

Nǐ Hǎo from China

Living and Learning in an Ancient Land

Leaving behind the youthful exuberance of Canada, we now spin our globe and alight in the country of China, an ancient land of sagacious wisdom and steadfast tradition. China is an extraordinary nation with some impressive numbers. It is one of the oldest civilizations on earth, with a history dating back more than 6000 years. One of the largest countries in the world, China ranks 3rd in geographical area after Russia and Canada, and 1st in population size. In fact, 1 out of every 5 people living in the world today resides in China – that’s a total of 1.25 billion residents.



On account of its size and central location in Asia, China has had a tremendous sphere of influence on her neighboring countries and on the world at large. Its rich cultural and technological achievements have been very significant in East Asia. To varying degrees, Japan, Korea and Vietnam have adopted China’s customs, religion and writing systems. And no matter where in the world you live, “made in China” is a familiar phrase that most of us see every day imprinted on products that we use in our homes and places of business. China has had a profound effect on our world as we know it today.

The History

The people who live in China do not call their nation by this name that we use. *Zhōngguo* is its proper name in Chinese. The character *zhōng* means

“central” and *guo* means “kingdom” and it is by this name that China has been called since the 6th century BC around the time of the Zhou Dynasty. The people of this time period literally believed that they were the “center of civilization.” The English word “China” is thought to be derived from the name of the Qin Dynasty which ruled during the 2nd century BC, as the pronunciation of “Qin” is similar to the phonetic sound “cheen”.

Ancient China was one of the earliest centers of human society and so it is no wonder that they considered themselves the “center of civilization.” The



Chinese people were among the few to develop a writing system independently of other cultures; the others being the Sumerians, the people of the Indus Valley, the Ancient Egyptians, the Minoans and the Mayans.

Because of the written records that have been preserved, along with artifacts that have been uncovered by archaeologists, we are given a glimpse into ancient Chinese history that began thousands of years before the time of Christ. The history of China has been broken down into *dynasties*, which simply means the kingdom or succession of

rulers from within the same family, of which there were approximately fourteen.

Chinese tradition names the first dynasty Xia, and although there is some archaeological evidence of its existence, it is impossible to verify because of the lack of written records from this early time period. The second dynasty, the Shang, was a feudal lordship that settled along the Huang He (aka Yellow) River in eastern China around 1700 BC. Following the Shang, came the Zhou, Qin, Han

and Xin dynasties which comprised the Ancient and Imperial Kingdoms of China. Then ruled the families of the later Han, the Song, Tang, Yuan, Ming and Qing which brings us up to the year 1912, when the modern Republic of China was born. This republic only lasted four years and then fragmented when regional warlords exerted their control over their respective territories.

Following World War II and the Chinese Civil War of 1947, China emerged as a socialist state headed by a “democratic dictatorship.” The people of mainland China endured a series of socio-economic movements during the 1950’s and 1960’s (namely The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution) that left

much of its education system and economy in shambles, as well as millions of its citizens dead. With the death of first generation Communist Party leaders, such as Mao Zedong, the People’s Republic of China (PRC)



implemented a new series of reforms that eventually led to its rapid economic development in the final decade of the 20th century.

Although reforms on the mainland have led to some relaxation of control over many areas of society, the government of the PRC still has almost absolute power over politics and continually seeks to eradicate perceived threats to its social, economic and political well-being. Examples include the regulation of religion and the press, random jailing of political opponents and journalists, suppression of protests, etc.

China’s political climate may be stifling, but its cultural heritage is rich and invigorating. The four great inventions of ancient China are paper, the compass,

gunpowder and printing with movable type. Chinese calligraphy, with its use of pictorial characters, is a stunning art form, especially when handwritten by ink brush. The literature, painting and sculpture from China point to a very delicate and sensitive people group, thoughtful in prose, and purposeful in their being. The Chinese people have a deep and strong cultural identity that transcends the many ethnic divisions that exist in China.

