

INTRODUCTION

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.”

George Orwell, *1984*

For several centuries now, European and American sinologists and novelists have imagined their own China, and have narrated and imposed China according to this imaginary. By imaginary, I mean that clutch of phrases, images and beliefs which make up the commonly held understanding we have of a group or community (be it an ethnicity or a nation, our own or someone else’s), and which dictates the way we perceive it or them.

Thus far, this Western imaginary of China has been globally dominant. But now, in the twenty-first century, ‘China’, whose shape and form and categories we in the West invented and maintained, is starting to escape us. The ‘China’ we have created, that we have imagined, that we have dreamt up and of which we have dreamt—the China that frightened us as well as fascinated us—has slipped our grasp. We no longer have sole control over it; just as the West’s dominance over the world’s economy has waned, so has its ability to impose the planet’s global story. But before attempting to take stock of today’s China, we need to understand where that China has come from.

We all know where China is, even if its present and its desired boundaries are contested by both China itself and its neighbours. But how far does this ‘entity’ called ‘China’ stretch

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back? To the early traces of ‘civilization’ in the space now occupied by China, thus between four and seven millennia or more? To the unification under the short-lived Qinⁱ dynasty in 221 BCE? To the European use of the name ‘China’ in the sixteenth century? Or to the establishment of the ‘Republic of China’ in 1912, when the ‘Chinese’ administration first employed the term?¹

For, however far back we may trace the elite cultural practices and succession of ruling dynasties that have occupied the space that is now called ‘China’, what is undeniable is that the popular collective consciousness of a nation called ‘China’, or *Zhongguo* 中國,ⁱⁱ is very recent indeed. As to what is, and what in the past has constituted, China—in terms of ethnicity, geography, language, culture, religion and politics—the question is both vast and complex. This book attempts to go beyond the glib or conventional responses to the question: ‘What and when is China?’

To begin with, where does the word ‘China’ come from? Not from the land we now call China, that much is certain. In the early sixteenth century, in 1516, a certain Portuguese travel writer named Duarte Barbosa employed the term. Later it occurs in several European languages: as *Cina* in Italy, as *Chine* in France, and in English as China. The Spaniards, arriving from Mexico in the mid-sixteenth century, rapidly colonized what would become the Philippines, and from there ventured into what was still Ming dynasty territory that they would call China. They thus participated significantly in the propagation of the word and the imaginary of ‘China’. One such adventurer was the soldier Miguel de Loarca, who in 1575 accompanied Father Martín de Rada on a diplomatic

i. Pronounced as in the English *chin*.

ii. *Zhongguo*: *zhong* pronounced like ‘jung’ as in Northern English ‘jungle’, and *guo* to rhyme with ‘war’ or ‘law’.

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mission to China, setting out from the Philippines, which would become increasingly important as a site of stories and information with which the Spanish built up their imagined China. Loarca is responsible for one of the first Western works on ‘China’.² Commenting on this and other early Spanish writings, Beatriz Moncó tells us that ‘the image of China was created gradually, through snippets of memory, through personal experiences, which gave rise to specific visions of that which was China’.³ Here, Moncó is describing the accumulation of minor writings that nevertheless were fundamental to an imagined ‘China’ that was entirely European.

In what we now call South-East Asia, it seems that a variant of ‘China’ was used to designate a neighbour to the north, and as the sinologist Jeff Wade has demonstrated, *Źina* designated a state in the south of what is now known as China, a territory inhabited by the Lolo and Yi peoples, and thus not by those who would become known as the Han, or by Westerners as simply ‘the Chinese’.⁴ In what the Europeans would call China, no polity or society ever used the name ‘China or any variants of such’.⁵

For several centuries, then, Europeans employed the word China to describe, narrate, and map the territory governed by the Ming rulers and later by the Manchus. After the fall of the Ming dynasty and the installation of the Qingⁱⁱⁱ by the Manchu people in 1644, the term ‘Tartary’ was also employed, as was ‘the Celestial Empire’. But neither the Manchu rulers nor the ruled had use for this foreign word ‘China’. Moreover, an equivalent for it was not sought, needed or employed until the nineteenth century, with its foreign power treaties and emerging ideologies of a nation-state; until then the people, or rather peoples, we called ‘Chinese’ simply had no need for it.

iii. Pronounced ‘ching’ as in Chingford.

