

# How to pronounce chinese names

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## Introduce yourself

- Reflections and confusions caused by Chinese (Mandarin) names
  - Chinese:
    - Should I change my name to make it easier for American people to pronounce? My name is given by my parents with such a good will though...
    - Is he/she calling my name? It sounds so weird...
  - Westerners:
    - There are indeed many chinese students and researchers in this field.
    - What did he/she say his/her name is? Geez, Chinese names are so difficult to pronounce... What am I gonna do next time we meet?
    - Hmm, here she is. Let me try, probably I can get it close. She may correct me if I am wrong ---- Xi...ao...lei....?

## Pronunciation of Mandarin chinese names – a simple introduction

- Chinese characters
- Mandarin vs. Cantonese
- The official Mandarin transliteration system of PRC -- Hanyu Pinyin, or Pinyi
- Examples of Pinyin
  - Mandarin chinese names
    - Last names: Li, Zhao, Zhang, Huang, Jiang, Qian, Sun, etc.
    - First names: Xiao-, Zhi-, Yong, Rong, Ying, Yi, Rui, etc.
  - City names
    - Beijing, Shanghai, Xi-an, Gui-lin, etc.
- Pinyin is generally pronounced pretty similar to English, though there are a few small “significant” differences.

## Pinyin Pronunciation (cont'd)

- **Vowels**
  - **a** as the 'a' in "father" – note this – It's not like in "bang"! "Chang" does not rhyme with "bang," but rather with "bong."
  - **ai** as the 'i' in "I" or "die"
  - **ao** as the 'ow' in "cow"
  - **e** as the 'ur' in "blur" (British pronunciation) or the 'u' in "but"
  - **ei** as the 'ay' in "way" or the 'ei' in "weigh"
  - **i** as the 'ee' in "meet," BUT after c, ch, r, s, sh, z or zh it sounds like the 'er' in "her" (British pronunciation) or the 'o' in "woman" (American pronunciation)
  - **ian** as the "yen"
  - **ie** as the 'ye' in "yet"

## Pinyin Pronunciation (cont'd)

- **iu** as the 'io' in "O solo mio"
- **o** as the 'o' in "or"
- **ou** as the 'oa' in "boat" or 'oe' in "Joe"
- **u** as the 'u' in "flute" (American pronunciation) or 'oo' in "woo" (British) BUT after q, j, x and y, as a German umlauted u
- **ü** As in the German umlauted u, sometimes written as 'v', e.g., last names: Yu (Yv), Lu (Lv).
- **ue** is difficult, as it doesn't have a very good equivalent in English. It's basically an umlauted *u* followed by an "e" sound, as in "wet." Pronouncing this is one of the hardest things for students of Mandarin.
- **ui** as "way"
- **uo** as "war" (British pronunciation)

## Pinyin Pronunciation (cont'd)

### ▪ Consonants

- **c** as the 'ts' in "bits" or the Russian "tsar"
- **ch** as in English, but with the tongue curled back
- **j** as the 'j' in "Joe" – a hard J, NOT as Dan Rather pronounces it!
- **h** a guttural, as in the Scottish "loch"
- **q** basically like ch, but with the tongue further forward than in English
- **r** as the 's' in "pleasure"
- **sh** as in English, but with the tongue curled back

## Pinyin Pronunciation (cont'd)

- **x** basically like sh, but with the tongue further forward than in English
- **z** as the 'ds' in "suds"
- **zh** as the 'j' in "judge" but with the tongue curled back
- Phonetic Spellings
  - “Qingdao” might be ‘Ching dow’.
  - “Beijing” could be spelled ‘Bay jeeng’.
  - “Xiaolei” might be “Shyau-Ley”

## PinYin in common last names

- Cao, Cai, Chen,
- Gao, Guo,
- Huang, Jiang
- Li, Lin, Liu, Luo, Lü
- Ma, Qiao
- Wang, Wu, Xu, Yang, Yu, Ye
- Zhang, Zeng, Zhu, Zhou, Zou, Zhuang

## PinYin in common first names

- Chun Cong Gong Guo
- Hui Hua Hui Kuo
- Jian Juan Guang Kuan
- Liang Luo Long Lian Jun Jie jia
- Qing Qiang Qiu Que Qi Rui Shou Tian
- Xuan Xiang Xiao Xiong Xiu Xin Xie Xia
- Ying Yang Yan Yi
- Zhen Zhi Zong Zhe

## Discussion

- What do you think is a good, practical solution?
  - Notes on pronunciation
    - Xiaolei Huang \shyau-IA 'hwä[ng] \ ?
  - Long chinese names?
    - Sharon xiaolei huang
  - Phonetic spellings to replace names?
  - How to make the few small “significant” differences between “pinyin” and English widely known to people?
  - Your two cents?

## References

- Rachel's Pages – Chinese names for gamers  
– <http://www.jiawen.net/Chinesenames.html>
- Rutgers DCS Student Web pages