The Chinese people place a strong emphasis on sports, although many of their popular sports are less familiar to us, such as dragon boat racing, Mongolian-style wrestling and badminton. Golf and basketball are becoming increasingly popular, as is horse racing. China was thrilled to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing.

Homeschooling

A strong emphasis is also placed on education. With China's one child policy still in place, parents are determined to make the best possible education choice for their only child, often at great sacrifice and expense to the family.

Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government took on education as a matter of utmost importance. Prior to this date in history, 80% of the Chinese population was illiterate. Today, 99% of Chinese students complete the 9 years of compulsory education.

Homeschooling is not technically illegal in China. However, it is unheard of. The educational system in China is very rigorous and school consumes most of a



child's day, often running into the early evening. And yet, there are parents who feel that the school system in China is not measuring up to their high standards.

One homeschool father says that the teaching methods used in traditional schools are "stultifying" so as to dull the student's interest in academic pursuits with tedious and unnecessary repetition. He argues that kids do not need 9 to 12 years to learn the material covered in primary and middle school. Half of that time may be sufficient if the children learn quickly and the teaching is competent.



Another Chinese homeschooling father asserts that the educational system is lacking in terms of content. He says that he would rather not waste his money on school tuition and teach his daughter something "useful" instead. One can begin to understand what "useful" means

when you enter this family's home – the walls are covered with a classical musical score and the ceilings are hand-painted with star charts.

These two families are not alone in their decision to homeschool their children. Although there are no accurate numbers recorded as to the number of homeschooling families that exist in China, the increasing number of cases reported in the media indicates that this educational choice is growing in popularity. (News article about these two families is located here:

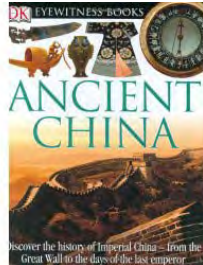
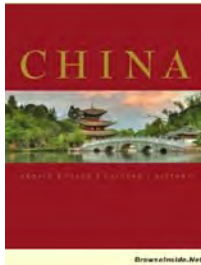
http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-08/11/content_3338049.htm)

Unit Study

Now that you have read the chapter, it's time to dive in for some hands-on learning to cement your student's growing knowledge of this Asian country.

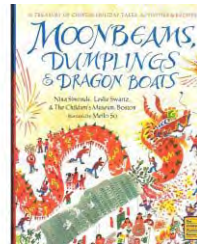
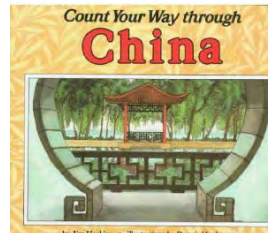
- 1. READING SELECTIONS** - Let's start with some extra reading. Listed below are some great books about China, or set in the Asian country of China, that will

provide many hours of enjoyable reading. The links below will take you to Amazon.com for more information, but you may be able to find these at your local library. Read for pleasure alone, or have your kids write a book report on one of these selections.



- [China](#) by DK Publishing
- [Ancient China](#) by Arthur Cotterell
- [China](#) by Hugh Sebag-Montefi...
- [Look What Came From China!](#) by Miles Harvey

The first three books listed above are all published by DK (Dorling Kindersley) and have magnificent photos. The first book is an adult or teen level book and the next three are for younger children in grades 2-6 or so. If you are looking for some books about China for your very young children, here are some great choices:



- [C is for China](#) by Sungwan So
- [Count Your Way through China](#) by James Haskins
- [Moonbeams, Dumpling and Dragon Boats](#) by Nina Simonds
- [Made in China](#) by Suzanne Williams

Truly, books about China are numerous at Amazon.com or at your local library. You should have no trouble finding a great selection. For historical fiction, you might want to read the legend of **Fa Mulan** by Robert D. San

Souci to younger children (then watch the movie). And for a primary source, you might consider **The Travels of Marco Polo** by Marco Polo (this is definitely for older students, but a fascinating read).

