

Chapter 3 Notes "So how much money do you make?" (VPC Book p.34)

1. You will likely often be asked if you are here to teach, a common profession for expats!

你	來	台 灣	教	英 文	嗎	?
nǐ	lái	tái wān	jiāo	yīng wén	ma	
You	come	Taiwan	teach	English	ma	

This question could also be phrased:

你	是	英 文	老 師	嗎	?
nǐ	shì	yīng wén	lǎo shī	ma	
You	are	English	teacher	ma	

ma 嗎 is used here as well as this is a question seeking a yes/no answer.

Notice how the question changes if **ba** 吧 is substituted.

你	是	英 文	老 師	吧	?
nǐ	shì	yīng wén	lǎo shī	ba	
You	are	English	teacher	ba	

The question now becomes, "You're an English teacher, aren't you?" as **ba** 吧 is equivalent of an English tag question.

Use **ma** 嗎 in a question that seeks a yes/no answer.

Use **ba** 吧 when seeking confirmation of something assumed to be true or false.

2. If you are a teacher, this is an appropriate answer.

對	,	我	是	英 文	老 師	.
duì		wǒ	shì	yīng wén	lǎo shī	
Right		I	am	English	teacher	

dāng 當 (to work as) may be substituted as well.

對	,	我	當	英 文	老 師	.
duì		wǒ	dāng	yīng wén	lǎo shī	
Right		I	am	English	teacher	

dāng 當 has several meanings, which can be divided into three categories.

While it means "to be" a profession, it is also used to describe "being" other things, i.e.

Wǒ dāng bàba le!	我當爸爸了!	I've become a father!
Wǒ dāng xuéshēng.	我當學生.	I'm a student.
Nǐ dāng guǐ.	你當鬼.	You're "it"! (In a game of tag the ghost is "it.")
Nǐ yào bú yào dāng wǒ-de nǚ péngyǒu?	妳要不要當我的女朋友?	Do you want to be my girlfriend?

Third, **dāng** 當 also means “when”

Dāng wǒ zhù Gāoxióng de shíhòu...	當我住高雄的時候...	When I lived in Kaohsiung...
Dāng wǒ xiǎo de shíhòu...	當我小的時候...	When I was small...
Dāng wǒ zhīdào zěnmě shǐyòng...	當我知道怎麼使用...	When I know how to use...
Dāng wǒ fāxiàn tā pītuǐ de shíhòu...	當我發現他劈腿的時候...	When I found out he was cheating on me...

3. **háishì** 還是 is a colloquial (and the most common) way to say “or” in Taiwan.

你	教	大 人	還 是	小 孩 子	?
nǐ	jiāo	dà rén	hái shì	xiǎo hái zi	
You	teach	adults	or	children	

huòshì 或是 also means “or” but it seen more in writing. In spoken Chinese in Taiwan **háishì** 還是 is more common, however **huò** 或 and **huòshì** 或是 are also heard.

4. The subject (I) may be left out in conversation, or alternatively, may also come after the time.

我	大 部 份 的	時 間	教	小 孩 子	.
wǒ	dà bù fèn de	shí jiān	jiāo	xiǎo hái zi	
I	most of the	time	teach	children	

bùfèn 部份	a part or section	quánbù 全部	all, whole, entire
dàbùfèn 大部份	the greater part/most of something		

5. It is not impolite in Taiwanese culture to directly ask someone how much money he/she makes. Therefore you should expect to often be quizzed on your salary.

你 的	薪 水	一 定	很	好	.
nǐ -de	xīn shuǐ	yí dìng	hě	hǎo	
Your	salary	definitely	very	good	

Instead of **yíding** 一定 (definitely) use **dàgài** 大概 (probably) or **yīnggāi** 應該 (should be)

6. The quickest way to end the conversation without appearing to be rude is to be evasive but polite.

還 可 以	.
hái kě yǐ	
It's alright.	

Use **hái búcuò** 還不錯 to say something is **really quite good**; very acceptable, or to praise someone.
Use **hái kěyǐ** 還可以 to say something is **good or satisfactory**; i.e. it will do.

When responding to how you feel about your salary, it's best not to say you think it's too low. While you might genuinely feel it is too low, this sort of pronouncement might make for awkward conversation, as the average salary foreigner salary in Taiwan is extremely high by local standards!

7. Note the subject (**you**) time (**one month**) verb (**earn**) object (**money**) word order, and that the question word (**how much**) always comes after the verb.

你	一 個	月	賺	多 少	錢	?
nǐ	yí ge	yuè	zhuàn	duō shǎo	qián	
You	one	month	earn	how much	money	

If so inclined, you could answer this question using the same word order as the question:

我	一 個	月	賺	四 萬	塊	.
wǒ	yí ge	yuè	zhuàn	sì wàn	kuài	
I	one	month	earn	forty thousand	dollars	

8. However, if you would prefer not to, just say:

不	一 定	.
bù	yí dìng	
Not	definite	

This indicates that your salary is not consistent from month to month, but varies.

