

# China

*a land of linguistic minorities*



# Chinese languages?

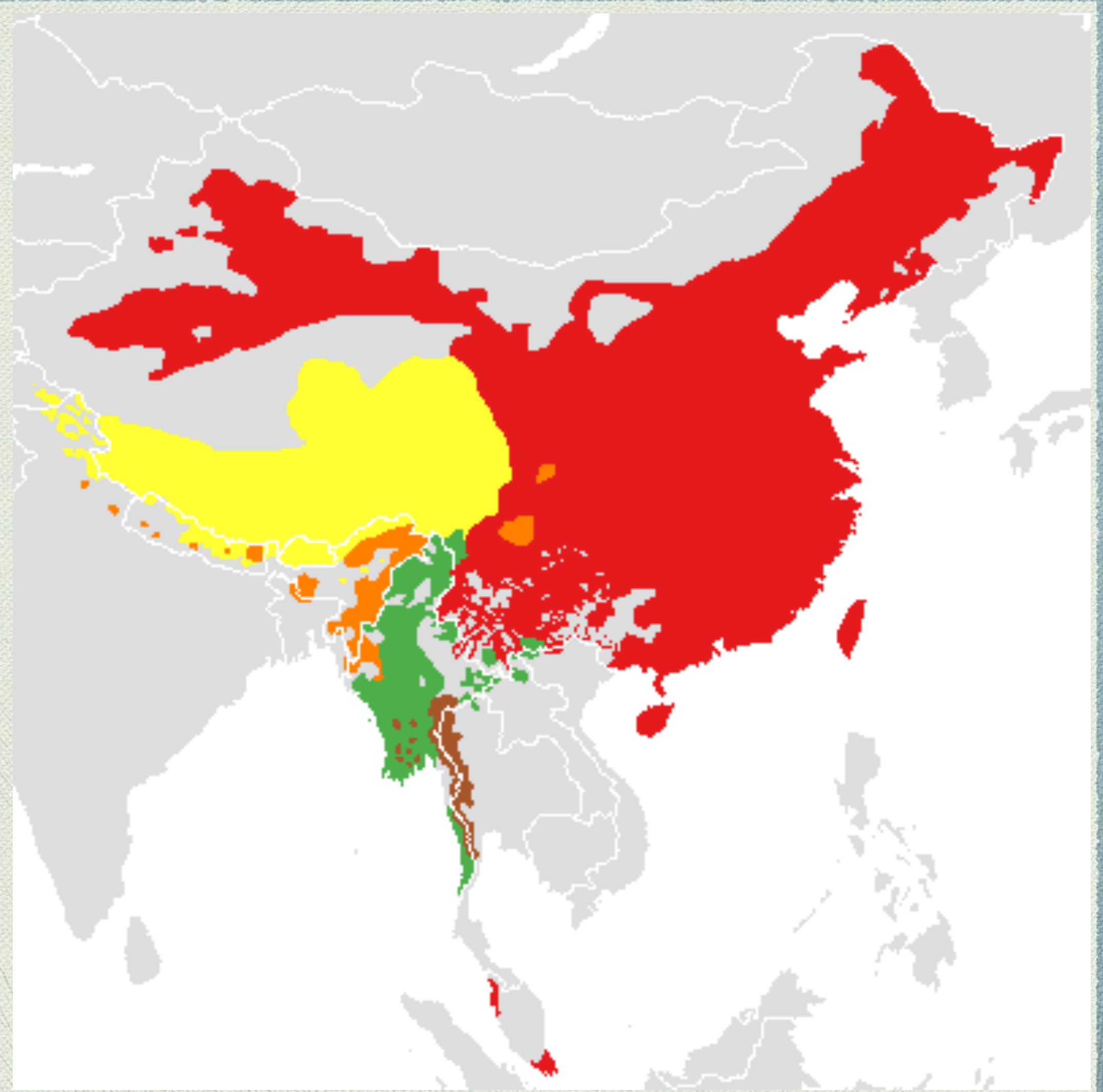
- ◆ The phrase “Chinese languages” is ambiguous:
  - (1) the languages of China (i.e., the languages spoken in China)
  - (2) the Sinitic languages (i.e., the languages that are genetically Chinese, i.e., similar to Mandarin Chinese)
- ◆ Many of the languages of China are not Sinitic languages.





