

INTRODUCTION

CHINESE DIALECTS

Spoken Chinese has many different dialects. Although the written language is essentially the same throughout China, the pronunciation of the characters varies tremendously in different regions. Speaking their native dialects, people from the north of China can communicate verbally with southerners about as easily as Frenchmen can speak with Italians.

It was in order to facilitate communication that the Chinese decided to establish a standard language for themselves. The dialect they chose as the standard is called Mandarin (*pǔtōnghuà* in Chinese), and it is native to the Beijing (Peking) area. Mandarin is taught throughout the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as in Taiwan, where it is called *guóyǔ*. It is also widely spoken in Singapore, Hong Kong, and other parts of Southeast Asia where there are large numbers of Chinese. Sometimes it is also referred to as *húayǔ* or *hànyǔ*.

Mandarin isn't the only dialect; you'll come across on a tour of China. Among the dozens of other widely spoken dialects are Cantonese, which is heard in and around Guangzhou or Canton, the capital of Guangdong Province, as well as in Hong Kong and Macao; Shanghainese, which is spoken in the greater Shanghai area; Hunan dialect, spoken in the Hunan Province; and Sichuan (Szechuan) dialect, spoken in Sichuan Province. You'll also hear the Hokkien dialect in Fujian Province as well as in Taiwan and in many parts of Southeast Asia where Chinese people who trace their ancestry back to Fujian Province live. For the purposes of a tour of China, however, Mandarin is by far the best dialect to learn. You'll find plenty of Mandarin speakers no matter where you go in the PRC or Taiwan.

SPEAKING CHINESE

The Chinese are delighted when foreigners try to speak their language. They will forgive you a multitude of sins, try

their best to understand you, even if your pronunciation is close to unintelligible, and probably even compliment you on your excellent command of Chinese. You needn't take such flattering compliments too seriously; they are simply the Chinese way of being polite and of expressing appreciation for your efforts.

In general, you'll have the best chance of being understood by Chinese who have had frequent contact with foreigners. They are more accustomed to, and better able to make sense of, the predictable mispronunciations. But don't let this stop you from speaking to anyone and everyone you meet. If all else fails, simply show the Chinese characters in this book for the phrase you wish to convey.

VISITING TAIWAN AND HONG KONG

Although this book has been written primarily for travelers to the PRC, the phrases included in it are also useful in Taiwan, where the Mandarin dialect is widely spoken. The native Taiwanese majority—those whose ancestors emigrated to Taiwan from southern Fujian Province during the nineteenth century, as opposed to the approximately 18 percent of "mainlanders" whose families arrived in the 1940s during the Communist takeover of the mainland—speak a dialect that is quite a bit different from Mandarin. But Mandarin has been taught widely in schools in Taiwan for many years, and one should have no trouble finding Mandarin speakers with whom to converse.

There are some linguistic differences to keep in mind, however. Though at least 98 percent of the vocabulary used in this book are understandable on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, some of the terms reflect PRC usage and are not widely used on Taiwan. A handful may not be understood at all. In general, basic conversational vocabulary varies very little, but words associated with the Communist system, such as *dānwèi*, or "work unit," and some technical terms referring to inventions of the last 30 years or so, may be troublesome in Taiwan.

There are also some pronunciation differences. Generally speaking, the further you are from Beijing, the less

standard the Mandarin pronunciation of the local populace. Inhabitants of Taiwan have a distinct accent when they speak Mandarin, just as Australians and Americans do when they speak English. It's not impossible to understand, but it can take some getting used to.

The native dialect of most of the residents of Hong Kong and Macao is *Guangdonghua*, or Cantonese, unintelligible to native speakers of Mandarin and vice versa. Mandarin has become increasingly popular in Hong Kong since the colony returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. But because of Hong Kong's history as a British colony, the most widely spoken second language there is still English, and, in general, you should be able to get by in English with little difficulty. Mandarin is also spoken in Macao, which the Portuguese returned to China in 1999, but Cantonese is the native dialect and is heard far more frequently.

