

China: A Rich Past, A Great Future

Written by Robert E. Slavin and Kate Conway



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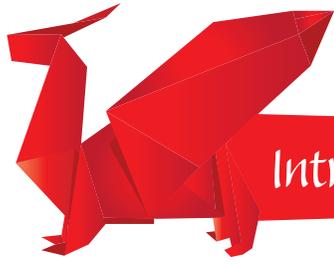
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
The Land.....	4
History.....	8
The People.....	12
Farms.....	16
Cities.....	18
Celebrations.....	22
Arts and Culture.....	26
China's Influence.....	28
Glossary.....	29
Index.....	30

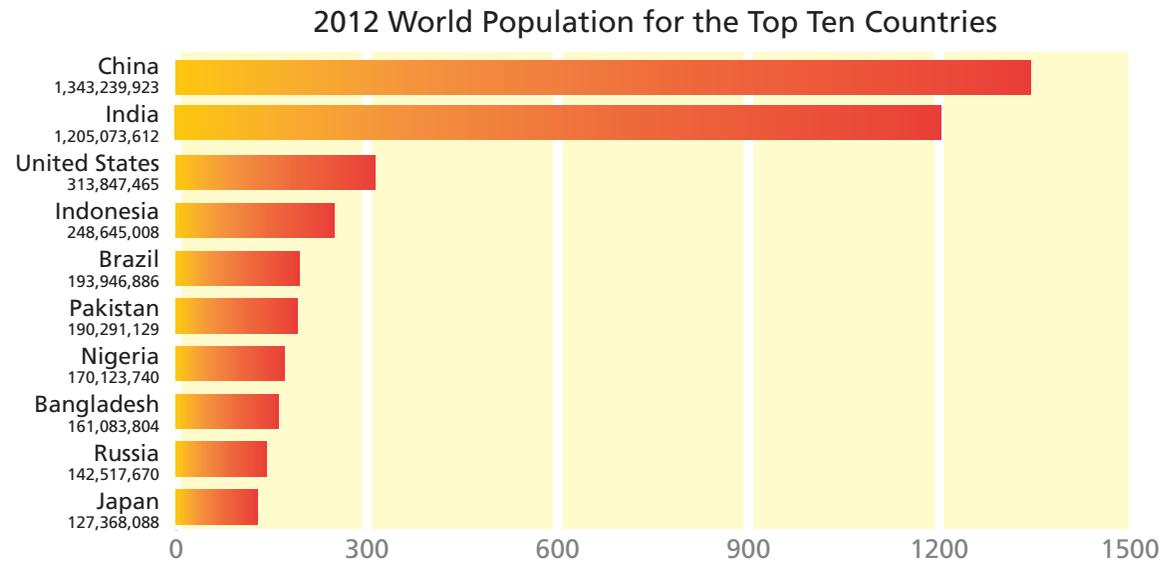


Introduction

Nin hao! Welcome to the People's Republic of China, a huge country in the eastern hemisphere. China is on the continent of Asia. It is about the same size as the United States.



Many, many people live in China. It has a **population** of 1.3 billion. That is more than four times the number of people in the United States. China has more people than any other country in the world.



Source: Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics



The people mainly speak Chinese, but some speak other similar languages. Chinese people write using characters, or symbols. The characters usually **represent** words rather than letters. Take a look!

This book describes this amazing country from its long and rich history to its **influence** around the globe today. Let's learn more about China, its land, and its people. You'll be surprised about what is similar to, and what is different from, where you live.

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LEARN

民
PEOPLE

憶
REMEMBER

笑
SMILE

習

Even though China is as big as the United States, China has only one time zone. The United States has six time zones if you count the time zones for Alaska and Hawaii! And China is one day ahead of us. If it's Monday in the United States, it's Tuesday in China.



Let's take another look at a map of China. This time we'll look at some of its main features and largest cities.

China is the fourth-largest country in the world by land area. See the water on the eastern coast? That's the Pacific Ocean. Many of China's people live and work in large modern cities near the Pacific coast. Hong Kong is one of these cities. Others live in **rural** villages. Many villages line the banks of China's rivers. China has more than 50,000 rivers! The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia. The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River is the largest **dam** in the world.





