

Revising Chinese Etymologies

A Lexicographic Journey through the *American Heritage Dictionary*

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HANDOUT #1

The following is a list of English words with Chinese etymologies as they appear in the *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition*. 2000. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Questions to think about:

1. None of the etymologies provide Chinese characters. Can you determine in all cases which Chinese words are involved and which characters are used to write them?
2. What problems do you see with the etymologies as currently written?
3. What kinds of improvements should be made? What research steps would be necessary to revise and improve the etymologies?

1. **ao dai** (ou' dī,) *n., pl. ao dais* A traditional garment of Vietnamese women, consisting of a knee-length jacket with sides slit up to the hips, worn over loose trousers. [Vietnamese *áo dài* : *áo*, tunic (from Middle Chinese *ʔaw*, padded coat) + *dài*, long (from Middle Chinese *daj*, *thaj*).]
2. **bo•hea** (bō-hē') *n.* A black Chinese tea, originally the choicest grade but later an inferior variety. [After the Fujian pronunciation of Chinese (Mandarin) *wǔ yí* (*shān*), the Wuyi mountain range on the border of Jiangxi and Fujian provinces.]
3. **bok choy** also **pak choi** (bōk' choi') *n.* A Chinese vegetable (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *chinensis*) in the mustard family, having a loose head of dark green leaves with thick white stems. Also called *celery cabbage*, *Chinese cabbage* [Chinese (Cantonese) *paāk ts'oi*, equivalent to Chinese (Mandarin) *báicài* : *bái*, white + *cài*, vegetable.]
4. **bonze** (bōnz) *n.* A Buddhist monk, especially of China, Japan, or nearby countries. [French, from Portuguese *bonzo*, from Japanese *bonsō* : *bon*, ordinary (from Middle Chinese *buan*, *fhan*) + *sō*, monk (from Middle Chinese *sang*, from Sanskrit *saṃghaḥ*, collection, brotherhood of monks, from *saṃhantisamgha-*, to

put together : *sam*, together; see **sem-1** in App. I + *hanti*, he strikes; see **g^when-** in App. I.)]

5. **chae•bol** (jě'bəl) *n., pl. chaebol* A conglomerate of businesses, usually owned by a single family, especially in Korea. [Korean *chaeböl* : *chae*, wealth (from Middle Chinese *tshaj*) + *böl*, powerful family (from Middle Chinese *buat*).]
6. **chop•chop** (chöp'chöp') *adv.* Right away; quickly. [Pidgin English, reduplication of *chop*, quick. See CHOPSTICK.]
7. **chop•stick** (chöp'stik') *n.* One of a pair of slender sticks made especially of wood, bamboo, or lacquer and held between the thumb and fingers and used as an eating utensil in Asian countries and in restaurants serving Asian food. [Pidgin English *chop*, quick (probably from Chinese (Cantonese) *kuai*) + STICK.]
8. **dai•mi•o** or **dai•my•o** (dī'mē-ō', dīm'yō') *n., pl. daimio* or **-mi•os** also **daimyo** or **-my•os** A feudal lord of Japan who was a large landowner. [Japanese *daimyō* : *dai*, great; see DAIKON + *myō*, name (from Middle Chinese *mjiajng*).]
9. **er•hu** (är'hōō') *n.* A Chinese stringed instrument that is played with a bow and has two strings stretched from a small sound box along a long thin neck. Also called *Chinese violin* [Mandarin *èrhú* : *èr*, two (in reference to its two strings) (from Middle Chinese) + *hú*, barbarian, any of numerous tribes living to the north and west of the Han in China (in reference to its place of origin) (from Middle Chinese).]
10. **gink•go** also **ging•ko** (gǐng'kō) *n., pl. -goes* also **-koes** A deciduous, dioecious tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) native to China and having fan-shaped leaves and fleshy yellowish seeds with a disagreeable odor. The male plants are often grown as ornamental street trees. Also called *maidenhair tree* [Probably from *ginkō*, an artificial or mistaken Sino-Japanese reading of the Chinese characters for ginkgo : Japanese *gin*, silver (from Middle Chinese *ŋin*) + Japanese *kō*, *kyō*, apricot (from Middle Chinese).]
11. **go²** (gō) *n.* A Japanese game for two, played with counters on a board that is ruled with 19 vertical and 19 horizontal lines. [Japanese, from Middle Chinese *gi*.]
12. **gyo•za** *n.* A pocket of dough that is stuffed, as with minced pork or shrimp, and fried. [Japanese.]
13. **Japan** *n.* A country of Asia on an archipelago off the northeast coast of the mainland.

