

Background

I. Names

1. *China*

It used to be thought that the name ‘China’ derived from the name of China’s early Qin dynasty (Chin or Ch’in in older transcriptions), whose rulers conquered all rivals and initiated the dynasty in 221 BC. But, as Wilkinson notes (*Chinese History: A Manual*: 753, and fn 7), the original pronunciation of the name ‘Qin’ was rather different, and would make it an unlikely source for the name China. Instead, China is thought to derive from a Persian root, and was, apparently, first used for porcelain, and only later applied to the country from which the finest examples of that material came. Another name, Cathay, now rather poetic in English, but surviving as the regular name for the country in languages such as Russian (Kitai), is said to derive from the name of the Khitan Tartars, who formed the Liao dynasty in north China in the 10th century. The Khitan dynasty was the first to make a capital on the site of Beijing.

The Chinese now call their country Zhōngguó, often translated as ‘Middle Kingdom’. Originally, this name meant the central – or royal – state of the many that occupied the region prior to the unification of Qin. Other names were used before Zhōngguó became current. One of the earliest was Huá (or Huáxià, combining Huá with the name of the earliest dynasty, the Xià). Xià, in fact, combined with the Zhōng of Zhōngguó, appears in the modern official names of the country, as we see below.

2. *Chinese places*

a) *The People’s Republic of China (PRC) [Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó]*

This is the political entity proclaimed by Máo Zédōng when he gave his speech (‘China has risen again’) at the Gate of Heavenly Peace [Tiān’ān Mén] in Beijing on October 1, 1949. The PRC claims sovereignty over Taiwan.

b) *Mainland China; the Mainland [Zhōngguó Dàlù]*

This is a geographic term, used to refer to the continental part of China, without Taiwan, but also implying the land in actual control of the PRC. The term functions as a proper name, so we go against custom and write ‘the Mainland’, with a capital rather than small initial, but only when used as short-hand for the *de facto* PRC.

c) *The Republic of China (ROC) [Zhōnghuá Mínguó]*

This was the name of the political entity established in 1912, after the fall of the Manchu (or Qing) dynasty (which took place the previous year). The man most responsible for the founding of the Republic was Sun Yat-sen (Sūn Yìxiān in Mandarin), and for this, he has earned the name Guófù ‘Father of the Country (country-father)’. But although he was named provisional president in 1911, fears for the unity of the country led to the appointment of Yuán Shìkǎi (Yuan Shih-k’ai), an important military and diplomatic official under the Qing, as the first president of the Republic (1912). When the later president, Chiang Kai-shek (Mandarin: Jiǎng Jièshí) fled with his government to Taiwan

in 1949, he kept the name Republic of China, as the basis of legitimacy over both Taiwan and the mainland.

d) Taiwan [Táiwān]

Taiwan was named Formosa by the Dutch (who took over the Portuguese name of *Ilha Formosa* ‘beautiful island’). The Dutch colonized the island in the early 17th century, fighting off the Spanish who had also established bases on the northern part of the island. Taiwan is some 130 miles off the coast of Fujian - its central mountains are just visible from the Fujian coast on a clear day. The earliest inhabitants of Taiwan spoke Austronesian languages unrelated to Chinese, and indigenous groups such as the Ami, Paiwan and Bunun who still speak non-Chinese languages are descendents of those early Taiwan Austronesians. At least by the 13th century, Chinese, speaking Hakka and Fujianese – regional Chinese languages -- had established small communities on the island. These were joined by holdouts from the Ming after the fall of that dynasty on the mainland. The Qing dynasty, that followed the Ming, annexed Taiwan in 1683, making it a province. In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan as part of a war settlement, and remained a colony until 1945. Then, in the period before the Communist victory in 1949, large numbers of mainlanders fled to Taiwan along with, or in conjunction with, the removal of the Nationalist government.

e) Hong Kong [Xiāng Gǎng]

From July 1997, Hong Kong has been a Special Administrative Region [tèbié xíngzhèngqū] of China, which guarantees it autonomy within the PRC in all but foreign affairs and defense. Its English name reflects the Cantonese pronunciation of what is in Mandarin Xiāng Gǎng ‘fragrant harbor’. Hong Kong was formally ceded to the British in the Treaty of Nanking [Nánjīng], signed in 1842 (on the a ship anchored in the Yangtse River, slightly east of Nanjing) at the end of the Opium War. The Kowloon Peninsula [Jiǔlóng ‘nine dragons’] was added, and the New Territories [Xīnjiè] were leased for 99 years from 1898 – making, in all, a little more than 1000 square kilometers.

