

## Top 10 Chinese Surnames in Singapore

The top 10 Chinese surnames in Singapore are:

1. 陳/陈, Tan 9.5% of Total Chinese population
2. 林, Lim 6.6%
3. 李, Lee 4.5%
4. 黄, Ng 4.2%
5. 王, Ong 2.7%
6. 王, Wong 2.6%
7. 吴, Goh 2.2%
8. 蔡, Chua 2.2%
9. 陳/陈, Chan 1.9%
10. 許/许, Koh 1.9%

Source: Statistics Department Report 2000

### Origins of top 4 surnames

1. 陳/陈 Chen in Mandarin, Tan in Hokkien, Teochew, Hainan, and Taiwan Chan in Hong Kong, Macau and Malaysia, Chin in Taishanese, Hakka and Japanese, Jin in Korean and Tran in Vietnamese.

Chen is one of the most common East Asian surnames of Chinese origin. It ranked 5<sup>th</sup> most common surname in China (2007), and the most common surname in Singapore (2000) and Taiwan (2010). It is also the most common family name in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian, Hong Kong and Macau.

The surname Chen was derived from Gui (媯), the surname of the descendants of the legendary sage king Emperor Shun(舜帝). When King Wu of Zhou (周武帝) established the Zhou Dynasty (周朝) in 1046/45 BC, he conferred his son-in-law Gui Man (媯满) as Duke Hu of Chen (陈侯胡公满, 胡公为谥号, 人死后的称号). The state of Chen was in the current Huaiyang County of Henan Province (河南省淮阳县). The Chen State was conquered by the Chu State (楚国) in 479 BC, and the people of Chen adopted the name of their former state as their surname.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (南北朝) period of 420-589, Chen Baxian (陈八仙) established the Chen Dynasty (陈朝) (557-589), the fourth and the last of the Southern Dynasties. It was also during this period that the nomadic Xianbei people (鲜卑族) was systematically assimilated into China's agrarian culture, and adopted Chinese surnames under the directives of Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei (北魏). The Xianbei subjects whose surnames of Houmochen (侯莫陈) was converted to Chen (陈).

Fujian was the original home of a chen clan when they migrated under Tran Kinh (陈京) to Dai Viet whose descendants established the Tran Dynasty which ruled Vietnam (Dai Viet). Certain members of the clan could still speak Chinese.

*Source: 新加坡琼崖陈氏公会 60 周年纪念特刊 1998 Wikipedia*

2. 林 Lin in Mandarin, Lim, Liem in Southern Fujian, Chaoshan, Korean, Lam in Cantonese, Ling in Eastern and Northern Fujian. The word means forest.

The first person associated with the Lim surname was Bi Gan (比干). Born 1092 BC in We Yi (未邑), formally known as Chao Ge (朝哥), he was the son of Emperor Shang Wending (商王文丁) of the Shang Dynasty, younger brother of Emperor Yi (帝乙), uncle of Emperor Zhou (纣王) and the 33<sup>rd</sup> generation descendant of Emperor Huang (黄帝) who is said to be the ancestor of all Chinese. Bi Gan got his name because he was conferred the land known as Bi (比).

Bi Gan served 3 Shang emperors as Senior Official in the rank of Shao Si (少师). He was loyal and dedicated, to the extent of sacrificing his life for the betterment of the country.

Emperor Zhou (纣王) was a cruel king and ruled his country with great brutality. All his senior court officials deserted him. Bi Gan was the only one who stayed behind and sent written admonition to Emperor Zhou to better manage matters of the state. He stood in Emperor Zhou's palace for 3 days waiting for Emperor Zhou's response. The Emperor was so angry with his admonition that he killed Bi Gan by taking out his heart, and ordered all his family members to be killed too. His pregnant wife escaped in time with 4 maids. They hid in a forest and she gave birth to a son in a stone cave beside a stream. She thus named him Spring (泉).

Years later the Shang Dynasty was replaced by the Zhou Dynasty. The new Emperor Zhou Wu Di (周武帝) posthumously honoured Bi Gan, and sent for his son, conferred him the surname Lin, changed his name to Jian (坚), and appointed him Imperial Scholar (大夫), and later conferred him Duke of Bo Ling (博陵公).

Bo Ling is a place in today's Hebei Province Li County (河北省蠡县)。

Lin Jian (林坚) was thus the first ancestor of the Lim surname, and Li County of Hebei Province is the original home of the Lins.

*Source: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Magazine of Lim Shi Da Zong Chi Jiu Long Tang Jia Zu Zhi Zhi Hui 新加坡林氏大宗祠九龙堂家族自治会 75 周年纪念特刊 Wikipedia*

### 3. 李, Li, Lee in Mandarin, Lee, Lei in Cantonese, Lee, Lie in Hokkien, Lie in Dutch Romanisation.

Li is the second most common surname In Mainland China shared by 95 million people there. It is also one of the most common surnames in Indonesia and many other parts of the World.

