**nation (state)/国(Guó)**

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In modern Chinese since 1949, Guo (国，國) is more a combination of nation, state, country, land, and its people, than any one of these terms individually.

The concept of Guo（originally 或 or 域，later 國） can be traced back to ancient times, as early as Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.-256B.C.). Later, it would come to be called either Guo when the territory was smaller, or Bang（邦）when it was larger; in both cases it means more than territory or land, and also includes ways of ruling the land. That is why the character was constructed as a full wall protected by weapons.

During the Zhou Dynasty and the long period afterwards including the Warring States Period (475B.C.-221B.C.), a period not only well-known for war after war among Guos (states) but also for the Hundred Schools of Thought, such as Chuang-Tzu after Lao-Tzu and Mencius after Confucius, Guo primarily referred to the state and its people and territory.

For centuries, Chinese Guo more encompassed a social unit, where political order and territory security were far more important than ethnic and cultural origins, although Guos were much smaller and united mostly by families and kinship in early times. As a result, most Guos were identified by the names of dominant families rather than places. It showed the significance of who they were over where they were. The social bonds of family and kinship were the real resources for people who either lived in their territories or temporarily left, sometimes for a long time or even for the rest of, and beyond, their lives. This identity had so much to do with one’s Guo, that next generations would be seen, and self-identified, as members of their original Guo. This is largely true even today. As a result, Guo is usually linked closely with Jia (家，family), Min (民，People), and also Tu (土，land), becoming one concept as Guojia (国家，referring to nation, state, or country), Guomin (国民, people of the nation), Guotu (国土, national territory). The very reason for this seemingly natural connection of Guo with family, people, and territory is that, since the early period of Chinese history, Guo has been the place as well as the home for members of families or relatives and neighbors, who belong to a larger territory, either a village, a town, a city, or another Guo, which today is more a nation, a state, a country, and a homeland under one or another way of governing. The larger the population and territory, the more connections between people and the Guo.

In modern Chinese, the most frequently used term is Guojia (国家), which is very close to the English nation-state, though literally it means Nation-as-one-family. Within it all members belong to one great extended family, or in Confucius’ words, “all are brothers within the Sea”. This is a way of connecting members of a family with their nation and even the Sea. That is, members are from Jia (家), then Guo (国), and finally Tianxia (天下).

The logic can be usually seen from another way round: without the Tianxia first, there cannot be the GuoJia，and without GuoJia, there will be neither Jia nor their members.

As to the concept of Nation（民族）, the term first was translated into Chinese in the late 19th century. One example of the concept of Minzu（民族）appeared in 1899 in a paper by Liang Qichao (梁启超，1873-1929), one of the most influential thinkers and political figures in modern Chinese history. Liang’s early understanding of a nation was more about the differences between the West and the East as a whole; he used the term to emphasize the importance of difference and even competition between Europeans and Asians, such as national competition, Eastern nations, and national changes.

The Chinese translation of Nation is actually taken from Japanese, who borrowed and combined two Chinese characters Min (民) and Zu（族）into one, trying to match the meaning of Nation in Western languages. Many such keywords in the late 19th Century were Chinese translations via Japan in subjects of Humanities and Social Sciences, and some are still used as the Japanese combination even nowadays. Min in Chinese literally means people or ordinary people, while Zu means members of a kinship or an ethnicity.

Dr Sun Yatsen, in his Three Principles of the People, wrote that the formation of a nation was driven by lineage, lifestyle, language, beliefs, customs, and places, territory, land....

It was Mao who had more intellectual influences on Contemporary China with such terms as Renmin (人民, the People )，Guojia (国家, the Nation）, and Zhengquan (政权，the State). Since the 1930s onwards, these terms were among the keywords used by Mao in his writings: people should/would be nucleated into a new Chinese nation with its own sovereignty and territorial integrity. A China that could finally be a nation as Dr. Sun Yat-Sen dreamed, a China that is “an equal member of the nation-state system in the World”.

The Chinese interpretations of Guo, which in many cases mix up the meaning of nation with country, people, state, and government, show both historic and cultural understandings of Guo as well as social and political necessity for organizing and mobilizing such a huge population and society with a long history of cultural diversities. The logic of seeing Guo as the Great SELF（大我） or Grand Unification and prioritizing it over the individual self (小我) also results from the size and complexity of Guo. In reality a reversed approach works better, especially in the daily life of ordinary people, which later becomes the origin of Mao’s approach to people and state.

One of the keys to understanding Chinese Guo is a philosophical approach as well as a structural framework of unity with complexity and harmony with diversity (多元一体，和而不同)。

As a modernising country, nation-building and state-building have been under way since the late Qing period; the progress of both is paralleled as the two sides of one coin. This has been especially true since 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was established. On the one hand, it was meant to integrate different ethnic groups into the Chinese nation – a result of influence by the Soviet Union in the 1950s. These ethnic groups were even wrongly named as different nations. On the other hand, it was meant to introduce or improve some modern institutions on a national level, such as education, public health, social welfare as well as diplomacy, defense...

For sociologists, and to a certain extent economists as well, Guojia (国家) can mean both nation and state; for political scientists and those in international relations, it refers more to state and could even refer to government. Behind a nation as a whole, there are at least three key elements necessary for its existence: a sense of identity, which gives its members a foundation for belonging to the country; a sense of security, which provides its members with a feeling of home-returning; and a sense of solidarity, which supports the unity of members whenever there is danger from outside presence or a challenge from within.

It can be argued that Chinese Guo is not just a term with a long history, but more importantly a term with a complexity that neither the term nation nor the term state can appropriately fit as a translation. In many cases, Guo means more the people or people’s country, from individual members to extended families to where they belong, either a territory, a country, or a state, a nation, or even Tianxia. In this type of relational network, it is difficult to differentiate them from one another. Rather, the term is to be understood as an everlasting linkage from individuals through families, communities, country, to the whole of society, nation, and Tianxia, in which it will be almost impossible to identify which part is prior to others.