

Chinese books are traditionally written from top to bottom, right to left, and bound with the spine on the right-hand side. In China today, publications, except calligraphy which still follows this tradition, are usually printed in the style used in the West. However, in Taiwan most newspapers, literary works and many other publications are still presented in the traditional style.

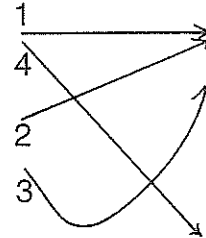
4 Pronunciation

As Chinese had no symbols to represent the sound of the words, in 1918 the Government of the Republic of China proclaimed thirty-nine symbols to represent the sounds. These phonetic symbols, i.e. ㄅ ㄆ ㄇ ㄏ ... were named zhùyīn fúhào [注音符號] in 1930 and thirty-seven of them are still in use in Taiwan and many Chinese communities overseas. As these symbols are not easy to learn, Westerners have adopted various ways of using Roman letters, such as the Wade-Giles system and the Yale system, to represent each Chinese sound. In 1958, the Government of the People's Republic of China introduced another Romanisation system, called *Pinyin* [pīnyīn 拼音]. Pinyin is now used in China and is an international system to express the sounds of the Chinese language as well as to spell Chinese names and places. The Pinyin system contains:

Initials		b	p	m	f		d	t	n	l
		g	k	h			j	q	x	
		zh	ch	sh	r		z	c	s	
		(y)	(w)							
Vowels	single	a	o	e	i	u	ü			
	double	ai	ei	ui	ao	ou	iu	ie	üe	er
	nasal	an	en	in	un	ün				
		ang	eng	ing	ong					
Special sounds		zhi	chi	shi	ri	zi	ci	si		
		yi	wu	yu						
		ye	yue	yin						
		yun	yuan	ying						

The pronunciation of the letters in the Pinyin system is somewhat different from that of English. Modern Chinese has 430 sounds, far less than the number of characters, therefore many characters share the same sound. The use of tone (pitch) is an important way to tell the differences in meaning of the same sound. There are four tones in the Chinese language.

- 1st tone: high level pitch
- / 2nd tone: rising in pitch
- ∨ 3rd tone: low dipping pitch
- 、 4th tone: abrupt falling in pitch



A change of tone will change the meaning of a sound. For example:

妈 mā	means	mother		八 bā	means	eight
麻 má	means	flax		拔 bá	means	to pull
马 mǎ	means	horse		靶 bǎ	means	target
骂 mà	means	to scold		爸 bà	means	father

Many characters with different meanings also share the same sound and the same tone. For example:

梅 méi—plum 眉 méi—eyebrow 煤 méi—coal

In addition to the four tones there is a neutral tone that does not carry any tone mark. Sometimes the second character of a two-character word uses a neutral tone. Some words that have only grammatical function also use a neutral tone. For example:

爸爸 bàba—father 妈妈 māma—mother 朋友 péngyou—friend
 好吗? Hǎo ma?—OK? 好啊。Hǎo a.—OK. 太好了! Tài hǎo le!—Great!



Write the characters

rén
person, people

shān
mountain

kǒu
mouth