

# Occidental and Oriental

Family heritage from Asia and Europe

# Who I Am. Who Am I?

- I am frequently asked “Where is home?” “Where are you from?” – as if these questions are interchangeable;
- American-born; European heritage several generations removed; Asian (Hong Kong) resident for more than 20 years;
- Home is less about where I grew up. It is more about where I am, where my family is, where my greatest connections are;
- I speak Chinese and English; I am now a Hong Kong Permanent Resident and have lived outside the US most of my adult life. My immediate family is here;
- So while I identify as ‘American’ and still have most of my family there, I also have significant roots outside the US.

# Who I Am. Who Am I?

- Family background can be exclusively family of origin, or can be expanded to incorporate my extended (in-law) family;
- My ***family of origin*** is all Western European - Irish, Franco-German Alsatian and Saxon/Prussian. Their languages upon coming to the US were English and German;
- I grew up thinking of myself as being 'Irish' (that is the picture that was painted), but through this project I have realized its really more 50/50 Irish and German;
- Yet the family I married into is Chinese, 1st generation. Although English speaking at home, the parents-in-law emigrated from China/Taiwan speaking Mandarin and Taiwanese dialects;
- We speak English with our children, yet we all also speak Chinese;
- While my own language and ethnic background is European, Caucasian, American, that of my children will be much more diverse. And by extension, so is mine.

# Family of Origin - Father

- Mother's side – Spitzer - emigrated from Alsace-Lorraine to Ste. Marie, Illinois (via New Orleans) in 1848. This is consistent with a Wikipedia citation stating that starting in '1843 and 1844, sailing ships bringing immigrant families from Alsace...Some settled in Illinois...' <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alsace>
- In 1848, Alsace-Lorraine belonged to the then French Second Republic. Alsace has for centuries been a contentious issue between France and Germany. My relatives identified themselves as 'German' and they almost certainly spoke German (despite Alsace belonging to France);
- Between 1871 and 1945, Alsace and Lorraine changed hands between Germany and France several times, finally ending up in French hands following WWII;
- Causes of emigration in 1848 were economic and demographic changes that led to hunger, housing shortages, and a lack of jobs. In addition to the US, emigrants left for Paris, Russia and the Ottoman Empire <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alsace>