The written Chinese in this book is expressed in simplified characters. The Communists simplified many characters in the 1950s in order to make the language easier to learn and promote literacy among the masses. Most of these forms are not widely used in Hong Kong, however, and still less in Taiwan, so people in these places may not easily recognize some of the written characters in this book, though in many cases they'll be able to make good educated guesses.

PINYIN SPELLING

The Chinese language in this book is rendered in characters as well as in a romanized system called *pinyin*, which translates quite simply as "spelling." The characters themselves give little or no phonetic information, and their pronunciation must normally be learned by rote. You won't be expected to learn characters to use this book effectively; we include them primarily to facilitate your communication with Chinese people when phonics fail you. Most Chinese can't read pinyin very well, even though many used it when learning Chinese in primary school. In Taiwan, it is hardly used at all.

Pinyin is the official romanization system of the People's Republic of China. It was adopted in the 1950s and has gained wide acceptance in China and abroad in recent years, essentially supplanting all previous romanization systems. Because pinyin is commonly used on street signs and storefronts in large cities, a knowledge of it can aid you as you make your way in China.

The traditional spellings of many names, such as *Peking*, *Tientsin*, *Canton*, and *Mao Tse-tung*, have been replaced with their less familiar but more phonetic pinyin forms: *Beijing*, *Tianjin*, *Guangzhou*, and *Mao Zedong*. The pinyin system is fairly accessible to native speakers of English. There are, however, a handful of notable exceptions. The table on page 3 explains pinyin pronunciation in detail.

Don't skip this section; you need to master pinyin for this book to be really useful to you. However, to help jog your memory, we include a summary of the hardest pinyin sounds to remember—both on page 10 and at the end of the book. And as an added convenience we have reprinted some of the most troublesome pinyin initials and their phonetic

equivalents on the bottom of each left-hand page in the body of the book.

SYLLABLES

Syllables are the building blocks of Chinese words and phrases. In the written language, each syllable can be rendered as a distinct character. The syllable consists of three components: the *initial*, the *final*, and the *tone*. For example, in the word *láng*, which means "sugar," the initial is the *l* sound at the beginning of the syllable; the final is the *ang* sound at the end; and the tone, represented by the () mark, is the rising tone of voice in which the word is pronounced. All three components must generally be present for the word to be completely understandable in Chinese, though some syllables don't require initials.

INITIALS

Initials are always consonants, and in pinyin most of the pronunciations are fairly intuitive to native speakers of English. Following is a table of initials with an explanation of how to pronounce them.

PINYIN INITIAL	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	EXAMPLES	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
b, p, m, f, d, t, n, l, g, k, j, s, w, y, ch, sh	approximately the same as in English	neng tou gan	<i>nung</i> <i>toe</i> <i>gone</i>
c	like the <i>ts</i> in <i>rats</i>	can cu hen hao	<i>tsahn</i> <i>tsoo</i> <i>hahn</i> <i>how</i>
h	more guttural than the English <i>h</i> . More like the German <i>ch</i> as in <i>ach</i>		
q	like the <i>ch</i> in <i>cheap</i>	qin qu	<i>cheen</i> <i>chü</i>
r	a cross between a <i>j</i> and an <i>r</i> . No English equivalent; something like the <i>z</i> in <i>azure</i>	ren ru	<i>arren</i> <i>roo</i>
x	like the <i>sh</i> in <i>sheen</i>	xiao xin	<i>shee-yow</i> <i>sheen</i>
z	like <i>dz</i> to sound like the <i>ds</i> in <i>kids</i>	zai zu	<i>dzye</i> <i>dzoo</i>
zh	like the hard <i>j</i> in <i>jack</i>	zhang zhou	<i>jahng</i> <i>joc</i>

FINALS

Finals always begin with vowels. They may end in vowels, consonants, or diphthongs. Study the list of finals below. In many cases they can be pronounced accurately by using your intuition as a native English speaker—but there are a few surprises.

