

The Centralia

The Origin and the Basics

To see what China is and represents takes one to an ocean of information about 20 percent of the humankind living on a continent over millennia. Appropriate to its mountainous volume, the existing knowledge of China is defiled by countless myths and distortions that often mislead even the most focused about China's past, present, and future. Generations of students of China have translated and clarified much of the Chinese mystique. Many sturdy Chinese peculiarities, however, persist to impede standardization and generalization of China studies that still critically need more historically grounded researches (Perry 1989, 579–91). To read the Chinese history holds a key to a proper understanding of China. Yet, the well-kept, rich, and massive Chinese historical records are particularly full of deliberate omissions, inadvertent inaccuracies, clever distortions, and blatant forgeries. A careful, holistic, and revisionist deciphering of the Chinese history, therefore, is the prerequisite to opening the black box of Chinese peculiarities. The first step is to clarify the factual fundamentals of China, the Centralia, that are often missed, misconstrued, or misconceived. The revealed and rectified basics inform well the rich sources and the multiple origins of China as a world empire. This chapter thus explores the nomenclature, the ecogeography, the peoples, and the writing of history in the Chinese World. The starting point is the feudal society prior to the third century BCE, the pre-Qin Era when the Eastern Eurasian continent was under a Westphalia-like world order.

The Chinese Nomenclature: More than Just Semantics

China (*Sina* in Latin, *Cīna* in Sanskrit, and *Chine* in French) is most probably the phonetic translation of a particular feudal state, later a kingdom in today's Western China (秦国 the *Qin* or the *Chin*, 770–221 BCE) that

became an empire and united and ruled the bulk of East Asian continent (秦朝 221–207 BCE). The Qin ended the Warring States Era with superior force and superb diplomacy, and created the basic model and pattern of a lasting political system and governance for the subsequent Chinese rulers. The word China (Qin) has since been used by foreigners to refer to this vast land of Eastern Eurasian continent, in a way similar to the geographic terms of Europe or America or Africa, in just about all Indo-European languages except Russian.¹ Many Chinese and neighboring nations like Japan that utilize Chinese characters called China *Zhina* (支那)—phonetically translated from Cina in Sanskrit first by Chinese Buddhist scholars in the eighth century.² *Zhina* is a geographical name but may literally mean “branch,” definitely without much grandeur. The term became offensive to nationalistic Chinese after the 1930s when the *Zhina*-using Japan invaded China. After World War II, Japan officially ceased using it while unofficially some in Japan still call China by *Zhina* today. When Indonesia turned away from the PRC in 1965 after a bloody coup, allegedly with Beijing’s involvement, and killed hundreds of thousands ethnic Chinese, Jakarta ordered the people to call China “Cina” (支那) instead of “Tionggok” (中国) and reversed that only in 2014 (Sheng 2016). China today rejects the term *Zhina* with one exception: Instead of *yindu-zhongguo* (印度中国), Indochina is still translated as *yindu-zhina* (印度支那).

The name China or *Zhina* in fact has nothing to do with the name Chinese today use to call their country in Chinese: *Zhongguo* (中国), which literally means “Centralia,”³ “central country” or “middle country.” Its synonym is *Zhonghua* (中华), which literally means “central refined” or “central brilliance” and has its root in the name of a prehistoric tribe nation of Huaxia (华夏). Archeological evidence suggests that the phrase of *Zhongguo* is ancient. It was, at the latest, used in the eleventh century BCE as a geographic term describing Centralia or the center of the known world (Chang 2009, 169–256). It was also politically and culturally used to indicate the central location of a tribe, nation, or state. It often described the center of population, wealth, power, and culture of the time.⁴ *Zhongguo*, however, was never the official name of China until the late-nineteenth century when it started to appear as a synonym of Great Qing in some Sino-foreign diplomatic documents, thus corresponding to the English word of China. The term Qin (China or *Zhina*) was never used by Chinese to name their country other than during the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) and during fourth and fifth centuries when, in the politically divided Chinese World, three kingdoms in today’s Northwest China used that name. The Qin’s successor, the Han Empire, actually called the Roman Empire (and the Mediterranean–European World under it) at the time the Great Qin/Chin (大秦) (Foster 1939, 124; Jenkins 2008, 64–68).

Ever since the dawn of China’s recorded history that can be traced back to Yin Shang (殷商) about 3,500 years ago, the countries in Eastern Eurasia were

always named after the specific ruling dynasties, especially those that managed to rule *tianxia* or the whole known world (Zhang 1944, 2–11). The dynasties were largely named after a location such as Qin, Han, Tang, or Song, or a royal design such as Yuan, Ming, Qing. The Qing Empire referred to itself in the Manchu phrase *dulimbai gurun* (middle or central country/area) for the first time in the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia in 1689 (and later used that term to define its dominance and conquest of the peripheries of the Chinese World), however, its official name always remained Great Qing. It was only in the late-nineteenth century, when *Zhongguo* (Centralia) became the name of choice for the country to the Western-educated or influenced elites of the conquered and suppressed ethnic majority—the Han nation (named after the Han Empire two millennia ago).⁵ The Han elites first felt strongly the need to distinguish their country from the invading foreign (mainly European) powers. They also politically needed to abandon the name of Qing Country, named after the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), which was a regime of the ethnic minority of Manchu, a Tungusic decedent of Sushen and Jurchen nomadic nation from the Northeastern Eurasia that invaded and conquered the Han-nation of the Ming Empire (Liang 1900, 9). On the treaties the Qing government signed with foreign countries in the late-nineteenth century, the official name of China in Chinese was almost always Great Qing Country and the phrase *Zhongguo* was only used occasionally in text. The English translation was China or Chinese empire (Palace Museum 2011). *Zhongguo* and *Zhonghua* formally became the official name of the country only in 1912 when a Han-state replaced the Qing Dynasty. The new country was named 中華民國 (People's Country of Zhonghua) with an English translation as Republic of China. *Zhongguo* (Central Country) and China were used, respectively, as the abbreviations. A somewhat wordier new name was adopted by the winning side of the Chinese Civil War in 1949: 中华人民共和国 (People's Republic of Zhonghua) and People's Republic of China in English with the same abbreviations of *Zhongguo* and China (Wei 2014).

