

History

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Littered with sieges, cults, kidnappings, indolent emperors, magnificent inventions, works of genius and grand gestures like the Terracotta Warriors of the Qin dynasty and the communists' Long March, Chinese history twists its way through nearly 6000 years. Often touted as the world's oldest surviving civilisation, China has seen as many changes as the Great Wall has bricks. The territorial reach of the state, the origin of its rulers, how people speak and dress, and even what they eat, have all changed beyond recognition more than once. Together, the history of the many societies that have flourished on this country's soil form the tale the Chinese tell about their origins.

LEGENDS OF YORE

While China's earliest history is made up of the stuff of legends and has no contemporary written record, archaeology confirms that societies have been putting down roots in China since antiquity. Excavations at Bàn pō (p430), not far from present-day Xī'ān, show that a sedentary agricultural community flourished nearly 6000 years ago. A second early culture was discovered in present-day Shāndōng. Known as Longshan culture, it shows the beginning of metallurgy and appears to have been the driving force behind the Bronze Age Shang dynasty.

TELLTALE SIGNS: THE SHANG

In 1899 peasants working near present-day Ānyáng unearthed pieces of polished bone and turtle shells. These relics were inscribed with characters and dated back to around 1500 BC, the time of the Shang dynasty. Housed in Ānyáng's museum (p467), these are the earliest examples of the elaborate writing system still used in China today.

Shang culture spread throughout much of north China, stretching from Shāndōng to Shaanxi and Héběi to Hénán. It was headed by a sacred kingship, who was supported by officials, armies and a peasantry that supplied labour for the building of city walls and other public works. There was also a skilled artisanry, which produced the magnificent bronzeware for which this dynasty is known; visit the Henan Provincial Museum for fabulous examples (p457).

Bones found near Ānyáng in 1899 were Shang dynasty oracle bones. The bones were inscribed and heated, and the resulting cracks were interpreted as responses from deceased ancestors.

ENTER CONFUCIUS: THE ZHOU

Around three millennia ago the last Shang sovereign was defeated by the forces of Zhou, who hailed from present-day Shaanxi province. The Zhou went on to rule over an increasingly large territory, reaching up to Běijīng in

PEKING MAN

In the 1920s and 1930s Chinese archaeologists unearthed *homo erectus* skulls, stone tools and animal bones believed to be between 500,000 and 230,000 years old. Was this the birthplace of Chinese civilisation? Unfortunately, we're unlikely to ever know. Research was never carried out on Peking Man's bones because, on the eve of the Japanese invasion, the remains mysteriously disappeared – some fear to the bottom of the sea.

TIMELINE c 4000 BC

Dynastic rule commences with the Xia; early settlements set up home in modern-day Shaanxi and Hénán

c 3000 BC

Emperor Fuxi (part man, part dragon) ushers in the legendary period of 'Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns'

CHINESE DYNASTIES

Dynasty	Period	Site of capital
Xia	2200–1700 BC	
Shang	1700–1100 BC	Ānyáng
Zhou	1100–221 BC	
Western Zhou	1100–771 BC	Hào (near Xī'ān)
Eastern Zhou	770–221 BC	Luòyáng
Qin	221–207 BC	Xiányáng
Han	206 BC–AD 220	
Western Han	206 BC–AD 9	Xī'ān
Xin	AD 9–23	Xī'ān
Eastern Han	AD 25–220	Luòyáng
Three Kingdoms	AD 220–80	
Wei	AD 220–65	Luòyáng
Shu (Shu Han)	AD 221–63	Chéngdū
Wu	AD 229–80	Nánjīng
Jin	AD 265–20	
Western Jin	AD 265–317	Luòyáng
Eastern Jin	AD 317–420	Nánjīng
Southern & Northern Dynasties	AD 420–589	
Southern Dynasties		
Song	AD 420–79	Nánjīng
Qi	AD 479–502	Nánjīng
Liang	AD 502–57	Nánjīng
Chen	AD 557–89	Nánjīng
Northern Dynasties		
Northern Wei	AD 386–534	Dàtóng, Luòyáng
Eastern Wei	AD 534–50	Línzhāng
Northern Qi	AD 550–77	Línzhāng
Western Wei	AD 535–56	Xī'ān
Northern Zhou	AD 557–81	Xī'ān
Sui	AD 581–618	Xī'ān
Tang	AD 618–907	Xī'ān
Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms	AD 907–60	
Later Liang	AD 907–23	Kāifēng
Later Tang	AD 923–36	Luòyáng
Later Jin	AD 936–47	Kāifēng
Later Han	AD 947–50	Kāifēng
Later Zhou	AD 951–60	Kāifēng
Liao	AD 907–1125	
Song	AD 960–1279	
Northern Song	AD 960–1127	Kāifēng
Southern Song	AD 1127–1279	Hángzhōu
Jin	AD 1115–1234	Kāifēng, Běijīng
Yuan	AD 1206–1368	Běijīng
Ming	AD 1368–1644	Nánjīng, Běijīng
Qing	AD 1644–1911	Běijīng
Republic of China	AD 1911–49	Běijīng, Chóngqìng, Nánjīng
People's Republic of China (PRC)	AD 1949–	Běijīng

the north and down to the lower Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) valley in the south. To overcome the difficulties of ruling such a vast area, the Zhou established a feudal system whereby landlords governed over principalities that were contained within walled cities.

In 771 BC the Zhou capital moved from a site near Xī'ān to one further east, leading present-day historians to divide this period into Western and Eastern Zhou. During the period of Eastern Zhou law codes were written down, iron was discovered and the fortunes of the landed aristocracy waned, while self-made men achieved places at court and merchants grew wealthy.

The Zhou's control over the principalities began to fade as landlords began to fight among themselves. The Eastern Zhou was a time riddled with strife, prompting reflection and philosophising on the part of one Master Kong (Kong Fuzi), better known in the West as Confucius.

Confucius (551–479 BC) grew up in the old state of Lu, at the present-day site of Qūfū (p218) in Shāndōng province. The descendant of a minor noble family, he set off at an early age in search of an able and righteous ruler who might lead the world back to virtuous paths. In this mission he was doomed to disappointment, and his death in 479 BC was to be followed by an ever keener struggle among the states for power.

Confucius did achieve enormous success as a teacher and moral exemplar, and the structure of Chinese society today remains very much rooted in his teachings. He gave voice to many of the sentiments of his age, and his contemporaries included luminaries such as Laotzu (Laozi), the founder of philosophical Taoism, and Mozi (born nine years after Confucius' death), who preached a creed of universal love. For more on Confucian beliefs, see p64 and the boxed text on p221, or head to Qūfū for a good dose of hands-on history.

CROSSING SWORDS: THE QIN

The principalities had been fighting with one another for more than 250 years, during what became known as the Warring States period. This dark era finally came to an end in 221 BC when the western state of Qin, having conquered the Zhou 35 years earlier, succeeded in subduing the remaining states to establish centralised rule.

'The First Emperor of Qin' (Qin Shi Huang) won and reigned by the sword. His ruling philosophy focused on law and punishment, and dealt a blow to Confucius' teachings of rights and morality. His martial fanaticism was none too subtle; check out his tomb near Xī'ān, which is protected by the extraordinary Army of Terracotta Warriors (p428).

Qin Shi Huang pursued campaigns as far north as Korea and south down to Vietnam while, at home, he began linking existing city walls to create the beginnings of the Great Wall. The 'First Emperor' also laid the foundations for a unified, integrated empire. He introduced a uniform currency, standardised the script and developed infrastructure through a network of roads and canals.

Qin Shi Huang's heir to the imperial throne proved ineffectual and, shaken by rebellion, the Qin capital fell after only 15 years to an army led by the commoner Liu Bang. Liu lost no time in taking the title of emperor and establishing the Han dynasty.

The conquering Zhou beheaded the Shang leader, but granted his son a state to rule, thereby hoping to diminish the wrath of the Shang ancestors.

The First Emperor of Qin burned thousands of books and killed countless scholars to eliminate potential challenges to his rule.

The Emperor and the Assassin (1999) is the epic tale of the First Emperor of Qin and his lust for power. Woven with murder, love and political intrigue, this film is beautifully shot and a must see whether you're a history buff or not.

c 1700 BC

Members of the Shang dynasty master bronze-ware production

604 BC

Laotzu, the founder of Taoism, is reputedly born

551 BC

Confucius is born

221 BC

The First Emperor of Qin conquers the surrounding states to create the first unified China

WIDENING THE NET: THE HAN

The Han dynasty brought further unification of the empire as vassal states that had lingered on the outskirts were swept up under its reign. Emperor Wu, who reigned from 140 BC to 87 BC, established supremacy over neighbouring societies to the north and west, recruited able men to serve the dynasty as officials, and promoted Confucian education. An examination system was introduced and would go on to become a hallmark of government in the late imperial era; visit the Imperial College (p134) in Běijīng to learn more.

After more than a century the Han gave way to the Xin dynasty (AD 9–23), led by the radical reformer Wang Mang. This 14-year blip divides the dynasty into Former (Western) and Later (Eastern) Han periods.

Venturing Down the Silk Road

The expansion of the Han brought the Chinese into contact with the ‘barbarians’ that encircled their world. As a matter of course, this contact brought both military conflict and commercial gains.

To the north, the Xiongnu (a name given to various nomadic tribes of central Asia) posed the greatest threat to China. Military expeditions were sent against these tribes, initially with much success. This in turn provided the Chinese with access to Central Asia, opening up the routes that carried Chinese silk as far afield as Rome.

Diplomatic links were also formed with central Asian tribes, and the great Chinese explorer Zhang Qian provided the authorities with information on the possibilities of trade and alliances in northern India. During the same period, Chinese influence percolated into areas that were later to become known as Vietnam and Korea.

UNITY & DIVISION

They say the momentum of history was ever thus: the empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide.

Luo Guanzhong

With these words, the storyteller of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (14th century) sums up the seemingly endless warring and reconstruction that followed the Han dynasty. Between the early 3rd and late 6th centuries AD north China saw a succession of rival kingdoms struggling for power. During this time of disunity a strong division formed between north and south China. The north was controlled by non-Chinese rulers and torn by warfare. Many people from the north consequently fled, carrying Chinese culture into previously non-Chinese territories. Meanwhile, the south experienced significant economic growth as Jiankang, later to become Nánjīng, served as capital for a succession of dynasties.

Culture Vultures

The most successful northern regime during this period was the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), founded by the Tuoba, a people from the north. The Tuoba embraced Buddhism wholeheartedly and left behind some of China’s top Buddhist art. Visit the cave temples near Dūnhuáng (p866) and outside Dàtóng (p416) for a glimpse. The Wei reallocation of lands to peasants and the division of the capital city into wards also outlasted the dynasty.

BRIDGING THE GAP: THE SUI

The Wei dynasty fell in 534. It was succeeded by a series of rival regimes until nobleman Yang Jian (d 604) seized all before him to establish the Sui dynasty (581–618). While the Sui was a short-lived dynasty, its accomplishments were many. Yang Jian’s great achievement was to bring the south back within the pale of a northern-based empire.

Yang Jian’s son, Sui Yangdi, has gone down in history as an unsavoury character who had more time for wine and women than for politics; the dynasty went into rapid decline under his rule. Nevertheless, he did contribute greatly to the unification of south and north through the construction of the Grand Canal. The canal combined earlier canals and linked the lower Yangzi River valley to Chāng’ān via the Yellow River (Huáng Hé). When Běijīng became capital of the Yuan dynasty, it was rerouted and extended northward, and remained the empire’s most important communication route between south and north until the late 19th century.

After instigating three unsuccessful incursions onto Korean soil, resulting in disastrous military setbacks, Yangdi faced revolt on the streets and was assassinated in 618 by one of his high officials.

THE GOLDEN ERA: THE TANG

The reams of literature produced during the Tang dynasty has prompted historians to think of it as the Golden Age. The *Three Hundred Tang Poems*, compiled from over 48,000 poems preserved from this time, provides Chinese conversation with quotable quotes, much as Shakespeare does in English.

Sui Yangdi was succeeded as emperor by his own leading general, Li Yuan, who seized the capital, declared the founding of the Tang dynasty and within 10 years had eliminated the last rival claimant to the throne. To discourage the development of regional power bases, the empire was subsequently divided into 300 prefectures (*zhōu*) and 1500 counties (*xiàn*), establishing a pattern of territorial jurisdiction that persists, with some modifications, to this day.

Li Yuan’s achievements were consolidated by his son, the much admired Taizong (626–49). The relationship between Taizong, the able ruler, and his wise minister Wei Zheng (580–645) was regarded as a model one by later Confucianists. On the other hand, Taizong’s concubine, Wu Zhao, was seen as a good example of what should be avoided in government.

All that Glitters...

Following Taizong’s death, Wu (625–705) wielded increasing influence over the court. In 690 she managed to declare a new dynasty, the Zhou, with herself as emperor – the only woman in Chinese history to ever officially hold this position. Wu was regarded as infinitely cruel (some claim she even murdered her own son); however, it was under her leadership that the empire reached its greatest extent, spreading well north of the Great Wall and far west into inner Asia. The rich repository of texts and paintings at Dūnhuáng (p864) in Gānsù testifies to the Zhou’s intense use of the Silk Road to India, Persia and on to the Mediterranean. During the 7th and 8th centuries major cities, like the capital Chāng’ān, the Yangzi port of Yángzhōu and the coastal port Guǎngzhōu, were crowded with foreign merchants. Wu later moved the capital to the more easily supplied Luòyáng.

Pick up a copy of *Shi Ji* or *Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Qian, translated by Burton Watson. Written during the Han dynasty, Sima chronicles history from antiquity to his own time, based on court records and conversations with courtiers and generals.

The website <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/chinese/frame.htm> gives you the opportunity to view the Golden Era from the eyes of its poets. This site has all 300 Tang Poems online along with English translations.

Made in AD 868, a Chinese Tang dynasty copy of the *Diamond Sutra* is the world’s oldest entire printed book.

214 BC

Emperor Qin indentures thousands of labourers to link existing city walls into one Great Wall

c 100 BC

Chinese traders and explorers follow the Silk Road all the way to Rome

c 50 BC

One of the first documented accounts of tea-drinking in China

c AD 600

The Grand Canal is constructed

Wu also replaced many aristocratic officials with scholars chosen through examinations. Her strong promotion of Buddhism, however, alienated her from these Confucian officials and in 705 she was forced to abdicate to Xuan Zong.

The Anti-Midas Touch

Emperor Xuan Zong took the reigns of power and moved the capital back to Chāng'ān. He re-established permanent armies, appointing minorities from the frontiers as generals, in the belief that they were so far removed from the political system and society that ideas of rebellion and coups would not enter their minds. Nevertheless, it was An Lushan, a general of Sogdian-Turkic parentage, who took advantage of his command in north China to make a bid for imperial power. The fighting, which dragged on for around eight years, overran the capital and caused massive dislocations of people and millions of deaths.

Following the failed rebellion, the aristocracy declined and a mercenary army was hired to support the imperial house. The dynasty grew increasingly dependent on the south, and began to close the door to inner and western Asia. Ideas and beliefs of the past were revived, paving the way for a comeback of Confucianism during the Song dynasty. Buddhism, on the other hand, was outlawed by Emperor Wuzong from 842 to 845. Although the ban was later modified, Buddhism never regained the power and prestige in China that it had enjoyed up until that time.

Tang power gradually weakened during the 8th and 9th centuries. In the northwest, Tibetan warriors overran Tang garrisons, while to the south the Nanzhao kingdom of Dàlǐ, Yúnnán, posed a serious threat to Sichuān. Meanwhile, in the Chinese heartland of the Yangzi River region and Zhèjiāng, heavy taxes and a series of calamities engendered wide-ranging discontent that culminated in the Huang Chao rebellion (874–84). This reduced the empire to chaos and resulted in the fall of the capital in 907.

GOING SOUTH: THE SONG

Another period of disunity followed the fall of the Tang until the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) was established. The Northern Song was a rather small empire coexisting with the non-Chinese Liao dynasty (which controlled a belt of Chinese territory south of the Great Wall) and rather less happily with the Western Xia, another non-Chinese power that pressed hard on the northwestern provinces. In 1126 the Song lost its capital, Kāifēng, to a third non-Chinese people, the Jurchen, who had previously been their allies against the Liao. The Song was driven to its southern capital of Hángzhōu for the period of the Southern Song (1127–1279).

The Jurchen, forebears of the Manchu, established the Jin dynasty with a capital near Běijīng. A treaty was drawn up with the Southern Song that divided the empire along the boundary of Huái Hé. The Jin dynasty pulled rank over the Southern Song, demanding the payment of tribute in the form of silk, tea and silver.

Nevertheless, the Song dynasty, North and South, was a time of enormous economic and cultural vitality. Considerable advances were made in archaeology, mathematics, astronomy, geography and medicine. Philosophy, poetry, painting and calligraphy flourished. Agricultural productivity was booming,

brought on by the spread of rice cultivation since the 8th century, and this left a surplus of labour that was used to develop secondary industries, like mining, ceramics and silk manufacture. The tea-bush and lacquer trees were cultivated, and gunpowder and moveable type were invented. Paper making and print technology experienced significant advances, and a busy trade with Southeast Asia and Japan sent Song copper currency far afield.

All of these developments nurtured urbanisation and commercial classes. Kāifēng (p468) emerged as the great centre of Northern Song politics, culture and commerce. Merchants flourished, while the aristocracy more or less disappeared. Many Tang restrictions on society were abolished as the urban population became more liberated; the removal of the curfew led to a thriving nightlife. Hángzhōu (p315) prospered as capital of the Southern Song, and to this day retains its reputation as one of the most beautiful and cultured cities in the empire.

An educated class of high social standing became a distinguishing feature of Chinese society as Confucianism achieved a dominance it was to retain until the 19th century. The Song refined and expanded the examination system, selecting officials from the successful candidates.

The Wrath of Khan

While the Song literati were busy studying moral codes, Genghis Khan (1167–1227) was beginning to flex his muscles in Mongolia. The son of a chieftain, Genghis commenced his awesome rise to power by avenging his father's murder. By 1206 he was recognised as supreme ruler of the Mongols. The Mongols, despised for what was considered their ignorance and poverty, had occasionally gone to war with the Chinese but had always lost. In 1211 Genghis Khan turned his sights on China, penetrated the Great Wall two years later and took Běijīng in 1215. He fought the Jin in the east, destroyed the Western Xia in the west and advanced on Russia. Under his descendants, a great Mongol empire was formed, stretching from the Ukraine and Persia to Korea and the northern limits of Vietnam.

The Jin fell in 1234. Hángzhōu, the Southern Song capital, was taken in 1276. The court fled and Southern Song resistance ended in 1279.

GRAND OPENING: THE YUAN

Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis, now reigned over all of China as emperor of the Yuan dynasty. He had inherited the largest empire the world had ever known. Foreigners were easily incorporated into this ethnically complex empire as land routes were reopened. European missionaries and traders, such as Marco Polo, went to and fro across the Eurasian continent. The Khan's capital, Khanbalig, was on the site of present-day Běijīng; today all that's left of his palace is a giant jade urn in Beihai Park (p134).

Under Khan, the entire population was divided into categories of Han, Mongol and foreigner, with the top administrative posts reserved for Mongols. The examination system was revived in 1315, but the Mongols and their non-Chinese allies were still strongly favoured, causing resentment among the Chinese literati.

Although they were a mighty military power, the Mongols were not masterminds at politics or economics and were soon faced with insurmountable opposition. The Mongols controlled China for less than a century; by

The superb www.confucius.org offers a look at the philosophy that changed the course of China. The grand sage's *Lun Yu* (Classic Sayings) is available in 21 languages, along with photos of his calligraphy, speeches and a biography.

The site www.eyewitness.to/history.com/khan.htm has Marco Polo's eyewitness account of Kublai Khan's battle of 1287, as well as a brief history of the battle.

c 640

Buddhist pilgrim Xuan Zhuang sets out for India, returning 16 years later with countless holy texts

690–705

Wu Zhao is the first and only woman to become emperor

c 1000

The major inventions of the premodern world – paper, printing, gunpowder and the compass – are all commonly used in China

1215

Genghis Khan conquers Běijīng

the middle of the 14th century rebellions raged through central and north China.

Chief among the rebel groups were the Red Turbans who followed a whole gamut of religions – from Buddhism to Manichaeism, Taoism and Confucianism. By 1367 Zhu Yuanzhang, originally an orphan and Buddhist novice, had climbed to the top of the rebel leadership and in 1368 he established the Ming dynasty, restoring Chinese rule.

FORTRESS MENTALITY: THE MING

A man of no great education, Zhu Yuanzhang was a born leader and a strong if harsh ruler. Remembered for his tyranny (he had some 10,000 scholars and their families put to death in two paranoid purges of his administration), he also did much to set China back on its feet in the aftermath of the Yuan collapse.

Yuanzhang established his capital in Nánjīng, but by the early 15th century the court had begun to move back to Běijīng. A massive reconstruction project was commenced under Emperor Yongle, who reigned from 1403 to 1424, establishing the Forbidden City (p133) much as it remains today. A burgeoning commercial and residential suburbia grew up south of the walled city, and was itself enclosed by a wall in 1522. In this form the city survived through to the 1950s.

In the early Ming, relations with inner Asia were at an all-time low. Yongle had usurped power from his nephew and the civil war that this provoked left him looking overseas to establish his credentials as ruler. In 1405 he launched the first of seven great maritime expeditions. Led by the eunuch general Zheng He (1371–1433), the fleet consisted of more than 60 large vessels and 255 smaller ones, carrying nearly 28,000 men. The fourth and fifth expeditions departed in 1413 and 1417, and travelled as far as Aden, on the present Suez Canal. The great achievement of these voyages was to bring tribute missions to the capital, including two embassies from Egypt.

Retreat!

In 1439 a dramatic invasion by the Mongols resulted in the capture and year-long imprisonment of the then-emperor. The Ming reaction was to retreat into itself. The Great Wall was lengthened by 600 miles in the second half of the century, turning it into one of the great building feats of history. The coast, however, was more difficult to defend. In the middle of the 16th century the coastal provinces were harassed by pirate ships and their suppression took great effort.

Around this time, ships also arrived from Europe. The Ming allowed these foreigners to enter their domain, and in 1557 the Portuguese gained the right to establish a permanent trade base in Macau. Traders were quickly followed by missionaries and the Jesuits, led by the formidable Matteo Ricci, made their way inland and established a presence at court. There they made a great impression with their skills in astronomy and in casting canons.

The Portuguese presence linked China directly to trade with the New World. New crops, such as potatoes and maize, were introduced and New World silver was used to pay for Chinese exports such as tea, porcelain and ceramics. Commerce via merchant banks became important, absentee landlordism and tenant farming became common, and urbanisation intensified.

A House of Cards

The Ming Government was undermined by the power eunuchs wielded at court and by struggles between officials. Strong emperors were needed to maintain order, but were few and far between. Zhu Houchao, ruler from 1505 to 1521, handed over matters of state to his chief eunuch so that he could devote his attention to his concubines. This was soon followed by the Tianqi reign (1621–28), a government dominated by the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627), who purged officials and built temples in honour of himself.

Such poor leadership could not have happened at a worse time. North of the border, the Jurchen people were consolidated into a militarised state, and by the 1620s they were carrying out periodic raids, sometimes deep into Chinese territory. At the same time floods and drought devastated large areas of north China, encouraging banditry that swelled into rebellions.

The Manchu to the north had long been growing in power and looked with keen interest to the convulsions of rebellion in their huge neighbour. Taking advantage of the turmoil they saw, they launched an invasion, but were initially held back by the Great Wall. Eventually a Ming general let them pass, believing that an alliance with the Manchu was the only hope for defeating the peasant rebel armies that now threatened Běijīng itself.

In 1644 Běijīng fell, not to the Manchu but to the peasant rebel Li Zicheng, who sat on the throne for one day before fleeing from the Chinese troops who helped put a Manchu emperor in his place.

HEAVY-HANDED: THE QING

The Manchu proclaimed their new dynasty the Qing (1644–1911), although it took them four decades to stamp out Ming loyalists in the south and pacify the entire country. This victory for the Qing came at great cost to the population, with acts of severe brutality and massacres.

The Qing neutralised threats from inner Asia by incorporating their homeland of Manchuria into the empire as well as that of the Mongols, whom they had subordinated. Their cultural policy involved a careful balance of attention to the Chinese, Manchu, Mongols and Tibetans. They courted the literati via the examination system and great literary projects. Their own people were appointed to key positions in the bureaucracy, but matching positions were created for Chinese officials.

As an alien dynasty, the Qing remained keen to establish its own legitimacy. Chinese men were forced to wear their hair in the Manchu style (the front shaved and the back braided into a long tail), a look you'll quickly recognise as a sign of 'Chineseness' used in countless Western cartoons. Harsh censorship was practised during the 18th century, with a literary inquisition begun in the 1770s and cruel punishments inflicted on authors of works containing anti-Manchu sentiments. Despite such ideological control, scholarship flourished.

Women's Cultural Battleground

Women became a site of Chinese cultural resistance to Manchu rule. Chinese women continued to wear Chinese-style dress, with skirts worn over loose jackets and trousers, as opposed to the one-piece robe worn by Manchu women. Foot binding, in force from perhaps the 10th or 11th centuries, persisted despite Qing prohibitions. Chinese women remained devout to

Emperor Jiajiang (r 1521–67) of the Ming dynasty kept over 1000 concubines. His treatment of them was notoriously cruel; over 200 died of abuse.

In his book, *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, author Gavin Menzies argues that a huge fleet of Chinese junks reached the New World over 70 years before Columbus.

1279–1368

Kublai Khan's vast Mongol empire includes all of China

1286

The Grand Canal is extended to Běijīng, assuming its familiar form

1368

Chinese rule is restored with the Ming dynasty

1406

Ming Emperor Yongle begins construction of the 800 buildings of the Forbidden City

Chinese men, continuing to honour them through the practice of widow suicide. The Manchu showed considerable political skill in moving from opposition to endorsement of widow suicide, awarding honours to women who followed their husbands to the grave.

'A great rebellion broke out in the 1860s, and was defeated in 1877 only at enormous expense and cost to life'

Tackling the Neighbours

Tibet was made a Chinese colony in 1751 and granted regional autonomy under the watchful eye of a Qing resident. Before this date it had many encounters with Běijīng; visit Lama Temple (p134) in Běijīng to learn more about this lopsided relationship. Although never fully integrated into the Chinese administrative system, the strategically important high plateau of Tibet was a cornerstone of Qing geopolitical strategy, particularly in the face of threats from the British and Russians.

Xinjiāng, home to the Muslim Uighur, was also under special administrative control throughout much of the Qing dynasty. A great rebellion broke out in the 1860s, and was defeated in 1877 only at enormous expense and cost to life on both sides. Regular provincial administration was established and Chinese people were settled within the Xinjiāng borders.

