The Sounds of Chinese

This accessible textbook provides a clear introduction to the sounds of Standard Chinese, designed for English-speaking students with no prior knowledge of linguistics. It explains from scratch the fundamentals of articulatory phonetics (the study of how speech sounds are produced) and phonology (the study of sound systems), and clearly applies them to the phonetic and phonological properties of Chinese. Topics covered include consonants, vowels, syllable structure, tone, stress, intonation, loanwords, and different varieties of Standard Chinese. Clear comparisons with English sounds are given wherever relevant, along with practical pronunciation advice. All the sounds described are demonstrated by native speakers on the audio CD (included) and over fifty graded exercises are provided, encouraging students to put their knowledge into practice. Building a solid understanding of how Chinese sounds work, this text will be invaluable to students of Chinese wishing to improve their pronunciation, their teachers, and students of Chinese linguistics.

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Preface

This book provides an introduction to Standard Chinese phonetics and phonology, designed for English-speaking students and readers with no prior knowledge of linguistics. The intended readers include students learning Chinese as a foreign language, undergraduate and beginning graduate students majoring in Chinese language and/or Chinese linguistics, Chinese language teachers, and anyone who is interested in learning more about the sounds of Standard Chinese. As a textbook, it can be used for an introductory course in Chinese phonetics and phonology, for the phonetics and phonology parts of a Chinese linguistics or Chinese grammar course, for Chinese language teacher training courses/workshops, or as a supplementary text for a Chinese language course. The book can also serve for independent study or as a reference book for anyone who wants to improve their Standard Chinese pronunciation or to obtain general knowledge of Chinese phonetics and phonology.

After the introductory chapter which provides background information regarding the Chinese language, its linguistic characteristics, its writing system, and phonetics and phonology, the book covers: (i) the phonetics of consonants, vowels, and tone (how they are produced) in chapters 2–4; (ii) syllable structure (how sequences of sounds are organized) in chapter 5; (iii) the phonological system (how and why a sound changes its pronunciation in what context) in chapters 7–9; (iv) the interaction of tone with stress and intonation in chapter 10; (v) loanword adaptation (how English sounds are adapted into Chinese sounds) in chapter 11; (vi) dialectal variation in Standard Chinese in chapter 12; and (vii) a comparison between the pinyin romanization spelling system and phonetic transcription in chapter 6.

The appendices provide information about the symbols used for phonetic transcription, a set of tables listing all possible Chinese syllables with pinyin spelling and corresponding phonetic transcription, and Internet resources. There are also over fifty graded exercises, suggestions for further reading, and
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a glossary of technical terms. The terms are in small capitals in the text when they first appear and also when they reappear in a different chapter or in appropriate contexts as a reminder. *The Sounds of Chinese CD* included with this book demonstrates the sounds and examples in the text and some exercises. In the book, a headphone icon is placed before the sets of examples that can be found on the CD.

I have tried to cover both the phonetic and phonological aspects evenly with sufficient details since the practical purpose of improving pronunciation involves learning both how an individual sound is produced (the phonetic aspect) and how and why a sound must or may be pronounced differently in a particular context (the phonological aspect). Needless to say, the comprehensive coverage also makes this volume useful as a textbook and a reference book for Chinese phonetics and phonology. Many phenomena discussed in the book have multiple analyses in the literature. My choice for a particular analysis over others is partly determined by the ease of presenting the idea to readers with no prior linguistics background and partly influenced by personal preference based on my own research. For those who want to know different views from what is presented or to go beyond the basics, I have included suggestions for further reading.

Although it took a little longer than I expected to complete this book, I have thoroughly enjoyed working on the project. I want to thank Helen Barton of Cambridge University Press, who suggested the idea for this book to me and provided helpful suggestions on the draft chapters, an anonymous reader, my production editor Liz Davey of Cambridge University Press, and my copy-editor, Adrian Stenton. I acknowledge the permission to reprint the International Phonetic Alphabet granted by the International Phonetic Association (http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/ipa.html), and a Research Enhancement Grant for Visiting Professor granted by City University of Hong Kong from May 6 to June 5 in 2005. I am grateful to Eric Zee and Wai-Sum Lee for their answers to several specific questions I had about Chinese phonetics. Thanks also go to Joseph Jue Wang and Hsiao-ping Wang for recording the sounds and examples for *The Sounds of Chinese CD*.

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