

History and Culture of China

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Family lines of emperors ruled China for most of its early history.
2. In China's modern history, revolution and civil war led to a Communist government.
3. China has the world's most people and a rich culture shaped by ancient traditions.

The Big Idea

Ruled by dynasties in its early history, China is a Communist country with an enormous population and ancient traditions.

Key Terms

dynasty, p. 571
 dialect, p. 573
 Daoism, p. 574
 Confucianism, p. 574
 pagodas, p. 575

TAKING NOTES As you read, use a chart like the one below to take notes on China's history, people, and culture.

China		
History	People	Culture

If YOU lived there...

Your parents own a small farm in the Chinese countryside in the mid-1950s. China's new leaders are making changes, however. They are taking people's farms and combining them to create large government-run farms. Your family and neighbors will now work a large farm together. China's leaders will tell you what to grow and pay you based on how much the farm produces.

How do you feel about these changes?

BUILDING BACKGROUND In 1949 China established a strong central government. This new government changed many familiar patterns of life. For much of its history, though, China had been ruled by family lines of emperors. During this period, China developed one of the world's most advanced civilizations.

China's Early Dynasties

Dynasties ruled China for some 3,500 years. The major achievements of the early dynasties are shown here.

Shang, c. 1500–1050 BC

- First recorded Chinese dynasty
- Strongest in the Huang He valley
- Developed China's first writing system, a calendar, and chopsticks
- Skilled at bronze casting



Shang bronze tigris container

Zhou, c. 1050–400 BC

- Longest-lasting Chinese dynasty
- Expanded China but declined into a period of disorder
- Influenced by the new teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism
- Began using iron tools and plows



Confucius, a Zhou thinker

China's Early History

When we enjoy the colorful fireworks on the Fourth of July, we can thank the early Chinese people. They invented fireworks. China's early civilization was one of the most advanced in the world. Its many achievements include the magnetic compass, gunpowder, paper, printing, and silk.

Today China can boast a civilization some 4,000 years old, older than any other. Understanding this long history is central to understanding China and its people.

China's Dynasties

For much of its history, China was ruled by dynasties. A **dynasty** is a series of rulers from the same family line. The rulers of China's dynasties were called emperors. Over time, many dynasties rose and fell in China. Between some dynasties, periods of chaos occurred as kingdoms or warlords fought for power. At other times, invaders came in and took control. Through it all, Chinese culture endured and evolved.

One of the most important dynasties is the Qin (CHIN), or Ch'in. It was the first dynasty to unite China under one empire. The greatest Qin ruler was Shi Huangdi (SHEE hwahng-dee). He ordered the building of much of the Great Wall of China.

Made to keep out invaders, the wall linked many older walls in northern China. In addition, Shi Huangdi had thousands of terra-cotta, or clay, warriors made to guard his tomb. These life-size warriors, each of which is unique, are skillful works of art.

The last dynasty in China was the Qing (CHING). Invaders called the Manchu ruled this dynasty starting in 1644. In time, outside influences would help lead to its end.

Outside Influences in China

Throughout history, China often limited contact with the outside world. The Chinese saw their culture as superior and had little use for foreigners. The tall mountains, deserts, and seas around China further limited contact and isolated the region.

Yet, other people increasingly wanted Chinese goods such as silk and tea. To gain access to the goods, some European powers forced China to open up trade in the 1800s. Europeans took control of parts of the country as well. These actions angered many Chinese, some of whom blamed the emperor. At the same time, increased contact with the West exposed the Chinese to new ideas.

READING CHECK Drawing Conclusions How did geography affect China's early history?

Qin, c. 221–206 BC

- First unified Chinese empire
- Strong central government with strict laws
- Created standardized money and writing systems
- Built a network of roads and canals and much of the Great Wall



Qin life-size terra-cotta warrior

Han, c. 206 BC–AD 220

- Based government on Confucianism
- Began trading over Silk Road
- Spread of Buddhism from India
- Invented paper, sundial, and acupuncture



Han bronze oil lamp

China's Modern History

As foreign influences increased, China's people grew unhappy with imperial rule. This unhappiness sparked a revolution.

