

**Starting Out in Chinese:**  
Character Pronunciation and Writing

**Wu Wang**

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*Starting Out in Chinese: Character Pronunciation and Writing*

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# **Part One**

Pinyin - Chinese phonetics and Tones



*Lesson 1 - Initials (consonants)*

*Initials:*

B - b

P - p

M - m

F - f

D - d

T - t

N - n

L - l

G - g

K - k

H - h

J - j

Q - q

X - x

Z - z

C - c

S - s

ZH - zh

CH - ch

SH - sh

R - r

Y - y

W - w

***Initials and their International Phonetic Symbols:***

<i>Initials</i>	<i>Pronunciation (International phonetic system)</i>	<i>Initials</i>	<i>Pronunciation (International phonetic system)</i>
b	[p]	j	[tɕ]
p	[pʰ]	q	[tɕʰ]
m	[m]	x	[ɕ]
f	[f]	z	[ts]
d	[t]	c	[tsʰ]
t	[tʰ]	s	[s]
n	[n]	zh	[tʂ]
l	[l]	ch	[tʂʰ]
g	[k]	sh	[ʂ]
k	[kʰ]	r	[ʒ]
h	[x]	y	[j]
		w	[w]



**Activities and Exercises:**

1. Listen carefully to the teacher and repeat all the initials as many times as needed until you memorize them.

b	p	m	f	d	t	n	l
g	k	h		j	q	x	
z	c	s		zh	ch	sh	r
y				w			

2. Work with a partner. Read aloud the initials to each other and see if you know the difference by listening and speaking.

<i>b - p</i>	<i>m - f</i>	<i>d - t</i>	<i>n - l</i>
<i>g - k - h</i>	<i>j - q - x</i>	<i>z - c - s</i>	<i>zh - ch - sh</i>
<i>z - zh</i>	<i>c - ch</i>	<i>s - sh</i>	<i>zh - r</i>
<i>r - ch</i>	<i>sh - r</i>	<i>j - y</i>	<i>w - r</i>

3. Work in a team. Everyone takes a turn to pick randomly some of the initials from the given list and read them aloud to the others. If all the others understand and write down the same initials as that the reader pronounced, it's good. Otherwise, ask the teacher to find out the correct pronunciation.

zh	m	x	p	t	r	y	c
d	j	w	sh	n	s	q	k
l	g	ch	b	z	h	f	

4. Fill in the blanks with the initials missing in the list:

b ( ) m ( )	d t ( ) ( )	g ( ) h
( ) q x	z c ( )	zh ( ) sh ( )
( )	( )	

5. Dictation - listen carefully and put a number aside in order with the initial that you heard. (Teacher should say the initials in a different order from that listed below)

b	p	m	f
d	t	n	l
g	k	h	
j	q	x	
z	c	s	
zh	ch	sh	r
y	w		

## Lesson 2 - Finals (1)

Single vowels:	a	o	i	e	u	ü
Phonetic symbols:	[a]	[o]	[i]	[e]	[u]	[y]

### Tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: ā ō ī ē ū ü

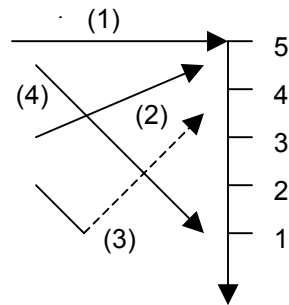
2<sup>nd</sup> tone: á ó í é ú ú

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: ǎ ǒ ǐ ě ǔ ǔ

4<sup>th</sup> tone: à ò ì è ù ù

Neutral tone / toneless: some of Chinese words have no tones in their pinyin, and they pronounce lightly and shortly.