Taiwan, home to a number of Austronesian peoples, had been colonised by the Dutch in the early 17th century and then occupied by the Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga; 1624–62), who defeated the Dutch to make the island his base of resistance against the Manchu. The Manchu conquered Taiwan in 1683, and incorporated it into Fújiàn province. Garrison towns were constructed, evolving into walled cities that housed the Chinese officials dispatched to administer the territory. In 1872, after the island was briefly occupied by the Japanese, the Manchu made it into an independent province. In 1895 it was ceded to the Japanese as part of the settlement following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. Nevertheless, the issue of its relationship with the mainland remains a lasting point of contention.

The population of the Qing more than doubled from the middle of the 17th century to reach around 350 million at the end of the 18th century. This may have been due to the introduction of New World crops, which could be grown in relatively harsh conditions, as well as increasingly efficient famine relief and flood control. A surge in population unsurprisingly led to increased pressure on resources, and land-hungry Han migrants headed west and south into lands of aboriginal peoples. With them went the Qing administration, which soon had ethnic conflict on its hands and, ultimately, rebellions. Suppressing these placed an enormous strain on the imperial treasury, contributing to the dynasty's downward spiral in the 19th century.

The Opium War & British Hong Kong

The early Qing emperors had shown a relatively open attitude towards Europeans in China, but this changed in the 18th century. Qianlong, ruler from 1736 to 1795, imposed strict controls on maritime trade, which from 1757 was limited to the single port of Guǎngzhōu.

Chinese exports well exceeded imports at Guǎngzhōu until Westerners hit upon the opium trade. Opium had long been a popular drug in China, but had been outlawed since the early 18th century. The Portuguese first discovered that there was profit to be made through opium, and began trading it between India and China. The British soon joined in. Stronger Chinese

prohibitions against the use and sale of the drug followed, but were far from effective as many officials were opium addicts and therefore assisted in smuggling it into China. By the early 19th century the opium trade had grown to the point of shifting the balance in trade in favour of the Westerners.

In March 1839 Lin Zexiu, an official of great personal integrity, was dispatched to Guǎngzhōu to put a stop to the illegal traffic once and for all. He acted promptly, demanding and eventually getting some 20,000 chests of opium stored by the British in Guǎngzhōu. The British believed they were due compensation and, without it, had the pretext for military action. In 1840 a British naval force assembled in Macau and moved up the coast to Běi He, not far from Běijīng. The Opium War was on.

The emperor watched with mild distress and authorised a negotiation that managed to fob off the first British force with a treaty that neither side ended up recognising. This increased British frustration, leading to an attack on Chinese positions close to Guǎngzhōu.

A second treaty was drawn up, ceding Hong Kong to the British, and calling for indemnities of Y6,000,000 and the full resumption of trade. The furious Qing emperor refused to recognise the treaty, and in 1841 British forces once again headed up the coast, taking Fújiàn and eastern Zhèjiāng. In the spring of 1842 an army inflated with reinforcements moved up the Yangzi River. With British guns trained on Nánjīng, the Qing fighting spirit evaporated and they reluctantly signed the humiliating Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing). This left Hong Kong in the hands of the British 'in perpetuity'.

In 1898 the New Territories adjoining Kowloon were 'leased' to the British for 99 years; the British later agreed to hand the entire colony back to China when the lease on the New Territories expired. For more details on the handover, see p519.

Christ's Kid Brother?

By the 19th century the increased presence of missionaries had fuelled hatred against 'foreign devils', leading to further rebellion throughout the provinces (see the boxed text, below).

Also at this time, the Taiping Rebellion erupted in 1850 in the southern province of Guǎngxī, and commanded forces of 600,000 men and 500,000 women as it raged through central and eastern China. The Taipings owed much of their ideology to Christianity. Its leader was Hong Xiuquan, a failed examination candidate from Guǎngdōng province whose encounters with Western missionaries had led him to believe he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ. The Taipings forbade gambling, opium, tobacco and alcohol,

'The Taipings forbade gambling, opium, tobacco and alcohol, and outlawed foot binding for women, prostitution and slavery'

BOXED UP

Culled from secret societies, the Boxers were a xenophobic group who erupted in rebellion at the end of the 19th century with violent attacks on missionaries and their families. Tired of the foreigners themselves, the Qing Court decided to support the Boxers. Armed with this backing and with charms and martial-arts techniques that they believed made them impervious to Western bullets, the Boxers began massacring foreigners at random and the famous 50-day siege of Běijīng's Foreign Legations began. It wasn't long before Western allies landed, handed the Qing Court a crippling foreign debt and knocked the Boxers down for the count.

1557

The Portuguese establish a permanent trade base in Macau

c 1640

The traditional *qipao* becomes a fashionable frock for women

1644

Conquerors from Manchuria establish the Qing dynasty

1751

Tibet becomes a Chinese colony

DRAGON WOMAN

Like many other Qing-dynasty teenagers, at the age of 15, Cixi (1835–1908) gave up her true love to become one of Emperor Xianfeng's concubines. Her cunningness and intelligence soon made her a favourite of the emperor, particularly after she gave birth to his only son in 1856. Cixi's subsequent rise to power was largely due to the convenient deaths of her adversaries. Xianfeng died at the age of 30 and his empress followed suit a few years later. This made Cixi's five-year-old son, Tongzhi, the new emperor, and Cixi herself the ruling Dowager Empress.

Cixi held on to the government reins for over 40 years in total, galloping over anyone who got in her way – including her own son and, on his death, Emperor Guangxu, whom she positioned to replace her son. Other opponents were slowly starved, thrown down wells or locked away. She spent her reign focusing on her own position rather than the country's; at the end of her life she left nine storerooms of personal treasures, a refurbished Summer Palace and the Qing dynasty in an irreparable state of decline. To see one of her more ridiculous 'achievements', take a gander at the marble boat in Běijīng's Summer Palace (p139).

advocated agricultural reform, and outlawed foot binding for women, prostitution and slavery. The rebellion took tens of millions of lives before being suppressed in 1864 by a coalition of Qing and Western forces – the Europeans preferring to deal with a corrupt and weak Qing government rather than a powerful, united China governed by the Taipings.

The Second Opium War

With Hong Kong in the hands of the British following the first Opium War, official trade was diverted to Shànghǎi. This left Hong Kong's economy in dire straits. With the attention of the Qing court focused on the Taiping Rebellion, the foreign powers struck again. The Anglo-French expedition of 1856 to 1860, sometimes called the Second Opium War, ended with the occupation of Běijīng and the flight of the court to Jehol (Chéngdé; p191). The final outcome was the Treaty of Tianjin, which opened further Treaty ports and established a regular diplomatic corps in Běijīng. At the same time, further massive rebellions were brewing: the Nian in central north China, the Panthay in Yúnnán and the Donggan in the northwest.

Bringing Home the Enemy

In the second half of the 19th century China sent embassies and students to the West. The goal was to pick up pointers from the enemy on how to strengthen Chinese military technology and industrial development. The Treaty-port cities, especially Shànghǎi, became the face of modernisation in China. Factories, banks, newspapers, new-style schools, bicycles, trains, and eventually motor cars, trade unions, chambers of commerce and political parties all made their appearance. In Shànghǎi, land conceded to Western nations quickly outgrew the old city. The unique architecture and atmosphere of the old French Concession makes it worth a wander even today (p253).

In the late 1890s China was in danger of being 'cut up like a melon, divided like a bean', as further leases of land and spheres of influence were ceded to the foreign powers. The Western powers were soon joined by the Japanese who, after a small scrap on Korean soil with Chinese forces, were ceded Taiwan in 1895. The same treaty granted the Japanese (and thereby other

100 DAYS REFORMS

A visionary reformer, Kang Youwei (1858–1927) became a key adviser to the Qing emperor following China's disastrous war with Japan. The result was the famous '100 Days Reforms' of 1898, which were expected to set China on the modernising path already taken by Japan. Reforms to the bureaucracy and examination system were proposed, as well as social reforms like the abolition of foot binding. Sadly, '100 Days' ended with a palace coup staged by the supposedly retired Dowager Empress Cixi, the house arrest of the Emperor Guangxu, the execution of some reformist activists and the flight of others, including Kang.

foreign powers) the right to construct their own factories in Shànghǎi. In 1898 Germany gained a lease in Qīngdǎo after Lutheran missionaries were murdered inland. They commenced building a railway that became the focus of protests by local people upset at the disturbance of feng shui. You'll still find a strong 'Germanness' in the air when you visit Qīngdǎo, in its brewery (p226) and old town architecture.

The Fall of the Qing

In 1908 the Dowager Empress died and two-year-old Emperor Puyi ascended to the throne. The Qing was now rudderless and teetered on the brink of collapse.

As an increasing number of new railways were financed and built by foreigners, public anger grew and gave birth to the Railway Protection Movement that spread and took on an anti-Qing nature. The movement turned increasingly violent, especially in Sichuān, and troops were taken from Wūhàn to quell the disturbances.

As it happened, republican revolutionaries in Wūhàn were already planning an uprising. With troops dispensed to Sichuān, they seized the opportunity and were able to not only take control of Wūhàn, but to ride on the back of the large-scale Railway Protection uprisings to victory all over China.

On 29 December 1911, representatives from 17 provinces throughout China gathered to establish the Provisional Republican Government of China. China's long dynastic cycle had come to an end.

EARLY DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC

On the same day that the Provisional Republican Government of China was established, Sun Yatsen (1866–1925) was elected as its provisional president. Educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong, a Christian and trained medical practitioner, Sun developed a political programme based on the 'Three Principles of the People': nationalism, popular sovereignty and livelihood. In 1895 his 'Revive China Society' initiated one of the country's first republican uprisings, after which Sun fled to Japan and on to Europe. Determined to arrest and execute him, Qing authorities hunted Sun down in London, where they kidnapped him and held him in the Chinese embassy. Sun managed to sneak out a message to one of his teachers who, in turn, alerted the British Government. The Chinese embassy was forced to release their prisoner.

Sun went on to build backing for the revolution he dreamt of for China. Supporters from Chinese communities abroad, as well as among disaffected members of the Qing army, grew in number. When his revolutionist followers

A modern classic, *The Last Emperor* (1988) is the tragic story of Puyi, China's final emperor who ascended the throne at age two. Although it's rather slow-paced, this film boasts great cinematography and is well worth it if you have a few hours to spare.

'The unique architecture and atmosphere of the old French Concession makes it worth a wander even today'

1839

The British hand over 20,000 chests of opium to Chinese officials, the pretext for the Opium Wars

1842

Hong Kong is ceded to the British in perpetuity

1850

The anti-Qing Taiping Rebellion erupts but ultimately fails to establish its Christian ideology throughout China

1908

Two-year-old Puyi ascends the throne as China's last emperor

began their campaign for victory in Wūhàn, Sun watched from abroad. It wasn't until the meeting in Nánjīng in December 1911 and the establishment of the Provisional Republic of China that Sun returned to his homeland to be named president.

Lacking the power to force a Manchu abdication, Sun had no choice but to call on the assistance of Yuan Shikai, the head of the imperial army, and the same man that the Manchu had called on to put down the republican uprisings. The republicans promised Yuan Shikai the presidency if he could negotiate the abdication of the emperor, which he achieved. The favour cost the republicans dearly. Yuan Shikai placed himself at the head of the republican movement and forced Sun Yatsen to stand down.

Yuan lost no time in dissolving the Provisional Republican Government and amending the constitution to make himself president for life. When this met with regional opposition, he took the natural next step in 1915 of pronouncing himself China's latest emperor. Yúnnán seceded, taking Guǎngxī, Guìzhōu and much of the rest of the south with it. Forces were sent to bring the breakaway provinces back into the imperial ambit, and in the midst of it all, Yuan died.

Between 1916 and 1927 the government in Běijīng lost power over the far-flung provinces and China was effectively fragmented into semi-autonomous regions governed by warlords. Nevertheless, Sun's labour had not been in vain. On 4 May 1919 large demonstrations took place outside the Gate of Heavenly Peace (p126) in Běijīng following the decision of the WWI Allies to pass defeated Germany's rights in Shāndōng over to Japan. This surge of nationalist sentiment in China began a movement that was rooted in Sun's earlier revolution and paved the way for the changes that were to come.

KUOMINTANG & COMMUNISTS

By 1920 the Kuomintang (KMT; Nationalist Party) had emerged as the dominant political force in eastern and southern China. The other main contender was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), composed of Marxist groups who had banded together in the same year. While each group had differing visions for a modern China, enough common ground existed for the establishment of a united front (partly prompted by Sun Yatsen's need for military assistance from the Soviet Union) between the CCP and the Kuomintang.

The union was short-lived. After Sun Yatsen's death in 1925 a power struggle emerged in the Kuomintang between those sympathetic to the communists and those who favoured a capitalist state supported by a military dictatorship. The latter group was headed by Chiang Kaishek (1887–1975).

In 1926 Chiang Kaishek attempted to grind the growing influence of communists to a halt by expanding his own power base. He attempted this first through a Northern Expedition that set out to wring power from the remaining warlords. The following year he took more direct action, ordering the massacre of thousands of Shànghǎi communists and trade union representatives.

By the middle of 1928 the Northern Expedition had reached Běijīng, and a national government was established with Chiang holding both military and political leadership. Nevertheless, only about half of the country was

under the direct control of the Kuomintang; the rest was still ruled by local warlords.

At this time China was heavily laden with social problems: child slave labour in factories; domestic slavery and prostitution; the destitute starving in the streets; and strikes ruthlessly suppressed by foreign and Chinese factory owners. The communists proposed solutions to these problems, namely the removal of the Kuomintang. Not surprisingly, Chiang became obsessed with stamping out the influence of the communists.

Grassroots Rebellion

After the massacre of 1927, the communists became divided in their views of where to base their rebellion – on large urban centres or in the countryside. After costly defeats in Nánchāng and Chángshā, the tide of opinion started to shift towards Mao Zedong (1893–1976; p506), who advocated rural-based revolt.

Communist-led uprisings in other parts of the country met with some success; however, the communist armies remained small and hampered by limited resources. It wasn't until 1930 that the ragged communist forces had turned into an army of perhaps 40,000, which presented such a serious challenge to the Kuomintang that Chiang waged extermination campaigns against them. He was defeated each time, and the communist army continued to expand its territory.

The Long March(es)

Chiang's fifth extermination campaign began in October 1933. Many of the communist troupes had begun disregarding Mao's authority and instead took the advice of those who advocated meeting Chiang's troops in pitched battles. This strategy proved disastrous. By October 1934 the communists had suffered heavy losses and were hemmed into a small area in Jiāngxī. On the brink of defeat, the communists decided to retreat from Jiāngxī and march north to Shaanxi to join up with other communist armies in Shaanxi, Gānsù and Níngxià.

Rather than one long march, there were several, as various communist armies in the south made their way to Shaanxi. The most famous (and commonly referred to as *the* Long March) was from Jiāngxī province. Beginning in October 1934, it took a year to complete and covered 8000km over some of the world's most inhospitable terrain. On the way the communists confiscated the property of officials, landlords and tax-collectors, and redistributed land to the peasants whom they armed by the thousands with weapons captured from the Kuomintang. Soldiers were left behind to organise guerrilla groups to harass the enemy. Of the 90,000 people who started out in Jiāngxī, only 20,000 made it to Shaanxi. Fatigue, sickness, exposure, enemy attacks and desertion all took their toll.

The march brought together many people who held top positions after 1949, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Lin Biao, Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. It also established Mao as the paramount leader of the Chinese communist movement. En route, the posse took a breather in Zūnyì (p673), Guìzhōu; if you're in the neighbourhood, you can take in some of the sights. Serious Long March history buffs might also check out Lúding (p781) in Sìchuān.

Wild Swans by Jung Chang offers a backdoor view into Chinese history, following three generations of women from the final days of Imperialism to post-Cultural Revolution China. She followed this epic tale in 2005 with her collaborative warts-and-all portrait of Mao Zedong, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, cowritten by Jon Halliday.

Red Star Over China, by Edgar Snow, is a journalist's first-hand perspective of China in the early days of the Communist Revolution. His portrayal of Mao may seem overly sympathetic, if not partisan, but Snow considers the situation from several perspectives.

1911–16

Dynastic rule comes to an end with Sun Yatsen's Republican Government

1927

Chiang Kaishek's Kuomintang massacres over 5000 communists in Shànghǎi

1935

Mao Zedong is recognised as head of the Chinese Communist Party in a meeting at Zūnyì

1937

Japan invades China

Japanese Invasion

All the internal upheaval going on in China gave the Japanese the moment they'd been waiting for. In September 1931 they invaded and occupied Manchuria, setting up a puppet state with Puyi, the last Manchu emperor. (Check out his digs and one of the settings for Bertolucci's film *The Last Emperor* in Chángchūn, p375.) Chiang, still obsessed with the threat of the communists, did nothing to resist Japan's invasion and instead focused on his fifth extermination drive. The Kuomintang was bitterly criticised for not defending against the Japanese.

In particular, Manchurian General Zhang Xueliang (1898–2001) was not impressed. In 1936 he kidnapped President Chiang Kaishek and forced him to agree to a Second United Front with the CCP to resist Japan. Zhang, hero of the hour, later surrendered to the Kuomintang and spent the next half-century under house arrest in China and then in Taiwan. He was eventually released after Chiang Kaishek's death in 1975.

The rest of China was invaded by Japan in the middle of 1937. The Nánjīng massacre of 1937 (see the boxed text, p287), human experiments in biological warfare factories in Hāěrbin (p392) and 'burn all, loot all, kill all' campaigns quickly made it one of the most brutal occupations of the 20th century. China experienced massive internal migrations, and was subjected to a process of divide and rule through the establishment of puppet governments.

The Kuomintang was forced into retreat by the Japanese occupation. Its wartime capital was Chóngqīng (p799), a higgledy-piggledy town piled up on mountains in the upper reaches of the Yangzi River. The city was subjected to heavy Japanese bombardments, but logistical difficulties prevented it from being approached by land.

Civil War

Following Japan's defeat and the end of WWII, the USA attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate a settlement between the CCP and the Kuomintang. The CCP had expanded enormously during the war years, filling a vacuum in local government in vast areas behind and beyond Japanese lines, and creating a base from which it would successfully challenge the Kuomintang's claims to legitimacy.

Civil war broke out in 1946. While their base at Yán'ān (p436) was destroyed by the Nationalists, communist forces managed to outmanoeuvre the Kuomintang on the battle ground of Manchuria. Three great battles were fought in 1948 and 1949 in which the Kuomintang were not only defeated, but thousands of Kuomintang troops defected to the communists. The USA, which had lost its wartime hero status and become an object of popular vilification in China, was dismayed by the failure of the Kuomintang and refused it further support. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union played a two-faced game of alliances in the early postwar period, recognising the Nationalist government, but eventually facilitating CCP ambitions.

In Běijīng on 1 October 1949 Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC, Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó). Chiang Kaishek fled to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), taking with him the entire gold reserves of the country, and what was left of his air force and navy. To prevent an attack from the mainland, President Truman ordered a protective US naval blockade.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The PRC began its days as a bankrupt nation. Unbridled inflation and a Kuomintang legacy of economic mismanagement left the economy in chaos. The country had just 19,200km of railways and 76,800km of useable roads – all in bad condition. Irrigation works had broken down, and livestock and animal populations were dwindling. Agricultural output plummeted and industrial production was half that of the prewar period.

With the communist takeover, China seemed to become a different country. Unified by the elation of victory and the immensity of the task before them, and further bonded by the Korean War and the necessity to defend the new regime from possible US invasion, the communists made the 1950s a dynamic period. They embarked upon land reform, recognised the role of women and attempted to restore the economy.

By 1953 inflation had been halted, industrial production was back to prewar levels, and land had been confiscated from landlords and redistributed to the peasants. On the basis of earlier Soviet models, the Chinese embarked on a massive five-year plan that was fairly successful in lifting production.

At the same time the CCP increased its social control by organising the people according to their work units (*dānwèi*), and dividing the country into 21 provinces, five autonomous regions and two municipalities (Běijīng and Shànghǎi). Around 2200 county governments held jurisdiction over nearly one million party sub-branches.

A Hundred Flowers

Behind the PRC's rapid economic development lingered immense social problems. Many Kuomintang intellectuals had stayed rather than flee to Taiwan, and still more overseas Chinese, many of them highly qualified, returned to China after its 'liberation' to help in the huge task of reconstruction. Returning Chinese and those of suspect backgrounds were given extensive re-education courses in special universities. Meanwhile, writers, artists and film-makers were subject to strict ideological controls guided by Mao's writings on art.

In the upper levels of the party, opinions were divided as to how to deal with these intellectuals and artists. Mao proposed 'letting a hundred flowers bloom' in the arts and 'a hundred schools of thought contend' in the sciences by welcoming open criticism. In 1957 intellectuals around the country responded with glee. Complaints poured in on everything from party corruption to control of artistic expression, from the unavailability of foreign literature to low standards of living; but most of all, criticisms focused on the CCP monopoly on power and the abuses that went with it.

Either the party had second thoughts about the critique or, as many now believe, the campaign was a trap to 'weed out' rightists. An anti-rightist campaign was launched and within six months 300,000 intellectuals had been branded rightists, removed from their jobs and, in many cases, incarcerated or sent to labour camps for thought reform. Some would stay in these camps for up to 20 years.

The Great Leap Forward

China's agricultural output continued to lag and, as urban populations burgeoned around industrialised areas, the question of how to feed the people grew increasingly urgent.

To Live (1994) follows one family through the Communist Revolution, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, depicting how these monumental upheavals affected the average Chinese citizen. Made in China, but later banned, this film is interesting for its Chinese perspective on historical events.

The site www.china-knowledge.de/History/history.htm has in-depth coverage of China's dynasties and eras, with links to more specific information on everything from the religion to the technology to the economy of each period.

1946

Civil war breaks out

1949

The PRC is established

1957

Mao weeds out 'rightist' intellectuals through the Hundred Flowers campaign

1958–60

The Great Leap Forward causes mass starvation

China embarked on the Great Leap Forward (1958–60), one of the greatest failed economic experiments in human history. A radical programme was initiated to create massive agricultural communes, drawing large numbers of people from the country and urban areas into enormous water control and irrigation projects. In Mao's view, revolutionary zeal and mass cooperative effort could overcome any obstacle and transform the Chinese landscape into a productive paradise.

The communists tried to abolish money and all private property, and told everyone to build backyard blast furnaces to increase steel production. Lacking iron ore, peasants had to melt down farm tools, pots and doorknobs to meet their quota of steel 'production'. The villages later discovered that the steel produced was basically worthless.

Despite the enthusiastic forecasts for agricultural production, there remained little incentive to work in the fields. Large numbers of rural workers engaged in the worthless blast furnace projects, resulting in a massive slump in grain output. Bad weather in 1959 and the withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1960 made matters worse.

All effort was made to cover up the ensuing disaster and so no foreign assistance was sought. China plunged into a famine of staggering proportions – an estimated 30 million Chinese starved to death (some put the figure at 60 million). The enormous failure of the Great Leap Forward led Mao to resign as head of state, although he remained Chairman of the Communist Party.

Sino-Soviet Split

Mao watched in horror as the USSR developed a policy of peaceful coexistence with the USA. Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation speech and what Mao saw as growing moderation in the Soviet leadership did nothing to mend Mao's increasingly frosty view of his neighbours. When Khrushchev refused to provide China with the promised prototype atomic bomb and sided with the Indians in a Sino-Indian border dispute, Sino-Soviet relations hit a low. In 1960 the Soviets brought their foreign experts home from China.

The Cultural Revolution

Mao's extreme views, his recent disastrous policy decisions and his opposition to bureaucratisation led to his increasing isolation within the party. To get back into the limelight of leadership, he set about cultivating a personality cult. His right-hand man was Lin Biao, the minister of defence and head of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). He was also supported by Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing (Mao's wife), a group that – along with Wang Hongwen – later became known as 'the Gang of Four'.

In the early 1960s Lin compiled a collection of Mao's selected thoughts into the 'little red book'. Studied by PLA troops and introduced into the general education system, this was to become one of the symbols of the era; you can still find well-used copies for sale in markets throughout the country.

In the early 1960s a play was released that criticised Mao. A campaign against the play began towards the end of 1966; the purge of the arts that followed was the springboard for the Cultural Revolution (Wénhuà Dàgémíng; 1966–76). Sanctioned by Mao, wall posters went up at Beijing University attacking the university administration and criticising Mao's opposition within the CCP. Before long students were being issued red armbands and taking to

the streets. The Red Guards (Hóngwèibīng) had been born. By August 1966 Mao was reviewing mass parades of the Red Guards in Tiananmen Square, chanting and waving copies of his little red book.

Nothing was sacred in the brutal onslaught of the Red Guards as they rampaged through the country. Schools were shut down; intellectuals, writers and artists were dismissed, killed, persecuted or sent to labour in the countryside; scientific, artistic, literary and cultural publications ceased; and temples were ransacked and monasteries disbanded. Physical reminders of China's 'feudal', 'exploitative' or 'capitalist' past – everything from monuments to musical instruments – were destroyed.

Sometimes fear of being accused themselves, neighbours and even family members began to turn on one another in the search for 'capitalist roaders'. Millions of people are estimated to have died in these years through beatings, executions, suicide or denial of medical care. Violence, social disorder and economic upheaval were rife. The 'four olds' – old customs, old habits, old culture and old thinking – were all to be eliminated. Gender equality was promoted, but there was little room for personal life. Families were split up; sex and romance were frowned upon. Dress codes were as strict as under the most rigid religious regime with the blue 'Mao suit'.

For Mao, the Cultural Revolution succeeded in establishing his power and in supplanting President Liu Shaoqi and party Secretary-General Deng Xiaoping. Liu Shaoqi died in prison in 1969, a fact concealed from the public till 1980. According to the official version of events, Lin Biao plotted a coup in 1971, was exposed, and died in a mysterious plane crash over Mongolia.

Some measure of political stability returned during the closing years of the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai, who had supported Mao from the sidelines, exercised the most influence in the day-to-day governing of China. Among other things, he worked towards restoring China's trade and diplomatic contacts with the outside world. In the 1970s China was admitted into the UN, re-establishing formal diplomatic relations with the USA in 1979.

In 1973 Deng Xiaoping, vilified as China's 'No 2 Capitalist Roader' during the Cultural Revolution, returned to power as Deputy Premier. Nevertheless, Běijīng politics remained factional and divided. On the one side was Zhou, Deng and a faction of 'moderates' or 'pragmatists', and on the other were the 'radicals', 'leftists' or 'Maoists' led by Jiang Qing. As Zhou's health declined, the radicals gradually gained the upper hand.

During this period Mao was watching from the wings. He'd been sick for many years and was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, an extremely rare motor-neuron disorder that left him dead by September 1976. The official line soon surfaced that Mao was 70% right and just 30% wrong in his leadership of the country.

Premier Zhou Enlai died in January 1976, and in April a crowd of mourners in Tiananmen Square erupted into a demonstration that was violently suppressed. Deng fell under attack again from Madame Mao and disappeared from public view as Hua Guofeng, Mao's chosen and groomed protégé, was made acting premier. When the Gang of Four opposed Hua, he had them arrested. Celebrations took place throughout China. When the Gang finally came to trial in 1980, the blame for the entire Cultural Revolution fell on

The Private Life of Chairman Mao, by Li Zhisui, is a fascinating and intimate (if somewhat disturbing) look into the world of this historical giant. Li was Mao's personal physician for 22 years and tells us everything from Mao's sexual habits to his political views.

