

Names of Chinese Skyscrapers

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This study examines 89 presentation names of skyscrapers in mainland China and shows how skyscraper names collectively relate to the region's economic status. Here, I extend Edward Callary definition of *presentation name* to include also institutional buildings and consider the presentation names of skyscrapers as the English names by which the skyscrapers are known to the international public. More than simple references to supertall structures, these names help to assist with the mission of portraying an image of national growth and progress. The study also notes how the names of skyscrapers in a non-Western country pattern differently from those of US skyscrapers.

KEYWORDS skyscraper names, mainland China, presentation names, onomastics.

Introduction

A skyscraper is typically considered to be any building with a structural height of 500 ft or more. Presently, the highest rate of skyscraper construction is in the increasingly prosperous cities of Asia, particularly in mainland China (MC), which is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. According to a recent Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) survey, the mainland region is ranked “very high, 10 % or above on the building under-construction growth scale, which is equivalent to about 40 to 100 buildings in million population” (CTBUH, 2014). In this study, 89 presentation names of MC skyscrapers extracted from Emporis's The World's Tallest Buildings list were examined and analyzed. The term *presentation name* was adopted from Callary (2008: 195), who defined it as: “the name form by which we present ourselves publicly.” Here I extend Callary's definition to include also institutional buildings and consider the presentation names of MC skyscrapers as the English names (English being the lingua franca of tourism) by which the skyscrapers are known to the international public. The results reveal how the presentation names of MC skyscrapers collectively relate to a country's economic status and make a statement about its desire to achieve global recognition. More than simple references to supertall iconic structures, these names assist with the mission of portraying an image of national growth and progress. The study also provides a glimpse of how skyscraper names in a non-Western country pattern differently from names of US skyscrapers.

Skyscrapers: Defining skylines and cities

Shaw (2010: 22) likened the modern skyscraper to the Great Pyramids of ancient Egypt: “the skyscraper is, in our time perhaps the ultimate symbol of cultural production.” New York is of course home to the world’s first tall commercial buildings. Even if one has never been to the city, the mere mention of a New York skyscraper may invoke certain feelings or associations. The Empire State Building, for instance, is considered to be a romantic symbol of the city. The site of the twin towers once called the World Trade Center — a reminder of a tragic chapter in New York’s history — is now known as One World Trade Center. In Chicago, the Sears Tower is particularly entrenched in the hearts and souls of residents, such that a name change to *Willis Tower* generated much protest. In fact, *Time* magazine slammed the name change as “one of the top 10 worst corporate name changes” (Suddath, 2010).

Informative publications on US skyscrapers are certainly not in short supply (e.g. Dolkart, 2003; Domosh, 1988; Dupre, 2013; Korom, 2008; Nash, 2010; Thomas, 2013). Through detailed descriptions, stories, and legends, and thorough technical analyses, these works provide unique insights into some of the most iconic buildings. In the process, readers also become familiar with the origin and inspiration behind the names of these structures. Surveying the names of US skyscrapers, one encounters famous names of the past and present: *Trump International Hotel*, *Trump Tower*, *John Hancock Center*, *Franklin Center*, *JP Morgan Chase Tower*, *One Astor Plaza*, and *Carnegie Hall Tower*. In addition, adopting a corporate name for a skyscraper can bring prestige and increase the profile of the company headquartered there. The buildings themselves, such as the Comcast Center, AT&T Corporate Center, New York Times Tower, and Two Prudential Plaza, are essentially giant poster advertisements for these companies. Names of major well-established banks that occupy several floors of the structure also abound: *Bank of America Tower*, *Bank of America Plaza*, *Citigroup Center*, *Wells Fargo Plaza*, *US Bank Tower*, and *Mellon National Bank*. Sometimes, a skyscraper is named to describe the shape and function of its structure. For example, the *Aqua* is an apt name for a skyscraper in Chicago with wave-like balconies, while the *Chicago Water Tower* denotes the building it references: a structure that houses a large water pump. Finally, a skyscraper’s name also can serve as a mnemonic for remembering the address of the building. Examples include *432 Park Avenue*, *600 Travis Street*, *311 South Wacker*, and *30 Park Place*.

Construction of skyscrapers continued to increase in the twentieth century. The last two decades, however, witnessed a dramatic shift in the mammoth construction landscape. In 1996, eight of the 10 tallest buildings were in the US. Today, all 10 of the world’s tallest buildings are outside the US (Emporis, 2015). According to the Emporis database, of the 20 tallest buildings in the world, 14 (70 %) are in Asia and 11 (55 %) are in MC. As millions of people from the Chinese mainland relocate to urban areas, there is an urgent need to provide housing. In general, the limited portion of flat land available for construction, plus rapid economic growth, has led to a concentrated high-rise environment, especially in major Chinese cities, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Currently, a 2,749-ft-tall skyscraper dubbed “Sky City” is under construction in the south-central city of Changsha. Once completed, it would have replaced the 2,073 ft Shanghai Tower as the tallest skyscraper in MC and worldwide, being taller than the current tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (2,717 ft).

