

## Chinese history

Primitive men lived in China about 1.7 million years ago. Historical research has produced evidence that approximately 400,000 to 500,000 years ago the famous Beijing Man could make and use simple tools and knew how to use and control fire.

The Xia dynasty (21<sup>st</sup>—16<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) saw the first introduction in Chinese history of the slave system. In the dynasties after the Xia, that is the Shang (16<sup>th</sup>---11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) and the Western Zhou (11<sup>th</sup> century to 770 BC), a slave society was firmly established. Then came the transitional phase from slave to feudal society in the Spring and Autumn Period(770 –476BC), when the princely rival states were fighting for supremacy. The state of Qin unified China in 221 BC, and established the first centralized, multi-national feudal state. In the 2000 years that followed, peasant uprisings brought about the rise and fall of dynasty after dynasty. The cycle of China's feudal society began to decay in the Ming and mid-Qing dynasties(1368--1840). In short, up to the Opium War in 1840, for more than 2000 years China remained a feudal society.

The history of modern China begins with the Opium War in 1840. Subsequent invasions by the imperialist powers gradually reduce china to the status of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal

country. The Chinese people began a long and courageous struggle against the oppression of feudalism and foreign aggression. The 1911 Revolution overthrew the Qing dynasty and ended the autocratic feudal rule, but failed to liberate China from the heavy burdens of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism that weighed down on the people's shoulders. The Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1921, and finally led the people to victory with the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. The coming of socialism has transformed the face of ancient China and turned over a new page in the long history.

### Geography of China

The People's Republic of China lies in East Asia on the western Pacific coast. Its area of 96 million square kilometers is almost as large as the entire European continent. The national inland boundaries total over 20,000 kilometers, with over 18,000 kilometers of coastline. There are more than 5,000 islands in its vast territorial waters, the largest being Taiwan and the second largest, Hainan. In the extreme south are the South China Sea Islands.

The land descends from the west to the east like a flight of

stairs. The highest step is the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which averages over 4000 meters above sea level. The world's highest peak, Mt. Qomolangma, towers over the China—Nepal border at 8,848 meters. East of the Plateau the topography suddenly drops to 1000—2000 meters. This second step is characterized by highlands alternating with basins. The third step stretches right down to the sea coast, with hills and plains averaging 500 meters above sea level. Still further east lies the continental shelf.

China's geography is extremely varied and complex, including mountains, plateaus, plains, grasslands, basins, hills, islands, desert, glaciers, and frozen earth. Mountain areas cover about two-thirds of the total land area. There are more than 1500 large rivers, the principal ones being the Changjiang (Yangzi River 6300 kilometers), the Huanghe (Yellow River 5464 kilometers), the Heilongjiang River and the Zhujiang River. China has 370 large lakes, of which the chief fresh-water lakes are Boyang, Dongting, Hongze and Taihu. Lake Qinghai is the largest salt-water lake.

The climate is varied, ranging from sub-arctic to temperate to tropical. However, the greater part of China is in the temperate zone, with four clearly-defined seasons.