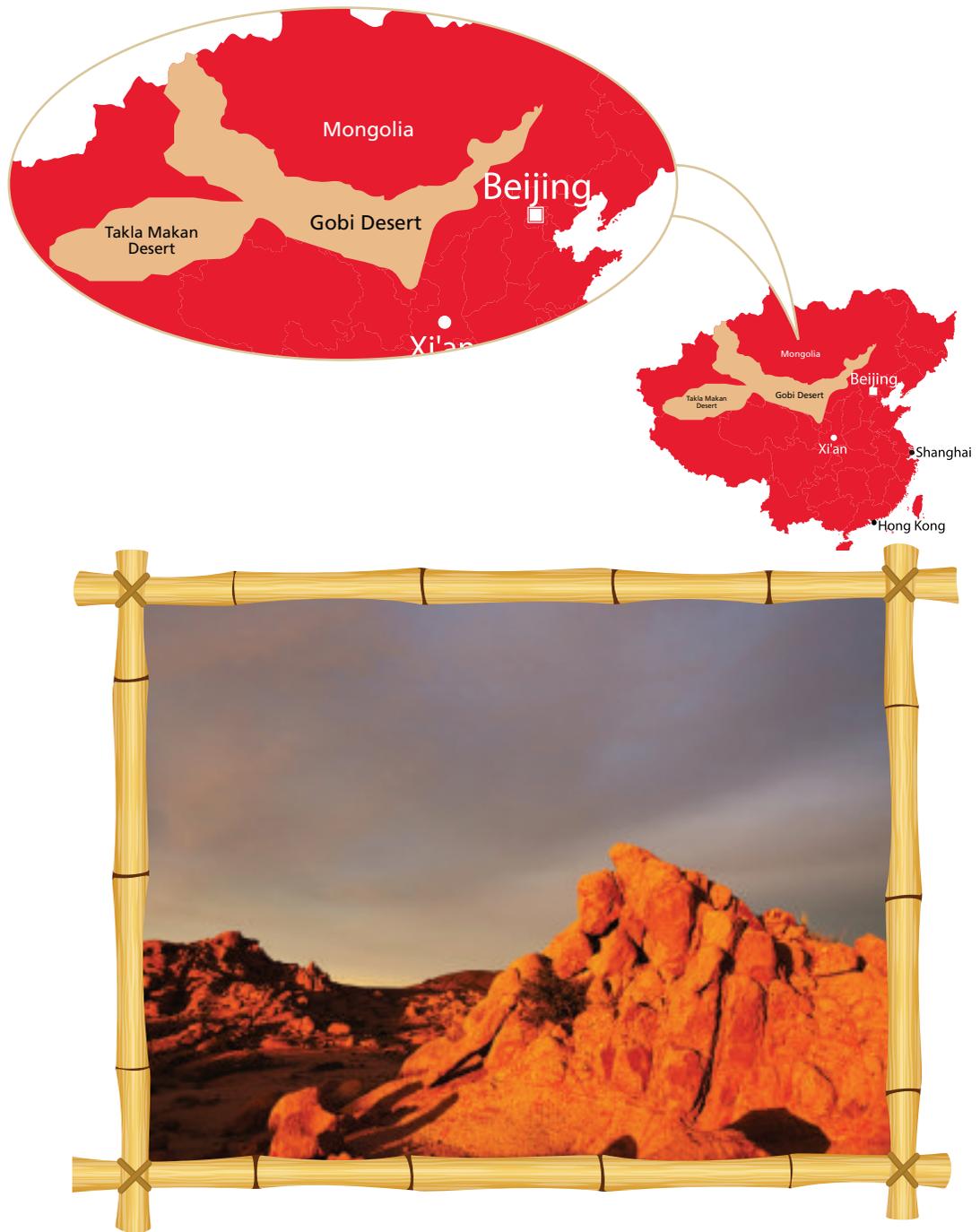
The Yangtze River

習

The Three Gorges Dam prevents floods, generates power, and aids transportation.