Hong Kong has been settled by a number of distinct Chinese groups, including the so-called *Bendi* (ie ‘locals’), who emigrated in the Sung (10th – 12th C.) after being driven from their homes in north China; the *Tanka*, fisherfolk who live on boats and are thought by some be the descendents of the non-Han *Yue* people; the *Hokla*, early immigrants from Fujian; the *Hakka*, who ended up mostly in less fertile parts of the New Territories; and numerous clans and people from nearby Cantonese speaking regions, as well as other parts of China. Despite its small size, Hong Kong has preserved the traces of many traditional Chinese social forms and practices better than many other parts of the Chinese speaking world.

f) Greater China

The occasional need to talk about a single Chinese entity, consisting of the Mainland with Hong Kong, and Taiwan, has recently given rise to a term, Liǎng’àn Sāndì ‘two-shores three-lands’.

g) Nationalists and Communists

After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, it was customary to distinguish the two political entities by their only extant political parties, the Communist Party (Gōngchǎndǎng) – abbreviated, CCP - and the Nationalist Party (Guómíndǎng, or Kuomintang) - the KMT; hence ‘the Communist government’, ‘the Nationalist leaders’, etc. Recent changes in Taiwan and on the Mainland make neither term appropriate. In Taiwan, in the election of 1998, the first democratic election in a Chinese country, the Nationalists failed to win for the first time. And on the Mainland, the Communist Party, though retaining its institutional position in the government, is becoming less of a dominating force in political life.

h) Běijīng and Běipíng (and Peking)

One of the curious consequences of the political differences between the PRC and the ROC (Taiwan) is that they have different names for the city known (at least until recently) as Peking by the English speaking world. For the PRC, the capital is, of course, Běijīng [‘northern capital’], the city that has been the capital for all but brief periods since 1422, when Emperor Yǒng Lè of the Míng dynasty moved the government north from Nánjīng [‘southern capital’] in Central China. However, in 1927, the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek, having little real power in the north and under threat from the Japanese, made Nánjīng their capital, and restored the name Běipíng ‘northern-peace’ (or, ‘Peiping’) that the northern city had had before Yǒnglè made it his capital in the 15th century. Officially, the Nationalists retained the name Běipíng even after the Japanese conquered the city of Nánjīng, and continued to do so even after the PRC was established (1949) and the city was restored as the capital and assumed the name of Beijing once again.

The spelling ‘Peking’ reflects an earlier system of transcribing Chinese, in which ‘ki’ represented the sounds now represented by ‘ji’, i.e. roughly the initial sound of English ‘jing-a-ling’. Unfortunately, English and other non-Chinese speakers got used to pronouncing Peking as it was spelled, ‘pee-king’, and the spelling with its literal pronunciation survives (in English) to this day in certain proper names, such as Peking University (still the official English name of the institution) and Peking Duck.

The transcription, Beijing, is not without its problems either, since speakers who do not know the *pinyin* system of transcription, tend to make the ‘j’ sound more foreign or exotic by giving it a French quality: i.e. ‘bay-zhing’. In fact -- as you will soon learn -- the actual Mandarin pronunciation is (using English as a guide) ‘bay-dging’ or ‘bay-jing’.

II. Chinese speech

1. Chinese [Zhōngwén, Hànyǔ]

Chinese, as a term for language, is used to refer to the native languages, spoken or written, now or in the past, of the Chinese people. Thus Mandarin, Cantonese, Taiwanese, and Classical Chinese are all Chinese. In other words, while Chinese can be used in a narrow sense to refer to standard Chinese, or Mandarin, it is more often used to

mean the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. In that respect it is comparable to the term ‘Romance’, that applies to the modern derivatives of Latin (French, Catalan, Romanian, etc.) as well as to Latin itself.