### Diagram of tones



### Practice:

ā	ō	ē	ī	ū	ü
á	ó	é	í	ú	ú
ǎ	ǒ	ě	ǐ	ǔ	ǔ
à	ò	è	ì	ù	ù
b-a → bà	m-a → mā	f-a → fǎ	c-a → cā		
k-e → kě	t-e → tè	z-e → zé	zh-e → zhè		
d-i → dì	p-i → pí	j-i → jǐ	q-i → qǐ		
f-o → fó	p-o → pò	m-o → mō	b-o → bó		
t-u → tú	ch-u → chù	z-u → zú	r-u → rù		
n-ü → nǚ	l-ü → lù	x-ü → xú	y-ü → yǔ		

## Notes:

1. Tone symbol's position (1): The tone symbols are always put on the vowels.
2. zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi, ri: These pinyin pronounce exactly the same as the initials z, c, s, zh, ch, sh, r.
3. i, u & ü as entire syllables: For some syllables that pronounce i, u, ü, their pinyin forms are yi, wu, yu (take off the two dots of ü in this case).
4. ü with j, q, x, and y: Because there exists no any combination of j, q, x, or y with u, when ü follows j, q, x, or y the two dots in ü will be omitted, but it still pronounces as ü. So, jü → ju, qü → qu, xü → xu, and yü → yu. When ü follows n and l, it remains to be ü: like nü and lü.

## Activities and Exercises:

### 1. Discriminate the pinyin:

bà - mā	fù - mǔ	dì - tú	mì - jí
kè - qì	zì - jǐ	wò - shì	sè - zé
mí - yǔ	cū - xī	yì - qǐ	nǚ - zǐ
chá - yè	shí - kè	yù - jì	lǚ - cì
pó - xí	zá - zhì	kǔ - sè	chè - dǐ
shū - fǎ	xǐ - jù	lā - sā	fú - wù
sī - lì	chú - xī	gē - qǔ	wǔ - gǔ
lì - tǐ	hù - zhù	tú - bù	zhé - hé

### 2. Vocabulary:

bàba	Dad	māma	Mom
gēge	elder brother	yéye	grandpa (dad's side)
dìdi	younger brother	bóbo	uncle (dad's elder brother);
gūgu	aunt (dad's sisters)	shūshu	uncle (dad's younger brother);
lǜ	green	zǐ	purple
wǒ	I; me	wǒde	my; mine
nǐ	you (single); you	nǐde	your; yours
tā	he; she; him; her	tāde	his; her; hers
zhè	this	nà	that

shì	to be	búshì	to be not
hé	and	yě	also; too

3. *Repeat the sentences as many times as needed until you can read them fluently.*

Zhè shì wǒde māma hé bàba.  
- This is my dad and mom.

Nà shì wǒde gēge.  
- That is my elder brother.

Zhè shì nǐde.  
- This is yours.

Nà shì tāde.  
- That is his.

Wǒ shì tāde gēge.  
- I am his elder brother.

Tā shì wǒde dìdi.  
- He is my younger brother.

Zhè búshì lǜde, shì zǐde.  
- This is not green, it's purple.

Nà búshì lǜde, yě búshì zǐde.  
- That is not green neither purple.

4. *Read aloud the following words with the correct pronunciation and tones.*

kělè	Coke Cola	dízi	flute
mǎlù	road; street	fóye	Buddha
mòzhī	ink for calligraphy	lǜsè	green color
dúshū	to read; reading	shīzi	lion
nǚshì	lady	rìqī	date (calendar)
yáchǐ	tooth; teeth	cíqì	porcelain, chinaware
chúshī	cook (person)	kǎchē	truck
yīfu	clothing; tops	kùzi	pants; trousers
chá	tea	chāzi	fork
gēbo	arm	bízi	nose
yǔyi	rain coat	shùyè	leaf
máiyǐ	ant	júzi	orange

5. Practice your pronunciation with the following tongue twister:  
 (<http://hellobaoba.533.net/photo.htm>, and reference book #1. See the appendix)

Sì shì sì,	四是四，
Shí shì shí,	十是十，
Shí sì shì shí sì,	十四是十四，
Sì shí shì sì shí.	四十是四十。
Shí sì bú shì sì shí,	十四不是四十，
Sì shí bú shì shí sì.	四十不是十四。

6. Listen carefully the pair of syllables (characters) and put in the blanks their tones:  
 For instance: you hear “zī / zǐ”, you put in the following blank (1 / 3) or (-/√) for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tones.

