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China



Written by Amanda Johnson

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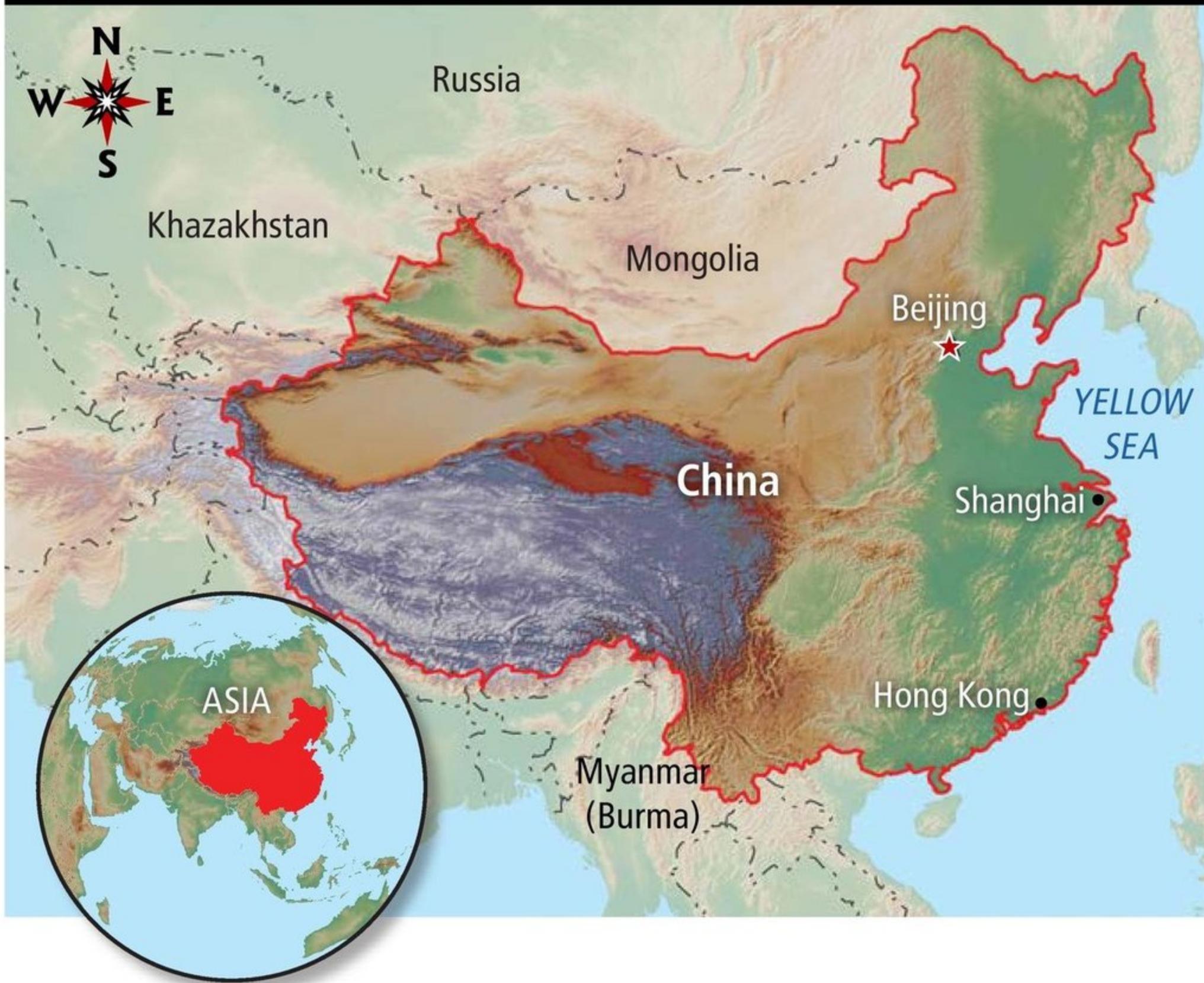


Beijing

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China



Where Is It?

The People's Republic of China—one of the largest countries in the world—covers a significant part of the Asian continent. With more than 9.5 million square kilometers (3.4 million sq. mi.) of land, China is almost as large as the entire continent of Europe. Along its borders lie many other countries, including Russia, India, North Korea, and Vietnam.

In all, China has about 14,500 kilometers (9,000 mi.) of coastline. The East and South China Seas border the eastern and southeastern edge of the mainland.

