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[MINI LESSONS](#)
[VOCABULARY](#)
[IDIOMS](#)
[RESOURCES](#)
[CHINESE ADVERTISING](#)
[FUN](#)

Learning Chinese – Pinyin or Zhuyin?

 by [Dave Flynn](#) | 19th June, 2010 | [Study Hacks](#)
[14 Comments](#)

When you're learning Chinese in school or university, you will most likely first learn some form of Pinyin for a period of time before progressing on to learning and reading the Chinese characters themselves. While learning a phonetic alphabet is an essential part of learning Chinese, you do have a choice about which phonetic alphabet you learn, and the choice you make will affect your pronunciation, reading ability, and how fast you learn.

You're probably wondering how the choice of phonetic alphabet could have such a big influence on the learning process, after all, it's all Chinese in the end, isn't it?

While Pinyin might be easier for westerners to grasp from the outset, the use of the roman alphabet to represent the Chinese sounds may have an adverse effect on pronunciation – shouldn't a new language with unique aspects of pronunciation warrant a completely new phonetic alphabet that allows the learner to detach themselves from the pronunciation of their mother tongue?

That's where Zhuyin comes in. Zhuyin, or BoPoMoFo, is a Chinese phonetic alphabet that was used in mainland China until being replaced by Pinyin, and that is in widespread use in Taiwan. If you want to learn more about the history of Zhuyin you can read the [Wikipedia article](#).

Apart from providing a new system of pronunciation that enables you to completely remove yourself from any influence of English pronunciation, Zhuyin also has great benefits when reading Chinese. Learners of Chinese will know this all too well – that when you look at a poster or newspaper that has both English and Chinese, your eyes are automatically drawn to the English. Naturally, this problem also occurs when reading Pinyin accompanied Chinese too, and is amplified by the Pinyin being on a separate line than the Chinese. Consider the following text:

Dialogue I Discussing a Room for Rent with a Friend

小張：你今天去看房子了沒有？
Nǐ jīntiān qù kàn fáng-zǐ -le méiyǒu?

小王：看了一個公寓。我不太喜歡。
Kàn-le yí -ge gōngyù. Wǒ bú tài xǐhuān.

When learning Chinese and reading this text, the reader is forced to look away from the Chinese to read the Pinyin, subsequently overlooking the Chinese:

Dialogue I Discussing a Room for Rent with a Friend

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- [Free Pinyin-Zhuyin Mandarin Chinese Phonetics Cheat Sheet](#)

The first few weeks or months of learning Chinese is inevitably spent studying a phonetic alphabet that will enable you to pronounce the new words you will be learning. This...

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So what happened in the world of learning Chinese and Chinese related blogs this week? (well more than a week since it's been a while since the last post). How...

- [Put the Chinese dictionary down!](#)

Don't check the dictionary on your first read-through of a text. This is something that is extremely difficult to achieve, and mainly because when learning Chinese it's not easy to...