Look at the top of the map. Do you see the Gobi Desert? The Gobi Desert is in China and its neighbor to the north, Mongolia. The Gobi has extreme temperatures. During the summer, it can be 122 degrees Fahrenheit. In the winter, it can drop to -40 degrees Fahrenheit. It is a cold desert. Sometimes there is even snow on the dunes! The Gobi is the fifth-largest desert in the world. It continues to get bigger by growing into China's **grasslands**.





China has many mountains. The Himalayan Mountain Range runs along the border between China and Tibet. The Himalayas are home to the world's tallest mountain, Mount Everest. China is also home to the Karst Mountains and Yellow Mountain. Yellow Mountain is a popular vacation and tourist spot with many activities for visitors.

The Tibetan Plateau is in western China. The plateau sits in the midst of many mountain ranges. Sometimes it is called the “roof of the world.” This area has very high **elevation**. It is an important source of water for many of the world's people, including herders and farmers who live in the **region**.



The Himalayan Mountains



In the past, China was ruled by powerful emperors. The ruling periods of these emperors, and of their sons who followed them, were called **dynasties**. The Qin dynasty was the first to rule all of China. This dynasty began in 221 BCE.

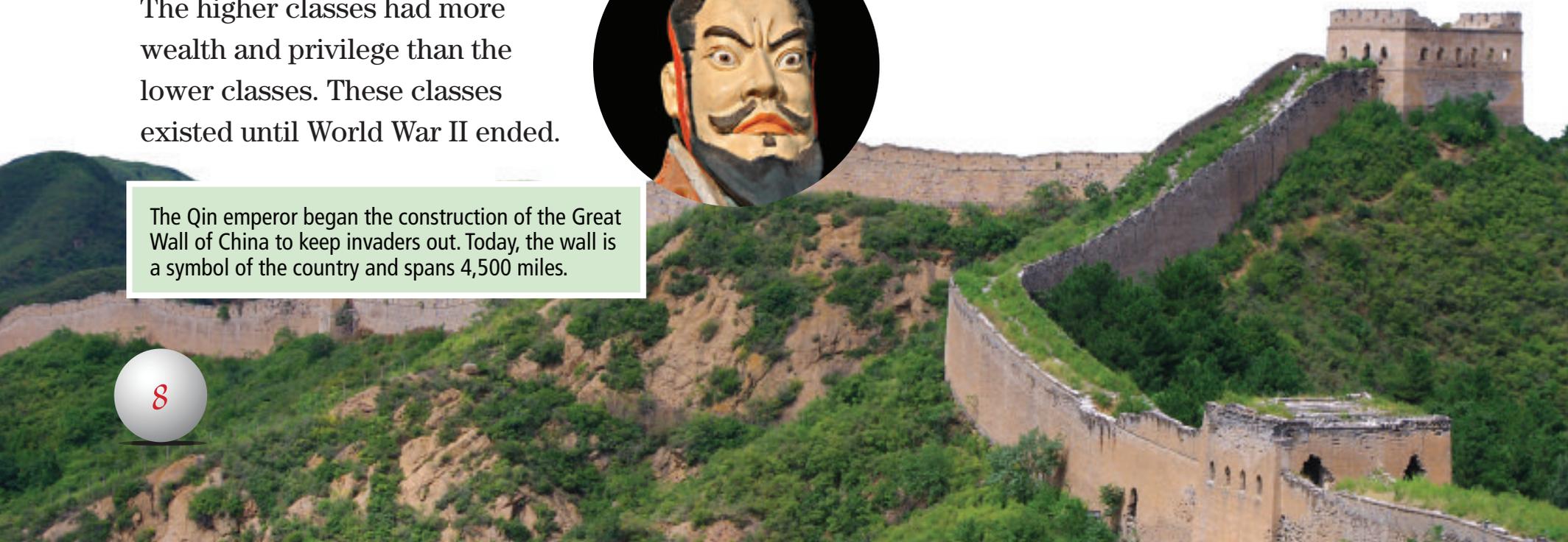
CHINESE DYNASTIES TIMELINE

Qin 221–206 BCE	Han 206 BCE–220 CE	Three Kingdoms Period 220–280 CE	Jin 265–420 CE	Northern/Southern Dynasties 420–581 CE	Sui 581–618 CE	Tang 618–907 CE	Five Dynasties 907–960 CE	Song 960–1279 CE
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During these dynasties, people were split into classes. The higher classes had more wealth and privilege than the lower classes. These classes existed until World War II ended.



