



Welcome to China

"China is such a fascinating country. I feel like I could spend 10 years there and not discover even a 10th of its secrets. I explored bamboo forests in search of pandas, vast ancient cities, and mysterious monasteries... all in one province!"

China, a country rich in history, culture, and stunning landscapes, is always an exciting destination for the adventurous traveller. Renowned for some of the most famous landmarks in the world, China also hosts an amazing diversity of wildlife. Walk along the Great Wall of China, see the Terracotta Army, or explore the famous gorges of the Yangtze River. For the true naturalist, visit one (or all!) of China's 119 national parks, 50 of which are home to the world's only remaining wild pandas. When not stealing glimpses of pandas through forests of bamboo, track down some of the 4,400 species of vertebrates - more than 10% of the world's total.

Know your History

China has a fascinating political and cultural heritage, and is one of the world's oldest continuous civilisations. It is held responsible for many major inventions and one of the world's oldest written languages. The existence of many Chinese Dynasties is mysteriously devoid of factual details, but more is discovered with each era. China was mostly made up of agricultural societies whose spiritual practice was based upon ancestral worship.

China is also home to some of the world most impressive cultural sites. One of the most famous of these, The Great Wall of China (begun in the 5th Century A.D.) stretches almost 6,400 km. Although China is thought to contain over 100 different peoples, only 56 are officially recognised, with the Han accounting for 92% of China's population. There are between six and twelve main regional groups of Chinese (depending on classification scheme), of which the most populous by far is Mandarin (c. 800 million), followed by Wu (c. 90 million), and Cantonese (c. 80 million). China's cultural influence has historically stretched across much of Asia, and Chinese religion, customs and writing systems have been adapted by neighbours such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

The Peking Man

China has been confirmed as one of the oldest civilisations in the world with its more recent discoveries of ancient man. One of the earliest known specimens of *Homo erectus*, known as the Peking Man, was found in the Zhoukoudian cave – the Peking Man is estimated to have lived between 300,000 and 780,000 years ago. The earliest evidence of a fully modern human in China comes from Liujiang County, Guangxi, where a cranium dating back 67,000 years has been found; it even pre-dates remains found in Japan.

Xia & Shang

China's rich history reaches back over 5,000 years. The first Dynasty, the Xia, is said to have lasted from 2200 to 1700 B.C., and is described in legends as having been preceded by a succession of god-like sovereigns who bestowed the gifts of life, hunting, and agricultural knowledge. The Dynasty was considered mythical until excavations in 1959 found evidence of Bronze Age sites.

It is the Shang (Yin) who were first Dynasty to leave historical records. The Shang settled along the Yellow River in eastern China between the 17th and 11th Century B.C. The Oracle bone script found from the Shang Dynasty is the oldest form of Chinese writing found, and is largely accepted as the direct ancestor of modern Chinese characters.

Zhou

The historical name for China, Zhongguó, is reference to the Zhou Dynasty, who believed they were the centre of civilisation. Zhongguó, is traditionally translated as "Middle Kingdom" or "central country", and first appeared around the 6th Century B.C. The Zhou Dynasty also marks the first appearance of Confucianism. Confucianism believed in the "mandate of heaven", which gave the right to rule to the virtuous, and condemn the wicked. This led to the later Taoist view that heaven's disapproval was expressed through natural disasters.

Between the 12th and 5th Century B.C. (1100 to 221 B.C.), the Zhou ruled the majority of China, invading the Shang from the west. However, feudal warlords eroded the power of the Zhou centralised authority and independent states began to emerge. Wars were waged with only occasional deference to the Zhou king. During the "Warring States" period, there were seven powerful sovereign states, each with their own king, ministry and army. These states eventually proved the downfall of the Zhou Dynasty.