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As the Qing dynasty progressed, European admiration and fascination turned to brutality and aggression. A new denigratory way of framing 'China' was necessary to justify Western encroachment and it was to be found in the mid-nineteenth century theories of scientific racism. The subjects of the Qing dynasty and later the citizens of the 1912 Republic needed to be portrayed as inferiors, decadent, incapable of modern thought, in short unfit to run a modern state. In particular, it had to be shown that the Chinese mind was inadequate. From the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, both serious and popular writers on China relied on a set of stereotypes first popularized by an American missionary, Arthur Smith. In his 1890 work *Chinese Characteristics* he described what he saw as the deficiencies of the Chinese mind thus:

He does not understand, because he does not expect to understand, and it takes him an appreciable time to get such intellectual forces as he has, into a position to be used at all. His mind is like a rusty old smooth-bore cannon mounted on an old decrepit carriage ... Another mark of intellectual torpor is the inability of an ordinary mind to entertain an idea, and then pass it on to another in its original shape.⁶

Everything good about China was projected onto its past, its now decadent, decrepit and sickly population deemed unsuited to the challenges of modernity. Thus, over forty years after Smith's book was published, a French China specialist with numerous China books to his name, Jean Rodes, could write at the beginning of the 1930s:

The power of control over the brain being less developed in the Chinese, he, under certain conditions of agitation, is overtaken by all sorts of subconscious and uncontrolled reflexes, dorsal column automatism ... [in which can be seen] an irremediable

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cause of racial inferiority, which had so enchanted Count Gobineau.⁷

Gobineau was a famous, now notorious, mid-nineteenth-century theorist of scientific racism, whose theories on the Aryan master race helped legitimize and justify nineteenth-century colonialist expansion in Africa and Asia. His work influenced the anti-Semitic stance adopted by Richard Wagner, and was later, in a redacted form, required reading for the German Nazi leadership. Convinced, as was Wagner, that China would invade Europe, he was also instrumental in spreading fear of the ‘Yellow Peril’ amongst the German aristocracy and beyond.

Western racist literary and journalistic representations thus straddled the end of the Qing and the early decades of the Republic of China. For the purveyor of racist stereotypes, nothing had changed; it was after all the West that had invented ‘China’, ‘Chinese’ and, of course, ‘the Chinaman’.⁸ With the legitimation of scientific racism, Europe—soon to be followed by Japan and the United States—had entered a new phase of colonialism marked by imperialist expansion, driven by industrial capitalist needs for resources and markets. The nineteenth century, then, saw confrontation between imperialist powers, particularly Britain, on the one hand and the Qing dynasty on the other. The Manchu bureaucratic elite found itself obliged to take account of this Western imaginary, which located and described them all as ‘Chinese’ and called the territory they inhabited ‘China’.

As for the Manchus’ urban-dwelling subjects, it was primarily their distaste for this foreign ruling house that fuelled the rise of a state-wide identity; I stipulate ‘urban-dwelling’ since the vast majority of China’s population, something like 90 per cent in the nineteenth century, was made up of illiterate peasants, largely ignorant of belonging to any sort of nation or political entity. In addition, the Manchus went out of their way

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to flaunt and bolster their ethnic difference, doing so by showing themselves as standing out against the majority Han population. While the Manchus ruled over and even extended the boundaries of what the West was already calling China, they took care to maintain a hallowed ancestral land that would be called Manchuria, a process embedded in the rulers' ambition 'to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Manchu people vis-à-vis the Han Chinese as well as with their desire clearly to demarcate the extent of the territory under Qing control.'⁹ Thus the existence of a Han identity was in part due to the Manchus' emphasizing their own exclusive difference.

So much for the role of the Manchus in the emergence of a Han national consciousness. As for the West's experts and specialists, they had long been treating this vast and ethnically, culturally and linguistically complex land as a homogeneous entity. And thus the elision of China the nation-state with what came before, what Western sinologists would call 'imperial China' and/or 'ancient China', has historically been a largely unproblematic one for such specialists. For Westerners, 'China', until mid-way through the twentieth century, was synonymous with a 'civilization' that had existed, indeed flourished, for several thousands of years, in the space Europe had called 'China' since the sixteenth century. The question of contemporary China was, for pre-Cold War sinologists, inexistent, except insofar as physical traces and vestiges of 'civilization' could be found on China's territory.

