

Zhōnghuá Rénm'n Gònghéguó

Did You Know?

- Chinese use chopsticks to eat nearly everything, even noodles in their soup.
- Chinese invented paper, porcelain, paper printing, the compass, and fireworks.
- Most places in central China do not have central heating. People wear thick pajamas all winter to keep warm.
- It took 3.1 million bricks to build the Forbidden City.
- The Great Wall, which is 3,950 miles (6,357 km) in length, was built by prisoners of war, criminals, and farmers. Many died building it. Their bodies were thrown into the structure of the wall.
- Chinese buy fresh meat and vegetables early each morning at open-air markets.
- Qín Shǐ Huángdì, one of the first emperors of China, was buried in a tomb with more than six thousand life-size *terra-cotta* (clay) soldiers. Many people believe his name helped inspire the country's name.
- Television in China is controlled by the government, but many young people enjoy watching movies and shows from the United Kingdom, the United States, Korea, and Japan.
- China produces two-thirds of the world's toys.
- Some of the earliest Chinese writings have been found on ox bones and turtle shells! Rulers and priests of the Shang Dynasty wrote messages and questions on *oracle bones* to predict the future. Today, these bones tell us about life in China thousands of years ago.
- The world's largest carved stone Buddha statue is carved into a cliff in southern China. It took one hundred years to carve. Two people can sit side by side on one of the statue's toenails!
- The Chinese invented silk fabric. Silk weavers kept the process secret for centuries, but now we know it comes from caterpillars! People carefully unwind the cocoons of silkworms, weaving the long strands of silk into a shiny, smooth fabric.
- Ancient Chinese made kites shaped like dragons to scare and distract enemies during battle.
- The soil of the Yellow River (*Huánghé* in Chinese) turns the water yellow.

Flag

Red is the color of the communist revolution. The large yellow star represents the Chinese Communist Party. The smaller stars stand for the Chinese people: workers, business people, intellectuals, and farmers.



National Image

When most people see a giant panda, they think of China. These endangered animals live in western China and eat mostly bamboo stalks.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.)
3,705,405
Area (sq. km.)
9,596,960



Just smaller than the United States, China is the fourth largest country in the world. China has many different landscapes. In the south and east, rich lowland plains stretch to meet the Pacific Ocean. These lowlands are home to many cities, rivers, rice paddies, and farmlands. Tropical plants and sandy beaches fill the country's southeast area. Tropical rain forests flourish in the southeast, while evergreen forests spread across the northeast. Dry deserts in the north and west separate China from its neighbors and, in the past, helped protect it from invasion.

Much of China is hilly or mountainous. In the south, green plants and trees cover the hills. In the north and west, mountains are covered with bare rocks, ice, and snow. Along the border with Nepal lies the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest. The Chinese call it *Zhūmùlǎngmǎfēng*. The nation's many different landforms were created by movements in the earth's crust. These same movements continue today and make China prone to earthquakes. Thousands of rivers flow through China; the two longest rivers are the Yangtze River and the Yellow River. The Yellow River is sometimes called China's Sorrow due to its history of flooding. China has many natural resources, such as coal, iron, tin, and copper.

The plants and animals of China are as different as its many landscapes. The north is home to Siberian tigers, wolves, cranes, flying squirrels, weasels, and lynx. Gazelles, beavers, and camels live in the dry northwest. The high mountains of Tibet and Qinghai provide homes for antelopes, yaks, and snow leopards. Giant salamanders, crocodile lizards, badgers, and tigers inhabit the Yangtze River Basin. Clouded leopards, hornbills, monkeys, and pandas live in the south. The giant panda, only found in the wild in China, is an endangered species.

China has all kinds of weather, too. The north experiences bitterly cold, long winters and short, hot summers. The south has warm, humid summers and mild winters. Monsoon winds deliver cold, dry wind and dust storms to the north during the winter and rain to the south and east in the summer. China also experiences typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, droughts, and floods. Though China has volcanoes, most are inactive.

Population

Population
1,367,485,388



China has the largest population in the world. One out of every six people in the world lives in China. Most of the people are Han Chinese, but there are many small minority groups, too. Many people live in *rural* villages scattered throughout the countryside, but more and more people are moving to live in the cities. China has some of the biggest

cities in the world. Around 23 million people live in Shanghai and more than 20 million in Beijing. Also, one hundred million workers travel from place to place for short-term work. That's equivalent to nearly one-third the population of the United States on the move! It is difficult to provide a good life for so many people. In 1978, the Chinese government started a program to reduce the population called the one-child family policy. Today, however, all families are allowed to have two children.