In imperial semantics, *Zhongguo* (Centralia) as a sociopolitical location actually migrated around on the East Eurasian continent due to the repeated dynastic cycles and the political divisions of the Chinese World. The empires of Qin and Han enshrined and operationalized the Centralia as a united world empire two millennia ago. This Qin-Han polity mandated a political unification or the China Order for the whole known World in a Centralia-periphery arrangement (Guan 2014). When a Qin-Han world empire (with various names) collapsed, warlords and warring states inevitably emerged with the predestined urge to reunify the world. They fought fiercely to obtain the scared trophy of the Mandate of Heaven symbolized by the title of Centralia. The location of the Centralia thus moved around geographically in the Chinese World from the Yellow River Valley to the south of Yangtze River and then

back to the Northern China plains. The winner of a world-unification war set a new world empire and got to decide where the center was. The official history books simply codified and recognized that afterwards.

Interestingly, the *tianxia* and Centralia conceptualization and the lexicons of *Zhongguo* or *Zhonghua* as the center of the whole known world and as the right name for “us versus the rest (barbarians)” is not exclusively a Han-Chinese practice. The major Japanese framer of the Bushido ideology Soko Yamaga (山鹿素行) argued in the seventeenth century as a Confucian scholar and historian in Han-Chinese language that Japan, not China, was the real *Zhongguo* and *Zhonghua*, the real Centralia or Central civilization of the time, inheriting and continuing the Chinese civilization while the Manchu-conquered China had become simply a “foreign dynasty” ruling over the “western land.”⁶ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Meiji Government, the Mito School of Confucian historians edited *Grand History of Japan* in Chinese characters describing the empires of Sui, Tang, Song, and Ming as simply the peripheral, contributing states to the Centralia of the Japanese World, just like the Ezo people (Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands) and the Ryukyu islands (Okinawa) (Tokugawa 1928). Similar use of the concept and the self-claiming by the small but true “inheritor” of the Centralia were also seen among the Korean elites after the Manchu conquered the Ming Empire in the seventeenth century.⁷ The Korean scholar of Confucianism and anti-Japanese exile, Ryu In-sok (柳麟錫유인석) argued for the Han Nation-centered world order of the Centralia as late as the 1910s (Ryu 1990).

Therefore, instead of *Zhongguo* or Centralia that often implies political and ethnocentric biases that mislead Chinese people and misinform other nations thus contributing to a “pessoptimist” national “identity dilemma” in the PRC (Callahan 2012, 13), the name of China in Chinese today perhaps could be Qin Country (秦国) or Qin-Han Country (秦汉国) that is historically accurate and also linguistically reflecting properly how the rest of the world calls the country: China. The name of the People’s Republic of China could also be renamed in Chinese to be People’s Republic of Qinhan (秦汉人民共和国) or simply Republic of Qinhan (秦汉共和国).⁸

China as a World: Ecogeography Shapes the Mind

The Chinese nomenclature reflects the peculiar self-identification and conception of polity and world order in the Chinese mind. It arises from the long interaction between humans and the nature. Just like the experiences of the peoples in Western and Southern Eurasia, the Mediterranean–European World

and the Subcontinent, the history of the Chinese World has been shaped by geography, especially location, environment, and natural endowment (Jones 2003, ix–xxxvii, 3–44, 225–60). The longevity and the “pattern of centrifugal geographic spread” of the Chinese civilization are also inseparable from the peculiar terrain and location of the Chinese World (Ho 1976, 547–54).

The whole known Chinese World on the Eastern Eurasian continent is physically isolated and insulated from the rest of the planet Earth by the great ocean of the Pacific to the east, the frozen Siberia to the north, the high mountains of the Tibetan Plateau and great deserts to the west, and the sea and tropical jungles (harboring deadly diseases such as malaria) to the south.

Formed and surrounded by impenetrable geographic barriers, the Chinese World is also shaped by climate especially precipitation. It has two distinctive parts: the Centralia or China Proper and the other, more peripheral regions.⁹ The Centralia is mostly on the east and southeast side of a 15-inch annual rainfall line maintained by the seasonal moist winds from the western Pacific

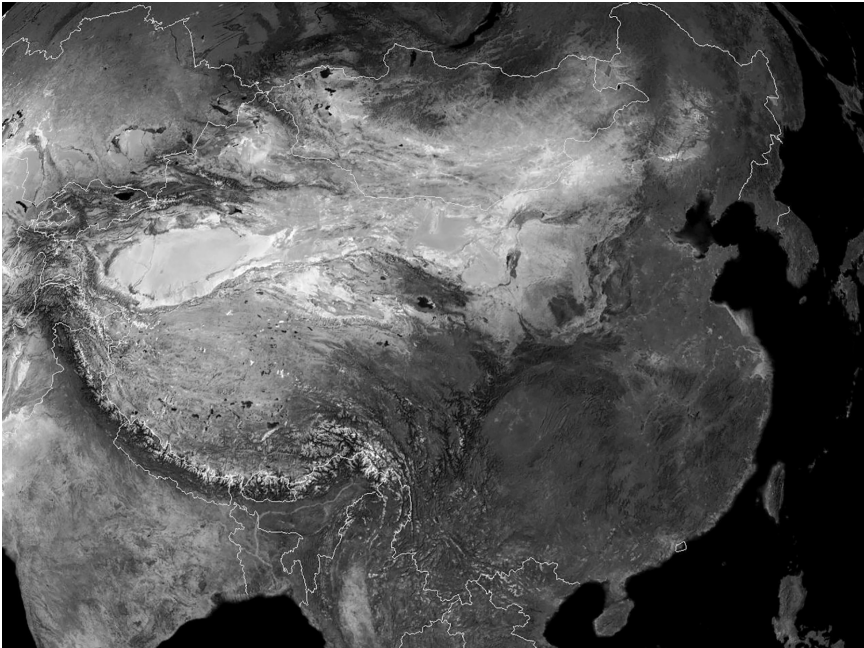


Figure 1.1. The Chinese World: Insulation and Isolation. Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_100.78713E_35.63718N.jpg, public domain image by the U.S. NASA. Downloaded April 20, 2016.