The Qin emperor began the construction of the Great Wall of China to keep invaders out. Today, the wall is a symbol of the country and spans 4,500 miles.



When the Qin emperor died, he was buried with an entire army made out of clay. The clay models were even life-size. For a long time, no one knew where the

army was buried. In 1974, it was found. The army has more than 7,500 statues of soldiers and horses. Each statue is different!

Yuan 1279–1368 CE	Ming 1368–1644 CE	Qing 1644–1911 CE	Republic of China (mainland) 1911–1949 CE	People's Republic of China 1949 CE–present
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習

Chinese people call their home “The Middle Country,” or *Zhongguo*, meaning the center of the world.

中国

China (written in its simplified form)

Qin – pronounced “Chin”

Qing – pronounced “Ching”

The last dynasty, the Qing, ruled China from 1644–1912. The Qing emperors embraced Chinese **culture**. They wanted China to stay Chinese. They tried to stop European ways from spreading to China.

In 1912, a revolution threw out the Qing. The new leader tried to start a **democracy**. His name was Sun Yat-Sen. But the country had been weakened by many wars. In 1931, Japan invaded China. Japan wanted China's natural **resources**. It also wanted to gain more land. Japan and China continued to fight into World War II.

Two Chinese groups fought the Japanese. One group was called the Nationalists. They were led by Chiang Kai-Shek. The other group was the Communists. They were led by Mao Zedong. Both groups also fought against each other.



Sun Yat-Sen



Mao Zedong



The leader, Mao, tried to move China forward. He had the government own all the land and factories, but this did not work. Millions of people died in famines. After Mao died in 1976, new leaders started letting business and trade grow. Today China's economy is growing quickly.

The Americans were also fighting the Japanese. In 1945, the United States defeated Japan. Then the Communists defeated the Nationalists. The Nationalists retreated to a large island called Taiwan.

In 1949, China officially became the People's Republic of China. It became communist. Under **communism**, things became more equal for Chinese people. Advances were made in education and medical care.



The People

How many people is 1.3 billion? Think about it like this. Imagine if every Chinese person visited Yankee Stadium in New York City. It would take more than 71 years, with visits every day, to get them all through.

Eleven out of every twelve people in China are from one group, the Han. There are also fifty-six other ethnic groups. Everyone speaks

one language, Chinese, but there are different forms of the Chinese language. Two-thirds of Chinese people speak Mandarin Chinese.



A composite image featuring a cricket on a green leaf in the top left, a woman in a white sweater flying a kite with colorful ribbons in the top right, and a traditional Chinese building in the background. A vertical green bamboo stalk runs down the center.

習

Chinese Favorites:

- **Pet:** Crickets! Chinese children like to have crickets as pets. Long ago, rich people had beautiful cages for their crickets.
- **Sport:** Ping pong. There are usually outdoor ping pong tables in public parks.
- **Hobby:** Stamp collecting
- **Color:** Red. Chinese people think red is the luckiest, happiest color. At Chinese New Year, parents give their children money in red envelopes. People wear red to weddings. Many ancient temples and palaces are usually painted red. White is a sad color in China. People wear white to funerals.
- **Game:** Kite wars. Chinese children love to fly kites. They sometimes fight with kites. To do this, they use special sharp kite strings and try to cut the strings of other kites. It takes a lot of practice.



There are many famous Chinese people. Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee are famous **martial artists** who became well known in movies. Ang Lee is a movie director. He has won many awards, including an Oscar, for his movies. Steve Chen helped to start the video website YouTube. Vivienne Tam is a fashion designer who designs clothes for people all over the world.

