



History of China

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Chinese civilization originated in various city-states along the Yellow River (Chinese: ; pinyin: Huáng Hé) valley in the Neolithic era. The written **history of China** begins with the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1550BCE - ca. 1046 BCE).^[1] Turtle shells with ancient Chinese writing from the Shang Dynasty have been carbon dated to as early as 1500 BCE.^[2] The origins of Chinese culture, literature and philosophy, developed during the Zhou Dynasty (1045BCE to 256 BCE) that followed the Shang. It was the longest lasting dynasty and spans the period in which the written script evolved from ancient oracle script to the beginnings of modern Chinese writing.

The feudal Zhou Dynasty eventually broke apart into individual city states, creating the Warring States period. In 221 BCE, Qin Shi Huang united the various warring kingdoms and created the first Chinese empire. Successive dynasties in Chinese history developed bureaucratic systems that enabled the Emperor of China to directly control the vast territories.

The conventional view of Chinese history is that of a dynasty alternating between periods of political unity and disunity and occasionally becoming dominated by foreign Asian peoples, most of whom were assimilated into the Han Chinese population. Cultural and political influences from many parts of Asia, carried by successive waves of immigration, expansion, and assimilation, merged to create modern Chinese culture.



Territories occupied by different dynasties as well as modern political states throughout the history of China.

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History of China

ANCIENT

3 Sovereigns and 5 Emperors

Xia Dynasty 2100–1600 BCE

Shang Dynasty 1600–1046 BCE

Zhou Dynasty 1045–256 BCE

Western Zhou

Eastern Zhou

Spring and Autumn Period

Warring States Period

IMPERIAL

Qin Dynasty 221 BCE–206 BCE

Han Dynasty 206 BCE–220 CE

Western Han

Xin Dynasty

Eastern Han

Three Kingdoms 220–280

Wei, Shu & Wu

Jin Dynasty 265–420

Western Jin

16 Kingdoms

Eastern Jin

304–439

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Prehistory

Paleolithic

See also: List of Paleolithic sites in China

What is now China was inhabited by *Homo erectus* more than a million years ago.^[3] Recent study shows that the stone tools found at Xiaochangliang site are magnetostratigraphically dated 1.36 million years ago.^[4] The archaeological site of Xihoudu () in Shanxi Province is the earliest recorded use of fire by Homo erectus, which is dated 1.27 million years ago.^[3] The excavations at Yuanmou and later Lantian show early habitation. Perhaps the most famous specimen of *Homo erectus* found in China is the so-called Peking Man discovered in 1923-27.

Southern & Northern Dynasties	
420–589	
Sui Dynasty	581–618
Tang Dynasty	618–907
(Second Zhou 690–705)	
5 Dynasties & 10 Kingdoms	Liao Dynasty
907–960	907–1125
Song Dynasty	
960–1279	
Northern Song	W. Xia
Southern Song	Jin
Yuan Dynasty	1271–1368
Ming Dynasty	1368–1644
Qing Dynasty	1644–1911
MODERN	
Republic of China	1912–1949
People's Republic of China	Republic of China
(Mainland China)	(Taiwan)
1949–present	1945–present
Related articles	
<p>Chinese historiography</p> <p>Timeline of Chinese history</p> <p>Dynasties in Chinese history</p> <p>Linguistic history</p> <p>Art history</p> <p>Economic history</p> <p>Education history</p> <p>Science and technology history</p> <p>Legal history</p> <p>Media history</p> <p>Military history</p> <p>Naval history</p>	

Ancient history

↑ Prehistory

Ancient Near East

Sumer · Akkad · Egypt · Babylonia · Hittite Empire · Syro-Hittite states · Neo-Assyrian Empire · Urartu

Classical Antiquity

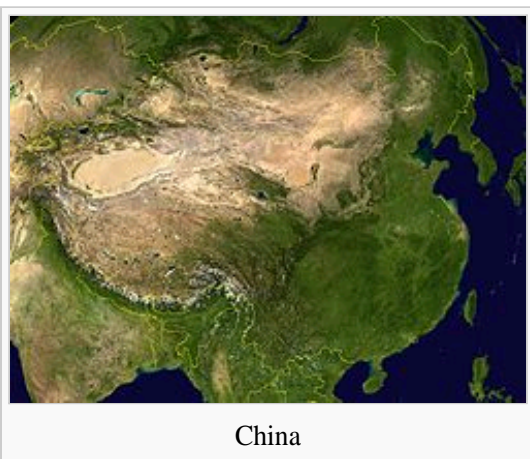
Archaic Greece · Median Empire · Achaemenid Empire ·

Three pottery pieces were unearthed at Liuzui Cave in Liuzhou, Guangxi Province dated 16,500 and 19,000 BCE.^[5]