八 / 拔 ( / )	吃 / 翅 ( / )	我 / 卧 ( / )	读 / 睹 ( / )
鼻 / 笔 ( / )	哭 / 苦 ( / )	茶 / 查 ( / )	书 / 树 ( / )
只 / 支 ( / )	于 / 雨 ( / )	富 / 福 ( / )	土 / 兔 ( / )
车 / 撤 ( / )	马 / 麻 ( / )	第 / 地 ( / )	者 / 这 ( / )
是 / 十 ( / )	坡 / 婆 ( / )	各 / 个 ( / )	去 / 曲 ( / )

### Lesson 3 - Finals (2)

Compound vowels:	<i>ai</i>	<i>ei</i>	<i>ui</i>	<i>ao</i>	<i>ou</i>
Phonetic symbols:	[ai]	[ei]	[uei]	[au]	[əu]

#### Practice:

āi	ēi	uī	āo	ōu
ái	éi	uí	áo	óu
ǎi	ěi	uǐ	ǎo	ǒu
ài	èi	uì	ào	òu
b-ai → bái	c-ai → cài	zh-ai → zhāi	d-ai → dǎi	
f-ei → fěi	m-ei → mèi	h-ei → hēi	w-ei → wéi	
sh-ui → shuǐ	k-ui → kuí	ch-ui → chuī	r-ui → ruì	
p-ao → pāo	r-ao → rào	t-ao → tǎo	n-ao → náo	
l-ou → lóu	g-ou → gòu	s-ou → sōu	z-ou → zǒu	

#### Notes:

1. Tone symbol's position (2): For the compound vowels, the tone symbols are always put on the vowel letter which appears early in the alphabetical order list except iu, which has its tone symbols on u: (iū, iú, iǔ, iù) (see lesson 4).
2. Change of tones (1):
  - a. When two 3<sup>rd</sup> tone syllables come together (nǐhǎo), the first syllable will pronounce its second half part of the tone, while the second pronounce its first part of the tone (but the tone symbol remains the same writing as it is - nǐhǎo), so the actual pronunciation is nǐhào. Be sure that your tone is half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tone, don't start off from or go up to the same heights as the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> tones (see the tone diagram).
  - b. When a syllable of 3<sup>rd</sup> tone precedes a syllable of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or neutral tones, it's pronounced only in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tone, that is, the tone only falls but doesn't rise. nǐde → nǐde

## Activities and Exercises:

### 1. Discriminate the pinyin:

bái - zhòu	shuǐ - wèi	mǎi - mài	méi - guì
měi - wèi	kāi - cǎi	fèi - shuǐ	huí - lái
yōu - huì	kǒu - dài	tuì - péi	shāo - kǎo
pái - lóu	dǎo - gào	móu - hài	zhāi - yào
chóu - bèi	cài - yáo	cǎo - méi	chuí - wēi
dài - hào	nèi - wài	bǎi - yóu	lòu - dòu
tóu - kào	cuī - huǐ	bǎo - bèi	bēi - āi
dōu - shòu	gòu - zào	zhuī - suí	nǎo - hǎi

### 2. Read aloud the following vocabulary with the correct pronunciation and tones.

bái	white	zhǐ	paper
hēi	black	zì	character; word
huī	gray	bàozhǐ	newspaper
hǎo	good	yǒu	have/has
bùhǎo	not good	méiyǒu	do not have/has
shéi/shuí	who	mèimei	younger sister
lǎoshī	teacher	nǎinai	grandma (dad's side)
suì	age	tuǐ	leg

### 3. Repeat the sentences as many times as needed until you can read them fluently.

Zhǐ shì báide.

- Papers are white.

Tā shì shuí?

- Who is she/he?

Zì shì hēide.

- Words are black.

Tā shì wǒde lǎoshī.

- She is my teacher.

Bàozhǐ shì huīde.

- Newspapers are gray.

Lǎoshī, nǐhǎo!

- Hello, teacher!

Wǒ yǒu yīgè gēge hé yīgè dìdi, méiyǒu mèimei.

- I have an elder brother and a younger brother, (but) no younger sister.



Tāde nǎinai qīshí suì le, tuǐ bùhǎo.

- His grandma is seventy years old and has some problem in her leg.