Other Chinese people are really great at sports. China has done well in the Olympic Games throughout history. They have won medals in many events, including badminton, diving, gymnastics, table tennis, and weightlifting. Yao Ming is a famous basketball player from China. Ming played in the NBA in the United States. He also played for the Chinese team in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China.



Traditions are very important to Chinese people. In the past, many family members lived together. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins would all live in the same home. Sometimes in rural areas, this is still the case. Now families mainly live with just grandparents. Boys used to be more valued than girls in Chinese culture. Today that is no longer the case. Moms work outside the home, and adults share

the responsibilities at home. Marriages in China used to be arranged, but now people choose their own husbands or wives. Sons usually take care of their parents as they get older.

Chinese children learn many of the same things that other children throughout the world do. They learn to speak English, and they no longer wear traditional Chinese clothing.

習

In the 1970s, China made a law limiting the number of children in a family. City families could only have one child, but many rural families could have two children. Sometimes other families are also given permission to have a second child.

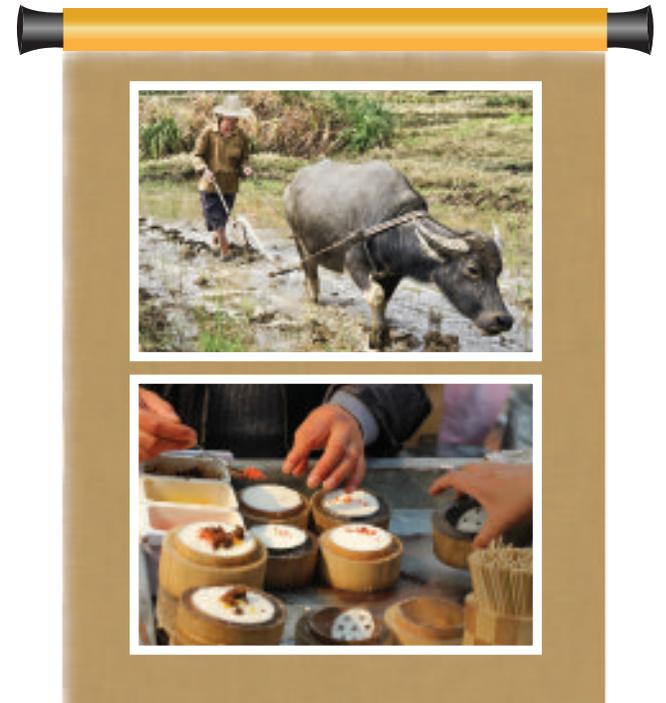


Farms

More than half of all Chinese people live in villages. There are one million villages in the Chinese countryside. These villages are still mostly poor.

Rural families live in small houses that might have mud floors. Many people cook over open fires. The people are peasants, **migrant** workers, farmers, and laborers. Migrant workers travel to the cities for work. Sometimes their families do not see them for a long time. Their families depend on the money

that they send back home. Migrant workers often return to harvest crops. The farmers grow rice, wheat, corn, and vegetables. Families may own some animals, such as chickens. The people feed their families with what they grow. They sell the little bit of food that is left over and rarely eat meat.



Villagers work together. They farm and do chores together. Often families gather together to wash their clothes because they do not have washing machines. They also visit markets to sell or buy various crops.

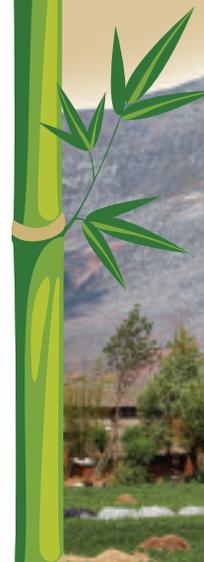
Many families in rural villages do not own televisions, phones, or other technology. Some families go to the city where they can get better jobs and buy modern things. Others are happy to stay in their villages.



Life in Dacitan

Nin hao! My name is Ling.

