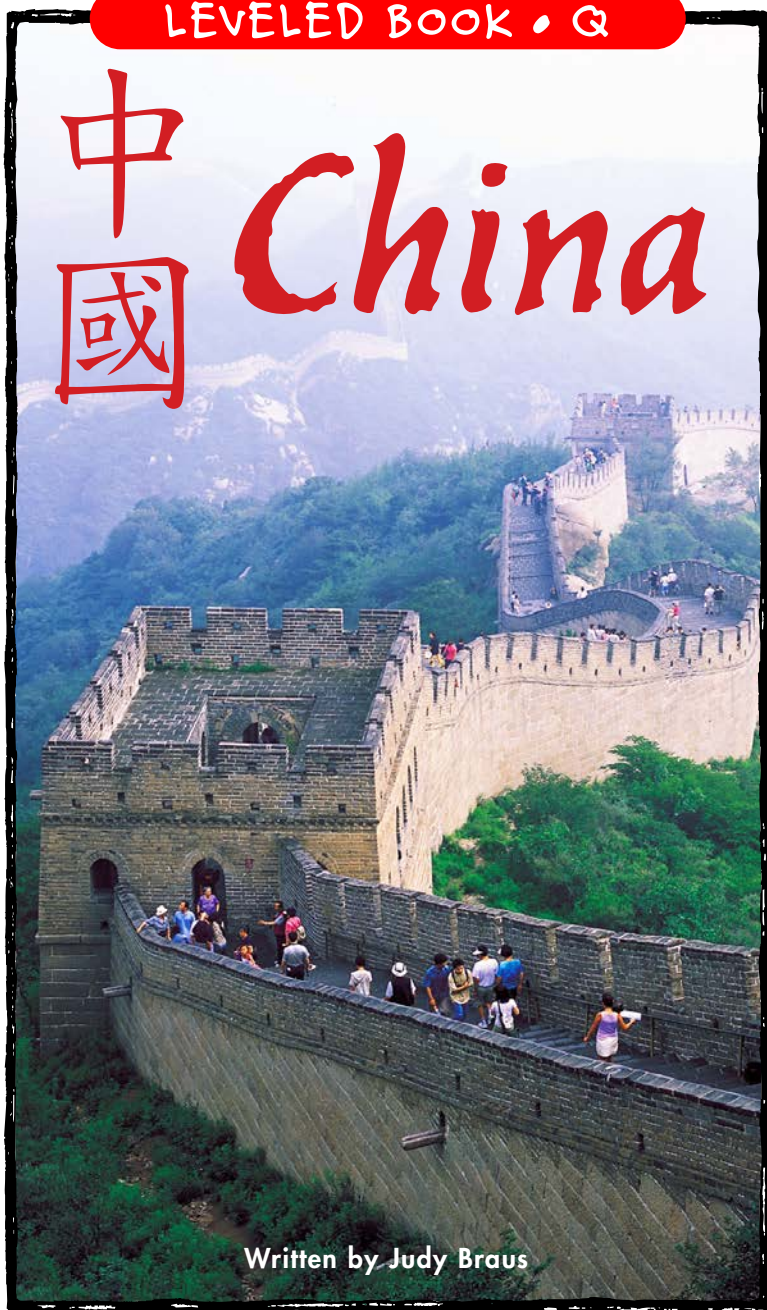


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中國 *China*



Written by Judy Braus

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China



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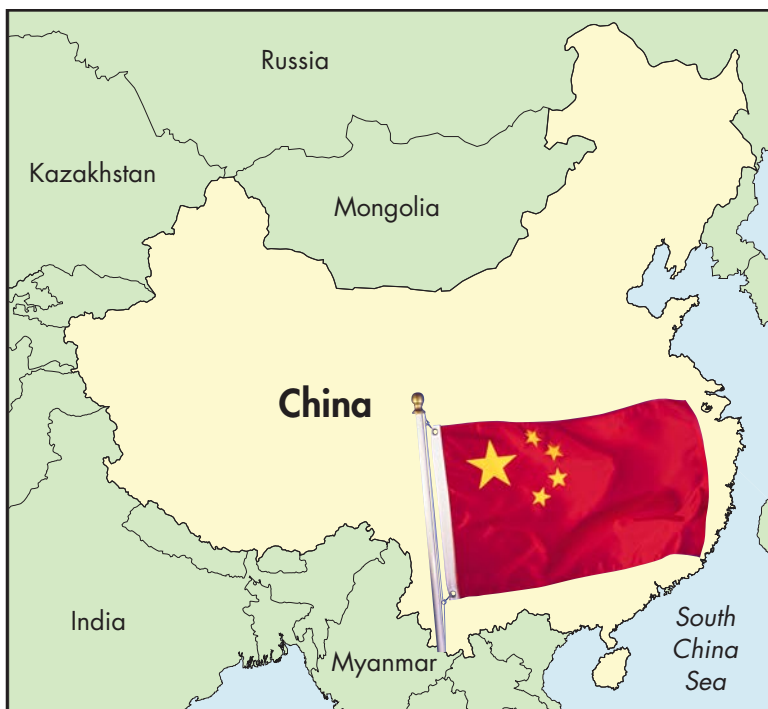


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China's cities are crowded with people.

China: An Amazing Country!

If you were to travel west to the edge of the Pacific Ocean, you'd come to Asia. Asia is the largest continent on the planet, with more land and people than anywhere else in the world. Asia is also home to one of the biggest, most diverse countries in the world—China.

China has an incredible mix of people, landscapes, and wildlife. It is the third largest country in the world (only Russia and Canada are bigger). And it has the largest population in the world. In fact, one out of every five people in the world live in China—that's more than 1.3 billion people!



