



第一步 Dì yī bù: Beginners' Chinese

How do friends and colleagues address each other?

Interviewer: So Qian, how do friends and colleague address each other?

Qian: OK, that varies a bit too. Now, usually between friends and colleagues, we address each other by full name, that is, surname first plus the given name. So surname comes first. A full name is used especially when the given name consists of only one character. So, for example, my surname is Kan and my given name is Qian, only one character, so most of my Chinese friends would call me Kan. Now, if someone's given name has got two characters, for example, the name 王天友 Wáng Tiānyǒu, Wáng is the surname, the family name, and Tiānyǒu is the given name, so his friends and family will call him 天友Tiānyǒu. And that has got to do, I think, with the rhythms, because the single syllable is difficult to pronounce, doesn't sound very rhythmical, but a two syllable name sounds quiet nice to say.

Interviewer: But what about if you know people really quite well, is there any other name that you might address them?

Qian: Yes, when I think about it, yes, there is. For example amongst friends or people who know each other pretty well, they may add the adjective 老lǎo, meaning 'old', or the adjective '小xiǎo' meaning 'young' in front of one's surname. So that sort of depends on the relative age and seniority of the speaker. So for example, a young person with the surname Li may address an elderly colleague whose surname is Wang as 老王lǎo Wáng (literally means *old Wang*) OK? And then the elderly person may address the younger person as 小李Xiǎo Lǐ, meaning *young Li* or *little Li*.

So that is a common practice amongst neighbours or even at work places actually.

Interviewer: OK, that's great. What about within a family itself, say between husband and wife, etc, how would they address each other?

Qian: Between husbands and wives you might be surprised to hear that, OK, some people actually use the full name, and others use the given names, and others may use the term 老公lǎo gōng (literally means *old husband*) to address the husband. And

then the husband may use the term 老婆 *lǎo pó* thing (literally meaning *old woman*) to address the wife. And that term 老 *lǎo* has got a touch of affection, you know? So it has a connotation of being close to each other, so a very endearing term to refer to a foreigner is 老外 *lǎo wài*, meaning 'old foreigner'.