# CHINA

HISTORY

China's story began with farmers along its great rivers. For more than 2,000 years, emperors ruled. Then China became a modern country.

## Farmers on the Yellow River

More than 7,000 years ago, people in China grew millet along the Yellow River and rice along the Yangtze (YANG-see). About 3,500 years ago, the Shang **dynasty** came to power. Shang kings carved questions about the future on animal bones and turtle shells. These oracle bones hold the oldest Chinese writing found so far.



## The First Emperor

China was once split into kingdoms that fought each other. In 221 BC, the king of Qin (CHIN) conquered the others and united China. He called himself Qin Shi Huang, the first **emperor**. He made everyone use the same writing, money and measures. He joined older walls into an early Great Wall against horse riders from the north. Thousands of clay soldiers guard his tomb near Xi'an (shee-AHN).

## The Han and the Silk Road

The Han dynasty ruled from 206 BC to AD 220. Traders carried Chinese silk west along the Silk Road, a chain of trade routes across Asia. Some of it reached as far as Rome. Ideas such as Buddhism came back along it. Around AD 105, a Han official named Cai Lun (tsy LOON) improved the way paper was made.

## Inventions of the Tang and Song

Under the Tang and Song dynasties, between 618 and 1279, printers carved whole pages into wood blocks and pressed them onto paper. The oldest dated printed book, the Diamond Sutra, was made in 868. Sailors used the magnetic compass to find their way at sea. Chinese **inventions** such as paper, printing, the compass and gunpowder later spread around the world.



## The Ming and the Forbidden City

In 1279, Mongol armies conquered the last of the Song, and the Mongols ruled all of China. In 1368, the Ming dynasty drove them out. Ming emperors built the Forbidden City in Beijing, a palace with hundreds of buildings, finished in 1420. Ordinary people could not go in, so it was called forbidden. The Ming rebuilt the Great Wall in stone and brick. From 1405 to 1433, Admiral Zheng He (jung HUH) led huge fleets as far as Africa.

## The Last Emperor and Modern China

In 1644, the Qing (CHING) dynasty took power. It was China's last dynasty. In 1912, China became a **republic**, and the last emperor, a six-year-old boy named Puyi, gave up the throne. The People's Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949. Today China has huge cities such as Shanghai and the world's biggest network of high-speed trains. In 2019, a Chinese spacecraft made the first landing on the far side of the Moon.

## CHINA THROUGH TIME

| 1600 BC | 221 BC | 105 | 868 | 1279 | 1420 | 1644 | 1912 | 1949 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shang dynasty begins | Qin Shi Huang unites China | Cai Lun improves paper | Diamond Sutra is printed | Mongols rule all of China | Forbidden City is finished | Qing dynasty begins | China becomes a republic | People's Republic is founded |

## PEOPLE TO KNOW

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| **Confucius** | Teacher whose ideas shaped China |
| **Qin Shi Huang** | First emperor, united China |
| **Cai Lun** | Han official who improved paper |
| **Wu Zetian** | China's only woman emperor |
| **Zheng He** | Admiral who sailed as far as Africa |

## WORDS TO KNOW

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|---|---|
| **dynasty** | a family that rules a country for a long time |
| **emperor** | the ruler of an empire |
| **invention** | something new that is made for the first time |
| **republic** | a country that is not ruled by a king or emperor |