A GUIDE TO CHINESE LYRIC DICTION AND VOCAL REPERTOIRE

Singing in Mandarin

KATHERINE CHU AND JULIET PETRUS

With a Foreword by BRIGHT SHENG

Guides to Lyric Diction
A Rowman & Littlefield Music Series

Series Editor: Timothy Cheek

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Singing in Mandarin

A Guide to Chinese Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire

Katherine Chu

Juliet Petrus

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Dedicated to Tian, Martha, Fugen and iSING!

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About the performers:

ZHOU Xiaolin has firmly established herself as one of the most sought-after sopranos in a new generation of Chinese opera singers. While she is seen regularly on the stage of National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing and other major Chinese theaters as a leading lady in standard Western repertoire, she is deeply committed to the performance of contemporary Chinese opera. Leading roles in such works as *Poet Li Bai, The Chinese Orphan, Visitors on the Snow Mountain, Rickshaw Boy,* and *Marco Polo* have taken her across China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Italy. Ms. ZHOU graduated from Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music with top honors and is a former young artist at Central City Opera in the United States. She was the top prize recipient in China's prestigious "Music Golden Bell Award," as well as the Neue Stimmen International Competition in Germany.

Bass WU Wei is a native of China, having recently made his company debut with the Santa Fe Opera as Kobun in the world premiere production of *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, for which he recently won a Grammy Award. Other recent engagements include performances with the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, where he was also a member of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, the, Glyndebourne Festival**,** and Washington Concert Opera**.** Future seasons include his debut with San Francisco Opera and a return to Washington National Opera. Mr. WU also made his Alice Tully Hall debut singing in concert with performers from China's iSING International Young Artist Festival**.** Mr. Wu was a young artist at Central City Opera covering Li Bai in Poet Li Bai in Colorado and on their subsequent tour in Rome, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Denver and Los Angeles. Mr. WU was a regional finalist and district special award winner (Rocky Mountain Region) for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition. He received degrees from the People's University of China, Beijing, and the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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Series Editor's Foreword

With *Singing in Mandarin*, the fifth book in the *Lyric Diction* series, we have traveled from Europe (*Singing in Czech*, *Singing in Greek*, and *Singing in Polish*) to South America (*Singing in Brazilian Portuguese*), and now to Asia. Each book in the series, too, has progressively moved through countries with more and more speakers of their respective languages, from native speakers of Czech (around ten million) to native speakers of Mandarin (around one billion). Given this enormous number of Mandarin speakers, the widespread interest in Mandarin language study throughout English-speaking countries (from elementary school on up), the global importance of China and its many resources, and the rich cultural history of this fascinating country—the publication of *Singing in Mandarin* at this point in the Twenty-First century is certainly well timed, very welcome, and highly significant.

This book comes at a time, too, when the song recital is evolving, sometimes by merging with other art forms and sometimes by exploring neglected repertoire. By their very nature, songs exquisitely reflect not only the feelings and thoughts of the composer and poet, but the era and culture in which they were written. This is certainly apparent in the rich vocal works of China and Taiwan.

With *Singing in Mandarin*, Chinese pianist Katherine Chu and American soprano Juliet Petrus have come together as an ideal team to create this landmark achievement. Through their passionately committed work, not only do we now have access to beautiful repertoire, but a door to the rich culture of China and its multilayered history has been opened for us. The authors anticipate every challenge for native English speakers and describe the sounds of Mandarin with clarity and logic, ingeniously using both the International Phonetic Alphabet and Pinyin as tools. Two native speakers demonstrate the sounds through an easily accessible online recording. Poets, composers, and a vast repertoire are presented,

while cultural and historical context illuminate each work. The book is fascinating and exciting to read, so that the reader is eager to master every step on the way to a successful performance. Thank you for this truly great resource!

TIMOTHY CHEEK

Foreword

As a composer and conductor, I often notice a worrisome feeling among non-Chinese singers when they have to sing in Mandarin (or 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà* as people in China call it). This is partially due to their confusion of singing in Mandarin with speaking in Mandarin.

For most non-native speakers, conversing in Mandarin is a rather daunting task. This is primarily due to two main challenging aspects of the language: (1) some of its consonants and vowels are difficult to pronounce, and (2) because Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language and each word consists of a single syllable, the comprehension of a speech is primarily delivered by context, and by the tones assigned to each word. Each tone delivers an important property of meaning, and the wrong tone applied to a word would cause miscommunication. Furthermore, even with the same exact consonant, vowel, and tone, there are still numerous homophones and homonyms, often dozens of them. To master all this would take years of practice.

When one sings in Mandarin, the second challenging aspect of the language (the more complicated of the two) should have been already settled by the composer. This leaves a singer only the need to manage mostly the first aspect for singing in Mandarin: to pronounce the difficult consonants and vowels correctly, especially when some of them might seem at odds with Western singing technique. I would like to add that it is similarly trying even for a native Chinese singer to sing the language comprehensibly while maintaining principles of their Western-style technique.