2. Mandarin [Guóyǔ, Pǔtōnghuà, Huáyǔ]

Mandarin is a term that dates from early Portuguese contacts with China, when it was used to translate the Chinese term Guānhuà (‘speech of officials’). The word, Mandarin, derives (ultimately) from a Portuguese word meaning ‘counselor’. Guānhuà was the name given to specialized speaking practices (that served as a *lingua franca*) used from Yuan times (13th century) and earlier among officials and other educated classes who might come from different parts of China, and speak mutually unintelligible Chinese in their home regions. In English, the term Mandarin persisted as a name for the modern standard, and now in ordinary English, it is often used for both the modern spoken and the modern written languages, as if the two were the same. Actually they are not, as we will see below, and so some prefer the more accurate, but unwieldy terms ‘Modern Spoken Chinese’ and ‘Modern Written Chinese’ instead of Mandarin. In this text, we will defer to ordinary usage and continue to use Mandarin, at least for the spoken language. Mandarin has been promoted as a national (spoken) language by the governments of both the PRC and Taiwan, and is generally conceived of as a norm for educated or formal speech by Chinese speaking peoples the world over.

In Chinese itself, the terminology is more complicated. Guānhuà, which might have followed the foreign term, Mandarin, to come to designate the modern spoken standard, was replaced by other names. Now, despite a notional agreement on the nature of the language itself, the PRC and Taiwan refer to Mandarin with different terms. Taiwan and most overseas communities use Guóyǔ (‘national language’, a term dating at least from 1918), while the PRC calls it Pǔtōnghuà (‘common language’, another term with a legacy dating back to the early part of the 20th century). In Singapore, where the different linguistic situation makes both terms inappropriate, it is called Huáyǔ (‘language of the Huá’ - Huá being an ancient name for the Chinese people).

3. The origins of Mandarin (speech)

While Guānhuà served as a medium of communication across regional lines, and enabled a small class of educated people to talk to each other, *no Chinese language evolved into a general medium of communication for all classes across the whole country until quite recent times*. (What did serve as a *lingua franca* for the educated classes was Classical Chinese, a written language, discussed below.) By the 19th century, the lack of a national spoken language was seen as a major obstacle to the modernization of China, and the 20th century brought efforts to identify a suitable medium and promote it as a standard. Ultimately, after various interesting attempts to establish a hybrid language, the language planners adopted the pronunciation (tones and other sounds) of the *educated* speech of the capital, Beijing (which had also formed the basis for Guānhuà) as the basis for a national language - Mandarin. But they did not adopt all features of the language of educated Beijingers - just the pronunciation.

In imagining a language, it is often easier to think of the sounds, which are limited and easily listed, than the words or grammatical patterns. But the choice of words or grammatical patterns that a speaker makes - usage - though they are facets of language that we attempt to characterize in dictionaries and grammars, are in the realm of culture and not concrete objects. They cannot be envisioned easily, nor can they be completely characterized or comprehensively listed. It turns out that Mandarin, while based on the pronunciation of a class of speakers associated with Běijīng (but also, at times, with another capital, Nánjīng) has sources of usage that lie beyond the Běijīng region. Words with relatively broad regional distribution have been adopted over Běijīng localisms, for example. And grammatical constructions found in southern speeches such as Cantonese, Shanghainese and Hokkien often co-exist with northern patterns in modern Mandarin. Written usage, which absorbed not only localisms from the important economic and cultural region of the Lower Yangtse River (Shànghǎi to Nánjīng), but also attracted words for modern concepts coined in Japanese, is another source of (spoken) Mandarin material. So Beijingers, while they may have a claim on the best pronunciation, are less justified in claiming the standard for speech!