Qin

The Chinese were united for the first time during the Qin dynasty (221 to 207 B.C.) under Qin Shi Huang, who named himself "First Emperor". This was the advent of a standardised writing system and other economic advancements. This era also saw the completed construction of the Great Wall. However, the period only lasted 15 years, when the legalist and authoritarian policies led to widespread rebellion in the empire.

Han & Sui

The Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) were leaders of military warfare and created the Three Kingdoms, three divided states whose emperors all claimed to be successors of the Dynasty. Military campaigns extended to Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia and Central Asia, where it helped to establish the Silk Road. Curiously, these war-torn centuries also saw the flowering of Buddhism and the arts. The Han cultural identity is still evident today, with around 92% of China's population from Han descent.

The Three Kingdoms ruled after the Han Dynasty collapsed – the Wu even opened diplomatic relations with Japan. However, in 589 A.D., China was reunited under the Sui. This Dynasty was short-lived, collapsing after the Goguryeo-Sui Wars between 598 and 618 A.D.

Tang & Song

The Tang and Song Dynasties were when Chinese technology and culture reached its zenith – the

first golden age. The Tang were at the height of power until the 8th Century, when the An Shi Rebellion destroyed Tang prosperity across the empire.

The Song Dynasty were the first government to issue paper money in world history, and also the first to establish a permanent navy. Under Song rule between the 10th and 11th Centuries, the population doubled across China, helped by abundant food surpluses and expanded rice cultivation in central and southern regions; the Northern Song Dynasty alone boasted around 100 million people within its borders.

Philosophy and the arts, hangovers from the Tang Dynasty, were brought to new levels of maturity and intricacy – landscape art and portrait painting flourished, and the social elites gathered to view, share and trade art. Confucianism was reinvigorated, infused with Buddhist ideals, and philosophers such as Cheng Yi and Chu Hsi emphasised a new organisation of classic texts, giving rise to the core doctrine of Neo-Confucianism.

Yuan & Ming

The Song Dynasty fell in 1279, after the invasion from the Mongol leader, Kublai Khan, in 1271. From roughly 120 million inhabitants before the invasion, the 1300 census reported only around 60 million. Kublai Khan set the foundations for the Yuan Dynasty, overthrown in 1368 by a peasant named Zhu Yuanshang – who began the infamous Ming Dynasty.

The Ming Dynasty was the dawn of a new golden age for China. Neo-Confucianism was expanded with ideas of individualism and innate morality by thinkers such as Wang Yangming; this philosophies would later greatly impact Japanese thought. Chosun Korea also adopted much of Ming China's Neo-Confucian bureaucratic structure, becoming a nominal vassal state of the empire. The Ming Dynasty boasted one of the strongest navies in the world, and flourished in arts and culture, its economy expanding. It was during this time that Zheng He led explorations around the world, rumoured to have even reached America. China's capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing.

In 1644, Li Zicheng, a minor Ming official, led a peasant revolt, and the coalition of rebel forces sacked Beijing – the last Ming Emperor, Chongzhen, committed suicide when the city fell. The short-lived Shun Dynasty was quickly overthrown when Ming Dynasty general Wu Sangui allied with the Manchu Qing Dynasty, seizing back Beijing and starting the Qing Dynasty – this was the last Dynasty to rule in China.

Qing

The Qing Dynasty survived until 1912, fighting European imperialism and the two Opium Wars. It was during this Dynasty that China began to realise the significance of the rest of world, and in particular, the West. Opening up to foreign trade and missionary activity meant that opium produced by British India was forced into the country. China's defeat in the Arrow War (1856 – 1860, the second Opium War), meant the passing of the humiliating Treaty of Tianjin, and the Beijing Conventions of 1860 further opened China to foreign influence. Hong Kong was ceded to the British, heavy indemnities had to be paid by the Chinese and more territory and control was handed to the foreigners. These defeats in the Opium Wars and unequal treaties weakened the Qing regime, sparking the Taiping Civil War between 1851 and 1862.