# Family of Origin



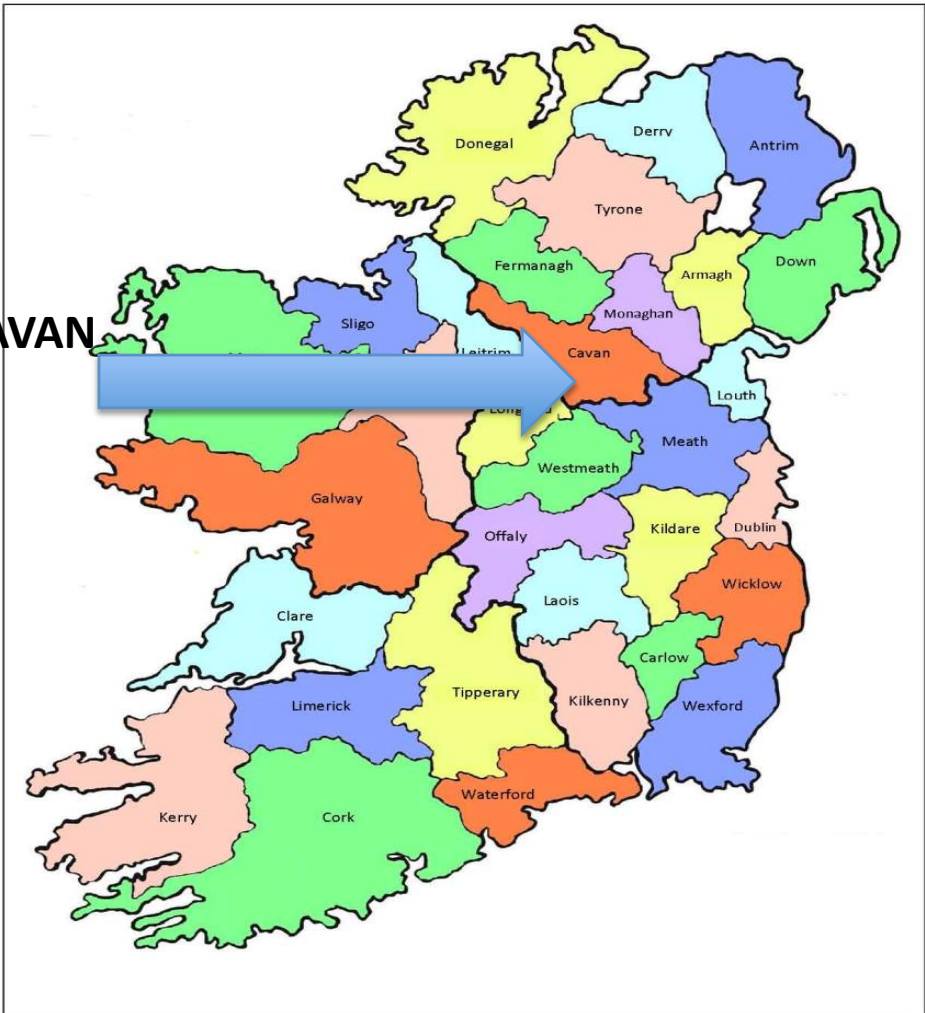
# Family of Origin - Father

- Father's side – Brady (*Irish: O'Brady*) – emigrated from County Cavan, Ireland. The great-great grandfather originally came to the US in 1817 but returned to start his family in Ireland before returning in 1848, directly to New York City;
- 1848 was the height of the Irish Potato Famine, the mass starvation (some would call it genocide) that resulted in approximately 1 million persons dying and another million emigrating, 20-25% of Ireland's population then;
- By comparison, the greatest genocide in recent history, in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, also resulted in 25% of the population being either killed or displaced (around 2 million persons as well);
- The Great Famine fundamentally altered both Ireland and the US' demography and history.
  - This was the 1<sup>st</sup> major immigration wave following US establishment, altering native born and Protestant predominance in the country;
  - Ireland's population more than 150 years later is still less than half of what it was before the Great Famine.

# Ireland and Irish Counties



CAVAN





# Family of Origin - Father

- My most 'prominent' paternal relation would be my great grandfather, who was the NYC Commissioner for Public Works around 1900 – the height of Tammany Hall influence. He was commended for overseeing all of the construction surrounding George Dewey's 1899 parade in NYC celebrating his conquest of Manila. No one died during the parade so the construction was viewed as a success!



Reviewing stand for Dewey's parade



# Family of Origin - Mother

- Mother's family also was a mix of Irish and German immigrants, coming to the US in 2 waves;
- Grandmother's side (Schein) was from Switzerland, but originally Saxony and Prussia, and emigrated in 1880;
- German immigration was one of the larger influences in US immigration history. According to Wikipedia, 'Between 1850 and 1930, about 5 million Germans migrated to the United States (a similar number as the Irish), peaking between 1881 and 1885 when 1 million Germans settled...' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_immigration\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_immigration_to_the_United_States)
- The 1880s also represent the 2<sup>nd</sup> major US immigration wave; this one brought predominantly non-English speaking immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, as opposed to earlier, largely English speaking, immigrants from England and Ireland. Again, this immigration wave dramatically altered US demographics.