I live in Dacitan in a hut with my mother, my sister, my aunt, my cousin, and all of my grandparents. My father and uncle travel to the city to work in a factory. We do not see them often, but they send us money. I wake up and walk to school each day. It is a long walk. After school, I have to take the long walk back home. Once I get there, I help my mother and sister farm before I eat a bowl of potatoes for dinner. Then I go to sleep in the room that I share with my sister and our cousins.





China has some very large cities. More than twenty-two million people live in Shanghai. More than eighteen million people live in Beijing. Beijing is the capital of China. Each of these cities is more than twice the size of Los Angeles!

It can be difficult for these large cities to keep up with the needs of their people. Imagine having enough housing, food, water, energy, and transportation for eighteen million people! But these cities do have advanced education and health care.

Life in cities in China is similar to life in other cities throughout the world. Have you ever been to a Chinese restaurant? If so, you probably had a meal similar to what people in Chinese cities eat. They eat meat and vegetables cut up and quickly fried in a large

pot, called a **wok**. You might have also had tea. Tea is a popular drink in China. People eat with chopsticks and soup spoons instead of forks.

Have you ever eaten with chopsticks?



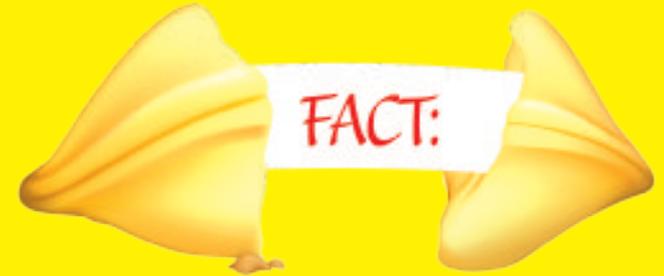


In Beijing, you can visit:

- the Forbidden City, which is the former palace for the Chinese emperors. Today it is a museum.
- Tiananmen Square, a huge meeting place for all sorts of events in the center of Beijing.



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Fortune cookies are never served in China. They were invented in America!

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The Silk Road has existed since ancient times. It was a trade route that allowed people from Asia, Europe, and Africa to trade their goods. It got its name from the silk that Chinese people traded along the route.



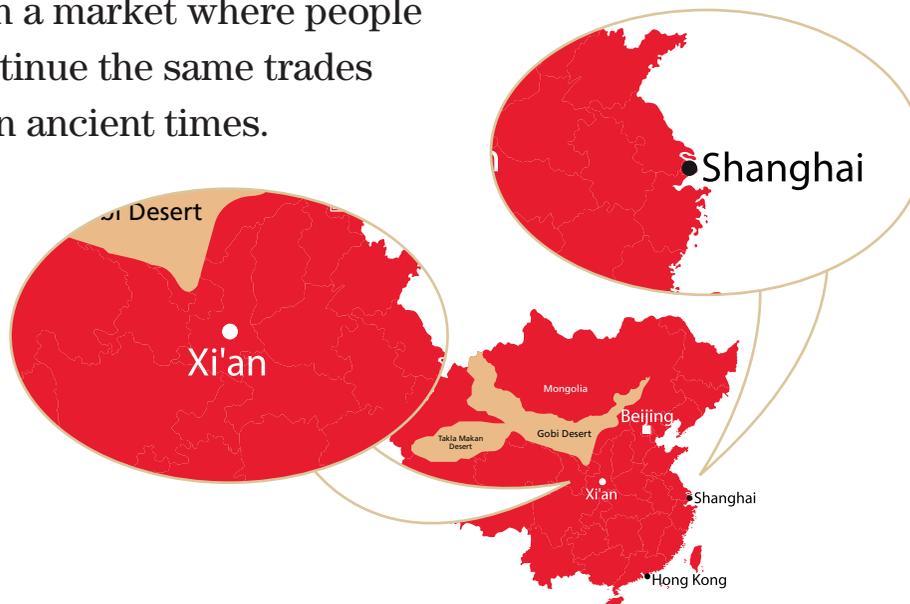
In Xi'an (pronounced "She-ahn"), you can see:

- the clay warriors from the Qin emperor's tomb and the city's ancient walls.
- the end of the Silk Road, with a market where people continue the same trades as in ancient times.