To summarize then: Mandarin is not simply the speech of Běijīng, nor is it a particular version of Běijīng speech. Its pronunciation reflects educated speech associated with Beijing (but not just Beijing), but its usage and vocabulary have a broad range of sources.

4. Varieties of Mandarin

Though both Taiwan and the PRC have always agreed on (and perhaps exaggerated) the relationship between Mandarin and Beijing speech, political separation and cultural divergence have resulted in differences in the norm. Thus dictionaries from the PRC and Taiwan may give different pronunciations and slightly different meanings (or more often, connotations) to words. In addition to these differences in the shape of the standard, there are even more differences between the standard and the Mandarin spoken on the streets.

The case of Taiwan is illustrative. There, Mandarin is not the first language of much of the population. The most common first language is Táiyǔ ('Taiwanese'), a Southern Min dialect that is mutually intelligible (if not virtually identical) to the Southern Min spoken in the province of Fujian across the Taiwan Straits. (Southern Min is also the predominant language of the Singapore Chinese, and many other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.)

With so many in Taiwan speaking Táiyǔ as a first language, it is not surprising that Mandarin there is often influenced by the pronunciation, grammar and usage of Taiwanese. This is Taiwan Mandarin. The same phenomenon occurs elsewhere, of course, so that no matter where you are in China, Mandarin heard on the street – particularly from the less cosmopolitan classes - will generally have local features. Native speakers quickly get used to these differences, just as English speakers get used to the various accents of English. But learners may find the variation more disquieting, so it is important to have some exposure to different speakers of Mandarin.

Though there are probably more and more Chinese whose first language is Mandarin and whose speech is close to the appointed norms, it is still true that the majority of Chinese speak more than one variety of Chinese, and for many of them Mandarin would be a second language. A few years ago, *USA Today* published statistics on the ‘world’s most common languages, ranked by population that uses each as a first language’. Mandarin was listed first, with 885 million speakers (followed by Spanish with 332m and English with 322m.) However, if the figures are, as stated, for first language use, then the Mandarin figure is probably quite inflated by speakers for whom Mandarin is actually a second language rather than a first.

When describing the ‘best Mandarin’ (or the ‘best Chinese’), Chinese tend to focus on pronunciation, praising it as biāozhǔn ‘standard’ (as in ‘your Chinese is very biāozhǔn’). For this reason, native Chinese speakers, who tend to be effusive in their praise in any case, will sometimes flatter a foreigner by saying (s)he speaks the language better than they do. By ‘better’, they mean with a better approximation of the educated Beijing accent. Apart from language classrooms, the most biāozhǔn Mandarin is heard on the broadcast media, in schools, and in the speech of young, educated urban Chinese.

5. Regional languages or ‘topolects’ [fāngyán]

There are some seven major dialect groupings of Chinese, including the geographically extensive Northern group (divided into Southwestern, Northwestern and Northern regions) to which Mandarin belongs. Of the others, Cantonese (Yuè), Shanghainese (Wú), Fujianese or Hokkien (Mǐn) and Kèjiā or Hakka are the best known. (Yuè, Wú and Mǐn are Chinese linguistic designations, while Hokkien and Hakka are dialect versions of the Mandarin names; Fújiàn = Hokkien etc.) All represent groupings of diverse dialects thought to share a common origin. Even within the group, the varieties are not necessarily mutually intelligible. Cantonese for example, includes many dialects, such as Táishān (Hoisan), which are quite distinct from the standard Canton dialect.

In many respects the dialect groupings of Chinese – represented by Cantonese, Shanghainese, Hakka etc. – are different languages. They are not, after all, mutually intelligible and they have their own standards (the language of Canton for Cantonese, Amoy, for Fujianese, Suzhou for Shanghainese, etc.) In linguistic terms, they are comparable to Dutch and German, or Spanish and Portuguese. However, as noted earlier, unlike those European languages, the Chinese regional languages share a written language, make reference to a common standard (Mandarin), and identify with a common culture. Recently, the term ‘topolect’, a direct translation of the Chinese term fāngyán ‘place-language’ that uses Greek roots, has gained currency as a more formal term for what are generally called ‘regional languages’ in this book. So we may speak of Cantonese (or Yuè) as a topolect, with varieties such as Hoisan as dialects within Cantonese.