2. **HISTORY & TIMELINES** - Learn more about China by compiling historical facts and events from its long and eventful history and adding them to your timeline. If you do not have a timeline already started, you can construct one by following these directions - [How to Make a Timeline Easily](#). Here is a link to a wonderful resource for timeline entries about China - <http://www.timelineindex.com/content/select/217/45,153,217>. What is interesting about this timeline is that you can click on the links to your right to bring up more information and links to other sites as well. Here is another one, however it includes some Korean history also - <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/chinese.html>.
3. **MAPWORK** - A unit study would not be complete without taking a good look at the lay of the land. Pages 106 and 107 include both a labeled and unlabeled map of China. Have your students mark some of the major cities, the neighboring countries, and the ocean to the east, at the least. For older students, have them use your teacher's map and fill in the rest!
4. **RECIPES** - This is my favorite part - the food from the land! Chinese food is probably my favorite, although I am sure that my idea of Chinese food may be quite different from those living in China. In fact, we had an exchange student from Chengdu, who questioned what type of food we were eating when we took her out to a local Chinese restaurant. Of course, the owners of the restaurant were from a completely different region of China and the flavors were vastly different from the food she was used to eating at home. Here are a few favorite dishes of mine. Enjoy!

Sesame Chicken

Sesame chicken is a very popular restaurant dish. (Note: You may want to increase the vinegar or lower the amount of sugar. It all depends on how sweet you want the sauce).

This recipe serves 3 - 4 if served with just rice, or 5 - 6 as part of a multi-course meal.

Prep Time: 25 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

3 whole boneless chicken breasts

Marinade:

2 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 tablespoon cooking wine or dry sherry
a few drops of sesame oil
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons water
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon vegetable oil

Sauce for Sesame Chicken:

1/2 cup water
1 cup chicken broth
1/8 cup vinegar
1/4 cup cornstarch
1 cup sugar
2 TB dark soy sauce
2 TB sesame oil
1 tsp chili paste, or more if desired
1 clove garlic (minced)

Other:

2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds (see recipe directions for link to how to toast)
3 1/2 - 4 cups peanut oil for deep-frying

Preparation:

Directions for Sesame Chicken: Toast the sesame seeds and set aside.

Cut the chicken into 1-inch cubes. Mix the marinade ingredients and marinate the chicken for 20 minutes.

To prepare the sauce: mix together all of the sauce ingredients. Pour them into a small pot and bring to a boil, stirring continuously. Turn the heat down to low and keep warm while you are deep-frying the chicken.

To deep-fry the chicken: add the marinated chicken pieces a few at a time, and deep-fry until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Repeat with the remainder of the chicken.

Just before you are finished deep-frying, bring the sauce back up to a boil. Place the chicken on a large platter and pour the sauce over. Sprinkle with sesame seeds. Serve the Sesame Chicken with rice.



Mongolian Beef (or Chicken)

Ingredients:

Marinade:

- 1 egg
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 2 Tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 Tbsp. peanut oil
- 1lb flank steak or chicken sliced into 2 inch pieces

Seasonings:

- 1 whole scallion, minced
- 1 tsp. minced fresh ginger
- 1 tsp. minced garlic

Sauce:

- 3 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 3 Tbsp. dry sherry
- 1 Tbsp. hoisin sauce
- 3 Tbsp. water

- PLUS 8 whole scallions cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 tsp. sesame oil



Preparation:

Mix the ingredients for the marinade in a bowl until smooth. Put in the beef (or chicken) slices and set aside uncovered for at least 20 minutes (can be refrigerated up to 24 hours at this point).

Heat wok over high heat. Add 1/4 cup of peanut oil. When the oil is hot, add the meat and its marinade. Stir-fry about 2 minutes or until the meat loses its pink color.

Remove the meat from the wok and set aside in a bowl uncovered. Add 2 Tbsp of peanut oil to the wok. When the oil is hot, add the minced seasonings. Stir a few times and then add the sauce. Stir and then add the scallion pieces. Stir for about 1/2 minute and then return the beef (or chicken) to the wok. Stir just to heat through. Stir in sesame oil if desired and serve immediately.