Revolution and Civil War

In 1911, rebels forced out China's last emperor. They then formed a republic, a political system in which voters elect their leaders. Power struggles continued, however. In time, two rival groups emerged—the Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek (chang ky-SHEK), and the Communists, led by Mao Zedong (MOW ZUH-DOOHNG).

The two groups fought a violent civil war. That war ended in October 1949 with the Communists as victors. They founded a new government, the People's Republic of China. The Nationalists fled to Taiwan, where they founded the Republic of China.

Communist China under Mao

Mao, the Communists' leader, became the head of China's new government. In a Communist system, the government owns most businesses and land and controls all areas of life. China's new Communist government began by taking over control of the economy. The government seized all private farms and organized them into large, state-run farms. It also took over all businesses and factories.

While some changes improved life, others did not. On one hand, women gained more rights and were able to work. On the other hand, the government limited freedoms and imprisoned people who criticized it. In addition, many economic programs were unsuccessful, and some were outright disasters. In the early 1960s, for example, poor planning and drought led to a famine that killed millions.

FOCUS ON READING

What is the main idea of the second paragraph under Population and Settlement on the next page?

China: Population



Geography Skills

Place Most Chinese live in the east, China's farming and industrial heartland.

1. **Use the Map** Which areas have the fewest people?
2. **Make Inferences** Based on this map, what can you infer about China's eastern cities?



Communist China Since Mao

Mao died in 1976, and Deng Xiaoping (DUHNG SHOW-PING) soon rose to power. Deng admitted the government had made mistakes. He then worked to modernize and improve China's economy. He allowed some private businesses and encouraged countries to invest in China. As a result, the economy began growing rapidly. Leaders after Deng continued economic reforms.

READING CHECK Summarizing How did communism change life in China?

China's People and Culture

One of China's best known features is its people—all 1.3 billion of them. China has the world's largest population. More people live there than in all of Europe, Russia, and the United States combined.

Population and Settlement

As the map shows, this huge population is not evenly spread out. Only 10 percent of the people live in the west, while the rest are jam-packed into the east. In fact, more people live in the Manchurian and North China Plains than in the United States!

Meanwhile, China's population continues to grow—by about 7.5 million each year. China's officials have worked to slow this growth. Officials have urged people to delay having children and have tried to limit each couple to one child. These actions have succeeded in slowing China's population growth.

Ethnic Groups and Language

Of China's millions of people, 92 percent identify their ancestry as Han Chinese. These people share the same culture and traditions. Many Han speak Mandarin, China's official language. Others speak a **dialect**, a regional version of a language.

Ethnic Groups

The majority of Chinese are Han. However, China includes 55 other ethnic groups. Most of these people live in western and southern China.



Han This woman and other Han make up about 92 percent of China's population. They share the same culture and traditions.



Hui This Hui man is from Gansu province, in central China. Most Hui are Sunni Muslims.



Zhuang This Zhuang man is from Guizhou, in southern China. The Zhuang are China's largest minority group.

Some 55 other ethnic groups make up the remaining 8 percent of China's population. Most of these minority groups live in western and southern China, where they have their own distinct cultures.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

values ideas that people hold dear and try to live by

elements parts of a whole

Religion, Values, and Beliefs

Ancient religions, values, and beliefs shape life for China's many people, even though the Communist government discourages the practice of religion. China's two main belief systems are Daoism (DOW-I-zuhm) and Buddhism. **Daoism** stresses living simply and in harmony with nature. It takes its name from the word *Dao*, which means "the way."

Buddhism came to China from India about AD 100. This religion is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha, who lived from 563 to 483 BC. Buddhists believe moral behavior, kindness, and meditation can lead to peace.