9. The inquisition may well continue! Instead of **yǒu** 有 (**have**, i.e. **exist**) you might also hear **yīnggāi** 應該 (**probably; likely**)

有	四	五	萬	吧	?
yǒu	sì	wǔ	wàn	ba	
Have	four	five	ten thousand	ba	

Note that there is no “or” between the two numbers – there could be, if you wanted to add it, but it’s not necessary, particularly in casual conversation.

A few more examples:

yì-liǎng ge péngyǒu	一兩個朋友	one or two friends
qī-bā diǎn	七八點	seven or eight o'clock
sān-sì bēi chá	三四杯茶	three or four cups of tea
wǔ-lìu shí yè	五六十頁	fifty or sixty pages
liǎng-sān bān	兩三班	two or three classes*
yī-èr shí fēnzhōng	一二十分鐘	ten or twenty minutes

**i.e., as an answer to the question “How many classes do you teach a week?”*

yíwàn 一萬 (**ten thousand**) is the basic unit of numerical measurement in Chinese, in contrast to English, which uses one thousand as its basic unit.

For example, forty thousand (40 x 1000) in English is translated into **sìwàn** 四萬 (**four ten thousands**) = 4 x 10,000

Likewise, four hundred thousand would be **sìshíwàn** 四十萬 (**forty ten thousands**) = 40 x 10,000

Really big numbers...for when you make your fortune or win the lottery (or just talk about it!)

yìbǎi wàn 一百萬 one million	liǎngbǎi wàn 兩百萬 two million
yìqiān wàn 一千萬 ten million	liǎngqiān wàn 兩千萬 twenty million
yíyì 一億 one hundred million	liǎngyì 兩億 two hundred million
shí yì 十億 one billion	èrshí yì 二十億 two billion
yìbǎi yì 一百億 ten billion	liǎngbǎi yì 兩百億 twenty billion
yìqiān yì 一千億 one hundred billion	liǎngqiān yì 兩千億 two hundred billion

liǎng 兩 (two) is used in conjunction with a classifier

liǎng diǎn 兩點	two o'clock
liǎng ge péngyǒu 兩個朋友	two friends
liǎng zhī gǒu 兩隻狗	two dogs
liǎng kuài 兩塊	two dollars
liǎngbǎi 兩百	two hundred
liǎngqiān 兩千	two thousand
liǎngwàn 兩萬	twenty thousand

èrshí 二十 (twenty); **èr** 二 not **X liǎng** 兩 because **shí** 十 (ten) is not a classifier in Taiwan, but it is in Mainland China, where you will also hear **èrqiān** 二千 and **èrbǎi** 二百

10. Vague agreement is the best way to politely end an inquisitive (or invasive!) conversation.

差	不	多	.
chā	bu	duō	
Approximately			

Words or phrases are often repeated in Chinese to soften an answer or encourage the conversation. By not repeating **chābuduō** 差不多 (roughly; approximately) you are giving a curt reply which leaves no avenue open for your interrogator to continue the conversation.

11. One way to express honest admiration:

哇	!	那	真 的	很	不 錯	耶	.
wà		nà	zhēn de	hěn	bú cuò	ye	
Wow		In that case	really	very	not bad	ye	

wà 哇 indicates surprise or admiration; in Taiwan, a lot of people pronounce it "wow"

12. Some people might try to goad you into admitting that your salary is much higher.

你	一 定	有	賺	十 萬	吧	!
nǐ	yí dìng	yǒu	zhuàn	shí wàn	ba	
You	definitely	have	earn	100,000	ba	

However, the only correct (i.e. gracious, tactful) answer is:

沒 有	那 麼	多	啦	.
méi yǒu	nà me	duō	la	
Not	that	much	la	

Regardless of how much you earn, never admit to having a higher salary than 50,000NT a month. A starting salary for a university graduate in Taiwan is around 22,000NT. A 7-11 worker makes 15-18,000 a month and many contract positions pay as little as 10,000NT a month. Chinese teachers in high schools make around 30,000NT a month – and often work longer hours than their foreigner co-workers.

My notes:

What it means!

	問	Mouth (口) at door (門) = <i>ask; inquire</i>
	wèn	
<p>Riddle: Q: Shìjièshàng nǎ yì zhǒng dòngwù yǒu zuì dà de xiōngbù? 世界上那一種動物有最大的胸部? <i>Which of the world's animal in has the largest breasts?</i></p> <p>A: Bānmǎ, yīnwèi tā chuān Z bra. 斑馬, 因為牠穿 Z bra. <i>Zebra, because it wears a "Z" bra</i></p>		

Use slang!

A: Wǒ zhège zhōumò gēn yí ge làmèi yuēhuì! 我這個週末跟一個辣妹約會!
I have a date with a hot girl this weekend!

B: Shǎo hǔlàn le, nǐ-de huà wǒ cái bú xìn ne. 少虎爛了, 你的話我才不信呢.
You're so full of it! I don't believe you one bit.