Shanghai is:

- a center of business and trade.
- a giant city with modern and traditional Chinese buildings.





In Hong Kong, you won't want to miss:

- the beautiful harbor and enormous buildings on islands.
- signs of the mix of Chinese and British cultures.



Life in Beijing

Nin hao! My name is Huian. I live in Beijing in an apartment with my father, my mother, and my dad's parents. Six days a week I wake up, eat breakfast, and then ride my bike to school. My father and mother ride their bikes to work. At school, I learn English, math, and science. At the end of the day, I ride my bike home and help my grandmother make fried meat for dinner. Then I do my homework, and if I have time, I watch television. Then I go to my room and fall asleep.



Celebrations

There are many celebrations in Chinese culture. Some of them are based on the Chinese New Year. This marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring in China.

It is tradition for Chinese families to celebrate the new year together. They celebrate it in much the same way that people in the United States celebrate New Year's Eve. They eat a meal and enjoy fireworks. People decorate their houses and dress in the color red. They wish

one another good fortune. The **festival** lasts about two weeks. There is a different

purpose for each day. There are many parades and celebrations.





The last day of the Chinese New Year is the Lantern Festival. There have been lantern festivals since the emperors ruled China. Some lanterns are shaped like circles or cylinders. Others are elaborate shapes. Children even make lanterns to carry in lantern parades

throughout their cities. The lantern parade ends with a dragon dance. Performers carry a long dragon made from wood and fabric. The dragon is supposed to bring good luck to the people. Many people set off fireworks to end the festival.

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The dragon is a symbol of wisdom, power, and wealth in Chinese culture.



The date of the Chinese New Year celebration changes every year. It depends on the calendar. The Chinese use a **lunar** calendar that tells them when all of their traditional celebrations should take place. The Chinese calendar has twelve months. Each Chinese year is named after an animal.



Find this year among the calendars. What animal is the year named after?

The dragon doesn't just show up for Chinese New Year. There is also a Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month on the Chinese calendar. Dragon boat races have taken place for thousands of years. There are many **legends** about why they started. Dragon boats look like colorful canoes with dragon faces on the front of them. Red is also a common color during the races. Many people eat *zongzi*, or rice dumplings, during the festival.



Arts and Culture

For most of its history, China had a more advanced culture than existed anywhere else. They invented the compass, printing, paper, gunpowder, silk, and porcelain. They had a writing system and an organized system of schools. They also had advanced road systems. They had all these things long before Europeans did. They even invented the first ice cream!

The Chinese have always loved beauty in all its forms. Let's look at some Chinese art:



- Chinese paintings traditionally show natural beauty. Many show mountains, flowers, and trees.



- Sculptures made out of jade, ivory, and porcelain are very valuable.



- Ancient Chinese buildings include temples and **pagodas**.



- Chinese writing, called calligraphy, is an art itself. It uses many brushes and techniques to create characters.



- Chinese gardens are famous for their beauty. They often include features that **symbolize** Chinese beliefs.

The Beijing Opera is another famous part of Chinese culture. The opera performs stories that show Chinese history and folklore. The actors wear elaborate costumes and make-up to become their characters.



China also has a long history of folk and traditional music and dance. Like many other places, there are different styles of music in China. One traditional Chinese instrument is the gong. A gong is like a flat metal drum. It is played with a long stick.



China's Influence

We have learned a lot about China! Let's learn more about where we can see the country's influence today.

- Tea is the traditional Chinese beverage. Today there are different types of tea. You can buy tea at many stores.

茶



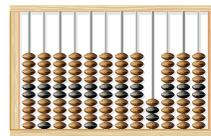
- The yin-yang symbol shows how two different pieces make a whole. It can mean good and evil or many other things. Have you seen the yin-yang before?



- Martial arts are popular in Chinese history and today. Kung fu is a martial art. It is taught for self-defense and **discipline**. There are martial arts schools all over the world.



