

Written Chinese, which is the same regardless of the dialect spoken, is based on a system of ideographs or characters. Modern Chinese includes more than 400 basic syllables. Each syllable can be written using the Roman alphabet and a variety of phonetic symbols. The People's Republic of China adopted the *Hanyu Pinyin* system for transliterating Chinese ideographs into the Roman alphabet in the late 1950s, and it is now recognized as standard throughout most of the world. Many Chinese product labels and street signs are expressed in these syllables. They can also be used to input Chinese on computer keyboards.

In Mandarin, *pin yin* means "spell sound." This transliteration system has gradually replaced an older British-designed method known as Wade-Giles in the Western media, which is why some well-known names have changed over the years. The replacement of *Peking* with the phonetically more accurate *Beijing* is an example.

Currency and Credit Cards

The official currency of the People's Republic of China is the *renminbi* (RMB), which means "people's money." The basic unit of currency is the *yuan*, commonly known as *kuai*, which may be written ¥. The *yuan* is divided into 10 *jiao* or 100 *fen*. In order to avoid misunderstandings, vendors usually write down the price for foreign clients. Except in hotels, restaurants and some fixed-priced shops, bargaining is the rule rather than the exception.

It is illegal to pay for anything with foreign currency or to exchange currency anywhere but at official government facilities. Refuse offers to change money on the street. This is not only illegal but also dangerous, since criminals operate the black market and use counterfeit bills.

The RMB is not fully convertible into hard currency. You will be asked to declare your currency holdings when you enter the country. You can change foreign currency or traveller's cheques for RMB at Chinese banks, airports and major hotels. You will be expected to spend at least 50 per cent of the RMB that you convert. You will be given