China has several large cities, including Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai. Beijing, the capital city, is more than three thousand years old, making it one of the world's oldest cities.

Today Beijing is a mix of the ancient and the modern. Skyscrapers, subways, and fast-food restaurants give the city its modern character as they stand beside ancient structures, including **temples**, monuments, and courtyards. The Forbidden City, a massive palace built during the fifteenth century, was the home of Chinese emperors for hundreds of years. The name comes from the fact that only the emperor could enter every room in it. Today, the palace is a museum.

Located on the coast of the East China Sea, Shanghai is China's largest city, its largest **industrial** center, and one of the world's largest ports. Great numbers of people move there each year to work, contributing to the population of more than twenty million people. As many as 50,000 people per square kilometer (125,000 people per sq. mi.) live in its most populated section—more than one and a half times as many people as in the most crowded part of New York City.

Do You Know?

A bridge near Beijing is named after Marco Polo, an Italian explorer who wrote about his travels to China in the thirteenth century.

People

With more than 1.3 billion people, China has the largest population of any country in the world. In comparison, about 316 million people live in the United States, a population about one fourth the size of China's.

More than half of the Chinese population lives in towns and villages. People who live in rural regions often grow crops and raise livestock, while people who live in towns and villages may manufacture goods as well as perform other jobs. Many people also live in large cities, which are centers for trade and business.

Most Chinese people speak Mandarin, which means "common language." People in different regions may speak **dialects** of Mandarin. Chinese people speak many other languages as well, including Cantonese and English.



China has more cell phone users than any other country in the world. About 75 percent of the people have cell phones.



Mandarin Characters

Here are Mandarin characters for some English words.