# the Sino-Tibetan language family

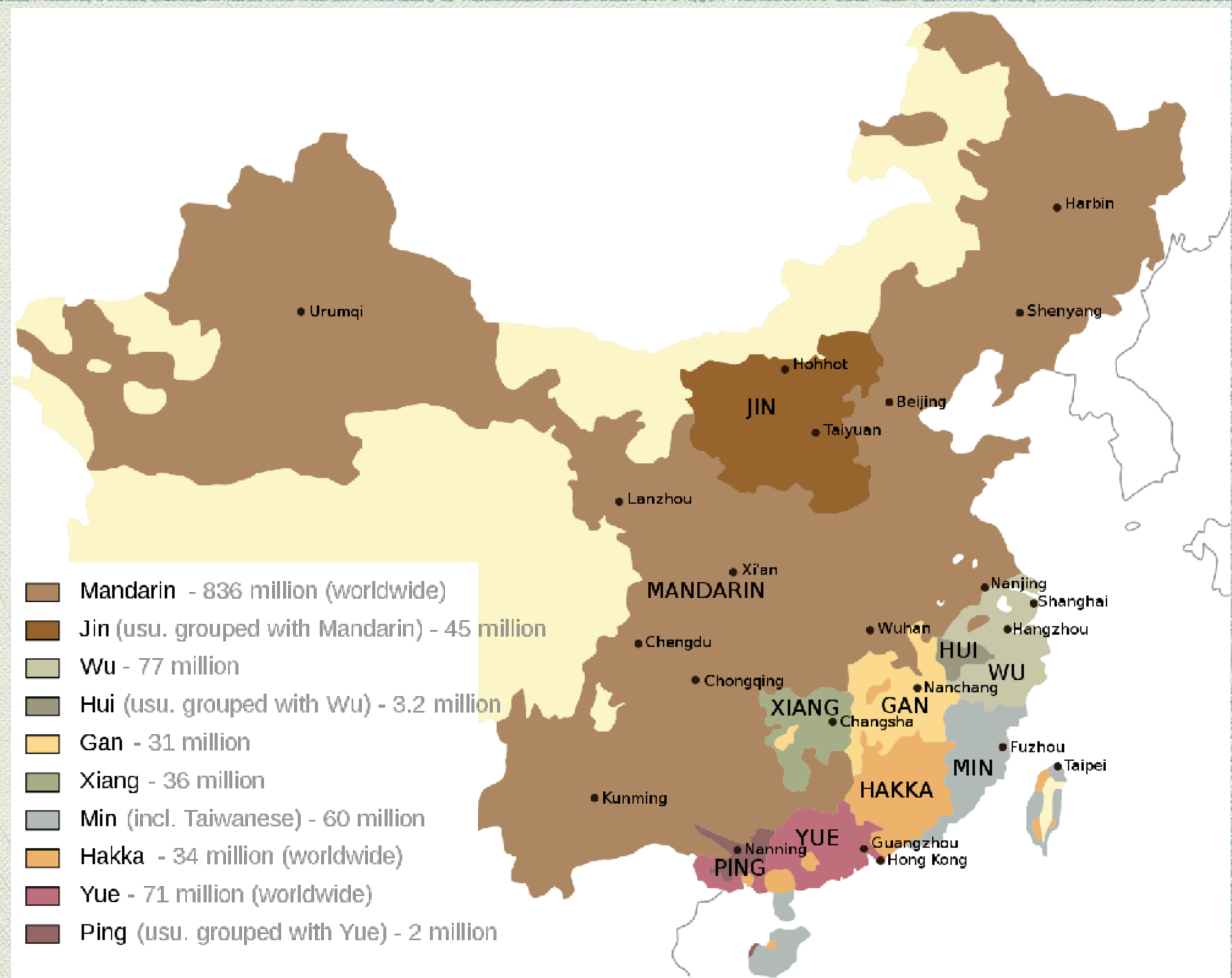
- Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken throughout China. The **Tibetic** languages (yellow) are spoken mostly in Tibet, and the **Sinitic** languages (red) are spoken mostly in the eastern areas.
- The Burmese (green) and Karen (purple) languages are part of this language family.