The common Korean surname, Lee (also Romanised as Yi, Ri, or Rhee), and the Vietnamese surname Ly, are derived from Li and are historically written with the same Chinese character 李. The character also means "plum" or "plum tree".

One legend had it that the Li surname originated from Gao Tao (皋陶), a member of the Niao Yi Tribe (鸟夷部落), who held the position of Dali (大理), equivalent to the present-day Minister for Law and Justice, during the reign of Emperor Yao (尧帝) and Emperor Shun (舜帝). He was efficient, strict and fair in administering law and order and gained a good reputation. Many generations of Gao Yao's descendants also held the same position after Gao Yao's death. It was the custom of the time to adopt the official designations as one's surname. Li (理) was thus known as the surname of Gao Yao and his descendants. In olden day China, 理 was also written as 李. Another legend had it that Li Zhen (利贞), the son of Li Zheng (理征), the Dali in Shang Dynasty (商朝), was the originator of the Li surname. Li Zheng was a righteous minister who

admonished the tyrant Emperor Zhou (纣王) to be a benign ruler. The Emperor not only did not accept his admonitions, he even killed Li Zheng. His wife and son Li Zhen escaped in time and hid in the woods. Without food, they survived on the fruit of the Li (李) Tree or Plum tree. Because of this, Li Zhen adopted the surname 李.

Another descendant, Li Er (李耳), the famous philosopher and founder of Taoism, propelled the Li surname to high social prestige.

The Tang Dynasty (唐朝) founded by Li Yan (李渊), and his descendants ruled China for 300 years. The Tang Dynasty was one of the greatest and most prosperous periods in the Chinese history. The Tang emperors had the custom of bestowing the Li surname to their favoured ministers, generals and even foreigners (The Tang Dynasty was an open society and there were numerous foreigners in the country). The surname Li was the most prestigious and common surname at that time.

*Adapted from 中华姓氏通史插图本：李姓, 东方出版社 Wikipedia*

4. 黃, Ng in Teochew, Huang in Mandarin, Hwang in Korean, Wong in Cantonese, Wee in Hainanese, Oey or Ung in Hokkien, Ooi or Hui in Hakka, Hoang or Huynh in Vietnamese.

Huang is the 7<sup>th</sup> most common surname in China. The population of Huang in China and Taiwan was estimated at 30 million (2007). It was also the surname of more than 2 million overseas Chinese, 4.6 million Vietnamese and 1 million South Koreans (2000 census).

Huang is an ancient surname. There are several different legends about the origin of the surname:

- Dong Yi Tribe (东夷). The Dong Yi or Eastern Barbarians were ancient people who lived in Eastern China during the prehistoric period. They were one of the Four Barbarians in the Chinese culture: Dong Yi (东夷), Northern Di (北狄), Southern Man (南蛮) and Western Rong (西戎)。

Dong Yi was the tribal alliance group comprising nine tribes in the Huai River Basin (淮水流域). They were: 1. Quan Yi (畎夷), 2. Yu Yi (於夷), 3. Fang Yi (方夷), 4. Huang Yi (黄夷), 5. Bai Yi (白夷), 6. Chi Yi (赤夷), 7. Xuan Yi (玄夷), 8. Feng Yi (风夷) and 9. Yang Yi (阳夷). The Dong Yi people use different birds as their totems, and the Huang Yi's totem was the Yellow Oriole (黄鹂). Later, as the Huang Yi Tribe moved and settled in different parts of China, they adopted Huang as their surname.

- Ying Clan (嬴氏). Shaogao's (少皋) son Gao Yao (高尧) had a son named Bo Yi (伯益). Bo Yi helped Emperor Shun (舜帝) and Yu the Great (大禹) control the Great Flood and got the surname Ying (嬴) in early Xia (夏) Dynasty. Bo Yi married Emperor's Shun's youngest daughter who gave birth to Da Lian (大廉). Yu the Great also known as Xia Yu (夏禹) later awarded the Huang Kingdom to Da Lian, and his descendants were known as Huangs.

There were a total of 14 clans derived from Bo Yi Ying Clan (伯益嬴氏). They were: 1. Lian (廉), 2. Xu (徐), 3. Jiang (江), 4. Qin (秦), 5. Zhao (赵), 6. Huang (黄), 7. Liang (梁), 8. Ma (马), 9. Ge (葛), 10. Gu (谷), 11. Mou (繆), 12. Zhong (钟), 13. Fei (费), 14. Qu (瞿).