The Rebellions

The Taiping Rebellion was led by Hong Xiuquan, who believed himself to be the son of God and the younger brother of Jesus. Although the Qing army was victorious, the Taiping Civil War was one of

the bloodiest in human history. Estimates of the numbers of those killed start at 20 million (more than the total number killed in World War One) to 200 million.

More rebellions came hot on the heels of Taiping. The Punti-Hakka Clan Wars between 1855 and 1867, the Nien Rebellion between 1851 and 1868, the Muslim Rebellion 1862–1877, the Panthay Rebellion from 1856 to 1873 and the Miao Rebellion 1854–1873. Each rebellion meant the loss of millions of lives, devastating the economy and the countryside.

The unrelenting flow of British opium only served to hasten the Qing Dynasty's fall. During the 19th Century, the Chinese Diaspora began; around 35 million Chinese live in Southeast Asia today. Further lives were lost during the famine between 1876 and 1879, which claimed between 9 and 13 million lives in northern China. Between 108 and 1911 A.D., there were 1,828 famines in China, which amounts to around one per year.

Meiji Japan

The continuous war in China left Meiji-ruled Japan free to modernise its military, and set its sights on Korea and Manchuria. In 1894, the Korean Emperor requested help from the Chinese to suppress the Tonghak Rebellion, but Japan also sent troops, and sparked the first Sino-Japanese War. The result was the loss of Qing influence in the Korean peninsula and the cessation of Taiwan to Japan.

In 1898, Emperor Guangxu drafted a reform plan to become a modern Meiji-style constitutional monarchy. The Empress Dowager Cixi opposed, starting a coup d'état and placing him under house arrest. The Qing Dynasty sealed its fate in 1990, with the ill-advised Boxer Rebellion against the Westerners in Beijing.

20th Century

The first half of the 20th Century was a frenzied period. Intellectuals rescinded Confucianism in search of a new philosophy, while warlords battled for power over the empire. On 14th November 1908, Guangxu died under house arrest, the day before Empress Dowager Cixi. Cixi's handpicked heir was the dead Emperor's two-year-old nephew, Puyi. Guangxu's consort, Longyu, became Empress Dowager. However, another coup d'état overthrew the last Qing Emperor, and in 1912, Longyu signed an abdication decree, ending 2,000 years of Chinese imperial rule.

Republic of China

With the abdication of the Empress Dowager, the Republic of China was born, with Sun Yat-sen of the Kuomintang (KMT or Nationalist Party) as provisional president. However, the position was soon given to former Qing general Yuan Shikai, who ensured the defection of the entire Beiyang Army to the revolution. In 1915, Yuan proclaimed himself Emperor of China, but quickly abdicated when it proved unpopular with the population and Beiyang Army. Imperial rule was truly over.

Yuan's death in 1916 meant China was politically fragmented, with a virtually powerless government seated in Peking (Beijing). Various regions were ruled by warlords, until the 1920s when the Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek, was able to reunify the country under its own control. The party moved the capital to Nanking (Nanjing) and implemented "political tutelage", effectively reducing China to one-party rule. This soon fragmented the population into Nationalists (Kuomintang supporters) and the Communists (who believed in equal and shared power).

Communist rebellions

The communists were divided between those who led urban resistance and those who sought to unite the masses in the countryside. Mao Zedong set up his forces in the mountains of Jinggang Shan, and by 1930 had marshalled a guerrilla army of 40,000. Chiang mounted four communist-extermination campaigns, each time resulting in communist victories.

Chiang's fifth campaign was very nearly successful because the communists ill-advisedly met the Kuomintang head-on in battle. Hemmed in, the communists retreated from Jiangxi north to Shaanxi – the Long March of 1934. En route the communists armed peasants and redistributed land, and Mao was recognised as the Communist Party's paramount leader.