For instance, take the renowned, erudite scientist and sinologist Joseph Needham, whose influential, monumental work *Science and Civilisation in China* addressed the evolution of a specifically 'Chinese' technology over the period of time corresponding to dynastic history.¹⁰ The first volume of this study appeared in 1954. For Needham, the ruling dynasties were already 'Chinese' dynasties, and the ruled already 'Chinese' ('it

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may be mentioned that the Chinese counted [years], as in medieval Europe, from the accession of their kings or emperors’).¹¹ Needham seems to understand ‘the Chinese’, both rulers and the ruled, in racial, or ethnic terms; presumably as Han. We learn that it is ‘unfortunate that the only exhaustive analysis of a single Chinese dynasty ... in a Western language, concerns a dynasty which was not really Chinese at all—the Liao.^{iv} We refer to the monumental book of Wittfogel, Fêng Chia-shêng *et al*’.¹² Thus, if the rulers were not ‘ethnically’ Chinese, as we might say today, the dynasty was ‘not really Chinese at all’, and China/Chinese is being understood ethnically and not territorially here. Without ever having defined, in the first seventy pages of his work, precisely who ‘the Chinese’ were, Needham simply invokes a shared author/reader imaginary of a racially and historically homogeneous and identifiable people, culture and language.

It is not only Western sinologists who bemoan the passing of an ‘authentic’ China. There is also a modern-day Chinese view that holds that, in seeking to become strong and sovereign, China, by dint of imitating the West, has lost its Chineseness; and that in following the economic, political and technological logic of the modern world and its epistemologies, China has quite simply become the West.^v

- iv. Liao 辽 was a dynasty which for two centuries (907–1125 CE) controlled a large part of what is now northern China.
- v. This is a contradiction that will be addressed at length later in this book. For now, let me simply remind the reader of the Chinese Communist Party’s 2017 campaign to discourage the celebration of Christmas, despite having used the same festival in the past as an excuse for excessive consumption—Christmas falling a few weeks before Chinese New Year, it provides a perfect opportunity for a prolonged period of consumerist bingeing. See Clover, ‘China accused of waging war on Christmas’: ‘Throughout China, local governments, Communist party branches,

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But this analysis needs to be tempered, nuanced and reconsidered. For if we accept ‘China’ as a concept, an entity invented in the West and subsequently naturalized, internalized and translated as *Zhongguo* 中國 (the central country) at the end of the Manchus’ reign, and if we accept the modernity of this nation-state, which for most of the twentieth century was a nation-state in the making, then we can perceive China quite differently. We can understand that the establishment of this nation-state in the space that we now call China never was, except for a sprinkling of idealists, a project of Renaissance, of rebirth, of rising from the ashes of an eternal China. In fact, if ‘China’ was a project of nation-making, there cannot have been any loss of identity, except the loss of non-national local cultures, languages and customs.^{vi} On the contrary, China can be seen as having been created, its national identity forged, during the twentieth century. For the first time in human history, a really existing polity called China was crafted and made. China did not lose its identity; it gained one. China was created.^{vii}

Indeed, the project underlying the establishment of this nation-state was precisely the creation of something else. Even

schools and even shopping malls issued regulations this year suggesting people tone down Christmas parties and decorations. The government insists there is no actual ban of Christmas in place at the national level but the number of local bans have raised questions about whether there is a behind-the-scenes “war on Christmas” by Beijing.’

vi. In the process of creating the nation-state, local customs or cultural and linguistic practices are weakened or destroyed; some will form the basis, as has been the case in China, for the creation of national-level practices. It is the loss of these community-level practices that leads to the nostalgia and new mythology inspiring separatist dreams of yet newer nations, as though the dead-end nineteenth-century paradigm of nationalism could provide the solutions demanded by the excesses and the heteronomy of the twenty-first.

vii. Here again the word ‘create’ is used advisedly.

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for those seeking a ‘rebirth’ of a mythic lost glory—in a backward-looking imaginary that venerated the past as a halcyon epoch to be regained, much as Confucius had looked back to past dynastic glories in the fourth century BCE—their project first necessitated the creation of this ‘something else’.^{viii} During the twentieth century, we witnessed various expressions of this ‘something else’. Today we see a China that has reached a stage of existence that corresponds to the ambition, or vision, of those who dreamt it. Premodern ‘China’, what I call in this book *China-Before-China*, is now simply part of the imaginary of today’s really existing China.

viii. Confucius, in his political philosophy, sought the unification of ‘the central states’ by privileging the past.