Names of mainland China skyscrapers

In total, 89 MC skyscraper names were examined. The list also includes Hong Kong, a former British colony but now a special administrative region in the People's Republic of China. These names were extracted from the World's Tallest Buildings (Top 200) list provided by Emporis, a global provider of building information. The heights ranged from 886 to 2,717 ft and the rankings were based on architectural height. The architectural height refers to the structural combined height, which is the vertical elevation from the base to the highest architectural or integral structural element of the building (e.g. the spire) (Emporis, 2015). These names are names of buildings which are completed or topped-out. The list, then, does not include those which are near completion, such as the aforementioned Sky City. For additional information and verification of facts, Wikipedia was consulted, if needed. The names were then noted for various features, such as incorporation of place names, personal names, institution names, descriptive terms, and relevant keywords. Some names were found to include multiple features (e.g. *Shanghai Wheelock Square*, which contains both a city name and a corporation name). All 89 presentation names, categorized by various features, are shown in the Appendix.

A few remarks about the term *presentation name* are in order here. As people may present themselves publicly through a presentation name, in this case, it is the owners or occupants who serve as agents in naming the buildings. For example, while the Longxi International Hotel (which will be discussed shortly) is more popularly known as the "Hanging Village," it is not the latter that will serve as the presentation name. Longxi Hotel Group is the building's major occupant and therefore it is its namesake that is printed on official guidebooks and other promotional materials.

Overall, city names, names of real estate companies, and an emphasis on wealth, grandeur, modernity, and global prominence are key aspects of Chinese skyscraper names. A salient contrast between the names of US skyscrapers and those of MC skyscrapers is the absence of surnames and street names. On the other hand, no city names were found among the US skyscrapers (considering those listed in the top 200 global list). The following discusses the naming patterns of MC skyscrapers in more detail.

Names of corporations

Of the 89 names in the list of China's skyscrapers, 22 (25 %) have been given the names of private companies, with the majority (16) associated with a real estate company. Those that contain a (non-real estate) corporation name are *SEG Plaza*, *Wuxi Suning Plaza 1*, *Longxi International Hotel*, and *SPG Global Tower A*. SEG Plaza in Shenzhen is the home of, and named after, the Shenzhen Electronics Group. Suning is China's leading brand of electronics and home appliances, while "SPG" is short for "Starwood Preferred Guest," the name of a group of well-known hotel and luxury resort brands. Nicknamed the "Hanging Village," the Longxi International Hotel in Jianguyin is known for offering free helicopter rides to residents (Li, 2012).

Names of financial service corporations are rare. Only two were found to be associated with a private banking institution. The two MC skyscrapers that signify their dominance in the banking industry are Mingsheng Bank Building and CITIC Plaza. The Mingsheng Bank Building in Wuhan is the first bank in the country to be owned mostly

by non-government enterprises. CITIC is an acronym for *China International Trust and Investment Corporation* and refers to the structure located in Guangzhou. The CITIC Plaza is considered to be a symbol of this emerging city's growing wealth and importance. While the *Bank of China Tower* also references a financial institution, it does not receive the "corporate name" designation because it is a government-owned bank.

The majority (16 out of the 22) of skyscrapers carrying the names of private companies are named after the real estate company that manages the building. Examples of the skyscraper names and the associated companies bearing the same namesake include *Cheung Kong Centre* (Cheung Kong Holdings Ltd), *Eton Place Dalian Tower 2* (Eton Properties Group), *Leatop Plaza* (Guangdong Leatop Real Estate Investment Company), *Kaisa Center* (Kaisa Group Holdings Ltd), *Maoye Plaza 1* (Maoye Property), *Wanda Plaza Main Tower 1 & 2* (Wanda Commercial Properties Company Ltd), *Wharf Times Square* and *Wharf IFS T1* (Wharf Holding Ltd), *Shanghai Wheelock Square* (Wheelock Properties Ltd), and *Yingli Tower* (Yingli Real Estate Development). Some of these buildings are the headquarters of major developers of residential, office, retail, and industrial properties. As such, these notable skyscrapers do more than add to the companies' substantial real estate portfolio; they showcase the companies' expertise in bringing prestige and quality in today's modern working and residential environment.