- Ji Clan (姬氏). The lineage of the Huang Clan from Yellow Emperor (黄帝) was as follow: Yellow Emperor -> Chang Yi (昌意) -> Zhuanxu Emperor (颛顼帝) -> Da Ye (大業) -> Shao Dian (少典) -> Nu Shen (女莘) -> Da Fei (大费) -> Juan Zhang (卷章) -> Wu Hui (吴回) also known as Zhurong -> Lu Zhong (陆终).

Lu Zhong had 6 sons: 1. Fan (樊) also known as Fan Ren (樊人), 2. Ding (定) also known as Hui Lian (惠连), 3. Qian, also known as Qian Keng (钱铿), 4. Qiu, also known as Qiu Yan (求言), 5. Yan An (晏安), also known as Cao An (曹安) or Zao An (遭安) and 6. Ji also known as Ji Lian (季连).

In 2220 BC during the reign of Emperor Yao (帝尧), Hui Lian scored merits in harnessing river floods. Emperor Yao conferred on Hui Lian the title of Viscount (子) and the state of Canhu (参胡) in present day region of Fenyang (汾阳), Shanxi Province (山西省). Emperor Yao later renamed the State of Canhu as State of Huang (黄), and bestowed on Hui Lian the surname of Huang and the name Yun (云). Hence, Hui Lian was also known as Huang Yun (黄云) or Nan Lu (南陆). Hui Lian became the progenitor of the Huang surname clan. During Western Zhou Dynasty (西周), the rulers of the Huang State was given the title of Duke (公). The descendants of Huang Yun or Nan Lu ruled the Huang State of Shanxi until the early Spring and Autumn Period (春秋 772BC -481 BC) when it was conquered by the state of Jin (晋国).

### **Huang Development and Migration**

In 891 BC, King Xiaoo of Zhou conferred on the 53<sup>rd</sup> generation descendants of Hui Lian, Huang Xi (黄熙, 也叫黄石) the nobility of Hou (侯) Marquis, and a fiefdom in the region east of the Han River (汉水), in the present- day region of Yicheng (宜城), Hubei Province (湖北省), 【 not to be confused with the Huang State of Fenyang, in Shanxi Province】 with the 4 states of Jiang (江), Huang (黄) founded by Bo Yi (伯益)'s descendants, Dao (道), and Bai (柏) in the Huang River (潢水) valley as vassals. The Huang State of Yicheng, Hubei was known as the Western Huang (西黄) in history.

In 845 BC, Marquis Wen (文侯) Huang Meng (黄孟, 也叫黄璋) moved the capital of the State of Huang from Yicheng to Huangchuan (潢川 in Henan Province). Huang Xi's descendants ruled the State of Huang until 648 BC when it was destroyed by the State of Chu (楚国). Marquis Mu (穆侯) Huang Qisheng (黄企生) fled to the State of Qi (齐国). The people of Huang were forced to relocate to Chu. They settled in the region known as Jiangxia Prefecture (江夏郡) during the Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220). This region is in the present-day Hubei Province (湖北省). There are many places in this region today that are named after Huang, eg, Huanggang (黄冈), Huangpi (黄陂), Huangmei (黄梅), Huangshi (黄石), Huanggan (黄安), Huangzhou (黄州). A large number of Huang was also relocated to regions south of the Yangtze River.

From Jiangxia, the Huang Clan later spread its branches to other parts of China and other parts of the World. Hence Jiangxia is regarded as the cradle of the Huang Clan, and the name Jiangxia was adopted as the Clan's Hall name (堂号). Today, the Huang Clan is known as the "Huang Clan of Jiangxia". The name Jiangxia has become synonymous with the Huang surname clan.

During the Jin Dynasty (金朝), AD 265-420, when northern China was invaded by the barbarian tribes, many northerners, especially the aristocratic clans, moved to the south with the Jin court. It was during this period that the Huang Clan migrated to Fujian, together with 7 other clans: Lin (林), Chen (陈), Zheng (郑), Zhan (詹), Qiu (邱), He (何) and Hu (胡).

From the Tang Dynasty (唐朝), AD 618-907 onwards, many Han Chinese migrated from Fujian to Guangdong and other southern provinces. The Huang clan grew into a big clan in south China, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest clan there.

Migration to Taiwan began during the transition period from the Ming Dynasty (明朝, 1368-1644) to Qing Dynasty (清朝, 1644-1912), when the Han Chinese followed the anti-Manchu Ming loyalist forces under Zheng Chenggong (郑成功) who crossed the Taiwan Strait.

Huang migration to Southeast Asia began as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century during the Ming Dynasty (明朝). Migration to America began only in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century following the forced opening of China's door to the West. Today, Huang is one of the largest Chinese surnames in America.