

# “Chinglish”- Chinese in English

## Words used in English that come from the Chinese Language

1. “Tea”\* comes from the Hokkien “dey”.
2. “Cha” used in English and “chai” used in Russian comes from the Mandarin “cha”.
3. “Silk” in English comes from the Greek “serikos”, and ultimately from the archaic Chinese “sieg” which in modern Mandarin is “sz”.
4. More about cloth: “shantung” is exported out of “Shandong” and is a high-quality silk cloth; “canton crepe” and “canton flannel” come from Guangdong and “pekin” is a striped silk cloth from Beijing.
5. “Peking Man” is a *Homo erectus fossil* found near Beijing; the ‘Pekinese’ is a small breed of dog, and “Peking duck” is duck meat with crispy skin served with scallions and sauce and wrapped in a pancake.
6. ‘Mahjong’ is perhaps derived from “sparrow generals”.
7. ‘Chipao’ is a Manchurian gown.
8. “To shanghai”\* used as a verb means to force or deceive or kidnap someone into doing something against their will
9. “To kowtow”\* comes from the Chinese “to knock one’s head on the ground” as a sign of respect, but in English, describes any fawning or obsequious behavior.
10. “Mandarin”, although sometimes explained as coming from Manchurian: (*man*) + great (*da*) + person (*ren*). Actually derives from Portuguese, influenced by Hindi *mantri* (head of state) and Latin *mandare* (to command).
11. “China” is often ascribed to the Qin Dynasty that united the country in 221BC, but more likely derives from the Tungusic Jin Dynasty which ruled northern China between 1115~1234AD.
12. “Cathay” derives from the word “catai” after the Uighur Khitay people who ruled the north from 936~1122AD.
13. “Xanadu” comes from “Shantu”, Kubla Khan’s summer residence in Mongolia.
14. “Han” as a term for the Chinese people comes from the first long-term imperial dynasty (206~220BC) that followed the Chin, and was itself named after the Han, a tributary of the Yangtze River.
15. “Chinatown” is referred to by the Chinese themselves as “Tang ren jie” after the Tang Dynasty (607~918AD, the next long-lived and glorious epoch.
16. In English, perhaps the most famous dynasty is the “Ming” (1368~1644) because of that period’s beautiful porcelain. The extremely fine, white clay for this came from Gaoling, and is known as “kaolin”—used for making porcelain, as a filler in textiles, paper and rubber, and as a cure for diarrhoea. This hydrous aluminium silicate is better known as “kaolinite”\*.
17. “China” as a word for porcelain derives from this important discovery and the great efforts of Chinese artisans in this field, but it may also reflect an earlier Persian word “chini”.
18. “Japan”\* actually comes from Chinese (j/r-ben) rather than Japanese (Nihon or Nippon) all of which mean, “where the sun rises” and are therefore similar to the English “orient”.

19. “Tofu” comes from “doufu” meaning bean curd.
20. “The Tao” comes from ‘dao” (the way), hence “Taoism”.
21. ‘Kong fu” comes from the Mandarin “gong fu” and refers to martial arts skills.
22. “Tai-chi” comes from “tai ji chuan” (grand ultimate fist”.
23. Geomancy is the correct word for “feng shui” but sometimes Westerners use a sound-alike such as “feng shooi” in ignorance of the true pronunciation.
24. “Yin” and “yang” are used as the two opposing but complementary principles.
25. “I Ching” is used for the pre-Confucian “Book of Changes”.
26. “Wok” for a bowl-like cooking pan comes from Cantonese.
27. “Chop suey” (mixed bits) comes from Cantonese.
28. “Chow mein” (fried noodles) comes from Cantonese.
29. “Soy” (sauce) comes from Japanese.
30. “Rickshaw” (ricki=power; sha=vehicle) has an ironic history. The Chinese *ren-li-che* became Japanese *jin-riki-sha* and then lost the *jin* to become English *rickshaw*.
31. “Jin” appears in “ginseng” because the ancients thought the root resembled a human being, much like Shakespeare’s “forked radish”.
32. “Ketchup”\* probably comes from Cantonese via Malay, and derives from *ke* (tomato) and *jap* (juice).
33. Fruits: “lichee” (li jr); “kumquat” (golden tangerine); “longan” (dragon eyes) and “loquat (rush tangerine).
34. “Gung-ho”\* comes from *gong* (work) and *he* (unity), but now means, “to work zealously or jingoistically”.
35. “To have a yen”\* comes from the Chinese *yan* (smoke) and means “to want to do something with desire or even addiction”.
36. “Chin-chin”\* as a toast probably comes from *qing-qing* (please, please).
37. “Long time no see”\* really came from the Chinese *hao-jiu-bu-jian* as Pidgin English.
38. “Take a look-see”\* came from the Chinese *kan-jian*.
39. “Chow” from the word for “food”.
40. “Chop-chop” from the word for “quickly”.
41. “Chopsticks” from the word for “quick sticks”.
42. “Pidgin” itself means “business”.
43. “Running dog”\* is another phrase translated literally from the Chinese *zou-gou* and means “lackey”. In Taiwan, it is applied to locals who sided with the Japanese during the Occupation period (1895~1945).
44. “Typhoon” may have come from *ta-feng* meaning “a great wind”, and may have merged with Typhon, a Greek monster and father of the wind.
45. “Sampan” comes from the word *san-ban* meaning three boards, but became elevated to a boat-related character.
46. “Tycoons”\*, powerful and wealthy financiers, owe their name to the Chinese *tai-guan* (great official) via Cantonese or Japanese.
47. “Taipan” comes from *tai ban* great boss), more commonly *lao ban* in Taiwan.

**\*Of the 50 plus words that have entered the English language, at least three-quarters are merely names of things. Words that have developed their own meanings are underlined above.**