Many Chinese blend elements of Daoism and Buddhism with **Confucianism**, a philosophy based on the ideas and teachings of Confucius. This philosophy stresses the importance of family, moral values, and respect for one's elders.

Other major religions in China include Christianity and Islam. Ancestor worship and fortune-telling are popular among the Chinese as well.

Close-up

Beijing's National Day

China celebrates National Day on October 1 with huge parades in Tiananmen Square. This square is one of the world's largest public gathering places. The space is needed because parades can include more than 500,000 participants.



The Gate of Heavenly Peace displays Mao Zedong's portrait above the entrance.

The parades include couples married on National Day, a popular time to wed.

A military parade of soldiers, tanks, and other equipment shows China's power.

The Arts and Popular Culture

China has a rich artistic tradition. Chinese crafts include items made of bronze, jade, ivory, silk, or wood. Chinese porcelain, which the ancient Chinese developed, is highly prized for its quality and beauty.

Traditional Chinese painting is done on silk or fine paper and reflects a focus on balance and harmony with nature. Popular subjects are landscapes, such as scenes of rugged mountains, trees, and lakes.

Chinese art often includes calligraphy, or decorative writing. Chinese writing uses symbols, or characters, instead of letters. This writing makes beautiful art, and some paintings feature just Chinese calligraphy.

In literature, the Chinese are known for their beautiful poetry. The Chinese highly value poetry, and poems appear on paintings and in novels and plays.

In theater, traditional Chinese opera is popular. These operas tell stories through spoken words, music, and dance. Actors wear elaborate costumes and makeup that have special meanings.

Traditional Chinese architecture features wooden buildings on stone bases. Large tiled roofs curve upward at the edge. Also common are **pagodas**, Buddhist temples that have multi-storied towers with an upward curving roof at each floor. Many cities are a mix of traditional and modern.

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

Why might China's government include so many different groups in the National Day parades?

The Chinese believe dragon dances bring good fortune to important events.

Lion dances are performed to spread good blessings to the community.



Chinese Martial Arts

Can you imagine getting up each day at 5 AM and exercising for 12 hours or more? Chinese teenagers who attend martial arts schools do just that. Many of the schools' instructors are Buddhist monks trained in the Chinese martial art of kung fu. These instructors teach their students self-defense techniques as well as the importance of hard work, discipline, and respect for one's elders. These values are important in Chinese culture and religion.

Starting as early as age 6, students memorize up to several hundred martial arts movements. These movements include different kicks, jumps, and punches. Some students dream of one day using their martial arts skills to star in a Chinese or American action movie.

Drawing Conclusions Why do you think discipline, hard work, and respect might be important for learning martial arts?



Popular culture includes many activities. Popular sports are martial arts and table tennis. A popular game is mah-jongg, played with small tiles. People also enjoy karaoke clubs, where they sing to music.

READING CHECK Evaluating Which aspect of Chinese culture most interests you? Why?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW After centuries of imperial rule under dynasties, China became a Communist country. China has a rich and ancient culture and is the world's most populous country. In the next section you will read about China's economy, government, and cities.

Section 2 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP22

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Define** What is a dynasty?
 - Summarize** How did outside influences affect China's early history?
- Recall** Which two groups fought for power during China's civil war, and which group won?
 - Contrast** How did China's economy under Mao differ from China's economy since his death?
- Recall** What are some popular pastimes in China today?
 - Explain** What are China's population problems, and how is China addressing them?
 - Elaborate** How are Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism important in Chinese culture?

Critical Thinking

- Sequencing** Look back over your notes and then create a chart like this one. List the main events in China's history in the order in which they occurred. Add or remove boxes as necessary.



FOCUS ON WRITING

- Collecting Information about China's History and Culture** Note historical or cultural details that you might want to include in your legend. For example, you might include some aspect of Chinese beliefs or artistic traditions in your legend.