Gobi Desert



Yangtze River



rice paddy

Do You Know?

China has more than 1,500 rivers—including some of the biggest rivers in the world. The longest river in China is the Yangtze (yank-SEE), which is the third longest river in the world. (Only the Amazon River in South America and the Nile River in Africa are longer!)

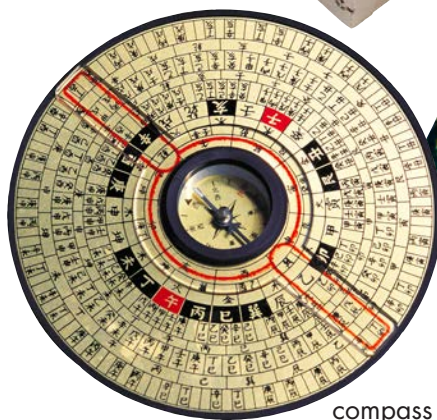
China is also a country alive with art, music, dance, food, and celebrations. And it's known for amazing cultural sites—from temples and palaces to statues, canals, and the longest hand-built wall in the world.

The Chinese also have a long, rich history of learning and inventing. They were the first people to make and use paper, ink, writing, silk cloth, printing, kites, **porcelain**, gunpowder, the compass, and much more.



abacus
(ancient
Chinese
calculator)