III. The written language

1. *Written Mandarin*

As noted above, Mandarin is often used to refer to the standard written language of China, as well as to the standard spoken language. This is the language of composition learned in school and used by all educated Chinese regardless of the particular variety (or ‘dialect’) that they speak. A Cantonese, for example, speaking Taishan Cantonese (called Hoisan in its own language) at home and in the neighborhood, speaking something closer to standard Cantonese when s/he goes to Canton (city), and speaking Cantonese flavored Mandarin in certain formal or official situations, is taught to write a language that is different in terms of vocabulary, grammar and usage from both Hoisan and standard Cantonese. Even though s/he would read it aloud with Cantonese pronunciation, it would in fact be more easily relatable to Mandarin in all respects *other than pronunciation*.

2. *From Classical Chinese to modern written Chinese*

Written language always differs from spoken, for it serves quite different functions. But in the case of Chinese, the difference was, until the early part of the 20th century, extreme. For until then, most written communication, and almost all printed matter, was written in a language called Wényán in Chinese (‘literary language’), and generally known in English as Classical Chinese. It was this language – written only – that served as a medium of communication *for the educated classes* across dialect areas.

Classical Chinese was unlikely ever to have been a close representation of a spoken language, but it is thought to have had its roots in the language spoken some 2500 years ago in northern China. That language, though still Chinese in the sense that it is ancestral to modern Chinese languages, would have differed quite significantly in sounds, grammar and vocabulary from any form of modern Chinese. However, it was written in characters that have retained their basic shape to the present day, and these serve to preserve the connection between ancient and modern words whose pronunciation and grammatical context is radically different. While spelling changes (that reflect changes in pronunciation), as well as a high degree of word replacement, make Old English texts completely opaque to modern readers of English, ancient Chinese texts continue to look familiar despite the changes that have taken place in the intervening years. Educated speakers can read them out in modern pronunciation, Mandarin, say, or Cantonese or Fujianese. Without knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of Classical Chinese, they may not fully understand them, but enough words – and more than words, sayings and phrases - have survived to modern times to make the writings of Confucius (5th – 6th century BC), or the poems of Li Po (8th century AD) superficially accessible to the modern reader of Chinese.

Classical Chinese is still used for certain kinds of formal or ritual writing, eg diplomas and inscriptions. It has also been a source of words, quotations, allusions, stories and even style that appear in the modern written language, as well as in speech, but relatively few people read the classical language well, and only a few specialists are still able to write it fluently.

Since Classical Chinese was not based on an accessible spoken language, facility in writing it required memorizing large samples to act as models. And once learned, the classical language would tend to channel expression in conservative directions. Citation was the main form of argument; balance and euphony were crucial elements of style. These features did not endear it to the modernizers, and they sought to replace it with a language closer to the modern spoken. They had a precedent, for all through Chinese history, there had in fact been genres of writing known as Báihuà ('white = plain or vernacular – language') that were rich in colloquial elements. Such genres were not highly regarded or considered worthy as literary models, but they were well known as the medium of the much read novels of the Ming and Qing, e.g. *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also called *The Story of Stone*), *Monkey* (also known as *Journey to the West*), or the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Báihuà, though it retained classical elements, provided the early model for a more colloquial standard written language

Because colloquial norms varied, and led to problems of consistency and clarity, some advocated a return to Classical Chinese as the written standard, and if it could have shed some of its stylistic affectations (such as the high value put on parallelism of structure and elaborate or archaic diction), Classical Chinese might have developed into a modern written norm much as Classical Arabic has become the written norm of the Arabic speaking world. But Classical Chinese was too closely associated with conservatism and insularity at a time when China was looking to modernize. Nevertheless, a new written norm does not arise overnight, and for at least the first half of the 20th century, a number of different styles across the range of classical to colloquial coexisted and vied for dominance. Following the Chinese revolution, written styles in Taiwan and the PRC diverged. In the PRC, political and other factors favored a more colloquial written style, whereas in Taiwan the influence of classical styles has remained stronger.