In the 1960s and 1970s, labyrinthine tunnels were built beneath Běijīng in the event of nuclear war with Russia; they can still be seen at the Beijing Underground City (see the boxed text, p130).

1966

The birth of the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution

1971

The US national table-tennis team becomes the first American delegation to set foot in China in 49 years; Nixon soon follows

1973

Deng Xiaoping returns to power as Deputy Premier

1976

Mao Zedong dies, aged 83

their shoulders. Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao were sentenced to death, with a two-year reprieve. Neither was ever actually executed. Jiang Qing's death sentence was commuted and she lived under house arrest until 1991, when she committed suicide by hanging.

POST-MAO CHINA

The final two decades of the 20th century saw a grand reversal of the traditional knee-jerk obeisance to Marxist-Leninist ideology. With Mao Zedong gone, the celebrated Deng Xiaoping era commenced as he returned to power for the third time as vice-premier, vice-chairman of the party and chief of staff. The event marked his emergence as paramount leader of the nation, a position he rapidly consolidated, calling for wide-ranging reforms.

Aiming to undo the damage inflicted on China by the Cultural Revolution and decades of post-revolutionary economic mismanagement, Deng Xiaoping unveiled his programme of the 'Four Modernisations' (agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence). In the process, China increased contact with the capitalist economies of the West and opened its doors to foreign visitors.

Special Economic Zones were established along China's coast, while in rural China the 'Responsibility System' allowed people to sell their agricultural surpluses on the open market. In 1993 Deng Xiaoping famously proclaimed that 'to get rich is glorious' as the government began to trim down capital-squandering state-owned industries. The new 'ideology' was declared 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', although it was clearly an overdue attempt to pull the land out of its potentially disastrous economic and social tailspin.

Deng Xiaoping was hardly an economic guru, but his tinkering unleashed the long-repressed capitalist instincts of the Chinese. Yet despite its very real successes, one of the lasting failures of the Deng Xiaoping reform era was its dearth of political evolution. The era directly paved the way to the China of today, with all of its massive impetus and glaring social and political contradictions.

Those contradictions are still best exemplified by the events of and leading up to 4 June 1989. Since 1978 demands had been heard for a 'fifth modernisation': democracy. The mass memorial that followed the death of reform-minded Party Secretary-General Hu Yaobang in 1989 turned into a popular, peaceful rebellion. Workers and hundreds of thousands of students gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square (p124) to press ever-escalating demands for political reform on the beleaguered party leadership. After imposing martial law on the capital, Deng Xiaoping sanctioned the forcible dispersal of the demonstrators. Hundreds were killed in the surrounding streets as the army cleared the squares late on 3 June and in the early hours of 4 June.

The era also saw the arrival of population control, first introduced in 1980. The strict measures certainly slowed China's growing population, but at the cost of intervening in one of the most basic of human rights, that of reproduction. Unforeseen further costs include a rapidly ageing society, the psychological harm inflicted on children growing up without siblings and the 'bachelor bomb': a massive body of young men (23 million-strong) who will never find a Chinese wife, a consequence of the practice of female-specific abortions.

THE 21ST CENTURY

As China grew in stature at the dawn of the 21st century, Deng Xiaoping's successor, Jiang Zemin, claimed popular success in playing the world stage. During his tenure, Hong Kong and Macau returned to China, Beijing was successful in its Olympics bid for 2008 and China was steered into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nevertheless, China's economic picture remained at best hazy as Jiang pinned all of his hopes on the WTO, while the lumbering state sector remained an unresolved burden on the economy.

Groomed to take the seat of power since the early 1990s, Hu Jintao – who became president in 2003 – is China's first modern leader to come into the communist fold post-1949. Hopes that Hu was a reformer were quietly suffocated, however, as the president committed himself to unbending controls over political opposition and a tightening of the management of information.

In Hu's bid to purge society of 'liberal elements', policing of the internet was even more rigorously enforced and publications (including the notable closure of the high-profile *Freezing Point*, a popular weekly supplement of the *China Youth Daily*) were shut down. Nicknamed the 'Great Firewall of China', Beijing has installed a highly effective system for filtering the internet, with around 10% of websites blocked. The official line is that the state remains opposed to the 'spreading of news with content that is against national security and public interest'.

Aware that it is in a struggle for its own survival, the Communist Party has increasingly relaxed controls preventing the creation of private wealth. The result is a land of opportunity pumped up by astonishing growth in GDP. It is also a land riven by a growing divide between the haves and have-nots, a spectacular trouncing of the most basic axiom of Marxist and CCP orthodoxy. The supreme irony has been that the very force that communism arose to overturn (capitalism) gave the CCP a new lease of life.

The principal fault-line lies between the flourishing south and east-coast provinces and the more backward inland provinces, especially the land-locked west. To redress the imbalance, the government has launched an ambitious Develop the West campaign to lure businesses, investment and graduates to China's poorer western regions.

Rural protests have increased in frequency in recent years, sparked by land confiscations, environmental pollution and high taxes, levied by corrupt officials. According to Chinese government figures, 74,000 riots or demonstrations took place during 2004, up from 58,000 the previous year. With increasing concern at the threat posed by protest and revolt, Beijing has plans to install special police units in 36 Chinese cities, specifically targeted at quelling riots and disturbances.

China has also made some astonishing achievements in recent years, putting its first man in space in 2003 (a feat it repeated in 2005), completing the Three Gorges Dam in 2006 – ahead of schedule – and, in the same year, putting finishing touches to a railway to Lhasa in Tibet, a technically challenging feat that some said was impossible. Also in the pipeline were plans for a further 48 airports to meet the massive surge in air travel.

China's economic advances over recent years have continued to dazzle (see p61). In 2004 China's GDP grew by a flabbergasting 9.6%. China now accounts for almost 30% of global steel production and a whopping 46%

'In Hu's bid to purge society of "liberal elements", policing of the internet was even more rigorously enforced and publications were shut down'

Most of China's middle-aged and elderly population are survivors of the Cultural Revolution; be mindful if discussing this period of history with them as few went untouched by the horrors of the time.

1980

The one-child policy is enforced

1987

The Last Emperor, filmed in the Forbidden City, collects an Oscar for Best Picture

1989

Hundreds of civilians are killed by Chinese troops in the streets around Tiananmen Square

1997

Britain returns Hong Kong to the PRC

COMING HOME *Lin Gu*

Wang Ruihai will never eat instant noodles again. He survived on the cheap noodles in the winter of 2003, when he couldn't find himself a job in Běijīng. Rather than being unemployed, the 25-year-old enrolled in a two-month computer-hardware maintenance course, believing that ignorance of a computer is even worse than illiteracy. All he had left after tuition and rent of the room with a broken window and no heating he shared with three other trainees was ¥200 (about US\$25).

Wang first came to Běijīng in the winter of 1999. 'Do you want to find something to do in Běijīng?' his father had asked him one day when they were toiling in the fields. Like most of his former schoolmates who were dashing off to the Chinese capital for work or college, the answer was obvious.

Together with his uncle, Wang left his family and headed for the big city, more than six hours from his village in Héběi province. They landed in a briquette factory, where Wang's job was to transport the honeycomb-shaped fire starters on a flat-board tricycle into factory storage. He earned ¥700 (about US\$88) a month, and life there was harsh. He almost lost a thumb to an assembly line. Less than three months passed before spring festival and the traditional time for family reunion, so Wang happily went home to the countryside.

Yet Běijīng kept calling to him. In 2001 Wang returned and worked for a cleaning company in a new apartment compound of 14 buildings in the northwest of the city, where the bulk of the residents were college teachers, foreign students and IT professionals. Every morning he got up at 3am, collected garbage from three apartment buildings by 5am and transported it to the processing station by 8am. His work clothes were often stained with sewage. Once, when Wang was about to share an elevator with a resident, the tenant frowned and covered her nose; at other times, they simply waited for the next elevator.

Wang doesn't blame them. 'The key to solving the problem of discrimination is in our own hands, as long as we try to make the best of ourselves.' All of Wang's workmates were rural migrants like himself, for no city resident had the least interest in this line of work. As everyone knows, all the dirty jobs in Běijīng are done by rural migrants.

Běijīng became a ghost city in spring 2003 when SARS evacuated the capital. Few dared to linger in a public space, but there were some exceptions: a team of volunteers came to Wang's workplace, distributing thermometers and gauze masks as preventive measures against SARS.

of world concrete production, while 40% of the world's television sets are made in China. The figures continue to astound, while perennial concerns that China's economy is overheating or facing meltdown have so far failed to shake overall confidence in foreign investment. Nay-sayers regularly point to the country's debt-ridden banking sector as a source of impending economic collapse, but the phenomenon of China's economic miracle has continued to surge ahead. Even property prices, which reached almost unsustainable levels in 2005, could only be marginally controlled by painful taxes imposed on vendors, in a bid to stifle speculation.

Modern China has few true intellectuals (out of fashion since the Hundred Flowers and the Cultural Revolution) or true ideologues, and the Communist Party has increasingly relied on nationalism to fill the ideological emptiness at the heart of society and to further shore up its standing and legitimacy. Meanwhile, a flowering of creeds and a growing interest in Christianity has similarly rushed to fill the spiritual vacuum. The ongoing crackdown on Falun Gong that began in 1999 is a measure of Běijīng's continual fear of

Later, they organised a party for lonely workers, and told Wang about a newly established cultural centre that tailored to rural migrants just like him.

The city's four million rural migrants have five nongovernment organisations that manage such gathering places. Out of 1.3 billion Chinese, around 150 million are migrating, mostly from the countryside to the city.

What motivates this giant mobile camp is the widening gap between rural and urban, poor and wealthy. There has long been an outcry for equal treatment towards rural migrants in terms of rights to work, medical care and education, with reports of injustices often occupying mainland newspaper headlines. For millions of hardworking women and men like Wang, their lot seems unlikely to change fast anytime soon. But small, incremental improvements are always possible.

Wang's most recent migration was in March 2005, when he became a photography assistant at a Taiwanese-owned wedding photo studio in downtown Běijīng, based on his one year as a trainee photographer in a small city in Héběi. The normal pay is about ¥1000 (about US\$125) per month, but it can rise up to ¥1700 (about US\$213) at peak season. It's the first step on the ladder.

Wang's boss, a young photographer surnamed Zhang, was impressed by Wang as being 'both attentive and reliable'. 'Glamorous as it may appear, this is a place where people with a lower-class background can possibly grab a chance,' Zhang says. 'You may speak Mandarin with an accent, but so what? As long as you have guts!'

Wang now finds his feelings for Běijīng are changing. Today, it's more than just a paying gig. He witnesses constant injustice against migrant workers, and yearns to do something about it. He joins other volunteers in visiting hospitalised migrants, and performs skits in schools for migrant children and at construction sites. He's also organised a photography team, where fellow migrants may exchange their ideas about photography while improving their photographic skills.

'Taking photos isn't just for fun. It's a way of documenting our lives,' he says. On a day off work, Wang likes to ride across the city on his bicycle, camera at his side. The remnants of an ancient courtyard being demolished by bulldozers, a gang of construction workers at lunch break taking in the shade – these are the typical targets of his lens.

A little timid and at 1.7m none too tall, Wang Ruihai is above all a good listener. He smiles as others exchange gossip at the cultural centre. The best moment for him, he says, is when they all sit down to eat together.

'It's like coming home.'

losing ground to noncommunist doctrines. The fate of Falun Gong prisoners in China is among the many human-rights issues regularly raised by international rights organisations.

Environmental issues also make for rather worrying reading. China's appetite for energy is growing daily: currently the nation accounts for 12% of world energy usage, but consumption is growing at four times the world average. In 2004, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest importer of oil, after the USA. China is the world's largest miner of coal (about one-third of global production), and its coal mines are responsible for chronic pollution and a shocking level of industrial accidents (6000 deaths in 2005). Around 25 million trees are felled annually to feed the nation's appetite for disposable chopsticks. Many observers noted that the 2005 toxic chemical spill into the Songhua River that polluted Hāěrbīn's water supplies was an accident waiting to happen. The world also woke up to the knowledge that there are inadequate global resources to feed and supply a China aiming for the same living standards as the USA.

1999

Falun Gong protest silently in Běijīng, prompting a crackdown

2001

China joins the World Trade Organization

2003

China sends its first astronaut into space

2006

The Three Gorges Dam is completed

China's modern-day Triads (gangs associated with criminal activity, like drug trafficking) are believed to be the descendants of secret societies originally set up to resist the Manchus.

China is currently undergoing the largest rural–urban migration ever seen, with millions moving to the cities in search of work and bringing increasing pressure to bear on the environment. Amazingly, China has also become the world's third-largest food donor, despite becoming a net importer of food.

As China grows in self-belief, it is also making its presence felt in the international realm. China is investing heavily in Africa, part of a policy of diversifying its sources of oil in order to quench a growing thirst for fossil fuels, at a time when the Middle East is increasingly in turmoil.

However, China's growing international profile sits uneasily with its non-interventionist policies. Pragmatically business-minded, Běijīng takes little interest in human-rights abuses in countries it does or does not do business with. A case in point: China's lucrative oil deals with Khartoum encouraged it to oppose efforts to impose UN sanctions on Sudan for the massacres in Darfur. China has also befriended nations such as North Korea, Myanmar and Zimbabwe, states widely shunned by the rest of the international community. Long-standing ally North Korea is particularly dependent on Chinese goodwill (especially in the form of food and economic aid), but tested that friendship with its widely condemned nuclear weapons test in October 2006. Critics argue that for China to take a leading role in international affairs, it will need to be seen as more than a purely opportunistic player.

Sino-US relations continue to be of primary strategic importance, especially as China grows in regional and global importance. Optimists point to the growing interdependency of Chinese and American economic ties, and the more cordial atmosphere of cooperation since the Al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11. Pessimists see Taiwan as a potential flashpoint (the US has pledged to militarily support the island in the event of a Chinese invasion) between the two powers.

Běijīng's primary concerns remain domestic and close to home. Beset with concerns about Taiwan, Běijīng is increasingly frustrated at its rebuffed efforts at wooing the 'renegade province' back into the fold. Perhaps ironically, in 2006 Běijīng was pinning its hopes on the restoration of a Kuomintang government on the island, to banish fears of a declaration of Taiwanese independence from President Chen Shuibian.

Also hogging the headlines in China is Japan, a nation that China eyes with undiminished suspicion. Japan's failure to fully apologise for its invasion of China in the 1930s and the subsequent atrocities (see the boxed text, p287), along with the regular appearance of Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the Yasukuni Shrine (where Japanese war criminals are honoured, among other war dead), enrages the Chinese. At the time of writing it was uncertain whether Koizumi's successor as prime minister, Shinzo Abe, would continue the controversial visits. Anti-Japanese sentiment is commonly heard, especially – and perhaps surprisingly – among the young. This, and Běijīng's continuing policy of promoting a spirit of nationalism among the Chinese, prompted the anti-Japanese riots of 2005.

The turbulent story of China continues unabated...

2006

The railway to Lhasa in Tibet begins operation

2008

Běijīng to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games

The Culture Julie Grundvig

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

China today is bursting with commercial and creative energy; everywhere you travel you'll see the vibrancy and strength of a people in the thrust of modernisation, while still trying to make peace with the past. As China leaps headfirst into the 21st century, it's seeking to find its place in the international community without compromising its rich cultural heritage.

China's humiliation at the hands of the West and Japan in the 19th and early 20th centuries still exerts a powerful influence on the Chinese psyche, creating for many a conflicting mix of emotions. The Chinese proudly extol their country's inventions of gunpowder, printing and paper currency, while simultaneously embracing Western business ideas and spending hours at late-night English classes. There's worry that Western values may destroy the heart of traditional Chinese culture, but there's also a strong drive to transform the insularity that has defined China for hundreds of years. More Chinese citizens want to be seen as participants in a global world, progressive and open to new ideas.

Modernisation has brought its share of headaches – pollution, rising crime, and unemployment, to name a few. The surge of new wealth in China has left millions behind. It's estimated that one out of eight Chinese live in absolute poverty and factory shutdowns have left millions unemployed. Mass migration of peasants to urban centres has put a huge toll on cities, causing water shortages, lack of housing and environmental pressure. The government has incentives in place to deal with these issues, but progress is very slow.

Even with so many changes taking place, traditional values persist. Many beliefs derive largely from the pervasive influence of Confucian philosophy on Chinese culture, which forms the very core of Chinese identity. The Chinese value the importance of the family, the cultivation of morality and self-restraint, and the emphasis on hard work and achievement. It's assumed that the family as a whole will thrive and prosper if harmony prevails at home. Strong family connections and community ties are what keep the Chinese going, even in times of difficulty.

Disillusionment with Communist party policies has resulted in more people speaking out and demanding changes. Private action groups are springing up all over the country, seeking to address social needs that are ignored or neglected by the government, including care of the disabled, equal rights for gays and lesbians, AIDS prevention, environmental protection and help for battered women. Artists and writers are freeing themselves from earlier political restraints, contributing to a burgeoning music, literary and art scene that has been stifled for many years. Censorship is still very common, though what defines something as 'taboo' or 'off limits' can be arbitrary.

With an increasingly open society, and with more exposure to the outside world, the Chinese have great hopes that their country will progress as a modern, equitable nation and be accepted as a strong player in the international community.

LIFESTYLE

Chinese culture has always revolved around the family, considered the bedrock of a stable and harmonious society. There's a traditional belief that the more family members living under the same roof, the more prosperous the household. With most urban Chinese living in tiny apartments, the traditional family structure of many generations living together is changing,

Big Breasts and Wide Hips by Mo Yan and translated by Howard Goldblatt (Arcade Publishing, 2004) traces the rise and decline of a Chinese family during the tumultuous 20th century.

with younger generations moving out to pursue new career and educational opportunities. Parents enjoy a very tight bond with their children and extended family remains important, with grandparents commonly acting as caretakers for grandchildren while adult children work and financially support their ageing parents.

The rapid development of the past three decades has raised the standard of living for many Chinese, especially for those along the wealthy east coast. 'You are what you have' has become the motto for China's new yuppies, who see a car and a large apartment as the symbols of success. Also at the forefront of a changing China is the computer-savvy younger generation, who are not only downloading the latest pop songs, games and movies, but engaging in heated debates on everything from education to premarital sex on blogs and internet chat sites. The 2005 'Supergirl' phenomenon, an *American Idol*-type singing contest, selected its winner from more than 3.5 million text messages sent in by viewers. Out of all this techno-blitz, new voices are emerging to challenge the way China sees itself in the 21st century.

Perhaps the biggest changes in China are attitudes towards sex and marriage. Many of China's younger generation are putting off marriage until they've completed university, settled into a good job and have acquired enough money to cover all the basics before settling down to raise a family. Divorce, traditionally looked down upon in Chinese society, is on the rise, and more young people are living together before tying the knot. These laid-back attitudes have raised fear in some who see the disintegration of traditional Chinese values.

The most difficult social problem in China is the growing gap between rich and poor. City dwellers earn more than those in rural areas, who eke out a meagre living on diminishing plots of land, while trying to pay for rising costs in education and healthcare. Government incentives, such as cutting land tax and providing partial education benefits, have done little to stem the tide of rural migrants flooding into cities. Peasant unrest is on the rise and the government knows it must act quickly to prevent further dissent.

China is an enormous country with many regional differences and you'll find that the behaviour of the Chinese may differ from place to place, according to custom and exposure to the outside world. This is especially true in the countryside, which can offer a remarkably different view of China than what can be seen in cities. You'll come away amazed at the diversity of the people and places you've encountered.

The Diary of Ma Yan (Harper Collins, 2004) is a translation of the diary of a teenage girl from rural Ningxia province who writes movingly of her family's struggle to pay for her education.

China has more than 100 million internet users.

The World (2004) by Jia Zhangke is an excellent look at the effects of globalisation in China, as seen through the eyes of young workers at a Beijing theme park.

ETIQUETTE DOS & DON'TS

- When beckoning to someone, wave them over to you with your palm down, motioning to yourself.
- If someone gives you a gift, put it aside to open later to avoid appearing greedy.
- Never write anything in red ink unless you're correcting an exam. Red ink is used for letters of protest.
- Don't give clocks as gifts. The phrase 'to give a clock' in Mandarin sounds too much like 'attend a funeral'.
- Always take your shoes off when entering a Chinese home.
- When meeting a Chinese family, greet the eldest person first as a sign of respect.
- Always present things to people with both hands, showing that what you are offering is the fullest extent of yourself.

VISITING THE HAN, SOLO

China has done its best to degrade its historical sites through war, revolution and that latest bane: real-estate development and road widening. What's left is frequently hung with ticket prices that rise in arbitrary, massive increments. Leave the tour coaches behind, escape the big cities and go in search of the Han Chinese in their homely heartland, the traditional village, which tends to have more independent economies, and stunning surrounding countryside to boot. Money goes to generating the villages and provides locals with a source of income other than agriculture. Furthermore, trips to small villages, such as **Guoliàngcūn** (p467), **Zhūjiāyù** (p210) and **Likēng** (p495), can be very cheap as you can stay in local family hostels, rather than in white-tiled, midrange Chinese hotels with cheap marble foyers, scowling staff and 3am wake-up calls from *xiǎojie* (young, often unmarried women) eager to give you a massage. See China's Traditional Villages tour (p31) in the Itineraries chapter for suggested escapes. You may never want to come back.

ECONOMY

Under Mao, China's economy was a prisoner to ideology and incompetence. Deng Xiaoping's tenure (essentially 1977–97) was a period of reform, continued in perhaps less dramatic fashion by Jiang Zemin (1989–2002) and currently Hu Jintao. Deng chose a pragmatic approach to achieving the so-called 'Four Modernisations': namely, modernisation of China's industry, agriculture, defence, and science and technology.

Today China has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Previously a state-controlled economy, the Chinese government introduced market-oriented economic reforms in the early 1980s. Now only a third of its economy is directly controlled by the state. China is strong in manufacturing and agriculture, but its service sector is slowly catching up, accounting for 32.5% of the economy. China's cheap labour costs have turned the country into 'the world's factory', manufacturing most of the world's clothing, electronics and household items. In 2005 China's global trade surplus was at US\$102 billion. China is also one of the largest importers in the world, buying cars, high-tech products, raw minerals, machineries and equipment, chemicals and petroleum. However, China's shrinking agricultural sector still employs over 40% of its workforce and keeps China as the largest agricultural country in the world.

China's GDP per capita is US\$6800, making China the second largest economy after the US. China's recent gain in trades has upset many trade protectionists, particularly in the US and Europe, who have been pressing China to revalue the yuan to soften China's competitive pricing edge on its exports. In 2005 they achieved a moderate success when China unpegged the yuan to the dollar, driving it up around 2% against the greenback.

A slightly more expensive yuan doesn't mean bad news for visitors. China's continuing economic reforms are bringing in more competition in virtually every sector, resulting in lowered prices and better services. The increase of living standards in China also means better infrastructure, improved transportation systems, better healthcare and environmental protection, all of which are good news if you're travelling in China.

POPULATION

China is home to 56 ethnic groups, with Han Chinese making up 92% of the population. Because Han Chinese are the majority, China's other ethnic groups are usually referred to as *shaoshu minzu* (minority nationals). Han live throughout the country but are mainly concentrated along the Yellow River, Yangzi River and Pearl River basins.

China is the world's second biggest oil user after the US.

China's minority groups are also found throughout the country, but their main distributions are along the border regions of northwest and southwest China and from the north to the northeast. Yúnnán is home to more than 20 ethnic groups and is one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in the country. The largest minority groups in China include the Zhuang, Manchu, Miao, Uighur, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan, Mongolian, Buoyi, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Li, Kazak and Dai.

Maintaining amicable relations with the minorities has been a continuous problem for the Han Chinese. Tibet and Xinjiāng are heavily garrisoned by Chinese troops, partly to protect China's borders and partly to prevent rebellion among the local population. The Chinese government has also set up special training centres, such as the Nationalities University in Běijīng, to train minority cadres for these regions.

China faces enormous population pressures, despite comprehensive programs to curb its growth. Over one-third of China's 1.3 billion live in urban centres, putting great pressure on land and water resources. It's estimated that China's total population will continue to grow at a speed of 10 million each year, even with population programs such as the one-child policy.

The one-child policy was railroaded into effect in 1979 without a careful analysis of its logic or feasibility. The original goal was to keep China's population to one billion by the year 2000 and then massaged down to an ideal of 700 million by 2050. The policy was originally harshly implemented but rural revolt led to a softer stance; nonetheless, it has generated much bad feeling between local officials and the rural population. All non-Han minorities are exempt from the one-child policy.

Rural families are now allowed to have two children if the first child is a girl, but some have upwards of three or four kids. Additional children often result in fines and families having to shoulder the cost of education themselves, without government assistance. Official stated policy opposes forced abortion or sterilisation, but allegations of coercion continue as local officials strive to meet population targets. The government is taking steps to punish officials who force women to undergo inhumane sterilisation procedures. Families who do abide by the one-child policy will often go to great lengths to make sure their child is male. In parts of China, this is creating a serious imbalance of the sexes – in 2005, 119 boys were born for every 100 girls. That could mean that by 2020, over 40 million men may be unable to find spouses.

Experts claim that China needs at least 30 more years to achieve zero population growth. However, a sharp drop in the birth rate may lead to problems as young workers become fewer and the number of senior citizens grows larger. In 2006 over 14% of China's population was over 60. This is expected to increase to 15.6% by 2020. How to support such a large aging population has yet to be addressed.

SPORT

The Chinese have a very long, rich sports history. Archaeological evidence shows that people in China over 4000 years ago were combining physical movements with breathing exercises to increase longevity – what we now know as taichi (*tàijíquán*; see the boxed text, opposite). Early murals and pottery from as far back as the Western Zhou dynasty (1066–771 BC) show people playing games resembling modern-day archery, acrobatics, martial arts, wrestling and various types of ball games. Most of these games were enjoyed by the well-to-do, who had time to invest in recreational activities.

During the Tang dynasty equestrian polo was at the height of fashion for aristocrats and officials. There are numerous paintings, ceramics and mirrors

Red Poppies: A Novel of Tibet by Alai, and translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin (Houghton Mifflin, 2002), is a powerful novel about opium production in Tibet during late imperial China.

Kung Fu Hustle (2005) is an entertaining comedy of wannabe gangsters in 1930s Shànghǎi that's a throwback to early martial art films. It's directed by Stephen Chow, who also made *Shaolin Soccer*.

CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS

Many martial arts of the East have their foundations deeply entwined with the philosophies, doctrines, concepts and religious beliefs of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. It is certainly true that most of the martial art systems in existence today owe their development and ultimate dissemination to the monks and priests who taught and transferred such knowledge over much of Asia throughout history.

In China today the existing various martial art styles number into the hundreds; many still not known to the Western world, and each style reflecting its own fighting philosophy and spirit. The following is a thumbnail sketch of two of the arts that you may see while travelling in China.