# Germany and Europe

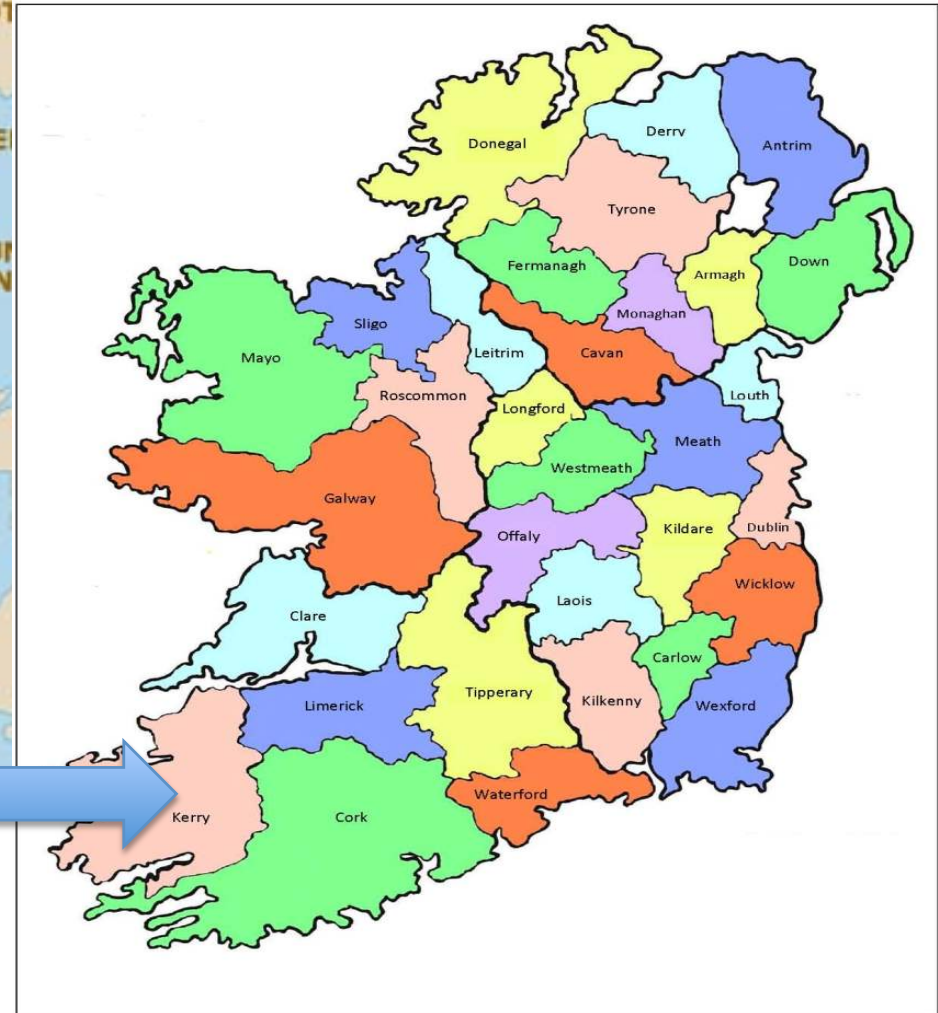
- Prussia and Saxony, North German Confederation (ca. 1866)



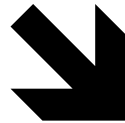
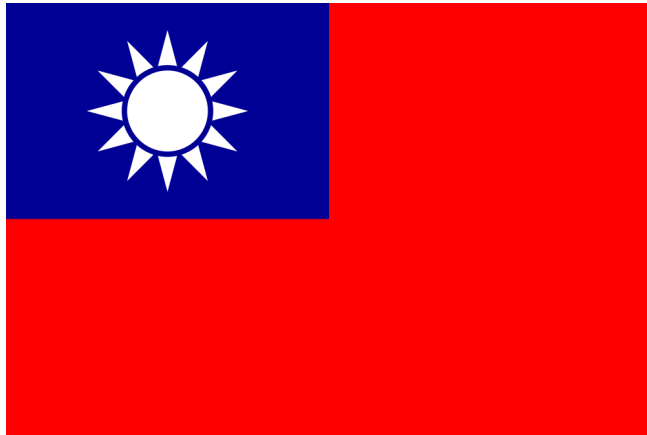
# Family of Origin - Mother

- Grandfather's family (Keeffe or O'Keefe) from County Kerry, Ireland, emigrated in 1905;
- Kerry was one of the poorest counties in Ireland throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, heavily reliant upon agriculture (and by extension the potato) and as a result was hard hit during the Potato Famine. Emigration from Kerry began during the 1840s and continued until recent times;
- The Potato Famine's legacy made Kerry a center for unrest, beginning with the Land Wars of the 1870s and 80s. As a result, Kerry was a focal point for violence during the Irish War of Independence (1919-21) and Civil War (1922-3);
- Kerry is also home to the Dingle Peninsula, a very remote area facing the Atlantic Ocean. Parts of the Spanish Armada wrecked here, and as a result there is Spanish genealogy in the area - my mother's DNA shows 6% Iberian!