3. *Characters*

The earliest extensive examples of written Chinese date from late in the second millennium BC. These are the so-called oracle bone inscriptions (jiǎgǔwén), inscribed or painted on ox bones and the bottom plate -- the carapace -- of tortoise shells. This early writing made use of characters whose form differs in appearance but which can be directly related to the modern characters (particularly the traditional characters that are still standard in Taiwan). In the Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BC), the script was modified and standardized as part of the reform of government administration. The resulting style, known as the 'little seal' (xiǎo zhuàn) is still used on seals (or 'chops'). At first glance, little seal characters look quite unlike the modern, but a native reader can often discern the basic parts and figure them out.

A script known as lishū came into extensive use in the Han (202 BC – AD 220). Individual strokes in the lishū style are described as having "silkworm's head and swallow's tail"; it is still used occasionally for writing large characters. The modern script – the kind generally used for printed matter – is based on the kǎishū 'the model script' that has been in use since before the period known as the Southern and Northern

Dynasties (5th and 6th centuries). Other varieties were developed for handwriting (xíngshū ‘running script’) and calligraphy (cǎoshū ‘grass script’).

4. Traditional (fántǐzì) and simplified characters (jiǎntǐzì)

The various styles such as lishū and kǎishū refer to the shape of the strokes and the style of the font rather than the number of strokes. In the past, simpler and more complex versions of characters have often co-existed. In many cases, the more complicated were used for formal communication and the simpler, for less formal. In the 1950s however, in the PRC, a set of characters, most of them based on attested forms, were promoted as a general standard for all printed matter. Singapore adopted the new forms for some purposes, but Taiwan, Hong Kong and most overseas communities kept the traditional forms, and as a result, two types of (formal) characters are now used in the Chinese speaking world. In Chinese, these are called fántǐzì ‘abundant-stroke-characters’ and jiǎntǐzì ‘simple-stroke-characters’. Here, they will be called ‘traditional’ and ‘simplified’ (rather than ‘full’ and ‘simplex’ as the Chinese names might suggest). The two types are illustrated below, using the phrase Zhōngguó huà ‘(middle-country speech) Chinese [spoken] language’:

Traditional	Simplified
中國話	中国话
Zhōngguó huà	Zhōngguó huà

The three characters cited illustrate the differences nicely. Many characters have only one form (like zhōng), or show slight differences between the two forms (like huà). Others (like guó) show significant differences but are easily relatable. Relatively few – no more than a few dozen – are completely different, and most of those are commonly encountered. So the differences between the two sets of characters are not as significant as might be imagined. A native speaker sees the relationship between the two fairly easily, and using context, moves from one to the other without much difficulty. Students generally write only one style, but they should be comfortable reading either.

5. Homophony

Characters represent syllable-length words (or rather morphemes, which are the meaningful components of words). And since in Chinese these units are short, the chance of homophony is relatively large, far larger than in English. In English words pronounced the same are often written the same, eg the ‘pens’ of ‘pig pen’ and ‘ink pen.’ But it is also common in English for different words of identical pronunciation to be written differently: ‘to, too, two’. Written Chinese is more comparable to the latter case: words with different (and unrelatable) meanings are written with different characters. A syllable such as shì can be written dozens of ways, depending on the meaning, as the famous Chinese linguist Chao Yuen Ren showed in a tour de force whose title was:

施氏食獅史

Shī shì shí shī shǐ.

(Shi) clan eat lion story

The story of how Shi ate the lion.

Chao's tale continues for another 100 or so words all pronounced shi on one of the four tones. It is written in Classical Chinese (and given modern sound values). In modern Chinese, there would be far less homophony and the story could probably be read aloud and understood. But Chao's exercise makes the point nicely: characters are units of sound and meaning. Letters are units of sound only.

