

## Background

### 1. China

#### *Names for 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 BCE. 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, 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 Liǎo dynasty in the north of China in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Khitan dynasty was the first to make a capital in the region of modern 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 Qin unification. 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). Huá, combined with the Zhōng of Zhōngguó, appears in the modern official names of the country (see below).

#### *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 the inaugural speech (‘China has risen again’) at the Gate of Heavenly Peace [Tiān’ānmén] in Beijing on October 1, 1949. The PRC claims sovereignty over Taiwan and the regions currently controlled by the government in Taipei.

##### *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. When the term functions as a proper name, referring to the *de facto* PRC, then we go against custom and write ‘the Mainland’, with a capital M; otherwise, it is written with the usual small ‘m’.

##### *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’. 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 in 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 the whole of China, both Taiwan and the mainland.

*d) Taiwan [Táiwān]*

Taiwan is some 130 miles off the coast of Fujian; its central mountains are just visible from the Fujian coast on a clear day. 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 17<sup>th</sup> century, fighting off the Spanish who had also established bases on the northern part of the island. Taiwan’s earliest inhabitants spoke Austronesian languages unrelated to Chinese, and indigenous groups such as the Ami, Paiwan and Bunan who still speak non-Chinese languages are descendents of those early Taiwan Austronesians. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier, Chinese speaking Hakka and Fukienese – 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 a ship anchored in the Yangtze River, slightly east of Nanjing) at the end of the Opium War. The Kowloon Peninsula [Jiǔlóng ‘nine dragons’] was added in 1860, and the New Territories [Xīnjiè] were leased for 99 years from 1898, making Hong Kong, 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* (‘locals’), who emigrated in the Sung (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> C.) after being driven from their homes in north China; the *Tanka*, fisherfolk who live on boats and are thought by some to 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’.



### Liǎng'àn Sāndì

(From *The World Factbook*, 2005; [www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ch.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ch.html))

#### 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 (Gòngchǎndǎng), abbreviated CCP, and the Nationalist Party (Guómíndǎng, or Kuomintang), the KMT. Hence ‘the Communist government’, ‘the Nationalist leaders’, etc. Recent changes in Taiwan and 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 and became the main opposition party. Meanwhile, on the Mainland, the Communist Party, though retaining its institutional position in the government, has become 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 formerly known to the English speaking world as Peking. For the PRC, the capital is Běijīng [‘the 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 [‘the 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 (Peiping) ‘northern-peace’ 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 after Běijīng reverted to the capital in 1949 under the PRC.

The spelling ‘Peking’, with a ‘ki’ may be a vestige of the French system of transcription that used ‘ki’ to represent the sound ‘tʃ’ – now written with a ‘j’. Or it may reflect the Cantonese pronunciation of the name Beijing, in which the initial of the second syllable is pronounced with a hard ‘k’ sound. Representations of Cantonese pronunciation were often adopted by the British as official postal spellings (cf. Nanking [Nánjīng] and Chungking [Chóngqìng]). Though most foreigners now spell the name of the city in *pinyin* transcription, Beijing (which represents the Mandarin pronunciation), the old spelling survives 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 tend to make the ‘j’ sound more foreign or exotic by giving it a French quality: ‘bay-zhing’. As you will soon learn, the actual Mandarin pronunciation is closer to ‘bay-dzing’.

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