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Social Studies

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China:

Now and Then



by Kelly Kong

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy	Text Features
Expository nonfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare and Contrast• Draw Conclusions• Predict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Captions• Map• Headings• Glossary

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Vocabulary

astonished

behavior

benefactor

distribution

gratitude

procession

recommend

sacred

traditions

Word count: 1,387

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Note: The total word count includes words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in chapter titles, captions, labels, diagrams, charts, graphs, sidebars, and extra features are not included.

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Have you ever flown a kite or carried an umbrella? Have you ever watched fireworks or written something on a piece of paper? These things share something in common. They were invented in China!

China's culture is one of the oldest on Earth. Only Canada and Russia have more land. China has the largest population of any country in the world. About 1.3 billion people live in China. This is one-fifth of the world's population!

There's a lot going on in China! To help you learn more about China, this book compares the country's past to its present. Keep reading to find out more!

China and the surrounding countries



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Government

From about 1600 B.C. until A.D. 1911, China was ruled by emperors. The Chinese emperors were like very powerful kings. Like the gods, they were held **sacred**. People were often willing to do anything to please their emperor.

A man became emperor based on who his ancestors were. How he was related to his living family members also mattered. When an emperor died, his son or another male relative would take his place. Often, one family would produce a series of emperors. These families were called dynasties. China had many dynasties. Each had a specific name, such as the Han or Shang dynasty.

One of the last Chinese emperors, with his children



The **procession** of Chinese dynasties didn't last forever. In the 1800s, China lost much of its power. Many Chinese disliked the **behavior** of the ruling Qing dynasty. Then, in 1911, the Chinese forced out the last Qing emperor.

The dynasty's collapse sparked a revolution. The revolution turned China into a republic. There was another revolution in 1949. Following that, China became the People's Republic of China.

Since 1949, China's government has been communist. There are many differences between communist and democratic governments. One of the biggest is that the people in a communist country do not elect their officials.

These carved figurines represent traditional Chinese peasants.



Arts and Entertainment

Movies are very popular in modern China. Just as people do here, the Chinese watch movies to relax and have fun. Crowds of Chinese teenagers often go to movie theaters on the weekends. Big movie theaters are being built in many large cities. Many types of movies are popular in China. Some of the most popular feature the Chinese action hero Jackie Chan.

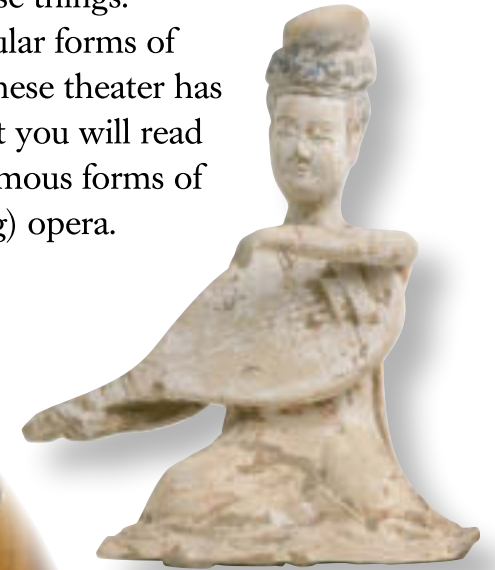
Aside from movies, today's Chinese find time to dance, listen to music, paint, draw calligraphy, and do many other activities. They also enjoy time-honored forms of art such as paper cutting. Both young and older people often go to China's parks to play musical instruments or exercise.

A group of Chinese girls enjoying themselves at a shopping mall in China



Many of the activities enjoyed in China today first became popular hundreds of years ago. The ancient Chinese painted, drew, and wrote poetry. The Chinese of today also do those things.

One of China's most popular forms of entertainment is theater. Chinese theater has much to **recommend** it. Next you will read about one of China's most famous forms of theatre, called Beijing (Peking) opera.



A terracotta figurine of a lutist, found in a Tang dynasty tomb

A Chinese actor performing



Beijing opera dates back to 1790. It got its name from the Chinese capital of Beijing. Sometimes it is called Peking opera. This is because Beijing used to be spelled *Peking* in English. Beijing operas are filled with singing and comedy. Their amazing stories have **astonished** audiences for years.

The Qing emperors would often watch performances of Beijing opera. They were known for showing their **gratitude** towards shows they liked. Often the emperor would become a **benefactor** of a theater he favored. As a benefactor, he would give the theater money to make sure that it survived.

A set used in a performance of Beijing opera



A mask worn by one of the performers

Sports

In ancient times, the Chinese participated in sports such as hunting, horseback riding, and archery. Both the emperor and the common people enjoyed these activities.

Today, very different athletic activities are popular in China. Soccer, basketball, swimming, and diving are enjoyed and watched by many modern Chinese.

Of these sports, basketball might be the most popular now. This is due to the influence of Yao Ming. Ming is a basketball player. After a successful career in China, he came to the United States to play in the NBA. Ming's decision to play here attracted a lot of attention in China.

