The **VPC Pinyin to BPMF Conversion Table** can be found at the back of the Very Practical Chinese Textbook. It is also available as a part of the **VPC Supplementary Materials** on our website at www.verypracticalchinese.com.

What is Pinyin? What is BPMF? They are both a means to the same end – a phonetic representation of Chinese characters. Pinyin is one several Romanized systems for phonetically writing Chinese. It was developed in China, and is by far the most common Romanized system in use. Given that it was developed in China, historically there has been a resistance to Pinyin in Taiwan, where street signs and names are a motley mix of Pinyin and several other systems.

BPMF is a phonetic alphabet encompassing the sounds of Mandarin. It is used predominately in Taiwan, where it was developed. Proponents of BPMF (many of whom are invariably detractors of Pinyin) argue correctly that it more accurately represents the sounds of Mandarin, as each phoneme (the smallest unit of sound) is represented by a symbol, whereas with Pinyin, there is no breakdown of the sound, only a Romanized equivalent of the sound as a whole, which can only serve as an approximation of the sound.

We at VPC exhort you to consider using BPMF (ㄅㄆㄇㄈ) <u>in conjunction with </u>Pinyin to **better understand** and be able to **more accurately distinguish** the sounds of Mandarin. This is a <u>**very good idea**</u>.

For example, look at:

pin ㄆㄧㄣ   and   ping ㄆㄧㄥ

In Pinyin, they differ only by a letter, but in BPMF we can see that they have different end phonemes.

How about:

dui ㄉㄨㄟ   and   duo ㄉㄨㄛ

These sounds are comprised of three separate phonemes. If we relied solely on the pinyin, it would be very difficult to "sound it out", however the BPMF makes the pronunciation very clear.

What about the difference between nu and nü? Going strictly by the Pinyin, it's impossible to know what the dots on top of the u indicate. However, a quick look the conversion table reveals two different vowel sounds:

nu ㄋㄨ   and   nü ㄋㄩ

The above are only a few examples of the many advantages to becoming acquainted with the BPMF equivalents of Pinyin sounds. It really is a worthwhile endeavor and will absolutely help you to increase your understanding of the sounds of Mandarin and to put this understanding into practice, improving your pronunciation!

The Phonetic warm-up at the beginning of the VPC Book has you look at the Pinyin spelling while listening to the BPMF pronunciation. For clarification, you can listen to the Phonetic Warm-Up while following the Pinyin to BPMF conversion table at the back of the book.

Why didn't we just use BPMF? Long answer short, it's just not practical. Once you're familiar with it, Pinyin is much easier to recognize/read at a glance than BPMF, which really is an unfamiliar symbol describing another unfamiliar symbol. It works well in our dialogues, where the Pinyin is clearly juxtaposed to the Chinese character above it (or beside it in the Study Guide.)

Those who argue that it looks too much like English should take a look at any of the other languages written in the Romanized Alphabet. We know that the "J" in Spanish has an "H" sound (like in Jalapeno or Jose). When we see a Spanish word (or French, Italian, Dutch, etc.) we adjust our pronunciation accordingly. It's the same thing with Pinyin. "ri" is not an "r" sound. As you will soon find out if you haven't already, "r" (or ㄖ in BPMF) is a wild and wonderful sound (somewhat akin to the act of retching while sticking your tongue far back in your mouth while imagining that your whole mouth is frozen after having been to the dentist) that is worlds away from an "r" in English. By Day 2 you'd never dream of putting them in the same category. The "c" sound is similar to ts at the end of any English word (ticke**ts**, ca**ts**) but sharper, like water on a hot pan. Again, confusing perhaps on Day 1 when you see "can" and are tempted to pronounce it like "Can I…" in English, but give it a few days (consulting the BPMF chart and discovering that can =ㄘㄢ also helps to break that erroneous link) and you'll easily be able to separate the two.

In short, both Pinyin and BPMF are simply assigned values to represent the sound of a character.

The phonetic representation of the character 是 can be assigned the graphic representation of shi (in Pinyin) or ㄕ (in BPMF), each a perfectly valid system in its own right. We could make 是 equal anything; it's always got the same phonetic value, i.e. 是 = shi = ㄕ = **the sound you make that a listener recognizes as the correct pronunciation of** 是 . Really, it could be written as ☺. The latter wouldn't be very practical, but I'm just using it to underscore the idea that any combination of letters, symbols, or even pictures can be used to represent a sound.

In sum, both Pinyin and BPMF have merits. When learning a language, should we not use every tool at our disposal? By using the Pinyin to BPMF Conversion Table provided on the VPC website, you're able to gain a deeper understand of the sounds of Mandarin by learning how these BPMF sounds are represented in Pinyin. Choosing one over the other would surely be a detriment to your studies, as the merits of both can be combined in a way to enhance your Chinese. Knowing BPMF will lead to a deeper understanding of the sounds of Mandarin, giving you a much better shot at "native" pronunciation. Being able to read and write Pinyin is an equally useful skill! Don't make the mistake of thinking it has to be one or the other – it really doesn't have to be like that.

It's true! Pinyin and BPMF happily co-exist in my universe (and my book!) and can in yours too☺