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Eugene Law

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# FOREWORD

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I'll never forget my mother's visit to Beijing two years ago. At age 72, she was coming to China for the first time in her life. Soon after entering my downtown apartment, this meticulous woman began to unpack her carefully organized suitcase. Wedged in with her clothes and shoes she had a few items that surprised me: a dozen rolls of toilet paper and a box of laundry detergent.

I couldn't figure out why she would have deemed such items necessary for a trip that would only last two weeks. Then it struck me: except for letters I had sent and conversations we had had about my life in China, her principal source of information about the country was outdated and overly cautious guidebooks written for the most part by short-term visitors.

These books comprised the first generation of China guides. Their authors were pioneering travelers who made their trips in the late 70s, 80s and early 90s when China had just opened to the world after several decades of isolation. Tourists who ventured to China during those years truly did need to worry about finding basic necessities.

At the time, few tourists had seen China – and for that matter, China had seen very few tourists. Because of this, the task of writing guidebooks in those days – guides to lands uncharted in the modern era – fell only to those authors who looked upon hardship as a badge of honor, who sought the glory of being labeled 'pioneers', no matter how many 24-hour hard-seat train rides they'd have to endure in the process. It was all part of the price one paid to go down in modern history as one of the first to set foot in the new China, a country that, to the outside world, had been shrouded in mystery for more than a generation.

A funny thing happened after these books were published: travelers following the routes these popular titles recommended soon created sub-cultures and worlds of their own within China; worlds of foreign travelers and backpacker hotspots in which the primary cultural experiences were foreign: Europeans and Americans running into Australians and Israelis while dining on banana pancakes in restaurants showing Hollywood films on big-screen TVs and playing *Eminem* on the stereo.

Though these first-generation books are updated every couple of years, it's hard for them to overcome what they are at their core – guides for those seeking a rough-hewn, but frankly clichéd, adventure.

From these pioneering guidebooks my mother came away with out-of-date perceptions of China that were rooted in this earlier generation of China travel. The world she read about was one where a roll of toilet paper would be hard to find, and where even using the tap water to rinse your toothbrush was an invitation to intestinal distress.



Imagine her surprise after arriving in Beijing, when instead of worrying about toilet paper, she was faced with difficult choices like where to dine in this food-lover's paradise. Would it be Peking Duck or Indian, Italian or Japanese cuisine? Or something more familiar from the Outback Steakhouse or TGIFriday's? Consider her shock when rather than encountering the dreaded dearth of washing powder, she was instead confronted by my local market's bulging aisle of cleansing products, their familiar names and screaming colors competing for the attention of discerning shoppers.

Perhaps her biggest misconception was the expectation that Beijing's streets would be clogged with cyclists in Mao suits, rather than the fleets of late model Audis and Buicks that she dodged with care.

As my mother's revelations demonstrate, China is undergoing such rapid change that a guidebook written even a couple of years ago is almost useless. China is no longer the destination for those looking to accumulate hardship tales of scarcity, penury and adversity overcome.

That's the reason a book like the one you're holding in your hands is so crucial. The guidebooks of old – and even some published very recently – have an overly cautious tone and an outsiders' perspective that depicts China as a world not to delve into but to skirt around and approach wearily. This one is different.

Written mostly by native English speakers who are not short-term tourists but long-term China residents, and edited by people who live and work in China, not in New York or London, this book lends a fresh perspective on all things Chinese. It melds foreign and local perspectives into a seamless narrative that allows new light to be cast on China's cities and places of interest.

This guidebook is not meant to be read as a novel. It does not assume the reader needs to be coddled and protected from China. Rather, it contains snapshots of rewarding things to do in and around China's most famous cities. Its compelling mix of cultural insights and practical information is designed to appeal to all readers, foreigners and Chinese, and to whet their appetite for travel in China.

Welcome to the second generation of China guidebooks. Sit back and enjoy.



Michael Wester

Manager of that's Beijing Magazine





# HISTORY & CULTURE



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# Brief Introduction to China's History

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Over 1.7 million years ago the early ancestors of humans roamed through China.