Word History

Stamp collectors know that *Nihon* and *Nippon* on Japanese stamps mean "Japan"; what they probably don't know is that *Nihon*, *Nippon*, and *Japan* are all ultimately the same word. In the early part of the Chinese Tang dynasty—in A.D. 670, to be precise—Japanese scholars who had studied Chinese created a new name for their country using the Chinese phrase for "origin of the sun, sunrise," because Japan is located east of China. In the Chinese of the time (called Middle Chinese), the phrase was *nzyet-pwun*. To this the scholars added the Chinese suffix *-kwuk*, "country," yielding a compound *nzyet-pwun-kwuk*, "sun-origin-country, land of the rising sun." The consonant clusters in the word were not pronounceable in Old Japanese, so the form was simplified to *Nip-pon-gu* or **Ni-pon-gu*, the latter developing by regular sound change to *Ni-hon-gu*. The forms *Nippon* and *Nihon* of today are the same as these, minus the "country" suffix. Interestingly, the Chinese themselves took to calling Japan by the name that the Japanese had invented, and it is from the Chinese version of the name that English *Japan* is ultimately derived. In Mandarin Chinese, one of the forms of Chinese to develop from Middle Chinese, the phrase

evolved to *Riběnguó*, an early form of which was recorded by Marco Polo as *Chipangu*, which he would have pronounced as (chǐ-pān-gōo) or (shǐ-pān-gōo). The early Mandarin word was borrowed into Malay as *Japang*, which was encountered by Portuguese traders in Moluccas in the 16th century. These traders may have been the ones to bring the word to Europe; it is first recorded in English in 1577, spelled *Giapan*.

14. **kan•ji** (kän'jē) *n.*, *pl.* **kanji** or **-jis 1**. A Japanese system of writing based on borrowed or modified Chinese characters. **2**. A character used in this system of writing. [Japanese : *kan*, Chinese (from Middle Chinese *xanh*) + *ji*, characters (from Middle Chinese *dzih*).]
15. **ketch•up** (kěch'əp, käch'-'-) also **catch•up** (käch'əp, kěch'-'-) or **cat•sup** (kät'səp, käch'əp, kěch'-'-) *n.* A condiment consisting of a thick, smooth-textured, spicy sauce usually made from tomatoes. [Probably Malay *kicap*, fish sauce, possibly from Chinese (Cantonese) *kē-chap*, equivalent to Chinese (Mandarin) *qié*, eggplant + Chinese (Mandarin) *zhī*, sap, gravy.]

Word History

The word *ketchup* exemplifies the types of modifications that can take place in borrowing—both of words and substances. The source of our word *ketchup* may be the Malay word *kēchap*, possibly taken into Malay from the Cantonese dialect of Chinese. *Kēchap*, like *ketchup*, was a sauce, but one without tomatoes; rather, it contained fish brine, herbs, and spices. Sailors seem to have brought the sauce to Europe, where it was made with locally available ingredients such as the juice of mushrooms or walnuts. At some unknown point, when the juice of tomatoes was first used, ketchup as we know it was born. But it is important to realize that in the 18th and 19th centuries *ketchup* was a generic term for sauces whose only common ingredient was vinegar. The word is first recorded in English in 1690 in the form *catchup*, in 1711 in the form *ketchup*, and in 1730 in the form *catsup*. All three spelling variants of this foreign borrowing remain current.

16. **kim•chi** also **kim•chee** (kǐm'chē) *n.*, *pl.* **-chis** also **-chees** A Korean dish made of vegetables, such as cabbage or radishes, that are salted, seasoned, and stored in sealed containers to undergo lactic acid fermentation. [Korean *kimch'i*, from Old Korean *timchoi* : Middle Chinese *trhim*, to soak, steep + Middle Chinese *tshoj*, *tshaj*, vegetable, greens.]
17. **kum•quat** also **cum•quat** (kŭm'kwöt') *n.* **1**. Any of several trees or shrubs of the genus *Fortunella*, having small, edible, orangelike fruit. **2**. The fruit of these plants, having an acid pulp and a thin, edible rind. It is the smallest of the citrus fruits. [Chinese (Cantonese) *kamkwat*, equivalent to Chinese (Mandarin) *xīn*, gold + Chinese (Mandarin) *jú*, orange, tangerine.]
18. **pe•koe** (pē'kō) *n.* A grade of black tea consisting of the leaves around the buds. [Chinese (Amoy) *pek ho* : *pek*, white + *ho*, down, fine feathers.]
19. **sat•in** (săt'n) *n.* **1**. A smooth fabric, as of silk or rayon, woven with a glossy face and a dull back. **2**. A garment made of this fabric. ❖ *adj.* **1**. Made of or covered with satin. **2**. Glossy, sleek, and smooth. [Middle English, from Old French, from Arabic (*'aṭlas*) *zaytūnī*, (satin) of Zaitun, from *Zaytūn*, probably Tsinkiang (Quanzhou), China.]
20. **tea** (tē) *n.* **1. a.** An eastern Asian evergreen shrub or small tree (*Camellia sinensis*) having fragrant, nodding, cup-shaped white flowers and glossy leaves. **b.** The young, dried leaves of this plant, prepared by various processes and used to make a hot beverage. **2**. An aromatic, slightly bitter beverage made by steeping tea leaves in boiling water. **3**. Any of various beverages, made as by steeping the