PINYIN FINAL	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	EXAMPLES	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
a	<i>ah</i> as in <i>rak</i>	ba	<i>bah</i>
ai	like the <i>y</i> in <i>rye</i> or <i>my</i>	na tai lai	<i>nah</i> <i>tie</i> <i>lye</i>
an	<i>ahn</i> , to rhyme with <i>John</i>	ban	<i>bahn</i>
ang	<i>ahng</i> , as in <i>angst</i>	can tang chang chao	<i>tsahn</i> <i>tahng</i> <i>chahng</i> <i>chow</i>
ao	like the <i>ow</i> in <i>cow</i>		
ar	as in <i>are</i>	nar	<i>nar</i>
e	like the <i>u</i> sound in <i>bush</i>	de	<i>dah</i>
ei	like the <i>a</i> in <i>pay</i> or <i>play</i>	le fei	<i>lah</i> <i>fay</i>
en	like the <i>un</i> in <i>pen</i>	shei men	<i>shay</i> <i>man</i>
eng	like the <i>ung</i> in <i>hang</i>	deng	<i>dung</i>
er	like the <i>ur</i> in <i>cur</i>	mer	<i>mar</i>
i	like the <i>ee</i> in <i>fee</i> when following <i>b, p, m, d, t, n, l, j, q,</i> and <i>r</i>	ji xi	<i>jee</i> <i>shee</i>
ia	like a <i>zz</i> after <i>z, c,</i> and <i>s</i> like an <i>r</i> after <i>zh, ch, sh,</i> and <i>r</i> <i>ya</i> , like the <i>ia</i> in the name <i>Mia</i> , but said in one syllable	zi si zhi shi lia xia	<i>dz</i> <i>sz</i> <i>jr</i> <i>shr</i> <i>lyt</i> <i>shyt</i>

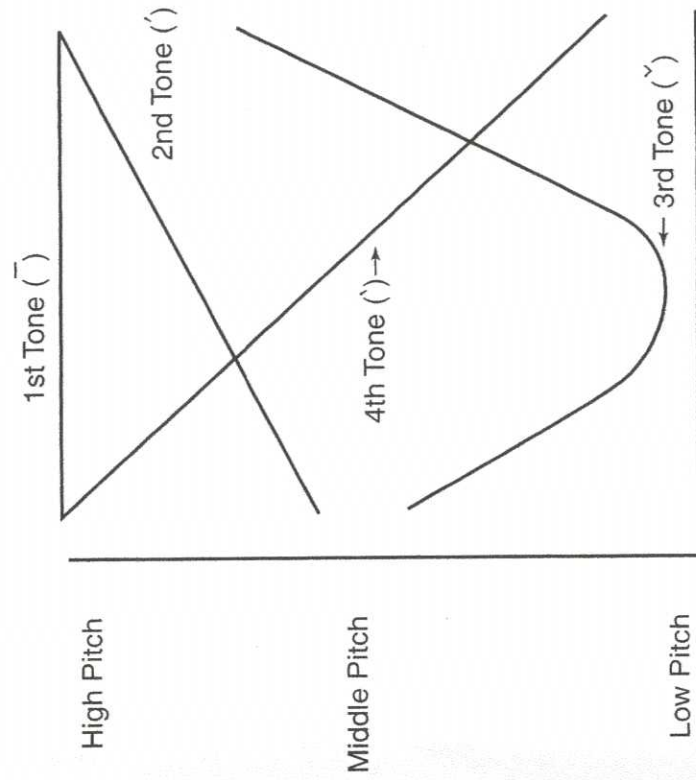
PINYIN FINAL	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	EXAMPLES	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
ian	<i>yeh</i> <i>yahng</i> , with the same vowel as in the word <i>angst</i>	pian liang jiang	<i>pyeh</i> <i>lyahng</i> <i>yyahng</i>
iao	<i>ee-yow</i> , to rhyme with the cat's <i>meow</i> , but said in one syllable	biao liao	<i>bee-yow</i> <i>lee-yow</i>
ie	<i>yeh</i> <i>een</i> as in <i>green</i>	bie qin xin	<i>byeh</i> <i>cheen</i> <i>sheen</i>
ing	as in <i>sing</i>	bing	<i>bing</i>
iong	<i>yahng</i> , to rhyme with <i>strong</i>	qiong xiong	<i>chyahng</i> <i>shyahng</i>
iu	like the <i>eo</i> in the name <i>Leo</i> , pronounced in one syllable	qiu liu	<i>cheo</i> <i>leo</i>
o	like the <i>aw</i> sound in <i>aww</i> , to rhyme with <i>saw</i>	mo po	<i>maw</i> <i>paw</i>
ong	like the <i>ong</i> in <i>wrong</i> , but with a rounder <i>o</i> sound	long zhong	<i>long</i> <i>jaung</i>
ou	like the <i>o</i> in <i>too</i> or <i>ho</i>	mou zhou	<i>moo</i> <i>joo</i>
u	<i>oo</i> as in <i>boo</i> after most letters pronounced as <i>ü</i> (see below) after <i>j, q, x,</i> or <i>y</i>	mu du qu xu	<i>moo</i> <i>doo</i> <i>chü</i> <i>shü</i>
ü	no English equivalent; like the German <i>ü</i> or the French <i>eu</i> . Used only after <i>n</i> and <i>l</i>	mü lǘ	<i>mü</i> <i>lǘ</i>
ua	<i>wah</i> , like the <i>ua</i> in <i>guava</i>	zhua gua	<i>juwah</i> <i>guwah</i>

