

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

A year in China

How a year in China's 'romantic city' helped Hannes Ortner learn Chinese.

In China, Dalian is known as the 'romantic city', and during my year studying Chinese at Dalian Foreign Language University, I certainly fell in love: the language is the key to a fascinating way of life, while the city itself is surrounded by green hills and the ocean, and overlooked by a marvellous castle that I always meant to visit while I was there.

Dalian is generally quite a new city, without the long cultural history of Beijing, and the skyscrapers that have appeared in recent years are evidence of China's position as the world's fastest-growing economy. The boom has seen the number of foreigners coming to the country to learn Chinese increase enormously, and I was thankful that relatively few Westerners have discovered Dalian. I rarely had the opportunity to use Chinese in everyday situations in China's bigger cities, where European tourists are everywhere and young people are keen to practise their English.

I was the only Westerner in my class. After a four-hour oral exam and a written test, I was placed in a post-intermediate group with 12 people – all Asians. I was already three years into a four-year degree in Chinese culture and language, but it was still difficult to keep up with the Japanese and Korean students, who were much more familiar with Chinese characters (the symbols used in the written language). One of the big disadvantages at the University of Vienna had been the large classes, with 30–40 people trying to learn Chinese in just four hours a week. In Dalian we were taught five days a week for three hours plus another four hours one afternoon a week. Some of the older teachers still used traditional teaching methods, concentrating on reading texts, listening to tapes and learning by oral repetition, and although it initially took me a while to become accustomed to this, it really helped us improve our skills.

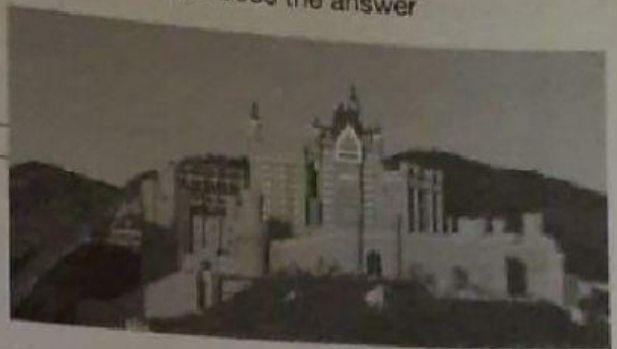
We had three teachers but Mrs Lin soon became our favourite. I was fortunate enough to have six weeks of

additional classes with this wonderful lady after I was chosen to take part in the Dalian Chinese speech competition. In preparation for the event, we met for two hours a day to work on my pronunciation using a text she had written called 'I love Dalian'. I found the whole experience quite demanding – from the intense training to speaking in front of a large audience (including Chinese teachers) – but it was the best language training I have ever received and I thank my patient teachers for the fact that I eventually won the competition. It was this experience that made me determined to perfect my command of the language.

Chinese is sometimes said to be one of the most difficult languages to learn, mainly because of its complex grammar, writing system (which uses a vast number of characters) and system of tones (every syllable in standard Chinese can be pronounced in four different ways depending on meaning). But Mrs Lin knew how to explain things in a simple way and, with her as my teacher, I realised that Chinese does not deserve its reputation for difficulty.

The second term had already started when I decided to move out of my Western-style flat and into a more traditional Chinese one, and I had to fill out a number of official documents. For Westerners in China, moving house involves re-registering at the police station and a certain amount of form-filling. On several occasions I had to bite my lip and remember that young Asian people coming to the West to study would probably have to go through a similar procedure, but in the end I was able to move into my new place.

During that second term I got my head down and concentrated on improving my language skills before returning to Austria to finish my degree. I adore China – its magnificent landscapes, its people with their unique history and, above all, its language, which introduced me to a new way of thinking and a rich cultural history, and ultimately helped me broaden my horizons.