To date, there has been no major literature on Mandarin diction. So, I am extremely grateful to learn of the birth of this valuable and pioneering book by Katherine Chu and Juliet Petrus. The publication of *Singing in Mandarin* satisfies a void in the singing world. I am also glad to see excerpts of songs set to Mandarin

text included, and the discussion on the history of song writing in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: both provide a welcoming perspective on the lineage of the genre. The availability of this book in English would not only make it easily accessible to non-Chinese readers, it also disseminates this small but important repertoire to other parts of the world. I hope it also opens a much-awaited discussion on the subject among all concerned parties and professionals.

BRIGHT SHENG

Preface

The idea for writing a Chinese diction book began when we first met in 2011. Juliet had been invited to the inaugural season of the iSING! program, conceived and founded by the Chinese-American bass Hao Jiang Tian. The mission of this program, to use music as a way of promoting cross-cultural understanding and to establish Mandarin as a lyric language, has truly become our own and is the reason that we have created this book. Katherine was the Program Director and a member of the faculty. Juliet had always had a fascination with Chinese culture but had never had the opportunity to travel to China. We bonded over our love of classical music, singing, foreign languages and a shared passion for education. Many discussions centered around how more singers could be introduced to this beautiful and fascinating repertoire. Both of us had gone through the rigorous diction training of our respective North American universities and conservatories, and both of us had an obsession for the analysis of sound, how it was produced and how it could be taught. We agreed that the vital first step in getting this "new" repertoire to Western singers and to academia required a necessary tool: a diction book.

The thought of writing a diction book about a language that is thousands of years old and spoken by 1.4 billion people on the planet is simply daunting. The regional accents and idiosyncrasies, idiomatic usage, drastically changed written language throughout the millennia (dare we say, changes probably more pronounced than the difference between Middle English and Modern English) and the sheer challenge of rendering a language so far from the comfort zone of the Indo-European language family into some kind of graspable linguistic equivalent, have presented us with not only mind-boggling conundrums but also enormous satisfactions. As with a native speaker in any language, Katherine has had to re-examine linguistically everything she had been doing since childhood when trying to explicate the sometimes inexplicably bizarre pronunciation phenomena of

Mandarin in Western terms. As an astute observer and skilled practitioner of lyric dictions, Juliet has been able to shed light on unlocking these mysteries based on her own experience of utilizing every miniscule muscle movement and re-creating every sensation in the chambers of resonance and points of articulation. Together we hope to have created a book that truly embodies the philosophy of gleaning the best of the Western system and applying it to the best of Eastern essence, an approach very much in keeping with the vision and aspiration of all the Chinese composers and musicians who vowed to give Chinese music a distinct national character and international voice.

We both believe that Chinese repertoire deserves to be introduced to the world and feel strongly that through the study of diction and repertoire, a fascinating history will be revealed like traveling through time and space. We hope that *Singing in Mandarin* will begin to open this repertoire to new audiences across the globe, removing bricks in the wall to instead build a road between East and West.

Acknowledgments

We would first like to thank the people who first brought us together and have inspired us so greatly, Hao Jiang Tian, Martha Liao, and the iSING! initiative. We especially thank WEI Fugen for his impassioned conversations about Chinese art song, whose ideas helped to give us direction.

We would like to thank Dr. Timothy Cheek for his belief in the project. Without him, this project may not have come to fruition. We likewise thank Natalie Mandziuk, Michael Tan, and our publishers, Rowman and Littlefield, for bringing *Singing in Mandarin* to life.

We want to thank our research assistant Sydelle Qingge Li for leading us down many inspired and unexpected paths in the discovery of Chinese musical history. Daniel Todd, our colleague and equal in love of sound, provided us with many hours of thought-provoking conversation, as well as proofreading and editing as the project came to a close. JIA Xiaoke was incredibly generous with his time in answering a myriad of questions regarding his pronunciation as a native Beijinger. Tia Yuting Xiao, and Fannings Harte were our gurus of acquisition and technology, who spent hours upon hours detangling the convoluted web of secondhand book websites, software malfunctions, language-conversion inconsistencies, and incredibly difficult-to-find resources. We would like to thank Professor Julian Wheatley for his support and suggestions for materials which guided our path. We also thank Professor Sang-Im Lee-Kim for her time and for sharing her expertise on a very specialized field of Chinese linguistics. We are grateful to be surrounded by such wonderful colleagues and people who like to talk about diction and have endured random messaging and questions regarding sounds and their own personal experiences with singing and speaking in Mandarin.

