



## Introduction

Give Them Something to Talk About

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## Simplified Chinese

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你是哪国人?  
我是美国人.  
很漂亮!

## Traditional Chinese

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你是哪國人?  
我是美國人.  
很漂亮!

## Pinyin

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Nǐ shì nǎ guó rén?  
Wǒ shì Měiguórén.  
Hěn piàoliàng!

## English

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Which country are you from?  
I am American.  
Very beautiful!

## Vocabulary

Simplified	Traditional	Pinyin	English
你	你	nǐ	you
是	是	shì	to be
我	我	wǒ	I, me
哪	哪	nǎ / nǎi	which
美国人	美國人	Měiguórén	American (person)
很	很	hěn	very
漂亮	漂亮	piàoliàng	beautiful, pretty



## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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是你吗? 你是我最喜欢的作家!	Shì nǐ ma? Nǐ shì wǒ zuì xǐhuan de zuòjiā!	Is it you? You are my favorite author!
我是第一次来这里。	Wǒ shì dì yī cì lái zhèlǐ 。	This is the first time I've been here.
这个是给你买的。 我是大学生。	Zhè gè shì gěi nǐ mǎi de。 Wǒ shì dà xué sheng.	I bought this for you. I am a college student.
你是哪国人? 我是美国人。	nǐ shì nǎ guó rén ? Wǒ shì Měiguórén.	Which country are you from? I am American.
这道菜很好吃!	Zhè dào cài hěn hǎo chī.	This dish is very delicious!
很漂亮! 是你吗? 你是我最喜欢的作家!	Hěn piàoliàng! Shì nǐ ma? Nǐ shì wǒ zuì xǐhuan de zuòjiā!	Very pretty! Is it you? You are my favorite author!
我是第一次来这里。	Wǒ shì dì yī cì lái zhèlǐ 。	This is the first time I've been here.
这个是给你买的。 我是大学生。	Zhè gè shì gěi nǐ mǎi de。 Wǒ shì dà xué sheng.	I bought this for you. I am a college student.
你是哪国人? 我是美国人。	nǐ shì nǎ guó rén ? Wǒ shì Měiguórén.	Which country are you from? I am American.
这道菜很好吃!	Zhè dào cài hěn hǎo chī.	This dish is very delicious!
很漂亮!	Hěn piàoliàng!	Very pretty!

## Grammar Points

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The focus of this lesson is speaking about one's nationality.

我是美国人。  
Wǒ shì Měiguórén.  
"I am American"

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To express nationality in Chinese, one must simply add the word

人

rén

"people"

to the end of the country name, i. e.

美国

Měiguó

"America"

美国人

Měiguórén

"American"

In Chinese, some country names consist of a descriptive word with the word for 'country' or 'nation' (国 guó) tacked onto the end, as in the example above for America. Some other country names that follow this pattern are:

英国

Yīngguó

"England"

中国

Zhōngguó

"China"

德国

Déguó

"Germany"

法国

Fǎguó

"France"

Other country names have been formed by transliteration. Here are a few examples:

加拿大

Jiānádà

"Canada"



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墨西哥

Mòxīgē

"Mexico"

意大利

Yìdàlì

"Italy"

## 'To Be' in Chinese

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We see the verb 是 (shì) 'to be' in our sentence expressing nationality, i. e.

我是美国人。

Wǒ shì Měiguórén.

"I am American"

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The structure of this sentence in Chinese is very similar to English, namely, the 是 (shì) serves as 'to be'. In Chinese, however, the use of the 'to be' verb is not always the same as in English. Subject + 是 (shì) + noun is the pattern we see here. You cannot, however, use 是 (shì) with an adjective in a descriptive sentence as we do in English (i. e. She is pretty.). Another lesson will show you how to make that kind of sentence in Chinese!

Examples from this lesson:

你是哪國人？

Nǐ shì nǎ guó rén?

"Which country are you from?"

Sample Sentences:

我是意大利人。

Wǒ shì Yìdàlìrén.

"I am Italian."

他是加拿大人。

Tā shì Jiānádàrén.

"He is Canadian."

她是哪国人？

Tā shì nǚ guó rén?

"What is her nationality" or "What country is she from?"

## Variations of Pronunciation of 哪

There are two acceptable pronunciations for the character '哪'. Some Mandarin speakers will pronounce it as 'nǎ', others will use 'něi'. Both are acceptable and interchangeable, it's just a matter of habit or preference.

## Cultural Insight

Sometimes upon moving to China, foreigners are shocked by the direct questions Chinese people will ask them. For example, your new neighbor may, on your first meeting, barrage you with questions as to your age, marital status, why you don't have children, job, income, eating habits. It's important to realize that this is Chinese people's way of showing interest in you. These kinds of questions are not personal in Chinese culture; rather they are a way of showing concern and making small talk, getting to know someone.

As time goes on, you may find some good evasive responses. Or, like many, you may just start to be more open. Learning a new language also means learning a new culture and new ways of thinking. This can really expand our horizons and challenge us. If you're not ready to show them your paystub yet, however, take a lesson from the Chinese themselves. See how they answer you next time you ask them a personal question. You just might learn a few evasion tactics of your own.