Shàolín Boxing

Shàolín boxing is one of the major branches of Chinese martial arts. The art is said to have originated at Shaolin Temple (p460) on Sōng Shān in Hénán province. Shàolín monk fighters were trained to help protect the temple's assets. The martial art routines of Shaolin Temple were not organised into a complete system until some 30 to 40 years later when Indian monk Bodhidharma visited the site.

Bodhidharma taught the monks various kinds of physical exercises to limber up the joints and build a good physique. These movements were expanded over time and a complicated series of Chinese boxing (or forms) evolved. By the Sui and Tang dynasties, Shaolin boxing was widely known.

The fighting styles originating from Shaolin Temple are based on five animals: dragon, snake, tiger, leopard and crane. Each animal represents a different style, each of which is used to develop different skills.

The temple's famous forms have had a profound influence on many of today's martial arts, and the temple is still being utilised today.

Taichi (Shadow Boxing)

Taichi or *tàijíquán* is a centuries-old Chinese discipline promoting flexibility, circulation, strength, balance, relaxation and meditation. While the art is seen by many outside China as a slow-motion form of gentle exercise, it is traditionally practised as a form of self-defence. Taichi aims to dispel the opponent without the use of force and with minimal effort. It is based on the Taoist idea that the principle of softness will ultimately overcome hardness. According to legend, it is derived from the movements of animals.

A major part of studying taichi is the development of chi (*qi*), or life energy that can be directed to all parts of the body with the help of mental training. Chi must flow and circulate freely in the body.

It is traditionally accepted that Zhang San Feng (see the boxed text, p482) is the founder of *tàijíquán*. Due to different needs and environments, various styles of taichi evolved. The most popular form of taichi is the Yang style, which is not too difficult to learn in its simplified form (though the full form has 108 postures) and is not strenuous. Other styles, such as the Chen style, call for a wider array of skills as the postures are painfully low and the kicks high, so endurance and flexibility are important. Chen style is popular with younger exponents and clearly has its roots in Shaolin, mixing slow movements with fast, snappy punches. Other styles include the Sun and Wu styles.

from this period that depict men and women engaging in the sport. Board games also became popular around this time and people enjoyed playing a game similar to contemporary mah jong. Long-distance running and hunting were popular sports for soldiers and the nobility.

During the Song dynasty one of the most well-liked sports was kicking around a leather ball stuffed with hair. This sport, similar to football (soccer), was enjoyed by both officials and ordinary people. In 2003 the international

football association FIFA officially recognised China as the birthplace of football, which is believed to have originated in present-day Shāndōng province. Golf is another sport with a long history – as far back as the Yuan dynasty the Chinese were hitting balls into holes in the ground with sticks.

It was during the Qing dynasty that modern sports, such as basketball, gymnastics, volleyball and swimming, came to China and Chinese athletes began participating in international sports events, such as the Olympics and the Asian Games. Some Chinese athletes have achieved worldwide recognition, such as the basketball player Yao Ming, who now plays for the Houston Rockets.

Some sports China excels in today are table tennis, volleyball, gymnastics and women's wrestling, with many athletes bringing home international awards for their efforts. China's latest addition to its sports repertoire is cricket, with a five-year plan to introduce the sport to schools and universities with the eventual hope of qualifying for the 2019 World Cup.

The first Chinese to win an Olympic gold medal was pistol-shooting champion Xu Haifeng at the 1984 Olympic Games. Deng Yaping is China's most celebrated table-tennis player, winning four gold medals in the 1992 and 1996 Olympic Games. In 1996, Wang Junxia became the first Chinese gold medallist in track and field, winning the 5000m. In the 2004 Olympic Games held in Athens, Greece, the Chinese took home 32 gold medals, 17 silver and 14 bronze, ranking second after the USA. In 2005, 18-year-old Ding Junhui won the UK snooker title.

With China set to host the 2008 summer Olympics in Běijīng, Chinese athletes are already being primed for the spotlight. The government is pouring money into the building of ultramodern sporting facilities in an effort to show off Běijīng as a world-class city on par with Olympic host cities of the past. Other participating Chinese cities include Qīngdǎo (sailing), Hong Kong (equestrian), Tiānjīn and Shànghǎi (football).

RELIGION

Chinese religion has been influenced by three streams of human thought: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. All three have been inextricably entwined in popular Chinese religion along with ancient animist beliefs. The founders of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism have been deified. The Chinese worship them and their disciples as fervently as they worship their own ancestors and a pantheon of gods and spirits.

Muslims are believed to be one of the largest identifiable religious group still active in China today, numbering perhaps 3% to 5% of the nation's population. Christians make up a similar percentage. The government has not published official figures for the number of Buddhists. It's impossible to determine the number of Taoists, but the number of Taoist priests is very small.

Confucianism

Although more a philosophy than a religion, Confucianism (Rújiā Sixiāng) has become intertwined with Chinese religious beliefs (see p221).

Confucius was born of a poor family around 551 BC in the state of Lu in modern-day Shāndōng. His ambition was to hold a high government office and to reorder society through the administrative apparatus. At most he seems to have had several insignificant government posts, a few followers and a permanently blocked career.

At the age of 50 he perceived his divine mission, and for the next 13 years tramped from state to state offering unsolicited advice to rulers on how to improve their governing, while looking for an opportunity to put his own ideas into practice. That opportunity never came, and he returned to his

own state to spend the last five years of his life teaching and editing classical literature. He died in 479 BC, aged 72.

The glorification of Confucius began after his death. Mencius (372–289 BC), or Mengzi, helped raise Confucian ideals into the national consciousness with the publication of *The Book of Mencius*.

The central theme of Confucianism is the conduct of human relationships for the attainment of harmony and overall good. Society was an ordinance of heaven and the five relationships: ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger, and friends. Respect flows upwards, from young to old, from subject to ruler. Confucian texts, such as the *Classics of Rituals (Liji)*, were used as part of the imperial examinations to educate aspiring officials on proper conduct. Drawing from the texts, emperors sought to establish a common set of moral values to create a unified empire. Virtues like filial piety, honesty and loyalty formed the basics for all schooling and were the common moral ideal for the elite.

In its early years Confucianism was regarded as a radical philosophy, but over the centuries it has come to be seen as conservative and reactionary. Confucius was strongly denounced by the communists as yet another incorrigible link to the bourgeois past. During the Cultural Revolution Confucian temples, statues and Confucianists themselves took quite a beating at the hands of rampaging Red Guards. Confucian temples, particularly the ones at Qūfū (p218) in Shāndōng province, have been restored.

Taoism

It is said that Taoism (Dàojiào) is the only true 'home-grown' Chinese religion – Buddhism was imported from India and Confucianism is mainly a philosophy. According to tradition, the founder of Taoism was a man known as Laotzu, variously spelled in Western literature as 'Laotse', 'Laotze' and the pinyin variant 'Laozi'. He is said to have been born around 604 BC, but there is some doubt that he ever lived at all. Almost nothing is known about him, not even his real name.

At the end of his life Laotzu is said to have climbed on a water buffalo and ridden west towards what is now Tibet, in search of solitude for his last few years. On the way he was asked by a gatekeeper to leave behind a record of his beliefs. The product was a slim volume of only 5000 characters: the

'In its early years Confucianism was regarded as a radical philosophy'

ANCESTORS, GHOSTS AND GHOULS

Beliefs about ancestor worship permeate almost every aspect of Chinese philosophy. Most homes have their own altar, where family members pay their respects to deceased relatives by burning paper money and providing offerings. It's believed that a person possesses two 'souls' – a *gui*, which is Yin and represents everything dark, damp and earthy, and a *shén*, which is Yang, and represents light, goodness and strength. When a person dies, the two souls go in separate directions. The *shén* heads upwards to heaven and the *gui* descends to the underworld. If a person has suffered a tragic death like murder or suicide, dies too young or is neglected after death, the *gui* lingers on earth, often seeking revenge. Chinese literature is full of tales of ghosts that come back and play havoc in people's lives until their grievances are satisfied and they get a proper burial. Evil spirits can be anywhere, lurking on lonely roads, in abandoned houses and even in toilets. They commonly haunt at night when Yin is strongest. Most popular in stories and movies are tales of young women, often in the guise of foxes, who bewitch young men and lure them to their death.

Nowadays, while ancestors are still revered, most Chinese scoff at the belief that ghosts can come back from the dead to punish the living, though traditional beliefs still persist in the countryside.

Did you know that in 2004 the All China Sports Federation recognised video games as a legitimate sport?

THE CHINESE ZODIAC

Astrology has a long history in China and is integrated with religious beliefs. If you want to know your sign in the Chinese zodiac, look up your year of birth in the chart, but remember that Chinese astrology goes by the lunar calendar. The Chinese Lunar New Year usually falls in late January or early February, so the first month will be included in the year before. Future years are included here so you'll know what's coming:

- Rat: generous, social, insecure, prone to laziness; 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020
- Ox/Cow: stubborn, conservative, patient; 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009
- Tiger: creative, brave, overbearing; 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010
- Rabbit: timid, amicable, affectionate; 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011
- Dragon: egotistical, strong, intelligent; 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012
- Snake: luxury seeking, secretive, friendly; 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013
- Horse: emotional, clever, quick thinker; 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014
- Goat: charming, good with money, indecisive; 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015
- Monkey: confident, humorous, fickle; 1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016
- Rooster: diligent, imaginative, needs attention; 1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017
- Dog: humble, responsible, patient; 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018
- Pig: materialistic, loyal, honest; 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019

Tao Te Ching (Dào Dé Jīng) or *The Book of the Way*. He then rode off on his buffalo. It's doubtful that Laotzu ever intended his philosophy to become a religion.

Zhuangzi (399–295 BC) picked up where Laotzu left off. Zhuangzi (also called Chuangtzu) is regarded as the greatest of all Taoist writers and his collection of stories, *The Book of Zhuangzi*, is still required reading for anyone trying to make sense of Taoism. However, like Laotzu, Zhuangzi was a philosopher and was not actually trying to establish a religion.

At the centre of Taoism is the concept of Tao (*dào*). Tao cannot be perceived because it exceeds senses, thoughts and imagination; it can be known only through mystical insight and cannot be expressed with words. The opening lines of Laotzu's *The Book of the Way* advise that the Tao that can be expressed is not the real Tao. Tao is the way of the universe, the driving power in nature, the order behind all life and the spirit that cannot be exhausted. Tao is the way people should order their lives to keep in harmony with the natural order of the universe.

The philosophy of Taoism is based on *The Book of the Way*. An amalgamation of folk beliefs and ritual, Taoism placed an emphasis on individual freedom, laissez-faire government and harmony with nature. The Tao, or way, according to Laotzu, is the essence of all things in the universe but ultimately cannot be defined. A central facet of Taoism is the concept of *wuwei* or 'nonaction', meaning to live in harmony with the universe without forcing things to your will.

In time Taoism split into two branches – religious Taoism and philosophical Taoism, each taking very different approaches to Laotzu's teachings. Religious Taoism, borrowing concepts from Buddhism and folk religion, became ultimately concerned with the afterlife and achieving immortality. Taoist magicians banished demons through exorcisms and won over the public with demonstrations of their supernatural powers. China lost several

Did you know that in early China Taoist magicians used chicken blood to ward off spectres?

emperors who died after drinking elixirs given to them by Taoists promising eternal life. Philosophical Taoism remained a way of life for hermits and sages, those who withdrew from the public life.

Taoism today has been much embraced in the West by many who offer their own various interpretations of what Laotzu and Zhuangzi were really trying to tell us.

Buddhism

Buddhism (Fó Jiào) was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BC), a prince brought up in luxury who became disillusioned by the world around him. At the age of 30 he sought 'enlightenment' by following various yogic disciplines. After several failed attempts he devoted the final phase of his search to intensive contemplation. One evening he slipped into deep meditation and emerged having achieved enlightenment. His title 'Buddha' means 'the awakened' or 'the enlightened one'.

The cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy is the view that all life is suffering. Everyone is subject to the traumas of birth, sickness, decrepitude and death, and to separation from what they love.

The cause of suffering is desire – specifically the desires of the body and the desire for personal fulfilment. Happiness can only be achieved if these desires are overcome, and this requires following the 'eightfold path'. By following this path the Buddhist aims to attain nirvana: a state of complete freedom from greed, anger, ignorance and the various other fetters of existence.

When Buddhism entered China from India, its exotic nature, with chanting, strange coloured robes, incense and foreign images, was an attraction for many Chinese disillusioned with the uptight formalism of Confucianism. Buddhism offered answers to the afterlife that neither Taoism nor Confucianism could address, with its elaborate explanations of karma and how to find relief from suffering.

Slowly, the religion drew more followers, gathering firm support in northern China and gradually moving south. However, Buddhism had its share of critics, and many Chinese were afraid that the foreign religion was a threat to the Chinese identity, which was firmly grounded in Confucianism. The growth of Buddhism was slowed by persecutions and outright abolishment by various emperors.

The Buddhist writings that have come down to us date from about 150 years after the Buddha's death. By the time these texts came out, divisions had already appeared within Buddhism. Some writers tried to emphasise the Buddha's break with Hinduism, while others tried to minimise it. At some stage Buddhism split into two major schools: Theravada and Mahayana.

The Theravada or 'doctrine of the elders' school (also called Hinayana or 'little vehicle' by non-Theravadins) holds that the path to nirvana is an individual pursuit. It centres on monks and nuns who make the search for nirvana a full-time profession. This school maintains that people are alone in the world and must tread the path to nirvana on their own; buddhas can only show the way. Theravada is the main school of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

The Mahayana, or 'big vehicle', school holds that since all existence is one, the fate of the individual is linked to the fate of others. The Buddha did not just point the way and float off into his own nirvana, but continues to offer spiritual help to others seeking nirvana. Mahayana is the main school of Buddhism in Vietnam, Japan, Tibet, Korea, Mongolia and China.

Mahayana Buddhism is replete with innumerable heavens, hells and descriptions of nirvana. Prayers are addressed to the Buddha and combined with elaborate ritual. There are deities and bodhisattvas – a rank of

'Mahayana Buddhism is replete with innumerable heavens, hells and descriptions of nirvana'

supernatural beings in their last incarnation before nirvana. Temples are filled with images such as the future buddha, Maitreya (often portrayed as fat and happy over his coming promotion), and Amitabha (a saviour who rewards the faithful with admission to a Christian-like paradise). The ritual, tradition and superstition that Buddha rejected came tumbling back in with a vengeance.

In Tibet and areas of Gānsù, Sīchuān and Yúnnán, a unique form of the Mahayana school is practised: Tantric or Lamaist Buddhism (Lāma Jiào). Tantric Buddhism, often called Vajrayana or 'thunderbolt vehicle' by its followers, has been practised since the early 7th century AD and is heavily influenced by Tibet's pre-Buddhist Bon religion, which relied on priests or shamans to placate spirits, gods and demons.

Generally speaking, it is much more mystical than other forms of Buddhism, relying heavily on *mudras* (ritual postures), mantras (sacred speech), *yantras* (sacred art) and secret initiation rites. Priests called lamas are believed to be reincarnations of highly evolved beings; the Dalai Lama is the supreme patriarch of Tibetan Buddhism.

Islam

The founder of Islam (Yīsilán Jiào) was the Arab prophet Mohammed. Strictly speaking, Muslims believe it was not Mohammed who shaped the religion but God, and Mohammed merely transmitted it from God to his people. The proper name of the religion is Islam, derived from the word *salam*, which primarily means 'peace', and in a secondary sense 'surrender' or 'submission'. The full connotation is something like 'the peace that comes by surrendering to God'. The corresponding adjective is 'Muslim'.

The Prophet was born around AD 570 and came to be called Mohammed, meaning 'highly praised'. His ancestry is traditionally traced back to Abraham, who had two wives, Hagar and Sarah. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, and Sarah had a son named Isaac. Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be banished. According to Islam's holy book, the Koran, Ishmael went to Mecca, where his line of descendants can be traced down to Mohammed. There have been other true prophets before Mohammed, but he is regarded as the culmination of them and the last.

Mohammed said that there is only one God, Allah. The name derives from joining al, which means 'the', with Llah, which means 'God'. His uncompromising monotheism conflicted with the pantheism and idolatry of the Arabs. His moral teachings and vision of a universal brotherhood conflicted with what he believed was a corrupt social order based on class divisions.

The initial reaction to his teachings was hostile. He and his followers were forced to flee from Mecca to Medina in 622, where Mohammed built a political base and an army that eventually defeated Mecca and brought all of Arabia under his control. He died in 632, two years after taking Mecca. By the time a century had passed the Arab Muslims had built a huge empire that stretched all the way from Persia to Spain. Although the Arabs were eventually supplanted by the Turks, the strength of Islam has continued to the present day.

Islam was brought to China peacefully. Arab traders who landed on the southern coast of China established their mosques in great maritime cities like Guǎngzhōu and Quánzhōu, and Muslim merchants travelling the Silk Road to China won converts among the Han Chinese in the north of the country. There are also large populations of Muslim Uighur people (of Turkic descent), whose ancestors first moved into China's Xīnjiāng region during the Tang dynasty.

'Although the Arabs were eventually supplanted by the Turks, the strength of Islam has continued to the present day'

RELIGION & COMMUNISM IN TODAY'S CHINA

Today the Chinese communist government professes atheism. It considers religion to be superstition, a remnant of old China used by the ruling classes to keep power. This is in line with the Marxist belief that religion is the 'opiate of the people'.

Nevertheless, in an effort to improve relations with the Muslim, Buddhist and Lamaist minorities, in 1982 the Chinese government amended its constitution to allow freedom of religion. However, only atheists are permitted to be members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Since almost all of China's 55 minority groups adhere to one religion or another, this rule precludes most of them from becoming party members.

Traditional Chinese religious beliefs took a battering during the Cultural Revolution when monasteries were disbanded, temples were destroyed, and the monks were sometimes killed or sent to the fields to labour. While traditional Chinese religion is strong in places like Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan, in mainland China the temples and monasteries are pale shadows of their former selves.

Since the death of Mao, the Chinese government allowed many temples (sometimes with their own contingent of monks and novices) to reopen as active places of worship. All religious activity is firmly under state control and many of the monks are caretakers within renovated shells of monasteries, which serve principally as tourist attractions.

Of all the people in China, the Tibetan Buddhists felt the brunt of Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The Dalai Lama and his entourage fled to India in 1959 when the Tibetan rebellion was put down by Chinese troops, and the theocracy, which had governed Tibet for centuries, was abolished during the ensuing democratic reform. During the Cultural Revolution the monasteries were disbanded (some were levelled to the ground). Some Tibetan temples and monasteries have been reopened, and the Tibetan religion is still a very powerful force among the people.

In spring 1999 the CCP was caught off-guard by a congregation of thousands of practitioners of a quasi-Buddhist health system, Falun Gong (Art of the Wheel of the Law), outside the political headquarters of Zhongnanhai in Běijīng. Falun Gong was branded a cult (*xiéjiào*) and outlawed.

The tussle between the party and Falun Gong quickly relocated to Tiananmen Square, where followers routinely appeared with banners, only to be pounced upon by patrolling plain-clothes police. Thousands of Falun Gong believers have been sent to prison where human-rights watchdogs say many are badly treated or killed.

Christianity

The earliest record of Christianity (Jīdū Jiào) in China dates back to the Nestorians, a Syrian Christian sect. They first appeared in China in the 7th century when a Syrian named Raban presented Christian scriptures to the imperial court at Chāng'ān (present-day Xī'ān). This event and the construction of a Nestorian monastery in Chāng'ān are recorded on a large stone stele made in AD 781, now displayed in the Shaanxi History Museum (p424) in Xī'ān.

The next major Christian group to arrive in China were the Jesuits. The priests Matteo Ricci and Michael Ruggieri were permitted to set up base at Zhàoqīng in Guǎngdōng in the 1580s, and eventually made it to the imperial court in Běijīng. Large numbers of Catholic and Protestant missionaries established themselves in China following the intrusion into China by the Western powers in the 19th century but left soon after the communists took over in 1949. Now Christians are estimated to comprise about 3% to 5% of China's population.

Judaism

Kāifēng (p468) in Hénán province has been the home of the largest community of Chinese Jews. Their religious beliefs of Judaism (Yóutài Jiào) and almost all the customs associated with them have died out, yet the descendants of the original Jews still consider themselves Jewish. Just how the Jews

got to China is unknown. They may have come as traders and merchants along the Silk Road when Kaifeng was the capital of China, or they may have emigrated from India.

WOMEN IN CHINA

In traditional China, an ideal woman's behaviour was governed by the 'three obediences and four virtues' of Confucian thought. The three obediences were submission to the father before marriage, husband after marriage and sons in the case of widows. The four virtues were propriety in behaviour, demeanour, speech and employment. The Communist party after 1949 tried to outlaw old customs and put women on equal footing with men. They abolished arranged marriages and encouraged women to get an education and join the workforce. Pictures from this time show sturdy, ruddy-cheeked women with short cropped hair and overalls, a far cry from the pale, willowy beauties of Chinese poetry and traditional paintings.

Today Chinese women officially share complete equality with men, though in reality there's still a long way to go. Chinese women suffer from low political representation, strict family policies and a lack of career opportunities. Despite these negatives, the women's movement has made considerable progress. The Marriage Law of 1980, amended in 2001, gives victims of spousal abuse official protection and orders that abusers be punished to the fullest extent of the law. Victims can also sue for damages. In education, women make up 44% of students in colleges and universities, and their average life expectancy is 73, three years more than men.

Women's improved social status has meant that more women are putting off marriage until their late twenties, instead choosing to focus on education and career opportunities. Equipped with a good education and a high salary, they have high expectations of their future husbands. Premarital sex and cohabitation before marriage are increasingly common in larger cities and lack the stigma they had several years ago.

ARTS

With such a long, unbroken history and culture, China has made one of the greatest artistic contributions to mankind. Sadly, much of China's ancient art treasures have been destroyed in times of civil war or dispersed by invasion or natural calamity. Many of China's remaining great paintings, ceramics, jade and other works of art were rescued by exile beyond the mainland – in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and elsewhere.

The West has also been guilty of ransacking China's heritage, making off with religious art and scriptures from such grottoes as Dūnhuáng (p864; see also the boxed text on p867). Fortunately since the early 1970s a great deal of work has been done to restore what was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution.

China today has a flourishing contemporary art scene, with private galleries competing with government-run museums and exhibition halls. Chinese artists are increasingly catching the attention of the international art world and joint exhibitions with European or American artists are now common. Two of the more prestigious exhibitions are the Shanghai Biennale and the Guangzhou Triennale, which showcase artworks from China's leading contemporary artists.

Visual Arts

CALLIGRAPHY

Calligraphy has been traditionally regarded in China as the highest form of artistic expression. The basic tools, commonly referred to as 'the four

THE BEST PLACES TO SEE CONTEMPORARY ART IN CHINA

- The Courtyard, Běijīng (p151)
- Factory 798, Běijīng (p138)
- Red Gate Gallery, Běijīng (p130)
- Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shànghǎi (p255)
- Shanghai Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shànghǎi (p256)
- 50 Moganshan Road Art Centre, Shànghǎi (p255)

treasures of the scholar's study', are paper, ink, ink-stone (on which the ink is mixed) and brush. These materials, which are shared by Chinese painters, reflect the close relationship between Chinese painting and calligraphy.

Calligraphy is still an extremely popular pastime in China and a major area of study. It can be seen all over China – on documents, artworks, in temples, adorning the walls of caves, and on the sides of mountains and monuments. There is an annual calligraphy festival (p328) held every year outside Shàoxīng in Zhèjiāng province.

PAINTING

Chinese painting is the art of brush and ink applied onto *xuān* (paper) or silk. The basic tools are those of calligraphy, which has influenced painting in both its style and theory. The brush line, which varies in thickness and tone, is the important feature of a Chinese painting, along with calligraphy itself, which is usually incorporated in the form of an inscription or poem along with the artist's seal. Shading and colour play only a minor symbolic and decorative role.

From the Han dynasty until the end of the Tang dynasty, the human figure occupied the dominant position in Chinese painting. The practice of seeking places of natural beauty and communing with nature first became popular among Taoist poets and painters, and landscape painting for its own sake started in the 4th and 5th centuries.

From the 11th century onwards landscape was to dominate Chinese painting. Towards the end of the Ming dynasty a group of painters known as the Individualists diverged from traditional techniques with unusual compositions and brushwork; however, it was not until the 20th century that there was any real departure from native traditions.

When the communists came to power, much of the country's artistic talent was turned to glorifying the revolution and bombarding the masses with political slogans. Colourful billboards of Mao waving to cheering crowds holding up the little red book were popular, as were giant Mao statues standing above smaller statues of enthusiastic workers and soldiers.

Since the late 1970s the Chinese art scene has gradually recovered. The work of traditionally influenced painters can be seen for sale in shops and galleries all over China, while in the major cities a flourishing avant-garde scene has emerged. The work of Chinese painters has been arguably more innovative and dissident than that of writers, possibly because the political implications are harder to interpret by the authorities.

CERAMICS

The Chinese began making pottery over 8000 years ago. The first vessels were handcrafted earthenware, primarily used for religious purposes. The invention of the pottery wheel during the late Neolithic period led to the

For in-depth articles and reviews on contemporary Chinese art and artists head to www.newchineseart.com run by the Shànghǎi-based gallery Art Scene China.

Did you know that women make up 20% of China's entrepreneurs?

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART ON THE EDGE

With its many private galleries and an escalating art market, China's contemporary art scene is booming. After Mao's death in 1976 China underwent a creative renaissance that continues to this day. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that artists began challenging traditional Chinese aesthetics, creating bold political works that challenged government authority. The Chinese avant garde was born during this time, heavily influenced by Western techniques. After the events of 4 June 1989 contemporary art took a critical turn. Disillusioned with the current political system and the rampant consumerism sweeping the country, artists began to create works permeated with feelings of loss, loneliness and social isolation, a far cry from the idealism of earlier years. Artists Feng Lijun and Yue Mingjun created grotesque portraits of themselves that conveyed a sense of boredom and mock joviality, an apt portrayal of the mood during this period.

The explosive development of the past two decades has had artists grappling with issues such as environmentalism, materialism, and the widening gap between rich and poor. The Běijīng-based artist Yin Xiuzhen has become known internationally for her commentaries on urban waste and the destruction of China's traditional architecture. While the Chinese authorities view Chinese art as a valuable, exploitable commodity, they keep a close eye on artists deemed too reactionary. One of the best places to see cutting-edge art that won't be shown in any state-run museums is at Factory 798 (p138) on the outskirts of Běijīng. The area is home to a vibrant community of Chinese and international artists, and hosts many worthwhile exhibitions. Shànghǎi and Guǎngzhōu are also home to a thriving art culture and dozens of lively, enigmatic galleries.

establishment of foundries and workshops and the eventual development of a ceramics industry.

Over the centuries Chinese potters perfected their craft, introducing many new exciting styles and techniques. Art thrived under the Tang dynasty and the ceramic arts were no exception. One of the most famous styles from this period is 'three-coloured ware', named because of the liberal use of bright yellow, green and white glaze. Blue-green celadons were another popular item, and demand for them grew in countries as far away as Egypt and Persia.