4. Practice more your pinyin by reading aloud the following words.

hǎidài	kelp; seaweed	běiwěi	north latitude
cǎomào	straw hat	pǎodào	racetrack
páiduì	line up	fěicùi	jadeite
báicài	Chinese cabbage	kāfēi	coffee
gāo/ǎi	tall/short	gāo/dī	high/low
fēizào	soap	guìtái	counter
lǎotóu	old man	lǎotàitai	old woman
máobǐ	Chinese paint brush	bǎoshí	precious stone
tóu	head	tóufa	hair
shǒu	hand	shǒuzhǐ	finger
shǒutào	gloves; mittens	shuǐ	water
kǒu	mouth	zuǐba	mouth
lǎolao	grandma (mom's side)	lǎoye	grandpa (mom's side)

5. Listen carefully the pronunciation of each word and check off the one that sounds the most similar to it.

a. (律师)

- lùshī
- yùshí
- ruìshì
- kǒuchī

b. (鬼祟)

- kuǐduì
- huíwèi
- guǐsui
- fěicùi

c. (处罚)

- chūfā
- chùfá
- shūfǎ
- zhùzhá

d. (口头)

- kǒutóu
- shǔtù
- kǔtóu
- cǎotú

e. (摇头摆尾)

( ) yǎotóuwúwěi

( ) chǎonàopàiduì

( ) yáotóubáiwěi

( ) lǎotóusǎshuǐ

f. (好逸恶劳)

( ) hǔliyǒunǎo

( ) hóuzitōutáo

( ) kǎoshìchídào

( ) hàoyìwùláo

g. (买卖)

( ) hǎidài

( ) bēi'āi

( ) mǎimài

( ) huǐhài

h. (卑微)

( ) bēiwēi

( ) léizhuì

( ) huíguī

( ) bēiwēi

i. (宝贝)

( ) pàohuī

( ) bǎobèi

( ) láolèi

( ) dǎosui

j. (归来)

( ) tuìfèi

( ) kuìduì

( ) guīlái

( ) guītái

## Lesson 4 - Finals (3)

Compound vowels:    *ia*        *iao*        *iu*        *ie*        *üe*  
Phonetic symbols:    [*ia*]        [*iau*]        [*iəu*]        [*iɛ*]        [*yɛ*]

### Practice:

iā	iāo	iū	iē	üē
íá	íáo	íú	ié	üé
ǎǎ	ǎǎo	ǎǎ	iě	üě
ìà	ìào	ìù	ìè	ùè
x-ia → xià	j-ia → jiā	q-ia → qiǎ	y-a → yá	
b-iao → biāo	m-iao → miào	t-iao → tiáo	p-iao → piào	
x-iu → xiù	d-iu → diū	n-iu → niú	j-iu → jiǔ	
l-ie → liè	q-ie → qiě	m-ie → miè	b-ie → bié	
j-üe → jué	n-üe → nüè	x-üe → xuě	q-üe → què	

### Notes:

1. *i* → *y*, *ü* + *y*: For any syllables that start with 'i', their pinyin forms have to change to *y* (*i* and *y* have the same pronunciation):  
*ia* → *ya*, *iao* → *yao*, *ie* → *ye*, *iu* → *you*. All syllables that start with 'ü' must have *y* preceded them and the two dots in *ü* omitted: *üe* → *yüe* → *yue*.
2. *j*, *q*, *x* with *ü*: *j* + *üe* → *jüe* → *jue*; *q* + *üe* → *qüe* → *que*; *x* + *üe* → *xüe* → *xue*, but their pronunciation still keep the same as *jüe*, *qüe*, and *xüe*.
3. Change of tones (2): *bù* (no, not) is normally pronounced with the 4<sup>th</sup> tone. However, it should change into the 2<sup>nd</sup> tone when and only when it is followed by another syllable of the 4<sup>th</sup> tone.  
For instance, *bùxiè* → *búxiè*; *bùshì* → *búshì*; *bùguò* → *búguò*

## Activities and Exercises:

### 1. Discriminate the pinyin:

jiā - jiào	xiǎo - jiě	biè - niu	jiāo - liú
jiǔ - yuè	liú - xuè	yǎo - yá	qià - qiǎo
tiě - qiāo	qiú - xié	xié - tiáo	diào - xiào
tiē - qiè	piào - jià	niǔ - nie	biǎo - jué
qiǎo - miào	jué - liè	yuē - lǜè	xiū - xué
jià - jiē	jiù - yè	xiāo - miè	què - qiè
xià - diē	jiǎo - xiè	tiáo - yuē	jiě - jué
miáo - xiě	xué - xiào	yè - xiāo	xué - jiū

