

CRAIG DIETRICH

# People's China

A Brief History



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A B R I E F H I S T O R Y

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Craig Dietrich

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*To Helen and  
to the memory of Harold*

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*Portland, Maine*  
*June 1985*

C. D.

## A Note on the Romanization of Chinese Words

No doubt every reader of this book will be at least dimly aware that Chinese writing is based on radically different principles from our own phonetically based alphabet. Already two millennia ago, the Chinese had developed a script comprised of several thousand “characters,” which either singly or in pairs constitute the words of the language. Essentially the same system is still in use today.

The difficulties of learning Chinese are evident enough, but readers may not have had occasion to realize the problems that such a system creates for Western scholars whose audience has no familiarity with these characters and yet must be introduced to various Chinese names. It is a problem that goes back to sixteenth-century Christian missionaries and even to Marco Polo in the fourteenth century.

Because these characters all have spoken pronunciations, the obvious answer to the difficulty is simply to adopt phonetic conventions, using Roman letters to represent the sounds. Such is the answer that has been pursued from the start. Inherently this is not a bad solution, even though the several “tones” that constitute part of the pronunciation are usually lost, and despite the fact that the many homonyms of Chinese make the phonetic spelling more ambiguous than the written characters.

The most annoying difficulty has been the fact that Western scholars, never satisfied with their predecessors’ efforts, have seemed unable to stop contriving new systems. There have been literally hundreds. The result is, for example, that the family name of one of the paramount leaders of modern China, which sounds much like the English name *Joe*, can be rendered *Jou*, *Tchou*, *Chow*, and *Cheo*—to name but a few. Responding to the need for standardization, in English-speaking countries a system known as Wade-Giles has been widely used

for many decades. By its dictates the name in question is spelled *Chou*. More recently—and it is hoped for the last time—one more new Romanization scheme has been introduced. Since 1979 the Chinese government has officially promoted a system known as “pinyin,” under whose rules the name is *Zhou*. Pinyin is coming into worldwide use and is employed throughout this book.

Unfortunately, pinyin conventions are not ideally suited to give English speakers an immediate idea of certain pronunciations. For example, how does one read *zhi* or *qi* or *ze*? In this book names, when first introduced, are accompanied by a pronunciation based on the closest sounds in common American words and spellings and without reference to any Romanization system. More rigorously inclined readers may wish to know the equivalencies of the various letters and combinations of pinyin. Most vowels are pronounced fairly close to how they would sound in English. A few consonants have special values:

*c* sounds like *ts*

*q* sounds like *ch*

*x* sounds like something between *s* and *sh*

*z* sounds like *ds*

*zh* sounds like *j*

These rules may be enough to permit tolerably close approximations of the originals. To learn the finer points, the reader should consult texts on the language or general texts on Chinese civilization, which always include a page or two on pronunciation.

Because pinyin has only recently replaced the Wade-Giles system, it will be useful here to provide a list of names used in this book together with their Wade-Giles equivalents.

### Personal Names

<i>pinyin</i>	<i>Wade-Giles</i>
Zhang Zhixin	Chang Chih-hsin
Chen Boda	Ch'en Po-ta
Chen Yun	Ch'en Yun
Chen Yi	Ch'en I
Chen Yongguei	Ch'en Yung-kuei
Deng Xiaoping	Deng Hsiao-p'ing
Deng Zihui	Deng Tzu-hui
Fu Yuehua	Fu Yueh-hua
Gao Gang	Kao Kang

Hu Yaobang	Hu Yao-pang
Hua Guofeng	Hua Kuo-feng
Jiang Qing	Chiang Ch'ing
Kang Sheng	K'ang Sheng
Lei Feng	Lei Feng
Lin Biao	Lin Piao
Liu Shaoqi	Liu Shao-ch'i
Luo Ruiqing	Lo Jui-ch'ing
Mao Zedong	Mao Tse-tung
Mao Yuanxin	Mao Yuan-hsin
Nie Yuanzi	Nieh Yuan-tsu
Peng Dehuai	P'eng Te-huai
Peng Zhen	P'eng Chen
Ren Wending	Jen Wen-ting
Wang Guangmei	Wang Kuang-mei
Wang Hongwen	Wang Hung-wen
Wei Jingsheng	Wei Ching-sheng
Wu Han	Wu Han
Yao Wen yuan	Yao Wen-yuan
Zhang Chunqiao	Chang Ch'un-ch'iao
Zhou Ziyang	Chao Tzu-yang
Zhou Enlai	Chou En-lai
Zhu De	Chu Teh