Neolithic

See also: List of Neolithic cultures of China

The Neolithic age in China can be traced back as early as 10,000 BCE^[6] Early evidence for proto-Chinese millet agriculture is carbon-dated to about 7,000 BCE.^[7] The Peiligang culture of Xinzheng county, Henan was excavated in 1977.^[8] With agriculture came increased population, the ability to store and redistribute crops, and to support specialist craftsmen and administrators.^[9] In late Neolithic times, the Yellow River valley began to establish itself as a cultural center, where the first villages were founded; the most archaeologically significant of those was found at Banpo, Xi'an.^[10] The Yellow River was so named because of the loess that would build up on the bank and down in the earth then sink, creating a yellowish tint to the water.^[11]



The early history of China is complicated by the lack of a written language during this period coupled with the existence of documents from later time periods attempting to describe events that occurred several centuries before. The problem in some sense stems from centuries of introspection on the part of the Chinese people which has blurred the distinction between fact and fiction in regards to this early history. By 7000 BCE, the Chinese were farming millet, giving rise to the Jiahu culture. At Damaidi in Ningxia, 3,172 cliff carvings dating to 6,000-5,000 BCE have been discovered "featuring 8,453 individual characters such as the sun, moon, stars, gods and scenes of hunting or grazing." These pictographs are reputed to be similar to the earliest characters confirmed to be written Chinese.^{[12][13]} Later Yangshao culture was superseded by the Longshan culture around 2500 BCE.

Ancient era

Xia Dynasty

See also: Xia Shang Zhou Chronology Project

The Xia Dynasty of China (from ca. 2,100 BCE to 1,600 BCE) is the first dynasty to be described in ancient historical records such as *Records of the Grand Historian* and *Bamboo Annals*.^{[1][14]}

Although there is disagreement regarding the actual existence of the dynasty, there is some archaeological evidence pointing to its possible existence. The historian Sima Qian (145 BCE-90 BCE), who wrote the *Shiji* or *Records of the Grand Historian* and the so-called *Bamboo Annals* date the founding of the Xia Dynasty to 4,200 years ago, but this date has not been corroborated. Most archaeologists now connect the Xia to excavations at Erlitou in central Henan province,^[15] where a bronze smelter from around 2000 BCE was unearthed. Early markings from this period found on pottery and shells are thought to be ancestors of modern Chinese characters.^[16] With few clear records matching the Shang oracle bones or the Zhou bronze vessel writings, the Xia era remains poorly understood.

Classical Greece · Dacia · Thrace · Scythia · Macedon · Hellenism · Roman Republic · Roman Empire · Parthia · Arsacid Empire · Sassanid Empire · Late Antiquity

East Asia

Hồng Bàng Dynasty · Gojoseon · Shang China · Qin Dynasty · Han Dynasty · Jin Dynasty

South Asia

Vedic India · Maha Janapadas · Mauryan India · Chola India · Satavahana India · Gupta India

Pre-Columbian Americas

Aztecs · Incas · Mayas · Olmecs · Teotihuacan

see also: World history · Ancient maritime history · Protohistory · Axial Age · Iron Age · Historiography · Ancient literature · Ancient warfare · Cradle of civilization

↓Middle Ages

Shang Dynasty

The earliest discovered written record of China's past dates from the Shang Dynasty in perhaps the 13th century BCE, and takes the form of inscriptions of divination records on the bones or shells of animals—the so-called *oracle bones*. Archeological findings providing evidence for the existence of the Shang Dynasty, c 1600–1046 BCE are divided into two sets. The first set, from the earlier Shang period (ca.1600–1300 BCE) comes from sources at Erligang, Zhengzhou and Shangcheng. The second set, from the later Shang or Yin () period, consists of a large body of oracle bone writings. Anyang in modern day Henan has been confirmed as the last of the Shang's nine capitals (c 1300–1046 BCE). The Shang Dynasty featured 31 kings, from Tang of Shang to King Zhou of Shang. In this period, the Chinese worshiped many different gods - weather gods and sky gods - and also a supreme god, named Shang-Ti, who ruled over the other gods. Those who lived during the Shang Dynasty also believed that their ancestors - their parents and grandparents - became like gods when they died, and that their ancestors wanted to be worshipped too, like gods. Each family worshipped its own ancestors.

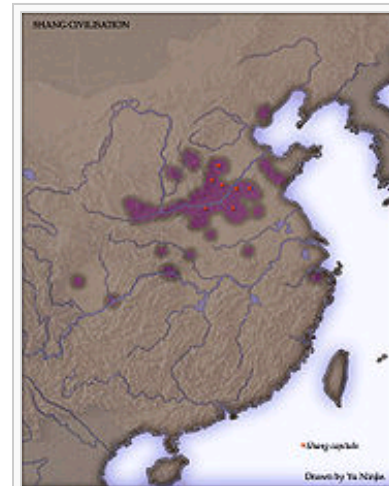
Around 1500 BCE, the Chinese began to use written oracle bones to predict the future. By the time of the Chou Dynasty (about 1100 BCE), the Chinese were also worshipping a natural force called t'ien, which is usually translated as Heaven. Like Shang-Ti, Heaven ruled over all the other gods, and it decided who would rule China, called the Mandate of Heaven. The ruler could rule as long as he or she had the Mandate of Heaven; it was believed that the emperor or empress had lost the Mandate of Heaven when natural disasters occurred in great number, and when, more realistically, the sovereign had apparently lost his concern for the people. In response, the royal house would be overthrown, and a new house would rule, having been granted the Mandate of Heaven.