Ocean (Figure 1.2): mostly the Yellow River Valley, the Yangtze River, and the Pearl River basins, and later the eastern part of Manchuria (the Northeast). The relatively flat terrain and fertile soil, especially the massive accumulation of loess on which early Chinese civilization developed; stable and sufficient rainfall; and suitable seasonal temperature in this region combined to sustain a great non-oasis agrarian economy that has powered civilizations for millennia (Naughton 2007, 21–22). The Centralia, therefore, is where the overwhelming majority of the population of the Chinese World has always lived since the prehistorical time. East of an imaginary demographic demarcation line first drawn by a Chinese demographic geographer in 1935, the Heihe (Aihui)-Tengchong Line that parallels the 15-inch rain fall line (Figure 1.3), the China Proper constitutes 43 percent of the total Chinese territory but had more than 96 percent of the total Chinese population in 1935, 94 percent in 2002, and still 92.4 percent in 2011.¹⁰

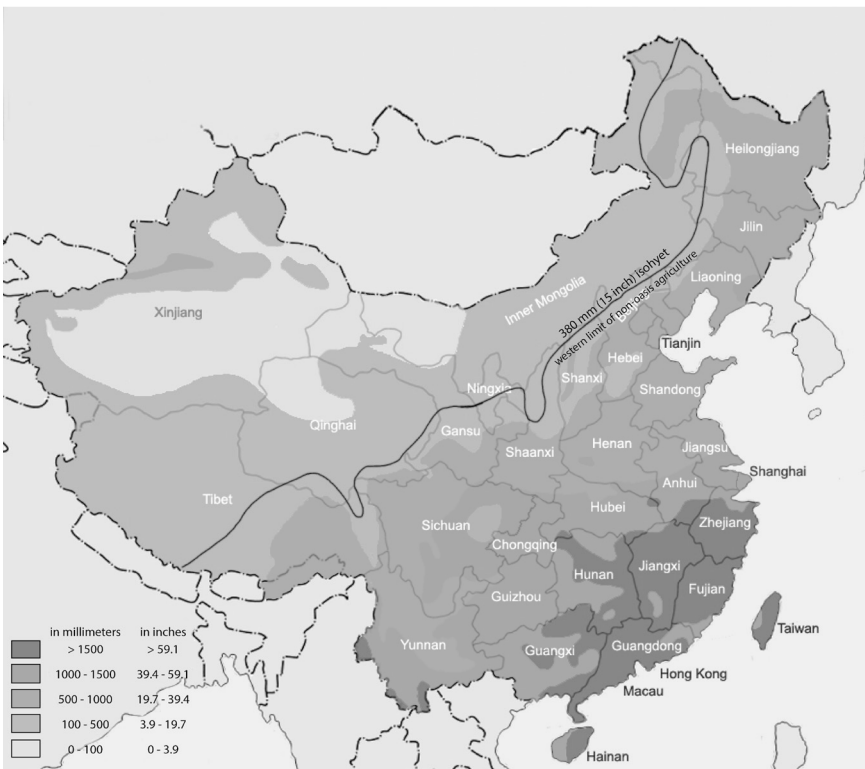


Figure 1.2. The Chinese World: Centralia Defined by Precipitation. Source: Adapted from commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Average_annual_precipitation_in_China(English).png, Creative Commons license. Downloaded December 2, 2016.

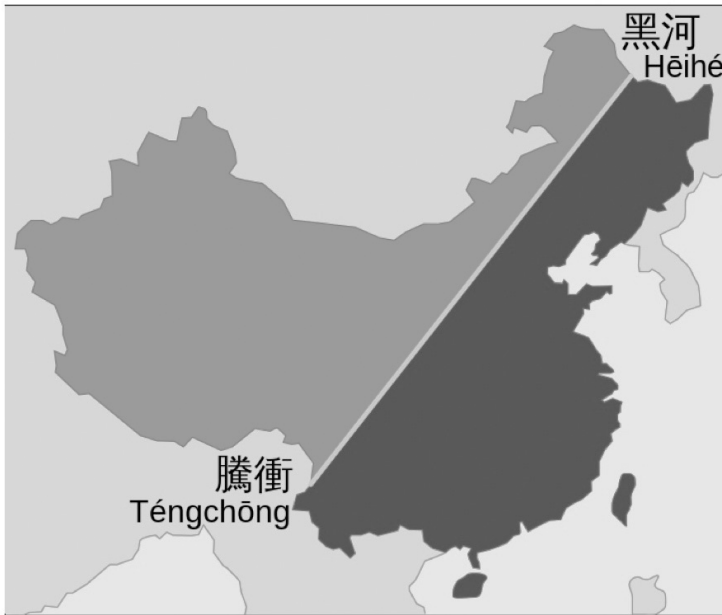


Figure 1.3. The Heihe-Tengchong Line. Source: Public domain neogaf.com/forum/showthread.php?t=728038. Downloaded December 6, 2015.

The Chinese reached the end of this isolated Chinese World, the Centralia or China Proper, easily and early in all directions. Ancient Chinese understandably wondered about what was out there beyond. Traveling monks and pilgrims brought exotic tales and items from other worlds. However, little of significance or relevance was believed or conceived beyond the prohibitive geographical confines and the Chinese largely ignored the non-Chinese worlds until the nineteenth century. The Chinese names of Japan (日本 where sun rises), Tibet (西藏 western land), and Vietnam (越南 beyond the south) illustrate the Chinese mindset.¹¹ The Centralia, mapped as the Qing's eighteen provinces since the eighteenth century, is relatively flat and small. It was only about one-third the size of today's China or roughly the size of Algeria or Iran. With the transportation lines of roughly 1,300 miles (Beijing-Guangzhou) or 900 miles (Beijing-Changsha) by 850 miles (Xianyang-Hangzhou), the Chinese World of Centralia was highly manageable by an imperial army of pre-firearm infantry and cavalry for a unified rule. Most Chinese empires were actually smaller than the Byzantine Empire in size, but much better buffered and insulated (Taagepera 1979, 115–38). Despite the existence of mountains and long rivers, centralized governance was economically and technologically feasible, efficient, and desirable—even necessary.¹² An exception is perhaps the

Nanling Range (南岭) that for centuries helped to shield today's Guangdong from the imperial control based in the north and maintained distinctive *Yue* (粤) society and culture until the twentieth century. Similarly, mountain ranges also allowed many nationalities, societies, and cultures like Hakka, Miao, Yi, and Dai, to exist in Fujian, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan, forming parts of the disparate, self-governing Zomia society in the highlands of East and Southeast Asia (Scott 2009).