# Ireland and Irish Counties



# Inherited Family



(Well, not really!)



# Inherited Family

- My in-laws, while long term residents in the US, originally hail from Southern China, Fujian Province. They fled China in 1948/9, first to Hong Kong and Taiwan, then to the US for graduate school in Minnesota in the 1950s, later settling in New Jersey;
- Grandparents on both sides of my wife's family were senior party functionaries within the KMT (Kuomintang), China's ruling party until the Communist takeover in 1949. One served in the Republic of China's (Taiwan's) Legislative Council (its Congress);
- The KMT was founded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1911, in order to overthrow the last Qing Dynasty Emperor. Sun established the Republic of China in 1912, and Chiang Kai-shek later assumed KMT leadership following Sun's death in 1925;
- Following the Communist victory in 1949, Chiang and the remnants of the KMT fled/relocated to Taiwan to re-establish the Republic of China. My in-laws were some of the last persons to make that journey, leaving behind many relatives in China;



# Inherited Family – China and Taiwan





# Inherited Family

Last year, my son interviewed his Chinese grandparents for a school project about the Second World War and their life surrounding it. It follows:



# Language Heritage – Inherited Family

- Inherited family languages are Chinese – Mandarin and Taiwanese (MinNan Hua). Mandarin is the dominant Chinese dialect, while Taiwanese is a regional dialect. Chinese dialects are as different from one another as English to French to Spanish;
- Fujian Province is directly across from Taiwan. MinNan dialect originates in Xiamen, the largest major city linking Taiwan and Fujian. Both grandparents are from the Xiamen area;
- Fujian is home to numerous local dialects owing to its mountainous geography. It is said that one can travel 50km and over the next mountain range and the people will be speaking a different dialect!

# Chinese Dialects

- Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwanese dialects:  
“Do you speak.....?”



Mandarin



Cantonese



Taiwanese

# Language Heritage – My Family

- In my current family, we speak English together. We all also speak Mandarin and some Cantonese (Cantonese is the predominant Hong Kong dialect) – but not to each other!
- My daughter was born in Hong Kong and has a Hong Kong passport; the rest of us are Hong Kong Permanent Residents;
- The children, owing to their family heritage, also have Chinese names.

# Language Heritage – Names

- Zac, my son (eldest): 郭若海
- Zahra, my daughter (youngest): 郭若滢
- 郭 Guo, or Kuo in the old Romanization, is the family name (from my wife's side);
- 若 ('Ruo' meaning 'like' or 'as if') is their middle name. It is very common in traditional Chinese families for this character to be the same for all children. The last character is the distinguishing one;
- 海 and 滢 (Hai and Ting) both are 'water' characters, distinguished by the 氵 radical. His is the character for 'the ocean', hers for 'a slowly bubbling stream.'
- For both children, their Chinese names very closely reflect their ***physical and emotional personalities*** – interesting in that both were named within a week of birth, before either of their personalities became apparent!!

# Expatriate, but Still American

- My adult life has been in Asia. My children have spent most of their life living overseas;
- We have family scattered throughout the US – Seattle, Washington, DC; New Jersey, and South Carolina and being American is emphasized;
- Yet having a diverse family heritage, it has been important to maintain a connection to both cultures. Imparting Asian culture, and having the children study Chinese, is part of that;
- Even today, when asked “Where are you from?” I do have to stop and ponder the question. But the answer is clear – America. Even if a lot about me and my family is not!