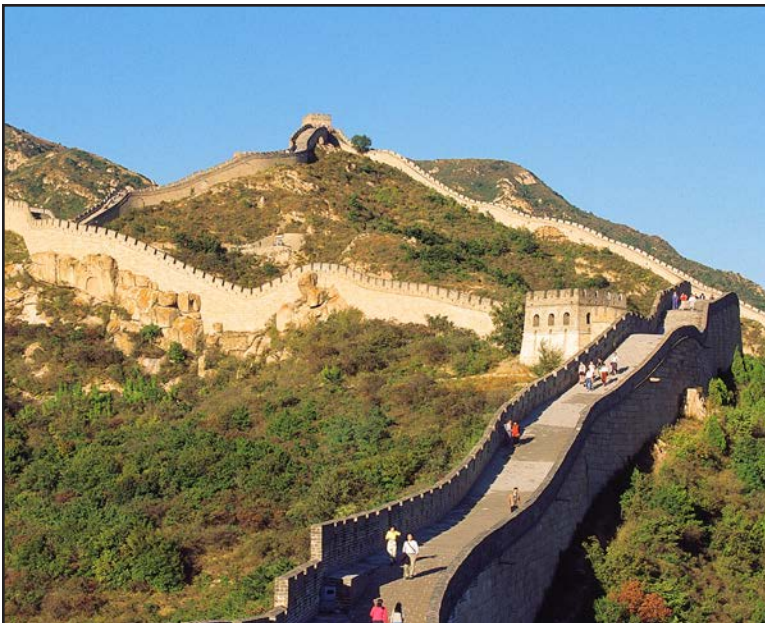
porcelain
pot



compass



kite



The Great Wall of China

More than 2,000 years ago, the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi (Chin Shih Hwong-DEE), started building the Great Wall. It was designed to keep hostile tribes from invading China. The Great Wall, which was mostly built by slaves, is the longest wall in the world. It's also the largest structure ever built by hand. It is more than 6,437 kilometers (4,000 miles) long. It was built wide enough so as many as 10 soldiers could march side by side when they patrolled the countryside. Although parts of the Great Wall are crumbling, you can still see many of the more than 20,000 watchtowers that served as lookout points thousands of years ago. The Great Wall crosses northern China between the east coast and North Central China.

Wild China

One thing that makes China special is that it has many different kinds of natural places. There are rugged mountain peaks, rocky deserts, tropical forests, and lush valleys.

And because China is such a big country with so many different habitats, it has many different kinds of living things. There are giant pandas in the bamboo forests of central China. There are tigers and monkeys in the tropical forests in the south. And there are all kinds of animals and plants that live in and near China's many rivers and streams—including the giant salamander.



On the Li River

Giant Panda

The Chinese people are so proud of the giant panda that these animals have become a symbol of their country.

Giant pandas live in the steep bamboo forests of China, feeding almost nonstop on these tall, quick-growing grasses. Many pandas will spend more than 16 hours a day chewing bamboo, eating about 10,000 pounds in a year.



Scientists attempt to breed pandas in captivity to preserve the species.

Unfortunately, China's population has grown so quickly that many plants and animals are losing their habitats. For example, scientists say there are fewer than 1,600 pandas left in the wild. The bamboo forests where pandas live are being cut down for farming and houses.

Celebrating China: From Dragons to Food

In addition to many natural treasures, China has a rich **culture** filled with special celebrations, art, music, dance, sports, and food. If you visit China, one of the first artistic things you might notice is the writing. The official language of China is **Mandarin**, which uses more than 6,000 characters instead of the 26-letter alphabet used in the English language. Each character stands for a word or a part of a word.



Chinese Characters

Here are the Mandarin characters for:

fire

火

mountain

山

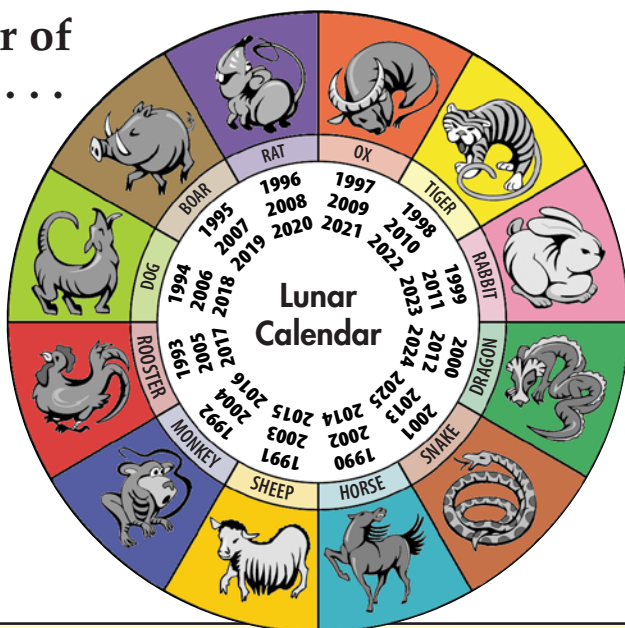
forest

森

woman

女

Year of
the . . .



Each Chinese year is named after one of 12 animals. It repeats every 12 years. Look at the calendar to find the animal name for the year you were born.

If you visit in late January or early February, you might be lucky enough to take part in the celebration of the New Year. This is one of China's most important festivals and is celebrated throughout the country.

To celebrate the New Year, people take part in colorful parades, wearing bright costumes and often dressing up as dragons. The dragon is a sign of good luck in China. Fireworks are also a big part of the festivities.



