

Wade-Giles Transcription

A fair number of E574 course readings – and more sources you are likely to encounter in your research work, use the Wade-Giles system of transcription. Thomas Wade and Herbert Giles were 19th century British sinologists – Giles was a good one – who occupied in succession a chair at Cambridge and who disliked one another. They are now immortally linked in the name of a transcription system that Wade designed and Giles improved. Perhaps it is no surprise that it is an awful system. It was in general use in English until *pinyin* was developed in the 1950s, and in scholarly publication, Wade-Giles has been only gradually displaced (works that employ it still occasionally appear).

You will need to be able to recognize Wade-Giles transcription and understand how it correlates to pronunciation now more commonly rendered in *pinyin*. There are, in fact, a range of variants of Wade-Giles, but for the practical purposes of E574, a rough understanding of how the system works should be sufficient. Here, we will simply list the common forms of initial consonants, vowels, and final consonants that appear in it and explain approximately how they are pronounced.

1. Consonant sounds that may begin a word

There are 23 of these, but a few are very hard for English speakers to distinguish. Twelve of the 23 occur in paired sets, where one member of the set is “unvoiced” and has an aspiration mark (‘), while the other is “voiced” and has no such mark. Whenever a letter is followed by an ‘ it is pronounced as it is in English. When the same letter has no aspiration mark, it is pronounced differently (it is voiced). *Pinyin* equivalents appear in **red**.

Aspirated consonants

ch‘ as in chin **q or ch**
k‘ as in kin **k**
p‘ as in pin **p**
t‘ as in tin **t**
ts‘ as in its **c**
tz‘ [like **ts**‘ before ‘-u’] **c in ci**

Voiced consonants

ch like “j” in jam **j or zh**
k like “g” in gun **g**
p like “b” in bin **b**
t like “d” in din **d**
ts like “z” in zone **z**
tz [like **ts** before ‘-u’] **z in zi**

There are nine consonant initials that simply sound as they do in English and *pinyin*.

f, h, l, m, n, s, sh, w, and **y** are all similar to natural English readings

Three unusual initials are as follows:

j much like “r,” as in run (but with a slightly fricative ‘r’) **r**
hs much like “sh,” as in shoo! **x**
ss (followed by ‘-u’) like “s” **s in si**

2. Vowel sounds

Basic vowels:	a as in <u>f</u> ather	a	e like “u” in <u>u</u> p	e
	i like “ee” in <u>b</u> ee	i	o as in <u>s</u> oft	o or uo
	u as in <u>r</u> ude	u	ü as in German <u>ü</u> ber	u or ü
	eh like “e” in <u>p</u> en	e		
Exceptions:	ih sounds like the “ir” in <u>s</u> ir		i (as in zhi / chi , etc.)	
	u after ss, tz, tz' is barely pronounced		i (as in zi / ci / si)	
	u after y or i is pronounced like “oe” in <u>h</u> oe		ou	
Diphthongs:	ai like “i” in <u>i</u> ce	ai		
	ao like “ow” in <u>c</u> ow	ao		
	ei as in <u>w</u> eigh	ei		
	iu like “yeo” in <u>y</u> eoman	iu		
	ou like “o” in <u>o</u> bey	ou		
	ui like “way” in <u>w</u> ay	ui		

3. Final consonants

There are only two: **n** and **ng**, as in English son and song. (A final **h** is always silent.)