Juliet would personally like to thank WEI Fugen, Hao Jiang Tian, Lydia Qiu, and FAN Jingma from whom she has learned so much about Chinese diction and interpretation over the years. She also thanks friend and linguist, Anja Pfeiffer, who was a sounding board in the early stages of preparation, helping her wade through the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Juliet would likewise like to thank her current Chinese teacher, Joanna Lee, for her wonderful instruction and understanding in needing to miss class while she completes this book. She thanks her Mom Janet, Dad Mike, stepdad Michael, sister Jessica, her family, and chosen family for their endless support and cheerleading. Juliet lovingly thanks her husband, Adolfo, and their son, Amedeo, who have had to endure so much time apart as she follows her life's work. She can only do so because she carries their love in her heart always.

Katherine would like to thank her partner, whose wisdom and calm have kept her afloat in managing two full-time jobs while writing the book.

Juliet and Katherine would like to thank their family and friends for their unending support, and for never tiring of asking "So, where are you now?"

KATHERINE CHU AND JULIET PETRUS

Part One

The Sounds of Mandarin Chinese

Introduction to Part One

With nearly 1.4 billion people speaking the official language of the most populous country in the world, Mandarin remains enigmatic and distant for many Westerners. It is a fascinating notion to think that this language is almost three thousand years old and unbroken in its linguistic lineage.[1] In the last century, vocabulary has been enlarged, written language has been simplified, style and usage have been modernized, and teaching methods have been revolutionized. All of these reforms have contributed to the survival and continued diffusion of this language in the new millennia, with all its technological advances and demands.

Mandarin-speakers have numerous ways of referring to their language: in Mainland China, it is *pǔtōnghuà*, meaning "common language" or *hànyǔ*, language of the Han tribe, to which the majority of Chinese belong, or *zhōngwén*, the language of China. In Taiwan, it is known as *guóyǔ*, meaning national language; Singaporeans refer to it as *huáyǔ*, meaning the language of Hua, which is another way of calling Chinese people. But for the Chinese diaspora worldwide, and for everyone else, both "Chinese" and "Mandarin" are used to refer to this ancient and intriguing language whose usage is only becoming more critical in the Twenty-First Century.

Strictly speaking, the term "Chinese" may be convincingly argued that it is not a single language, but a group of regional languages.[2] With some of these regional languages being mutually unintelligible, it was necessary to find a common language to unite the people. Literally meaning "the language of the officials,[3]" Mandarin was the most widely spread and uniform dialect, spoken by the population in three-fourths of the Chinese territory.[4] Therefore, it became the "lingua franca,[5]" Standard Mandarin. Standard Mandarin is to Mandarin what *Hochdeutsch* is to German. It is based on the northern dialect spoken in the Yellow River basin and Manchuria, to which the dialect of Beijing also belongs.[4]

Accents within Mainland China vary greatly from region to region and city to city, not to mention differences heard in Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and all of the overseas Chinese.

Through numerous linguistic resources, as well as listening to native Mandarin speakers from all regions, this book hopes to establish for singing a language which has been previously overlooked as a lyric diction.

Chinese Characters

Written Chinese is a pictorial, not a phonetic language. Its basic fundamental unit is a written character, a type of logogram, known as a *zì* in Chinese. When pronounced, each character is a single syllable. A character can sometimes carry an independent meaning. However, a character can also be combined with one or two other characters to form another independent meaning. This combination of characters generates what we commonly recognize as words and phrases, known as a *cí* in Chinese.

The logograms themselves can be categorized into various groups, according to their origin and intention, some of which are:

- A pictogram, a pictorial symbol for a word, such as water;
- An ideogram, a graphic symbol that expresses both concrete and abstract ideas such as up or down;
- A hybrid, which can be a combination of pictogram and ideograms. Many characters are indeed in this semantic-phonetic combination, with a portion of the character that imparts the meaning, and another portion that dictates the pronunciation

mǎ (horse)[6]

Traditional and Simplified Characters

Chinese characters currently exist in two forms, *traditional characters* 繁體字 *fántǐzì* and *simplified characters* 简体字 *jiǎntǐzì*. Traditional and simplified are both pictographs. Traditional characters have intricate depictions; simplified characters are a simpler derivative of these depictions. Comparing the word for "noodles" in traditional characters versus simplified characters, it is possible to see that the right-hand side of the traditional character becomes the whole of the simplified character:

traditional character	simplified character
麵 *miàn*	面 *miàn*

The use of traditional versus simplified characters does not affect the pronunciation of a syllable. Simplified mainly reduces the number of strokes, the

drawn segments needed to create each character. Traditional characters were historically used by all Chinese speakers prior to MAO Zedong's campaign to simplify the written language in the attempt to increase literacy in Mainland China.

Tones

Mandarin is a tonal language, giving it a certain musicality. This goes beyond the inflection in Western languages controlled by the speaker to add meaning to the sentence: the correct pitching of the four tones is absolutely necessary to convey the correct meaning of words.

