

NĪ XĪHUĀN FOOTBALL MA?

Chinese words are written in symbols (“characters”) that represent meaning rather than sound, and the Chinese writing system consists of thousands of these characters. When writing foreign names in Chinese, a selection of these characters is used based not on what they mean, but on how they sound. In the table below you will see how some names of English football teams are written in Chinese. The transliteration system is not entirely straightforward however:

- (1) Generally each character represents a syllable (V, CV or CVC), but
- (2) some English consonant combinations are not possible in Chinese, so they are split into two syllables, e.g. “spin” might be “s(u)+pin”.
- (3) Chinese does not have the same set of vowel and consonant sounds as English, so some sounds are mixed up – you probably know that R and L sound the same to a Chinese speaker. There are a few other pairs like that.
- (4) Finally, sometimes meaningful characters are used instead of phonetic ones. For example, in the Chinese for “Liverpool”, the sign for “pool” is used – it’s not pronounced “pool”.

Study the following examples. Remember that the renderings are phonetic: they are based on pronunciation, not spelling.

阿森纳	Arsenal	莱斯特城	Leicester City
阿斯顿维拉	Aston Villa	利物浦	Liverpool
博尔顿	Bolton	曼彻斯特城	Manchester City
切尔西	Chelsea	米德尔斯堡	Middlesbrough
富勒姆	Fulham	纽卡斯尔联队	Newcastle United
利兹联队	Leeds United		

To view the solution to this problem, and to try out more puzzles, visit <https://ailo.adaptcentre.ie>

(1) Identify the following four names from the list of seven possible answers given on the right.

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------|
| a. 曼彻斯特联队 | Birmingham |
| | Blackpool |
| b. 物阿米姆 | Charlton |
| | Doncaster |
| c. 埃弗顿 | Everton |
| | Manchester United |
| d. 查尔顿 | Preston |

(2) How do you think the place name Boston would be written in Chinese?

(3) Fill in the table below showing the correspondence between individual characters and English sounds

森	
	KA
西	
	LA
顿	

Solution: Nǐ XǐHUĀN FOOTBALL MA?

(1) Identify the following four names from the list of seven possible answers given on the right.

A = Manchester United

B = Birmingham

C = Preston

D = Charlton

A has the first three characters of Manchester City combined with the last two seen in both Leeds United and Newcastle United.

Although "United" is three syllables, this is an example where the actual word meaning "United" (or "union") is used.

B has the second character of Liverpool (VER), the first character of Arsenal and Aston Villa (A), the first character of Middlesborough (MI) and the last character of Fulham. The MI+HAM ending makes Birmingham the best solution. Why is BIR and VER the same? We were warned that Chinese doesn't have all the sounds of English: B and V are an example of this. And why the extra A? Remember this is phonetic, not spelling: ba+a makes a long vowel.

C has two characters not previously seen, plus the final character of Bolton, so it must be one of Charlton, Everton or Preston. If it was Charlton, you'd expect the middle character to be the same as Bolton, and if it was Everton you'd expect the middle character to be the same as the middle character of Liverpool. So it must be Preston.

D has the same last two characters as Bolton, so must be Charlton.

(2) How do you think the place name **Boston** would be written in Chinese?

BO and TON from Bolton combined with the S from Aston, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle

博斯顿

(3) Fill in the table below showing the correspondence between individual characters and English sounds

森	SE or SEN	We can't tell from the data whether this is SE or SEN. It occurs only in "Arsenal" followed by another character that only occurs in that word. So we know between them they cover SENAL. We were told that characters represent vowel, consonant+vowel or consonant+vowel+consonant, so we can't tell if it's SE+NAL or SEN+AL, both of which are possible.
卡	KA	As in Newcastle

西	SI (SEA)	As in Chelsea
拉	LA	Seen in Villa
顿	TON	Seen in Bolton, and two of the answers in Q1 (the only final syllable that occurs more than once in the list of candidates)

*