Region names

Of the 89 MC skyscraper names, 27 (30 %) contain a region name. Region names include the names of cities, provinces, and districts. City names, however, are most common (22 skyscrapers) and range from world-famous to lesser-known cities. Examples include Shanghai (*Shanghai Tower*, *Shanghai World Financial Center*, *Shanghai Wheelock Square*), Guangzhou (*Guangzhou International Finance Center*, *Guangzhou Fortune Center*), Tianjin (*Tianjin Global Financial Center*), Shenzhen (*Shenzhen World Finance Center*), Nantong (*Nantong Zhongnan International Plaza*), Wuxi (*Wuxi Moi City Tower*, *Wuxi Suning Plaza*), Yantai (*Yantai Shimao No. 1 The Harbour*), Dalian (*Eton Place Dalian 1*), Zhengzhou (*Zhengzhou Eastern Center South Tower & North Tower*), Xiamen (*Xiamen Shimao Cross-Strait Plaza Tower B*), Wenzhou (*Wenzhou Trade Center*), Chongqing (*Chongqing World Trade Center*), and Wuhan (*Wuhan Center*, *Wuhan World Trade Center*). These are in addition to the notable China World Trade Center, which is located in the central business district of its capital Beijing and is part of the complex known as "The Place Where China Meets the World."

Thus, there are several *shimao zhongxin* ("world trade centers") in the top 200 list. These skyscraper names not only designate the location of the building but also help to place the region in the global spotlight. Some of these Chinese cities are in the process of becoming industrialized. Through names, economically emerging cities vie for national and global attention alongside their more internationally-known counterparts (e.g. Shanghai). Having their names on a supertall building is like imprinting their names on the world map.

Names containing relevant keywords

Relevant keywords like “international,” “finance/financial,” “global,” and the collocation “world trade” (*shimao*) are common among names of MC skyscrapers, appearing 14, 8, 5, and 7 times respectively within the list. The pervasive occurrence of these terms is reasonable. After all, these buildings are often places in which to conduct major international business or global affairs. Skyscraper names with one or a combination of these terms include *Two International Finance Center*, *International Commerce Centre*, *Shimao International Center Office Tower*, *Shimao International Plaza*, *Shimao No. 1 The Harbour Main Tower*, *Global Financial Building*, *Global City Square*, and *Global Trade Plaza*. In addition, one or more of these words may collocate with city names, as exemplified previously.

Descriptive names

Descriptive names of MC skyscrapers are more likely to contain words suggesting grandeur and modernity. *The Pinnacle* is the name for a building in Guangzhou that resembles the Empire State Building. Two additional “imperial” (*diwang*) structures were also found: the Diwang International Commerce Center in Nanning and the Diwang International Fortune Center in Liuzhou. Over in Guangzhou, fortune also can be found in the Guangzhou Fortune Center. While *United International Mansion* connotes opulence, royalty is implied in the names of two majestic structures: *Kingkey Xiasha Project* and *Kingkey 100*. The lucky number “6” (which sounds like “luk” in Cantonese) appears in the names *Forum 66 Tower 2* and *Plaza 66 Tower 1*. Names exuding elegance or exoticism of the Far East include the *Pearl River Tower*, *White Magnolia Plaza 1* (the white magnolia is a symbol of purity and perfection), *Gate to the East*, and *Han Kwok* (“nation of the Han”) *City Center*. With respect to the name *Jin Mao Tower*, *jin mao* means literally “golden prosperity.” On the other hand, there is no typo in the skyscraper name *Goldin Finance 117*. The word *Goldin* — a concatenation of “gold” and “in” — is supposedly homophonous with the Chinese phrase consisting of the two characters *gao* “high” and *yin* “silver.” Finally, the Youth Olympics Center Tower alludes to a successful hosting of an international sporting event.

There is a current trend for eco-architecture designs, which combine advances in architecture, engineering, and sustainable design to create an energy-efficient structure. As Al-Kodmany (2014: 686) explains: “Peer pressure or ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ has been a driver of skyscrapers’ greenery.” In fact, the term *Greenland* is featured five times in the list of skyscraper names (*Jiangxi Nanchang Greenland Central Plaza 1 & 2*, *Zhengzhou Greenland Plaza*, *Greenland Puli Center*, and *Beijing Greenland Dawangjing Tower*). These specific descriptions reflect the region’s awareness of environmental consciousness.

Finally, *Modern City*, *Modern Media Center*, *Tomorrow Square*, *Shimao Didang New City Main Tower*, *Neo Tower*, and *Excellence Century Plaza Tower 1* are names that suggest the city’s coming of age and an optimistic outlook for the future.