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So when and what is China? If we attempt to unpack the proper nouns and adjectives used in Chinese to define and describe the country, people and language that in English we call China and Chinese, we then understand immediately the inadequacy of these two English words. If we compare everything that is hidden behind the terms ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ in English with the words employed in what we now call modern standard Chinese (or ‘Mandarin’) to name this entity, this ‘people’ who are not, by any definition, one people—to describe this language which seems monolithic and yet is multiple—we start to grasp their complexity. Below is a list, not an exhaustive one, of terms in Chinese which contain within them a number of meanings and nuances, but which are often, innocently or otherwise, simply translated into English as ‘China’ or ‘Chinese’—by the Chinese authorities and their English-language media, by sinologists and China experts. Each of these terms, both proper nouns and adjectives, needs to be unpacked, historicized, contextualized. This may seem a forbidding exercise, but bear with it and you will see the extent of the problem of this under-translation, of both the Chinese reality today and what preceded it.

Let us take first the proper noun adjective *Zhongguo* 中國, which translates the polity and/or territory, China. The range

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of meanings it has to cover is vast. It can refer simply to China, today's modern nation-state, which officially is called the People's Republic of China or PRC. It may also signify the Chinese government or authorities, as in 'China's policy on pollution', when we mean the Chinese government's policy. 'China' is also used transhistorically, or ahistorically, to mean not only China the modern nation-state, but also the state during the dynastic periods, and the prehistoric civilizations found within the space now occupied by the PRC. The word *zhongguo* can also translate as the 'central states' or 'central kingdoms' that existed before their unification—or rather absorption—by the Qin state and what became the short-lived Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). The unified state was consolidated by the Han dynasties ('Western Han' 206 BCE–9 CE; 'Eastern Han' 25–220 CE), which would give rise to the denomination 'Han' to describe the subjects of China's dynasties thereafter; however, the connotation that links 'Han' to an ethnicity is a modern one. Geographically, *Da Zhongguo*, literally 'Big China' but usually translated 'Greater China', refers to China as a spatially larger unit which includes mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

The proper noun and adjective *Zhonghua* 中華 (China/Chinese) also denotes the territory and polity that is China. However, *Zhonghua* is a higher register of language than *Zhongguo* and is used in the official names of both modern republics: *Zhonghua minguo* 中華民國 for the Republic of China (1912–49); and *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 中華人民共和國 for the People's Republic of China (1949–). The former is still the official name for the state known as Taiwan, where the nationalist government sought refuge when it fled the mainland in 1949. The proper noun *Da Zhonghua* 大中華 translates as 'Greater China' and again is used more broadly to designate mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and even the Chinese Diaspora.

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Zhongguoren 中國人 may refer to a Chinese (person) or the Chinese (people). The word became known in Britain to a whole generation of Monty Python fans when the popular comedians recorded the 1980 song ‘I Like Chinese’, which included a verse sung in Chinese: ‘*Wǒ ài Zhongguoren*’, literally ‘I like Chinese’.ⁱ *Zhongguoren* may more specifically refer to a citizen of the PRC, and thus include Tibetans and Uighurs.

The word *Huaren* 華人 is an inclusive term meaning ‘a Chinese person’ or ‘Chinese people’ and may refer to all those in China proper while also denoting those outside China proper in the diaspora. The term *Huaqiao* is usually translated as ‘Overseas Chinese’ and more specifically refers to Chinese living abroad or descendants of those who have emigrated.

As for the term *Han* 漢, it is assumed by scholars trained in the dominant tradition of sinology that ‘Han’ is generally equal to ‘Chinese’—a convention maintained by the current regime. Han is used in China today to refer to what the authorities have defined as the main ethnic group in China. However, originally it referred to those seeing themselves as descending from the first relatively long dynastic period, the Han, which consolidated the process of unification and homogenization started by the short-lived Qin. There originally was no connotation of race or ethnicity. Nowadays, the term *Hanren* 漢人, literally ‘Han person’ or ‘Han people’, which again we generally translate outside China as ‘Chinese’, refers to a member of

- i. The song is to be found on the album *Contractual Obligation* released on the Charisma (UK) and Arista (US) labels in October 1980. It was also issued as a single in the UK in the same month, and again in 1989, with the Chinese characters for ‘I like Chinese’ (我愛中國人) featuring on the sleeves. The song’s lyrics were infused with orientalist and racist stereotypes redolent of George Formby’s 1930s lyrics recounting the adventures of Mr Wu the Laundryman. When the Pythons were reconstituted for a 2014 concert, some of the offending lyrics were replaced.