PIN YIN FINAL	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	EXAMPLES	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
uai	<i>waye</i> , to rhyme with <i>rye</i>	guai	<i>gwaye</i>
uan	<i>wahn</i> , to rhyme with <i>swan</i> after most letters <i>wen</i> , to rhyme with <i>when</i> after <i>j, q, x, or y</i>	tuan duan yuan juan	<i>twahn</i> <i>dawahn</i> <i>ywen</i> <i>juwen</i>
uang	<i>wahng</i> , with the same vowel as the word <i>angst</i>	zhuang kuang	<i>juwahng</i> <i>kuwahng</i>
ue or üe	<i>oo-eh</i> , to rhyme with <i>moo</i> and <i>yeh</i> , merged into one syllable. Written with () symbol after <i>n</i> and <i>l</i>	xue lue	<i>shoeh</i> <i>loeh</i>
ui	<i>way</i>	dui	<i>dway</i>
un	<i>one</i> is the closest sound in English, though the vowel is actually closer to the <i>oo</i> sound in <i>book</i> .	dun sun	<i>durun</i> <i>surun</i>
uo	After <i>j, q, and x</i> , pronounced like the English <i>win</i> <i>waw</i> , to rhyme with <i>thaw</i>	jun xun duo cuo	<i>juwin</i> <i>shwin</i> <i>dawaw</i> <i>lawaw</i>

important is that the tones remain relatively distinct from one another.

For example, the first tone is pronounced at a high, level pitch at the top of one's vocal range. For a woman this will be a higher pitch than for a man, but this makes no difference as long as it's done at the top of one's register. The second tone rises from the middle of the voice to the top, as when asking a question in English, even though a rising tone implies no interrogative in Chinese. The third tone starts in the middle of the voice and dips to the bottom before rising at the end. The fourth tone starts high and ends low, as when scolding someone or emphasizing something in English. The figure below illustrates the four tones.

The tones are indicated by the use of diacritical marks above the syllables. The first tone, the even tone, is illustrated



TONES

Each Chinese syllable also has a special intonation that must be used when it is pronounced. Spoken Mandarin has four distinct tones. They do not correspond to absolute musical pitches but rather, are spoken differently by different individuals, depending on the range of their voices. What is

with a horizontal mark above the syllable (ˊ). The second tone, which rises, is shown with a line sloping up (ˊ). The third tone, which dips to the bottom of the voice, is indicated with a U-shaped mark (ˇ). The fourth, or falling, tone is illustrated with a line sloping down (ˋ).

The importance of the tones is clear from the example of the syllable *mā*. *Mā*, in the first tone, means “mother.” In the second tone, *má* is understood to mean “hemp.” The third tone form, *mǎ*, means “horse.” And in the fourth tone, *mà* means “to scold.” If you are careless with your tones, you are more than likely to make a serious mistake speaking Chinese, since the language is rich in homonyms. The tones help a Chinese listener to distinguish different words. Asking for *láng* at the table will get you sugar, but if you pronounce it *lāng*, you’ll be given a bowl of soup.