Personal names

Surnames are almost entirely absent among names of MC skyscrapers. One example that just misses out from being included in the top 200 is *One Lujiazui* (literally “the mouth of the Lu family”), which refers to the 883 ft structure built on the former residence of Sheng Lu, the famous literary scholar and writer during the Ming Dynasty. The only given name found in the list is *Teddy Tower*. As part of a twin tower, the higher of the two is known as Teddy Tower and the lower tower as Nina Tower. The whole development, however, is known as Nina Tower, which was named after Nina Wang, Asia’s wealthiest woman at the time of her death in 2007. Wang was the widow of chemical magnate Teddy Wang, who was kidnapped in 1990 and presumed to have been killed.

Concluding remarks

In a historical document made digitally available by the National Humanities Center, an anonymous author of the section “Becoming Modern: America in the 1920s” reflected on the emergence of American skyscrapers: “Love it or hate it, the skyscraper symbolized the go-go and up-up drive that America meant to itself and much of the world” (Anon., 2012). It is interesting to note that this statement now seems to apply to Chinese cities, some of which have amazing skylines full of gleaming skyscrapers. However, these ambitious “prestige projects” (Larmer, 2012) are not just high-rise buildings required to house more people and, in general, to meet the challenges of limited housing. The structures themselves physically demonstrate a country’s economic growth and progress.

Towards this end, these skyscrapers have adopted appropriate names to convey the image of prosperity and advancement, or at least the illusion of it. By overall comparison, a few salient differences between MC skyscrapers and US skyscrapers were also observed. For example, the names of MC skyscrapers do not take the form of street address; bank names are rare; and personal names are almost non-existent. Instead, city names, the names of real estate companies, and an emphasis on wealth, grandeur, and global prominence are key aspects of the names of MC skyscrapers. The incorporation of city names helps to bring recognition to lesser-known cities, while real estate company names collectively signal that the region has the technology and engineering expertise, as well as the management skill, required to build modern supertall skyscrapers. Keywords related to internationalization and finance draw attention to the country’s importance in the global financial market. Finally, descriptive names befit the iconic structures themselves and symbolically convey the image of status and modernity.

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Appendix

Names of skyscrapers in mainland China

Skyscraper Name (Emporis Ranking)	Location
<i>Containing a region name</i>	
Shanghai Tower (2)	Shanghai
Shanghai World Financial Center (9)	Shanghai
Guangzhou International Finance Center (17)	Guangzhou
Eton Place Dalian 1 (26)	Dalian
Bank of China Tower (34)	Hong Kong
Tianjin Global Financial Center (53)	Tianjin
Wenzhou Trade Center (56)	Wenzhou
Wuxi Suning Plaza (67)	Wuxi
Guangzhou Fortune Center (91)	Guangzhou
Shenzhen World Finance Center (106)	Shenzhen
Wuxi Moi City Tower (110)	Wuxi
Jiangxi Nanchang Greenland Central Plaza 2 (113)	Nanchang
Jiangxi Nanchang Greenland Central Plaza 1 (113)	Nanchang
Shanghai Wheelock Square (127)	Shanghai
Xiamen Shimao Cross-Strait Plaza Tower B (133)	Xiamen
Kingkey Xiasha Project (137)	Shenzhen
Zhengzhou Eastern Center South Tower (143)	Zhengzhou
Zhengzhou Eastern Center North Tower (144)	Zhengzhou

(Continued)