# major Sinitic languages

- ◆ The many Sinitic languages form a vast dialect continuum. However, the dialects far from each other are not mutually intelligible.
- ◆ **Mandarin** is by far the most widely spoken Sinitic language.
- ◆ Over the past century, Mandarin has become commonly spoken in Manchuria and in Xinjiang.





# China proper (e.g., 1912)

- ◆ In this 1912 map, the area of **China proper** is shaded pink. This is an area where the Sinitic languages have been dominant since the Qing dynasty. Other areas with pink borders (Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, Manchuria) are non-Chinese areas claimed by China.





# 8 main dialects of Mandarin

- ◆ Even Mandarin has several identifiable dialects.





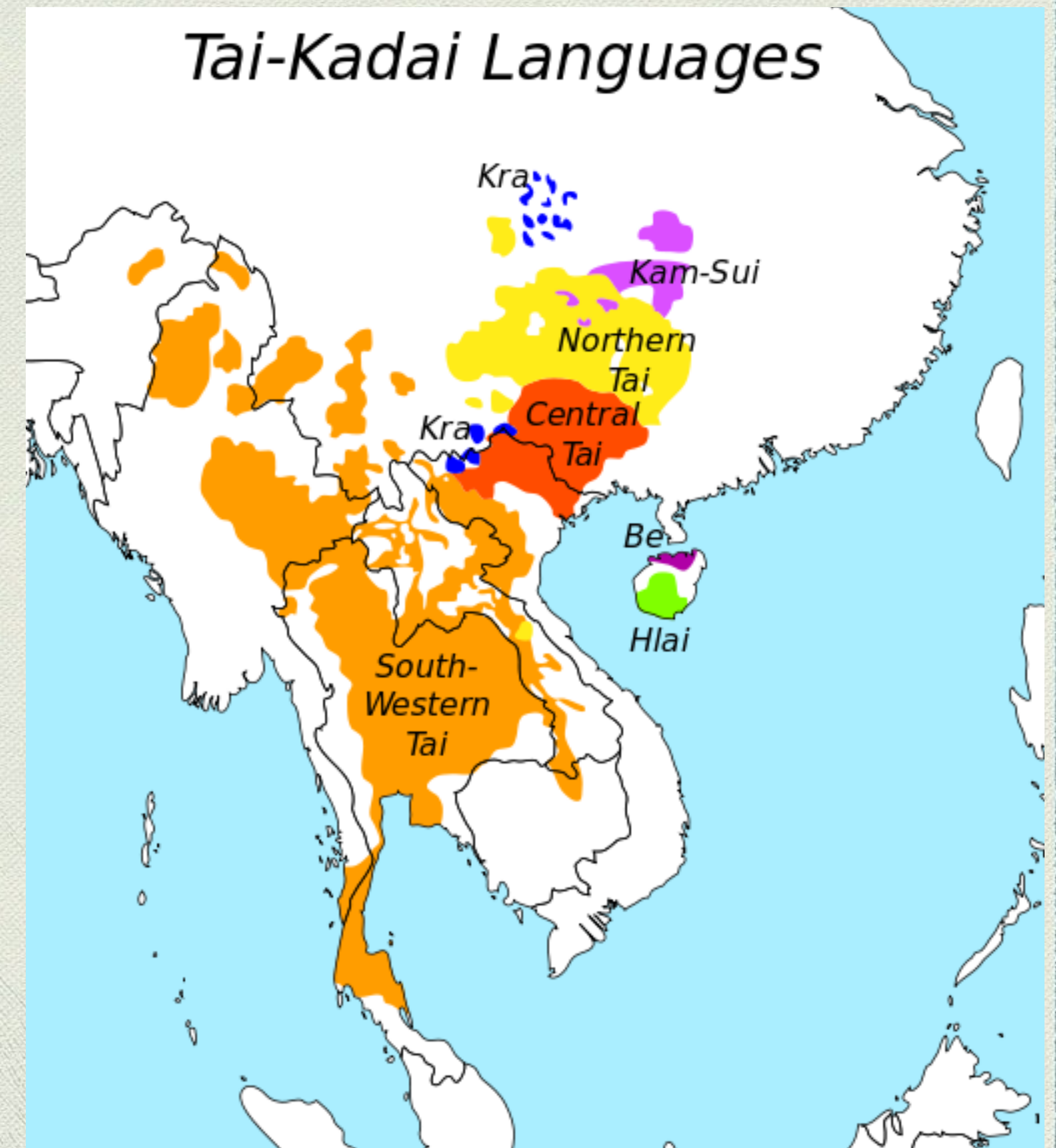
# non-Sino-Tibetan languages of China

- ◆ Some of the non-Sino-Tibetan languages of China are