Language

Chinese is the national language. But each region of China has its own *dialect* (a way of pronouncing and speaking), so the Chinese government named the *Pǔtōnghuà* (Mandarin) *dialect* as the official language. Tone of voice is important when speaking Chinese. Different tones give words a different meaning. Some of them are high or low; others are rising tones that sound like a question or falling tones that sound like they are being cut off. Mandarin has four tones. Other languages, such as Mongolian, Tibetan, and Kazakh, are spoken by China's minorities.

Instead of an alphabet where letters are used to form words, written Chinese is based on *characters* (written symbols). One *character* represents an entire word or idea. All of the *dialects* use the same *characters*, so people from different regions are able to communicate through writing, even when speaking a different *dialect*. There are over 50,000 *characters*, but only 8,000 are used today. A beginning reader has to learn at least 1,500 *characters*. In addition to *characters*, Chinese students learn to write *Pinyin* (a simplified alphabet of letters) to communicate globally.



Can You Say It in Chinese?

Hello	<i>Ni hao</i>	(KNEE how)
Good-bye	<i>Zai jian</i>	(dzai JEN)
Please	<i>Qing</i>	(CHEENG)
Thank you	<i>Xie xie</i>	(SHE-EH she-eh)
Yes	<i>Shi</i>	(shur)
No	<i>Bu shi</i>	(BOO shur)

Religion

The ancient Chinese believed in many gods and spirits. They believed spirits could be found in all of nature, including mountains, rivers, wind, and stars. These spirits were thought to control health, weather, and peace. Spirits of ancestors were also considered very important. Holy men and women, as well as Chinese rulers, were in charge of communicating with spirits. One of the most famous holy men was Confucius. He lived during the Zhou Dynasty, 2,500 years ago. Confucius taught kindness, mercy, and respect, especially for elders. His followers passed on his ideas, known as *Confucianism*. *Daoism*, another spiritual philosophy, began about the same time and taught that all answers come from nature. These spiritual beliefs were passed down for centuries. Buddhism came to China from India in the first century. These three faiths were often practiced together.

Today, it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics about religion in China. The Chinese government encourages *atheism* (the belief that there is no God), but millions of Chinese have at least some religious faith. Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism are the main religions in China. Temples, *mosques* (houses of prayer), and churches are open to the public, but public worship is discouraged. Participating in unauthorized religious activities can lead to imprisonment or other penalties.

History

Time Line

2100 BC	
2100 BC	The Xia civilization is the first known settlement in China
c. 1700–1046	The Shang Dynasty ushers in China's Bronze Age; skilled craftsmen create sculptures, ceremonial objects, weapons, and tools out of bronze
	
c. 1045	The Zhou Dynasty begins
c. 770–476	The Zhou Dynasty collapses into several warring states, called the Eastern Zhou
c. 475	The Eastern Zhou form seven large groups; fighting continues until one of the seven, the Qin, take power
221	With the start of the Qin Dynasty, China is united for the first time under a strong central government
206	The Han Dynasty begins a cultural golden age; traders use camels to carry silk, jade, and other riches along the <i>Silk Road</i> (an ancient trade route connecting China, Europe, and the Middle East)
	
AD 1	
AD 589	The Sui Dynasty begins
618	China's wealth and culture expand under the Tang Dynasty

960 The Song Dynasty reunites most of China, especially in the south



1000

1279 The Mongols, led by Kublai Khan, conquer China and start the Yuan Dynasty

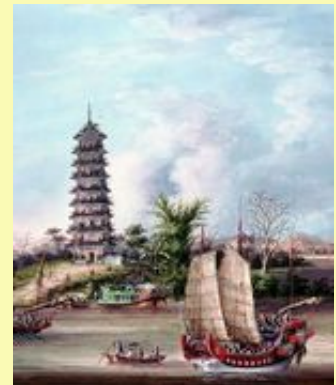
1368 A rebel army leader starts the Ming Dynasty



1644 The Manchus conquer Beijing and begin the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty

1800

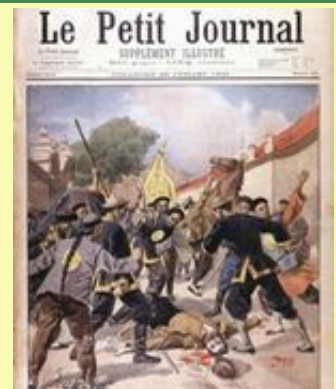
1839–42 Britain defeats China in the Opium Wars and wins Hong Kong



