition of foreign languages by emphasising how important a knowledge of the sounds of a language are before any attempt is made to study the language. For the Chinese language this can be done by means of the NZCLA’s bilingual Chinese reader ***Legends and Tales from Ancient China***, because each of the 25 stories is read aloud on the accompanying CD Rom in Putonghua (Mandarin), Cantonese, and English. Before you look at the printed book, listen to the sounds of Chinese so that your brain knows what new vocal sounds it is going to have to deal with. You can listen to it while you are doing other things – washing dishes, even studying something else, getting dressed – at anytime that you have the means of listening to a CD Rom.

After a few sessions of just listening, you are ready to open the book and you will see that each story has a double page spread. At the top of the left-hand page the story is written in the simplified characters which the PRC introduced to the language in the early 1950s, following the recommendations of many academics over many years. Beneath the characters, the story is printed in Pinyin which is the alphabetised form of the sound related to each character. At the top of the right-hand page is a translation of the story in English, with a few vocabulary words underneath. So, after listening to the stories lots of times before you look at the book, and then, as you listen to the CD Rom, look at the Pinyin so that your eyes will now give you a written form which you can feel comfortable with. Listen to the story as you read the written version. After a few sessions that way, listen again, and this time look at the characters. You will soon see that there are frequently-used characters which you can recognise. Then you can look at the English version and learn what those frequently-used characters mean. I am not saying that this is a way to learn Chinese. This is just an introduction to the language and I hope it may take away some of the misconceptions people have about how difficult it is to learn Chinese.

The biggest advantage that Chinese has over European languages (including English) is the lack of a complicated grammar: there are no definite or indefinite articles and plurals needing agreement, and no changes to verb forms. In Chinese, “I eat today,” “I eat yesterday” and “I eat tomorrow” are correct! Think of the changes needed in English to make the second and third sentences correct English. I found, when I went to live in China, that I could pick up survival oral Chinese which was more correct than the survival French or German you could pick up similarly in Europe.

You can purchase a copy of the book and CD Rom for \$25 + \$2.50 p & p (**Note:** If you purchase more than one copy, p & p will be \$2.50 for each copy.) Please send a cheque payable to "NZCLA, Inc." to the address below, preferably with the order form.

Click here [for the order form](#)

I'm sure that you will enjoy the stories and learn some Chinese in the process.

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March, 2011