There are four distinct tones in Mandarin, five if accounting for the "neutral tone" always assigned to unstressed words. Singing essentially eliminates tones. Still, even well-set text will need to bend to the musical line. Therefore, audiences must rely on clear pronunciation, context, and supertitles, which are ever-present in certain types of concert settings in Mainland China.

The tones in spoken Mandarin are referred to by their ordinal numbers, first tone, second tone, third tone, and fourth tone. The pitch of the tone is specific to each person and their voice's range and stays consistent throughout speech. Native speakers will generally return to the same pitches for all of the tones. The following chart illustrates a rough musical estimation of where each tone lies and its pathway. Note that the staff does not represent any particular clef. Instead, it should be viewed as a comfortable, speakable span of about a fifth, specific to each voice. "First Tone, Second Tone," and so on, has been written below the staff, and below that, the word "ma" with markings above. This "ma" is an example of Pinyin used in this book, which will be explained shortly. The marking above the vowel indicates which tone the syllable receives and attempts to visually represent the melodic direction of each tone.

First Tone	Second Tone	Third Tone	Fourth Tone
mā	*má*	*mǎ*	*mà*

The first tone is the most sung of the tones. It is a single, high, sustained tone. A first tone will be different for each voice type. Often, first time Mandarin learners will attempt to imitate the exact pitch of their teachers, which, if too high for their natural voice, may lead to fatigue. This is quickly remedied when the student finds the first tone pitch suited to their voice.

The second tone is a rising tone, starting approximately a third below the first tone and rising to the pitch of the first tone. To some, it resembles the rising

inflection used at the end of a sentence to indicate a question by some speakers in North American English. It is often confused in execution by non-native speakers with the third tone which also has a rising quality.

The third tone is a falling-rising tone, beginning as low as comfortable in the speaker's voice and then rising, but not to the height of the second tone. In spoken Mandarin, the third tone often contains an element of "vocal fry" before ascending.

The fourth tone is a fast, descending tone, covering the most distance of the tones, beginning at the most-comfortable high pitch and falling quickly to the bottom of the range of the speaker. It has a similar sound to emphatic inflection added to show conclusion at the end of a sentence in English.[7]

The fifth "tone," the "neutral tone," which is applied to unstressed syllables, does not have a marking, although it may be written with a simple dot above the vowel to intentionally distinguish from the other four tones.

As already mentioned, the usage of the correct tones is absolutely necessary for being understood in spoken Mandarin. To see them in action, look at the two phrases in Pinyin: *shùi jiào* and *shǔi jiǎo.* The written Pinyin is identical, except for tones above the syllables. There would be no issue telling the two words apart if looking at the Chinese characters, 睡觉 and 水饺. But, the first one means "to sleep" and the second one means "steamed dumplings." Tones are the only difference between drifting off to dream land or resting on a bed of fluffy dumplings.

In the exercises in upcoming chapters, Chinese characters are followed by their Pinyin with tone markings, as well as International Phonetic Alphabet symbols. The tone markings are included as an extra level of education for the reader, and it is encouraged to use them during the spoken examples. If, however, they are causing frustration, it is suggested to use the first tone—single, high sustained—to intone all of the sounds. The execution of correct tones has little application in actual singing, but it does have impact on interpretation (discussed in Chapter 7), which is why they are included in this text.

Adding to the conundrum of pronouncing with the correct tones is the fact that there are many homophones in Chinese. These characters sound exactly the same, both in pronunciation and in tone. How is it possible to differentiate? Without reading the Chinese characters, it is impossible. In speaking, there is context, thankfully. The third-person pronouns *he*, *she,* and *it* are all pronounced *tā* with the exact same tone—the first tone. However, the written character for each one of these homophones is different: 他, 她, 它. Therefore, in reading one might know that a boy or a girl or an animal/object is being referred to, but in speaking, one can rely on context.

Chinese characters are written without any tones being indicated. Between the completely unphonetic writing system and the lack of tone indication, teaching Chinese to non-native speakers seems rather challenging, but learning to read it for the natives is no less difficult.

Pinyin and Transliteration

In 1954, a spelling system using the Roman alphabet to express how Chinese characters are pronounced, called Pinyin, was developed by ZHOU Youguang. The character *pīn* means "to piece together" and the character *yīn* means "sound." Pinyin is therefore the "piecing together of sounds," hence a system that spells out the pronunciation. Furthermore, the Pinyin system also often includes the tone indication, making it truly the pronunciation guide for non-native learners of Chinese, and at the same time a learning aid for native Chinese children starting to read. Since the invention of Pinyin, the literacy rate in China has grown exponentially. Pinyin transformed this incredibly difficult written language into a language that can be learned phonetically and expressed in a systematic way. In the technology-driven world of today, Pinyin is the indispensable input method for millions of people using their cell phones and computers. Mr. ZHOU, the inventor of Pinyin, could not have possibly imagined the transformative power of his invention.