- 1 Apart from the natural beauty of Dalian, why did the writer enjoy staying there?
- A It has always been an important centre of Chinese culture.
 - B Near the city there is an old building that he often visited.
 - C While he was there he was in love with another student.
 - D His studies enabled him to understand Chinese society.
- 2 Why did he prefer Dalian to other Chinese cities?
- A He didn't have to speak in Chinese all the time.
 - B There were not so many people from the West.
 - C He could help local people learn to speak English.
 - D He had always liked seeing modern buildings.
- 3 What does the writer say about his lessons at Dalian University?
- A The number of students in the class was far too high.
 - B He should have been placed in a much lower-level class.
 - C Some of his classmates made faster progress than him.
 - D Students did not spend enough time in the classroom.
- 4 How did he feel about the way he was taught Chinese in Dalian?
- A It was impossible for him to get used to it.
 - B It was a pity he only did reading and listening.
 - C It was different but it was highly effective.
 - D It was not as good as the teaching in Vienna.
- 5 What change occurred as a result of his involvement in the speech competition?
- A He felt he did not need to continue improving his Chinese.
 - B He had extra lessons with the teacher he admired most.
 - C He began to write his own texts in Chinese about Dalian.
 - D He no longer found it difficult to make speeches in Chinese.
- 6 What did he discover about the Chinese language?
- A Some aspects of the grammar are very simple.
 - B It is easier to learn than some people claim.
 - C The pronunciation of short words is easy to learn.
 - D It is impossible for Westerners to learn it outside China.
- 7 What is meant by 'bite my lip' in line 62?
- A stop myself saying something
 - B smile at what somebody said
 - C say something that wasn't true
 - D get very angry with somebody
- 8 What conclusion does the writer draw about his stay in China?
- A It was enjoyable being there but he was glad to return to Europe.
 - B The thing he loved most was seeing the beautiful scenery there.
 - C Learning Chinese made him interested in a wider range of things.
 - D He would never really understand the way people there think.

Test 4

Reading Part 2

You are going to read an article about blogs (the internet sites where individuals regularly write their own thoughts and comments). Seven sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences A-H the one which fits each gap (9-15). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Get blogging!

Do you want others to read what you write online? Try setting up a blog with Susan Purcell's guide to getting started.

Short for 'weblogs', blogs began as online diaries, but these days many are useful and entertaining sources of news and information. A blog is really a kind of mini-website, but with one big difference: it costs nothing, or very little, to run. What makes blogs different from most websites is that they are updated regularly and they are interactive – readers can comment on what you write.

9 You type your text as if it were any article and the software of the blog company does the rest. Each time you add another piece of text, known as a 'post', that gets published at the top of the page and everything else moves down.

More than 130 million blogs have been started on the web and around a million blog posts are written every day. Every blog is different: some have only one author, some are the work of two or more people, some are streams of nonsense about nothing in particular. **10** These are often the ones that attract most comments.

People blog for different reasons. Some blogs are platforms for the writers' own opinions, some bloggers write to promote themselves and show off their skills, some even sell stuff on their blogs. Other bloggers write to get in touch with people who have similar views, while some blog to share their knowledge. **11** Blogs can be password-protected so that they can only be read by those who are allowed to view them.

The best blogs are those that specialise. If you cover too wide a topic area, you'll find it difficult to attract a loyal audience. People go to their favourite blog regularly, as they know they'll always find something of interest there.

12 You'll come across as knowledgeable and others with the same interest will visit regularly.



It is very easy to set up a blog. You can be online within a few minutes of opening an account. Start by looking at as many blogs as possible to get ideas. Most blogs publish a 'blogroll', or list of links to other blogs, so click on those to view more examples. **13** The biggest and most user-friendly are free, although they all offer slightly different features, so make sure you investigate and choose the one that provides what you want.

You can write as much or as little as you like but you must add posts regularly. It is best to write every few days, but it doesn't matter if you do so only at weekends or a couple of times a month, so long as your readers know when to expect posts. It is frustrating to visit a favourite blog only to find that it hasn't been updated as expected. You won't always have the time to write long blogs. **14**

Blogging about items in the news will help increase your readership, as more people will be searching for that topic.

