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### **CHINESE NAMES**

Personal names in Chinese culture follow a number of conventions different from those of personal names in Western cultures. Most noticeably, a Chinese name is written with the family name (surname or last name) first and the given name next.

The surname is generally composed of one character or syllable, such as Zhang, Wang, Li, or Zhao, among which Li is the most popular. There are also two-syllable surnames, or compound surnames, such as Ouyang, Zhuge, Sima and Gongsun. All members in a Chinese family have the same last name. Unlike people in western countries, Chinese women retain their family name even after marriage. When a daughter marries, she leaves the family and assumes the last name of her husband. In some places, there are additional taboos against marriage between people of the same surname, considered to be closely related.

Chinese given names are often made up of one or two characters. Unlike Western personal names, there is great variety in assigning Chinese given names. Chinese names can consist of any character and contain almost any meaning.

When a baby is born parents often give him or her a "milk name" or "little name". The given name is then usually chosen later, and is often chosen with consultation of the grandparents. In China, parents have a month before having to register the child. The parents may continue to use the nickname.

With a limited repertoire of family names, Chinese depend on using given names to introduce variety in naming. Almost any character with any meaning can be used. Unlike the Western convention, it is extremely frowned upon to name a person after someone else, and cases where people have the same name are almost universally the result of coincidence rather than intention. The common Western

practice of naming the children after their parents, ancestors, or historical figures is almost a taboo in Chinese culture.

There are also other conventions. Given names resonant of qualities which are perceived to be either masculine or feminine are frequently given, with males being linked with strength and firmness, and females with beauty and flowers. Chinese females sometimes have doubled names (Lili). This practice also extends to males (e.g. Yoyo Ma), but much less so. Siblings' names are frequently related. For example, one child may be named "sun" while his sister may be named "moon, or a boy may be named pine while his sister may be named plum, both being primary elements of the traditional Chinese system of naturally symbolizing moral imperatives.

Chinese personal names also reflect periods of history. Chinese names often do not just represent the environment or the time. For example, many Chinese born during the Cultural Revolution have revolutionary names such as "strong country" or "eastern wind". In Taiwan, it had been common to incorporate one of the four characters of the name "Republic of China" into masculine names.

A recent trend has swept through greater China to let fortune tellers change people's names years after they have been given. These fortune tellers claim that the name leads to a better future in the child according to principles such as Bagua. In jurisdictions where it is possible, people may also choose to change their legal given name, or their children's names, in order to improve their fortune.

Due to varying cultural backgrounds and regional dialects, some names may sound silly and hilarious when spoken in a different community and dialect, although it is considered rude to tease a person's name in such a way.

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