1851 The Taiping Rebellion leaves 30 million dead after 14 years of fighting

1900

1900 Anti-foreign "Boxer" massacres occur; foreigners invade



1911–12	The Qing Dynasty falls, and China's last emperor, six-year-old Puyi, is forced to step down; Sun Yat-sen begins a revolution	
1934	Mao Zedong's communist army, fighting the Nationalists, retreats in the Long March; tens of thousands die	
1937–45	Communists and Nationalists fight the Japanese in World War II and continue to fight each other in a civil war	
1949	The Nationalists retreat to Taiwan; the People's Republic of China is established on the mainland under Mao Zedong	
1958	Mao Zedong begins the Great Leap Forward, an economic plan that leads to death and hunger for millions	
1959	China invades Tibet, and the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, flees to India	
1976	Mao Zedong dies, and Deng Xiaoping assumes power	
1986–90	China's Open Door Policy begins trade and communication with foreign countries	
1989	The Tiananmen Square massacre occurs in the capital, Beijing	
1997	China regains control of Hong Kong (previously part of the British Commonwealth)	
2000		
2000	China regains control of Macau (Ao Men), which previously belonged to Portugal	
2003	China launches its first manned spacecraft; Yang Liwei becomes the first Chinese citizen in space; a SARS outbreak strikes China and threatens health worldwide	

<p>2006</p>	<p>A new railway between China and Tibet begins operating; it is the longest high-altitude railway in the world; the Three Gorges Dam, the largest <i>hydroelectric power</i> (water-powered electricity) project in the world, is completed</p>	
<p>2008</p>	<p>A huge earthquake in Sichuan province kills tens of thousands of people and leaves more than five million homeless; Beijing hosts the Summer Olympic Games; pro-Tibet protests bring violence and world attention</p>	
<p>2009</p>	<p>After decades of enforcing a strict one-child policy, the government begins encouraging many couples to have two children in order to balance the aging population</p>	
<p>2010</p>	<p>Jailed Chinese human-rights activist Liu Xiaobo is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his long non-violent fight for human rights in China; the Chinese government protests the award; the United States investigates Chinese <i>cyber-attacks</i> (attempts to harm or gain access to computer systems)</p>	
<p>2011</p>	<p>China becomes the world's second largest economy; artist and political activist Ai Weiwei is arrested for criticizing the government</p>	
<p>2012</p>	<p>City population outnumbers countryside population; <i>imports</i> (goods bought from another country) and <i>exports</i> (goods sold to another country) slow due to the global economy; the Chinese government places new restrictions on television, internet, and other media</p>	
<p>2013</p>	<p>China successfully lands the Yutu ("Jade Rabbit") robotic rover on the surface of the moon</p>	
<p>2015</p>	<p>The government officially ends the one-child policy; families are allowed to have two children</p>	

PRESENT

Family Rule

For thousands of years, powerful families controlled China. Each family dynasty left its mark on Chinese history. Many dynasties ushered in times of peace, where arts and sciences flourished. In between, China struggled through times of war. The first of these dynasties was the Shang, known for the earliest Chinese writings and as the beginning of China's Bronze Age. Confucius lived during the Zhou Dynasty and taught others how to live together in peace and harmony. His ideas later spread through Asia. The Qin Dynasty united all of China for the first time under one emperor.

During the Tang Dynasty, sometimes called China's golden age, painting, sculpture, *calligraphy* (the art of elegant handwriting), and poetry grew and developed. The invention of woodblock printing made mass book production possible for the first time. During the Ming Dynasty, the Forbidden City was built and the Great Wall was strengthened to keep out the fierce Mongol warriors, who had previously conquered and ruled China for almost one hundred years. The Qing Dynasty was China's last, ending in 1912, when Chinese revolutionaries forced six-year-old Emperor Puyi to step down.

Foreign Powers

The Silk Road was established during the Han Dynasty as a trade route between Europe, the Middle East, and China. Traders along the route used camels to carry silk, porcelain, gold, linen, and spices from one city to the next. By the 13th century, international trade was thriving, and Italian explorer Marco Polo spoke of China's many riches after visiting.