leaves of certain plants or by extracting an infusion especially from beef. **4.** Any of various plants having leaves used to make a tealike beverage. **5.** A tea rose. **6.** *Chiefly British a.* An afternoon refreshment consisting usually of sandwiches and cakes served with tea. *b.* High tea. **7.** An afternoon reception or social gathering at which tea is served. **8.** *Slang* Marijuana. [Probably Dutch *thee*, from Malay *teh*, from Chinese (Amoy) *te* (equivalent to Chinese (Mandarin) *chá*).]

Word History

“Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,/Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.” When Alexander Pope wrote these lines from *The Rape of the Lock* in 1714, *tea* still rhymed with *obey*. This was true of many words spelled with *ea*, and it was just about in Pope's time that nearly all these words started changing their pronunciation from (ā) to (ē), as in our modern pronunciation of *tea* (tē). Most modern English words whose main vowel sound is spelled *-ea-* were pronounced with long vowels in Middle and Old English. Many of these vowels were shortened in the 16th and 17th century to their modern pronunciations, as in our words *dead* and *sweat*. But those words that were pronounced with an (ā) sound in Middle English did not undergo this sound change and kept their long vowels, undergoing the further change in Pope's time to the modern “long e” sound. There were several exceptions to this last sound change, most notably the words *break*, *great*, and *steak*. Interestingly, the old pronunciation is also retained in Irish family names, such as *Reagan*, *Shea*, *Beatty*, and *Yeats* (in contrast to British family names such as *Keats*).

21. **typhoon** (tī-fōon') *n.* A tropical cyclone occurring in the western Pacific or Indian oceans. [Greek *tuphōn*, whirlwind, and Arabic *ṭūfān*, deluge (from Greek *tuphōn*), and Chinese (Cantonese) *taaifung* (equivalent to Chinese (Mandarin) *tái*, great + Chinese (Mandarin) *fēng*, wind).]

Word History

The history of *typhoon* presents a perfect example of the long journey that many words made in coming to English. It traveled from Greece to Arabia to India, and also arose independently in China, before assuming its current form in our language. The Greek word *tuphōn*, used both as the name of the father of the winds and a common noun meaning “whirlwind, typhoon,” was borrowed into Arabic during the Middle Ages, when Arabic learning both preserved and expanded the classical heritage and passed it on to Europe and other parts of the world. *Ṭūfān*, the Arabic version of the Greek word, passed into languages spoken in India, where Arabic-speaking Muslim invaders had settled in the 11th century. Thus the descendant of the Arabic word, passing into English (first recorded in 1588) through an Indian language and appearing in English in forms such as *touffon* and *tufan*, originally referred specifically to a severe storm in India. The modern form of *typhoon* was influenced by a borrowing from the Cantonese variety of Chinese, namely the word *taaifung*, and respelled to make it look more like Greek. *Taaifung*, meaning literally “great wind,” was coincidentally similar to the Arabic borrowing and is first recorded in English guise as *tuffoon* in 1699. The various forms coalesced and finally became *typhoon*, a spelling that first appeared in 1819 in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

22. **won²** (wôn) *n., pl. won* See table at **currency**. [Korean.]
23. **yen²** (yĕn) *n., pl. yen* See table at **currency**. [Japanese *en*, from Chinese (Mandarin) *yuán*, dollar.]
24. **yu•an** (yōō-än', yü-) *n., pl. yuan* or **yuans** See table at **currency**. [Chinese (Mandarin) *yuán*, dollar.]
25. **zai•bat•su** (zī'bät-sōō') *n., pl. zaibatsu 1.* A powerful family-controlled commercial combine of Japan. **2.** A Japanese conglomerate or cartel. [Japanese : *zai*, wealth (from Middle Chinese *dzəj*) + *batsu*, powerful person or family (from Middle Chinese *buat*).]