In Western Eurasia, as a comparison, the Mediterranean–European World has great mountains (the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Zagros) and massive waters (the Mediterranean, Black, and Baltic seas) which serve to internally sustain many sizable arable lands separated by natural barriers that are hard to penetrate. Multiple peoples developed in localized ways to prohibitively raise the cost of a centralized administration through military conquests. The peoples of the Mediterranean–European World could also move, exit, or enter (and reenter) in the form of massive invasion, migration, and resettlement with low-tech but cost-effective means of sailing. The Chinese World was internally easy to govern geographically and logistically as a whole unit since a centralized conquest was often effective and even efficient. It was hard for contesting states to coexist due to the lack of natural barriers among them, and they had little option for moving or exiting out of the *only* livable Centralia. The main “outside” competing power was mostly from one direction in the form of nomadic cavalry looting the mostly agrarian settlers in Centralia, which justified a united effort by the agrarian peoples for their defense.¹³ Consequently, the whole known Chinese world was often (later “should be” or “ought to be”) united under one ruler as a single entity although the name of that world government could vary, depending on who was the ruler. Ecogeographically and socioeconomically, the Centralia, tended to be a unified world empire.

Meaningful contacts and exchanges constantly existed between the geographically insulated Chinese World and the non-Chinese worlds for eons via mostly the migrants and caravans traveling along the chain of oases in Northwest China and Central Asia, and also via maritime routes of communication and the passes through or around the Himalayans and the Southeast Asian jungles. Out of the Centralia and its immediate peripheries, an “international society” was identifiable in East Asia (Buzan and Zhang 2014, 1–50). Archeological evidences suggest that Caucasian settlers from Western Eurasia have lived in today's West China since 1800 BCE.¹⁴ The world-famous Terracotta Warriors buried with Emperor Qin Shihuang in third century BCE might have been “inspired” by Hellenistic arts at the time (Nickel 2013, 413–47). A minority but growing view (even among PRC historians) holds that the ancient Chinese culture and writing characters might have originated or been influenced in various ways by the non-Chinese civilizations in the West (Hellenic World)

and Southwest Asia (Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley) (Z. Wang 1994, 30). The Chinese ancestors, ancient religions, and language, argues one PRC scholar, were all originally from Africa via West Asia (D. Zhu 2014). The archaeological discoveries in Sanxingdui in Western China have, for example, challenged the standard views of the Yellow River origin of the Chinese civilization.¹⁵ Indeed, non-Chinese worlds impacted the Chinese World in numerous ways throughout the entirety of Chinese history, with imported ideologies and numerous important crops such as cotton, wheat, walnuts, watermelons, pepper, grapes, sesame, cucumbers, carrots and later corn, yams, tomatoes, and tobacco. Yet, those external influences were largely trickles and the existence of non-Chinese worlds was easily obscured culturally and politically. To the Chinese people, there were indeed solid and convenient reasons to believe that the whole known Chinese World was all there was, greatly reinforced by the powerful efforts of the rulers and elites of the *tianxia* world empires to assert and indoctrinate it to be so.

The ecogeography of Centralia thus allowed a determined and powerful ruler to relatively easily unite and rule it all. This internally united Chinese World was largely free from the kind of international comparison and competition that have powered much of the history in the post-Roman Western Eurasia and Mediterranean World. Other than the often one-way sailings and treks by missionaries, fishermen, and merchants, and the very rare government-sponsored overland or maritime explorations—the famous ones being the Zhang Qian exploration of Central Asia in late-second century BCE and the Zheng He voyages in early-fifteenth century CE—the Chinese were largely land-locked for millennia. The main external threat and challenge almost always came from the northern nomadic nations and tribes on the harsh Asia Steppes that in fact did repeatedly invade, loot, conquer, and rule part and even the whole of the Chinese World—sometimes for decades like the Yuan, or even centuries like the Qing.

The geography and geopolitical location of the Centralia have given the Chinese many deep and lasting characteristics and predispositions for their politics and worldviews.¹⁶ China, for many centuries, was a country and a world: a world empire. For efficiency, comfort, and stability of governance, the rulers of the Chinese World later deliberately tried to self-isolate the peoples to enhance the geographic predisposition. The relatively easy-way-out of maritime links were especially, and repeatedly, curtailed with force. Numerous Chinese rulers attempted *haijin* (海禁 banning maritime contact with outsiders) that peaked in the Ming and Qing empires (fourteenth through nineteenth centuries) (J. Zheng 2002; Z. Chao 2005). Over time, the initial condition of geographical isolation of the Chinese World has become conceptual and ideal, perpetuating a mentality for a unified world empire order: the Qin-Han *tianxia* system or

the China Order. Technology has greatly transformed the Chinese World over the past two centuries. Geopolitically, China is now but one country in the world that has about 200 other sovereign units. The barriers that insulated and isolated the Chinese World for millennia are no longer meaningful even though the ideology and tradition of the Centralia and the China Order remain critically important to the contemporary Chinese as this book will show later.

Today's China contains of two components that are *de facto* independent from each other: the PRC, an one-party authoritarian political system created by the Chinese Civil War in 1949 that now rules the majority of the Chinese land and people; and the ROC, the authoritarian government of whole China from 1912 to 1949 when it fled the Chinese Mainland and has now evolved into a political democracy on Taiwan.¹⁷ The PRC has two small subunits that are wealthy and temporarily autonomous in their internal governance (until 2047 and 2049, respectively): the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, which was a British colony (1840–1997), and the Macau Special Administrative Region, which was a Portuguese colony (1535–1999). Narrowly and more specifically, the term “China” refers to the PRC (and its two special administrative regions) while the ROC is known as Taiwan. Together, they are often called “Greater China,” sharing many common traits and close ties.