The *Records of the Grand Historian* states that the Shang Dynasty moved its capital six times. The final (and most important) move to Yin in 1350 BCE led to the dynasty's golden age. The term Yin Dynasty has been synonymous with the Shang dynasty in history, although it has lately been used to specifically refer to the latter half of the Shang Dynasty.

Chinese historians living in later periods were accustomed to the notion of one dynasty succeeding another, but the actual political situation in early China is known to have been much more complicated. Hence, as some scholars of China suggest, the Xia and the Shang can possibly refer to political entities that existed concurrently, just as the early Zhou, is known to have existed at the same time as the Shang.

Written records found at Anyang confirm the existence of the Shang dynasty. However, Western scholars are often hesitant to associate settlements contemporaneous with the Anyang settlement with the Shang dynasty. For example, archaeological findings at Sanxingdui suggest a technologically advanced civilization culturally unlike Anyang. The evidence is inconclusive in proving how far the Shang realm extended from Anyang. The leading hypothesis is that Anyang, ruled by the same Shang in the official history, coexisted and traded with numerous other culturally diverse settlements in the area that is now referred to as China proper.

Zhou Dynasty



Remnants of advanced, stratified societies dating back to the Shang found in the Yellow River Valley.

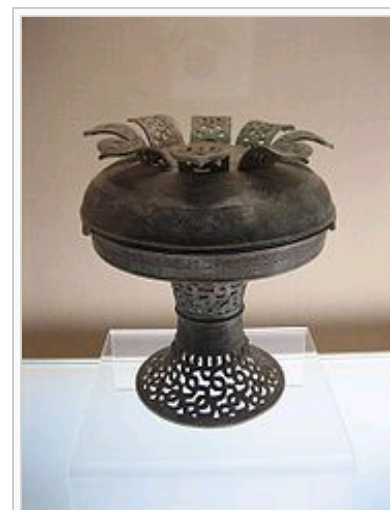


Bronze ritual vessel (You),
Western Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou Dynasty was the longest dynasty in Chinese history, from 1027 to approximately 221 B.C. By the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, the Zhou Dynasty began to emerge in the Yellow River valley, overrunning the Shang. The Zhou appeared to have begun their rule under a semi-feudal system. The Zhou were a people who lived west of Shang, and the Zhou leader had been appointed "Western Protector" by the Shang. The ruler of the Zhou, King Wu, with the assistance of his brother, the Duke of Zhou, as regent managed to defeat the Shang at the Battle of Muye. The king of Zhou at this time invoked the concept of the Mandate of Heaven to legitimize his rule, a concept that would be influential for almost every successive dynasty. The Zhou initially moved their capital west to an area near modern Xi'an, near the Yellow River, but they would preside over a series of expansions into the Yangtze River valley. This would be the first of many population migrations from north to south in Chinese history.

Spring and Autumn Period

In the 8th century BCE, power became decentralized during the Spring and Autumn Period (春秋), named after the influential Spring and Autumn Annals. In this period, local military leaders used by the Zhou began to assert their power and vie for hegemony. The situation was aggravated by the invasion of other peoples from the northwest, such as the Qin, forcing the Zhou to move their capital east to Luoyang. This marks the second large phase of the Zhou dynasty: the Eastern Zhou. In each of the hundreds of states that eventually arose, local strongmen held most of the political power and continued their subservience to the Zhou kings in name only. Local leaders for instance started using royal titles for themselves. The Hundred Schools of Thought (百家 / 百學) of Chinese philosophy blossomed during this period, and such influential intellectual movements as Confucianism (儒家), Taoism (道家), Legalism (法家) and Mohism (墨家) were founded, partly in response to the changing political world. The Spring and Autumn Period is marked by a falling apart of the central Zhou power. China now consists of hundreds of states, some only as large as a village with a fort.



Chinese pu vessel with
interlaced dragon design,
Spring and Autumn Period.

Warring States Period

After further political consolidation, seven prominent states remained by the end of 5th century BCE, and the years in which these few states battled each other are known as the Warring States Period. Though there remained a nominal Zhou king until 256 BCE, he was largely a figurehead and held little real power. As neighboring territories of these warring states, including areas of modern Sichuan and Liaoning, were annexed, they were governed under the new local administrative system of commandery and prefecture (郡 / 縣). This system had been in use since the Spring and Autumn Period and parts can still be seen in the modern system of Sheng & Xian (province and county, 省 / 縣). The final expansion in this period began during the reign of Ying Zheng (秦始皇), the king of Qin. His unification of the other six powers, and further annexations in the modern regions of Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong and Guangxi in 214 BCE enabled him to proclaim himself the First Emperor (Qin Shi Huangdi, 秦始皇).