fire

火
山
森
女

mountain

forest

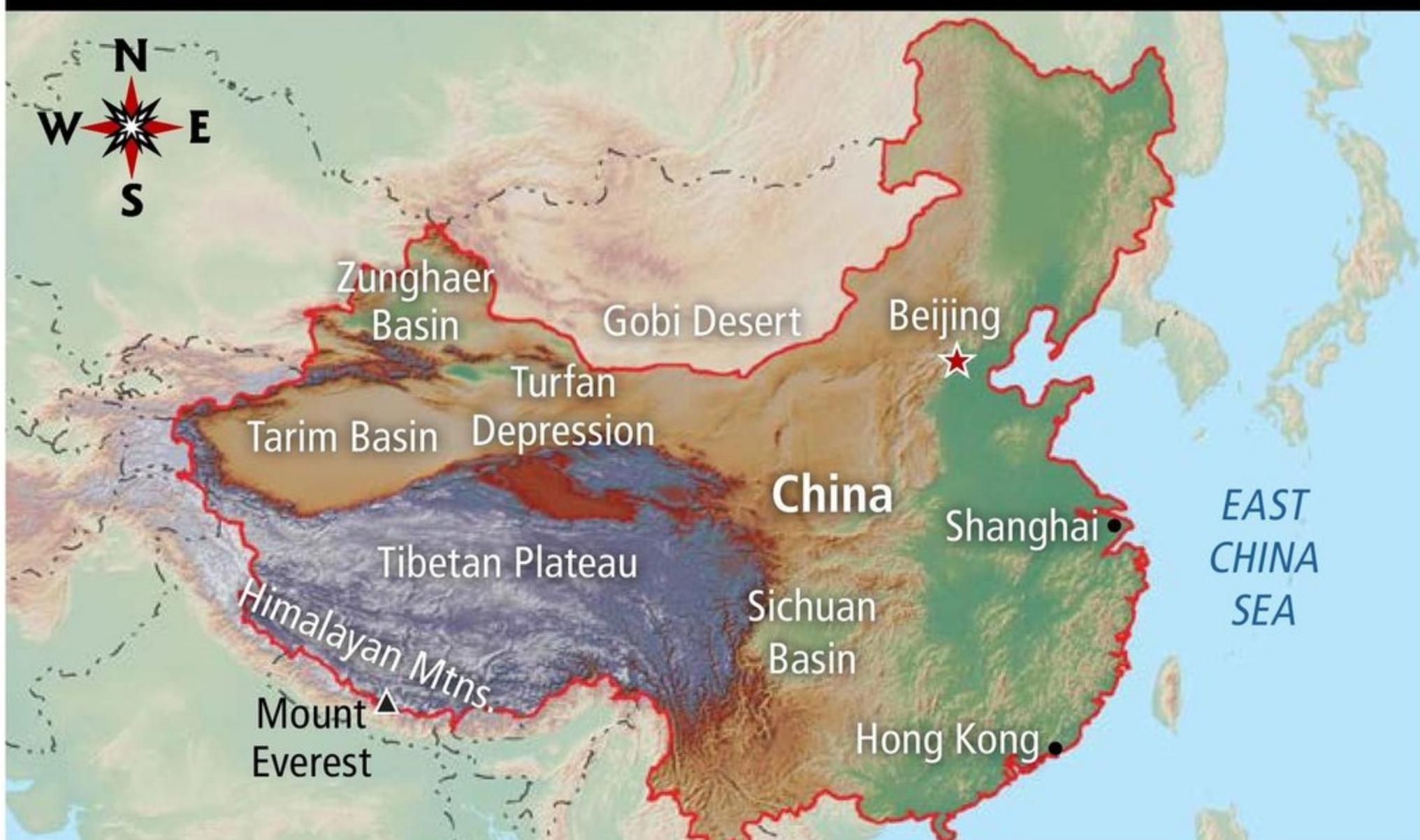
woman

In Mandarin, the characters of some words look like what they mean.

Unlike English, which uses an alphabet to represent the individual sounds that make up words, Chinese writing uses characters that represent entire words or parts of words. Experts estimate that the system of writing in China began around 2000 BC, making it one of the world's oldest. Some characters resemble what they mean. For example, the character for the word *mountain* actually looks like mountain peaks. An educated Chinese person knows on average about four thousand characters, although the language contains tens of thousands.

In the Chinese education system, students must attend school for nine years. After that, they can continue their education by going to secondary school, which can be followed by job training or university. Getting into a university, however, is very difficult, and only a small number of students are admitted each year.

China's Landforms



Land

China's vastness means it contains many different types of landforms. The mountain ranges in the southern regions are some of the country's most outstanding features. Mountains cover about one third of the country, and one famous mountain range, the Himalayas, contains many of the highest mountains in the world, including the tallest: Mount Everest. Mount Everest rises 8,850 meters (29,035 ft.) on the border between China and Nepal.

Mountains can also be found in the western parts of the country, along with **plateaus**. The eastern part of the country is a lowland area with forests and wetlands, and it is this area of the country that contains China's large cities.

China also contains a huge desert, which stretches across about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 mi.) of the northern region. The Gobi Desert borders Mongolia. The name *Gobi* means “waterless place,” and, like all deserts, the Gobi receives little rainfall. It has a total annual rainfall ranging from 5 centimeters (2 in.) in the western part to 20 centimeters (8 in.) in the northeastern part.

Even though the Gobi Desert is a harsh environment, people do manage to live there. Those who make their home in this desert are **nomadic** herders who use underground water sources to raise cattle, sheep, goats, and camels. In addition to the livestock of the herders, the Gobi is home to wild camels, gazelles, and China’s rare wild horses.

China also has thousands of rivers, the longest being the Yangtze (yank-SEE) river, which runs for 6,300 kilometers (3,915 mi.). The Yangtze is an important means of transporting both people and goods. The **Yangtze river basin** is known as the **granary** of the country. The basin is home to about half of the country’s **agriculture**, including the largest amount of rice farming. Other grain crops grown in the river basin include barley, wheat, and corn.



When born, a baby panda typically weighs only about four ounces — much smaller than its giant panda mother.

Animals

One of China's most famous animals is the giant panda. This member of the bear family is very rare—so rare, in fact, that scientists think only about 1,600 are left in the wild. Their population has decreased to this small number because their habitat in the mountains of central China has been lost.

Giant pandas live in forests and eat only **bamboo**, but many of China's bamboo forests have been cleared for agriculture, timber, and fuel. To save the giant panda, China has created special nature reserves. In addition, scientists in China and other countries have tried to breed giant pandas in captivity. However, the animals do not reproduce well outside their native habitat, and only in recent years have baby pandas been born in captivity.

The Chinese alligator is one of only two alligator species in the world. Smaller than its American cousin, the alligator's native habitat lies along the Yangtze River. Like the giant panda, its numbers have been greatly reduced due to habitat loss, and only a few hundred remain in the wild. Scientists have had great luck breeding the Chinese alligator in captivity, however, and are working with farmers along the Yangtze to keep alligators safe in their native habitat.