The Yuan dynasty saw the first production of China's most famous type of porcelain, often referred to simply as 'blue-and-white'. Cobalt blue paint, obtained from Persia, was applied as an underglaze directly to white porcelain with a brush, and then the vessel was covered with another transparent glaze and fired. This technique was perfected under the Ming dynasty and ceramics made in this style became hugely popular all over the world, eventually acquiring the name 'Chinaware', whether produced in China or not. Jīngdézhèn (p492) in Jiāngxī province was established during the Yuan dynasty as the centre of the ceramics industry and still retains that importance today.

During the Qing dynasty porcelain techniques were further refined and developed, showing superb craftsmanship and ingenuity. British and European consumers dominated the export market, having an insatiable appetite for Chinese vases and bowls decorated with flowers and landscapes. The Qing is also known for its stunning monochromatic ware, especially the ox-blood vases, and enamel decorated porcelain.

Jīngdézhèn remains an excellent place to visit ceramic workshops and purchase various types of ceramic wares, from Mao statues to traditional glazed urns. Another place to pick up pottery is at Dīngshān (p302) in Jiāngsū province, which is famous for ceramic teapots. The Shanghai Museum (p252) also boasts an impressive collection of ceramics.

SCULPTURE

Chinese sculpture dates back to the Zhou and Shang dynasties, when small clay and wooden figures were commonly placed in tombs to protect the

dead and guide them on their way to heaven. Often these figures were in the shape of animals – dragons, lions and chimeras, all creatures with magical powers that could quell lurking evil spirits. Sculptures of humans became more common in succeeding dynasties – perhaps the best example is the amazing army of Terracotta Warriors (p428) found in the tomb of Qin Shi Huang outside present-day Xī'ān.

It wasn't until the introduction of Buddhism in China that sculpture moved beyond tomb figurines to other realms of figurative art. The Buddhist caves of Dàtóng (p416) in Shānxī province date back to the 4th century and are an excellent example of the type of art that was introduced to China from India. The enormous figures of the Buddhas, carved directly into the rock, are stiff and formal, their garments embellished with Indian patterns and flourishes. The 4th-century Longmen Caves (p465) in Hénán province are similar in style to those at Dàtóng, with great profusions of sculptures and Indian iconography. The later cave sculptures at Lóngmén, primarily those completed during the Tang dynasty, take on a more Chinese feel, with elongated features and less stiffness in form.

The best place to see early Buddhist sculpture is at the marvellous Mogao Caves of Dūnhuáng (p866) in Gānsù province. Here, Indian- and central Asian-style sculptures, particularly of the Tang dynasty, carry overtly Chinese characteristics – many statues feature long, fluid bodies and have warmer, more refined facial features. It's also common to see traditional Chinese dragons and lions mingling with the demons and gods of Indian iconography.

The caves in Dàzú County (p809), built during the Song dynasty, are another fascinating place to see cave art. The caves feature a wild assortment of sculpture, including Buddhist statues, animals and people. Many of the sculptures are more colourful and lively than those of Dūnhuáng and are remarkably well preserved.

BRONZE VESSELS

Bronze is an alloy whose chief elements are copper, tin and lead. Tradition ascribes the first casting of bronze to the legendary Xia dynasty of 5000 years ago.

Shang-dynasty bronzes are marvellous specimens, often fabulously patterned with *tāotiè*, a type of fierce animal design. Zhou-dynasty bronze vessels tend to have long messages in ideographic characters; they describe wars, rewards, ceremonial events and the appointment of officials.

Bronze mirrors had already developed into an artistic form by the Warring States period. Ceramics gradually replaced bronze utensils by Han times, but bronze mirrors were not displaced by glass mirrors until the Qing dynasty. The backs of bronze mirrors were inscribed with wishes for good fortune and protection from evil influence.

JADE

The jade stone has been revered in China since Neolithic times. Jade (*yù*) was firstly utilised for tools because of its hardness and strength, but later appeared on ornaments and ceremonial vessels for its decorative value. During the Qin and Han dynasties it was believed that jade was empowered with magical and life-giving properties, and the dead were buried with jadeware. Opulent jade suits, meant to prevent decomposition, have been found in Han tombs, while Taoist alchemists, striving for immortality, ate elixirs of powdered jade.

Jade's value lies not just in its scarcity, but depends also on its colour, hardness and the skill with which it has been carved. While the pure white form is the most highly valued, the stone varies in translucency and colour,

'During the Qin and Han dynasties it was believed that jade was empowered with magical and life-giving properties'

'Art thrived under the Tang dynasty and the ceramic arts were no exception'

including many shades of green, brown and black. China's most famous jade comes from Hotan (p840) in Xinjiang province; much of what is sold in Hong Kong is fake.

FUNERARY OBJECTS

As early as Neolithic times (9000–6000 BC), offerings of pottery vessels and stone tools or weapons were placed in graves to accompany the departed.

During the Shang dynasty precious objects, such as bronze ritual vessels, weapons and jade, were buried with the dead. Dogs, horses and even human beings were sacrificed for burial in the tombs of great rulers, later replaced by replicas (usually in pottery).

The cosmopolitan life of Tang China was illustrated by its funerary wares; western and central Asians flocked to the capital at Ch'ang'an, and were portrayed in figurines of merchants, attendants, warriors, grooms, musicians and dancers.

Guardian spirits are some of the strangest funerary objects. A common one has bird wings, elephant ears, a human face, the body of a lion, and the legs and hooves of a deer or horse, all rolled into one.

Literature

China has a very long, fascinating literary tradition. Unfortunately, unless you can read Chinese, it remains out of reach. Many of the translations of the past decade have produced rather stilted, bland versions of Chinese classics, modern short stories and poetry. In recent years publishing houses have been putting more effort into their translations, though the selection remains limited.

PREMODERN LITERATURE

Prior to the 20th century there were two literary traditions in China: the classical and the vernacular. The classical canon, largely Confucian in nature, consisted of a core of texts written in ancient Chinese that had to be mastered thoroughly by all aspirants to the Chinese civil service, and was the backbone of the Chinese education system – it was nearly indecipherable to the masses.

The vernacular tradition arose in the Ming dynasty and consisted largely of prose epics written for entertainment. For Western readers it is the vernacular texts, precursors of the contemporary Chinese novel, that are probably of more interest. Most of them are available in translation and provide a fascinating insight into life in China centuries past.

Classical

I Ching (*Yijing*), or *Book of Changes*, is the oldest Chinese classical text and dates back to antiquity. Stemming from an ancient system of cosmology, it expresses the wisdom and philosophy of early China. The *I Ching* uses 64 hexagrams, composed of broken and continuous lines, to represent a balance of opposites (Yin and Yang), the inevitability of change and the evolution of events. If interpreted correctly, the hexagrams can advise on moral conduct and foretell the future.

Analects (*Lúnyǔ*) is a collection of sayings attributed to Confucius that were remembered by his followers and compiled over a period of years. The *Analects* contain all the essential tenets of Confucianism, including filial piety, respect to ancestors and adherence to ritual. Many still consider Arthur Waley's 1938 translation to be the best.

Tao Te Ching (*Dào Dé Jīng*) or *The Book of the Way* is (tentatively) attributed to Lao-tzu, a sixth-century philosopher. According to the *Tao Te*

Ching, the Tao, often translated in the West as 'the way', is the highest form of truth and can never be defined (see Taoism, p65). The *Tao Te Ching* forms the central canon of Taoist philosophy. Moss Roberts' *Dao De Jing: The Book of the Way* (University of California Press, 2001 and 2004) is the most complete translation.

Vernacular

Water Margin/Outlaws of the Marsh (*Shuǐhǔ Zhuàn*) by Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong is a rollicking tale of a group of outlaws (with good hearts) who fight against corruption and evil during the Northern Song dynasty. This book is considered one of the great historical epics of China, along with *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*San Guo Zhi Yǎnyì*) by Luo Guanzhong is a swashbuckling historical novel about the legendary battles that took place during the latter half of the Han dynasty, when the country was divided into three kingdoms. The novel remains as popular today in China as it was when it first appeared in the Ming dynasty. The best translation is by Moss Roberts (University of California Press, 1999), whose English version of the novel is highly readable and entertaining.

Dream of the Red Chamber (*Hónglóu Mèng*) by Cao Xueqin, also translated as *The Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Story of the Stone*, is a novel of manners about the decline of a genteel family in 18th-century China. The preferred translation is by David Hawkes (Penguin, 1973), who provides a captivating rendition of the original.

Journey to the West (*Xiyóu Jì*) by Wu Cheng'en is a delightful novel about the Buddhist monk Xuanzhang's pilgrimage to India, accompanied by the rebellious 'Monkey King' Sun Wukong. The monkey's rebellious nature causes a wild assortment of misadventures. Two of the best translations of *Journey to the West* are by Arthur Waley (John Day, 1943) and Anthony Yu (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

CHINESE POETRY

The earliest collection of Chinese poetry is the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), which includes over 300 poems dating back to the sixth century BC. The poems were gathered by royal musicians who lived in the many feudal states clustered on the banks of the Yellow River during the Zhou dynasty. The poems were originally meant to be sung, and centre on love, marriage, war, hunting and sacrifice.

China's greatest early poet is Qu Yuan, who lived during the Warring States period (475–221 BC) and is known for his romantic, lyric poetry. After being sent into exile by the King of Chu, Qu Yuan wrote an autobiographic poem 'Sorrow After Departure', depicting his grief at being sent from his home. On the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, Qu Yuan drowned himself in the Milo River. The Dragon Boat Festival is now celebrated in his memory.

The Tang dynasty is considered the 'golden age' of Chinese poetry. It was during this time that two of China's greatest poets, Li Bai and Du Fu, lived. During the Song dynasty lyric poetry called *ci* emerged, which expressed feelings of passion and desire. Su Shi (Su Dongpo) is the most famous poet during this period. After the Tang and Song dynasties poetry lost favour for more narrative prose and interest did not rise again until the Qing dynasty.

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

By the early 20th century Western novels had begun to appear in Chinese translations in increasing numbers. Chinese intellectuals began to look at their own literary traditions more critically, in particular the classical one,

For a comprehensive website that discusses the philosophy and practice of the *I Ching* check out www.taopage.org/iching. It's possible to download the *I Ching* to your phone.

Stone Turtle by Mai Mang (Godavaya, 2005) is a bilingual collection of contemporary Chinese poetry that delves into the poet's elusive search for identity in America after leaving China in 1993.

which was markedly different in form from the Chinese that was spoken by modern Chinese.

After China came under the control of the communists, most writing in 20th-century China tended to echo the CCP line, with formulaic language and predictable plotlines. Writing was rigid and unimaginative, with little allowance for creative embellishment.

Things changed after Mao's death in 1976, when Chinese artists and writers were finally able to throw off political constraints and write more freely. Writers for the first time dared to explore the traumatic events of the 20th century that had reshaped the Chinese landscape. China's economic progress has spawned a new generation of authors, many of whom remember little about the Cultural Revolution and instead are most affected by the day-to-day realities of living in the city. Growing up without war or poverty, young writers are instead writing about the loneliness and decadence of urban life.

The True Story of Ah Q by Lu Xun (Chinese University Press, 2002), and translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi, was first published in 1921 by an author who is regarded by many as the father of modern Chinese literature. Lu Xun was the first of the major Chinese writers to write in colloquial Chinese. *Ah Q* is a moving tale of a simple-minded man caught up in the turmoil of the 1911 revolution.

Blades of Grass: The Stories of Lao She (University of Hawaii Press, 1999), translated by William Lyell, is a collection of 14 stories by Lao She, one of China's most famous 20th-century writers. The stories contain poignant descriptions of people living through times of political upheaval and uncertainty. Lao She faced severe persecution during the Cultural Revolution and committed suicide.

Family by Ba Jin (Anchor Books, 1972) is the first in a trilogy that also includes *Autumn* and *Spring*. Influenced by the May 4th Movement, the novel offers a scathing view of Chinese feudalism.

Wild Swans by Jung Chang (Touchstone Books, 2003) is a gripping saga about three generations of Chinese women struggling to survive the tumultuous events of 20th-century China. This book has been banned in China for its frank depictions of modern Chinese life.

Half of Man Is Woman by Zhang Xianliang (WW Norton & Co, 1998), translated by Martha Avery, is a candid exploration of sexuality and marriage in contemporary China, and considered one of the most controversial novels to appear in the 1980s.

Please Don't Call Me Human by Wang Shuo (Hyperion East, 2000), translated by Howard Goldblatt, is a mocking look at the failures of China's state security system. Wang Shuo has been dubbed China's 'hooligan author' for his criticism of government policies. Wang's works appeal to a broad spectrum of Chinese society, despite being banned.

The Book and the Sword: Gratitude and Revenge by Jin Yong (Oxford University Press, 2004), translated by Graham Earnshaw, is the first feature-length novel written by China's most well-known martial arts novelist. The story revolves around the Red Flower Society, in a battle to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. Taut and suspenseful, the story has wowed Chinese audiences since its initial publication in 1955.

War Trash by Ha Jin (New York, Pantheon Books, 2004) tells the haunting story of a young Chinese soldier taken prisoner by the Americans during the Korean War. Winner of the 2005 Pen/Faulkner Prize for fiction, the historical novel is made more timely and profound by the events of today. Ha Jin won the PEN/Faulkner Award, in addition to a National Book Award, for his 2000 novel *Waiting*.

Figments of the Supernatural by China's most acclaimed young writer, Chi Zijian, and translated by Simon Patton (James Joyce Press, 2004) is a poignant collection of short stories about rural life in China.

Cinema

Cinema in China can be traced back to 1896, when a Spanish entrepreneur by the name of Galen Bocca showed a series of one-reel films to astonished crowds at an entertainment plaza in Shànghǎi. Bocca's films drew large audiences, who packed the plaza nightly to witness the marvellous new medium. Soon after permanent film-only theatres were being built in Běijīng and Shànghǎi, and the Chinese film craze had officially begun.

The first films shown in China were largely Western, with shots of European cities and frolicking Westerners. As film took hold in China, there grew a demand for films that echoed Chinese tastes. By the 1920s three of the most important genres in Chinese cinema were established: historical dramas, costume dramas set in classical China and most importantly, 'swordsmen films', which would evolve into the modern martial arts film.

In 1931 the Nationalist Party in Nánjīng placed restrictions on films that were seen as promoting dissent or immorality. The Lianhua Film Company had close connections with the Nationalist Party, and with funding and government support created some of the most important films and film stars in what has been dubbed China's 'Golden Age of Cinema'. This age came to a standstill with the invasion of Shànghǎi by Japan in 1937, when many filmmakers fled to Hong Kong or went into hiding.

Civil war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was a setback for the film industry, which was forced to follow rigid political guidelines. Heroic tales of the revolutionary struggle (*gémìng piàn*) made filmmaking into a kind of communist comic strip of beatific peasants and peerless harvests. The Cultural Revolution added its own extremist vision to this surreal cinematography.

After the death of Mao Chinese filmmakers began to break free from years of political repression. The major turning point took place with the graduation of the first intake of students since the end of the Cultural Revolution from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982. This group of directors, the best known being Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang, became known collectively as the 'Fifth Generation'.

The first film to create an international stir was Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984), a beautifully shot film about a communist cadre who visits a remote village to collect folk songs and inspires a young woman to flee the village and join the communists. The film held little interest for Chinese audiences and the government disparaged the film as too pessimistic. However, Western audiences loved the film and it spurred a taste in the West for Chinese cinema. Chen's later film *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) also received critical acclaim in Western countries.

Zhang Yimou followed Chen's success with *Red Sorghum* (1987), set in a northern Chinese village during the Japanese invasion. *Red Sorghum* won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and also introduced to the Western world the actress Gong Li, who became the poster girl of Chinese cinema in the 1990s. She also appeared in Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou* (1990), *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1991), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), *To Live* (1994) and *Shanghai Triad* (1995), all popular in the West. These films generated a great deal of criticism in China, particularly for their candid approach to politically sensitive issues. Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993), a brilliant but heartbreaking movie that chronicles the events of the Cultural Revolution, was considered so controversial the filmmaker was banned from moviemaking for years.

In 2002, Zhang Yimou released *Hero*, with big names Maggie Cheung, Jet Li, Zhang Zhiyi and Tony Leung. It proved to be a hit with Chinese and

For an extensive list of links to Chinese film reviews go to www.chinesecinemas.org.

Westerners alike. This was followed by other big-budget flicks like *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *The Promise* (2005).

In the 1990s China's 'Sixth Generation' of Chinese filmmakers began to create films that were a reaction against the Fifth Generation's need to please Western audiences. In 1990 Beijing Film Academy graduate Zhang Yuan created *Mama*, a beautiful but disturbing film about a mother and her autistic child. This small film, created without government sponsorship, started a trend in independent films that continues today. Some of these indie filmmakers include Wang Xiaoshuai, *Beijing Bicycle* (2000), Jia Zhangke, *Unknown Pleasure* (2002), Jiang Wen, *Devils on the Doorstep* (1999) and Lu Xuechang, *The Making of Steel* (1996). Their films are far grittier, more urban observations than their Fifth Generation precursors. As a result, many Sixth Generation directors are blacklisted by the authorities and are not allowed to travel outside of China to attend film festivals.

Except for a few directors who are able to attract domestic and overseas investments, such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, filmmakers are continually dealing with a shortage of funds, small audiences and high ticket prices. Many Chinese prefer Hollywood blockbusters to local movies, with the exception of Hong Kong martial arts movies. In 2005 *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was one of China's most popular films. However, rising ticket prices put many movies out of reach for the average Chinese and contribute to dwindling audiences. Still, the movie industry carries on, producing often surprisingly high-quality movies on tiny budgets that few Westerners, or even Chinese, get to see.

In 2006 the *Da Vinci Code* was set to be the biggest foreign money-maker in China but was pulled suddenly from cinemas. It's uncertain whether it was banned because of its religious content or because officials wanted to give more attention to local Chinese films.

HONG KONG & BEYOND

Hong Kong cinema has always been uniquely Chinese – a ramshackle, violent, slapstick, chaotic, vivid and superstitious world. Money, vendettas, ghosts, gambling and romance are endlessly recycled themes.

You can't discuss Hong Kong cinema without mentioning Jackie Chan, the stunt-icon martial artist who has thrilled both Western and Chinese audiences with his gravity-defying, body-bruising feats of madness. Hong Kong action woman Michelle Yeoh has also performed her own share of amazing feats – she even broke her neck when she fell 6m from a highway overpass while filming Ann Hui's *The Stuntwoman* (1996).

John Woo's gun-toting films are probably the most celebrated of the action films (*dòngzuò piān*). The master of slow motion and ultraviolence (*Hard Boiled*; *City On Fire*) has been seduced by Hollywood and now works on gargantuan budget spectacles (*Face/Off*; *Mission Impossible 2*).

Another iconic director and screenwriter of Hong Kong cinema is Wong Kar Wai, famous for his edgy camera work and inventive, atmospheric storytelling. Wong's first film, *As Tears Go By* (1988), starring megapop stars Andy Lau and Jack Cheung, became an instant classic with its Canto-pop soundtrack and gritty urban landscape. *Chungking Express* (1994) made Wong a household name and is considered a remarkable portrayal of Hong Kong urban life. In 1997 Wong became the first Chinese to win the best director award at Cannes for *Happy Together* (1997), a film about a gay couple living in Buenos Aires. Wong's recent creations, *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and *2046* (2004) are mood-saturated pieces about almost-lovers caught in a web of isolation and longing. The slow-motion sequences and stylised camera work cemented Wong's place as one of Hong Kong's most celebrated directors.

In 2000 Taiwan director Ang Lee's Oscar-winning epic tale *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* caused quite a stir among Western audiences, but the Chinese, a public with loftier expectations of cinematic kung fu and death-defying stunts, panned it. Regardless, for many Westerners it was their first taste of Chinese cinema and it left them wanting more. The movie also launched the career of actress Zhang Ziyi, who replaced Gong Li as the new female icon of Chinese cinema.

Music

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Musical instruments have been unearthed from tombs dating back to the Shang dynasty and Chinese folk songs can be traced back at least this far. Traditional Chinese instruments are often based on ancient Chinese poetry, making them very symbolic in form. Two books of the Confucian canon, the *Book of Songs* (p75) and the *Book of Rites* both dwell on music, the first actually being a collection of songs and poems, formerly set to music.

The traditional Chinese music scale differs from its Western equivalent. Unlike Western music, tone is considered more important than melody. Music to the Chinese was once believed to have cosmological significance and in early times, if a musician played in the wrong tone, it could indicate the fall of a dynasty.

Traditional Chinese musical instruments include the two-stringed fiddle (*erhu*), four-stringed banjo (*yuè qín*), two-stringed viola (*húqín*), vertical flute (*dòngxiāo*), horizontal flute (*dizi*), piccolo (*bāngdí*), four-stringed lute (*pípa*), zither (*gǔzhēng*) and ceremonial trumpet (*sùnnà*). Traditional music places a lot of emphasis on percussion, which is what you'll most likely hear at funerals, temples and weddings.

China's ethnic minorities have preserved their own folk song traditions; a trip to Lijiang in Yunnan gives you the chance to appreciate the ancient sounds of the local Naxi orchestra (p714). The communist anthem 'The East is Red' developed from a folk song popular in northern China and later became a defining element of the Cultural Revolution. Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (p77) contains many beautiful folk songs of this region.

Many department stores in China sell traditional Chinese instruments like flutes and piccolos, and most music stores sell recordings of opera and instrumental music.

The Conservatory of Music (p271) in Shanghai offers short and long-term programs for serious students of traditional or contemporary Chinese music.

Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has been formally in existence since the northern Song dynasty, developing out of China's long balladic tradition. Performances were put on by travelling entertainers, often families, in teahouses frequented by China's working classes. Performances were drawn from popular legends and folklore. Beijing opera evolved in the 19th century as a popular form of entertainment for both the imperial family and the general populace.

There are over three hundred types of opera in China, Beijing opera being the most familiar to Westerners. Other types include Yue opera and Kunqu opera, among others. Yue opera is commonly performed in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. Its singing and dialogue are all in Cantonese dialect. In addition to Chinese traditional instruments, Western instruments such as the violin, saxophone, cello and double bass are also used. Kunqu opera, originating in Jiangsu, is notable for its soft melodies and the use of the flute.

The first American movie to be shown in China was *The Fugitive* starring Harrison Ford in 1994.

'There are over three hundred types of opera in China, Beijing opera being the most familiar to Westerners'

Chinese opera is fascinating for its use of makeup, acrobatics and elaborate costumes. Face painting derives from the early use of masks worn by players, and each colour suggests the personality and attributes that define a character. Chinese audiences can tell instantly the personality of characters by their painted faces. In addition, the status of a character is suggested by the size of headdress worn – the more elaborate, the more significant the character. The four major roles in Chinese opera are the female role, the male role, the ‘painted-face’ role (for gods and warriors) and the clown.

POPULAR MUSIC

China’s thriving music industry came about in the 1980s, a time when many younger Chinese were becoming more exposed to international music trends. The energetic Hong Kong song industry had for years been popular in China, with its twinkle-eyed and pretty emissaries (Aaron Kwok, Faye Wong, Andy Lau, Kelly Chen, Jackie Cheung et al) warbling their catchy, saccharine melodies. Further north, however, their harmless songs of love and loss impacted with a growing rock scene. Cui Jian, the singer and guitarist whose politically subversive lyrics provoked authorities, led the way for a slew of gritty bands who hacked away at the edifice of rock and metal (Tang dynasty) and punk (Underground Baby, Brain Failure). Today major cities such as Běijīng and Shànghǎi have a thriving underground music scene and plenty of places to hear live music. The Midi Music School in Běijīng hosts the annual Midi Modern Music Festival between September and November, with local and international bands playing everything from heavy metal to New Wave.

Architecture

China’s architectural history stretches back more than 3000 years, making it one of the longest of any civilisation. Many different materials and finishes can be seen throughout Chinese architecture – wood, rammed earth, masonry, stone, thatch, tiles, plaster and paint. Its use depended on function, cost, availability and aesthetics.

HISTORY

Few structures survive from before the 8th century AD. Many early buildings were constructed in wood, which have long since disappeared, with more durable buildings often destroyed by war. Much of what is known has gathered from references to building in literature, song and artwork.

Until Qin Shi Huang became the first emperor around 220 BC and unified China under a centralised system, there was no such thing as a Chinese national architecture. Under Qin Shi Huang’s rule large and impressively decorated structures were built. This period saw the beginnings of what would later become the Great Wall.

It is from the Tang and Song dynasties that the first surviving structures appear. Buildings were painted in bright colours, with great attention to detail. When the Mongols ousted the Song in the late 13th century they contributed little of their own culture to architecture, instead choosing to imitate and rebuild the style of the Chinese.

Běijīng was the long-standing capital during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Forbidden City (p133) showcases the architecture of the time. In it we can see the epitome of traditional Chinese architectural ideas of monumentality and symmetry, with strong use of colour and decoration.

WESTERN INFLUENCE & MODERN ARCHITECTURE

China had early contact with foreign traders along the Silk Road, but it was not until the establishment of Western trading headquarters and banks in

the late 18th century that a colonial influence in architecture made its presence felt. The Portuguese, Germans, British, Dutch, Spanish and Russians, among others, established communities and constructed buildings using foreign architects and Chinese craftsmen.

It was not until the 20th century that Chinese architects designed Western-style buildings themselves. Buildings with sleek, clean lines, flat roofs and materials such as steel and glass had appeared in Shànghǎi by the 1940s. There was for some time a push to revive the traditional Chinese style, but this proved uneconomical and was eventually abandoned.

The 1990s especially saw China drawing up an increasingly ambitious building agenda. Běijīng, in particular, is being transformed for the 2008 Olympics and losing much of its traditional architecture. With so many construction projects currently under way, it’s uncertain what China will look like in the not so distant future. Some towns and villages, such as Lǐjiāng (p709), Hóngcūn (p444) and Xīdì (p443), have been designated Unesco World Heritage sites and are good places to see China’s few remaining traditional buildings. Away from the wealthy eastern seaboard, it’s still possible to see traditional-style houses in the countryside and less-developed cities.

RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

All Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian temples are built on a north–south axis, with the main door of each hall facing south. Běijīng’s *hùtòng* courtyards were traditionally also constructed on this axis. Most temples tend to follow a strict schematic pattern, depending on the faith. The shape of the roof, the placement of the beams and columns, and the location of deities are all carefully placed following the use of feng shui (meaning wind and water), a complex cosmological system designed to create harmonious surroundings in accordance with the natural laws of the universe.

The exteriors of many temples in China look similar. However, Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian temples are all fairly easy to distinguish once you know what to look for. Buddhist temples have fewer images, except for statues of the Buddha, seated in the middle of the temple on an altar. Guanyin is the next most common deity you’ll see, sometimes accompanied by other bodhisattvas. Pagodas are common features of Buddhist temples, built to house Sanskrit sutras, religious artefacts and documents, or to store the ashes of the deceased. A number of pagodas stand alone in China, their adjacent temples gone.