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the Han majority ethnicity (91 per cent of China's current population as officially defined by the PRC state). This group is, nevertheless, 'comprised of a wide variety of culturally and ethnically diverse populations, including eight mutually unintelligible linguistic groupings (Mandarin, Wu, Yue, Xiang, Hakka, Gan, Southern and Northern Min).'¹

Similarly, 唐人 *Tangren* is a term used by those who see their 'Chineseness' as stemming from a later period, the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), when the southern parts of what is now China and their populations were absorbed into the dynastic territories of the Tang. The term *Tangren* is used primarily by Cantonese-speaking southerners, especially in Hong Kong, and by those in the diaspora who emigrated in the nineteenth century from the south. Thus what is called 'Chinatown' in English was called *Tangrenjie* 唐人街 in Chinese, which translates literally as 'Tang-Person Street'. The word for Chinatown used by the Chinese authorities, *Zhongguocheng* 中國城, now found inscribed on the world's Chinatown arches—which are often paid for by Chinese municipalities—is a late twentieth-century neologism and is no more than a back-translation of the English 'Chinatown'.ⁱⁱ Again a wealth of complex history is erased in the translation of *Tangren* by 'Chinese', an erasure the authorities have been happy to embrace.

Then come the terms we use to describe the language(s) spoken in China today and in the past. In English we refer indiscriminately to 'Chinese'. In China itself we find *Zhongwen* 中文, which we could translate literally as 'China writing'. The word carries no connotation of the historical moment

- ii. For instance, the Liverpool arch constructed in 1999–2000 was financed by Liverpool's sister city Shanghai and built by engineers and artisans from China. It was squeezed into the narrow confines of Nelson Street, the post-World War II Chinatown, where it towers over nothing in particular. See Figure 2.

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concerned, and is thus a transhistorical and transregional term used to refer to language(s) which, when written down, use ‘Chinese’ characters. But *Zhongwen* may refer to both oral and written Chinese; to the national language—*Guoyu* 國語, as it was called in the first half of the twentieth century, and as it is still called today on Taiwan—or *Putonghua* 普通, the ‘common language’, as it has been called since 1949 in the PRC. This national language or *lingua franca* is also based on northern Chinese. ‘Mandarin’ or ‘Mandarin Chinese’ is the term often used by non-Chinese to describe this national language, to distinguish it from Cantonese and other languages of China often mistakenly termed ‘dialects’.ⁱⁱⁱ *Zhongwen* would also cover the premodern written vernacular, *baihua* 白話 (‘plain talk’), as well as the premodern literary language, *wenyanwen* 文言文.

In the PRC, Chinese is often referred to as *Hanyu* 漢語 (‘Han language’). Again this may refer to oral or written Chinese, the language of the officially determined majority Han ethnicity, even though many within the Han ethnic category use another language such as Cantonese, *Minnanhua* 閩南話 (the language of Fujian and Taiwan), or *Wu* 吳 (the language of the Shanghai region). When referring to today’s China, *Hanyu* is effectively modern standard Chinese (MSC), in other words *Putonghua* or what foreigners call Mandarin. But *Hanyu* may also refer to the premodern language, so the term is often qualified as *xian-dai Hanyu* 現代漢語 (‘modern Hanyu’) as opposed to *gu* 古 or *gudai* 古代 (‘ancient Hanyu’). But more on this modern/ancient divide later.

iii. Strictly speaking, ‘Mandarin’, or *guanhua* 官話—literally ‘functionary-speak’ or ‘mandarin-talk’—refers only to the spoken language, since it served only as the oral *lingua franca* of the officials or Mandarins, *guan* 官話, who for written communication used the literary language, *wenyanwen* 文言文.