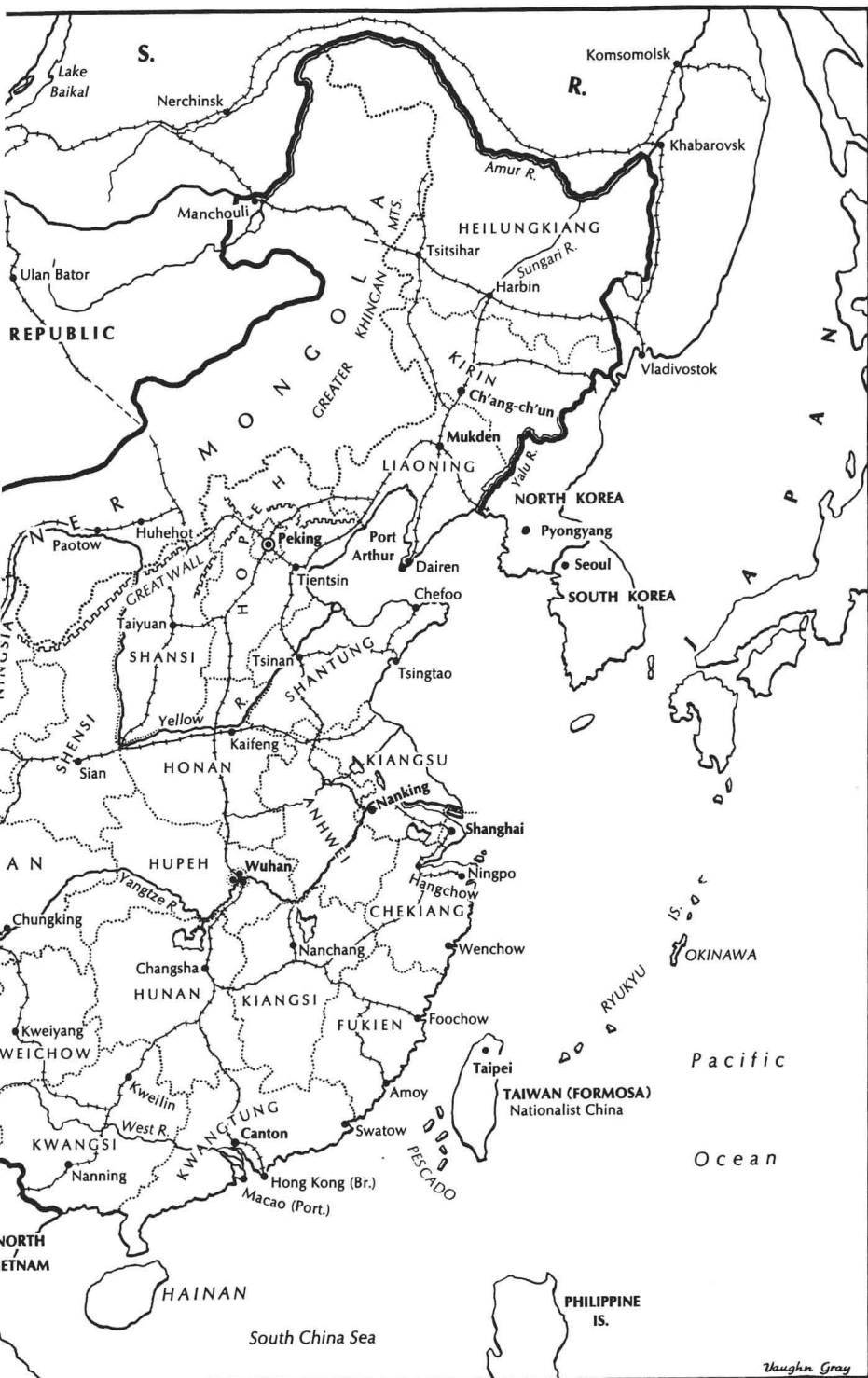
### Place Names

<i>pinyin</i>	<i>Wade-Giles</i>
Beijing	Peking
Changsha	Changsha
Guangzhou	Canton
Nanjing	Nanking
Shanghai	Shanghai
Tianjin	Tientsin
Wuhan	Wuhan
Yanan	Yenan

Finally, the following names have become so familiar in their own idiosyncratic or Wade-Giles spellings that they have been retained in this book: Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen, and Hu Shih.







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PEOPLE'S CHINA





# Introduction

*A long night stayed the dawn of China's crimson day.  
Hundred-year hobgoblins galloped up and down.  
But the people . . . oh the fragmented five hundred million . . .  
Suddenly a crowing cock illuminates the world.  
From far-off Yutian, from everywhere, musicians come.  
What gathering of poets could equal this?*

Mao Zedong addressed these verses to a fellow poet in 1949 during the celebrations marking the Communist victory in China.<sup>1</sup> The poem seemed to point both forward and backward. In form and diction, it recalled a traditional scholar-gentleman's literary amusement. But the content was new. Mao Zedong scarcely resembled a robed scholar sipping tea with friends and sharing poems in his exquisite garden. He was the redoubtable commander of an insurgency, the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army, that had seized control of the world's most populous country. He had just proclaimed the birth of the People's Republic of China. It was a moment that marked the victory over numerous hobgoblins—the rulers, warlords, and foreign aggressors who had presided over a century of national humiliation. The curtain was now rising on some extraordinary historical scenes as China, under communism, sought to achieve social change, economic development, and power. To sketch these scenes briefly is the objective of this book.

Chapter 1 describes the genesis of revolution. One important ingredient was poverty: Pre-1949 China was scarred by want and