

Understand China

CHINA TODAY922

With a mix of optimism and deep-rooted social and economic problems, China continues to position itself at the centre of world trade – but will it last?

HISTORY924

China has, for much of its history, been in conflict either internally or with outsiders.

PEOPLE OF CHINA945

China is a huge cluster of different ethnicities, a consequence of sharing borders with more than a dozen nations.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY949

Although each faith is distinct, some fascinating cross-pollination goes on between Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and even Christianity in China.

CHINESE CUISINE956

Some people visit China for the food alone. We can't blame them.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE967

China is the custodian of one of the world's richest cultural and artistic legacies.

CHINA'S LANDSCAPES981

China is home to the world's highest mountain range, one of the planet's hottest deserts and a colossal web of waterways.

MARTIAL ARTS OF CHINA988

Chinese martial arts are deeply impregnated with religious and philosophical values – and perhaps a morsel of magic.

China Today

A highly idiosyncratic mix of can-do entrepreneurs, inward-looking Buddhists, textbook Marxists, overnight millionaires, the out-of-pocket, leather-faced farmers, unflagging migrant workers and round-the-clock McJobbers, China today is as multifaceted as its challenges are diverse. From the outside, China's autocratic decision-making may suggest national uniformity, but things are actually more in a state of controlled, and not so controlled, chaos.

Best in Print

Country Driving: A Chinese Road Trip (Peter Hessler) Hessler's amusing and insightful journey at the wheel around the highways and byways of China.

Tiger Head, Snake Tails (Jonathan Fenby) Compelling account of contemporary China's myriad challenges and contradictions.

Diary of a Madman & Other Stories (Lu Xun) Astonishing tales from the father of modern Chinese fiction.

Best on Film

Still Life (Jia Zhangke; 2005) Bleak and hauntingly beautiful portrayal of a family devastated by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.

Raise the Red Lantern (Zhang Yimou; 1991) Exquisitely fashioned tragedy from the sumptuous palette of the Fifth Generation.

In the Mood for Love (Wong Kar-Wai; 2000) Seductive, stylishly costumed and slow-burning Hong Kong romance.

New Superpower or the Next Japan?

Tipped to overtake the US economy sometime before 2020, China can readily seem to be assuming the mantle of superpower. The rash of books trumpeting China's ascendancy echoes the glut of titles in the late 1980s that celebrated the rise of its island neighbour. While the Chinese economy effortlessly streaked past Japan's in 2010 and today gradually fills the United States' rear-view mirror, the unstoppable juggernaut of the Chinese economy could be hitting some hefty potholes, if not nearing the end of the road. Some financial analysts foresee China slewing into a long era of stagnation similar to that which depressed Japan after its asset bubble burst in the early 1990s. A combination of bad debt accumulation, imbalanced growth, downward property prices, a burdensome overcapacity and overdependence on exports could commence a persistent squeeze to the brakes on economic growth. Resolving bad debt and sorting out the shaky banking sector and the deeply undercapitalised financial system may be central to any long-term resolution but a real estate slump could limit options, while inequality in China remains among the most severe in the world.

To Boldly Go

In December 2013, the Chang'e 3 probe landed on the surface of the moon, marking the first lunar landing since 1976. Carrying the Yutu (Jade Rabbit) lunar rover, the mission also marked China's coming of age as a space power. Since the 1960s, moon landings have been a superpower hallmark: China's foray into the ether is as much about national standing as it is about scientific research. Rivalries notwithstanding – India's unmanned Mars probe achieved Martian orbit in 2014 – China