

A-Z for Mandarin Ab Initio, Dr Ziv Kan (published by Elemei)

Review by Elizabeth Ka Yee LOH

In teacher training sessions, IB teachers often ask me what resources can genuinely support students in building vocabulary effectively. *A-Z for Mandarin Ab Initio* is one such resource — a thoughtfully designed and pedagogically sound guide that meets the needs of beginner learners while aligning closely with the aims of the IB Diploma Programme.

As a scholar in Chinese as a second language (CSL), I believe that language learning involves far more than memorizing forms and words; it requires understanding the cultural meanings embedded within the language. This book reflects that philosophy. It offers clearly organised vocabulary by theme, example sentences, idiomatic expressions, and exam-relevant functional language, all supported by pinyin to aid pronunciation. The structure allows students to learn independently and purposefully, selecting topics according to their communicative needs.

What makes this book particularly distinctive is its seamless integration of cultural knowledge, humor, and the profound insights presented by the author. It is not merely a tool for learning a second language, but a gateway to understanding diverse cultures and reflecting on one's attitude toward life. Each topic includes bilingual explanations of Chinese customs, values, festivals, geography, and aspects of modern society. For non-heritage learners, this dual focus on language and culture provides essential context and supports the development of intercultural understanding — a core expectation of IB's international-mindedness.

A-Z for Mandarin Ab Initio is a rare resource that supports both linguistic development and cultural insight. I sincerely recommend it to teachers and students.

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