Many people ride bikes to get around China's congested cities.

Sports are also important to the Chinese. You'll probably see a lot of people playing table tennis (Ping-Pong). The Chinese are some of the best table tennis players in the world! You'll also see a lot of bike riders, since most people get around by bike.

Food and Chinese culture go hand in hand. If you've eaten in a Chinese restaurant, then you know that there are many flavors and spices that make Chinese food special. Different regions of China are known for different kinds of food. For example, food from southwestern China is very spicy and often uses chili pepper oil. You might also notice that the Chinese only use two **utensils**: chopsticks and a soup spoon.

The Chinese eat a lot of rice. Rice is grown in flooded fields called **paddies**. In many parts of China, rice is served with all meals and is an important part of the Chinese diet. You'll also see people eating noodles, soups, fish, soybeans, and other foods.



Do You Know?

The Chinese eat three times more fish than Americans. In fact, the average person in China eats more than 20 kilograms (45 lbs) of seafood each year.

A fish market



Tiananmen Square, also called Gate of Heavenly Peace

China: Past, Present, and Future

China has a long and rich history, which has helped shape the country today. Most **historians** think the country was settled more than 5,500 years ago—making China one of the earliest **civilizations** in the world that is still thriving today.

The capital of China is Beijing (BAY-jing). It is a city of almost 14 million people. Beijing is the center of government. It is also known for its many tourist sites, like Tiananmen (TEE-AHN-un-men) Square, also named the Gate of Heavenly Peace—a large square in the city's center that is used for special events.

China also has many other thriving cities. Shanghai (shang-HI) is the largest city in China and one of the biggest ports in the world. And Hong Kong, in the southern part of China, is a major business center known for its many shops and markets.

Even though many of China's more than a billion people live in cities, most people still live in rural towns and villages. Many of them farm or herd sheep and goats in the grasslands.



Millions of Chinese still live in small farming villages scattered across the countryside. While services and opportunities have improved rapidly, many young Chinese still look to the cities for their future.

Land of the Silk Moth

Most of the world's silk is produced in China. Silk comes from the caterpillar of a silk moth—the only domesticated insect in the world. The caterpillar spins a silken cocoon, and people harvest the silk threads from the cocoon. The Chinese discovered silk about 2640 BC and kept it a secret for almost 3,000 years.



Today, China has the second largest **economy** in the world. It is a leader in making and selling many products to other countries—from toys to televisions and textiles, such as silk. It also has a huge tourist industry and hosted the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.



*Numbers in billions of dollars

SOURCE: PRC General Administration of Customs, China's Customs Statistics



At large corporate job fairs, recent college graduates compete with displaced workers for jobs that offer a chance of stable employment.

But China faces big challenges. Recent reforms by the **Communist government** mean more private businesses will grow. The move away from a system where everyone works for the government means China has many unemployed workers. The “opening up” of the economy is expected to be better in the long term, but this kind of change does not come easily.

Do You Know?

The Communist government discourages religion, so most people do not belong to a church or other religious institution. However, many people believe in the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and other religious thinking that promotes harmony and compassion.



Hong Kong at night

As China's population grows, people will need more water, energy, food, and other resources. The country faces the challenge of providing enough jobs and resources for its population while still protecting the environment and people's rights.

Glossary

civilizations (<i>n.</i>)	organized societies that have a stable food supply, government, social structure, culture, written language, and religion (p. 14)
Communist government (<i>n.</i>)	form of government where the state plans and controls the economy; emphasis is on the whole and not the individual (p. 17)
culture (<i>n.</i>)	ideas and customs of a certain group of people that are passed on to future generations (p. 10)
economy (<i>n.</i>)	the circulation of money in industry, trade, and finance in a country or area (p. 16)
historians (<i>n.</i>)	experts on history (p. 14)
Mandarin (<i>n.</i>)	the main language spoken in China (p. 10)
paddies (<i>n.</i>)	fields that are flooded to grow rice (p. 13)
porcelain (<i>n.</i>)	a hard, white clay that can be shaped and fired into pottery or other forms (p. 6)
utensils (<i>n.</i>)	something used to eat or serve food (p. 12)

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