6. *Transcribing sound in characters*

Characters are sometimes used only for their sound values, with the usual meanings ignored. In this way, Chinese characters can be used to transcribe foreign sounds. And in fact, just as we can use roman letters to write Chinese, Chinese have used characters to write foreign languages, including English. Here is an example from a very simple Chinese English-teaching manual from the Mainland (and therefore written in simplified characters):

艾姆搜普利丝得吐斯衣油厄根

ài-mǔ sōu pǔ-lì-sī-dé tǔ sī-yī yóu è-gēn
I'm so pleased to see you again.

Characters are regularly used for their syllabic value, in this way, to transliterate personal names, names of places, as well as sounds: 沙士比亞 Shāshìbǐyà 'Shakespeare'; 密西西比 Mìxīxībǐ 'Mississippi'; 嘩啦 huālá 'splat' [*sound of crashing*]. But because characters can only be used for syllabic units, the match is not usually as good as it would be in an alphabetic system, that can match symbol to (consonant and vowel) sounds. A more precise match could be achieved by inserting an alphabetic transcription such as *bopomofo* or *pinyin* (see below) into a character text, but this practice is still rare.

7. *Pictographs, ideographs, logographs.*

Simple characters, or the basic components of more complicated ones, can often be traced back to pictorial representations, and for this reason characters are sometimes labeled pictographs. The earliest characters – the oracle bone inscriptions - look even more like pictures. (Incidentally, alphabetic symbols also have pictorial origins; the letter 'A', for example, derives from a representation of the head of an ox, and can be rotated 90 degrees to make the connection more apparent.) But the majority of modern characters do not derive from attempts to represent objects pictorially, and even those that do, have become so conventionalized that no one could possibly guess the meaning from the form alone. That is not to say that Chinese characters do not have certain aesthetic qualities that can be exploited in poetry and art, or that their pictorial qualities cannot be exploited

for language learning as well; it is rather that the pictorial aspects of characters do not play a significant role in ordinary reading or writing

The term ideograph has also been applied to Chinese characters, sometimes with the implication that characters allow immediate access to meaning without reference to sound, or without reference to particular words. The fact that Chinese characters were borrowed into other languages such as Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese to represent words that matched in meaning but not sound offer some support for such a notion. And indeed, it is true that the link between character and sound can vary; Cantonese speakers read Chinese with Cantonese sounds, while Mandarin speakers read them with Mandarin. (Much as Australians and Scots both read English in their own pronunciation.) But regardless of the particular language, understanding of the text is still dependent on linguistic contexts. Even in classical Chinese, the reader has to identify words and contexts that are linguistic, not just in the realm of thought, in order to perceive meaning. So the term ideographic is not really appropriate either.

Writing systems are better named according to the units that they encode. Thus English is basically phonographic – letters encode sounds – but also has considerable logographic elements (to, too, two; &; \$). Chinese is primarily logographic (units encode words) but also has syllabo-graphic elements (since syllables of similar sound often have similar graphic elements, regardless of meaning).

8. Representing the sounds of Chinese

While characters do exhibit sound-based connections (as we will see later), the pronunciation of a particular character is not systematically indicated by its form. This can be an advantage, as we noted earlier, for it allows speakers of different dialects (or even languages) to apply different sound to the same graph. But learners have special needs. It is useful for them to be able to symbolize the pronunciation for purposes of keeping track of material (such as dialogues) and internalizing correct pronunciation. (Cantonese and other dialect speakers, learning Mandarin, need a transcription system for the same reasons.) But even more important, an alphabetic system of writing, which can be learned very quickly, speeds up the presentation of language material.