15 It is often more satisfying to attract regular readers who interact with you, so write about what you know, check your facts and don't be afraid to say things people may disagree with – it's a good way of attracting comments. You'll soon have a loyal audience who will spread the word about your blog.

- A** On those days, refer your visitors to another blog, something in the press or a video clip on the Internet.
- B** Many, though, are clever, informative and well written.
- C** When you've done this, you'll be asked to choose a name for your blog, so have something ready.
- D** They don't want a wasted visit, so stick to your own particular subject.
- E** No technical knowledge is required to blog.
- F** However, blogging is not necessarily about gaining a wide audience.
- G** Teachers, for instance, often blog to help students to catch up when they miss a class.
- H** Next you need to select a blog company.

You are going to read a magazine article about people who bought clothes in different ways. For questions **16–30**, choose from the people (**A–D**). The people may be chosen more than once. When more than one answer is required, these may be given in any order.

Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Which person

- was pleased with a replacement item?
- regretted not buying a different kind of item?
- was disappointed with the item after they had owned it for some time?
- had difficulty deciding which to buy as there were so many attractive items?
- became impatient while waiting to pay for the item?
- is sure they got a bargain?
- had not previously bought clothes that way?
- had difficulty finding the right item because of the labelling?
- bought an item that was the wrong size?
- asked the seller a question about the item before they bought it?
- says they will always buy clothes in the same place?
- had not intended to buy clothes there?
- was in the street when they saw the item advertised?
- wished they had bought more than one of the same item?

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Shopping for clothes

A Brad Stevens

I was food shopping in the big supermarket near here and I saw they were selling jeans at a ridiculously low price, so I thought I'd pick up a pair. Later when I remembered I had a job interview the week after, I realised I should have bought some formal trousers instead, but I suppose it was just one of those things you suddenly do when you see something going cheap. Even though I probably could have got them for less on eBay. Anyway, I spent quite a bit of time going through this great pile of jeans because all the different sizes were mixed up and they weren't very clearly marked 'large' or 'extra large' or whatever. Eventually I came across a pair that seemed about my size and headed for the checkout. It was very slow there, and I got fed up standing in a line of about ten customers. Why they don't open more checkouts at busy times I really don't know.

C Tania Ferreira

I was walking along the pavement looking for something new to wear when a sign in a shop window saying 'cotton jackets 50% off' caught my eye, so I went in. They didn't have one in my size but said they could order it for me. A few days later they called me to say it'd arrived and I went back to the shop to collect it. It fitted me perfectly, but when I tried it on, I just didn't like the colour, a kind of grey-brown, and I said I'd prefer a lighter one. Again I had to wait, and again I went back to the shop. This time everything seemed fine, and I paid for it and took it home. After I'd worn it twice, though, I put it through the washing machine and was most upset to find it'd shrunk, despite the fact that I'd followed the washing instructions exactly. It was a waste of money, really.

B Sara Desai

I saw a stall selling sweaters when I was wandering around my usual clothes market and there was such a wide range of lovely ones that I was spoilt for choice. In the end I made my mind up and I enquired whether they had a particularly attractive pale blue one in medium. The stall holder said they had. I couldn't try it on there and then but I was sure it would fit me, so I paid and took it home. There I discovered that the sleeves were far too short so I had to take it back. That was annoying, but the man on the stall quickly found me a larger one for the same very reasonable price and that turned out to be just right on me. I'd wasted an hour or so travelling to and from the market, but I still wouldn't dream of shopping for things like that anywhere else.

D Ali Haddad

I'd picked up lots of things like books and computer games online, but that was the first time I'd actually got myself something to wear over the Internet. It looked like a really lovely shirt and the price was incredibly low, so I clicked on 'Buy it now', paid by credit card and waited for it to arrive. I thought afterwards that perhaps I should have emailed the seller to check the colour, because although it looked fine in the photo, it might not be exactly what I wanted. In the event I needn't have worried, and I was absolutely delighted when I saw it. I would have got another one if I'd known how good it would look.