

Joanna Marciniak, student, NUI Galway

As a student of languages, I have always been interested in learning Mandarin Chinese and this year, the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at NUI Galway has made it possible by organising an introductory course to Chinese culture and language.

A group of my friends and I have participated in the course for twenty weeks during the academic year, and it was the most stimulating way to spend Tuesday evenings. Since the People's Republic of China has been the main academic superpower of the world, also being the world's most populous country, I think that it is extremely important to have Mandarin Chinese as a part of your curriculum.

The course was extremely well organised and we were taught by a native speaker from Beijing, something that made learning Chinese more authentic and enriching, as we were able to interact fully with our knowledgeable lecturer.

Learning Chinese itself was an unforgettable experience and we were all surprised at how easy the language structure was; over the course of the twenty weeks, we have gained knowledge of many practical aspects of the language, such as doing business or getting around in a Chinese metropolis. I found that the learning objectives were very well applied and carried out, as each week we learned something new in terms of language, but also culture.

Our lecturer was extremely enthusiastic and inspiring and the effort she put into preparing every class paid off to all the students. Each lesson we learned a new aspect of Chinese culture, so by the end of the course we had developed a good idea of family structures, business customs, the variety of religions in the Republic and general demographics of the country.

Overall, I would strongly recommend the course to anyone with an interest in Chinese culture; with the ever-growing business opportunities that we have been offered from the East, I think that it is extremely important and very impressive to be able to communicate in Mandarin Chinese. Besides that, I think that the course also broadened our cultural understanding of this vast and refined society.

Thomas Keane

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I have always had an interest in languages from an early age. I knew from secondary school that it was something that I would like to pursue as a career. After studying languages such as Irish, Italian and French (which I am still studying), I decided to take a chance and do the Chinese course that was being offered by NUIG. I did not really have an idea about the Chinese language except that it looked complicated with all those characters. It's unlike the European languages that I was familiar with up to this point as there were certain patterns that were similar across these languages. However, Chinese has pinyin, which makes it much easier to recognise words for those more familiar with the modern alphabet. The characters themselves are remarkable as they are pictorial symbols of what they represent. For example, the characters of the moon and the sun in Chinese are similar to the actual image of the moon and the sun. Overall, the Chinese language is very simple in terms of its grammar. It does not contain gender based nouns (like French, Spanish, and Italian), the tenses are not complicated, there is no need to be concerned between the past and present, and the word order is similar to the English language. It's not too difficult to grasp the idea behind the language as it makes sense.

The classes themselves were small so it's easy to interact with others. Our teacher, Dongxia, was also very considerate and attentive, sending out emails regarding class topics, allowing everyone in class to practise out loud, and was able to clear up any confusion about the Chinese language. Grammar is, of course, a fundamental aspect of this course but things such as the history of China, Chinese travel tips, calligraphy and much more became vital during these lessons.

Overall, this course was extremely interesting and has provided me with a desire to continue with Chinese Studies after completing my degree.