In the 1800s, British traders smuggled opium, a powerful drug, into China. Many Chinese became addicted and destroyed their health by using it. When the emperor saw how opium was affecting his people, he tried to force the British out. That was the beginning of the Opium Wars between the Europeans and the Chinese. China lost each time, and the Chinese blamed their government. After the Opium Wars, Britain took control of Hong Kong. Many Chinese called for China to use Western technology to stop foreign attacks. But the Qing Empire refused to adopt foreign ways.

Revolution and Civil War

A man named Sun Yat-sen was tired of constant chaos. In 1911, he led the Nationalists in a revolt against the Chinese government. They forced the last Qing emperor to give up the throne. Sun Yat-sen wanted to make China a powerful *democracy* (government by the people). But another group wanted China to be a *communist* country, or a classless society where goods are shared equally but individual freedoms are strictly controlled by the government. While fighting the Japanese in World War II, the Nationalists and Communists fought each other, too. The civil war lasted until the Nationalists fled to Taiwan in 1949. The new government was called the People's Republic of China.



Under Communism

Mao Zedong was the leader of the communists. He set up a communist government in China. In 1958, Mao started an economic program called the Great Leap Forward. It was supposed to make sure everyone had food, a job, a home, and an education. Sadly, because his programs didn't work, countless Chinese died of starvation. From 1960–61, the Great Leap Forward, bad weather, and poor planning caused one of the worst food shortages in history.

When Mao started to lose power, he began a special 10-year campaign to improve support of the young Chinese. He called on citizens to get rid of the Four Olds: old customs, old traditions, old beliefs, and China's ancient culture. He convinced young people, known as Red Guards, to rebel against their customs and to betray friends and relatives. Many schools were closed, and almost an entire generation of children had no education. Those who didn't agree with Mao's policies were thrown in jail.



China Today

One of the people Mao put in jail was his advisor Deng Xiaoping. But after Mao died in 1976, Deng became the nation's leader. He brought new technology to China and began to make friends with old enemies. He was eager to learn from Western countries and invited communication and trade with foreign nations through his Open Door Policy. Deng Xiaoping let people own land and businesses. Art, writing, and journalism were encouraged as long as they did not criticize the government. Many hoped these changes would also bring political reform.

In 1989, thousands of Chinese students and citizens gathered in Tiananmen Square to call for *democracy* (government by the people). The Chinese military was sent in to stop the protest. Many people were killed or arrested. It is still very difficult for Chinese citizens to organize protests today. Despite human-rights issues, the Chinese economy continued to grow. Today, the Chinese are more free to work where and how they want. Many Chinese now enjoy a higher standard of living than previous generations. However, the people are still not free to say or read what they want.



Lifestyle

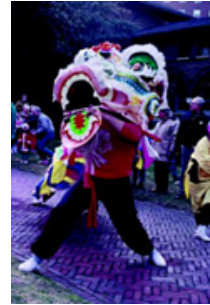
Games and Sports

The Chinese love basketball. The first superstar athlete in China was Yao Ming, who played for the Houston Rockets basketball team in the United States. His face can be seen on advertisements and labels across China. People crowd around the television to watch basketball games, and most boys learn to play it when they're young. Kids also like table tennis, swimming, soccer, and badminton. Girls play *tiao pi jin*, a jump rope game with teams. Nearly everyone likes *mah-jongg*. It's like a card game but with tiles instead of cards. Each player tries to get certain sets of tiles. A favorite strategy game is *xiang qi*, or Chinese chess.



Holidays

China celebrates two *golden weeks* (weeklong holidays) every year. One is the Spring Festival, also called Chinese New Year, and the other is National Day. Each year during the Spring Festival, China turns into one big party. The Spring Festival is a celebration of the New Year, which usually falls sometime in January or February because China uses the *lunar* (moon) calendar. The festivities can last up to two weeks. Everyone goes home to be with family, and together they light off fireworks, join in colorful parades, and prepare huge feasts. Most families gather and prepare large trays of dumplings to be eaten for the Spring Festival. Kids and unmarried family members get red envelopes filled with money, new clothes, and other gifts. Dragon dances are performed across China to bring luck in the new year.



National Day is celebrated around the first week of October and marks the founding anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Citizens show their patriotism with flags, fireworks, and parades and by paying respect to military heroes.

Food

Chinese food is served all over the world, but there are many different types. Each region has its own flavors and style of cooking. In the south, farmers grow rice in wet fields called *rice paddies*. Here, rice is eaten almost every day. It is put in soup, covered with sauce, or served with cooked vegetables. In northern China, people eat a lot of noodles, dumplings, and steamed wheat bread. Meat like pork, beef, duck, or chicken is popular, but it's also expensive in some areas. Spicy Sichuan cooking comes from western China. Cantonese dishes are popular in the southeast and are known for their quick, almost raw cooking style and for being a little sweeter than other regional foods.