important because they have many speakers or they are dominant in certain local areas.
- ◆ Other non-Sino-Tibetan languages have international ties with China's historic ethnic enemies and political rivals.



# Tai-Kadai languages

- ◆ Tai-Kadai languages are spoken in southern China.





# Hmong-Mien languages

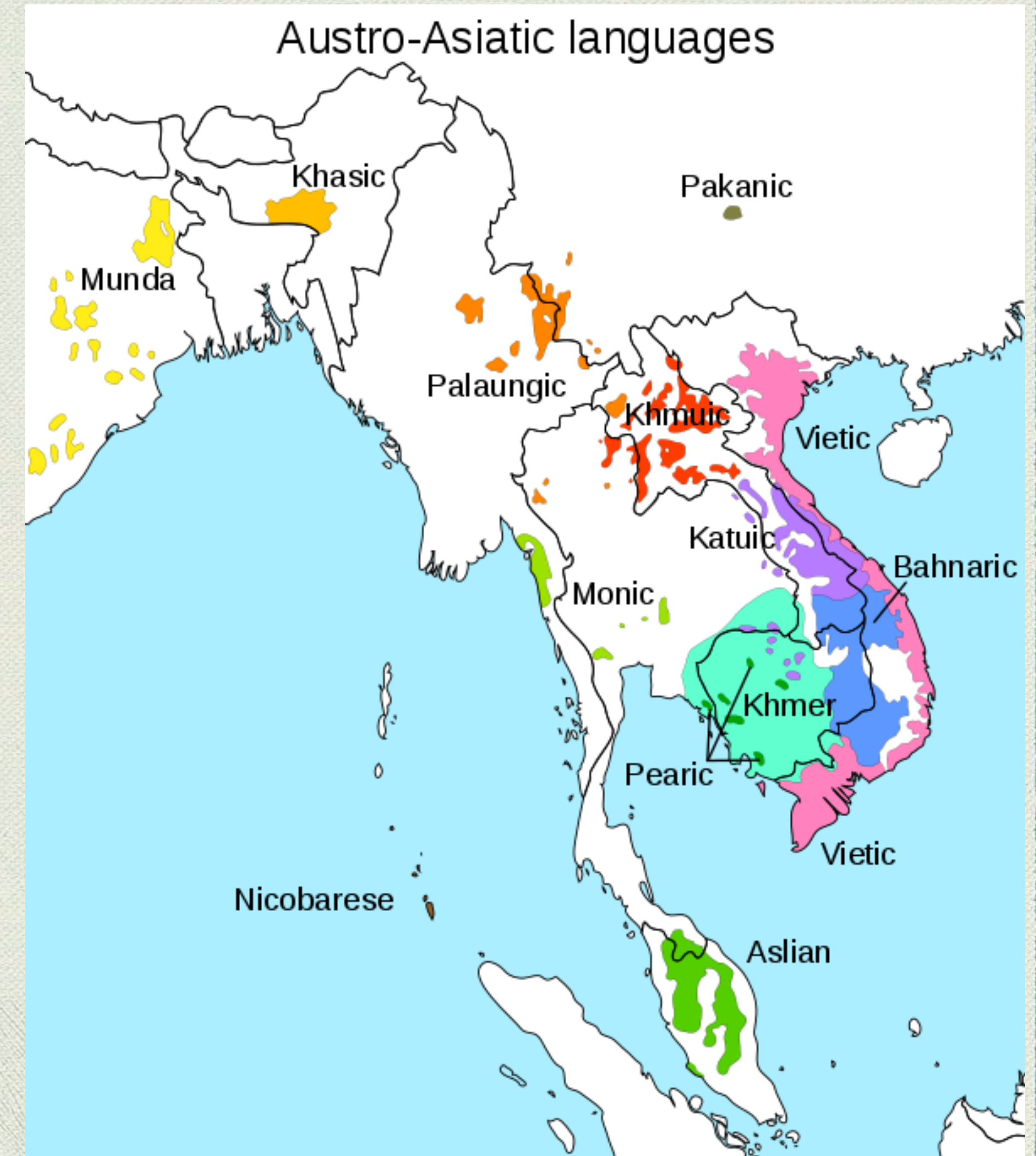
- Communities that speak Hmong-Mien languages are scattered across southern China.