Taoist and folk temples are much gaudier inside, with brightly painted statues of deities and colourful murals of scenes from Chinese mythology. On the main altar is the principle deity of the temple, often flanked by some lesser-ranked gods. Fierce-looking temple guardians are often painted on the doors to the entrance of the temple to scare away evil spirits. Large furnaces also stand in the courtyard; these are for burning ‘ghost money’, paper money meant to keep the ancestors happy in heaven.

Wǔtái Shān (p411), Tàì Shān (p214), Qīngchéng Shān (p766), Wǔdǎng Shān (p481) and Pǔtúoshān (p332) are some of China’s famous sacred mountains, and are excellent places to visit Buddhist and Taoist temples.

Confucian temples are the most sedate and lack the colour and noise of Taoist or Buddhist temples. Not nearly as active or as colourful as their Taoist or Buddhist cousins, they often have a faded and musty feel. Their courtyards are a forest of stelae celebrating local scholars, some supported on the backs of *bixi* (mythical tortoise-like animals). The Confucius temples in Qūfū (p220), Shāndōng province, and Běijīng (p134) are very famous. You can also see Confucian temples in many other Chinese towns, though they’re often outnumbered by their Taoist counterparts.

‘With so many construction projects currently under way, it’s uncertain what China will look like in the not so distant future’

For insight into China’s contemporary rock scene and information on the latest bands go to www.rockinchina.com.

In addition to Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian buildings, Islamic architecture may also be found across China, most of it dating after the 14th century, and influenced by central Asian styles and often combined with local Chinese style.

Gardens

Chinese garden design reached its fullest development during the late Ming dynasty, when gardens were commonly found in homes of the elite. Gardens were particularly prevalent in southeastern China south of the Yangzi River, especially in Hángzhōu (p315), Yángzhōu (p294) and Sūzhōu (p302).

Rather than lawn and flowers, the three principle elements of Chinese gardens are rock, water and stone, arranged in formations that mimic well-known mountains or paintings. Gardening was considered an intellectual pursuit, and calligraphy, poetic names, references to literary classics and other complementary art forms are featured in many Chinese gardens.

Although many are parklike in scale, historically Chinese gardens were nothing like the public parks of today. They were compounds to which only a tiny portion of the population ever had access. The larger and grander of these were imperial, existing to please and entertain the emperor. In prosperous regions, private gardens also proliferated in certain periods. At its peak Sūzhōu had hundreds of gardens, and the city was registered as a Unesco World Heritage site in 1997 in recognition of those that remain. The numerous pavilions dotted around the gardens were used for everything from meditating and playing chess to musical performances and banqueting.

For a terrific resource on Chinese gardens and architecture with information on their origin, aesthetics and design go to <http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/home/3garintr.htm>.

Environment David Andrew

Covering a massive area of 9.5 million sq km, China straddles natural environments as diverse as subarctic tundra in the north and tropical rainforests in the south. It stretches from the world's highest mountain range and one of its hottest deserts in the west to the typhoon-lashed coastline of the China Sea. Dissecting this vast landscape are countless waterways, including one of the world's great waterways – the mighty Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng).

Not surprisingly, this vast area hosts an incredible variety of landscapes and biodiversity, but as a traveller it's often hard to envisage a world beyond the choking fumes of a Chinese city. Two-thirds of China may be mountain, desert or otherwise unfit for cultivation, but boy do they pack 'em into the remaining third. There is seemingly no respite from humanity anywhere on the beaten path, and you'll be sharing some of the better-known natural areas with hordes of Chinese tourists trying to get away from it all. But with a little effort (actually, quite a bit of effort in some cases) it is possible to visit and enjoy some of China's wild places, a world far different from the relentless materialism of modern cities. Infrastructure is often lacking and the experience won't always match the expectations of those who have been on, say, an African safari. It's early days for the country's ecotourism industry, however, and the situation can only improve (see the boxed text, p84).

Spelunkers will be awed by Guizhōu's Zhijin Cave (p678), one of the world's largest underground labyrinths. Geologists will be astounded by Guǎngxī's bizarre karst landscape at Guilín (p650). Hikers after a challenge with views will find it at the holy Èméi Shān (p769), and photographers (and everyone else) will be gobsmacked by the gorgeous alpine scenery of Jiūzhàigōu (p795).

Unfortunately, China also faces some serious environmental problems. Breakneck economic growth has meant untrammelled industrial development, which goes hand-in-hand with environmental toxins and pollution. Environmental laws are often unpoliced, and until recently China lacked an environmental voice among the people. Things are improving in some areas, but be prepared to encounter heavy pollution, piles of litter and dirty waterways.

THE LAND

Broadly speaking, China is made up of three major physical regions. The first and highest of these is the Tibetan plateau, encompassing the regions of Qinghǎi and Tibet, which averages 4500m above sea level. Peaks of the towering Himalayan mountain range at its southern rim average about 6000m above sea level, and 40 peaks rise to 7000m or more. Mt Everest (p932), known to the Chinese as Zhūmùlángmǎfēng, lies on the Tibet–Nepal border. This region features low temperatures, high winds and intense solar radiation. Snowmelt in these mountains feeds the headwaters for many of the country's largest rivers, including the Yellow (Huáng Hé), Mekong (Láncāng Jiāng), Salween (Nù Jiāng) Rivers and, of course, the mighty Yangzi (Cháng Jiāng).

The second major region is a vast, arid area in northwestern China that features inhospitable sandy and rocky deserts. North from the plateaus of Tibet and Qinghǎi lies Xinjiāng's Tarim Basin, the largest inland basin in the world. Here you'll find the Taklamakan Desert (p839), China's largest, as well as the country's biggest shifting salt lake, Lop Nur in Xinjiāng. (Lop Nur was also the site of China's nuclear-bomb testing.) The Tarim Basin

'Spelunkers will be awed by Guizhōu's Zhijin Cave (p678), one of the world's largest underground labyrinths'

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Not so long ago, the enjoyment of wildlife-watching for its own sake would have been anathema to communist ideology, but with typical pragmatism Chinese entrepreneurs have begun to realise the potential of domestic and foreign ecotourism. And while China's ecotourism industry is in its infancy, rest assured it will catch on fast – probably faster than the bureaucracy can implement and enforce sensible guidelines.

Westerners are sometimes shocked at the way animals are treated in China. Many traditional medicines and dishes contain wild animal parts and, as in many areas of the world, a few ruthless operators may flaunt wildlife protection laws to enable visitors to enjoy themselves. It's not all bad, of course, and attitudes are definitely changing, but travellers can make informed choices when choosing tour operators, opting for environment-friendly operators whenever possible, and when buying souvenirs.

The language barrier can be a problem in many parts of China, but when choosing a tour operator try to find out whether they:

- employ local people, and use local products and services
- make contributions to the parks and places they visit
- sponsor local environmental projects
- keep tour groups small to reduce the impact on the environment
- aid environmental and wildlife researchers
- educate travellers about wildlife, the environment and local cultures.

Bear in mind that this isn't Africa or Central America, and 'ecotour' operators are still finding their feet, so don't expect a 'yes' to every question. But if you get a 'no' to all of them, try to ascertain how the company *does* contribute to sustainable tourism and if the answer doesn't ring true, consider looking elsewhere.

Travellers have reported seeing parts of endangered animals for sale in remote (and even not-so-remote) areas. Before buying souvenirs, check that they have not been made with parts of protected and/or endangered animals. And check with your country's importation laws before you waste your money – items manufactured from protected wildlife may be confiscated at customs when you return home anyway.

Poachers trading in protected species can find themselves behind bars for up to 15 years, while those found smuggling the internationally revered giant panda face death. Even consumers can be punished, a law that has been around for some time but only recently enforced. So before you swallow that time-honoured remedy, ask for the ingredients. Despite laws banning their capture, protected and endangered animals continue to be led to the chemist counters of China. Ingredients to watch for include bear bile, rhinoceros horns, dried seahorse, musk deer, antelope horns, leopard bones, sea lions, macaques, alligators, anteaters, pangolins, green sea turtles, freshwater turtles, rat snakes and giant clams.

As traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) makes it big globally, international laws prohibiting the trade of many species have forced practitioners to seek out alternative ingredients. Tiger bones, for instance, are being replaced with the bones of rodents. The difficulty lies in persuading Chinese consumers to accept such alternatives – rodent bones just don't come close to tiger bones in prestige.

And don't forget to offer encouragement to locals who have provided a valuable service. Try to avoid the vulgar habit of tipping – the official line usually discourages this anyway. Instead, consider donating something that park staff, or your tour guide or driver, would appreciate, especially if you feel they have a natural interest or talent. (For example, if you're about to leave the country you could leave behind your well-thumbed bird book.) Such gifts are way beyond the procurement power of most tour guides and will help further their interest in providing a sustainable tour experience.

is bordered to the north by the lofty Tiān Shān (p827) mountains. Also in Xinjiāng is China's hot spot, the low-lying Turpan Basin (p827), known as the 'Oasis of Fire'. China's best-known desert is of course the Gobi, although most of it lies outside the country's borders.

The third major region comprises about 45% of the country and contains 95% of the population. This densely populated part of China descends like a staircase from west to east, from the inhospitable high plateaus of Tibet and Qinghǎi to the fertile but largely featureless plains and basins of the great rivers that drain the high ranges. These plains are the most important agricultural areas of the country and the most heavily populated. It's hard to imagine, but the plains have largely been laid down by siltation by the Yangzi and other great rivers over many millennia. The process continues: the Yangzi alone deposits millions of tonnes of silt annually and land at the river mouth is growing at the rate of 100m a year. Hardly any significant stands of natural vegetation remain in this area, although several mountain ranges are still forested and provide oases for wildlife and native plants.

The Yellow River, about 5460km long and the second-longest river in China, is often touted as the birthplace of Chinese civilisation. China's longest river, the Yangzi, is one of the longest rivers in the world. Its watershed of almost 2 million sq km – 20% of China's land mass – supports 400 million people. Dropping from its source high on the Tibetan plateau, it runs for 6300km to the sea, of which the last few hundred kilometres is across virtually flat alluvial plains. The Yangzi has been an important thoroughfare for humans for centuries, used throughout China's history for trade and transport; it even has its own unique wildlife, but all this has been threatened by the controversial Three Gorges Dam Project (see the boxed text, p814). The dam will generate power and is supposed to thwart the Yangzi's propensity to flood – floodwaters periodically inundate millions of hectares and destroy hundreds of thousands of lives.

The remote Spratly Islands (Nánshā) in the South China Sea are claimed by China and other countries, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia. In 1989 the Chinese forcefully took the Paracel Islands (Xishā) from Vietnam. China and Vietnam have had a long history of conflict, which led to fighting as recently as 1979, when 120,000 Chinese troops invaded and captured several Vietnamese towns before withdrawing. China fought and won a border war with India in the 1960s, but the boundary issue remains unresolved and a potential source of further conflict between these two nuclear states.

WILDLIFE

China's varied topography sets the stage for an incredible variety of habitats, ranging from tropical rainforests in the south to subarctic wilderness in the north, barren cold and hot deserts, and high mountains. China's wild animals include nearly 400 species of mammal – including some of the world's rarest and most charismatic species: more than 1300 bird species, 424 of reptile and more than 300 species of amphibian. Unfortunately, the country's enormous human population and rapidly expanding economy have had a considerable impact on this rich natural heritage; many of these same species are now rare or critically endangered. Many animals are officially protected, though illegal hunting and trapping continue. The biggest challenges to wildlife conservation are habitat destruction and deforestation to feed encroaching agriculture and urbanisation, although slow improvements are being made in some areas.

Watching China's wildlife in its natural habitat still requires a great deal of time, patience and luck – for example, without specialist knowledge your

'The Yellow River, about 5460km long, is often touted as the birthplace of Chinese civilisation'

chances of seeing large animals in the wild are virtually nil – but almost pristine reserves are within a relatively easy distance of travellers' destinations such as Chéngdū and Xī'ān. More and more visitors are including visits to protected areas as part of their itinerary for a look at China's elusive wildlife residents – outside of zoos.

Plants

China is home to more than 32,000 species of seed plant and 2500 species of forest tree, plus an extraordinary plant diversity that includes some famous 'living fossils' – a diversity so great that a comparison between the vegetation of Jílín province in the semifrighid north and Hāinán province in the tropical south would find few plant species shared by the two provinces. Major habitats include: coniferous forests, dominated by fir, spruce and hemlock, sometimes mixed with bamboo thickets; deciduous broadleaf forests, similar to but richer in species than equivalent forests in Europe and North America; tropical and subtropical rainforests, which grow chiefly in the southeast and southwest, and are particularly rich in both plant and animal species; and floristically less well endowed habitats such as wetlands, deserts and alpine meadows. There are still many reserves where intact vegetation ecosystems can be seen at first-hand, but few parts of the country have escaped human impact. Deforestation continues apace in many regions and vast areas are under cultivation with monocultures such as rice.

Many plants commonly cultivated in Western gardens today originated in China, and among them is the ginkgo tree, a famous 'living fossil' whose unmistakable imprint has been found in rocks 270 million years old. The ginkgo has both male and female plants, and has been cultivated as an ornamental tree both in and outside China for centuries. Until recently it was thought to be extinct in the wild, but two small populations are now protected in Zhèjiāng province's Tian Mu Shan Reserve. Scientists were somewhat astonished to find specimens of *Metasequoia*, a 200-million-year-old conifer long thought extinct, growing in an isolated valley in Sichuān. This ancient pine is related to the huge redwoods of West Coast USA and is the only such example that grows outside of the western hemisphere. The unique dove tree or paper tree, whose greatly enlarged white bracts look like a flock of doves, grows only in the deciduous forests of the southwest and is becoming increasingly rare.

Apart from rice, the plant probably most often associated with China and Chinese culture is bamboo, of which China boasts some 300 species. Bamboos grow in many parts of China, but bamboo forests were once so extensive that they enabled the evolution of the giant panda, which eats virtually nothing else, and a suite of small mammals, birds and insects that live in bamboo thickets. Some bamboo species have long been cultivated by people for building material, tools and food. Most of these useful species are found in the subtropical areas south of the Yangzi, and the best surviving thickets are in southwestern provinces such as Sichuān.

Deciduous forests cover mid-altitudes in the mountains, and are characterised by oaks, hemlocks and aspens, with a leafy understorey that springs to life after the winter snows have melted. Among the more famous blooms of the understorey are rhododendrons and azaleas, and many species of each grow naturally in China's mountain ranges. They are best viewed in spring, although some species flower right through summer; one of the best places to see them is at Sichuān's Wolong Nature Reserve (p767), where rare azaleas bring tourists in summer. Both rhododendrons and azaleas grow in distinct bands at various heights on the mountainsides, which are recognisable as you drive through the reserve to the high mountain passes. At the very highest

Bamboo comprises 99% of the giant panda's diet, and it spends up to 16 hours a day feeding, during which time it may eat up to 20kg of bamboo shoots, stems and leaves.

elevations, the alpine meadows grazed by yaks are often dotted with showy and colourful blooms.

For a good look at plants from China's north, visit Běijīng's Botanic Gardens (p141).

Mammals

Hardly a day goes by without China's favourite animal, the giant panda, hitting the news either at home or around the world. After several Western nations, including Australia, protested against China's rather profligate use of pandas as 'good-will ambassadors' (read: cash cows), the government now seems genuine about panda conservation, as it is about the conservation of many other species. Nonetheless, a pair of pandas was recently offered to Taiwan, so panda diplomacy looks set to continue.

The giant panda is the most famous denizen of western Sichuān, although you have zip chance of seeing them on the steep, bamboo-covered slopes of the Himalayan foothills. It really is an amazing animal (see the boxed text, p758), as well as being universally appealing, and a recent census has revised the world population upwards after an estimated 39 pandas were located in Wanglang Nature Reserve, Sichuān. Another positive development has been the 'bamboo tunnel', an area of reforestation designed to act as a corridor for the pandas to move between two fragmented patches of forest.

China's high mountain ranges form natural refuges for wildlife, many of which are now protected in parks and reserves that have escaped the depredations of loggers and dam-builders. The barren high plains of the Tibetan plateau are home to several large animals, such as the *chiru* or Tibetan antelope, Tibetan wild ass, wild sheep and goats, and wolves. In theory, many of these animals are protected but in practice poaching and hunting still pose a threat to their survival. One animal you won't see outside of zoos is the beautiful snow leopard, which normally inhabits the highest parts of the most remote mountain ranges and is rarely encountered even by researchers. This small, retiring leopard has a luxuriant coat of fur that insulates it against the cold. It preys on mammals as large as mountain goats, but unfortunately it is persecuted for allegedly preying on livestock.

The Himalayan foothills of western Sichuān – still big hills by anyone's standards – support the biggest diversity of mammals in China. Aside from giant pandas, other mammals found in this region include the panda's small cousin, the raccoon-like red panda, as well as Asiatic black bears and leopards. Among the grazers are golden takin, a large goatlike antelope with a yellowish coat and a reputation for being cantankerous, argali sheep and various deer species including the diminutive mouse deer. You have virtually no chance of seeing any of these animals in the wild (we know of only one person who has seen a wild red panda in years of leading tours to China – and it's not even endangered), but you may be lucky enough to see small mammals, such as squirrels, badgers and martens if you can get far enough away from people and their dogs.

The sparsely inhabited northeastern provinces abutting Siberia are inhabited by reindeer, moose, musk deer, bears, sables and Manchurian tigers. The world's largest tiger, the Manchurian Tiger (Dongbeihu) – also known as the Siberian Tiger – only numbers a few hundred in the wild, its remote habitat being one of its principal saviours. Overall, China is unusually well endowed with big and small cats. Apart from tigers, it also supports three species of leopard, including the beautiful clouded leopard of tropical rainforests, plus several species of small cat, such as the Asiatic golden cat and a rare endemic species, the Chinese mountain cat.

The Last Panda by George Schaller is an evocative book describing his ground-breaking field research on the giant panda with a Chinese team during the 1980s in the forests of Sichuān's Wolong Nature Reserve.

Rainforests are famous for their diversity of wildlife, and the tropical south of Yúnnán province, particularly the area around Xishuāngbànnà (p730), is one of the richest in China. These forests support herds of Asiatic elephants and Indochinese tigers, although most of your wildlife encounters here will be of the feathered kind.

The Yangzi floodway was big enough to favour the evolution of distinct large animals, including the Yangzi dolphin (*baiji*) and Chinese alligator, both now desperately endangered (see p90). The Yangzi dolphin is one of just a few freshwater dolphin species in the world (others occur in the Ganges and Amazon river systems) and is by far the rarest. Once common, it has succumbed to drowning in fishing nets and lethal injuries from ship's propellers, now ubiquitous in a river that for centuries was trafficked by sailing vessels.

One famous victim of China's many wars was the *milu*, known to the West as Père David's deer, which became extinct during the Boxer Rebellion. Fortunately, a herd had been translocated to a private location in England, where they thrived, and late in the 20th century a number were used to set up breeding herds in China once again. There are now some 2000 *milu* in special reserves in the Yangzi basin.

The wild mammals you are most likely to see are several species of monkey. The large and precocious Père David's macaque is common at Èméi Shān (p769), in Sìchuān, where bands often intimidate people into handing over their picnics; macaques can also be seen on Hǎinán's Monkey Island (p629). Several other monkey species are rare and endangered, including the beautiful golden monkey of the southwestern mountains and the snub-nosed monkey of the Yúnnán rainforests. But by far the most endangered is the Hainan gibbon, which thanks to massive forest clearance is down to just a few dozen individuals on the island of Hǎinán.

Birds

Most of the wildlife you'll see will be birds, and with more than 1300 species recorded, including about 100 endemic or near-endemic species, China offers some great bird-watching opportunities. Spring is usually the best time to see them, when deciduous foliage buds, migrants return from their wintering grounds and nesting gets into full swing. Even city parks and gardens in all but the most polluted cities will support a few species at this time of year. **BirdLife International** (www.birdlife.org/regional/asia/), the worldwide bird conservation organisation, recognises 12 Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) in China, nine of which are wholly within the country and three are shared with neighbouring countries.

Although the range of birds is huge, China is a centre of endemism for several species and these are usually the ones that visiting birders will seek out. Most famous are the pheasant family, of which China can boast 62 species, including many endemic or near-endemic species. Most male pheasants are large showy birds, but among the more spectacular examples are Lady Amherst's pheasant, the gorgeous golden pheasant, Reeves' pheasant (which has a tail up to 1.5m in length), and the iridescent Chinese monal.

Other families well represented in China include the laughing thrushes, with 36 species; parrotbills, which are almost confined to China and its near neighbours; and many members of the jay family. The crested ibis is a pinkish bird that feeds in the rice paddies on invertebrates, and was once found from central China to Japan. It is now extinct in the wild in Japan, but a captive breeding and release programme has seen its numbers climb to over 400 in Shaanxi and adjoining provinces.

Keen bird-watchers should carry *The Field Guide to the Birds of China* by J MacKinnon, which illustrates and describes all 1300 species that have been recorded in China and gives valuable background on their ecology and conservation.

Among China's more famous large birds are cranes, and nine of the world's 14 species have been recorded here. In Jiāngxī province, on the lower Yangzi, a vast series of shallow lakes and lagoons was formed by stranded overflow from Yangzi flooding. The largest of these is Lake Poyang, although it is only a few metres deep and drains during winter. Vast numbers of waterfowl and other birds inhabit these swamps year-round, including ducks, geese, herons and egrets. Although it is difficult to get to, birders are increasingly drawn to the area in winter, when many of the lakes dry up and attract flocks of up to five crane species, including the endangered, pure white Siberian crane. The number of waterfowl swells with migratory ducks and geese escaping the harsh winter of the far north. It is not known how the Three Gorges Dam will affect this valuable wintering ground.

Parts of China are now established on the itineraries of global ecotour companies, although the country is so vast that few visitors manage more than one or two sites per trip. Check websites such as www.eurobirding.com for birders' trip reports and more information on bird-watching in China. Recommended destinations in which you should see a good variety of interesting species, plus several of the endemic birds, include Zhalong Nature Reserve (p398), one of several vast wetlands in Hēilóngjiāng province. Visit in summer to see breeding storks, cranes and flocks of wildfowl before they fly south for the winter. Běidàihé, on the coast of the China Sea, is well known for migratory birds on passage. Běidàihé is within easy reach of Běijīng, and bird-watching tours go there in spring and autumn to check out the migrants.

Not many birders make it to the Tibetan plateau, but Qīnghǎi Hú (p904) is a breeding ground for cranes, wild geese, sandpipers and countless other birds, including a couple that are endemic to this inhospitable region. In 2005 some 6300 birds, mainly wild geese, were found dead in the area. Some tested positive to the H5N1 virus (bird flu), although the source of the infection remains unclear and could have been local poultry farms.

Caohai Lake (p679), in northwestern Guizhōu province, is the most important wetland in this part of the country and supports overwintering black-necked cranes, as well as other cranes, storks and waterfowl.

Jiūzhàigōu (p795) is not just an amazing scenic spot – it is home to some rare and endemic Chinese birds, such as the Sichuan owl, although you will have to work hard to escape the crowds of noisy, camera-toting Chinese tourists.

Even a short stopover in Hong Kong can be rewarding, especially in winter when Mai Po Marsh (p536) is thronged with migratory wildfowl and waders, including the rare spoon-billed sandpiper. The **Hong Kong Bird Watching Society** (www.hkbws.org.hk) organises regular outings and publishes a newsletter in English.

Most bird-watchers and bird tours head straight for Sìchuān, which offers superb birding in sites such as Wolong (p767). Here, several spectacular pheasants, including golden, blood and kalij pheasants, live on the steep forested hillsides surrounding the main road. As the road climbs towards Beilanshan Pass, higher altitude species such as eared pheasants and the spectacular Chinese monal may be seen. Alpine meadows host smaller birds, and the rocky scree slopes at the pass hold partridges, the beautiful grandala and the mighty lammergeier or bearded vulture, with a 2m wingspan.

Reptiles & Amphibians

The Chinese alligator – known as the 'muddy dragon' – is one of the smallest of the world's crocodylians, measuring only 2m in length, and is harmless to humans. But owing to habitat clearance and intense pressure

At www.cnbirds.com China Birding can fill you in on overwintering sites, migration routes and the geographical distribution of your feathered friends in China. It also has lots of excellent photos.

to turn its wetlands to agriculture along the lower Yangzi, fewer than 130 of these crocs still exist in the wild. A captive breeding programme has been successful, but as yet there are few options for releasing this rare reptile back into the wild.

The cold, rushing rivers of the southwestern mountains are home to the world's largest amphibian, the giant salamander. This enormous amphibian can reach 1m in length and feeds on small aquatic animals. Unfortunately, it is now critically endangered in the wild and, like so many other animals, hunted for food. More than 300 other species of frog and salamander occur in China's waterways and wetlands, and preying on them is a variety of snakes, including cobras and vipers. One of China's more unusual national parks is Snake Island, near Dàlián in Liáoning province. This 800-hectare dot in the China Sea is uninhabited by people, but supports an estimated 130,000 Pallas' pit vipers, an extraordinary concentration of snakes that prey on migrating birds that land on the island every spring and autumn in huge numbers. By eating several birds each season, the snakes can subsist on lizards and invertebrates for the rest of the year until migration time comes round again.

Endangered Species

It is sometimes said that the people of southern China will eat anything with four legs except a table. While this is not *entirely* true, the list of animals that are served up at dinner or bottled for traditional remedies is depressingly long. Just about every large mammal you can think of is on China's list of endangered species, as are many of the so-called 'lower' animals and plants. **Earth Trends** (<http://earthtrends.wri.org>) lists 168 threatened species of higher plant, 79 of mammal, 74 of bird, 31 of reptile and one amphibian.

Threats facing native animals include the usual suspects: deforestation, pollution, hunting and trapping for fur, body parts and sport. The Convention on International Trade in Threatened and Endangered Species (CITES) records legal trade in live reptiles and parrots, and astonishingly high numbers of reptile and wild cat skins. One can only guess at the number of such products being collected or sold unofficially.

In spite of the unequal odds against them, a number of rare animals continue to survive in the wild in small and remote areas. Notable among them are the Chinese alligator in Ānhuī, the giant salamander in the fast-running waters of the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers, the Yangzi River dolphin in the lower and middle reaches of the river, and the pink dolphin of the Hong Kong islands of Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau (these animals may be seen on dolphin-spotting trips in Hong Kong Harbour). The famed giant panda is confined to the fauna-rich valleys and ranges of Sichuān, but your best chances for sighting one is in Chéngdū's Giant Panda Breeding Research Base (p757). For more on these charismatic creatures, see the boxed text, opposite. You may be lucky enough to chance upon a golden monkey in the mountains of Sichuān, Yúnnán and Guizhōu. Other animals to make the endangered list include the snow leopard, Indochinese tiger, chiru antelope, crested ibis, Asiatic elephant, red-crowned crane and black-crowned crane.

