LESSON FIVE

Final particles play an important role in expressing grammar and also tone. The first item *ya* (no tone) consists of mouth on the left and tooth on the right. This word has nothing to do with teeth, just as *ma* (question word) has nothing to do with horses. Only the sound counts, and the mouth on the left tells us that sound alone is meant. Item #20 is another important particle. This one includes the negative *bu* fused with the *a* sound. The English equivalent might be something like No? The last line on p. 93 might be translated, You’ll give me a cup of water, won’t you? The sentence four lines up might be translated, I guess I’ll have beer. *Ba* often implies, I suppose. Compare *Ni shi Zhang xiansheng ma* (Are you Mr. Zhang?) and *Ni shi Zhang xiansheng ba* (You are Mr. Zhang). The first means: Are you Mr. Zhang? The second means: You are Mr. Zhang, I suppose / assume / guess.

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#9 *piao* actually is read in 3 tones, the most important being the first with the meaning to float. *Liang* means light, brilliant. The compound *piaoliang* describes physical beauty (male or female) and sports plays. It’s a fairly modern term and suggests grace, ease (weightlessness), and brilliance.

#10 and 11. Notice the word *tu* for ground in both words. *Zuo* to sit often has a social sense, to sit and chat. There are two persons sitting on the ground (or a mat, no chairs). *Zai* shows a hand sticking a stick into the ground. As a verb it means to exist or be alive. In modern Chinese it is weakened into a preposition indicating location in or at. The graph of *tu* is a line representing earth with something growing up from it.

#21. *Yao* is far more demanding than *xiang*, want vs. would like to. Other so-called auxiliary verbs such as *xihuan* and *yuanyi* express different shades of intentionality. *Yao* usually precedes a verb but it may precede a noun.

#24. *Ke* is an ancient and important word meaning allow. In traditional times the emperor would write this word on a proposal and it meant: let it be so / done; We allow it. That’s why it’s used in cola: *kele* means allows
pleasure. Ke 可 always precedes a verb. In English “-able” is often used to express ke 可. Keyi 可以 means may be used for the purpose of, allowable. One of the most famous Chinese books, the Dao De Jing, opens with the mysterious words Dao ke dao 道可道, usually translated: The Way that may be called the Way . . .

#2.5 duibuqi 對不起 = pardon me, excuse me, sorry. These are useful translations, but the phrase contains an all-important grammatical construction, the negative potential. Literally, the three words mean: as for facing you (dui 對) I am unable to raise [my face] to you. The positive form, able to face someone, would be duideqi 對得起. (The de is introduced in Lesson 7.) We will return to this subject in the future.

#27. This is the full form of “water” as a mono-graph. Combined with another graph to the right, it is written with three short strokes (virtually dots), e.g. piao 漂, jiu 酒. The right side of jiu 酒 (wine, beer) is a jar for fermentation. Compare p. 96 # 9 and 10.

p. 100. Note that le 了 derives from a full verb liao 了 (and is still pronounced that way in some northern areas), meaning “to wind up, to bring to a finish or conclusion.” Le 了 does not mark a past tense, simply the completion of an action, even in the future! (Chinese has no tenses as we understand them. "Actions are in sequential relation to each other." Le 了 can mark the boundary between an action and its sequel. The set past by contrast is indicated by an adverb of time, last year, yesterday, etc.)

Since meiyou 沒有 is the opposite and the negation of le 了, we may consider you 有 the equivalent of le 了. You 有 means “to exist, to have, to come into existence.” So le 了 really means “it happened,” and now “it’s over with,” as opposed to an ongoing action (grammar for which we have not yet studied). The form bu 不 . . . le 了 does exist and will be taken up later. It is a common form with an unvarying meaning. The form in this lesson is: vle mei you V+了沒有 (did you v. or not). Yes = vle 了; no = meiyou 沒有 (with or without verb, plain meiyou 沒有 or meiyou 沒有+v).

Note: meiyou 沒有 can precede a noun or a verb; bu 不 can only precede a verb.
p. 101 *cai* 才.

This is a word indicating delayed time and is best thought of as “then and only then” followed by a verb. *Le 了* can never follow *cai 才*. “Not until” is a good translation, but remember there is no negative in the Chinese only in the English. *Cai 才* may be thought of as the opposite of *jiu 就* (lesson 7). *Le 了* often follows *jiu 就*. *Ta zuotian jiu laile* 他昨天就來了 means He came as early as yesterday. Perhaps even earlier than expected. *Ta zuotian laile* 他昨天來了 means he came yesterday with no temporal emphasis (early or late). *Ta zuotian cai lai* 他昨天才來 means: He came yesterday but was due before then = yesterday, then and only then he came = he did not arrive until yesterday.

Logically speaking, *cai 才* withholding a result (the words after *cai 才*) until a condition (the words before *cai 才*) is fulfilled: first X then (and only then) Y. It is also used therefore in situations other than those having to do with time.