Skyscraper Name (Emporis Ranking)	Location
China Chuneng Tower (149)	Shenzhen
Soochow International Plaza West Tower (155)	Huzhou
Soochow International Plaza East Tower (156)	Huzhou
Chongqing Poly International Tower (158)	Chongqing
Beijing Greenland Dawangjing Tower (163)	Beijing
Chongqing World Trade Center (166)	Chongqing
Eton Place Dalian Tower 2 (184)	Dalian
Nantong Zhongnan International Plaza (196)	Nantong
Wuhan World Trade Tower (197)	Wuhan
<i>Containing a corporate name</i>	
Zifeng Tower (13)	Nanjing
CITIC Plaza (25)	Guangzhou
Bank of China Tower (34)	Hong Kong
The Wharf Times Square (49)	Wuxi
Minsheng Bank Building (60)	Wuhan
Longxi International Hotel (65)	Jiangyin
Wuxi Suning Plaza (67)	Wuxi
The Wharf IFS T1 (81)	Chongqing
Maoye Plaza 1 (85)	Shenyang
Wanda Plaza Main Tower 2 (97)	Kunming
Wanda Plaza Main Tower 1 (98)	Kunming
Wuxi Moi City Tower (110)	Wuxi
Heung Kong Tower (112)	Shenzhen
Leatop Plaza (115)	Guangzhou
Shanghai Wheelock Square (127)	Shanghai
Greenland Puli Center (139)	Jinan
SEG Plaza (141)	Shenzhen
Yingli Tower (153)	Chongqing
Kaisa Center (154)	Huizhou
Cheung Kong Centre (167)	Hong Kong
Eton Place Dalian Tower 2 (184)	Dalian
<i>Containing relevant keyword(s)</i>	
Ping An International Finance Center (4)	Shenzhen
Goldin Finance 117 (5)	Tianjin
CTF Finance Centre (7)	Guangzhou
Shanghai World Financial Center (9)	Shanghai
International Commerce Centre (10)	Hong Kong
Guangzhou International Finance Center (17)	Guangzhou
Two International Finance Centre (21)	Hong Kong
Global Financial Building (50)	Chongqing
Tianjin Global Financial Center (53)	Tianjin
Wenzhou Trade Center (56)	Wenzhou
Shimao International Plaza (58)	Shanghai
China World Trade Center Tower III (62)	Beijing
Longxi International Hotel (65)	Jiangjin
Shimao No. 1 The Harbour Main Tower (70)	Yantai
Global City Square (77)	Guangzhou
Shenzhen World Finance Center (106)	Shenzhen
Diwang International Fortune Center (109)	Liuzhou
Xiamen Shimao Cross-Strait Plaza Tower B (133)	Xiamen
Global Trade Plaza (145)	Dongguan
Soochow International Plaza West Tower (155)	Huzhou
Soochow International Plaza East Tower (156)	Huzhou
United International Mansion (157)	Chongqing
Chongqing Poly International Tower (158)	Chongqing
Chongqing World Trade Center (166)	Chongqing

(Continued)

Skyscraper Name (Emporis Ranking)	Location
SPG Global Tower A (171)	Suzhou
Diwang International Commerce Center (191)	Nanning
Nantong Zhongnan International Plaza (196)	Nantong
Wuhan World Trade Tower (197)	Wuhan
Shimao International Center Office Tower (198)	Fuzhou
<i>Descriptive names</i>	
Kingkey100 (15)	Guangzhou
Jin Mao Tower (20)	Shanghai
The Pinnacle (37)	Guangzhou
Forum 66 Tower 2 (42)	Shenyang
Modern City (52)	Tianjin
Modern Media Center (59)	Changzhou
Han Kwok City Center (63)	Shenzhen
Shimao No. 1 The Harbour Main Tower (70)	Yantai
White Magnolia Plaza 1 (74)	Shanghai
Riverside Century Plaza Main Tower (79)	Wuhu
Youth Olympics Center Tower 1 (82)	Nanjing
Pearl River Tower (90)	Guangzhou
Guangzhou Fortune Center (91)	Guangzhou
East Pacific Center Tower A (101)	Shenzhen
Diwang International Fortune Center (109)	Liuzhou
Jiangxi Nanchang Greenland Central Plaza 2 (113)	Nanchang
Jiangxi Nanchang Greenland Central Plaza 1 (114)	Nanchang
Gate to the East (118)	Suzhou
One Island East Centre (125)	Hone Kong
Xiamen Shimao Cross-Strait Plaza Tower B (133)	Xiamen
Kingkey Xiasha Project (137)	Shenzhen
Greenland Puli Center (139)	Jinan
Plaza 66 Tower 1 (151)	Shanghai
United International Mansion (157)	Chongqing
Tomorrow Square (164)	Shanghai
Excellence Century Plaza Tower 1 (177)	Shenzhen
Shimao Didang New City Main Tower (178)	Shaoxing
Zhengzhou Greenland Plaza (179)	Zhengzhou
China Resources Center 1 (180)	Hefei
GT Land Landmark Plaza South Tower (181)	Guangzhou
Hong Kong New World Tower (187)	Shanghai
Diwang International Commerce Center (191)	Nanning
Neo Tower A (199)	Shenzhen
<i>Containing a personal name</i>	
Teddy Tower (76)	Hong Kong
<i>Other (does not contain any of the key features)</i>	
Shun Hing Square (28)	Shenzhen
Central Plaza (32)	Hong Kong
The Center (45)	Hong Kong
Deji Plaza Phase II (69)	Nanjing
R&F Yingkai Square (150)	Guangzhou

Source: Emporis. 2015. "The World's Tallest Buildings (Top 200)." <---<https://www.emporis.com/statistics/worlds-tallest-buildings>---> [accessed 25 August 2015].

Note: Some names contain more than one feature.