### 2. Read aloud the following vocabulary with the correct pronunciation and tones.

huíjiā	go home	shǒubiǎo	watch (that tells time)
xuéxiào	school	xiàxuě	to snow
méiyǒu	do not have	xièxie	to thank; thanks
liùyuè	June	xiūjià	take vacation
jiějie	elder sister	jiùjiu	uncle (mom's side)
biǎojiě	cousin (as elder sister)	biǎomèi	cousin (as younger sister)
biǎogē	cousin (as elder brother)	biǎodi	cousin (as younger brother)
duìbùqǐ	excuse me; sorry	jǐyuè	which month
nǎlǐ	where	nàme	so; then
zhù zài	live at; live in	jiā	family; home
dōu	all	xūyào	to need

### 3. Repeat the sentences as many times as needed until you can read them fluently.

Nǐ qù nǎlǐ?

- Where are you going?

Wǒ qù xuéxiào.

- I'm going to school.

Xiàxuě le, búyòngqù xuéxiào le.

- It's snowing, there is no school.

Nàme wǒ huíjiā.

- Then, I go home.

Duìbùqǐ, zhè shì nǐde shǒubiǎo ma?

- Excuse me, is this your watch?

Shìde, xièxie.

- Yes, thanks.

Zhè búshì wǒde shǒubiǎo.

- This is not my watch.

Nàme zhè shì shuíde shǒubiǎo?

- Then whose watch is this?

Nǐ jǐyuè xiūjià?

- In which month will you take your vacation?

Wǒ liùyuè xiūjià.

- I'll take my vacation in June.

Wǒde biǎojiě hé biǎogē dōu zhù zài wǒ jiā. Wǒ bù xūyào xiūjià le.

- My cousins (one sister and one brother) all live in my house. I don't need to take vacation.

4. *Practice more your pinyin by reading aloud the words given below.*

píjiǔ	beer	niúniǎi	milk
qìqiú	balloon	zúqiú	soccer; soccer ball
tiělù	railway; railroad	ditiě	subway; metro
qiǎzi	clip	húdié	butterfly
yuèqiú	the moon (as planet)	juésài	final (of a game)
xiězi	to write (words)	jiérì	festival
shūjià	bookshelf	jiěfu	brother-in-law
tiàowǔ	dance	diàoyú	fishing
xié	shoes	xiā	shrimp
niǎo	bird	shuìjiào	to sleep
dà/xiǎo	big/small	kū/xiào	to cry/ to laugh
qīzi	egg plant	jiàoshì	classroom
xiàjì	summer (season)	qiūjì	autumn (season)

5. Listen carefully and put a number with the word you heard in order.  
(Teacher should say the words in a different order from that listed below)

谢谢 xièxie  
( )

姐姐 jiějie  
( )

学校 xuéxiào  
( )

铁路 tiělù  
( )

足球 zúqiú  
( )

九月 jiǔyuè  
( )

书架 shūjià  
( )

决赛 juésài  
( )

夏日 xiàri  
( )

来去 láiqù  
( )

别扭 bièniu  
( )

确实 quèshí  
( )

介绍 jièshào  
( )

韭菜 jiǔcài  
( )

列队 lièduì  
( )

吹牛 chuīniú  
( )

叠纸 diézhǐ  
( )

饺子 jiǎozi  
( )

预料 yùliào  
( )

巧妙 qiǎomiào  
( )

窃取 qièqǔ  
( )

## Lesson 5 - Finals (4)

Compound vowels:    *ua*        *uai*        *ui*        *uo*  
Phonetic symbols:    [*ua*]        [*uai*]        [*uei*]        [*uə*]

### Practice:

uā	uāi	uī	uō
uá	uái	uí	uó
uǎ	uǎi	uǐ	uǒ
uà	uài	uì	uò
h-ua → huà	g-ua → guā	k-ua → kuǎ	zh-ua → zhuā
uai → wài	sh-uai → shuāi	h-uai → huái	g-uai → guǎi
c-ui → cuī	s-ui → suí	z-ui → zuǐ	r-ui → ruì
k-uo → kuò	d-uo → duō	l-uo → luó	n-uo → nuò

### Notes:

u → w:                      For the syllables that start with 'u', their pinyin forms have to change to w (u and w pronounce the same):  
ua → wa, uai → wai, uo → wo