## ARCHEOLOGY & ANCIENT HISTORY

China's culture is one of the oldest of the world. Legend has it that the three nobles and five emperors (*sānhuáng wǔdì* 三皇五帝) were the first rulers of China. They're also considered as the ancestors of the Chinese people. Of these legendary figures, some taught the Chinese to build houses, others how to grow grain. All of them were idealized figures during a time when mankind was first learning how to survive in the world. The most famous two of these eight semi-deities were the emperors Yan and Huang. Today the Chinese often refer to themselves as *Yan Huang Zisun* (*Yán Huáng zisūn* 炎黄子孙) – descendants of the Yan and Huang emperors.

Despite a lack of written records in prehistoric China, through rich archaeological finds, it's possible to build a picture what life was like during this period.

Fossils of an ancient humanoid dating back 1.7 million years were found in Yuanmou County in Yunnan Province. The Yuanmou fossils are the earliest trace of homo sapiens in China. Research has shown that during the prehistoric era there were many patches of human inhabitation throughout China. Unearthed jade and pottery show the civilization of that time was technologically advanced.

## XIA (22nd – 17th CENTURY BC)

The Xia is the first dynasty recorded in China's history. The dynasty was established by Qi, son of Yu the Great, the legendary hero who tamed the Yellow River and controlled its perennial floods. The Erlitou ruins, discovered in Henan Province, illustrate the advanced technology of Xia culture, particularly the relics of an ancient palace and point to the rule of one strong figure.

## SHANG (17th – 11th CENTURY BC)

According to historical records, the Xia reigned for 471 years and was superseded by the Shang dynasty. The Shang powerbase was in what are now Henan, Hebei and Shandong provinces. Relics of the Shang dynasty, the Yin ruins, were discovered by archaeologists at Xiaotun Village in Henan Province. At the site they unearthed numerous tortoise shells and animal bones inscribed with *jiaguwen* (*jiǎgǔwén* 甲骨文), the precursor to modern Chinese characters. These bones, also called oracle bones, were used in divination ceremonies. Basic questions such as choosing auspicious days for important events, what course of action to take and when to begin harvesting, have been found. These bones have given much information about the daily lives of the Shang people.

A significant amount of bronzeware was also excavated, of which the best known is the rectangular *simuwu ding* (*sīmūwù dàfāngdīng* 司母戊大方鼎). Named after the characters carved on it, this *ding* is 133cm high and weighs 875kg. The *simuwu* is an impressive piece – the technological skill required to cast such pieces was considerable. Much of the Shang bronzeware is inscribed with characters and decorations. The decorations are usually based on animalistic motifs; one that's particularly common is the *taotie* (*tāotiè* 饕餮), a mythical feral animal.

## ZHOU (11th CENTURY – 256 BC)

King Zhou (*zhòuwáng* 纣王), the last king of Shang dynasty was a despotic tyrant and was overthrown by the Zhou (no relation), a tribe from the west. The Zhou dynasty would become longest ruling dynasty in Chinese history, lasting over 770 years. Initially the Zhou dynasty made its capital in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, but the capital was later moved east to Luoyang in Henan Province. Historians divide the Zhou dynasty into Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou because of this shift.

The king of the Western Zhou distributed his lands as fiefs to the nobles of his clan. These nobles then established vassal states around the Zhou capital, protecting the ruling authority in the center. The Zhou rulers created an elaborate system of ceremonial rites with every rite matched to music and dance. The Zhou, as a method of control over their subjects, used these rites by explaining the nature of the Zhou's supremacy and legitimacy to rule. By performing the rituals, the Zhou believed they maintained the "Mandate of Heaven." As long as the ruling elite continued to have this mandate, their authority to rule remained divinely ordained.

During the rule of King Ping, the capital was moved to Luoyang to escape the threat of the Quanrong, a tribe from the west. This marked the beginning of the Eastern Zhou dynasty. The Eastern Zhou is further subdivided into two periods, the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period.

