

Initials

The following chart lists all initials in Chinese according to their traditional linguistic groupings. These groupings are called an “initial set,” using the first letter of each set as its identifying marker (e.g., the *b* initial set). Each set is grouped together as such because the position of the mouth, tongue, and lips is virtually the same for each group. The formal linguistic term of each is given in parenthesis.

B INTIAL SET (LABIALS)	
b	Sounds like <i>b</i> in <i>bun</i> , but without a strong push of air
p	Sounds like the soft <i>p</i> in <i>pun</i>
m	Sounds like the <i>m</i> in <i>mud</i>
f	Sounds like the <i>f</i> in <i>fun</i>

D INITIAL SET (ALVEOLARS)

d	Sounds like the <i>d</i> in <i>done</i> , but softer
t	Sounds like the <i>t</i> in <i>ton</i>
n	Sounds like the <i>n</i> in <i>nut</i>
l	Sounds like the <i>l</i> in <i>lug</i>

G INITIAL SET (VELARS)

g	Sounds like the <i>g</i> in <i>gum</i>
k	Sounds like the <i>k</i> in <i>king</i>
h	Sounds like the <i>h</i> in <i>hum</i> , but with a moderate fricative (throaty) element

J INITIAL SET (PALATALS)

j	Sounds like the <i>j</i> in <i>Jeep</i>
q	Sounds like the <i>ch</i> in <i>cheap</i>
x	Sounds like <i>she</i> , but the lips don't move

ZH INITIAL SET (RETROFLEXES)

zh	Sounds like the <i>j</i> in <i>jerky</i>
ch	Sounds like the <i>ch</i> in <i>chirp</i>
sh	Sounds like the <i>sh</i> in <i>shirt</i>
r	First pronounce the <i>jer</i> , <i>chir</i> , and <i>shir</i> from the three initials above, then say the same vibrating sound but with an <i>r</i> sound without moving your lips

Z INITIAL SET (DENTAL SIBILANTS)

z	Pronounced like <i>dz</i> , as in <i>sud<u>s</u></i>
c	Sounds like <i>ts</i> in <i>wants</i>
s	Sounds like <i>s</i> in <i>so</i>

Y INITIAL SET (SEMI-VOWELS)

*y	Sounds like the <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i> , but is silent when followed by an <i>i</i>
*w	or <i>u</i>
*yü	Sounds like the <i>w</i> in <i>won</i> Say <i>oo</i> with pursed lips, then say <i>ee</i> inside your mouth without moving your lips
