

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

Basic Facts about the People's Republic of China

Geography

At 3,704,427 square miles, China is the world's third largest country by area, after Russia and Canada. It is bordered by 14 countries: Russia, India, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Vietnam. It has a variety of landscapes: enormous mountains and the world's largest plateau in the west, smaller mountain ranges and huge deserts in the north, and fertile coastal plains in the southeast. The two major rivers are the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers.

Population

With over 1.4 billion people, China is the world's most populated country. It has 56 ethnic groups, with Han Chinese being the vast majority (92%). To control the population growth the government has enforced the policy of "one child per family" since the 70s with mixed results.

Food

The traditional staples include rice, millet, sorghum, and wheat. There is archaeological evidence of rice farming along the Yangtze River as early as about 5000 BC. However, rice does not grow in the colder and drier north, so people in northern China farmed millet and sorghum instead. Wheat came in from West Asia around 1500 BC. Cooking techniques such as stir-frying developed out of the necessity to conserve fuel. Although Buddhists are traditionally vegetarian, the contemporary Chinese food includes all variety of meats and fish, and is loved around the globe.

Clothes

Traditional garments include hemp tunics, padded jackets, pants, and silk robes. Historically the color of clothing indicated the social status of the person. (The emperor always wore yellow.) Today most Han Chinese wear western-style clothing for everyday life. Elderly men and women in rural areas may still wear

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

the Mao suit. Many ethnic minorities are known for their colorful, traditional clothes.

Housing

Traditional homes in China are one story high with whitewashed walls and dark tiled roofs. Most houses have a kitchen, a bathroom, and two large rooms that serve many purposes. They open up to a communal courtyard, where families and neighbors play games and eat together. There is a great variety of architectural styles, since houses are built to suit the various landscapes and weather conditions. In big cities there are western style homes, apartments, even luxury condos. Running water and electricity are still scarce in rural areas today.

Religions and Philosophies

In Imperial China, religious beliefs were divided into ‘the three ways’ of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, all of which still influence the Chinese people’s lives and customs today. Religions were strongly repressed during the Mao years, but today there is a more tolerant attitude. However, there have been clashes between the government and different religious groups, such as Buddhists in Tibet, Muslims in Xinjiang, and Christians.

Education

China’s education system includes 5-6 years of primary school, a three-year middle school, and three years of high school, which can be followed by vocational training or a college or university. The 1986 Education law mandates nine years of compulsory education. In order to go to college, the student must pass a rigorous National College Entrance Examination. In cities like Beijing and Shanghai, about 75 percent of students go to college, but in rural areas this drops to only 10 to 20 percent.

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

Notes on Chinese Languages

China's many different ethnic groups speak many different languages, which are mutually unintelligible. *Putonghua*, or Standard Mandarin, is the official national spoken language (except in Hong Kong and Macau, which use Cantonese, English, and Portuguese.) Standard Mandarin is taught in schools and used on radio and TV. Full literacy in Chinese requires knowledge of three to four thousand Chinese characters. Children in primary schools are first taught *pinyin*, the Romanization system for Standard Mandarin.

Some Chinese sounds are difficult for English speakers.

Chinese	English	Chinese	English
z	ds as in cards	zh	a soft 'j' with a hint of r
c	ts as in cats	ch	a soft 'ch with a hint of r
q	ch as in cheese	sh	a soft 'sh' with a hint of r
x	sh as in she	r	a soft 'r'

Chinese is also a tonal language. Tones are the changes of the pitch in pronunciation of a syllable. There are 4 tones in Mandarin Chinese. Each Chinese word (character) carries a tone. Different tones carry different meanings.

Examples:

mā means mother

má means flax or linen

mǎ means a horse

mà means to scold

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

Greetings

Nǐ hǎo	Hello!
Xiè xie	Thank you.
Bié kè qi	You're welcome.
Duì bu qǐ	Excuse me. I'm sorry.
Zài jiàn	Good bye.
Nǐ zǎo	Good morning.
Wǎn shang hǎo	Good evening.
Wǎn 'ān	Good night.

How to Count in Chinese

1	一	yī
2	二	èr
3	三	sān
4	四	sì
5	五	wǔ
6	六	liù
7	七	qī
8	八	bā
9	九	jiǔ
10	十	shí

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

Bibliography

General

Kalman, Bobbie. *China: the People*. (Crabtree, 2008)

_____. *China: the Land*. (Crabtree, 2008)

Festivals and Holidays

Bledsoe, Karen E. *Chinese New Year Crafts*. (Enslow, 2005)

Chan, Hingman. *Celebrating Chinese New Year: An Activity Book*. (Infini Press, 2004)

Florence, Debbi Michiko. *China: Over 40 Activities to Experience China-Past and Present*. (Williamson, 2008)

Kramer, Lance. *Great Ancient China Projects You Can Build Yourself*. (Nomad Press, 2008)

Simonds, Nina; Swartz, Leslie, & the Boston Children's Museum. *Moonbeams, Dumplings & Dragon Boats: a Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities & Recipes*. (Harcourts, 2002.)

Stepanchuk, Carol, and Wong, Charles. *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts: Festivals of China*. (China Books, 1991)

Stepanchuk, Carol. *Red Eggs & Dragon Boats: Celebrating Chinese Festivals*. (Pacific View Press, 1994)

History

Cotterell, Authur. *Eyewitness Ancient China*. (DK Publishing, 1994)

Williams, Suzanne. *Made in China: Ideas and Inventions from Ancient China*. (Pacific View Press, 1996)

Ni Hao Peng You! (Hello Friends!)---Stories from China

Folktale Anthologies

Birch, Cyril. *Chinese Myths and Fantasies*. (Henry Walck, 1961)

Carpenter, Frances. *Tales of a Chinese Grandmother*. (Tuttle, 1973)

Han, Carolyn. *The Demon King and Other Festival Folktales of China*. (Univ. of Hawaii, 1996)

_____. *Why Snails Have Shells: Minority and Han Folktales of China*. (Univ. of Hawaii, 1993)

_____. *Tales from Within the Clouds: Nakhi Stories of China*. (Univ. of Hawaii, 1997)

Hume, Lotta Carswell. *Favorite Children's Stories from China and Tibet*. (Tuttle, 1962)

Jagendorf, M.A., and Weng, Virginia. *The Magic Boat and Other Chinese Folk Stories*. (Vanguard, 1980)

Roberts, Moss. *Chinese Fairy Tales & Fantasies*. (Pantheon, 1979)

Sanders, Tao Tao Liu. *Dragons, Gods & Spirits from Chinese Mythology*. (Peter Bedrick Books, 1980)

References

Primary Source, Inc., ed. *China in the World: A History Since 1644*. (Cheng & Tsui, 2009)