At first glance, Chinese characters may resemble a tangled web of lines, slashes, and dashes randomly thrown into shapes, but upon further study a rich tapestry of patterns, aesthetics, and philology emerges. Grammar and syntax exist in Mandarin just like in every other language, but written Mandarin does not concern itself with showing grammatical elements in the writing. To a Western language speaker, it is interesting to note that there is no verb conjugation, use of tense, plural and gender declensions, definite or indefinite articles, adverbial or adjectival endings. None of those elements are manifested in the written form of this language: characters look the same no matter what grammatical changes are happening. To indicate tense, plurality, adverbial or adjectival endings, various characters must be added at specific places within the sentence. Pinyin, however, besides providing a system for phonetic transcription of Chinese characters, begins to show the concept of semantics and syntax in the way that words are spelled out. The monosyllabic characters that are combined to form words are now transcribed into Pinyin no longer as monosyllables but as polysyllables of words which must hang together to convey a certain meaning.

床前明月光
疑是地上霜
举头望明月
低头思故乡

chuángqián míngyuè guāng
yíshì dìshàng shuāng
jǔtóu wàng míngyuè
dītóu sī gùxiāng

The idea of the space bar was never part of the Chinese writing system, but with Pinyin, it is now used to separate different phrasal components. To use another example, *hàn yǔ* are written in Pinyin like *hànyǔ*—suddenly a polysyllabic expression meaning "Chinese language."

Pinyin was not the first transliteration system of Chinese characters. Over the centuries, one of the most widely used systems was known as "Wade-Giles." Created by Sir Thomas Francis Wade, a British ambassador to China, and later refined by Professor Herbert Allen Giles, it was published in Giles's *Chinese-English Dictionary* in 1912. For many years, this remained the primary system for Romanization. However, it presented a number of issues. First, it was "based on the language of Beijing,[8]" which, as will be discussed throughout the book, includes regional sounds not used throughout the whole of China. Second, it indicated aspirated sounds with the addition of an apostrophe ('), as in *t'* to represent an aspirated *t.* The addition of this small symbol was easily missed or misinterpreted, as there were a number of other diacritical symbols added to letters to indicate various changes. Lastly, one sound could have multiple ways of being written. For example, the sound [s], could be written in Wade-Giles as *s, ss,* or *sz.* In addition to tones written as superscript numbers, as in $t'a^{1}$, many complained that it was simply too visually disruptive to allow for an easy flow of reading.

Another system known as *Zhuyin Fuhao*, literally "sound-notation symbols," was taking shape right around the time as Wade-Giles, but this one was created by the Chinese for their own language. Zhuyin Fuhao took a completely different approach to transliteration, assigning a group of thirty-nine symbols to indicate the various sounds in Chinese.[9, 10] In many cases, these symbols were derived from Chinese characters, but are simple enough for a non-native speaker to learn and utilize. This was the Chinese national standard from 1918 until the creation of Pinyin in 1954, although it is still used in Taiwan today.

These were not the only two systems created for Chinese transliteration. Other systems came into being in an effort to make the language more accessible. This can account for the myriad of ways one might see a local Chinese restaurant signage written. The Pinyin for the province of Canton has officially changed to Guangdong, but we will always continue to use Cantonese to mean the people, language, and culture from Guangdong, in any Western language. When we speak about the cuisine from the province of Sichuan, we still say and write Szechuan-style cooking. When Ping, Pang, and Pong in Puccini's *Turandot* refer to their nostalgic abode, they call it "Honan," not *Henan*, which is how the name of the province is transliterated into Pinyin currently. The official English names of the two famous universities in China will always be Peking University and Tsinghua University, and not Beijing or Qinghua Universities.

Since Pinyin is the most widely used spelling system, it will be the baseline reference when discussing Mandarin diction in this book. Desiring to stay in alignment with the standard method of teaching lyric diction, this book will employ the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which for many singers is still considered the comfort zone.

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Pinyin

The International Phonetic Alphabet, abbreviated as IPA for the remainder of this text, is a method of symbols representing sounds found in human language and is used by linguists and those studying the sounds of language, including classical singers, across the globe.

Throughout Part One, both Pinyin and IPA will accompany the Chinese characters. While IPA is familiar and perhaps more comfortable for classically trained singers, it is Pinyin that a native speaker will know as a way to communicate sounds from Chinese characters. Ultimately, it will be worthwhile, and in many cases easier, for users of this book to learn and pronounce Pinyin directly. But, until that level of comfort is achieved, IPA will always be made available to illustrate the sounds.