Snakes feature prominently on China's menus – more than 10,000 tonnes of serpents are dished up every year to diners – and in traditional Chinese medicine, because snake parts are said to restore health and improve sexual prowess. The venom of dangerous species such as vipers is particularly sought for medicine. The situation is so dire that no fewer than 43 of China's 200 snake species are said to be endangered. Fortunately, nature has a way of

SEARCHING FOR THE ELUSIVE GIANT PANDA *David Andrew*

The giant panda's solitary nature makes it extremely hard to observe in the wild, and even today, after decades of intensive research and total protection in dedicated reserves, sightings are rare. A few years ago the thought of travelling to China to track giant pandas seemed an impossible dream, but in 2005 I was lucky enough to be involved in field research on the animals in Changqing Nature Reserve, Shaanxi province.

Changqing Nature Reserve boasts a comparatively high density of pandas, and trained local guides monitor the bears' movements year-round. But even so, the pandas are still mighty hard to find: the terrain is ruggedly mountainous and we spent days clambering up steep hillsides only to lose the trail among the dense bamboo thickets. The guides assured us the weather was to blame, as it had been unseasonably hot and the pandas had sought the comparative coolness of the mountain tops.

We didn't manage to see any pandas on the first field trip of the study, but we vowed to return in the dead of winter when, the guides assured us, pandas were easier to track in the snow. Fortunately, giant pandas leave abundant traces of their passage, so to speak, and their droppings gave us enough clues to their life histories, population dynamics and feeding habits to make the study a success.

Changqing Nature Reserve is open to visitors and is well worth a visit for its relatively unspoilt montane forest and the chance to see giant pandas in the wild. Find out more at www.cqpanda.com.

fighting back and the depletion of snake numbers leads pretty quickly to an increase in rodent numbers, with resulting crop destruction.

Intensive farmland cultivation, the reclaiming of wetlands, river damming, industrial and rural waste, and desertification are reducing unprotected forest areas and making the survival of many of these species increasingly precarious. Although there are laws against killing or capturing rare wildlife, their struggle for survival is further complicated as many remain on the most-wanted lists for traditional Chinese medicine and dinner delicacies.

PROTECTED AREAS

Since the first nature reserve was established in 1956, around 2000 more protected areas have joined the ranks, protecting about 14% of China's land area (see the map on p92). Various categories of reserve are recognised, ranging from nature reserves, wilderness areas and national parks to areas managed for sustainable use. Together they offer the traveller the chance to enjoy an incredible variety of landscapes, although infrastructure is often lacking and access may be well off the beaten track. Although China has many World Heritage-listed sites, most of these are for cultural reasons, rather than natural attributes; and some areas in need of protection, such as marine ecosystems, are notably lacking.

While many of the parks are intended for the preservation of endangered plants and animals, don't expect to see any wild animals except for some precocious monkeys at various sacred mountains (although birders will usually find something to look at). And before you pack your hiking gear and binoculars, be prepared to share many of the more popular reserves with expanding commercial development. Tourism is generally welcomed into these reserves with open arms, meaning pricey hotels, more roads, gondolas, hawkers and busloads of tourists. With a little effort, you can often find a less beaten path to escape down, but don't expect utter tranquillity. It's better to take it in your stride and remember that most Chinese visitors won't be up at dawn to see wildlife, so get an early start.

'With a little effort, you can often find a less beaten path to escape down, but don't expect utter tranquillity'

The www.wwfchina.org website has details of the Worldwide Fund for Nature's (WWF) projects for endangered and protected animals in China. You'll also find a kids' page for the budding biologists in the family.



NATURE RESERVES		OTHER PROTECTED AREAS	
Fènghuáng Shān.....	1 D2	Chángbái Shān.....	31 D1
Huá Shān.....	2 C2	Cāohǎi Hú.....	32 C3
Jiānfēnglǐng.....	3 C3	Dìnghú Shān.....	33 C3
Jìgōng Shān.....	4 C2	Dragon Pool.....	34 C3
Jìngpō Hú.....	5 D1	Heaven Lake.....	35 B1
Jiūyúhuá Shān.....	6 C2	Shénnóngjiā.....	36 C2
Kanas Lake.....	7 B1	Wólóng.....	37 B2
Kǒngtóng Shān.....	8 C2	Xīshuāngbǎnà.....	38 B3
Lǎiféng Shān.....	9 B3		
Mèngdǎ.....	10 B2	WORLD HERITAGE SITES	
Nam-tso Lake.....	11 B2	Èméi Shān & Lèshān.....	22 B3
Napa Lake.....	12 B3	Huáng Shān.....	23 D2
Qīngchéng Shān.....	13 B3	Huánglóng.....	24 C2
Qīnghǎi Hú.....	14 B2	Zuǒ Jiāng.....	25 B2
		Qomolonga (Mt Everest).....	15 A3
		Sānchǎhé.....	16 B3
		Three Beaches.....	17 C2
		Wúdǎlián Chí.....	18 D1
		Wútái Shān.....	19 C2
		Wúliánguān.....	29 C3
		Wùyí Shān.....	30 D3

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

As a developing country with rapid industrialisation, it's not surprising that China has some hefty environmental issues to contend with. Unfortunately, China's huge population makes its environmental plights infinitely bigger than those of most other nations. Sometimes astounding levels of industrial pollution render whole cities barely habitable by Western standards, and air pollution, deforestation, endangered species, and rural and industrial waste are all taking their toll.

With the 2008 Olympics and the country's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), China seems to have changed its policy of "industrial catch-up first, environmental clean-up later" to one of tidying up its environmental act now. Nevertheless, analysts continue to point to an impending environmental catastrophe, fearing that the efforts could well be too little, too late.

The impact of China's environmental problems doesn't stop at the country's borders – acid rain, desert sandstorms, and silted and polluted rivers are all too familiar to China's neighbours. Across the north of China, rampaging natural fires are believed to consume more than 200 million tonnes of coal a year, further exacerbating China's contribution to global warming.

China's authoritarian system does yield occasional advantages, however. When the penny finally drops, action can be taken quickly and sometimes effectively to slow or halt environmental degradation, despite having to overcome years of bureaucratic foot-dragging and inertia. In this way the clear-felling of mountain ranges was quickly stopped when it was realised that it led to catastrophic flooding and huge loss of life. Likewise, top-down management can enforce wildlife protection in a way that is lacking at a grass-roots level in rural China.

'China's huge population makes its environmental plights infinitely bigger than those of most other nations'

Energy Use & Air Pollution

Seven of the world's 10 most polluted cities are in China, and some make American cities like Los Angeles look clean in comparison. The problem is worst in winter, when temperature inversion smothers most of the country's major cities under a great canopy of smog. The incredible rise in automobile use and ownership has been partly to blame, but the biggest source of air pollution is coal. It provides some 70% of China's energy needs and around 900 million tonnes of it goes up in smoke yearly. The result is immense damage to air and water quality, agriculture and human health, with acid rain falling on about 30% of the country. Neighbouring Korea and Japan complain about damage to their forests from acid rain that is believed to have come from China, and indeed satellites have detected black, sulphurous clouds drifting out to sea from China and over the Pacific Ocean. As demand quickly outstrips domestic resources of coal, the government has made some efforts to seek out alternative sources of energy. Plans to construct natural gas pipelines are under way and taxes have been introduced on high-sulphur coals.

Desertification

Deforestation and overgrazing have accelerated the desertification of vast areas of China, particularly in the western provinces. Deserts now cover almost one-fifth of the country and China's dustbowl is the largest in the world. The Ministry of Land and Resources says the total area under the threat of desertification may amount to more than a quarter of China's land area. Běijīng itself is threatened by a rolling tide of sand advancing on the capital from the Gobi Desert that is responsible for massive dust storms every spring (see the boxed text, p95). As usual, people are the problem: agricultural reforms which deregulated stocking levels have prompted the overstocking of grazing land with livestock and the resulting unsustainable stripping of vegetation. The government has imposed selective bans on stock levels but, once again, unless these are enforced it may be too little, too late. United Nations experts estimate the annual direct damage to China's economy through desertification at US\$6.5 billion, and the livelihood of some 400 million people is threatened by the encroaching sands of the Gobi, Taklamakan and Kumtag Deserts.

Water & Wetlands

The Grand Canal, once billed as China's third great waterway (after the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers), is the longest artificial canal in the world. It once stretched for 1800km from Hángzhōu in south China to Běijīng in the north. Today, however, most of the Grand Canal is silted over and no longer navigable. Siltation due to deforestation and increased runoff is just one of several problems affecting China's waterways. It is estimated that China annually

'Deforestation and overgrazing have accelerated the desertification of vast areas of China'

TOP NATIONAL PARKS

Reserves	Features	Activities	When to visit	Page
Chángbái Shān	China's largest reserve: cranes, deer, tigers and some 300 medicinal plants	hiking	Jun-early Sep	p380
Éméi Shān	luxuriant scenery along a steep, ancient pilgrim route; monkeys; Buddhist sights	hiking, monastery stays	May-Oct	p769
Jiūzhàigōu	stunning alpine scenery and gem-coloured lakes; takins, golden monkeys	hiking, Tibetan village stays	Jun-Oct	p795
Tài Shān	holy mountain with gobsmacking views; Taoist sights	hiking	May-Oct	p214
Wulingyuan Scenic Area	craggy peaks, waterfalls, caves, subtropical forest	rafting, hiking	Jun-Oct	p515

dumps three billion tonnes of untreated water into the ocean via its rivers, a statement that won't likely shock you if you take a look at some of the water flowing under the bridges as you journey across the country.

China's rivers and wetlands face great pressure from draining and reclamation, as well as pollution from untreated industrial and domestic waste. This poor-quality water, coupled with often acute water shortages, is creating significant environmental health hazards. Some reports suggest that half the population is supplied with polluted water.

Another of China's biggest water problems is that the resource is too cheap and overused by farmers, industry and the general public, but the government is fearful of raising the price. Drought often hits north and west China while northeast and central China are flooded: waste, silting up of riverbeds, overextraction of water and the general abuse of the environment worsen the situation. The communists' cure-all to China's water problems is the damming of the Yangzi River. For more on this monumental project, see p814.

TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

THE GREEN WALL OF CHINA

If you visit Bèijīng in spring and experience the sand storms that send residents rushing around with plastic bags over their heads, you may not be so surprised to hear that the city may one day be swallowed up by the Gobi Desert. Only 150km away, the winds are blowing the sands towards the capital at a rate of 2km a year, with 30m dunes closing in. In their wake, these massive dust storms have left entire towns abandoned and environmental refugees numbering in the millions. They've also brought about bizarre weather effects, such as 'black winds' and 'mud rains', even finding their way across the Pacific to drop grit on Vancouver and bring unreal sunsets to San Francisco.

The problem is overgrazing and deforestation, for every month 200 sq km of arable land in China becomes a desert. China's government has pledged US\$6.8 billion to plant a 'green wall' of millions of trees between Bèijīng and the sands; at 5700km long, it will be longer than the Great Wall of China. Under the scheme, the government pays farmers to plant trees and is claiming a partial victory despite ongoing problems, such as trees dying, over-irrigation, erosion and corruption. China's State Forestry Administration states that desertification has slowed from more than 10,400 sq km annually at the end of the last century to about 3000 sq km since 2001. But while the frequency of sandstorms has apparently decreased since the 1990s, their intensity has increased: one storm in 2006 dumped an estimated 330,000 tonnes of dust on the capital. In 2006 China agreed to work with neighbouring countries to combat desertification in northeast Asia.

Environmental Awareness

China has a long tradition of celebrating nature, from landscape paintings to poems dwelling on the beauty of mountain peaks shrouded in mist. However, today, as in times gone by, the luxury of soliloquising over bounteous nature is afforded to only a few: the vast majority of people are too busy just trying to survive. And as in many nations of the world, the unfortunate corollary of this is that overexploitation of resources by a massive (and growing) population simultaneously destroys the land and environment it needs to survive.

Compelling economic pressure to exploit the environment has been exacerbated by a lack of knowledge on the part of China's citizens who have been given no education or information on ecology. Waking up to this, the government now bombards viewers with green directives on TV, from saving water to planting trees and litter disposal. In the dour 1970s, such environmental concerns were more likely to be dismissed as a bourgeois conspiracy. These days a growing middle class finds itself wooed by advertisements for environmentally friendly washing powders and detergents.

There is legislation to curb the worst excesses of industry, but these laws are rarely enforced. Corrupt officials are partly to blame, but the drag on economic expansion is also cited as a factor. There has been an increase in the severity of penalties for violating China's conservation laws, with the death penalty and life sentences not uncommon. However, there remains little room for robust debate of the issues in the media.

More than 2000 environmental groups have sprung up since the advent of the first environmental NGO (nongovernmental organisation) in China, Friends of Nature, in the mid-1990s. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese now participate in activities ranging from politically 'safe' issues, such as biodiversity protection and environmental education, to cutting-edge environmental activism such as dam protests, energy conservation and the prosecution of polluters through the court system. The government in general tolerates these activities, as it realises that environmental NGOs can fill gaps in official efforts to protect the environment. Although many NGOs are politically savvy, to a great extent they still rely on international funding and may thus attract criticism for being 'directed' by outside agencies.

Roadside billboards proclaiming that 'Wildlife is not food' in English and Chinese are an encouraging sign that attitudes to wildlife conservation are starting to change.

Food & Drink Julie Grundvig

To the Chinese, food is life, health and good fortune. The Chinese live to eat and China's cuisine is as varied as its geography and peoples. Wherever you travel, you'll come across a panoply of different cooking styles and dishes, all making good use of fresh, local ingredients and spices. There's something for everybody, from the peppery flavours of Sichuan to the delicate seasonings of Guangdong. Bring your appetite because when it comes to eating, China will not let you down.

There's a common Chinese saying that goes 'For the people food is their heaven'. This passion for food has shaped Chinese culture, with cooks developing and perfecting their art even in the harshest of living conditions. To save cooking fuel, meat and vegetables were chopped into tiny pieces to ensure faster cooking and dishes were served communally to make sure everyone got something to eat. What has resulted is a triumphant blending of inventiveness, flavour and economy.

In a traditional Chinese meal, grains are always the centrepiece, served with vegetables and soybean products and, if affordable, meat or fish. The Chinese commonly greet each other with the question 'Nǐ chī fàn le ma?' ('Have you eaten yet?'). *Fàn* may be loosely translated as 'grain' – as opposed to *cài*, which literally means 'vegetable' and, by extension, any accompaniment to grain in a meal. The principle that a proper meal is based around a staple grain dates back at least to the Shang dynasty (1700–1100 BC) and remains fundamental to Chinese cuisine wherever it is found.

A well-prepared Chinese dish is expected to appeal to the senses: smell, sight, taste and touch. There's always a blending of Yin and Yang, the principles of balance and harmony – bland dishes paired with strong, crisp dishes paired with soft. The dichotomy between *fàn* and *cài* also shows how Yin and Yang are applied in everyday life. To be more specific, most vegetables and fruits are Yin foods, generally moist or soft, and are meant to have a cooling effect, nurturing the feminine aspect of our nature. Yang foods – fried, spicy or with red meat – are warming and nourish the masculine side of our nature.

China's geographical and climatic differences, together with local cooking styles, have created many different schools of cuisine. Generally, cooking in China is divided into four broad schools, the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern schools, which can be further subdivided into smaller categories. The Chinese sum up their cooking as 'south is sweet, north is salty; east is spicy and west is sour.' It wasn't until China was overrun by the Mongols in the 12th century, when the Song court fled south of the Yangzi River, that these regional schools were codified and developed. Widespread urbanisation, made possible by the commercialisation of agriculture and food distribution, gave rise to the restaurant industry, which in turn facilitated the development of the regional cuisines. Improved communications, notably the building of the Grand Canal to link many of China's innumerable waterways, allowed food to be brought from and supplied to any part of the kingdom.

The most significant development in Chinese cuisine took place in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when crops were introduced from the New World. Maize, sweet potatoes and peanuts – which flourished in climates where rice, wheat and millet wouldn't grow – made life possible in formerly uninhabitable areas. The other significant import from the New World was red chillies, which are not only a spice, but also a concentrated source of vitamins A and C.

Did you know that chilli peppers came to China from Peru and Mexico in the Ming dynasty?

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Eating in China can be an overwhelming experience, especially with the variety of delicious foods to try. With so many regional delicacies, it's truly a gourmand's paradise. In the north, fill up on a tasty dish of wontons (*hùntún*) stuffed with juicy leeks and minced pork, or Mongolian hotpot (*mènggǔ huōguō*), a hearty brew of mutton, onions and cabbage.

When travelling through China's arid northwest, consider trying a bowl of noodles topped with sliced donkey meat (*lǚròu huáng miàn*) or sizzling lamb kebabs (*kǎo yáng ròu*). Make sure to stop in Xī'ān for a warming bowl of mutton broth and shredded flat bread (*yáng ròu pàomó*). The hand-pulled noodles (*lāmiàn*) of Lánzhōu are also a non-miss.

If you're in the mood for something sweet and savoury, head to Shànghǎi for delicious honey-smoked carp (*mìzhī xūnyú*) or a tongue-tingling plate of hot and sour squid (*suānlà yóuyú*). Cleanse your palate with a glass of heady Shàoxing yellow wine (*Shàoxing huángjiǔ*) or the more delicate flavours of Dragonwell tea (*lóngjīng chá*). About to climb the misty peaks of Huángshān? Gear up for your ascent with a dish of Huángshān braised pigeon (*Huángshān zhēnggē*).

For those who like it hot, nothing is better than the fiery flavours of Sichuan. You can start with mouth-numbing tofu (*mǎpó dòufu*), followed up with spicy chicken with peanuts (*gāngbào jīdīng*). If the smoke still isn't coming out of your ears, we dare you to order boiled fish smothered in chilli (*shuǐzhǔ yú*). That'll really get you breathing fire.

In the south, enjoy morning dim sum in Guǎngzhōu or a bowl of Cantonese snake soup (*shé gēng*) in one of the city's boisterous night markets. While in Macau, taste the Macanese dish *porco à alentejana*, a mouthwatering casserole of pork and clams.

And don't forget delectable stinky tofu (*chòu dòufu*) – some say it's the equivalent to European stinky cheese.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

For breakfast, the Chinese generally eat very light. They may have a bowl of rice porridge (*zhōu* or *congee*) often accompanied by pickles and *yóutiáo* (deep-fried dough sticks), along with steamed buns, served plain or with fillings. This is usually washed down with hot soybean milk, sweetened or plain. Other dishes can include rice-noodle soups, boiled eggs, fried peanuts and dumplings.

The Chinese eat lunch between 11.30am and 2pm, many taking their midday meal from any number of small eateries on the streets. For Chinese on the run, lunch and dinner generally consist of rice or noodles, topped with a vegetable and/or some meat. For more formal affairs with family and friends, lunch and dinner usually consist of several meat and vegetable dishes and a soup. Banquets can be overwhelming affairs, with 20- to 30-course dinners being common.

Rice

To the Chinese, rice is a symbol of life itself. There's a saying in Chinese that 'precious things are not pearls or jade but the five grains'. An old legend about the origin of rice claims that rice is actually a gift from the animals. Many centuries ago, China was swept by floods that destroyed all the crops and caused massive starvation. One day, some villagers saw a dog running towards them. On the dog's tail were bunches of long yellow seeds. When the villagers planted the seeds, the rice grew and hunger disappeared.

The Chinese revere rice not only as their staff of life but also for its aesthetic value. Its mellow aroma is not unlike bread. Its texture when properly done – soft yet offering some resistance, the grains detached – sets off the textures of the foods that surround it. Flavours are brought into better focus by its simplicity. Rice is the unifier of the table, bringing all the dishes into harmony. Rice isn't just steamed: it's boiled, stir-fried, roasted and used in everything from noodles to desserts.

A terrific blog dedicated to everything related to Chinese food is at www.eatingchina.com. There's great background on Chinese recipes, tea and holiday foods.

Noodles

Noodles are a staple in the north and eaten there more than rice, which is more commonly eaten in southern China. It's believed that the Chinese have been feasting on noodles for approximately 4000 years. Legend credits Marco Polo with introducing pasta to Italy in 1295.

Noodles can be made by hand or by machine, but many people agree that hand-pulled noodles (*lāmiàn*) are the tastiest. Watching the noodles being made is almost as much of a treat as eating them. First the cook stretches the dough by hand, then shakes it gently up and down and swings it so the dough twists around itself many times until it becomes firm. The dough is pulled and stretched until it becomes very fine.

Regional Cuisines

NORTHERN SCHOOL

In the north, wheat or millet traditionally are eaten rather than rice. The most famous Chinese dish of all, Peking duck, is served with typical northern ingredients: wheat pancakes, spring onions and fermented bean paste. There is a heavy reliance on freshwater fish and chicken in the north; cabbage is ubiquitous and seems to fill any available space on trains, buses and lorries in the winter.

Not surprisingly, the influence of the Mongols is felt most strongly in the north, and two of the region's most famous culinary exports – Mongolian barbecue and Mongolian hotpot – are adaptations from Mongol field kitchens. Animals that were hunted on horseback could be dismembered and cooked with wild vegetables and onions using soldiers' iron shields on top of hot coals as primitive barbecues.

Alternatively, soldiers could use their helmet as a pot, filling it with water, meat, condiments and vegetables to taste. Mutton is now the main ingredient used in Mongolian hotpot.

Roasting was once considered rather barbaric in other parts of China and is still more common in the north. The main methods of cooking in the northern style, though, are steaming, baking and 'explode-frying' (dropping items into a wok of hot oil and having them sizzle or 'explode', like deep-frying). This way, the food cooks very quickly. The last of these is the most common, historically because of the scarcity of fuel and, more recently, due to the introduction of the peanut, which thrives in the north and produces an abundance of oil. Although northern-style food has a reputation for being unsophisticated and bland, it has the benefit of being filling and therefore well suited to the cold climate.

EASTERN SCHOOL

The eastern region – blessed with the bounty of the Yangzi River and its tributaries, a subtropical climate, fertile soil and a coastline – has long been a mecca for gastronomes. The Southern Song capital of Hángzhōu, on the banks of West Lake with abundant fish including the highly esteemed silver carp, is the birthplace of the restaurant industry. At least one restaurant, the Louwailou Restaurant (p321), has been around since 1848. Sūzhōu (p302) is equally famous for its cuisine, which has been eulogised by generations of poets.

A vast variety of ingredients and condiments is available, which has led to a wide diversity of cuisine within the region. Explode-frying is used here, too, but not as much as the form of frying known throughout the world as archetypically Chinese: stir-frying in a wok. Another eastern style of cooking that has been exported to the rest of the world (from Fújiàn via Taiwan) is the red-stew, in which meat is simmered slowly in dark soy sauce, sugar

In 2005 the remains of a 4000-year-old noodle dish were discovered in an upturned pot next to China's Yellow River.

and spices. Indeed, many Fújiàn dishes rely on a heavy, meaty stock for their distinctive flavour. Nonetheless, it is in this region that Chinese vegetarian cuisine reached its apex, partly thanks to the availability of fresh ingredients and partly to the specialisation of generations of chefs. As might be expected, seasoning is light to allow the natural flavours of the fresh ingredients to be fully appreciated.

WESTERN SCHOOL

The Western school is renowned most for its use of the red chilli, introduced by Spanish traders in the early Qing dynasty. While northern foods evolved to provide lasting satisfaction in a cold climate, Sichuān dishes tend to dry out the body through perspiration, which helps it adjust to the intense humidity.

Pork, poultry, legumes and soya beans are the most commonly used items, supplemented by a variety of wild condiments and mountain products, such as mushrooms and other fungi, as well as bamboo shoots. Seasonings are heavy: the red chilli is often used in conjunction with Sichuān peppercorns, garlic, ginger and onions. Meat, particularly in Húnán, is marinated, pickled or otherwise processed before cooking, which is generally by stir- or explode-frying.

The cuisine of the Western school has a reputation of being down-to-earth, rather like the inhabitants of the region. Mao Zedong hailed from Húnán and remained fond of the hot foods from his native province throughout his life. However, it was due to the Nationalists in the civil war that Sichuān cuisine gained international recognition. Fleeing the Japanese in 1937, the Nationalist government took refuge in Chóngqing until the end of the war in Asia. On its return to Nánjing and Shànghǎi, thousands of Sichuān chefs were brought along. Most of them continued on to Taiwan when the Nationalist government was forced to flee once more, and from there spread out across the globe.

SOUTHERN SCHOOL

The food from this region is easily the most common form of Chinese food found in the Western world since most overseas Chinese have their roots in the Guǎngdōng region. The humid climate and heavy rainfall mean that rice has been a staple here since the Chinese first came to the region in the Han era (206 BC–AD 220). The Southern school also benefits from a cornucopia of ingredients to choose from, although the choice is even more exotic than that of the Eastern school. Stir-frying is by far the most favoured method of cooking, closely followed by steaming. Dim sum, now a worldwide Sunday institution, originated in this region; to go *yum cha* (Cantonese for 'drink tea') still provides most overseas Chinese communities with the opportunity to get together at the weekend.

Not only are the ingredients more varied than elsewhere in China, methods of preparation also reach their peak of sophistication in the south, where the appearance and texture of foods are prized alongside their freshness. Such refinement is a far cry from the austere cuisine of the north and the earthy fare of the west. Consequently, the southerners' gourmandising and exotic tastes – for dogs, cats, raccoons, monkeys, lizards and rats – have earned them a long-established reputation around China.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Tea is *the* national drink in China and when visiting a restaurant the first thing you'll be asked is '*hé shénme chá?*' ('what kind of tea do you want?'). In cheaper

At <http://www.china-vista.com/culture/cuisine/recipes.html> there is a great collection of Chinese recipes divided by province. If you want to make your own Peking duck, come here!

A NICE CUP OF TEA

Tea is a fundamental part of Chinese life. In fact, an old Chinese saying identifies tea as one of the seven basic necessities of life, along with fuel, oil, rice, salt, soy sauce and vinegar. The Chinese were the first to cultivate tea, and the art of brewing and drinking tea has been popular since the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907).

China has three main types of tea: green tea (*lǜ chá*), black tea (*hóng chá*) and *wūlóng* (a semifermented tea, halfway between black and green tea). In addition, there are other variations, including jasmine (*mòlǐhúachá*) and chrysanthemum (*júhuā chá*). Some famous regional teas of China are Fújiàn's *tiě guānyīn*, pú'ěr from Yúnnán and Zhèjiāng's *lóngjīng* tea. Eight-treasure tea (*bābǎo chá*) consists of rock sugar, dates, nuts and tea combined in a cup and makes a delicious treat. Tea is to the Chinese what fine wine is to the French, a beloved beverage savoured for its fine aroma, distinctive flavour and pleasing aftertaste.

restaurants you'll be served on-the-house pots of weak jasmine or green tea but in more expensive places you have a choice of higher-quality (and higher priced) brands. You can also buy tea in tea shops or in supermarkets.

Traditionally, Chinese would never put milk or sugar in their tea but things are changing. Now 'milk tea' (*nǎi chá*) is available everywhere in China, often served as a sweet treat. There's also what some call 'Hong Kong' tea, which is (believe it or not) coffee brewed with a heart-stopping amount of sugar, tea and milk. Modern, trendy teahouses are springing up all over China and are a popular place for young urbanites to socialise.