The power of the Zhou kings was slowly whittled away as powerful nobles began to contend for power and only paid nominal

homage to the king. Eventually the authority of the Zhou kings only extended to their territories immediately surrounding Luoyang. The most influential Zhou dukes became so powerful they were called "The Five Overlords of the Spring and Autumn Period."

Under a state of constant warfare and expansion, the social system of the Eastern Zhou changed radically. New technologies made their impact felt – the development of iron tools over stone tools coupled with the harnessing of animal power significantly increased agricultural production. With the expansion of agriculture, trade also grew and the first merchants and traders appeared.

The social classes also became more clearly defined into four groups – the scholar (*shì* 士), peasant farmer (*nóng* 农), manual laborer (*gōng* 工) and merchant (*shāng* 商). The social system outgrew the simplistic structure that the Western Zhou rites had established. What was desperately needed was a written code.

Enter Confucius, China's most influential teacher and philosopher who lived from 551 to 479 BC, during one of China's most turbulent periods. This was a transitional time, a period between dynasties when local



Bronze *ding* vessels were an important part of early Chinese rituals.



## HISTORY & CULTURE

warlords fought for supremacy – a reoccurring theme in Chinese history. Confucius' theories and teachings would eventually be known simply as Confucianism (*rú jiā* 儒家). His core belief stresses the idea of *ren* (*rén* 仁), which is approximately translated as benevolence, something he felt that society sorely lacked. Confucius traveled extensively, hoping to influence local leaders. On his travels he picked up a large following of students who continued his teachings after his death, thus laying the foundation for the Confucian school of thought, which continues to influence Asia to this day.

Once the Zhou dynasty became nothing but a name, the battle for supremacy intensified. The most powerful of these competing kingdoms are known as the "Seven Overlords." Each competing kingdom sought any advantage they could find over their rivals – this was a dynamic time replete with reforms and stratagems. It was the Qin kingdom that most successfully reformed and adapted itself politically, economically and technologically to the changing times.

Under the Zhou, the ruling elite held a monopoly on power and were able to define

what was culture. With the upheavals of the Warring States period, a new scholarly class (*shi rén* 士人) emerged at the cultural forefront. These scholars formed differing schools of thought, each offering their services as advisors in hopes of gaining influence. Out of this developed the "Hundred Schools of Thought," which promoted the development of systematic learning.

### QIN (221 – 206 BC)

In 221 BC, King Ying Zheng (*Yíng Zhèng* 嬴政) established the first unified empire in Chinese history, and named himself Shi Huangdi which means, the First Emperor. He unified the Chinese script, currency and measurement system. His policies were focused on the exploration and stabilization of the Chinese frontier. One of his projects to protect his domains included the renowned Great Wall, which was built on the foundations of older walls. History remembers Qin Shihuang as a tyrant. Severe laws and penalties were enacted as a social control while supreme power lay with the emperor.

Another of the emperor's grandiose projects included the Terracotta Army. Excavated in

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A wall carving depicting Confucius' visits to various kingdoms.



Shaanxi Province, this is part of the emperor's massive mausoleum. Tens of thousands of conscripts were sent to construct his tomb. The dynasty's tyrannical reign lasted a mere 16 years. After the emperor's death widespread rebellions broke out. Eventually a rebel army led by Liu Bang, a former local official, established the Han dynasty.

### HAN (206 BC – AD 220)

Like the Zhou dynasty, the Han dynasty is divided into two phases, the Western Han and the Eastern Han. The Western Han settled its capital at Xi'an, while the Eastern Han returned it to Luoyang in AD 25. The emperor and his chancellors, having witnessed the sudden collapse of the Qin dynasty, realized that it wasn't feasible to rule a vast kingdom solely on a strict legal system. The monarch relaxed the "legalist system" and allowed the economy, destroyed by war, to recover. Emperor Wudi, one of the early Han emperors, was both ambitious and talented – his reign saw many achievements. By his reign, the Han dynasty was a thriving and powerful empire. One of his most enduring legacies was promoting Confucianism as the official ideology and applying it to the bureaucracy. Ministers were selected based on their knowledge of the Confucian classics, a system that was continued by succeeding dynasties up until the end of the Qing dynasty. He was also able to centralize power, thus removing the threat of powerful nobles rising in rebellion. On the economic side, new trade routes were established between China and Central Asia. Chinese silk was exported along these routes, which would become known as the Silk Road (*sīchóu zhìlù* 丝绸之路).