The PRC ranks as the world's largest country in terms of population and the fourth largest in terms of landmass. To unite with Taiwan (the ROC) would not change that ranking. However, the PRC government officially insists and PRC citizens have been educated to believe (and many international organizations have been informed by Beijing) that the country has the world's third largest territory as it claims several pieces of disputed land (over 120,000 square kilometers) with its neighboring countries, mostly the entire state of India's Arunachal Pradesh (Editorial Board-history 2013, V1, 2).

The Chinese Peoples and the Chinese Multination

Culturally and ethnolinguistically, China as a world and a civilization enjoys a seemingly singular and stable identity with a long recorded history that is often traced back to 3,700 years ago (Chien 1939, i). Official PRC history textbook asserts that the Chinese civilization started 5,000 years ago and “has never discontinued ever since” (Institute of History 2012, chap. 1). The many competing, migrating, and merging tribe-nations in the Chinese World started stable agrarian economy-based civilization long before then (Z. Wang 1994, 30–53, 428–31). Frequent and repeated external invasions and influences, numerous conquests and rulings by the “barbarians” who were first racially, culturally, and linguistically alien, and the merging of many distinctive (but

now disappeared) tribes, ethnic groups, and nations have contributed to and transformed that shared linguistic and cultural common bond. China has been a lasting, boiling at times, melting-pot of many peoples and cultures coexisting and competing over the millennia.¹⁸ Of which, the officially sanctioned, modified and later enshrined ideologies originated from the pre-Qin Era (before third century BCE) served as the core of Chinese culture. Two of those ideologies, the Confucianism and the Legalism, have served as the moral coating and the inner core of the political system for the Chinese World.

Started with many different verbal and writing systems (Keightley 1983, 570–71), the Chinese language itself was largely shaped by political forces. The written Chinese characters—the symbolic or pictographic scripts, were officially standardized in the third century BCE and then fixed and maintained to be the written *lingua franca* for the “worldwide” communication in the Chinese world. This writing system was complicated and fossilized as the Classic Chinese (文言文), which functioned like the Classic Latin in Western Europe since the Western Roman Empire. The verbal Chinese language (the Han language) developed many local dialects and accents that were often divorced from the written scripts and mutually incomprehensible, in addition to the existence of non-Han languages in the Chinese World. While the written signage-like Chinese characters have remained largely the same since the Qin (especially the Han when calligraphy started to become an art and a key part of education), the standard pronunciation, the Mandarin (普通话 or 國語) based on the Northern China (Beijing) accent, emerged merely four centuries ago and became the official tone only in 1932 by a decree of the ROC and reaffirmed by the PRC in 1956 (P. Chen 1999). Indeed, were there no centralized imperial power to forcefully maintain it particularly in the written form, the Han language would have long ago evolved into many languages, making China very much like Europe on the linguistic map.¹⁹ The centralized imperial rule of the whole known world unified and molded the language with power-centered deferential and casuistry that belittle and even dismiss reasoning of principles and logic, and even truthfulness.²⁰ In the 2010s, some Chinese scholars openly asserted that the Chinese language itself has been politicized to be duplicitous, degraded, and discourteous (W. Zhang 2014; Z. Su 2016). Like the imperial rulers who used to routinely list certain words as taboos, Beijing today still publishes an official list of “banned words” (Lei 2010; *Xinhua* 7-21-2014, 1–3).

Throughout the Chinese World the people have exhibited a great regional diversity and variety in their physical features, customs, and languages, despite the long and powerful assimilation force exerted mainly by the centralized world empire through its control of education, religions, sociopolitical mobility, resource allocation, and cultural activities. Even today, the Chinese people from the different parts of the PRC often look, speak, live, and behave very

differently—a great variety that would easily rival the ethnocultural differences among the European Union’s member nations.²¹ With the noted exception of the Turkic and Slavic minorities, the 1.3 billion Chinese people mostly belong to Mongolian (East Asian) race with the Han ethnic group as the overwhelming majority (currently 91 percent of the total population). There are now officially fifty-five other ethnic or national groups in the PRC, divided mostly along the linguistic-religious cleavages. Some of those minorities actually have their own nation-states outside of China (such as Koreans, Mongolians, and Thai). The Han, the dominant ethnic group, is largely a single written-language group that in fact contains a great diversity of cultures, religions, oral dialects, costumes, tradition, and even facial and physical features. “The Han people today,” concluded a PRC scholar in 2007, “are not genetically pure” or exclusive by DNA analysis (X. Xie 2007).

In 1902, to accommodate the reality of the world empire of the past (without losing the minority-concentrated land such as Tibet and Xinjiang) and to fit in the imposed Westphalia world order of nation states, leading Chinese (Han) intellectual Liang Qichao, who was in political exile at the time, coined a political concept of Chinese Nation (中华民族), a Han-based political grouping of peoples living in the Qing Empire, to elastically utilize Han nationalism against the Manchu rulers and also foreign invaders.²² His opponent, Zhang Taiyan advocated a geography-based concept of China (the Centralia or China Proper) and a linguistic concept of Chinese Nation that would include the Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese but exclude the Manchu (Zhang 1907). The Han rulers of the ROC since Sun Yet-sen (and the PRC since the 1980s) adopted and elaborated this artificial anthropological concept, a “singular nation of multi-ethnicity” so to have a uniform “patriotism for the single motherland,” to capitalize politically on nationalism while minimizing the negatives (local autonomy, federalism, and separatism) of the multinational state inherited from the Qing Empire.²³

Influenced by the Soviet Union, the CCP politically has had a nationality policy since the 1920s that recognizes fifty-five nations (about 8.5 percent of the total population) as minority nationalities. Those non-Han nations grow slightly faster than the Han and are granted some affirmative benefits (Statistical Bureau 2011). Nominally, the PRC maintains five provincial-level minority autonomous regions and numerous minority autonomous prefectures and counties—the former Chinese World outside the China Proper that counts for 64 percent of the PRC territory. Consequently, CCP’s Stalinist multinational-state policy jars with its increased reliance on nationalism of a singular Chinese Nation, creating worries about geographically based separatism viewed by some in Beijing as “the biggest risk China faces in the 21st century” (R. Ma 2011, 88–108).