### Activities and Exercises:

#### 1. Discriminate the pinyin:

guā - guǒ	kuài - huó	tuō - kuǎ	suǒ - suì
chuǎi - duó	cuō - tuó	huá - guì	shuǐ - guǒ
wài - guó	zuò - suì	guài - zuì	wò - chuò
huí - guī	shuò - guǒ	zuò - luò	guò - huǒ
tuó - luó	wài - kuài	guó - cuì	huā - huì
cuì - ruò	shuō - huà	cuò - guài	gài - kuò
kuí - huā	nuò - ruò	guī - suō	duō - guǎ
luō - suo	huā - duǒ	kuì - duì	tuō - shuǐ

## 2. Vocabulary

shuōhuà	to speak; speaking	cuòwù	mistake; error
huáxuě	to ski; skiing	guójiā	country
qíguài	strange; weird	yúkuài	happy; joyful; cheerful
shuō	to say	zuòyè	assignment; homework
zhù	to wish	lǚyóu	tour; tourism
hǎo/huài	good/bad	duō/shǎo	much; many/few; little
duì/cuò	right; correct/wrong	lǐ/wài	in; inside/out; outside
huì	can; know how to (by learning)	búhuì	can't; don't know how to
tài	too; excessively	zhème	so; such; this way; like this
kuài	fast; quick; quickly	búcuò	not bad
Yàzhōu	Asia	Ōuzhōu	Europe
Fēizhōu	Africa	Měizhōu	America

## 3. Repeat the sentences as many times as needed until you can read them fluently.

Tā shuōhuà tài duō, tài kuài.

- He/she speaks too much and too fast.

Wǒ qù huáxuě, nǐ yě qù hǎo ma?

- I am going to ski, would you join me?

Duìbùqǐ, wǒ búhuì huáxuě.

- Sorry, I don't know how to ski.

Nǐde zuòyè lǐ yǒu cuòwù.

- There are mistakes in your homework.

Shìma? Qíguài, lǎoshī méi zhème shuō.

- What? It's weird, the teacher didn't say so.

Wǒde guójiā zài Yàzhōu.

- My country is in Asia.

Wǒ qù guò Ōuzhōu, Fēizhōu hé Měizhōu.

- I've been Europe, Africa and America.



Nǐ hǎo ma?

- How are you ?

Búcuò, xièxie. Wǒ yào qù Ōuzhōu lǚyóu le.

- Not bad, thanks. I'm going on a trip to Europe.

Hǎo wa, zhù nǐ lǚyóu yúkuài!

- Good. Wish you a happy tour!

4. *Read aloud the following words.*

huā flower

huà picture

huà to draw (a picture)

huáliu slippery

wòshǒu shake hands

cèsuǒ toilet; bathroom

luóbo radish

bōluó pineapple

wàzi socks

zhuǎzi claw; paw

guàiwù monster

shuāijiāo wrestling

shuāyá brush one's teeth

yáshuā toothbrush

kuàizi chopsticks

shuǐguǒ fruit

luòtuó camel

huǒchē train

zhuōzi table

zhuōbù tablecloth

kuòhào brackets

guōtái the top of a kitchen range

yóuchuō postmark

zuǒshǒu left hand

5. *Practice your pronunciation with the following tongue twister:*

(<http://hellobaoba.533.net/photo.htm>)

Jiǔ yuè jiǔ, jiǔ gè jiǔ mí hē zuì jiǔ.

九月九，九个酒迷喝醉酒。

Jiǔ gè jiǔ bēi jiǔ bēi jiǔ,

九个酒杯九杯酒，

Jiǔ gè jiǔ mí hē jiǔ kǒu.

九个酒迷喝九口。

Jiǔ kǒu jiǔ, jiǔ bēi jiǔ,

九口酒，九杯酒，

Jiǔ gè jiǔ mí bǐ hē jiǔ.

九个酒迷比喝酒。

Bǐ lái bǐ qù jiǔ kǒu jiǔ,

比来比去九口酒，

Nǐ hē wǒ hē jiǔ bēi jiǔ.

你喝我喝九杯酒。

Jiǔ kǒu jiǔ, Jiǔ bēi jiǔ,

九口酒，九杯酒，

Hē de jiǔ gè jiǔ mí zuì le jiǔ.

喝得九个酒迷醉了酒。