Under the Eastern Han dynasty, power was further centralized, the economy continued to prosper and cultural achievements reached a peak – this era is considered one of China's golden ages. Paper was also invented during this time. Although samples of paper have been found dating back to the Western Han, it was during the Eastern Han when improved papermaking techniques made it practical to manufacture. With the discovery of paper, the dissemination of information and spread of learning increased China's cultural influence.

### DISUNION (220 – 589)

From the 2nd to the 6th century, China went



The first emperor of a united China, Qin Shihuang.

through a period of disunity. The disintegration began with the displacement of the Eastern Han by three regimes, the Wei, Shu and Wu. One of China's most famous literary epics, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*sānguó yǎnyì* 三国演义), which was written by Luo Guanzhong during the Ming dynasty, is a fictionalized account of this period.

Numerous petty kingdoms rose and fell during this time. Groups of northern "barbarians" made inroads into China during this time, establishing a series of kingdoms in the vulnerable north. Eventually the Turgut (*tuòbá* 拓跋) tribe of the Xianbei unified northern China and established the Northern Wei dynasty.

Xiao Wendi, an emperor of the Northern



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Wei dynasty, carried out a series of reforms, basing his kingdom along the Chinese bureaucracy. The Confucian bureaucracy would prove to be one of China's most durable institutions – by adopting it, would-be rulers could gain legitimacy and claim the "Mandate of Heaven," whether they were ethnic Chinese or not. This extended period of northern incursion into Chinese lands saw the intermingling of different ethnic groups and exchange of knowledge.

It was during Han dynasty when Buddhism first came to China from India. Temples and stupas, the architecture that people associate with Chinese Buddhism began to sprout throughout the land. As a sign of devotion, Buddhist cave carvings were begun in northern China. The ones at Yungang and Longmen continue to awe and inspire visitors.

There were mass migrations during this period of upheaval. Some were by those seeking a better future, while others were forced from their homes. Vast numbers of Han Chinese journeyed south, expanding the cultural boundaries of China. They brought new technologies and Han culture as they moved into the periphery and

assimilated or displaced local population.

### SUI (581 – 618)

The Sui dynasty unified China in AD 581 after more than 400 years of disunity, yet it only lasted 38 years. Much was accomplished during this dynasty's short reign – a population census, reformation of the bloated regional administration system and consolidation the southern regions. One of the Sui's most important legacies was building the Grand Canal (*dà yùnhé* 大运河), which linked Hangzhou in the south to Beijing in the north. The network of canals aided and enhanced economic and cultural exchange between the south and north and would greatly influence China's development. The downfall of the Sui dynasty came with several military excursions into Korea. These disastrous wars were prohibitively expensive and brought the dynasty to bankruptcy. Peasant rebellions erupted throughout the countryside and Li Yuan, a Sui government minister ended the Sui dynasty when he founded the Tang dynasty.

### TANG (618 – 907)

The Tang dynasty was one of China's most prosperous and culturally rich periods.

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An early papermaking workshop.





Heroes from the Three Kingdoms period.

Under the rule of the second Tang emperor, Taizong, the economy flourished and empire experienced an era of stability. Moreover, he was considered an enlightened ruler for his open style of governing.

Not long after Emperor Taizong, Wu Zetian became the only female empress in China's history. She's remembered as a harsh but capable ruler who attracted people of talent to her court.