Imperial era

Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC)

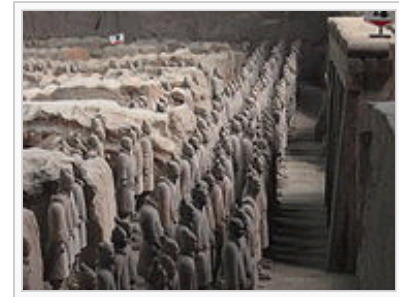


Qin Shi Huang.

Historians often refer to the period from Qin Dynasty to the end of Qing Dynasty as Imperial China. Though the unified reign of the Qin () Emperor lasted only 12 years, he managed to subdue great parts of what constitutes the core of the Han Chinese homeland and to unite them under a tightly centralized Legalist government seated at Xianyang (/) (close to modern Xi'an). The doctrine of legalism that guided the Qin emphasized strict adherence to a legal code and the absolute power of the emperor. This philosophy of Legalism, while effective for expanding the empire in a military fashion, proved unworkable for governing it in peace time. The Qin presided over the brutal silencing of political opposition, including the event known as the burning and burying of scholars. This would be the impetus behind the later Han Synthesis incorporating the more moderate schools of political governance.

The Qin Dynasty is well known for beginning the Great Wall of China, which was later augmented and enhanced during the Ming Dynasty (). The other major contributions of the Qin include the concept of a centralized government, the unification of the legal code, written language, measurement, and currency of China after the tribulations of the Spring and

Autumn and Warring States Periods. Even something as basic as the length of axles for carts had to be made uniform to ensure a viable trading system throughout the empire.^[17]



The Terracotta Army of Qin Shi Huang.

Han Dynasty

Further information: History of the Han Dynasty



A Han Dynasty oil lamp with a sliding shutter, in the shape of a kneeling female servant, 2nd century BCE.

The Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE) emerged in 206 BCE, with its founder Liu Bang proclaimed emperor in 202. It was the first dynasty to embrace the philosophy of Confucianism, which became the ideological underpinning of all regimes until the end of imperial China. Under the Han Dynasty, China made great advances in many areas of the arts and sciences. Emperor Wu (Han Wudi /) consolidated and extended the Chinese empire by pushing back the Xiongnu (sometimes identified with the Huns) into the steppes of modern Inner Mongolia, wresting from them the modern areas of Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai. This enabled the first opening of trading connections between China and the West, the Silk Road. Han Dynasty general Ban Chao expanded his conquests across the Pamirs to the shores of the Caspian Sea.^[18] The first of several Roman embassies to China is recorded in Chinese sources, coming from the sea route in 166, and a second one in 284.

Nevertheless, land acquisitions by elite families gradually drained the tax base. In CE 9, the usurper Wang Mang () founded the short-lived Xin ("New") Dynasty () and started an extensive program of land and other economic reforms. These programs, however, were never supported by the land-holding families, for they favored the peasants. The instability brought about chaos and uprisings.

Emperor Guangwu () reinstated the Han Dynasty with the support of land-holding and merchant families at Luoyang, east of Xi'an. This new era would be termed the Eastern Han Dynasty. Han power declined again amidst land acquisitions, invasions, and feuding between consort clans and eunuchs. The Yellow Turban Rebellion (/) broke out in 184, ushering in an era of warlords. In the ensuing turmoil, three states tried to gain predominance in the Period of the Three Kingdoms. This time period has been greatly romanticized in works such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Wei and Jin Period

After Cao Cao reunified the North in 208CE, his son proclaimed the Wei dynasty in 220CE. Soon, Wei's rivals Shu and Wu proclaimed their independence, leading China into the Three Kingdoms Period. This period was characterized by a gradual decentralization of the state that had existed during the Qin and Han Dynasties, and an increase in the power of great families. Although the Three Kingdoms were reunified by the Jin Dynasty in 280 CE, this structure was essentially the same until the Wu Hu uprising.

Wu Hu Period

Taking advantage of civil war in the Jin Dynasty, the contemporary non-Han Chinese (Wu Hu, 五胡) ethnic groups controlled much of the country in the early 4th century and provoked large-scale Han Chinese migrations to south of the Chang Jiang. In 303 the Di people rebelled and later captured Chengdu, establishing the state of Cheng Han. Under Liu Yuan the Xiongnu rebelled near today's Linfen County and established the state of Han Zhao. His successor Liu Cong captured and executed the last two Western Jin emperors. Sixteen kingdoms were a plethora of short-lived non-Chinese dynasties that came to rule the whole or parts of northern China in the 4th and 5th centuries. Many ethnic groups were involved, including ancestors of the Turks, Mongolians, and Tibetans. Most of these nomadic peoples had to some extent been "Sinicized" long before their ascent to power. In fact, some of them, notably the Ch'iang and the Xiong-nu, had already been allowed to live in the frontier regions within the Great Wall since late Han times.