A group of young people
playing the ancient Chinese
game of mah jong



Chinese athletes have performed well in recent Olympic Games. The **distribution** of medals at the 2004 Olympic Games shows how far China has come in terms of international competition. China took home more gold medals that year than any country except one! Only the United States received more.

In total, Chinese athletes earned sixty-three medals at the 2004 Olympics. Thirty-two were gold, seventeen were silver, and fourteen were bronze.



A figurine of an ancient Chinese archer



Basketball has become
very popular in China.

These photos show some of China's most famous landmarks and regions. The Great Wall might be the most famous landmark in the world. It runs for hundreds of miles along what used to be China's northern border.

The Great Wall



The Countryside



The Forbidden City



Hong Kong, a Modern City



Transportation

Everywhere you go in China, you'll see people riding bicycles. The bicycle has become a symbol of Chinese life. The Chinese also use public transportation, such as buses and taxis. For longer trips, people often take a train or a plane. Now that China is wealthier, more Chinese are buying cars.

Chinese bicycles are different from American bikes. This is because they are designed for transportation. In contrast, American bicycles are designed for sport. Most bikes in China have a flat metal platform behind the bike seat. The platform is used to carry bags and other belongings.

Often in China you will see two people riding on the same bike. One rider sits on the seat and pedals the bike. The other rider sits sideways on the flat platform behind the one who is pedaling.

In China's bigger cities it can be easier to get around in buses and taxis. The buses are often crowded. That is because they are cheap.

In ancient China, people moved around by walking or by riding horses. There is some evidence that the Chinese invented both the hot-air balloon and the parachute as well.



Many Chinese use bicycles, buses, and taxicabs to travel.

Education

Chinese children start their education at an early age. Both boys and girls go to public school. They take part in after-school activities and play sports.

Classrooms in China look a lot like those in the United States. Teachers stand in the front of the room. Most Chinese classrooms have chalkboards, desks, and bookshelves. Many schools have cafeterias as well as areas for students to play. Students study subjects such as mathematics, science, and history.

Children who live in the bigger cities can start school as early as kindergarten. Most children now attend school. A few are schooled at home.

For years one of the **traditions** was that only boys from the wealthiest families went to school in China. As time went on, more and more boys were admitted. Eventually, girls were also allowed to attend.

Chinese students practicing their writing (right). Scholars (upper right) controlled learning in ancient China.



Writing Styles

The ancient Chinese developed a system of writing that used pictures instead of words. Each picture was drawn in a way that made it represent the thing it stood for. When the Chinese wanted to write something that meant “fish,” they drew a picture of a fish.

Over time the pictures got simpler and simpler. Many stopped looking like the things they represented.

These simplified pictures are now called characters. Characters can be drawn more quickly than pictures. They can also be used to express different ideas. The character for *rain*, for example, also came to mean “the growth of crops.”

Characters are still used today. Originally, the Chinese language did not have an alphabet, as English does. Instead, there was a separate character for each word. Because of this, Chinese has thousands of different characters.

Chinese characters are usually written in one of three styles. These styles are called cursive script, traditional script, and simplified script. Cursive script is often used for art and decoration. Traditional script is very beautiful, due to its special details. Simplified script is used when people want to write quickly. Most schools now teach the simplified script. This is because it takes less time to learn and write.

China is a huge and complicated country. In some ways it has hardly changed for thousands of years. In other ways it has changed dramatically.

China faces many problems. Its growing population is consuming more and more resources. Its economy and culture are changing rapidly as it opens up to the West. China will have to keep changing to meet these new challenges.



A scroll of Chinese characters (left) and a Ming dynasty soapstone seal displaying characters (above)

Glossary

astonished *adj.* very surprised.

behavior *n.* way of acting.

benefactor *n.* person who gives money or kindly help.

distribution *n.* the act of giving out.

gratitude *n.* thankfulness.

procession *n.* a line or sequence of people or things.

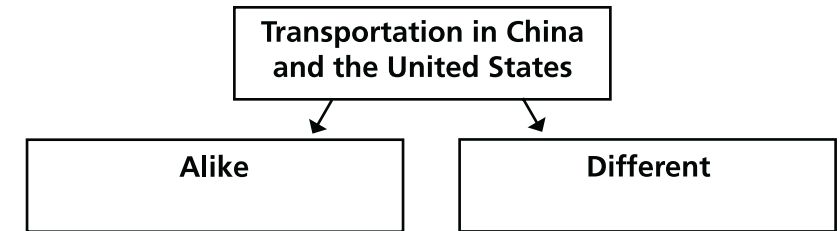
recommend *v.* to speak in favor of; suggest favorably.

sacred *adj.* holy.

traditions *n.* customs.

Reader Response

1. Using a graphic organizer like the one below, compare and contrast transportation in China with transportation in the United States.



2. Go back to the end of page 19. Based on what you know, do you predict that China will have a difficult time becoming more modern? Why or why not?
3. A *benefactor* is a person who does good for others. Use a dictionary to find at least two more words that start with *bene-* and have meanings that include "good." Use them in sentences.
4. Pages 12–13 show four pictures of regions and landmarks in China. Which one is the most interesting to you and why?