Even a syllable with a given tone can have more than one meaning. *Shī*, for example, means both “lion” and “poem” in the first tone, as well as other things. A Chinese can generally figure out what you mean from the context of your remarks, but imagine how much harder you make his or her task if you mispronounce the word. In various other tones, *shī* can mean history, a teacher, an envoy, a market, to show, a lifetime, a test, a style, the number ten, a stone, or the verb “to be.”

You’ll notice that in this book we have frequently omitted the tone mark over a particular syllable. This simply means that the syllable should be unstressed and pronounced in a neutral tone of voice.

One more point: We’ve used standard punctuation marks in this text. These are as intelligible to the Chinese as to us. But when you’re speaking Chinese, don’t make the all-too-common mistake of raising your pitch at the end of a question or dropping it after an exclamation, as you might in English, for this will interfere with the proper pronunciation of tones. Just keep to the tones as marked and you will get the desired results.

SOME CONVENTIONS

We’ve adopted a few conventions in our use of pinyin that we hope will be helpful to you. First of all, we have omitted the space between two syllables when the syllables combine to form a common word. For example, to say “already” in Chinese requires two characters: *yǐ* and *jǐng*. Neither can stand alone; the meaning comes from the combination. So for the sake of clarity we render it *yǐjǐng*. This technique should help you to recognize words—as opposed to just syllables—a bit more quickly. We are also capitalizing the initial letter of words that begin sentences and that in English are considered proper nouns. Thus, *yīngwén* (“English language”) is spelled throughout this book with a capital *Y*.

Finally, spoken Chinese occasionally involves a *change* in the tone of a syllable, depending on the context. When two third tones occur together, for example, the first one is generally pronounced as a second tone. We have built such changes in for you in this book, so you needn’t concern yourself with these rules. It is for this reason, however, that the same word may occasionally appear in different tones in this book. An example is *wó* (“I” or “me”). This occasionally shows up as *wó*, depending on the tone of the word that follows it. Just say it the way it appears in the text and you won’t go wrong. If you need to know the standard tone of the word out of context, check the dictionary at the end of the book.

10 • QUICK PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

THE COMMON PROBLEMS OF PINYIN	
INITIALS*	
c = <i>ts</i> , as in <i>rats</i> x = <i>sh</i>	q = <i>ch</i> zh = <i>j</i> z = <i>dz</i> , like the <i>ds</i> sound in <i>kids</i>
FINALS	
ai rhymes with <i>rye</i>	an = <i>ahn</i> , rhymes with <i>John</i> ang = <i>ahng</i> as in <i>angst</i>
ao rhymes with <i>cow</i>	e = <i>u</i> as in <i>bush</i> ei rhymes with <i>pay</i>
en rhymes with <i>pun</i>	eng rhymes with <i>lung</i> ia = <i>ya</i>
i sounds like <i>ee</i> after most letters, but like <i>zz</i> after <i>z</i> , <i>c</i> , and <i>s</i> , and like an <i>r</i> after <i>zh</i> , <i>ch</i> , <i>sh</i> , and <i>r</i>	ian = <i>yen</i> iang = <i>yahng</i> ie = <i>yeh</i>
iu rhymes with <i>Leo</i>	iong = <i>yawng</i> in rhymes with <i>green</i>
u rhymes with <i>boo</i> in most cases, but becomes the German <i>ü</i> after <i>j</i> , <i>q</i> , <i>x</i> , and <i>y</i>	o = <i>aw</i> ou rhymes with <i>toe</i> ua = <i>wah</i> uai = <i>wyeh</i>
un = <i>one</i> , but the vowel is as in <i>book</i>	uan = <i>wahn</i> ; but <i>wen</i> after <i>j</i> , <i>q</i> , <i>x</i> , and <i>y</i> uang = <i>wahng</i> ; vowel as in <i>angst</i> ui rhymes with <i>way</i>
	ün rhymes with <i>wün</i> uo = <i>waw</i>

*The "Initials" of this table are hereafter repeated at the bottom of every left-hand page for the reader's convenience.

c = ts; q = ch; x = sh; z = dz; zh = j