Southern and Northern Dynasties

Signaled by the collapse of East Jin (东晋) Dynasty in 420, China entered the era of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. The Han people managed to survive the military attacks from the nomadic tribes of the north, such as the Xian Bei (鲜卑), and their civilization continued to thrive.

In Southern China, fierce debates about whether Buddhism should be allowed to exist were held frequently by the royal court and nobles. Finally, near the end of the Southern and Northern Dynasties era, both Buddhist and Taoist followers compromised and became more tolerant of each other.

In 589, Sui (隋) annexed the last Southern Dynasty, Chen (陈), through military force, and put an end to the era of Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Sui Dynasty

The Sui Dynasty (隋), which managed to reunite the country in 589 after nearly four centuries of political fragmentation, played a role more important than its length of existence would suggest. The Sui brought China together again and set up many institutions that were to be adopted by their successors, the Tang. Like the Qin, however, the Sui overused their resources and collapsed. Also similar to the Qin, traditional history has judged the Sui somewhat unfairly, as it has stressed the harshness of the Sui regime and the arrogance of its second emperor, giving little credit for the Dynasty's many positive achievements.



A limestone statue of the Bodhisattva, from the Northern Qi Dynasty, 570 AD, made in what is now modern Henan province.

Tang Dynasty



A Chinese Tang Dynasty tri-colored glaze porcelain horse (ca. 700 AD).

On June 18, 618, Gaozu () took the throne, and the Tang Dynasty () was established, opening a new age of prosperity and innovations in arts and technology. Buddhism, which had gradually been established in China from the first century, became the predominant religion and was adopted by the imperial family and many of the common people.

Chang'an (/) (modern Xi'an), the national capital, is thought to have been the world's largest city at the time. The Tang and the Han are often referred to as the most prosperous periods of Chinese history.

The Tang, like the Han, kept the trade routes open to the west and south and there was extensive trade with distant foreign countries and many foreign merchants settled in China.

The Tang introduced a new system into the Chinese government, called the "Equal Field System". This system gave families land grants from the Emperor based on their needs, not their wealth.

From about 860 the Tang Dynasty began to decline due to a series of rebellions within China itself, and in the previously subject Kingdom of Nanzhao (/) to the south. One of the warlords, Huang Chao (), captured Guangzhou in 879, killing most of the 200,000 inhabitants including most of the large colony of foreign merchant families there.^[19] In late 880 Luoyang surrendered to him and on 5 January, 881 he conquered Chang'an. The emperor Xizong () fled to Chengdu and Huang established a new temporary regime, which was eventually destroyed by Tang forces, but another time of political chaos followed.

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

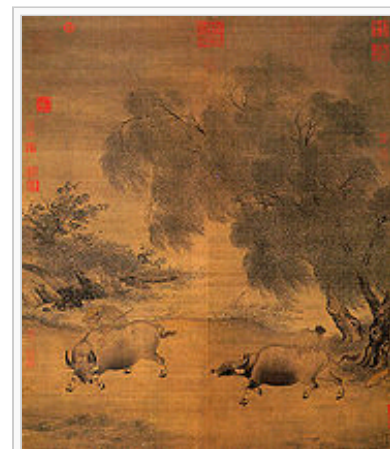
The period of political disunity between the Tang and the Song, known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (), lasted little more than half a century, from 907 to 960. During this brief era, when China was in all respects a multi-state system, five regimes succeeded one another rapidly in control of the old Imperial heartland in northern China. During this same time, 10 more stable regimes occupied sections of southern and western China, so the period is also referred to as that of the Ten Kingdoms ().

Song Dynasty and Liao, Jin, Western Xia

Further information: History of the Song Dynasty

In 960, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) () gained power over most of China and established its capital in Kaifeng (, later known as), starting a period of economic prosperity, while the Khitan Liao Dynasty (/) ruled over Manchuria, present-day Mongolia, and parts of Northern China. In 1115 the Jurchen Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) (/) emerged to prominence, annihilating the Liao Dynasty in 10 years. Meanwhile, in what are now the northwestern Chinese provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, and Ningxia, there emerged a Western Xia Dynasty () from 1032 up to 1227, established by Tangut tribes.

It also took power over northern China and Kaifeng from the Song Dynasty, which moved its capital to Hangzhou (). The Southern Song Dynasty also suffered the humiliation of having to acknowledge the Jin Dynasty as formal overlords. In the ensuing years China was divided between the Song Dynasty, the Jin Dynasty and the Tangut Western Xia (). Southern Song experienced a period of great technological development which can be explained in part by the military pressure that it felt from the north. This included the use of gunpowder weapons, which played a large role in the Song Dynasty naval victories against the Jin in the Battle of Tangdao and Battle of Caishi on the Yangtze River in 1161. Furthermore, China's first permanent standing navy was assembled and provided an admiral's office at Dinghai in 1132, under the reign of Emperor Renzong of Song.