In 1931 the Japanese took advantage of the chaos in China and invaded Manchuria. Chiang Kai-shek did little to halt the Japanese, who by 1939 had overrun most of eastern China. This Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945, part of World War Two), however, did mean an uneasy alliance between the Nationalists and Communists, though caused around 20 million Chinese civilian deaths. With the defeat of the Japanese in World War Two, China emerged victorious, but only just.

ROC

After World War Two, China was once again in the grip of civil war. On October 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), while Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan – which had been under Chinese rule since the end of World War Two. The US continued to recognise Chiang as the legitimate ruler of China. Major armed hostilities between the Republic of China (ROC, the political regime led by the Kuomintang) and PRC ceased in 1950, but no peace treaty has ever been signed.

In the 1970s, the ROC began to implement multiparty democracy in the territories still under its control – Taiwan and a number of smaller islands including Quemoy and Matsu. Today, the ROC has active participation by all sectors of society, but the contentious issue of eventual unification with the Chinese mainland or the formal independence of Taiwan is still being discussed.

Communism

After the civil war, the PRC implemented a series of socioeconomic movements, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which left much of the economy and education system crippled. With the death of the first generation of communist leaders, such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the PRC started a series of political and economic reforms that eventually became the foundation for China's rapid economic development that began in the 1990s.

In current years, China's "one country, two systems" plan has shifted up a gear with the handover of Hong Kong and Macau. With the leadership of Jiang Zemin, a new course of economic growth began; overseeing the admission of China into the World Trade Organisation and guiding Beijing to success in the 2008 Olympics bid. Economic modernisation is the priority, and is aggressively instituted by the ruling powers. Continued civil rights abuses, official corruption, and the stagnant rural economy are the sharpest thorns in the country's side, but membership of the World Trade Organisation is a great leap forward – though probably not one Chairman Mao would have envisaged.

The biggest barrier to the "One China" model is the tiny rogue island of ROC-ruled Taiwan, which has agreed in principle to the model but paradoxically interprets it in its idiosyncratic, Taiwanese way. China has retorted with rhetoric about "brothers and sisters" and, just to prove that all families have their problems has backed it up with a show of military muscle. It's the equivalent of a Chinese burn administered by an older and stronger brother! Under China's PRC influence, many organisations, such as the World Health Organisation and the United Nations, many nations do not

recognise the ROC, and do not keep diplomatic relations.

Money Talks

The economy of the People's Republic of China is the 3rd largest in the world – just after the US and Japan – when measured in exchange rate terms, with a nominal GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of US\$ 4.91 trillion. And it is the 2nd largest when measured by PPP (Purchasing Power Parity), with a GDP of US\$ 8.8 trillion, only just behind the USA. As the fastest growing major economy in the world, China's average annual GDP growth rate has been over 10%, sparking drastic reduction in poverty, but a rise in income inequalities.

Exports

China currently stands as the largest trading nation in the world, the largest exporter of goods and the 2nd largest importer. All this has only occurred in the last three decades, as in the 1980s, China was a minimal contender on the world economic stage.

It is the largest producer of rice, and is a principal source for wheat, corn (maize), tobacco, soybeans, peanuts (groundnuts), and cotton. China is also the main producer of industrial and mineral products, such as cotton cloth, tungsten, and antimony, as well as cotton yarn, coal, and crude oil, although its mineral resources are only partially developed. Its exports directly vie with production from Asian countries such as Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia.

Initially, the technological level and quality standards of its industry were still fairly low, but there has been a marked change since 2000, thanks to increased foreign investment. A report by UBS in 2009 concluded that China has experienced total factor productivity growth of 4% per year since 1990, and now has one of the fastest improvements in world economic history.

Money

China's currency, the yuan (CNY), sometimes known as the renminbi (RMB), has been used over the years as a sign of occupation – with Japan between 1932 and 1945. It has also been used to replace the Japanese yen in Taiwan, first in 1946, and then reissued in 1949 at a rate of 40,000 to 1. Various banknotes and coins of yuan have signified huge political changes over the years, including communist occupation by Soviets, and suffered from hyperinflation following the Second World War, meaning the creation of the 5,000,000 yuan banknote.