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Huayu 華語 is often used to designate standard Chinese for a non-mainland Chinese or overseas Chinese public, who associate more readily with the idea of *Hua* than they do with *Han*. It is for instance used in Singapore to designate Modern Standard Chinese, and is found in the expression *Xinjiapo Huayu* 新加坡華語, or Singapore Mandarin.

‘Chinese’ may also refer to ‘Chinese literature’ just as ‘English’ may refer to ‘English literature’. However, there are several terms in Modern Standard Chinese today. *Zhongguo wenxue* 中國文學, which sinologists translate as ‘Chinese literature’, literally means ‘China literature’ or ‘literature of China’. This could be understood quite innocently—after all, we talk of British literature and American literature to distinguish between national literatures within the larger family of English literature, which many in any case still understand as pertaining to England, and perhaps Britain and Ireland. ‘Literature in English’ would be a more inclusive way of referring to the many literatures that exist in the English language. But just as the term ‘British literature’ would not evoke in most people’s minds the use of Welsh and Gaelic as a literary language of Britain, so ‘China literature’ refers to literature in Chinese, and thus excludes literature of China in Tibetan, Uighur and other minority languages such as Korean.

Zhongguo wenxue is also used transhistorically, to refer to the literature written in the premodern language for more than 2,000 years, even though during those two millennia no writers ever referred to their writings as *Zhongguo wenxue*. To sum up, in the dominant collective imaginary, ‘China literature’ refers to literature written in ‘Chinese’ characters, within the space that is now China, in either modern Chinese or the premodern vernacular or in the premodern ‘literary’ language *wenyan* 文言; but it excludes what is written in languages such as Tibetan. There is, however, also a specific term for literature written in

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Hanyu (the language of the Han) written down in *Hanzi* 漢字 ('Chinese characters'), and that is *Hanwen wenxue* 漢文文學, or 'literature in Han writing', where *Hanwen* 漢文 (Han writing) refers to the written language from the Han dynasty onwards.

The term *Hanwen* is also used to specify language written in characters as opposed to Romanized script. During the Republican period (1912–49) there existed projects to spell out characters in the Latin alphabet not merely as an aid to learning them, but so as to replace them altogether. Indeed, abandoning characters, in order to universalize the use of a national standard language, was seriously considered by intellectuals and the political authorities. In the years just after the 1911 Chinese Revolution, the prominent intellectual Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) discussed in his diary the question of 'Whether or not our country's language can become a language using letters', and concluded that the abandonment of characters was not desirable: 'The reason Han writing [writing in characters] is difficult to popularize lies not in Han writing itself, but in the imperfect way it is taught'.²

Hu Shi distinguishes between 'letters' (*zimu* 字母) and 'Han writing' (*Hanwen*); and, writing in 1915, he still expresses himself in the old literary language (*wenyan*), rather than the modern, national vernacular he advocated. It is also noteworthy that he refers to 'our country's language' *wo guo yu* 吾國語, refraining from referring to 'Chinese' with use of *Zhongwen* or any of the other ways we have seen to describe Chinese language or literature. Today, a century later, 'letters' are confined to the pinyin Romanization system, used merely as an aid to identifying the pronunciation of characters and in representing names in foreign language texts. There is no further discussion of using the Latin alphabet to replace characters.^{iv}

iv. Hanyu *Pinyin* Romanization is the official romanization system of the

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All of the terms explored above translate into English as simply ‘China’ or ‘Chinese’. It is easily understandable how simple it is to mask, intentionally or unintentionally, the complexity of the lexicon. When translating from Chinese into English, everything becomes ‘China’ or ‘Chinese’; but when we attempt to translate from English or other languages into Chinese, what becomes obvious is the extent to which these two terms are extremely reductive of the diverse and complex political and historical issues foregrounded by the process of translation. In short, the English subsumes a host of historically, geopolitically and ethnically distinct significations.

People’s Republic of China. Developed in the 1950s, it has been used to represent Chinese names in foreign-language publications since the end of the 1970s. Thus, Mao Tse-tung became Mao Zedong, Chou En-lai became Zhou Enlai. It was preceded by several other systems, mainly developed by missionaries and sinologists, which aimed to spell out and represent the written language. While pinyin works fairly well in rendering the sounds of *Putonghua* (the ‘common standard language’), throughout China many speakers of the language pronounce the sounds quite differently. Pinyin is discussed further below.