The golden snub-nosed monkey is truly an odd sight—not because of its golden fur but because of its blue face. This primate is found in the forests of central China, but it also suffers from habitat loss. China has set aside reserves to help the monkeys keep some of their habitat, and the animals are also bred in captivity.



Golden snub-nosed monkeys live in large groups, with as many as four hundred or more in one group.

History

China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Scientific evidence has shown that some of the earliest humans lived in China about 770,000 to 230,000 years ago.

For thousands of years, emperors ruled China. Sometimes, emperors from the same family ruled parts of China for hundreds of years. These periods of time are known as **dynasties**. The first dynasty that left a written history is the Shang Dynasty, which began around 1600 BC. Other dynasties include the Zhou (JHOW), Qin (CHIN), Han (HAHN), Jin, Tang (TAHNG), Song (SUNG), and Ming.

The Qin Dynasty made several important contributions to China's history. The Qin emperor Shi Huangdi (SHI HWAHNG-dee), who ruled from 259 to 210 BC, ordered a wall built to keep out invaders. Other emperors, especially those of the Ming Dynasty, continued to build the wall for nearly 2,000 years. Today, it is known as the Great Wall, even though it is actually a series of walls throughout northern China and Southern Mongolia. One section of the Great Wall runs about 8,850 kilometers (5,500 mi.) and ranges from 5 to 8 meters (15–25 ft.) wide.

The ancient Chinese made great advances and invented many things. One invention, the abacus, was an early way of doing complex mathematical calculations. The ancient Chinese invented the magnetic compass, which helped early sailors navigate. They also invented gunpowder to blast rocks apart and to make fireworks.

The ancient Chinese were also the first to make fabric from **silk**. It became the country's most popular **export**, and people traveled from around the world on a trade route called the Silk Road to get it. The fibers used to make silk come from the cocoons of silkworms. The ancient Chinese discovered that they could separate the fibers from the cocoon and then spin the fibers together to make a strong thread. The thread was woven together to make beautiful cloth.



silk fabric

In 1912, China went through massive changes. War with Japan and internal strife ended the Qing Dynasty, and China became a republic.

After many years of political turmoil and conflict, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of the government in 1949.



(Left) A farmer in Yangshuo carries baskets of food. (Right) Crowds of people visit a Shanghai shopping district.

Conclusion

China is a fascinating mix of ancient and modern, rural and urban. China's long history has influenced the world in many ways. Its diverse people reflect this history in their unique and interesting cultures. Stretching across much of Asia, its landscape includes breathtaking mountains, huge deserts, and ancient rivers. People from all over the world visit China's amazing structures. If you were to visit China, where would you want to go first?

China



Population: 1,355,692,576

Land: 9,569,901 sq km (3,694,959 sq. mi.)

Capital City: Beijing

Primary Language: Mandarin

Primary Religions: Daoism, Buddhism

Currency: Yuan (yoo-WAHN)



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

Glossary

agriculture (<i>n.</i>)	the science or practice of farming and raising livestock (p. 9)
bamboo (<i>n.</i>)	a plant with long woody stems and long leaves (p. 10)
dialects (<i>n.</i>)	forms of language that are used in specific regions or by specific groups of people (p. 6)
dynasties (<i>n.</i>)	series of rulers in a country from the same families (p. 12)
export (<i>n.</i>)	a product that is sent or sold from one country or region to another (p. 13)
granary (<i>n.</i>)	a place where grain is stored (p. 9)
industrial (<i>adj.</i>)	having to do with the creation of goods in factories; having to do with the goods created in factories or the people who work in factories (p. 5)
nomadic (<i>adj.</i>)	moving from place to place without a permanent home (p. 9)
plateaus (<i>n.</i>)	large raised areas of flat land (p. 8)
river basin (<i>n.</i>)	an area of land from which water drains into a river or its tributaries (p. 9)
silk (<i>n.</i>)	strong threads made by a spider or silkworm (p. 13)
temples (<i>n.</i>)	buildings that are places of worship (p. 5)

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Front and back cover: A colorful dragon decorates a lake during the Chinese New Year celebration in Beijing.

Title page: This Buddhist temple is a famous landmark in Hong Kong, China.

Page 3: Beijing, China's capital city, is crowded with skyscrapers, high-rise apartment buildings, and people.

China
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