Homeward Oxherds in Wind and Rain, by Li Di, 12th century

The Song Dynasty is considered by many to be classical China's high point in science and technology, with innovative scholar-officials such as Su Song (1020-1101) and Shen Kuo (1031-1095). There was court intrigue with the political rivals of the Reformers and Conservatives, led by the chancellors Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, respectively. By the mid to late 13th century the Chinese had adopted the dogma of Neo-Confucian philosophy formulated by Zhu Xi. There were enormous literary works compiled during the Song Dynasty, such as the historical work of the *Zizhi Tongjian*. Culture and the arts flourished, with grandiose artworks such as *Along the River During Qingming Festival* and *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*, while there were great Buddhist painters such as Lin Tinggui.

Yuan Dynasty

Jurchen tribes' Jin Dynasty, whose names are also rendered "Jin" in pinyin, was defeated by the Mongols, who then proceeded to defeat the Southern Song in a long and bloody war, the first war where firearms played an important role. During the era after the war, later called the *Pax Mongolica*, adventurous Westerners such as Marco Polo travelled all the way to China and brought the first reports of its wonders to Europe. In the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongols were divided between those who wanted to remain based in the steppes and those who wished to adopt the customs of the Chinese.



Kublai Khan (/), grandson of Genghis Khan (), wanting to adopt the customs of China, established the Yuan Dynasty (). This was the first dynasty to rule the whole of China from Beijing () as the capital. Beijing had been ceded to Liao in CE 938 with the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan Yun (). Before that, it had been the capital of the Jin, who did not rule all of China.

Before the Mongol invasion, Chinese dynasties reportedly had approximately 120 million inhabitants; after the conquest was completed in 1279, the 1300 census reported roughly 60 million people.^[20] The 14th century epidemics of plague (Black Death) is estimated to have killed 30% of the population of China.^{[21][22]}

Ming Dynasty

Further information: History of the Ming Dynasty and Tibet during the Ming Dynasty



Hongwu Emperor, founder of Ming Dynasty.

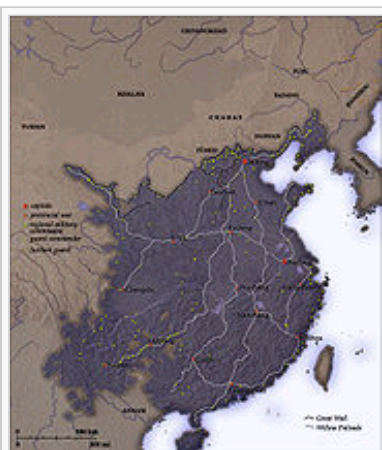
Throughout the Yuan Dynasty, which lasted less than a century, there was relatively strong sentiment among the populace against the Mongol rule. The frequent natural disasters since the 1340s finally led to peasant revolts. The Yuan Dynasty was eventually overthrown by the Ming Dynasty () in 1368.

Urbanization increased as the population grew and as the division of labor grew more complex. Large urban centers, such as Nanjing and Beijing, also contributed to the growth of private industry. In particular, small-scale industries grew up, often specializing in paper, silk, cotton, and porcelain goods. For the most part, however, relatively small urban centers with markets proliferated around the country. Town markets mainly traded food, with some necessary manufactures such as pins or oil.

Despite the xenophobia and intellectual introspection characteristic of the increasingly popular new school of neo-Confucianism, China under the early Ming Dynasty was not

isolated. Foreign trade and other contacts with the outside world, particularly Japan, increased considerably. Chinese merchants explored all of the Indian Ocean, reaching East Africa with the voyages of Zheng He (), original name Ma Sanbao ().

Zhu Yuanzhang () or (Hong-wu, /), the founder of the dynasty, laid the foundations for a state interested less in commerce and more in extracting revenues from the agricultural sector. Perhaps because of the Emperor's background as a peasant, the Ming economic system emphasized agriculture, unlike that of the Song and the Mongolian Dynasties, which relied on traders and merchants for revenue. Neo-feudal landholdings of the Song and Mongol periods were expropriated by the Ming rulers. Land estates were confiscated by the government, fragmented, and rented out. Private slavery was forbidden. Consequently, after the death of Emperor Yong-le (/), independent peasant landholders predominated in Chinese agriculture. These laws might have paved the way to removing the worst of the poverty during the previous regimes.



1580s foreign relations of the Ming Dynasty

The dynasty had a strong and complex central government that unified and controlled the empire. The emperor's role became more autocratic, although Zhu Yuanzhang necessarily continued to use what he called the "Grand Secretaries"[] to assist with the immense paperwork of the bureaucracy, including memorials (petitions and recommendations to the throne), imperial edicts in reply, reports of various kinds, and tax records. It was this same bureaucracy that later prevented the Ming government from being able to adapt to changes in society, and eventually led to its decline.