While IPA symbols have changed over the years in an effort to become more linguistically inclusive—or "International"—the symbols still do not suffice in application to Mandarin. After much analysis, *Singing in Mandarin* has decided to use two symbols not officially found in IPA. This is done in order to best communicate Mandarin sounds which currently struggle to be defined, while remaining within the existing framework of lyric diction study and still being true to the language. This will be discussed further in upcoming chapters.

IPA symbols chosen throughout this text have been done so for their application to *lyric singing*—singing relating to a classical style, such as opera, art song, and the like—and the needs of the lyric singer. In some cases, they will therefore deviate from the symbols assigned to spoken Mandarin and may also differ from the diction used in popular or folk styles of singing. These choices are an intentional analysis of the language specifically for art song and operatic repertoire.

Exercises

The exercises in *Singing in Mandarin* are designed to help the reader re-create the sounds in Mandarin to as native sounding a level as possible. While it is possible that those interested in learning to sing in Mandarin have had exposure to other lyric dictions, mainly Italian, German, or French—and parallels to sounds in these languages are used where applicable—the exercises attempt to break down the sounds in Mandarin to the most basic level. In many cases, exercises are designed to simply bring awareness to how sounds are created in the mouth so that they can be changed or manipulated into the sounds found in Mandarin. Because every person has a different style of learning, multiple exercises are often included to illustrate different viewpoints of the same sound. If one exercise resonates, it is not necessary to complete all of them.

Mandarin words used as examples in this text are chosen because of their frequency found in song repertoire. Each syllable may exist in Mandarin with a

variety of tones, but space dictates that only some examples be included. Speaking the examples with tones adds an extra level of education, but the book is focused on how the sounds are sung. Therefore, if necessary, tones may be excluded and syllables "sung" on the first tone, or on notes of the reader's choosing.

Finally, a disclaimer. Being that *Singing in Mandarin* is the first text to officially attempt to formalize Mandarin as a lyric language, it is understood and to be expected that not all native speakers will agree with the analysis of sounds. Where possible, all standard deviations and points of view will be presented. The hope is that *Singing in Mandarin* will open up a greater conversation about what *is* Mandarin as a lyric language. With its rich history and over one billion speakers worldwide, it deserves to take its place on stage.

Notes

1. Yuen Ren Chao, *Mandarin Primer: An Intensive Course in Spoken Chinese,* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Harvard University Press, 1961, 1948), 3-4.

2. Julian K. Wheatley, PhD, *Chinese Verbs and Essentials of Grammar,* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 1.

3. Victor H. Mair, "What is Chinese, Dialect/Topolect? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistics Terms," *Sino-Platonic Papers,* 29, September 1991. http://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp029_chinese_dialect.html (accessed April 1, 2020)

4. Chao, *Mandarin Primer: An Intensive Course in Spoken Chinese,* 6.

5. Wheatley, *Chinese Verbs and Essentials of Grammar,* 3.

6. Etymology of Chinese characters from www.hanziyuan.net, © 1994-2017 Richard Sears. "Chinese Etymology 字源." http://hanziyuan.net/. (accessed December 15, 2019)

7. Julian K. Wheatley, *Learning Chinese: A Foundation Course in Mandarin*, from MIT Open Courseware, https://ocw.mit.edu/resources/res-21g-003-learning-chinese-a-foundation-course-in-mandarin-spring-2011/online-textbook/part-i-introduction-units-1-4-character-lessons-1-3/MITRES_21G_003S11_pinyin.pdf. (accessed February 20, 2019), 20.

8. Ulrich Theobald, "The Wade-Giles Transcription System." chinaknowledge.de, March 25, 2011. http://www.chinaknowledge.de/Literature/Script/wadegiles.html. (accessed December 12, 2019)

9. Ulrich Theobald, "The Zhuyin Alphabet 注音字母 Transcription System (Bo-Po-Mo-Fo)."chinaknowledge.de March 23, 2011 http://www.chinaknowledge.de/

10. Literature/Script/zhuyin.html. (accessed December 11, 2019)

11. Paul Taele and Tracy Hammond, "BopoNoto: An Intelligent Sketch Education Application for Learning Zhuyin Phonetic Script," 101-107. 10.18293/DMS2015-031. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-thirty-seven-symbols-that-represent-the phonetic-system-of-zhuyin-ie-zhuyin_fig5_300465467. (accessed November 29, 2019)

1

Common-Ground Consonants

When approaching all things new—language, culture, country, people, or endeavor—it is easy to become overwhelmed with and focus only on the differences. The secret to success is, of course, to find the similarities and build off of knowledge that already exists. Even in a language as different from English as Chinese, there is common ground in unfamiliar territory.