By mitochondria method, the Chinese peoples, just as all humans living today, are the descendants of *homo sapiens* migrated out of today's East Africa, arriving in Central and East Asia about 50,000–125,000 years ago (Quintana-Murci 1999, 437–41; Armitage 2011, 453–56; Bower 2011). Fossil and archeological evidence, however, shows that there were ape-men and homo species active in East Asia dating back to a half-million years ago or even earlier (R. Zhu 2004, 559–62). These might be Neanderthal-type homo branches that eventually went extinct. However, to Chinese historians and anthropologists, those “local” ape-men are the direct and unique ancestral origin of “the Chinese Nation” mainly the Han people (Chien 1939, 2; X. Wu 1988, 286–93). Even after Chinese scientists confirmed conclusively the African origin of the Chinese peoples through DNA analysis (Ke 2001), many in the PRC still strongly advance the idea that the Chinese people evolved uniquely and independently on the East Asian continent, developing a “multiple origin” theory of human evolution in opposition to the “out-of-Africa” theory (X. Wu 2012, 269–78). The official PRC history textbooks describe China as one of the birthplaces of the humankind and assert that the Chinese people were descendants of the ape-men who lived locally in China over 1.7 million years ago, ignoring completely the African-origin theory.²⁴ Some PRC publications even argue that China is in fact *the* origin of the whole of humankind (B. Liu 2008).

Thus, many Chinese (often officially) believe themselves to be categorically different from and impliedly superior to the rest of the humankind. Yet, the melting-pot reality has also maintained a strong belief that if the “others” accept or succumb to the Central's rules and norms, then all could become and must become the one and the same. This ethnohistorical duality and inherent contradiction have constituted a major corner stone of the peculiar Chinese worldview that rigidly ranks peoples and cultures but also practically tolerates and enables racial and cultural submissions and assimilations over time, often by force (Levenson 1964, V1, 137–39; S. Chen 2008, 12–15).

History and the Writing of History in China

The Chinese people have held essentially a polytheist religious belief and pan-spiritual faith system. This pre-Qin tradition, naturally shaped by the long geographical and political divides, was strengthened and institutionalized to be a hallmark of the Chinese culture by the omnipresent and omnipotent imperial political power of the Chinese world empire after the Qin Dynasty. The ruler (emperor) acts and is accepted as the son of heaven or God (a Caesaropapism) who mostly is above any particular organized religion and functions as

a divine sovereign. The PRC currently continues that policy of subjugating religion to tight and expedient political control (J. Xi 2016). Ancestral-worship and paternal family-kinship lineage, often contextualized and deified with Taoist natural religion of heaven and earth, replaced organized autonomous religion to address effectively much of the spiritual needs for the people. This is one of the defining and consequential features of the long Chinese imperial society according to scholars like Max Weber (Weber 1915). The self-proclaimed atheist (communist) ruling elites of the PRC carried on this Chinese characteristic. In China today, all religious organizations are forced to register with and be approved by the government and thus monitored and even salaried by the state. The natural religious practice of ancestor-worship is sanctioned, as reflected by the state's display and worship of the preserved body of Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC, as a quasi-religious holy site right in the very center of PRC political symbolism, the Tiananmen Square.²⁵

Yet, just like the ordinary Chinese, the Chinese elites (including the emperors) still have the same religious urges and spiritual aspirations as any other peoples, wondering apprehensively about what is there after life that is only minimally and haphazardly explained by the natural religion of worshiping heaven and earth. Related to and shaped by the emphasis on family-kinship and ancestral worship, at least to the educated elites in the Chinese World, history steps in both as a substitute and an euphemism of the politically suppressed or displaced superior spiritual power or authority that records, judges, rewards, and punishes human behavior perpetually and eternally—to explain the past and to give meaning to life. The Heaven the imperial rulers worshiped and feared is therefore personified by the historical records. “History is the Chinese faith and religion,” claimed some Chinese writers (S. Yu 2012, 23–28). “To us Chinese,” concluded a Chinese historian, “history is our religion” and “in other countries, what is provided by religion is provided to us here by history . . . When other peoples ask for help from religion, we have only history. On our spiritual map, there is no Last Judgment but the judgment of history. We don't believe there is a fair God above our heads, but believe in a fair history. So totalitarian governments always want to systematically and meticulously rewrite history . . . to bury facts with lies (G. Fu 2010, 297).

The self-proclaimed “lawless” and “God-less” PRC founding ruler Mao Zedong was in fact just like any emperor, deeply fearful about how he would be recorded and judged by history and therefore plotted everything possible to whitewash, hide, “create,” and falsify history, even at the expense of persecuting millions of people and deceiving many more.²⁶ Attempting to reshape and evade the comeuppance-like *ultimum iudicium* by history, Mao started the practice for the top CCP leaders to avoid speaking publicly without a careful script,

prohibit recording even note-taking and publication of his words without specific authorization and revisions, package acts and facts with duplicitous phraseology, and prefer issuing consequential orders such as deadly purges verbally to minimize written records (S. Guo 2014, 47–54; W. Su 2015). That tradition goes on as both the winners and losers of CCP's top-level power struggles "all care very much about how history views them" (Q. Li 2013, 57). Liu Shaoqi, Mao's deputy and designated successor, allegedly professed his last hope that he would be treated better by the history "written by the people" when he was purged (Z. Huang 2011, 1).

Jiang Zemin, the still influential former PRC President, wrote in 2012 that everyone especially the CCP officials must study history well to "shape the right kind of worldviews," to cultivate personal values and norms, and to learn how to govern and rejuvenate China (Z. Jiang 2012). Xi Jinping, the PRC top leader, believes that "history is the foundation of all social sciences" and calls his cadres to "study history" in a way like a religious leader mandating his prelates to study holy scriptures for self-cultivation and serving the country and the world (Xi 8-23-2015 and 9-2011). A "cultural self-confidence" based on reading history, asserts Xi, is the foundation for the much-needed "three self-confidences in (our) direction, theory, and institutions" (F. Li 2014). Wen Jiabao, the then PRC Premier, invoked publicly religious-like verses to conclude his decade-long tenure in 2012, "I shall dare to face the people and face history. Only history will understand me or blame me."²⁷ And the CCP's mouthpiece openly called in 2014 for a "holy reverence" for the official narratives of history (J. Cai 2014, 5). As fully expected, the CCP has in the 2010s continued its active "plundering history to justify its present-day ambitions" so to "rewrite the past to control the future" (*The Economist* 8-15-2015).