ATM machines are widespread in Beijing although withdrawals may have a small surplus charge similar to traveller's cheque commission rates. Credit and debit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted for cash withdrawals at most banks as well as for general payments. A credit card will come in useful in the event of an emergency.

Get Culture Savvy

The culture of China is the result of over 5,000 years of artistic, philosophical, political, and scientific advancement. Though regional differences provide a sense of diversity, commonalities in language and religion connect a culture distinguished by such contributions as Confucianism and Taoism. Traditional Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism.

Religion

The orthodox faith in China, from the first to the last Dynasty, was the worship of Shangdi ("Supreme God") or "heaven" as an omnipotent force. This faith pre-dates Taoism and Confucianism, and even the introduction of Buddhism and Christianity.

Christianity in China developed in the 7th Century A.D. after the introduction of the Assyrian Church of the East. After the 16th Century, Christianity grew in China thanks to missionary work, and the Taiping Rebellion was somewhat influenced by Christian teachings. The Boxer Rebellion was in part a rebellion against Christianity in China.

The first Islamic mission came to China in 651, just 18 years after Muhammad's death. Muslims came to China for trade, and dominated the import and export industry during the Song Dynasty. Muslims moved in privileged circles, becoming influential in governments, but were eventually pushed aside when the Qing Dynasty waged war and genocide against them in the Dungan Revolt and Panthay Rebellion.

Judaism appeared in China as early as the 7th or 8th Century C.E. During the first half of the 20th Century, many Jews came to Shanghai and Hong Kong seeking refuge from the Holocaust – Shanghai became notable for its large Jewish population, as it was the only port in the world to accept them without entry visas.

Taoism

Taoism can be traced to the works of Zhang Daoling and the composition of Lao Zi's Tao Te Ching ("The Book of Tao and Its Virtues"). The philosophy of Tao is centred around "the way", an understanding likened to recognising the true nature of the universe. Taoism has also led to the derivatives of Feng Shui, Sun Tzu's "Art of War" and acupuncture.

Buddhism

First introduced during the Han Dynasty from India and Central Asia, Buddhism became popular with peasants and Emperor's alike. Buddhism is now the largest organised faith in China, though many Chinese identify themselves as Buddhist and Tao at the same time. Mahayana is the predominant form of Buddhism in China, but other derivatives include Amidism (Pure Land) and Zen. These practices of Buddhism have also been exported to Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

Confucianism

Confucianism was the official philosophy of imperial China, and it was the mastering of Confucian texts that were the main criterion for entry into imperial bureaucracy. With the introduction of more Western philosophies, Confucianism has fragmented into several different strands, though much of Chinese thought is still attached to Confucian ideals.

Sports

Physical fitness is highly regarded in China, and popular sports include martial arts, table tennis, badminton and golf. Board games such as International Chess, Go (Weiqi) and Xiangqi (Chinese chess) have organised formal competitions, and it's not unusual to see the elderly practicing Tai Chi Chuan and qigong in parks.

Literature & Calligraphy

From Oracle bones to Qing edicts, the art of writing in China has long affected the general perception that calligraphy is a form of cultural refinement. Each Dynasty is marked by the advances in writing – from scientific to philosophical to poetic. Dynastic histories were often handwritten, and printmaking was not practiced until the Song Dynasty. Calligraphy itself was considered an art form – higher than painting or drama. Chinese philosophers, writers and poets were highly respected, and played key roles in the preservation and promotion of Chinese culture and history.