Chinese Noodles in Peanut Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1 lb or 500 grams Hakka (flat) noodles
- 2 Tbsp. dark sesame oil

Dressing:

- 6 Tbsp. peanut butter
- 1/4 cup water
- 3 Tbsp. light soya sauce
- 6 Tbsp. dark soy sauce
- 6 Tbsp. sesame paste (ground sesame seeds)
- 1/2 cup dark sesame oil
- 2 Tbsp. sherry or any wine of your choice
- 4 tsp. white vinegar
- 1/4 cup honey or sugar syrup
- 4 medium cloves garlic, chopped fine
- 2 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger
- 1/2 cup hot water

Garnish (all are optional, depending on your taste)

- 1 carrot, peeled, julienned
- 1/2 firm medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and julienned
- 1/2 cup roasted peanuts, coarsely chopped
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced



Preparation:

Boil noodles in large pot of unsalted water over medium heat until barely tender and still firm. Drain immediately and rinse with cold water until cold. Drain well and toss noodles with (2 Tbsp) dark sesame oil so they don't stick together. For dressing, combine all ingredients except hot water in a blender or food processor fitted with steel blade and blend until smooth. Thin with hot water to consistency of whipping cream. For garnish, put carrot julienne in ice water for 30 minutes. Just before serving, toss noodles with sauce. Garnish with cucumber, peanuts, green onion, and carrot. Serve at room temperature.

Boiled Dumplings (Jiao Zi)

Ingredients:

- 4 1/2 cups flour, sifted
- 10 1/2 oz lean boneless pork or mutton, minced
- 1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 6 1/2 tbsp scallions, chopped
- 2 tsp ginger, chopped
- 1/8 tsp five-spice powder
- 1/2 tsp MSG (optional)

Directions:

1. Mix the flour with 3 1/2 oz of water to make a dough. knead until smooth and let stand for 30 minutes.
2. To prepare the filling, mix the pork or mutton with 7 oz (200 ml) of water and the salt. Stir in one direction until it becomes a paste. Add the scallions and blend well. divide filling into 100 portions.
3. Divide the dough into 4 portions and roll into long rolls. Cut each into 25 pieces. Flatten each piece and roll into 2 inches (5 cm) circles. Place 1 portion of filling in the center of each wrapper and fold the dough over it, making a bonnet-shaped pouch. Pinch the edges together to seal the dumpling. Repeat until all the dough and filling are used.
4. Bring 8 cups (2 litres) of water to a boil over high heat, Add half the dumplings. Stir them around gently with a ladel, and let the water return to a boil. Add enough cold water to stop the boiling, then bring back to a boil. When the water boils again, add more cold water and bring to a boil a third time. The dumplings will be done when they float to the surface. Remove, drain well, and serve.

(Or, if you are in a pinch for time, you can buy frozen potstickers at your local grocery store or Costco Warehouse).



Almond Cookies

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups flour
1 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup butter
2 eggs, beaten
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon almond extract
1/4 pound whole, blanched almonds

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. In a food processor, mix the flour, sugar, butter, salt and baking soda until it forms little balls. Add the eggs and almond extract. Roll out the dough on floured surface. Cut with 2 1/2 inch cookie cutter. Place on greased cookie sheet and place an almond in center of each cookie. Bake for 25 minutes.



5. CRAFTS - The people of China create some amazing and exquisite craft items that they use and sell to make a living. Here are a few fun projects that you can do with your children.

- Make a Chinese Paper Lantern: <http://crafts.kaboose.com/lantern1.html>
- Construct Red Gift Envelopes: <http://crafts.kaboose.com/red-envelopes.html>
- Create some lovely Plum Blossoms that you can use in your table setting: <http://crafts.kaboose.com/plum-blossoms.html>

All of these crafts are appropriate for kids age 7 and up. Here are some ideas for the under 7's: <http://www.shirleys-preschool-activities.com/preschool-lesson-plan-china.html>.

And remember to have fun!



Around the World
CHINA

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