The powerful and lasting political motivations and spiritual needs have, therefore, combined to give China the world's longest, continuously kept historical records in the same written language (Chien 1975, 1–27 and 1979, 1–77). It is mostly edited and maintained in the same style and with the same guiding principles, value norms, and selecting and evaluating criteria, started at least in the fifth century BCE when Confucius was credited for editing the political chronology, *The Annals* (春秋). Historians documented every ruler of every regime, down to even daily details, to produce thousands of volumes. History is also traditionally a major source of lessons for Chinese rulers and elites about how to understand the world, govern the people, behave properly, and live admirably (G. Wang 2013, 1–22).

Yet, China's near-holy historical records were largely written with the imperial sponsorship, editorial control, official standardization, and massive censorship. They were mostly the careful products of imperial officials and court historians, who monopolized information and the dissemination of it for the declared

purpose of using history to guide actions (Ng and Wang 2005). Voluminous, meticulous, continuous, and often highly readable as literary stories, Chinese imperial and official historical records have been largely court-anthologies and lineages that inform at best only partially the history of the Chinese World.²⁸ It is the kind of historical narrative that almost entirely neglects and crowds out the real history of the common people, what Michel Foucault termed the life of *l'infime* (the lowly) and *l'infâme* (the infamous) (Foucault 1979, 90). Science, technology, and many more aspects of the Chinese life are largely missing in the official history books. The best-known history book that started it all, *Records of the Grand Historian* (史记) by Sima Qian (145 or 135–86 BCE), clearly contains many fictional and opinionated materials that make the book highly elegant and readable but with many inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions. There has since been the tradition of “no separation between literature and history” (文史不分家) that sanctions politicized, populist, sensational, and even fictional writing and teaching of history.²⁹ The incompleteness and unreliability of the written Chinese history records have been especially true since the eighth century when writing of history became mainly (later exclusively) the domain and enterprise of the imperial court. Particularly in the last world empire ruled by the minority of Manchu, the Qing (1644–1911), non-governmental keeping and editing of history were banned, often by the death penalty (sometime of the authors' extended families), and the imperial court systematically censored all available books and written materials and destroyed many of them in order to control people's knowledge of the past (Xie and Wan 1996; Kong 1980, Z. Qiao 2013). As one dissident Chinese scholar commented in the seventeenth century, the Chinese history records, not just the court-written ones, tend to be full of errors, biases, deceptions, and taboos (Zhang 1655). “Chinese history prior to 1840” with its central features of “the art of ruses,” commented a Chinese scholar in 2015, is “very tedious and toxic” (S. Tang 2015).

For example, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–95), the Qing government organized a decades-long “worldwide” effort to collect, purchase, and confiscate (with bloody means when necessary) all books and written materials “under the sun,” then finally edit, frequently rewrite and reword, all of them into only eight imperially controlled copies of 3,457 books (79,070 volumes total)—the famous but officially way-over-rated Four Completed Collections of Books (四库全书) to administratively lock up all publications for the sole purpose of revising history, controlling information, and monopolizing knowledge. The thorough and extensive rewriting and falsification of history archives and publications by the Qianlong Emperor were truly unprecedented and unparalleled in human history. Worse, the imperial ruler used this opportunity to ban and literally burn to eliminate at least 6,766 kinds of books

(or as many as 100,000 kinds of books as estimated by later scholars, with 93,556 to over 150,000 volumes and countless printing plates)—two to ten times more than were collected and preserved (Baidu 2016; G. Gu 2001, 7; F. Zhang 2001, 412–17). Incomplete official lists compiled later by bibliographers showed that, by 1780 (the heyday of the book-burning campaign), over 3,000 kinds of books were already banned and burned (Yao 1882; Shi 1925). Such a genuinely anti-intellect act of extreme obscurantism created an imaginable hurdle for Chinese educational and scientific development and an irreversible holocaust of Chinese culture, historical records, and accumulated knowledge in general.³⁰

After the mid-nineteenth century, especially during the ROC Era (1912–49), Chinese historians, particularly the foreign-influenced and educated scholars, started to reread and rewrite Chinese history with modern scientific methods and Enlightenment philosophy of free exploration and expression. They broke the state-monopoly and traditional historiography to ground in facts and logic (Moloughney and Zarrow 2012). Influential Chinese intellectuals started to call for “writing a new Chinese history” free from the perverse and pervasive imperial fallaciousness (Lu 1933). Exemplary and significant accomplishments of this rewriting of Chinese history by Chinese scholars include the works by Zhang Taiyan, Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei, Hu Shi, Chen Yuan, Gu Jiegang, Fu Sinian, Chen Yinque, Chien Mu, Lü Simian, and Zhang Yinlin.³¹ Yet, many if not most of them still continued to a varied extent the tradition of reading and writing history as a religious and political endeavor for contemporary sociopolitical purposes and personal convictions particularly for promoting Han-Chinese nationalism and political changes (J. Wang 2000, 357–81, 409–34).

Chinese historiography degenerated deplorably in the PRC (since 1949) as the ruling CCP has gone back to the imperial tradition to dictate the recording, dissemination, and especially the interpretation of history. The scale, depth, and extent of distortion, falsification, and destruction of history records have all reached a new level, perfectly exemplifying a “Mutability of the Past” or “alteration of the past,” as classically described by George Orwell, to practice a belief of “who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell 1949, 19, 124, 143). Not only have there been systematic forgery, omission, and misrepresentation about the PRC history, the CCP has also been hiding, rewriting, and falsifying its own history and records as well as the Chinese history for momentary political purposes (W. Yuan 2006). The countless history publications in the PRC, including the many “official documents,” top leaders’ writings, and “original” historical records and “eyewitness” memoirs, are now deemed by many insiders with conscience to be full of deliberate deception and distortion (F. He 2005).

