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How to Pronounce Chinese Names
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Abstract

This document tries to give a brief introduction of how to pronounce Chinese spelling of names. After reading it, you will find it very easy to accomplish that.

Status of This Memo

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[1.](#) Background

Many Chinese people are attending IETF meetings and joining mailing list discussions (around 150 according to IETF Chairman report at Operation Plenary). Although their names are spelt using English letters, it is always not easy for English speakers to pronounce them. The essential problem is that there was not a standard while translating or mapping the Chinese names to English letters at the time. This document will not go into the details of the why this is the fact, but rather would like to serve as a tutorial for English speakers to pronounce Chinese spellings especially names correctly.

There are several translating systems from Chinese characters to Latin script, including Pinyin, Webster and Zhuyin. Most people are using Pinyin now, which is the focus of this document. This document will not help you if you encounter names spelt in other systems.

Most of the contents are referred to [[Pinyin](#)]. This document is not to accomplish a comprehensive education of pronunciation, but to educate people to start with some basic knowledge and would like to serve as a guide that that IETF people can drop by and get the correct pronounce in a quick way.

We also have submitted a companion document on how to call Chinese people in an authentic way, i.e. <http://tools.ietf.org/id/draft-deng-call-chinese-names>.

[2.](#) The Pinyin system

Pinyin is the official phonetic system for transcribing the sound of Chinese characters into Latin script in China. It is often used to teach Standard Chinese and spell Chinese names in foreign publications and may be used as an input method to enter Chinese

characters (Hanzi) into computers. 'Pinyin' literally means "spelled-out sounds."

The pinyin system was developed in the 1950s based on earlier forms of romanization. It was published by the Chinese government in 1958 and revised several times. The International Organization for Standardization adopted pinyin as the international standard in 1982.

[3.](#) How to Pronounce Pinyin Words

I will describe the simple way to learn the pronouncing system as below.

1. Divide the Pinyin syllable into one 'Initial' and one 'Final'
2. Learn how to pronounce the 'Initial' per introduction in [Section 3.1](#)
3. Learn how to pronounce the 'Final' per introduction in [Section 3.2](#)
4. Combine what you get from Step 2&3, and speak out (do not be afraid of making mistakes :))

[3.1.](#) How to Pronounce 'Initials'

Query the following table for your convenience.

Pinyin		English approximation
--------	--	-----------------------

b		unaspirated p, as in spit
---	--	---------------------------

p		strongly aspirated p, as in pit
---	--	---------------------------------

m		as in English mummy
---	--	---------------------

f		as in English fun
d		unaspirated t, as in stop
t		strongly aspirated t, as in top
n		as in English nit
l		as in English love
g		unaspirated k, as in skill

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k		strongly aspirated k, as in kill
h		roughly like the Scots ch. English h as in hay
j		No equivalent in English, but similar to 'ge' in garage
q		No equivalent in English. Like pun"ch y"ourself
x		No equivalent in English. Like -sh y-
zh		Rather like ch (a sound between choke and drew, ~~~~~ tongue tip curled more upwards)
ch		as in chin, but with the tongue curled upwards; very similar to n ~~~~~ in American English, but strongly aspirated.
sh		as in shoe, but with the tongue curled upwards; very similar to m ~~~~~ American English
r		Similar to the English z in azure and r in reduce ~~~~~
z		similar to something between suds and cats ~~~~~
c		like the English ts in cats, very similar to the Czech

		~
s		as in sun
w		as in water
y		as in yes

Figure 1: How to pronounce Initials

3.2. How to Pronounce 'Finals'

'Finals' come after 'Initials'. Generally they are more difficult to pronounce than 'Initials'. But the good thing is, unlike English equivalent, they have only one way to pronounce. Compared to 'ough' in 'Cough' and 'rough', 'cought', etc., 'Finals' are more stable.

Pinyin | Explanation

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a		as 'a' in father
e		as 'er' in 'her'
ai		like English "eye", but a bit lighter
ei		as in "hey"
ao		approximately as 'ow' in "cow"; a is much more audible than the
ou		as in "so"
an		as 'an' in "ban" in British Englis
en		as 'en' in "taken"
ang		as in German Angst
eng		like e in en above but with ng added to it at the back
er		similar to the sound of 'ar' in "bar" in American English

ia		as i + a; like 'yar' in "yard"
ie		[i?]
iao		as i + ao
iu		as i + ou
ian		like English yen
iang		as i + ang
in		as i + n
u		like English "oo"
ua		as u + a
uo		as u + o where the o is much lighter
uai		as u + ai like as in why
ui		as u + ei;
uan		as u + an;

un		as u + en; like the 'on' in the English won;
uang		as u + ang;
ong		starts with the vowel sound in book and ends with the velar nasa sound in sing

Figure 2: How to pronounce Finals in Pinyin

4. Examples

For example, how to pronounce my first name Zhen and last name Cao. For 'zhen', we can divide it into initial 'zh' and final 'en', and

then go and find them in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Okay, you will find them in the tables, 'zh' pronounces like 'ch', and 'en' follows its pronunciation in 'taken', so you will know how to pronounce it in a combination. For 'Cao', it will be similar, you can take it as an exercise and confirm with me on future IETF meetings :).

Take Hui Deng as another example, 'Hui' can be divided into 'h'(initial) and 'ui' (final), and you can speak out. 'Deng' can be divided into 'd' and 'eng'. As in Figure 2, 'g' is silent.

5. Pronunciation Dictionary for Chinese Participants

This section intends to serve as a pronunciation dictionary for Chinese participants in IETF.

Note: please advise an efficient way to accomplish this task, to benefit communication between working group chairs and working group participants from China.

6. Acknowledgement

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7. IANA Considerations

NO IANA Requests.

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8. Security Considerations

N/A.

9. Informative References

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