Science & technology

Ancient China boasts many major inventions, including that of paper and papermaking, woodblock printing and moveable type printing, the early lodestone and needle compass, gunpowder, toilet paper, early seismological detectors, matches and pound locks. We can also thank the Chinese for: the double-action piston pump, blast furnace and cast iron, the iron plough, the multi-tube seed drill, the suspension bridge, natural gas as fuel, the differential gear for the Southern Pointing Chariot, the hydraulic-powered armillary sphere, the hydraulic-powered trip hammer, the mechanical chain drive, the mechanical belt drive, the raised-relief map, the propeller, the crossbow, the cannon, the rocket, and the multistage rocket.

Chinese astrologers were the first in the world to record observations of a supernova, and the astronomer Shen Kuo's theories have influenced much of astrology today – including the knowledge that the sun and moon are spherical!

By the 17th Century, Chinese science and technology had fallen behind Europe's. It's believed that the instability and poor economy were the causes of this, but since the PRC has come into power, China has placed great importance in science and technology, and is now making several advances.

Guanxi

Throughout much of Chinese history, the fundamental glue that has held society together is the concept of guanxi – relationships between people. It is very important for the Chinese to have good relationships. They often regard good social relations as a symbol of personal ability and influence. Someone who has no connections would be despised and is considered only half-Chinese.

Chinese courtesies have always been formal and follow strict rules, although sometimes Chinese people would seem to be impolite according to Western norms. To understand the Chinese, there are some key concepts to remember:

Mainz (Face)

The idea of shame, usually expressed as "face" could be loosely defined as the "status" or "self-respect" and is by no means alien to foreigners. It is the worst thing for a Chinese to lose face. Never insult, embarrass, shame, or yell at or otherwise demean a person in China. All these actions would risk putting a Chinese person in a situation where he might lose face. Additionally, never try to prove someone wrong nor shout at him in public. In order to get a successful effect without letting a Chinese lose face, any criticism should be delivered privately, discreetly and tactfully.

Keqi

Keqi not only means considerate, polite, and well mannered, but also represents humbleness and modesty. It is impolite to be arrogant and brag about oneself or one's inner circle. The expression is most often used in the negative, as in buyao keqi, meaning "you shouldn't be so kind and polite to me," or "you're welcome."

Chinese seldom express what they think directly, preferring to use an indirect route, and they never show their emotions and feelings in public. They rarely greet people with a handshake, and they definitely never embrace or kiss when greeting or saying good-bye. Consequently, it is better not to behave too carefree in public, even though you are well-intentioned. Also, it is advisable to be fairly cautious in political discussions. Do not push yourself into a discussion, as you will run the risk of being unwelcome.

Holidays

1st January - New Year

1st day of 1st lunar month* - Chinese New Year

5th solar term (4th/5th April) - Qing Ming festival

1st May - Labour Day

5th day of 5th lunar month* - Dragon Boat festival

15th day of 8th lunar month* - Mid-Autumn festival

1st October - National Day

*Lunar months are generally a month ahead of a 12-month Gregorian calendar. The days in a lunar month also do not correspond to calendar days. For example, Chinese New Year falls between 21st January and 20th February; dependent on the lunisolar Chinese calendar.

Learn the Lingo

The Chinese written language employs Chinese characters (pinyin: hànzi), which are logograms; each symbol represents a morpheme (a meaningful unit of language), as well as one syllable.

The key thing to remember when communicating with locals in China is to remember the importance of strong relationships in their culture. Though you may find them at times too formal, or not formal enough, the Chinese that you encounter will often treat you with courtesy and respect, which is expected to be reciprocated. Some helpful phrases are listed below.