Politically motivated (later also profit-driven), often officially sanctioned, fake history and misinformation have been ubiquitous in the PRC.³² The official writing of the CCP history has been a carefully controlled political “construction,” with “the (CCP) Party as the sole yardstick for evaluating every historical event and character” (C. Jin 2014; M. Zhang 2016). One study documented that the CCP-PRC has systematically doctored at least 500 important news photographs since the 1950s (D. Zhang 2010). The editors of a major collection of “truthful” oral history of the CCP told by the party leaders and elders unequivocally declared in the preface “to follow strictly the [CCP] Party Central’s judgment about history” and “to reject completely any material that may not fit in the spirit of the Party Central’s decrees on CCP history” (L. Lu 2002, 2). Countless key facts and basic information have been hidden, distorted, or manufactured.³³ In the 2010s, the CCP continues to punish professors who dared to question the party’s official narratives of history in classrooms (L. Zhang 2015). Misrepresentation of history, though, is often poorly done. On the same day in 2015, for example, an official CCP publication about Mao Anying (Mao Zedong’s son) openly and squarely contradicted President Xi Jinping’s account (Xi 5-7-2015; G. Yue 2015, 9).

Perhaps more treacherous to the students of China history, the CCP-PRC has apparently systematically destroyed many sensitive but crucial archives, often the sole copies of them, which are deemed inconvenient or embarrassing in addition to hiding documents indefinitely or forging documents (Smarlo 2004, 332–34). A leading CCP party historian openly declared in 2014 that in order to “protect the core interests of the Party,” some historical documents are sealed away forever in the PRC.³⁴ Mao Zedong reportedly ordered the destruction of “two big bags full of top secret files” after his designated successor Lin Biao defected and died in a mysterious plane crash in 1971 (S. Guo 2014). The deposed CCP top leader Zhao Ziyang secretly told his visitor in 1999 (the eleventh year of his house arrest) that, for example, Deng Xiaoping ordered him in early 1980s to “destroy all” the documents implicating the late Premier Zhou Enlai in the political persecution cases in the Cultural Revolution (Du 2010, 174). At the same time, countless half-truths or even totally fabricated “facts” or documents have been manufactured and promoted by the state monopoly of education, publication, and media, as today’s PRC has been termed by some Chinese themselves as a “superpower of counterfeits” that makes fake things “everyday and everywhere” (X. Hu 2008).³⁵ At the minimum, the government has made the study of Chinese history dauntingly difficult in the PRC.

Consequently, ever since Confucius of the fifth century BCE (with the noted brief pause of a few decades during the ROC Era), to the Chinese elites,

writing history means keeping scores, forming and changing memories, and shaping and altering worldviews, traditions, and contexts. Therefore, writing and teaching history function as the de facto national and state religion in the Chinese World. Unlike a well-organized religion, the holy scripture itself as well as the divine judgments in this case are constantly rewritten and expanded thus creating an irresistible temptation for the powerful to control their fate through writing and teaching history in their preferred ways. It became inevitable for the rulers, who are above all other restrictions and confines, to routinely censor, revise, and falsify history records and presentations. Imperial rulers routinely use Posthumous Name/Title (谥号) to officially entitle people with words or phrases so to explicitly honor or humiliate them according to the ruler's criteria in the official narrative of history.³⁶

To be sure, reinterpreting or revising history and historical images for contemporary political and other purposes and values are neither rare nor exclusively Chinese (Bhabha 1990; Anagnost 1997). As Benedetto Croce argued long ago, all written history is essentially about “contemporary history” and inevitably affected by the contemporary cultural values, philosophical thoughts, and sociopolitical norms (Croce 1921, 19, 51, 135–39 and 1955, 149). Many governments in other countries, ancient or modern, have attempted to control the writing and teaching of history. One of the worst culprits of falsifying history has been the former Soviet Union, the creator and teacher of the CCP.³⁷ Even during the qualitatively more open ROC Era (and today's Taiwan), politicized and Sinocentric distortion of history has still been commonplace.³⁸ However, the kind of effort made by the imperial rulers in the Chinese World has been unparalleled and unrivalled: they monopolized the writing and teaching of the history of the *whole* world, whereas the divided polity in the Mediterranean-European World, by definition, provided alternatives and external checks to mitigate and minimize the singular distortion and fakery of the writing and teaching of history.

Therefore, the Chinese in the PRC today have been taught about history in a singular and uncontested official way, starting with the origin of humankind. Some Chinese dissident historians in the PRC have radically asserted that up to 95 percent of the history now taught in PRC schools is either distorted or deceptive (C. Yan 2013).³⁹ A leading example of such politically motivated but highly effective and deeply consequential distortion of history in the PRC has been the construction and indoctrination of the notion of “the century (1840–1949) of humiliation” (David 2008). In 2015, much of the 100 criteria of censorship in the PRC revealed were about history (PRC Central Government 2015).

Table 1.1. Diverging Interpretation and Presentation of China and Chinese History

Issue/fact/event	PRC Official Narratives	Contrasting Views*
Size of China	3rd largest in the world	4th largest in the world
People and nation	Multiethnic Chinese Nation	Multination-state
Ancestors of Chinese	1.7 million years ago, homegrown	50,000 years ago, from Africa
Start of Chinese history	5,000 years ago, Yellow Emperor	3,700 years ago, archeology evidence
Continuity of history	World's only unbroken socio-culture & same state/nation of five millennia	Like Europe, divided, being conquered & transformed numerous times
Warring States Era	Chaotic divided country Slavery system	Feudal states in the Chinese World Source of Chinese civilization
221–207 BCE	Qin Kingdom united the country Starting feudal system	Qin Kingdom conquered the known world Imperial system ended feudal system
202 BCE–220 CE	Han Empire, a peak of China Enshrining Confucianism	Han world empire order Qin-Han Confucian-Legalist polity
960-1279	Song, divided country Weak, failure, humiliated	Song, Chinese Westphalia system Best era of imperial China, highest peak
1271–1368	“Our” great Yuan Dynasty	Majority Chinese (Han) conquered & enslaved
1644–1911	“Our” great Qing Dynasty	Majority Chinese (Han) conquered & enslaved
1840–1949	Century of humiliation Chaotic low point	Century of experimentation and progress Forced to leave China Order
October 1, 1949–	The PRC, the “New China”	The PRC, leaping backward to the past

*Based on PRC official history textbooks. Contrasting views are based on non-PRC and/or dissident PRC works.