

PINYIN

There have been many different systems of transcription used for learning to pronounce Chinese. Once, the name of the Chinese capital could be written “Peking” or “Pekin”. Today the official transcription accepted on an international basis is the PINYIN alphabet developed in China at the end of the 1950’s. Peking must now be written “Beijing”.

1 - INITIALS



b	p	m	f
d	t	n	l
g	k	h	
j	q	x	
z	c	s	
zh	ch	sh	r

- ➡ **m, f, n, l, h,** and **sh** are pronounced as in English
- ➡ **d** like “t” in “straight” (unaspirated)
- j** like “g” in “genius” (unaspirated)
- z** like “ds” in “beds”
- zh** like “j” in job
- ➡ **b** like “p” in “spin” (unaspirated)
- g** a soft unaspirated “k” sound
- x** like “sh” in “sheep” but with the corners of the lips drawn back
- r** somewhat like “ge” in lodge

- ▶ Particular attention should be paid to the pronunciation of the so called “aspirated” consonants.

It is necessary to breath heavily after the original consonant is sounded:

p = p’ (like in “pop”)

q = ch harder than “ch” in cheap

t = t’ (like in “tap”)

c = ts’ (like in “cats”), with aspiration

k = k’ (like in “kangaroo”)

ch = ch’ (tongue curled back, aspiration)



- ▶ Distinction between certain initials:



b/p d/t g/k j/q z/c zh/ch

2 – FINALS

Vowels do not present any particular difficulty in pronunciation. When they are combined they must not be pronounced separately.

	i	u	ü
a	ia	ua	
o		uo	
i	ie		üe
e			
er			
ai		uai	
ei		uei	
ao	iao		
ou	iou		
an	ian	uan	üan
en	in	uen	üen
ang	iang	uang	
eng	ing	ueng	
ong	iong		



- ▶ **ie** like “ye” in “yes”

- ▶ **e** like “e” in “her” (open)

- ▶ **-r** (final) like “er” in “sister” (American pronunciation)

ai like “y” as in “by” (light)

ei like “ay” as in “bay” (light)

ou like “o” in “go”

an like “an” in “can” (without stressing the “n”)

- ▶ **-ng** (final) a nasalised sound like the “ng” in “bang” without pronouncing the “g”

➔ **an** preceded by **y** or **i** = “yen” without stressing the “n”

➔ In **zi**, **ci**, **si**, **zhi**, **chi**, **shi** and **ri** the **i** is not pronounced. It indicates that the consonant only is pronounced.

E. g. **zi** = “ds” as in “beds”

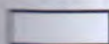
ri = “r” as in “right”

➔ The consonants **j**, **q** and **x** are all followed by long vowels like the “ee” in “bee”.

➔ When placed in the initial position **-u** and **-i** are written as **w** and **y** respectively.



➔ Distinction between certain finals:



in/ing

en/eng

an/ang

3 – TONES

The pronunciation of each syllable i. e. each sinogram includes a tonal melody. There are four accented tones, a high tone, a low tone, a rising tone and a falling tone. On a chart of the movement of the vocal chords and the muscles that control them, the high tone consists of a prolonged stretch, the low tone a prolonged retraction, the rising tone consists of a normal tension followed by a stretch, and the falling tone consists of a slight stretch and then a sharp retraction.



- mā** mother
- má** hemp
- mǎ** horse
- mà** to insult