ENGLISH	CHINESE	ENGLISH	CHINESE
Greetings		Numbers	
Hello	n ho	1	Yi
nín ho	2	Er	
(on the phone)	wéi	3	San
How are you?	n ho ma	4	Sz
I'm fine thanks, and you?	w hn ho, n ne?	5	Wu
Pleased to meet you	hn goxìng rènshi n	6	Leo
w hn goxìng gn n jiànmiàn	7	Qi	
xìnghuì	8	Ba	
Good morning	zon	9	Jou
zoshàngho	10	Shi	
zochénho			
nzo			
Good afternoon	wn		

Good evening	wǎn		
wǎnshàng			
Goodnight	wǎn		
Goodbye	zàijiàn		
bàibài			
About Yourself		General Phrases	
What is your name? (polite form)	nín guìxìng dànmíng?	Thank you	xièxie
What is your name? (normal form)	n jiào shénme míngzi?	gnxiè n	
My name is...	w xìng ...	ficháng gnxiè (n)	
w jiào ...	You're welcome	bú kèqi	
Where are you from?	n shì cóng nli/nr lái de	bú yòng xiè	
n shì nguórén	méi gunxi		
I'm from...	w shì cóng ... lái de	méi wèntí	
w shì ... rén	Excuse me (to attract attention)	qngwén	
Do you speak English?	Ni hui jiang yingyu ma?	Excuse me (asking people to move)	duìbùq
I don't understand	w tngbùdng	How much?	Duo shao
w bùdng	How do you say... in Mandarin?	... zhngwén znme shu?	
w bù míngbai	Sorry	duìbùq	
Please say that again	máfan n zài shu ybin	bàoqiàn	
qng n zài shu yci ho ma?			
Please speak more slowly	máfan n jing màn ydin		
I want...	Yao...		
I don't want...	Bu yao...		

Lay of the Land

China is one of the biggest countries in the world. It has an area of about 9.6 million km² which comprises about 6.5% of the world total land area. Situated in the eastern part of Asia, on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean, China has approximately 14,500 km² of coastline.

The geography of China is just as diverse as the culture and the people. China is a mountainous country, with two thirds of its total land area covered by mountains, hills and plateaus. Out of the world's 12 highest peaks of more than 8,000 m, seven are located in China. The Highest peak in the world, Mount Qomolangma (8,828 m) stands on the border between China and Nepal.

There are five major mountain systems in China. These mountain systems, together with numerous inter-montane plateaus, basins, and plains are interwoven into three macro landform complexes in China. Therefore, the topography of China from the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau eastward is broadly

arranged into four great steps descending step-by-step from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to the coastal area in the east.

Rivers also play a major role in China, both for transportation and for irrigation. Much of the northern wheat fields and southern rice fields are irrigated from rivers. China has a great number of rivers. The inland river system accounts for 36% of the total land area in China, more than 1,500 km² of which have a catchment area exceeding 1,000 km². Among these, the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Heilongjiang River, and Pearl River are the major ones. The Yangtze River is the longest river in China and the 3rd longest in the world.

The Sichuan Basin in central China is one of the more remote and beautiful regions. Wolong is cradled by the Himalayas to the west, the Qinling range to the north, and the Yunnan region to the south. The presence of both these and the Yangtze River, which flows through the basin, give the region a mystical aura, mild temperatures, and high humidity. Known throughout its history as the "province of abundance", ancient medicines thrive here and the land is rich with sugarcane, sweet potato, and grapes.

Yantai, in northeast China, in Shandong Province. Originally a small fishing village, Yantai became important as a warning post against marauding pirates, as fires were made on the tallest hills to warn surrounding settlements. It got its name, meaning "smoking mound" for this very reason. Today it is one of China's most important trade ports, and has been the envy of many visiting nations. The British, German, Americans, and Japanese have all settled here through history, and yet for all their influence the region still displays its deep-rooted cultural heritage. Set in rolling terraced hills, Yantai boasts mild weather nearly all year round, and as such is a famous fruit centre for China's economy. Being a port city, the seafood is excellent. A spiritual centre through China's history, Yantai is a treasure trove of sites and artefacts. The most well known of these is the Penglai Pavilion, where philosophers and poets came for inspiration and where visitors today can see ancient inscribed tablets.

What's the Weather like?

Temperatures vary greatly according to location, with the north bearing the most extreme summers and winters, to the southern subtropical climate.