Emperor Yong-le strenuously tried to extend China's influence beyond its borders by demanding other rulers send ambassadors to China to present tribute. A large navy was built, including four-masted ships displacing 1,500 tons. A standing army of 1 million troops (some estimate as many as 1.9 million) was created. The Chinese armies conquered Vietnam () for around 20 years, while the Chinese fleet sailed the China seas and the Indian Ocean, cruising as far as the east coast of Africa. The Chinese gained influence in Eastern Turkestan. Several maritime Asian nations sent envoys with tribute for the Chinese emperor. Domestically, the Grand Canal was expanded, and proved to be a stimulus to domestic trade. Over 100,000 tons of iron per year

were produced. Many books were printed using movable type. The imperial palace in Beijing's Forbidden City reached its current splendor. It was also during these centuries that the potential of south China came to be fully exploited. New crops were widely cultivated and industries such as those producing porcelain and textiles flourished.

In 1449 Esen Tayisi led an Oirat Mongol invasion of northern China which culminated in the capture of the Zhengtong Emperor at Tumu. In 1542 the Mongol leader Altan Khan began to harass China along the northern border. In 1550 he even reached the



Court Ladies of the Former Shu, by Ming painter Tang Yin (1470-1523).

suburbs of Beijing. The empire also had to deal with Japanese pirates attacking the southeastern coastline;^[23] general Qi Jiguang was instrumental in defeating these pirates. The deadliest earthquake of all times, the Shaanxi earthquake of 1556 that killed approximately 830,000 people, occurred during the Jiajing Emperor's reign.

During the Ming dynasty the last construction on the Great Wall was undertaken to protect China from foreign invasions. While the Great Wall had been built in earlier times, most of what is seen today was either built or repaired by the Ming. The brick and granite work was enlarged, the watch towers were redesigned, and cannons were placed along its length.

Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty (, 1644–1911) was founded after the defeat of the Ming, the last Han Chinese dynasty, by the Manchus (). The Manchus were formerly known as the *Jurchen* () and invaded from the north in the late seventeenth century. An estimated 25 million people died during the Manchu conquest of the Ming Dynasty (1616-1644).^[24] The Manchus adopted the Confucian norms of traditional Chinese government in their rule of China proper.

The Manchus enforced a 'queue order' forcing the Han Chinese to adopt the Manchu queue hairstyle and Manchu-style clothing. The traditional Chinese clothing, or Hanfu () was also replaced by Manchu-style clothing. Qipao (bannermen dress () and *Tangzhuang* (). The penalty for not complying was death.

Emperor Kangxi (/) ordered the creation of the most complete dictionary of Chinese characters ever put together at the time. The Manchus set up the "Eight Banners" system () in an attempt to avoid being assimilated into Chinese society. The "Eight Banners" were military institutions set up to provide a structure with which the Manchu "bannermen" were meant to identify. Banner membership was to be based on traditional Manchu skills such as archery, horsemanship, and frugality. In addition, they were encouraged to use the Manchu language, rather than Chinese, though this had been changed significantly in the later course of the dynasty. Bannermen were given economic and legal privileges in Chinese cities.



Territory of Qing China in 1892



French political cartoon from the late 1890s. A pie representing China and is being divided between UK,

Over the next half-century, the Qing consolidated control of some areas originally under the Ming, including Yunnan. They also stretched their sphere of influence over Xinjiang, Tibet and Mongolia. But during the nineteenth century, Qing control weakened. Britain's desire to continue its opium trade with China collided with imperial edicts prohibiting the addictive drug, and the First Opium War erupted in 1840. Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1842 under the Treaty of Nanjing.

A large rebellion, the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), involved around a third of China falling under control of the Taiping Tianguo, a quasi-Christian religious movement led by the "Heavenly King" Hong Xiuquan. Only after fourteen years were the Taipings finally crushed - the Taiping army was destroyed in the Third Battle of Nanking in 1864. The death toll during the 15 years of the rebellion was about 20 million,^[25]

In addition, more costly rebellions in terms of human lives and economics followed with the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars, Nien Rebellion, Muslim Rebellion, Panthay Rebellion and the Boxer Rebellion.^[26] In many ways, the rebellions and the unequal treaties the Qing were forced to sign with the imperialist powers are symptomatic of the Qing's inability to deal with the new challenges of the 19th century.

Germany, Russia, France and Japan.

By the 1860s, the Qing Dynasty had put down the rebellions at enormous cost and loss of life. This undermined the credibility of the Qing regime and, spearheaded by local initiatives by provincial leaders and gentry, contributed to the rise of warlordism in China. The Qing Dynasty under the Emperor Guangxu (/) proceeded to deal with the problem of modernization through the Self-Strengthening Movement (). However, between 1898 and 1908 the Empress Dowager Cixi had the reformist Guangxu imprisoned for being 'mentally disabled'. The Empress Dowager (), with the help of conservatives, initiated a military coup, effectively removed the young Emperor from power, and overturned most of the more radical reforms. He died one day before the death of the Empress Dowager (some believe Guangxu was poisoned by Cixi). Official corruption, cynicism, and imperial family quarrels made most of the military reforms useless. As a result, the Qing's "New Armies" were soundly defeated in the Sino-French War (1883-1885) and the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).