In *Singing in Mandarin*, written Roman letters represent sounds in Pinyin (usually with, but sometimes without, their tone marking) and will appear in *italics.* IPA will always appear in [brackets]. It should be emphasized that correct tones are not necessary in singing, as the composer is responsible for whether or not the written notes will have any relationship to the tones of spoken speech. Therefore, while the tones are included, if they are proving cumbersome, they can be omitted in the spoken practice. Syllables can simply be intoned on a comfortably sung note. But, choosing to attempt them will add an extra level of spoken Chinese language learning along the way.

Pinyin:	*wǒ*	*zhù*	*cháng*	*jiāng*	*tóu*
Chinese characters:	我	住	长	江	头
IPA:	[wɔ	tʂu	tʂ^{h}ɑŋ	tɕjɑŋ	t^{h}oʊ]
Translation	(I	live (at the)	Yangtze	River's	head)

Chinese, as discussed previously, is not a phonetic language. There is no alphabet indicating phonetic sounds. It was with the creation of the Pinyin system

that Western language speakers gained a better organized system for transliterating Chinese characters into sounds more familiar to them.[1]

All Chinese syllables end in either a vowel sound, or a vowel sound plus an *-n* or an *-ng* sound, with no exception to this fact. All other consonants presented in these first two chapters, (apart from *-n* or *-ng*), are initial consonants—for example, consonants which begin words.

Because of the lack of alphabet, and therefore alphabetical order, this text follows the order that Pinyin sounds are taught to both young Chinese children and foreign-language learners. Luckily, there is still a logic to the various groupings of sounds, beginning with consonants that are produced in the front of the mouth, and working to the back of the mouth. Special attention has been given to how sounds in Chinese are relatable to other lyric dictions.

Front of the Mouth: Bilabials and Labiodental *b, p, m, f*

b = [p]

The sounds represented in Pinyin by *b* and *p* are *bilabial plosives*, meaning that they require the articulation of the two lips, and that the air builds up pressure behind the two lips before forcing them apart. In Chinese, however, the sound written as Pinyin *b* is unvoiced, carrying no pitch and no vocal cord engagement. Therefore, *b* in Pinyin is written in IPA as [p].

To the classically trained singer, the most relatable sound may be the unaspirated *p* in the Italian language: *padre, punto, piccolo*. An unaspirated sound will have no escape of air following its articulation.

Exercise 1.1A: Alternate the Italian word, *pane* [pane] *bread* with the Chinese word, 白 *bái* [paɪ] *white,* paying special attention that the initial, unaspirated consonant [p] remains the same:

pane *bái* pane *bái* pane *bái* pane *bái*
[pane paɪ pane paɪ pane paɪ pane paɪ]

The [p] starts with the lips together, in a relaxed manner, with less pressure between the lips than a [b]. A [p] also does not engage the vocal cords. If how to create the [p] sound is still unclear, use the following exercise to explore the contrast between the voiced [b] and unvoiced [p].

Exercise 1.1B: Alternate between the voiced [b], in rapid succession, as if to say the name “Bubba,” and the unvoiced [p]. Remember that the [p] is unaspirated, having no escape of air following its articulation.

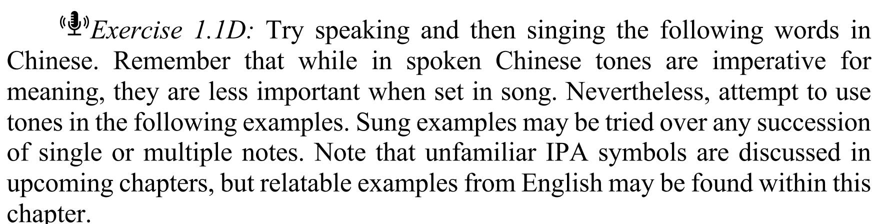
[b b b b b p p p p p b b b b b p p p p p p b b b b b p p p p p]

One last exercise allows the immediate difference between the voiced and unvoiced [b] and [p] to be felt.

Exercise 1.1C: Alternate the English word *bye* [baɪ], with the Chinese word for *white, bai* [paɪ]. For [b], focus on the sensation of the tight pressing of the surface of the lips, while engaging the vocal cords. For [p], focus on the lips beginning together, but relaxed. To English speakers, the difference between the unvoiced [p] and voiced [b] may feel negligible. If needed, try repeating a few [b] sounds prior to *bye* and a few [p] sounds prior to *bai.* Pay attention that [p] has no aspiration, just like the previously practiced, unaspirated Italianate *p.*

[b b baɪ p p paɪ b b baɪ p p paɪ b b baɪ p p paɪ b b baɪ p p paɪ]

bye	*bai*	bye	*bai*	bye	*bai*	bye	*bai*
[baɪ	paɪ	baɪ	paɪ	baɪ	paɪ	baɪ	paɪ]



Exercise 1.1D: Try speaking and then singing the following words in Chinese. Remember that while in spoken Chinese tones are imperative for meaning, they are less important when set in song. Nevertheless, attempt to use tones in the following examples. Sung examples may be tried over any succession of single or multiple notes. Note that unfamiliar IPA symbols are discussed in upcoming chapters, but relatable examples from English may be found within this chapter.