The eastern part of the Sichuan Basin (including Chengdu), where the Panda conservation project is based, experiences a subtropical monsoon climate with long, humid summers and short, dry and cloudy winters, and has China's lowest sunshine totals. The western areas of the Sichuan Basin province have a mountainous climate characterised by very cold winters and mild summers and plentiful sunshine. The southern part of the province, including Panzhihua, has a sunny, subtropical climate with very mild winters and hot summers.

In the Shandong province, where the teaching project is based, is blessed with a temperate climate – moist summers and dry, cold winters. Average temperatures range from -5°C to 1°C in January and 24°C to 28°C in July, with an annual precipitation of 550 mm to 950 mm.

Biodiversity

China is home to one of the world's few biodiversity hotspots – the mountains in southwest China. These mountains are home to species such as the giant panda, red panda and the golden monkey. But illegal hunting, overgrazing and firewood collection still threaten this region. To add to this, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River, the largest dam in history, has already and will continue to heavily threaten the biodiversity of the mountains.

China also boasts the largest number of bird species in the world, but conversely, 15 to 20% of its higher plant varieties are endangered, threatening the existence of 40,000 organisms related to them. However, China is one of the countries leading the way for conservation and sustainable development. According to China's Law on the Protection of Wildlife, the highest punishment for crimes of damaging wildlife resources is the death penalty.

So far, 300 million yuan has been put towards projects collecting rare and endangered plants, and with the goal of increasing plant varieties from 13,000 to 21,000. 250 wildlife breeding centres have been established throughout the country, and special projects set up to help the most threatened species, including the giant panda and red ibis – whose population has increased from 7, to over 560. Other species that are getting special care are: Chinese alligators (nearly 10,000), Eld's deer (over 800), relic (more than 10,000), and Tibetan antelopes (about 70,000). Sightings of the incredibly rare tiger have increased in recent years, reported in the northeastern, eastern and southern parts of China. In October 2003, construction began for a nature reserve for white-flag dolphins, one of the most endangered animals in the world, in Zhenjiang on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, which is the last place the dolphin can be found in the world.

Good Books

- Fried Eggs with Chopsticks. Polly Evans. ISBN 9780553816785 (Bantam, 2005)
- China - Culture Smart!: A quick guide to customs and etiquette. Kathy Flower. ISBN 9781558687028 (Kuperard, 2003)
- Mandarin Phrasebook. Anthony Garnaut. ISBN 9781741042306 (Lonely Planet Publications, 2005)
- China (Lonely Planet Country Guide) 11th Edition. Damien Harper et al. ISBN 9781741048667 (Lonely Planet Publications, 2009)
- River Town: Two Years on the Yangze. Peter Hessler. ISBN 9780719564802 (John Murray Publications, 2002)
- The Rough Guide to China – 5th Edition. David Leffman & Simon Lewis. ISBN 9781843538721 (Rough Guide Publications, 2008)
- A Beginner's Guide to Changing the World: A True Life Adventure Story. Isabel Losada. ISBN 9780060780104 (Harper San Francisco, 2005)
- 1421: The Year China Discovered the World. Gavin Menzies. ISBN 9780553815221 (Bantam, 2004)
- Frontiers of Heaven: A Journey to the End of China. Stanely Stewart. ISBN 9781592287918 (Lyons Press, 2006)
- Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train through China. Paul Theroux. ISBN 9780140112955 (Penguin, 2001)

Teaching Guides

- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Elementary Students of English 2nd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 9780521529327
- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Students of English 3rd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 9780521532891
- Lessons from Nothing: Activities for Language Teaching with Limited Time and Resources (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers). Bruce Marsland. Cambridge University Press,

1998. ISBN 9780521627658

- Games for Children (Resource Books for Teachers). Gordon Lewis & Gunther Benson. Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 9780194372244
- Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching 2nd Edition. Diane Larsen-Freeman. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 9780194355742

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