The Tang dynasty reached its peak under the stewardship of Emperor Xuanzong. His rule heralded a long period of expansion, prosperity and stability, but towards his later years, the dynasty declined and before long regional military commanders seized the opportunity to rebel. The greatest peril the dynasty faced was the devastating rebellion of An Lushan, an ethnic Sogdian, who was

the adopted son of Xuanzong's favorite concubine, Yang Guifei.

Many of the emperor's closest advisors blamed Yang Guifei, who was nicknamed "the Fat Concubine," for the decline of the empire. The emperor was so enamored by her charms that he ignored state affairs and spent his time with frolicking with his favorite instead. Coming from a poor family, Yang Guifei took this opportunity to enrich herself and her family. Eventually the emperor's officials forced the emperor to order her to commit suicide while fleeing from An Lushan. After this episode, Xuanzong fell into a deep depression and abdicated the throne. Tang poet Bai Juyi immortalized this fatal love story in his poem *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (*cháng hèn gē* 长恨歌).

The imperial examination system became highly developed under the Tang. While in theory anyone, even a poor peasant, could take part in the examinations, in practice only those rich enough to afford the years of study

could advance through the highly competitive system. Poetry also achieved remarkable heights of artistry during the Tang dynasty. Many China's most talented poets, such as Li Bai, Du Fu and Bai Juyi hail from this era.

The Tang dynasty was the largest power in Asia, extending towards Central Asia with its cultural reach playing a key role in the development of Korea and Japan. Numerous envoys and students from foreign countries frequently visited Tang dynasty China. Different ethnic groups that inhabited the periphery of the dynasty allowed for frequent cultural exchanges, making the Tang dynasty the most cosmopolitan and open of all China's dynasties.

The Tang legal code and Chinese characters were some of China's most important



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exports to Korea and Japan. Thousands of students from both countries went arrived in China to study and Chinese teachers traveled abroad to spread their wisdom. Buddhism continued to spread throughout China where it became Sinicized, furthering its popularity. An eclectic milieu of religions – Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, Judaism and Islam were brought into China. Technology also traveled along the Silk Road, Arab traders spread papermaking techniques. Wood block printing was invented during the Tang dynasty, with the *Diamond Sutra* (*jīngāng jīng* 金刚经), printed in 868, being the earliest example of a book made using this technique. In late Tang battles, weapons employing gunpowder were used.

As the Tang dynasty reeled from An Lushan's



Entertainment in a Tang dynasty court.

rebellion, which last for over eight years, increased power was given to military officials to deal with the rebels, but in turn they began to acquire power and carve out kingdoms of their own. In AD 907, the Tang dynasty was overthrown. The dynastic cycle once again began anew. The period following the collapse of the Tang was a time of devastation and turbulence. It was during this period of upheaval that China's economic center shifted from the Chinese heartland of the Yellow River valley in the north to the south. This economic migration south, coupled with frequent invasions from the north would create a cultural and psychological divide in the Chinese psyche based along the Yangtze River.

### SONG (960 – 1279)

In 960, Zhao Kuangyin, a former military official, donned the "Dragon Robe," the symbol of imperial power and established the Northern Song dynasty. The second Northern Song emperor completed the reunification of the country when he destroyed the remaining opposition. The Song emperors, fully aware that the concentration of power among regional governors led to the downfall of the Tang dynasty, deliberately curbed the powers of the local officials.

While officials had their powers curb, their numbers increased and they soon became a severe financial burden on the state coffers. This led to a financial crisis that affected the ability of the dynasty to defend itself militarily. To solve this problem, the scholar-bureaucrats of the Song dynasty launched a series of political reforms. The policies that were proposed by Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi are the best known, they were wide ranging and, for the era, considered very liberal.

One characteristic of the Northern Song dynasty was its emphasis on academia and its disdain for the military. The Northern Song developed a complicated administration system and a commodity based economy prospered. Due to the inconvenience of coins for such trade, the first Chinese paper currency, called *jiaozi* (*jiāozǐ* 交子), was developed. Porcelain became a very important export and commerce flourished. The detailed painting *The Riverside Scene in Pure Brightness*