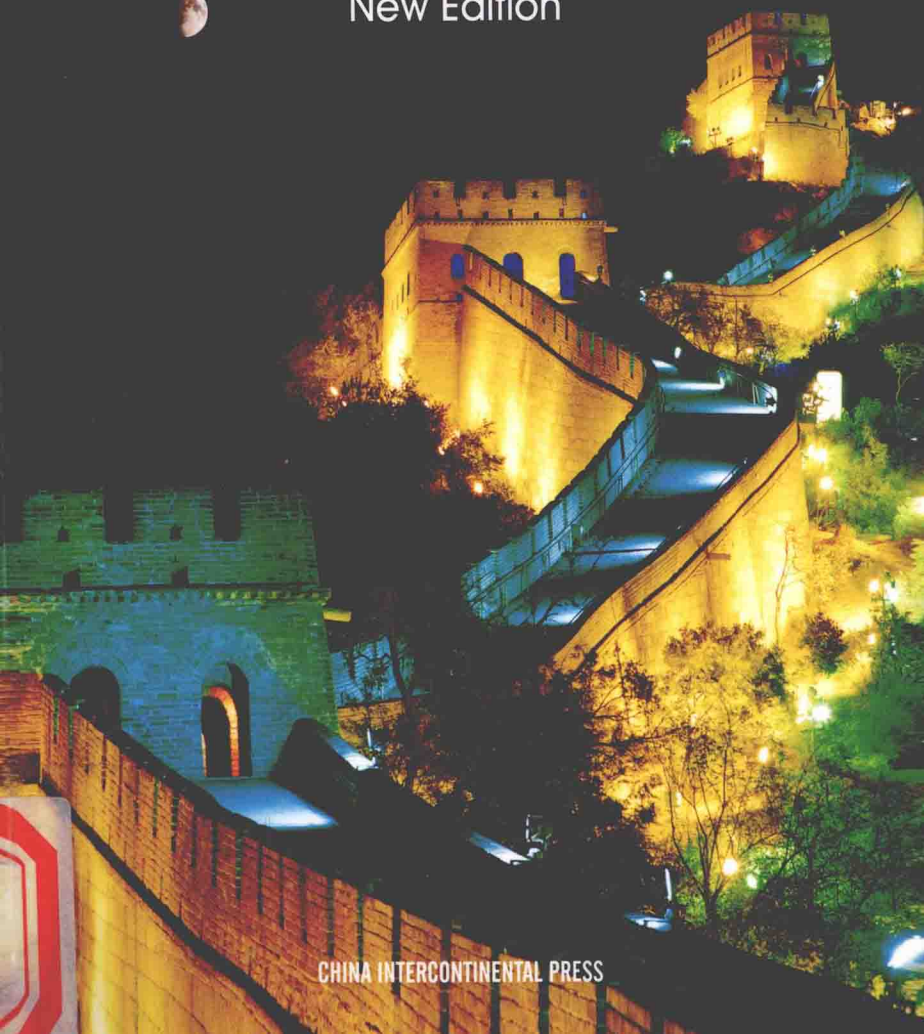


# INTERCONTINENTAL'S BEST OF CHINA



New Edition



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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*Best of*  
**CHINA**

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had sent and conversations we had had about my life in China, her principal source of information about the country was outdated and overly cautious guidebooks written for the most part by short-term visitors.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.

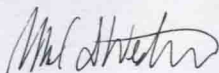
As my mother's revelations demonstrate, China is undergoing such rapid change that a guidebook written even a couple of years ago is almost useless. China is no longer the destination for those looking to accumulate hardship tales of scarcity, penury and adversity overcome.

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 warily. 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 in the world. Legend has it that the first rulers of China who are three nobles and five emperors (*sānhuáng wǔdì* 三皇五帝). 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 zǐsūn* 炎黄子孙) – descendants of the Yan and Huang emperors.

Despite the lack of written records, through rich archaeological finds, it's possible to build a picture of what life was like in prehistoric China. Fossils of an ancient

hominid dating back 1.7 million years were found in Yuanmou County in Yunnan Province. The Yuanmou fossils are the earliest trace of human ancestors 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 to help answer such basic questions as what dates would be auspicious for important events, what course of action to take and when to begin harvesting. 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 dàfāngdǐng* 司母戊大方鼎). Named after the characters carved on it, this large vessel is 52 inches (133cm) high and weighs 1,929 pounds (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 the Shang dynasty and a despotic tyrant, was overthrown by the Zhou (no relation), a tribe from the west. The Zhou dynasty would become the 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 to explain 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



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

## HISTORY & CULTURE

time, a period between dynasties when local warlords fought for supremacy – a recurring theme in Chinese history. Confucian 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 it could find over its 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 (*shì 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, 260-210 BC) established the first unified empire in Chinese history, and named himself Shi Huangdi, which means "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

A wall carving depicting Confucius' visits to various kingdoms.



included the Terracotta Army. Excavated in 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 zhīlù* 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.



The first emperor of a united China, Qin Shihuang.

### DISUNION (220 – 589)

From the 3rd to the 6th century, China went 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 (*tuóbá* 拓跋) tribe of the Xianbei unified northern China and established the Northern Wei dynasty.

Xiao Wendi, an emperor of the Northern Wei dynasty, carried out a series of reforms, basing his rule on the Chinese bureaucracy. The Confucian bureaucracy would prove to



## HISTORY & CULTURE

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 the exchange of knowledge.

It was during the Han dynasty that 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 people seeking a better future, while others were made up of people forced from their homes. Vast numbers of Han Chinese journeyed south, expanding the cultural boundaries of China. They brought new technologies and Han culture with them as they assimilated

among or displaced local populations.

### 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 of 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.

An early papermaking workshop.

