

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 17 — Mandarin



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MANDARIN, the common name for all public officials in China, the Chinese name for whom is *kwan* or *kwūn*. The word comes through the Portuguese from Malay *mantri*, a counsellor or minister of state. The ultimate origin of this word is the Sanskrit root *man-*, meaning to “think,” seen in “man,” “mind,” &c. The term “mandarin” is not, in its western usage, applied indiscriminately to all civil and military officials, but only to those who are entitled to wear a “button,” which is a spherical knob, about an inch in diameter, affixed to the top of the official cap or hat. These officials, civil and military alike, are divided into nine grades or classes, each grade being distinguished by a button of a particular colour. The grade to which an official belongs is not necessarily related to the office he holds. The button which distinguishes the first grade is a transparent red stone; the second grade, a red coral button; the third, a sapphire; the fourth, a blue opaque stone; the fifth, a crystal button; the sixth, an opaque white shell button; the seventh, a plain gold button; the eighth, a worked gold button; and the ninth, a worked silver button. The mandarins also wear certain insignia embroidered on their official robes, and have girdle clasps of different material. The first grade have, for civilians an embroidered Manchurian crane on the breast and back, for the military an embroidered unicorn with a girdle clasp of jade set in rubies. The second grade, for civilians an embroidered golden pheasant, for the military a lion with a girdle clasp of gold set in rubies. The third grade, for civilians a peacock, for the military a

leopard with a clasp of worked gold. The fourth grade, for civilians a wild goose, for the military a tiger, and a clasp of worked gold with a silver button. The fifth grade, for civilians a silver pheasant, for the military a bear and a clasp of plain gold with a silver button. The sixth grade, for civilians an egret, for the military a tiger-cat with a mother-of-pearl clasp. The seventh grade, for civilians a mandarin duck, for the military a mottled bear with a silver clasp. The eighth grade, for civilians a quail, for the military a seal with a clear horn clasp. The ninth grade, for civilians a long-tailed jay, for the military a rhinoceros with a buffalo-horn clasp.

The “mandarin language” is the Chinese, which is spoken in official and legal circles; it is also spoken over a considerable portion of the country, particularly the northern and central parts, though not perhaps with the same purity. Mandarin duck (*anas galericulata*) and Mandarin orange (*citrus nobilis*) possibly derive their names, by analogy, from the sense of superiority implied in the title “mandarin.”

See *Society in China*, by Sir R. K. Douglas; *L'Empire du milieu*, by E. and O. Reclus.

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