The Dowager Empress Cixi

At the start of the 20th century, the Boxer Rebellion threatened northern China. This was a conservative anti-imperialist movement that sought to return China to old ways. The Empress Dowager, probably seeking to ensure her continued grip on power, sided with the Boxers when they advanced on Beijing. In response, a relief expedition of the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded China to rescue the besieged foreign missions. Consisting of British, Japanese, Russian, Italian, German, French, US and Austrian troops, the alliance defeated the Boxers and demanded further concessions from the Qing government.

Modern era

Republic of China

Frustrated by the Qing court's resistance to reform and by China's weakness, young officials, military officers, and students—inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen ()—began to advocate the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the creation of a republic.



Sun Yat-sen, founder and first president of the Republic of China.

Slavery in China was abolished in 1910.^[27]

A revolutionary military uprising, the Wuchang Uprising, began on October 10, 1911 in Wuhan (). The provisional government of the Republic of China () was formed in Nanjing on March 12, 1912 with Sun Yat-sen as President, but Sun was forced to turn power over to Yuan Shikai (), who commanded the New Army and was Prime Minister under the Qing government, as part of the agreement to let the last Qing monarch abdicate (a decision Sun would later regret). Over the next few years, Yuan proceeded to abolish the national and provincial assemblies, and declared himself emperor in late 1915. Yuan's imperial ambitions were fiercely opposed by his subordinates; faced with the prospect of rebellion, he abdicated in March 1916, and died in June of that year. His death left a power vacuum in China; the republican government was all but shattered. This ushered in the warlord era, during which much of the country was ruled by shifting coalitions of competing provincial military leaders.

In 1919, the May Fourth Movement () began as a response to the insult imposed on China by the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I, but quickly became a protest movement about the domestic situation in China. The discrediting of liberal Western philosophy amongst Chinese intellectuals was followed by the adoption of more radical lines of

thought. This in turn planted the seeds for the irreconcilable conflict between the left and right in China that would dominate Chinese history for the rest of the century.

In the 1920s, Sun Yat-Sen established a revolutionary base in south China, and set out to unite the fragmented nation. With Soviet assistance, he entered into an alliance with the fledgling Communist Party of China (CPC,). After Sun's death from cancer in 1925, one of his protégés, Chiang Kai-shek (), seized control of the *Kuomintang* (Nationalist Party or KMT,) and succeeded in bringing most of south and central China under its rule in a military campaign known as the Northern Expedition (). Having defeated the warlords in south and central China by military force, Chiang was able to secure the nominal allegiance of the warlords in the North. In 1927, Chiang turned on the CPC and relentlessly chased the CPC armies and its leaders from their bases in southern and eastern China. In 1934, driven from their mountain bases such as the Chinese Soviet Republic (), the CPC forces embarked on the Long March () across China's most desolate terrain to the northwest, where they established a guerrilla base at Yan'an in Shaanxi Province ().

During the Long March, the communists reorganized under a new leader, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung,). The bitter struggle between the KMT and the CPC continued, openly or clandestinely, through the 14-year long Japanese occupation (1931-1945), of various parts of the country. The two Chinese parties nominally formed a united front to oppose the Japanese in 1937, during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), which became a part of World War II. Following the defeat of Japan in 1945, the war between the KMT and the CPC resumed, after failed attempts at reconciliation and a negotiated settlement. By 1949, the CPC had occupied most of the country. (*see Chinese Civil War*)

At the end of WWII in 1945 as part of the overall Japanese surrender, Japanese troops in Taiwan surrendered to Republic of China troops giving Chiang Kai-shek effective control of Taiwan.^[28] When Chiang was defeated by CPC forces in mainland China in 1949, he fled to Taiwan with his government and the remnants of his army, along with most of the KMT leadership and a large number of their supporters.

1949 to Present

See also: People's Republic of China, Republic of China, Legal status of Taiwan, and Political status of Taiwan

With the CPC's victory, and their proclamation of the People's Republic of China (,) on October 1, 1949, Taiwan was again politically separated from mainland China, and continues to be governed by the Republic of China to the present day. No peace treaty has ever been signed between the two opposing parties. For the history of the People's Republic of China since 1949, see History of the People's Republic of China. For the history of the Republic of China since 1949, see Republic of China on Taiwan (1949-present).

See also

- Religion in China
- Chinese armour
- Chinese exploration
- Chinese historiography
- Chinese sovereign
- Culture of China
- Dynasties in Chinese history
- Ethnic groups in Chinese history
- Foreign relations of Imperial China
- Four occupations
- History of Hong Kong
- History of Islam in China

- History of Macau
- History of science and technology in China
- List of recipients of tribute from China
- List of tributaries of Imperial China
- List of Chinese rebellions
- List of Neolithic cultures of China
- Military history of China
- Naval history of China
- Table of Chinese monarchs
- Timeline of Chinese history
- Xia Shang Zhou Chronology Project

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- Chinese Text Project Texts and translations of historical Chinese works.
- Ancient Asian World History, culture and archaeology of the ancient Asian continent. Many articles and pictures

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