Alphabetic systems for writing Chinese date back at least to the 16th century. Most have made use of Roman letters, and are therefore called romanizations. We can illustrate some of the systems, using the compound word for ‘Chinese language’ again:

1. <i>Wade-Giles</i>	Chūngkuó huà	ㄓ	=	zh
		ㄨ	=	w
2. <i>Yale</i>	Jūnggwó hwà	ㄌ	=	eng
3. <i>National Romanization</i>	Jong-guo huah	ㄍ	=	g
		ㄨ	=	w
4. <i>Zhùyīn Fúhào</i>	→	ㄛ	=	o

5. *Hanyu Pinyin*

Zhōngguó huà

ㄆ = h
 ㄨ = w
 ㄩ、 = a

The Wade-Giles system (named for Thomas Wade, a Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University at the turn of 19th century who invented it, and Herbert A. Giles, a consular officer and, later, Wade’s successor at Cambridge, who incorporated it in his dictionary) was, for many years, used in most English language publications on China, and by many library catalogues. It is well known for distinguishing the plain initial consonants from the aspirated (g from k, d from t, zh from ch etc. in the *pinyin* system) by placing an apostrophe after the latter: *kuo* versus *k’uo*, for example, or *chung* versus *ch’ung*. (This is phonetically quite sensible since both sounds are voiceless in Chinese.)

The Yale system grew out of work performed by the War Department during WW II and was used in the Yale textbook series familiar to several generations of students of Chinese. It is probably the most transparent of the transcription systems. National Romanization (Guóyǔ Luómǎzì), a system that had official status in China during the 1930s, incorporates the tone in the spelling - notice there are no tone marks above the vowels in *Jong-guo huah* - which makes it invaluable for learning and retaining tones. And Hànyǔ Pīnyīn is the official system of the PRC and has been accepted by most of the rest of the world - but not (until very recently) Taiwan.

Zhùyīn Fúhào (‘transcription of sounds’), or more colloquially, *Bopo mofo*, after the first four letters of its alphabet, has been the primary system of transcription in Taiwan. It has a longer history than *pinyin*, being based on a system created in 1919, called Zhùyīn Zìmǔ ‘transcription alphabet’ that was intended to serve as a fully fledged writing system (ie one to serve publication). It was inspired by the Japanese ‘kana’ system, whose symbols derive from characters rather than Roman letters. *Bopo mofo* symbols have the advantage of looking Chinese, and of not suggesting any particular English (or other language’s) sound values. In Taiwan, children and foreign students learn to read with materials in which *Bopo mofo* is written vertically alongside the character text to indicate pronunciation (as shown below).

flowers	night	place	spring	花ㄉ	夜ㄝ	處ㄝ	春ㄝ	
				ㄨ	ㄝ	ㄨ	ㄨ	
				ㄩ			ㄩ	
fall	come	place	sleep	落ㄌ	來ㄌ	處ㄝ	眠ㄇ	
				ㄨ	ㄝ	ㄨ	ㄝ	春
				ㄝ			ㄝ	
know	wind	hear	not	知ㄓ	風ㄈ	聞ㄨ	不ㄨ	
					ㄨ	ㄨ	ㄨ	曉
							ㄨ	
many	rain	sing	aware	多ㄉ	雨ㄩ	啼ㄉ	覺ㄐ	
				ㄨ		ㄝ	ㄝ	
				ㄝ			ㄝ	

The Mainland	Běipíng (Peiping)
The Republic of China (ROC)	Máo Zédōng
Taiwan	Chiang Kai-shek (Jiǎng Jièshí)
Hong Kong (Xiāng Gǎng)	Sun Yat-sen (Sūn Yìxiān)
Qīng (Manchu) dynasty (1644-1912)	1911
Míng (Chinese) dynasty (1368-1644)	1912
Yuán (Mongol) dynasty (1276-1368)	1949
Chinese	oracle bone inscriptions (jiǎgǔwén))
Guānhuà ('officials' language)	little seal characters (xiǎo zhuàn)
Mandarin	model script (kǎishū)
Guóyǔ (national language)	traditional characters (fántǐzì)
Pǔtōnghuà (ordinary language)	simplified characters (jiǎntǐzì)
lingua franca	homophony
Classical Chinese (Wényán)	pictographs
Báihuà	ideographs
Táiyǔ	logographs
Taiwanese Mandarin	Wade-Giles
dialects and topolects	Zhùyīn Fúhào (Bopo mofo)
Cantonese	Hànyǔ Pīnyīn
Shanghainese	
Fujianese (Hokkien)	
Kejia (Hakka)	

V. Further Reading and Reference

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