# Austro-Asiatic languages

- ◆ Only a few Austro-Asiatic languages are spoken in China.
- ◆ Palaung and Wa are spoken near the borders with Burma and Laos.
- ◆ Mang, Bolyu, and Bugar are spoken in southern China. Mang is also spoken in Vietnam and Laos.
- ◆ The language of the Jīngzú 京族 people is very **similar to Vietnamese**.





# Turkic languages

- ◆ The Turkic languages are spoken across Asia, and some are also spoken in China.
- ◆ Uyghur has 10-15 million speakers, and it is written in a **Perso-Arabic script**.
- ◆ The number of Uyghur speakers is uncertain because of their persecution by the government.





# Mongolic languages

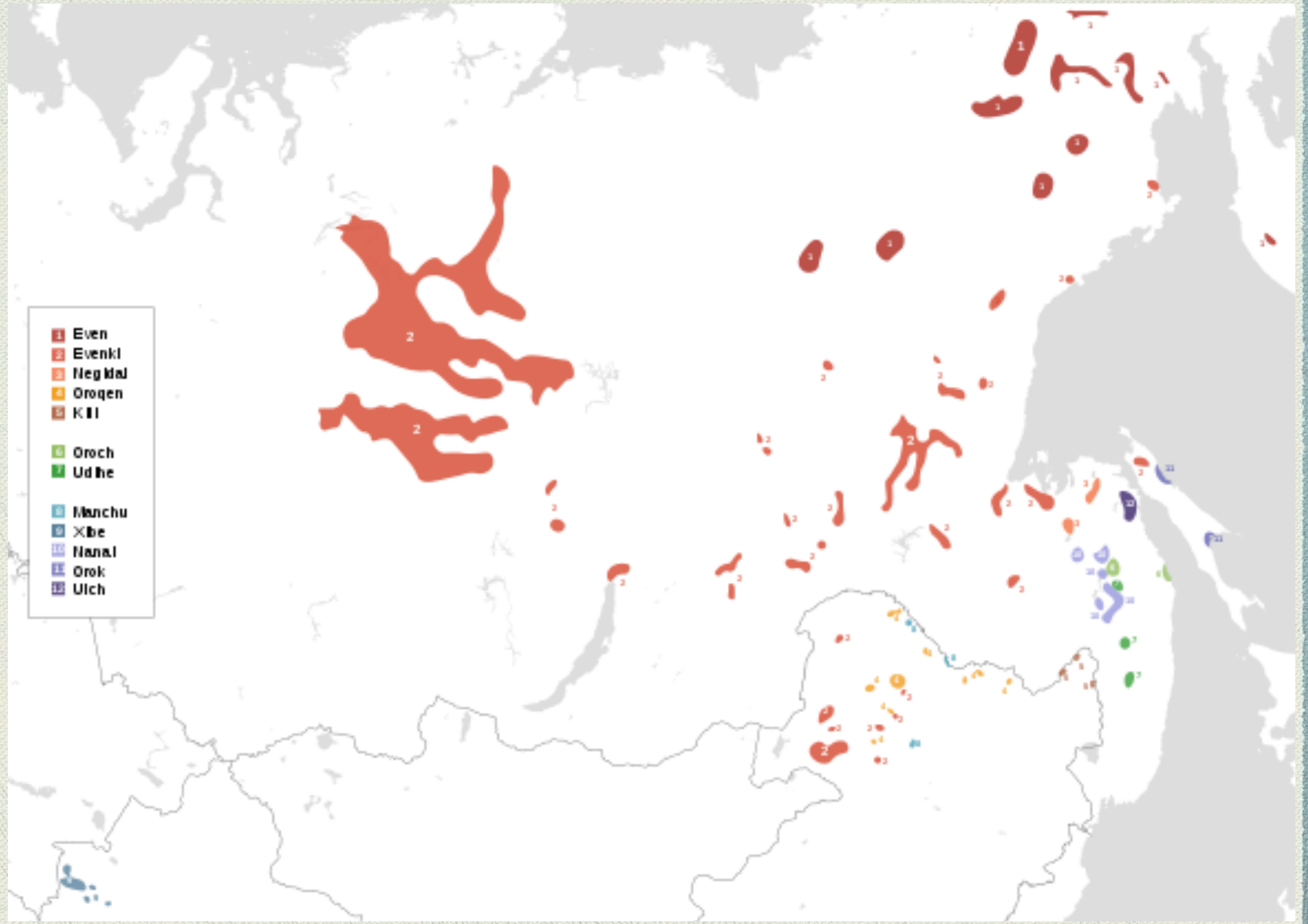
- ◆ **Mongolian** is widely spoken throughout the part of China known as Inner Mongolia.
- ◆ Daur, Oirat, and other Mongolic languages are also spoken in China.
- ◆ Evenki is usually classified as a Tungusic language.