Coffee house chic has hit China in a big way and Western-style coffee houses can be found everywhere. The coffee chain Starbucks has become fashionable for trendy youth with money to burn. There are also local chains that can brew up a cup of semi-decent coffee for about Y10 to Y20, depending upon the establishment.

Soft drinks such as Sprite and Coca-Cola are easily found, along with ice tea and fruit drinks. Bottled water is on sale all over the place but check the cap before buying to see if it's sealed.

Milk is available fresh or powdered from supermarkets and convenience stores. Popular are sweet yogurt drinks in bottles sold in stores or fresh yogurt sold at some street stalls.

Alcoholic Drinks

If tea is the most popular drink in China, then beer must be number two. By any standards the top brands are good. The best known is Tsingtao, made with a mineral water that gives it a sparkling quality. It's essentially a German beer since the town of Qīngdǎo (formerly spelled 'Tsingtao'), where it's made, was once a German concession and the Chinese inherited the brewery (p226). Experts claim that draft Tsingtao tastes much better than the bottled stuff. A bottle will normally cost Y1.50 to Y2 in street shops, around Y15 to Y20 in a bar.

China has cultivated vines and produced wine for an estimated 4000 years. The word 'wine' gets rather loosely translated – many Chinese 'wines' are in fact spirits. Rice wine is intended mainly for cooking rather than drinking. Chinese wine-producing techniques differ from those of the West. Western producers try to prevent oxidation in their wines, but oxidation produces a flavour that Chinese tipplers find desirable and go to great lengths to achieve. Chinese diners are also keen on wines with different herbs and other materials soaked in them, which they drink for their health and for restorative or aphrodisiac qualities.

Wine with dead bees, pickled snakes or lizards is desirable for its alleged tonic properties – in general, the more poisonous the creature, the more

potent the tonic's effects. *Maotai*, a favourite of Chinese drinkers, is a spirit made from sorghum (a type of millet) and used for toasts at banquets.

CELEBRATIONS

Holidays

Food plays a major role in Chinese holidays. For many Chinese, the appearance of a food is symbolic. Chinese like to eat noodles on birthdays and on the New Year (p944) because their long thin shape symbolises longevity. That's why it's bad luck to break the noodles before cooking them. During the Chinese New Year, it's common to serve a whole chicken because it resembles family unity. Clams and spring rolls are also served during New Year festivities because their shapes represent wealth: clams resemble bullion and spring rolls are shaped like bars of gold.

Fish also plays an important role during New Year celebrations. The word for fish, *yú*, sounds similar to the word for abundance. It's customary to serve a fish at the end of the evening meal, symbolising a wish for prosperity in the coming year.

Certain holiday foods stem from legends. For example, the tradition of eating moon cakes (*yuè bǐng*), a sweet cake filled with sesame seeds, lotus seeds, dates and other fillings during China's Mid-Autumn Festival (p945), is based on a story from the 14th century. Supposedly, when China was battling the Mongol invasions, a certain general had a plan to take back Mongol-held territory. He dressed up as a Taoist priest, entered the city and distributed moon cakes to the populace. Hidden within the cakes were notes instructing the people to revolt and overthrow the Mongols to retake their city. The people did as instructed and threw the Mongols out.

Zongzi (dumplings made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves) are eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival (p945) and have a very long history in China. According to legend, such dumplings were thrown into the river as fish food to keep them from eating the body of Qu Yuan (p75), a poet who committed suicide during the Warring States period (475–221 BC). Now the dumplings are eaten throughout China as well as Southeast Asia.

Banquets

The banquet is the apex of the Chinese dining experience. Virtually all significant business deals in China are clinched at the banquet table.

Dishes are served in sequence, beginning with cold appetisers and continuing through 10 or more courses. Soup, usually a thin broth to aid digestion, is generally served after the main course.

The idea is to serve or order far more than everyone can eat. Empty bowls imply a stingy host. Rice is considered a cheap filler and rarely appears at a banquet – don't ask for it, as this would imply that the snacks and main courses are insufficient, causing embarrassment to the host.

It's best to wait for some signal from the host before digging in. You will most likely be invited to take the first taste. Often your host will serve it to you, placing a piece of meat, chicken or fish in your bowl. If a whole fish is served, you might be offered the head, the cheeks of which are considered to be the tastiest part. Try to take at least a taste of what is given to you.

Never drink alone. Imbibing is conducted via toasts, which will usually commence with a general toast by the host, followed by the main guest reply toast, and then settle down to frequent toasts to individuals. A toast is conducted by raising your glass in both hands in the direction of the toastee and crying out '*gānbēi*', literally 'dry the glass'. Chinese do not clink glasses. Drain your glass in one hit. It is not unusual for everyone to end up very drunk, though at very formal banquets this is frowned upon.

Did you know that tea was once used as a form of currency in China?

The delightful children's book *Moonbeams, Dumplings & Dragon Boats* by Nina Simonds and Leslie Swartz (Harcourt, 2002) is filled with recipes from Chinese holidays, including how to make your own moon cakes and dumplings.

Don't be late for a formal banquet; it's considered extremely rude. The banquet ends when the food and toasts end – the Chinese don't linger after the meal. You may find yourself being applauded when you enter a large banquet. It is polite to applaud back.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

It's hard to go hungry in China as just about everywhere you go there will be myriad food options to suit most budgets. The word *fàndiàn* usually refers to a large-scale restaurant that may or may not offer lodging. A *cānguǎn* is generally a smaller restaurant that specialises in one particular type of food. The most informal type of restaurant is the *cāntīng*, which has low-end prices, though the quality of the food can be quite high.

Breakfast is served early in China, mainly between 6am and 9am. In larger cities many restaurants serving lunch and dinner open from 11am to 2pm, reopen around 5pm and close at 9pm. In smaller cities, restaurants may close as early as 8pm. Some street stalls stay open 24 hours.

Tourist-friendly restaurants can be found around tourist sights and often have English signs and menus. Sometimes food can be quite overpriced and geared towards foreign tastes. It's easy to find restaurants that cater to Chinese clientele – just look for noisy, crowded places, the noisier the better. These restaurants may not have English menus but it's OK to look at what other people are having and indicate to the wait staff what you want by pointing. You can also use the Menu Decoder (p106).

Eating solo in China can be a lonely experience, since Chinese food is meant to be shared by groups of people. Larger restaurants cater to groups of people and portions may be too large for someone dining solo. Smaller restaurants off the main streets are more welcoming, though the menus can be repetitious. For variety, solo travellers can try eating at any of the growing number of cafés and family-style restaurants that offer set meals, usually a main course served with salad and soup, at very reasonable prices. Self-serve cafeterias (*zìzhù cān*) are another option and offer plenty of meat and vegetable dishes to choose from.

Hotels in larger cities often serve high-end regional dishes and international food, everything from Indian to French cuisine.

Quick Eats

Eating in China's bustling night markets is an experience not to be missed. Some of the country's best treats can be sampled in the markets, making them a gourmet's paradise. Hygiene is always a question, so make sure to eat only at the busiest of places to avoid getting sick.

Dumplings (*jiǎozi*) are a popular snack item in China and a delicious, inexpensive way to fill up. They're best described as Chinese ravioli, stuffed with meat, spring onion and greens. They are sometimes served by the bowl in a soup, sometimes dry by weight (250g or half a *jin* is normally enough). Locals mix chilli (*làjiāo*), vinegar (*cù*) and soy sauce (*jiàngyóu*) in a little bowl according to taste and dip the dumpling in. Dumplings are often created by family minifactories – one stretches the pastry, another makes the filling and a third spoons the filling into the pastry, finishing with a little twist.

Other street snacks include fried tofu, tea eggs (soaked in soy sauce) and baked sweet potatoes, which can be bought by weight.

In addition to the markets, there are innumerable snack stalls set up around markets, train stations and bus stations. These are the places to grab something on the run, including *bāozi*, steamed buns stuffed with meat or vegetables, as well as grilled corn, mutton kebabs, noodles and plenty of regional specialities.

DUMPLINGS, UNWRAPPED

There's an old saying that 'Nothing tastes better than dumplings'. In fact, the Chinese have been eating this tasty home-style food since the Han dynasty! Dumplings have traditionally been eaten during Chinese New Year, their half-moon shape thought to resemble ancient gold ingots and bring good luck. The word *jiǎozi* (dumpling) can be translated as 'saying goodbye to the past and welcoming the new'. Nowadays, you can get them at any time of year but they're most popular in the north. Try this recipe for your own version of this tasty dish.

Chinese Dumplings

(makes 35-40 dumplings)

1 pack dumpling wrappers
300g (10oz) ground pork
150g (5oz) minced Napa cabbage
2 bunches minced coriander
1 bunch minced green onions
100g (3½oz) chopped ginger
2 cloves finely chopped garlic
20ml (1 tbsp) dark soy sauce
20ml (1 tbsp) sesame oil

Sauce

80ml (4 tbsp) light soy sauce
20ml (1 tbsp) sesame oil
20ml (1 tbsp) vinegar
Chilli oil to taste
2 cloves chopped garlic

- Combine the ingredients for the filling.
- Moisten the edges of a dumpling wrap and put a small amount of filling in the centre.
- Fold the wrap over and pinch together in a crescent shape, making a tight seal.
- Place the dumplings one at a time into a large pot of boiling water. When the water comes to a hard boil, pour in one cup of cold water. Wait for the water to come to a boil again and repeat with the cold water. Do this one more time. When the dumplings rise to the top, drain and transfer to a large plate. Don't overcook or the dumplings will fall apart.
- Mix all the ingredients together for the sauce and serve in small, individual bowls.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegetarianism in China can be traced back over 1000 years. The Tang dynasty physician Sun Simiao extolled the virtues of vegetarianism in his 60-volume classic, *Prescriptions Worth More Than Gold*. Legend has it that Sun lived to the ripe old age of 101.

Because of China's history of poverty and famine, eating meat is a status symbol, symbolic of health and wealth. Many Chinese remember all too well the famines of the 1950s and 1960s when having anything to eat at all was a luxury. Eating meat (as well as milk and eggs) is a sign of progress and material abundance. Even vegetables are often fried in animal-based oils, and soups are most commonly made with chicken or beef stock.

In larger cities such as Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu and Hong Kong, vegetarianism is slowly catching on and there are new chic vegetarian eateries appearing in fashionable restaurant districts. These are often pricey establishments and you pay for ambience as well as the food.

The fast food industry in China is increasing by 20% annually.

Chinese vegetarian food often consists of ‘mock meat’ dishes, which are made from tofu, wheat gluten and vegetables. Some of the dishes are quite fantastic to look at, with vegetarian ingredients sculpted to look like spare ribs or fried chicken. Sometimes the chefs go to great lengths to even create ‘bones’ from carrots and lotus roots. Some of the more famous vegetarian dishes include vegetarian ‘ham’, braised vegetarian ‘shrimp’ and sweet-and-sour ‘fish’.

Buddhist temples often have their own vegetarian restaurants where you can fill up on a delicious vegetarian meal quite cheaply.

EATING WITH KIDS

Eating out with children in China can be a challenge. Budget eateries won’t have special menus for children nor will they supply booster seats. Higher-end restaurants may be able to offer these things but it’s best to check in advance. On the up side, in larger cities there are now more family-style restaurants that offer set meals and cater to families. Some of these places have special meals for children, usually consisting of fried chicken or fish. Fast-food restaurants are another option that offer a kid-friendly atmosphere.

Supermarkets in China sell Western baby formula and baby foods, as well as infant cereals. For more information on children see p937.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Chinese dining habits reflect traditional Chinese values that cherish close family ties and friendships. Eating communally is a way to celebrate togetherness and create an atmosphere of warmth and congeniality.

Restaurants in China are noisy, crowded places, where people come to relax and get away from the pressures of work and school. While friends in the West go out for a beer, the Chinese will opt for a ‘hot and noisy’ meal, which is sometimes punctuated with increasingly vociferous shots of spirits.

Typically, the Chinese sit at a round table and order dishes from which everyone partakes; ordering a dish just for yourself would be unthinkable. It’s not unusual for one person at the table to order on everyone’s behalf. Usually among friends only several dishes will be ordered but if guests are present, the host will order at least one dish per person, possibly more. At formal dinners, be prepared for a staggering amount of food, far more than anyone could eat.

Epicureans will tell you that the key to ordering is to get a balance of textures, tastes, smells, colours and even temperatures. Most Chinese meals start with some snacks, perhaps some peanuts or pickles. Following the little tidbits are the main courses, usually some meat and vegetable dishes. Soup is often served at the end of the meal (except in Guǎngdōng where it’s served first) as well as noodles or rice.

Traditionally, the Chinese had a number of taboos regarding table etiquette. Nowadays, these rules are much more relaxed and foreigners are given special allowances for social gaffes. However, there are some basic rules to follow when eating with Chinese friends or colleagues that will make things at the table go more smoothly.

Everyone gets an individual bowl and a small plate and tea cup. It’s quite acceptable to hold the bowl close to your lips and shovel the contents into your mouth with chopsticks. If the food contains bones or seeds, just put them out on the tablecloth or in a dish reserved for this purpose. Restaurants are prepared for the mess and staff change the tablecloth after each customer leaves.

EATING DOS & DON’TS

- Don’t wave your chopsticks around or point them at people. This is considered rude.
- Don’t drum your chopsticks on the sides of your bowl – only beggars do this.
- Never commit the terrible faux pas of sticking your chopsticks into your rice. Two chopsticks stuck vertically into a rice bowl resemble incense sticks in a bowl of ashes, which is considered an omen of death.
- Don’t discuss business or unpleasant topics at dinner.
- Don’t let the spout of a teapot face towards anyone. Make sure it is directed outward from the table or to where nobody is sitting.
- Never flip a fish over to get to the flesh underneath. If you do so, the next boat you pass will capsize.

Chopstick skills are a necessary means of survival when eating out in China. Don’t despair if at first much of the food lands on the table or in your lap and not in your bowl. Eating this way takes practice and most Chinese are pretty understanding when it comes to foreigners and chopstick problems.

When eating from communal dishes, don’t use your chopsticks to root around in a dish for a piece of food. Find a piece by sight and go directly for it without touching anything else. And remember that while dropping food is OK, be sure to never drop your chopsticks as this is considered bad luck.

Most Chinese think little of sticking their own chopsticks into a communal dish, though this attitude is changing because of SARS. Most high-end restaurants now provide separate serving spoons or chopsticks to be used with communal dishes. If these are provided, make sure to use them. You should never use a personal spoon to serve from a communal plate or bowl.

Don’t be surprised if your Chinese host uses their chopsticks to place food in your bowl or plate. This is a sign of friendship and the polite thing to do is to smile and eat whatever has been given you. If for some reason you can’t eat it, leave it in your bowl or hide it with rice.

Remember to fill your neighbours’ tea cups when they are empty, as yours will be filled by them. You can thank the pourer by tapping two fingers on the table gently. On no account serve yourself tea without serving others first. When your teapot needs a refill, signal this to the waiter by taking the lid off the pot.

Probably the most important piece of etiquette comes with the bill: the person who extended the dinner invitation is presumed to pay, though everyone at the table will put up a fight. Don’t argue too hard; it’s expected that at a certain point in the future the meal will be reciprocated. Tipping is not the norm in China.

COOKING COURSES

Some Western tour operators offer ‘culinary tours’ of China that give visitors the opportunity to try their hand at Chinese cooking. Travellers have recommended the tour ‘China Gourmet Traveller’ offered by Intrepid Tours. The 15-day journey takes you through Shànghǎi, Xī’an, Běijīng, Hong Kong and Yángshuò where you can try a variety of regional dishes as well as participate in cooking classes. Check out Intrepid’s website at www.intrepidtravel.com.

Some Chinese believe eating pigs’ feet regularly will slow down the aging process.

Daughter of Heaven, A Memoir with Earthly Recipes by Leslie Li (Time Warner, 2005) is the story of a Chinese-American woman and her grandmother, whose cooking shapes the most significant events in her childhood.

EAT YOUR WORDS

See the Language chapter (p985) for pronunciation guidelines.

Useful Words & Phrases

I'm vegetarian.	<i>Wó chī sù.</i>
I don't want MSG.	<i>Wó bú yào wèijīng.</i>
Let's eat!	<i>Chī fàn!</i>
Not too spicy.	<i>Bù yào tài là.</i>
Cheers!	<i>Gānbēi!</i>
chopsticks	<i>kuàizi</i>
fork	<i>chāzi</i>
hot	<i>rède</i>
ice cold	<i>bīngde</i>
knife	<i>dàozǐ</i>
menu	<i>càidān</i>
set meal (no menu)	<i>tàocān</i>
spoon	<i>tiáogēng/tāngchí/sháozi</i>
bill (check)	<i>mǎidān/jiézhang</i>

我吃素
我不要味精
吃饭
不要太辣
干杯
筷子
叉子
热的
冰的
刀子
菜单
套餐
调羹/汤匙/勺子
买单/结账

Menu Decoder**NORTHERN SCHOOL**

<i>Běijīng kǎoyā</i>	北京烤鸭	Peking duck
<i>jiāo zhá yáng ròu</i>	焦炸羊肉	deep-fried mutton
<i>jiǔ zhuǎn dàcháng</i>	九转大肠	spicy braised pig's intestine
<i>qīng xiāng shāo jī</i>	清香烧鸡	chicken wrapped in lotus leaf
<i>sān měi dòufu</i>	三美豆腐	sliced bean curd with Chinese cabbage
<i>shuàn yáng ròu</i>	涮羊肉	lamb hotpot
<i>sì xǐ wánzi</i>	四喜丸子	steamed and fried pork, shrimp and bamboo shoot balls
<i>yuán bào lì jī</i>	芫爆里脊	stir-fried pork tenderloin with coriander
<i>zào liū sān bái</i>	糟溜三白	stir-fried chicken, fish and bamboo shoots

EASTERN SCHOOL

<i>jiāng cōng cháo xié</i>	姜葱炒蟹	stir-fried crab with ginger and scallions
<i>mìzhī xūnyú</i>	蜜汁熏鱼	honey-smoked carp
<i>níng shì shànyú</i>	宁式鳊鱼	stir-fried eel with onion
<i>qiézhī yúkuài</i>	茄汁鱼块	fish fillet in tomato sauce
<i>qīng zhēng guìyú</i>	清蒸鳊鱼	steamed Mandarin fish
<i>sōngzǐ guìyú</i>	松子鳊鱼	Mandarin fish with pine nuts
<i>suānlà yóuyú</i>	酸辣鱿鱼	hot-and-sour squid
<i>yóubào xiārén</i>	油爆虾仁	fried shrimp
<i>zhá hēi liúyú</i>	炸黑鲤鱼	fried black carp
<i>zhá yúwán</i>	炸鱼丸	fish balls

WESTERN SCHOOL

<i>bàngàng jī</i>	棒棒鸡	shredded chicken in a hot pepper and sesame sauce
<i>dàsuàn shàn duàn</i>	大蒜鳝段	stewed eel with garlic
<i>gānshāo yán lí</i>	干烧岩鲤	stewed carp with ham and hot-and-sweet sauce
<i>gōngbào jīdīng</i>	宫爆鸡丁	spicy chicken with peanuts

<i>huíguō ròu</i>	回锅肉	boiled and stir-fried pork with salty and hot sauce
<i>málà dòufu</i>	麻辣豆腐	spicy tofu
<i>shuǐ zhǔ niúròu</i>	水煮牛肉	fried and boiled beef, garlic sprouts and celery
<i>yúxiāng ròusī</i>	鱼香肉丝	'fish-resembling' meat
<i>zhàcài ròusī</i>	榨菜肉丝	stir-fried pork or beef tenderloin with tuber mustard
<i>zhāngchá yā</i>	樟茶鸭	camphor tea duck

SOUTHERN SCHOOL

<i>bái zhuó xiā</i>	白灼虾	blanched prawns with shredded scallions
<i>dōngjiāng yánjú jī</i>	东江盐焗鸡	salt-baked chicken
<i>gāilǐ jī</i>	咖喱鸡	curried chicken
<i>háoyóu niúròu</i>	蚝油牛肉	beef with oyster sauce
<i>kāo rǔzhū</i>	烤乳猪	crispy suckling pig
<i>mì zhī chāshāo</i>	蜜汁叉烧	roast pork with honey
<i>shé ròu</i>	蛇肉	snake
<i>tángcù lǐjī/gǔlǎo ròu</i>	糖醋里脊/咕佬肉	sweet-and-sour pork fillets
<i>tángcù páigǔ</i>	糖醋排骨	sweet-and-sour spare ribs

Food Glossary**COOKING TERMS**

<i>chǎo</i>	炒	fry
<i>hóngshāo</i>	红烧	red-cooked (stewed in soy sauce)
<i>kǎo</i>	烤	roast
<i>yóujiān</i>	油煎	deep-fry
<i>zhēng</i>	蒸	steam
<i>zhǔ</i>	煮	boil

RICE DISHES

<i>jīchǎofàn</i>	鸡炒饭	fried rice with chicken
<i>jīdàn chǎofàn</i>	鸡蛋炒饭	fried rice with egg
<i>jīdàn mǐfàn</i>	米饭	steamed white rice
<i>shūcài chǎofàn</i>	蔬菜炒饭	fried rice with vegetables
<i>xīfàn; zhōu</i>	稀饭; 粥	watery rice porridge (<i>congee</i>)

NOODLE DISHES

<i>húntún miàn</i>	馄饨面	wontons and noodles
<i>jīsī chǎomiàn</i>	鸡丝炒面	fried noodles with chicken
<i>jīsī tāngmiàn</i>	鸡丝汤面	soupy noodles with chicken
<i>májiàng miàn</i>	麻酱面	sesame paste noodles
<i>niúròu chǎomiàn</i>	牛肉炒面	fried noodles with beef
<i>niúròu miàn</i>	牛肉汤面	soupy beef noodles
<i>ròusī chǎomiàn</i>	肉丝炒面	fried noodles with pork
<i>shūcài chǎomiàn</i>	蔬菜炒面	fried noodles with vegetables
<i>tāngmiàn</i>	汤面	noodles in soup
<i>xiārén chǎomiàn</i>	虾仁炒面	fried noodles with shrimp
<i>zhájiàng miàn</i>	炸酱面	bean and meat noodles

BREAD, BUNS & DUMPLINGS

<i>cōngyóu bǐng</i>	葱油饼	spring onion pancakes
<i>guōtiē</i>	锅贴	pot stickers/pan-grilled dumplings
<i>mántou</i>	馒头	steamed buns

ròu bāozi
shāo bǐng
shuǐjiān bāo
shuǐjiǎo
sùcài bāozi

肉包子
烧饼
水煎包
水餃
素菜包子

SOUP

húntún tāng
sān xiān tāng
suānlà tāng

馄饨汤
三鲜汤
酸辣汤

BEEF DISHES

gānbǎn niúròu sī
háoyóu niúròu
hóngshāo niúròu
niúròu fàn
tiěbǎn niúròu

干煸牛肉丝
蚝油牛肉
红烧牛肉
牛肉饭
铁板牛肉

CHICKEN & DUCK DISHES

háoyóu jīkuài
hóngshāo jīkuài
jītǔi fàn
níngméng jī
tángcù jīdīng
yāoguǒ jīdīng
yāròu fàn

蚝油鸡块
红烧鸡块
鸡腿饭
柠檬鸡
糖醋鸡丁
腰果鸡丁
鸭肉饭

PORK DISHES

biǎndòu ròusī
gūlǔ ròu
guōbā ròupiàn
háoyóu ròusī
jiāngbào ròudīng
jīngjiàng ròusī
mù'ěr ròu
páigǔ fàn
qīngjiāo ròu piàn
yángcōng chǎo ròupiàn

扁豆肉丝
咕嚕肉
锅巴肉片
蚝油肉丝
酱爆肉丁
京酱肉丝
木耳肉
排骨饭
青椒肉片
洋葱炒肉片

SEAFOOD DISHES

gēli
gōngbào xiārén
háo
hóngshāo yú
lóngxiā
pángxiè
yóuyú
zhāngyú

蛤蜊
宫爆虾仁
蚝
红烧鱼
龙虾
螃蟹
鱿鱼
章鱼

VEGETABLE & BEAN CURD DISHES

báicài xiān shuānggū
cuìpí dòufu
hēimù'ěr mèn dòufu

白菜鲜双菇
脆皮豆腐
黑木耳焖豆腐

hóngshāo qiézi

红烧茄子

steamed meat buns
clay-oven rolls
pan-grilled buns
boiled dumplings
steamed vegetable buns

wonton soup
three kinds of seafood soup
hot-and-sour soup

stir-fried beef and chilli
beef with oyster sauce
beef braised in soy sauce
beef with rice
sizzling beef platter

diced chicken in oyster sauce
chicken braised in soy sauce
chicken leg with rice
lemon chicken
sweet-and-sour chicken
chicken and cashews
duck with rice

shredded pork and green beans
sweet-and-sour pork
pork and sizzling rice crust
pork with oyster sauce
diced pork with soy sauce
pork cooked with soy sauce
wood-ear mushrooms and pork
pork chop with rice
pork and green peppers
pork and fried onions

clams
diced shrimp with peanuts
oysters
fish braised in soy sauce
lobster
crab
squid
octopus

bok choy and mushrooms
crispy skin bean curd
bean curd with wood-ear
mushrooms
red-cooked aubergine

jiācháng dòufu
jiāngzhī qīngdòu
lúshuǐ dòufu
shāguǒ dòufu
sùchǎo biǎndòu
sùchǎo sùcài
tángcù ǒubǐng
yúxiāng qiézi

家常豆腐
姜汁青豆
卤水豆腐
砂锅豆腐
素炒扁豆
素炒素菜
糖醋藕饼
鱼香茄子

FRUIT

bāilè
fēnglí
gānzè
lí
lǐzhī
lóngyǎn
mángguǒ
píngguǒ
pútáo
xiāngjiāo
xigūa

芭乐
凤梨
甘蔗
梨
荔枝
龙眼
芒果
苹果
葡萄
香蕉
西瓜

DRINKS

bái pútáo jiǔ
báijiǔ
chá
dòujiāng
hóng pútáo jiǔ
kāfēi
kāi shuǐ
kěkǒu kělè
kuànguān shuǐ
mǐjiǔ
nǎijīng
niú'nǎi
pǐjiǔ
qìshuǐ
suānnǎi
yēzi zhī

白葡萄酒
白酒
茶
豆浆
红葡萄酒
咖啡
开水
可口可乐
矿泉水
米酒
奶精
牛奶
啤酒
汽水
酸奶
椰子汁

'home-style' tofu
string beans with ginger
smoked bean curd
clay pot bean curd
garlic beans
fried vegetables
sweet-and-sour lotus root cakes
'fish-resembling' aubergine

guava
pineapple
sugar cane
pear
lychee
'dragon eyes'
mango
apple
grape
banana
watermelon

white wine
Chinese spirits
tea
soya bean milk
red wine
coffee
water (boiled)
Coca-Cola
mineral water
rice wine
coffee creamer
milk
beer
soft drink (soda)
yogurt
coconut juice

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