- Do you know what this is?

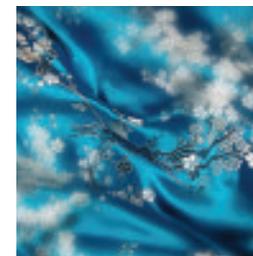


It's an abacus, or counting tool. You can use it to add, subtract, multiply, and divide by moving the beads around. Many shopkeepers in Asia still use abacuses today. How is that different from what store owners use where you live?

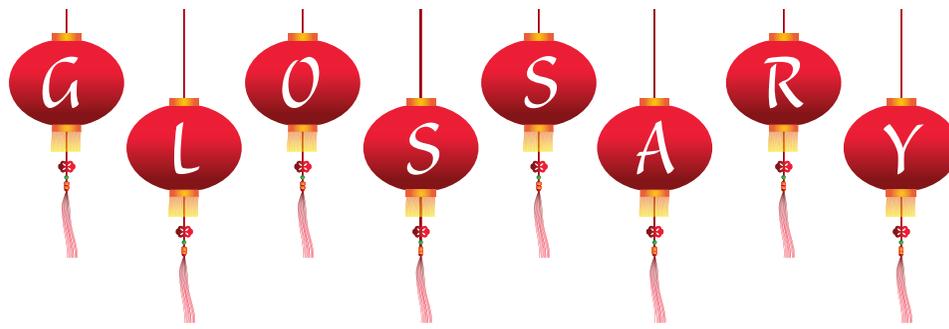
- Have you ever seen a pagoda? Pagodas are traditional Chinese buildings, but they have been built throughout the world.



- You may have seen or felt a little Chinese luxury if you have ever touched silk. Robes and other clothing can be made from this fabric.



So the next time you drink a cup of tea, fly a kite, or practice kung fu, remember that those all come from a country rich with history and influence.



communism: A system in which land and factories are controlled by the government and all people are supposed to be equal.

culture: History, beliefs.

dam: A barrier that controls water flow.

democracy: A government in which people vote for their rulers and everyone has equal rights.

discipline: Self-control.

dynasties: Family empires.

elevation: Height, altitude.

festival: Fair, celebration.

grasslands: Prairies.

influence: Inspiration.

legends: Myths, folktales.

lunar: Having to do with the moon.

martial arts: A group of self-discipline and self-defense techniques.

migrant: Traveling.

pagoda: A Chinese temple.

population: People.

region: Area.

represent: Stand for, symbolize.

resources: Means.

rural: Country.

symbolize: Stand for, represent.

traditions: Customs.

wok: Traditional Chinese pot for cooking.



abacus	28	Hong Kong.....	4, 21	Silk Road.....	20
Beijing	14, 18, 19, 21	Kai-Shek, Chiang.....	10	tea	18, 28
Beijing Opera.....	27	Karst Mountains.....	7	Three Gorges Dam.....	5
calendar	24, 25	language	3, 12	Tiananmen Square	19
Chinese New Year	13, 22-25	lanterns	23	Tibetan Plateau	7
clay army.....	9, 20	martial arts	14, 28	villages	4, 16
Communists.....	10, 11	Nationalists.....	10, 11	World War II.....	8, 10
Dacitan.....	17	Olympics	14	Xi'an.....	20
Dragon Boat Festival.....	25	Pacific Ocean.....	4	Yangtze River.....	4
farming.....	7, 16, 17	pagoda.....	26, 28	Yat-Sen, Sun.....	10
Forbidden City	19	population.....	2, 12	Yellow Mountain	7
Gobi Desert.....	6	Qin dynasty.....	8, 9, 20	yin-yang.....	28
gong	27	Qing dynasty.....	9, 10	Zedong, Mao	10, 11
Himalayas	7	Shanghai.....	4, 18, 20		

癌 藹 矮 艾 礙 愛 隘 鞍
昂 盎 凹 敖 熬 翱 澳 傲
筓 八 疤 巴 拔 跋 靶 把
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