

## *Problematic Initials and Finals*

Several initials and finals require additional explanation. As indicated by an \* in the charts above, the initials *y*, *w*, and *yü* overlap with finals *i*, *u*, and *ü* in many instances. For example, *yao* and *biao* make the same sound (minus the *b*). The following sections will explain the individual differences in more detail.

**Y/I:** The letter *y* replaces *i* when no other initial is present.

Go through the following chart, column by column. Notice that each set of three syllables rhymes. The syllables *yi* and *ying* are italicized below to indicate that the *y* is silent.

<i>yi</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>ye</i>	<i>you</i>
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bi	lia	biao	mie	diu
mi	jia	piao	die	niu

yan	yang	<i>ying</i>	yong
jian	qiang	ming	jiong
qian	xiang	ting	qiong

In the case of *diu* and *niu* (also with *m*-, *l*-, and the *j* initial set), the *you* becomes *iu* (i.e., the *o* is dropped); the pronunciation is the same as *you*.

**W/U:** The letter *w* is used instead of *u* when no other initial is present, as the following chart illustrates.

wu	wo	wai	wei	wan	wang	<i>wen</i>
bu	duo	huai	cui	shuan	guang	dun
fu	guo	chuai	sui	duan	kuang	lun

Unlike *yi*, *wu* is pronounced with a strong *w* sound in China, but in Taiwan it is normally just pronounced as *oo* (without a *w* initial). In the case of *cui* and *sui*, the *e* in *wei* is dropped. Also, note that the vowel sound for *wen* is slightly different than its counterparts. *Wen* sounds like the English word *one*, whereas *-un* in Chinese is pronounced like *woo* from *wood* plus an *n*.

**YÜ/Ü:** The combination *yü* is used when no initial precedes the *ü*.

yü	yüe	yüan	yün
nü	xüe	jüan	jün
lü	lüe	qüan	xün

The only initials that are combined with *ü* are *n* and *l*, as well as *y*, *j*, *q*, and *x*. One

point of ambiguity in *pīnyīn* is the fact that the latter four initials cannot be combined with *u*, only with *ü*. However, *n* and *l* can be combined with both *u* and *ü*. As a result, *ü* (with the umlaut) is used to differentiate between *nǔ* (diligent) and *nǚ* (girl), *lù* (road) and *lǜ* (green). However, because *y*, *j*, *q*, and *x* can only take *ü* and not *u*, for “simplicity” the two dots on the *ü* are left off, even though they are still pronounced as if an umlaut was there. Thus the chart above would be more accurately written as *yu*, *yue*, *yuan*, *yun*, etc. The umlaut was included for you to get the right first impression. Committing the following mnemonic to memory will help mitigate the ambiguity of when to pronounce the *ü*:

*Initials N and L*  
*Can do them both quite well;*  
*For Y, X, Q, and J*  
*The umlaut “stays” away.*