Instead of grocery stores, most Chinese buy their food in outdoor markets from local farmers. The Chinese diet includes lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. Many Chinese enjoy a piece of fruit at the end of a meal. Kids like sunflower and pumpkin seeds and nuts for a quick snack. Rather than forks and knives, Chinese eat with chopsticks. Many young Chinese enjoy foreign foods, and fast-food restaurants such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's are available in almost every big city.

Schools

Adult Literacy
96%

Chinese kids feel a lot of pressure to do well in school, even at a young age. Students take tests to decide who gets into the good schools in China. They often have more homework and spend more time in school than children in other countries. Each day before classes start, the kids gather outside on a large field and exercise. Classes are pretty large. Students are expected to respect and obey their teachers. Some *rural* (countryside) children go to school for a few years and then drop out because they're needed at home or on the farm. While in school, kids often have to share supplies like books, pencils, and paper.



Life as a Kid

Children in *rural* (countryside) China have very different lives from those in the cities. Before and after school, kids in *rural* areas have to help out on the farm or at home with chores. They don't have much free time to play. Kids in the cities usually take language, art, music, or sports classes on the weekends. Wealthier children in the cities often have computer and video games and more free time to play. But whether in the countryside or city, Chinese kids have to study a lot. Because the government requires that families be small, Chinese kids have few or no brothers and sisters, although they often treat their cousins like siblings and spend lots of time with their extended family.



Society

Government

Capital

Beijing

Head of State

President Xi Jinping

Head of Government

Premier Li Keqiang



The Communist Party rules China, and all politicians have to belong to it. The most powerful politicians are the seven members of the Standing Committee, which is led by the president. The Chinese people do get to vote. In fact, they elect almost three thousand members to serve in the National People's Congress. However, the Communist Party first chooses who the people can vote for, and Congress members don't really have much power. The Chinese government is known for not respecting the freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and press. It also has a poor track record with human rights. China is divided into 23 *sheng* (provinces). For government positions that are filled through elections, the voting age is 18.

Money and Economy

Currency

Renminbi/yuan



Only one-tenth of the land in China is fit for farming, but China sells more rice, tobacco, corn, and soybeans than almost any other country in the world! Around a third of the population works in agriculture. Farming is hard work, so many Chinese move to the cities to look for jobs. Some people make clothes, toys, cars, or electronics. Others mine, drill oil, or build machines. Some Chinese are getting richer, but those in *rural* (countryside) areas still struggle to earn enough money to make ends meet.

Getting Around

Not many Chinese own cars, but it is becoming more common. In *rural* (countryside) areas, the best way—and sometimes the only way—to get around is to walk. Some have water buffalo or other animals that pull carts and carry people. In cities, people usually ride bicycles, motor scooters, trains, or buses. They also travel in *pedicabs* (two-passenger buggies pulled by three-wheeled bikes). China has many rivers, so barges and ferries are pretty common, too. In 2012, China opened the world's longest high-speed rail route, between Beijing and Guangzhou. China continues to add long stretches of high-speed rail track between major cities.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Forbidden City

It took one million workers 14 years to build the Forbidden City, the former home of the emperors. They started in 1406, and as soon as they were finished, no commoners were allowed inside its walls. Even if they had tried to break in, they would have had a hard time. The Forbidden City is surrounded by a moat and a high wall. The walls were built using sticky rice and egg whites and are meant to be impossible to climb. For nearly five hundred years, the city served as home to the emperors and their households. Located in the center of Beijing, it is now a UNESCO World Heritage site and museum. The complex includes more than nine hundred buildings.



Learn More

Contact the China National Tourist Office, phone (212) 760-8218; web site www.cnto.org. Or contact the Embassy of China, 3505 International Place NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 495-2266; web site www.china-embassy.org.

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China



The Gobi Desert is the world's second largest desert. Its harsh sandstorms blow dust through the whole country.

The Great Wall of China stretches 1,500 miles (2,400 km) but is broken up into four main sections.

The world's tallest mountain is Mount Everest, at 29,035 feet (8,850 m). One side of the mountain lies in China.

The Yangtze River (3,964 miles, or 6,380 km) is the world's third longest, after the Nile and the Amazon.

The world's largest and highest plateau is the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau (Roof of the World). Its average elevation is 13,000 feet (4,000 m).