# Tungusic languages

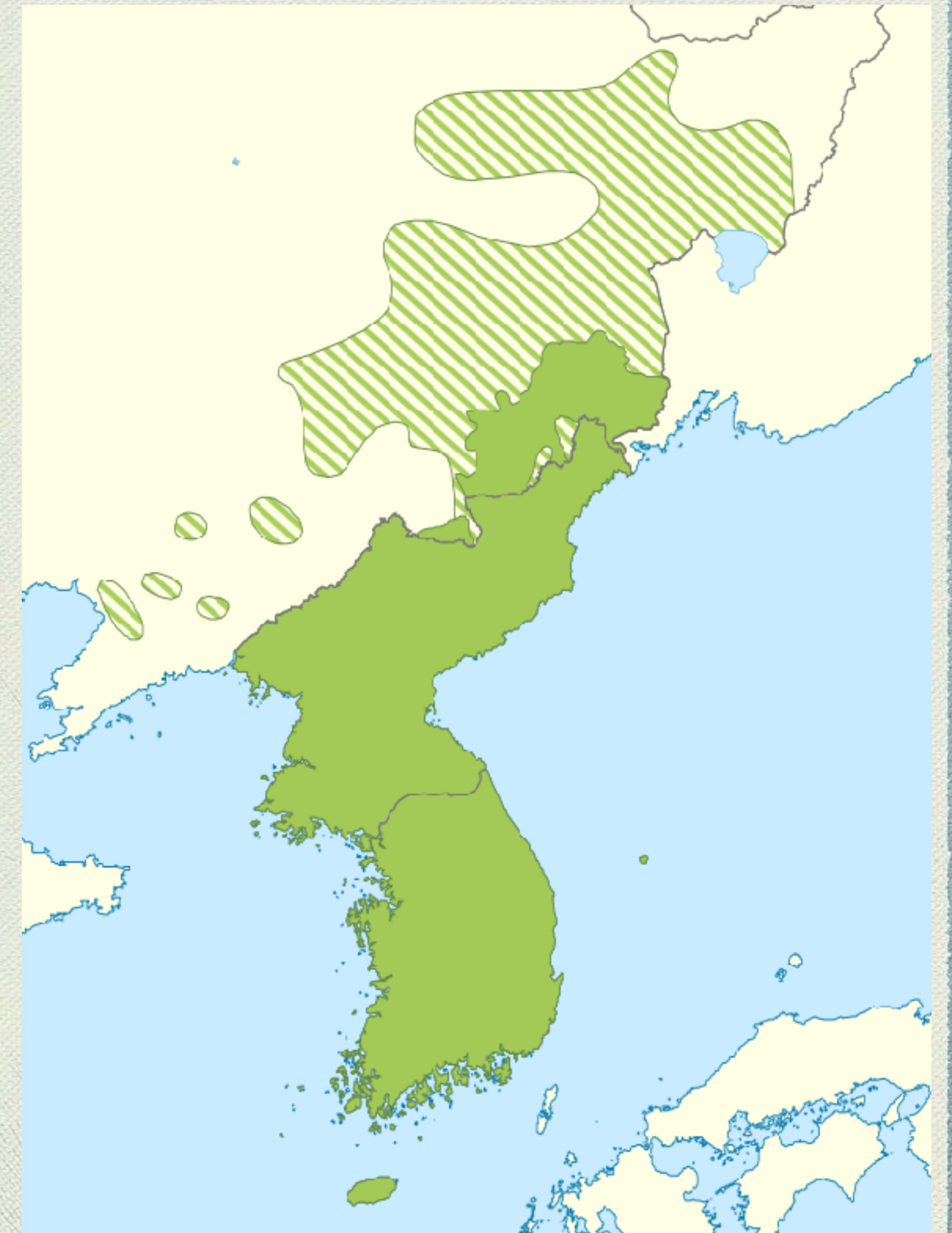
- ◆ Some Tungusic languages, including Evenki, are spoken in northeast China. However, the number of speakers is decreasing.





# Koreanic languages

- ◆ There are many **Korean** language communities in areas of China near Korea.





# standardization of Mandarin

- ◆ Because of the many languages spoken throughout China, Mandarin became a **lingua franca** during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Successive Chinese governments have used Mandarin 官話 for many years.
- ◆ In 1919, 國音字典 (the Dictionary of National Pronunciation) was published by the Republic of China.
- ◆ In 1956, 普通话 Pǔtōnghuà, which has northern grammar and Beijing pronunciation, became the standard of the People's Republic of China.



# Mandarin as a lingua academica

- ◆ Despite having variation in writing, Mandarin has become a **lingua academica** for scholars in the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong and Macau), the Republic of China, Singapore, and also worldwide.
- ◆ The Republic of China 中華民國 (Taipei) continues to use the traditional writing system for Mandarin.
- ◆ The People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国 (Beijing) writes Mandarin with simplified characters.