八 *bā*	[pa]	(eight)	爸 *bà*	[pa]	(father)
包 *bāo*	[pɑʊ]	(to embrace)	白 *bái*	[paɪ]	(white)
鼻 *bí*	[pi]	(nose)	不 *bù*	[pu]	(not)
波 *bō*	[pwɔ]	(wave)	冰 *bīng*	[pɪŋ]	(ice)

p **= [p^{h}]**

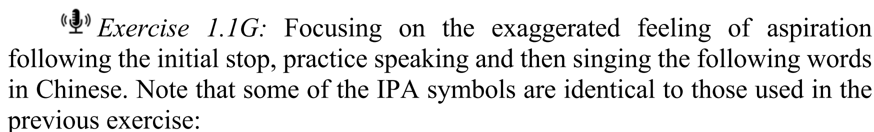
The *p* sound in Chinese and in English share pronunciation qualities. In both languages, *p* appears as aspirated, meaning that there is an escape of air after the initial bilabial stop. In Chinese, *p* is always aspirated. Therefore, *p* in Pinyin is written in IPA as [p^{h}]. The superscript *h* [^{h}] in IPA is a logical reminder of this escape of air. There are a few aspirated consonants in Chinese, therefore [^{h}] is a symbol which will be seen throughout this text.

A simple test can allow the speaker to know whether or not *p* is being produced as aspirated or unaspirated.

Exercise 1.1E: Paper Exercise: Holding a piece of paper in front of the mouth just past the tip of the nose, say the sound [p^{h}], a *p* with an escape of air after the sound. If the aspiration is sufficient, the corner of the paper will move.

Exercise 1.1F: Practice the pronunciation of aspirated *p* in English with the following words:

pay	pail	ping	peek	pow
[p^{h}ɛɪ]	[p^{h}ɛɪl]	[p^{h}ɪŋ]	[p^{h}ik]	[p^{h}ɑʊ]

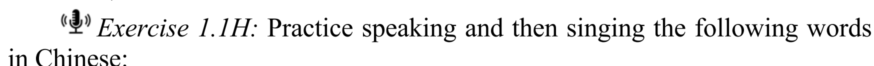


Exercise 1.1G: Focusing on the exaggerated feeling of aspiration following the initial stop, practice speaking and then singing the following words in Chinese. Note that some of the IPA symbols are identical to those used in the previous exercise:

怕 *pà*	[pʰa]	(fear)	排 *pái*	[pʰaɪ]	(to list, rank)
陪 *péi*	[pʰɛɪ]	(to accompany someone)	皮 *pí*	[pʰi]	(skin)
瓶 *píng*	[pʰɪŋ]	(bottle, vase)	谱 *pǔ*	[pʰu]	(to compose)

m = [m]

Pinyin *m* is pronounced as would be an [m] in English, as well as Italian, German, or French, requiring no further pronunciation explanation. It is categorized as a *voiced, bilabial nasal*. It appears in Chinese only at the beginning of a word, as an initial sound.

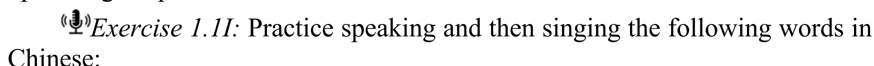


Exercise 1.1H: Practice speaking and then singing the following words in Chinese:

妈 *mā*	[ma]	(mother)	买 *mǎi*	[maɪ]	(to buy)
慢 *màn*	[man]	(slow)	美 *měi*	[mɛɪ]	(beautiful)
米 *mǐ*	[mi]	(rice)	民 *mín*	[min]	(people)
名 *míng*	[mɪŋ]	(name)	木 *mù*	[mu]	(wood)

f = [f]

Pinyin *f* likewise shares the [f] pronunciation for English, Italian, German, and French. It is an *unvoiced, labiodental fricative*. *Labiodental* refers to both the engagement of the lips and teeth for its creation. A fricative is a consonant requiring a high level of constriction, but not full closure, leading to audible friction in the sound. Other fricatives occurring in Chinese will be discussed in upcoming chapters.



Exercise 1.1I: Practice speaking and then singing the following words in Chinese:

发 *fā*	[fa]	(to send)	饭 *fàn*	[fan]	(meal)
飞 *fēi*	[fɛɪ]	(to fly)	佛 *fó*	[fwɔ]	(Buddha)
富 *fù*	[fu]	(rich)	放 *fàng*	[fɑŋ]	(to release)
分 *fēn*	[fən]	(to separate)	风 *fēng*	[fəŋ]	(wind)