



**KIDS  
DISCOVER**

What is China's Curse?

# Ancient China

**8,000  
SILENT  
SOLDIERS  
STANDING  
STILL**

**A Home  
with  
9,999  
Buildings**

**The First  
Fireworks**



# A Long-lasting Empire

China is very old. Its written history goes back 3,500 years.

In 221 B.C., when European kingdoms and states were still fighting among themselves, one of China's first great rulers

united warring states to form a great empire. For over two thousand years—from 221 B.C. until A.D. 1912—the empire developed under the watchful eyes of more than a dozen ruling families, called dynasties. In 1912, the long-lasting empire collapsed as the last emperor stepped down.



**▲ CHINA TAKES ITS** name from the dynasty started by the powerful first emperor, Shi Huangdi, of the Qin dynasty. (In earlier dynasties, kings and their nobles ruled.) In Chinese, the word *Qin* sounds like "chin." Hence our word "China." The first

emperor ruled for only 14 years, from 221 B.C. to 207 B.C., but he united the country by defeating the local rulers of states. Emperor Shi Huangdi built a strong central government. He made sure his strict laws were obeyed and required everyone to pay taxes.

**THIS EARTH-AND-STONE** wall is China's most famous landmark. Known as the Great Wall, it's the longest human-made construction in the world—and the only one that can be seen from

space with the naked eye! Stretching over 1,500 miles along China's northern border, it was built to protect the country from enemies. Although parts of the wall offered protection

from minor attacks, the Great Wall could not have stopped a major invasion. Several hundred miles of the wall still stand today, a symbol of China's power and unity.

## The Chinese Dynasties

A dynasty is a series of rulers who all belong to the same family. Ancient China's first dynasty was the Shang. By 1788 B.C. the Shang family had

grown so powerful that it was able to take control of much of China. Here are China's major dynasties. A representative piece of art is shown for each.



SHANG 1788–1027 B.C.



ZHOU 1027–256 B.C.



QIN 221–207 B.C.



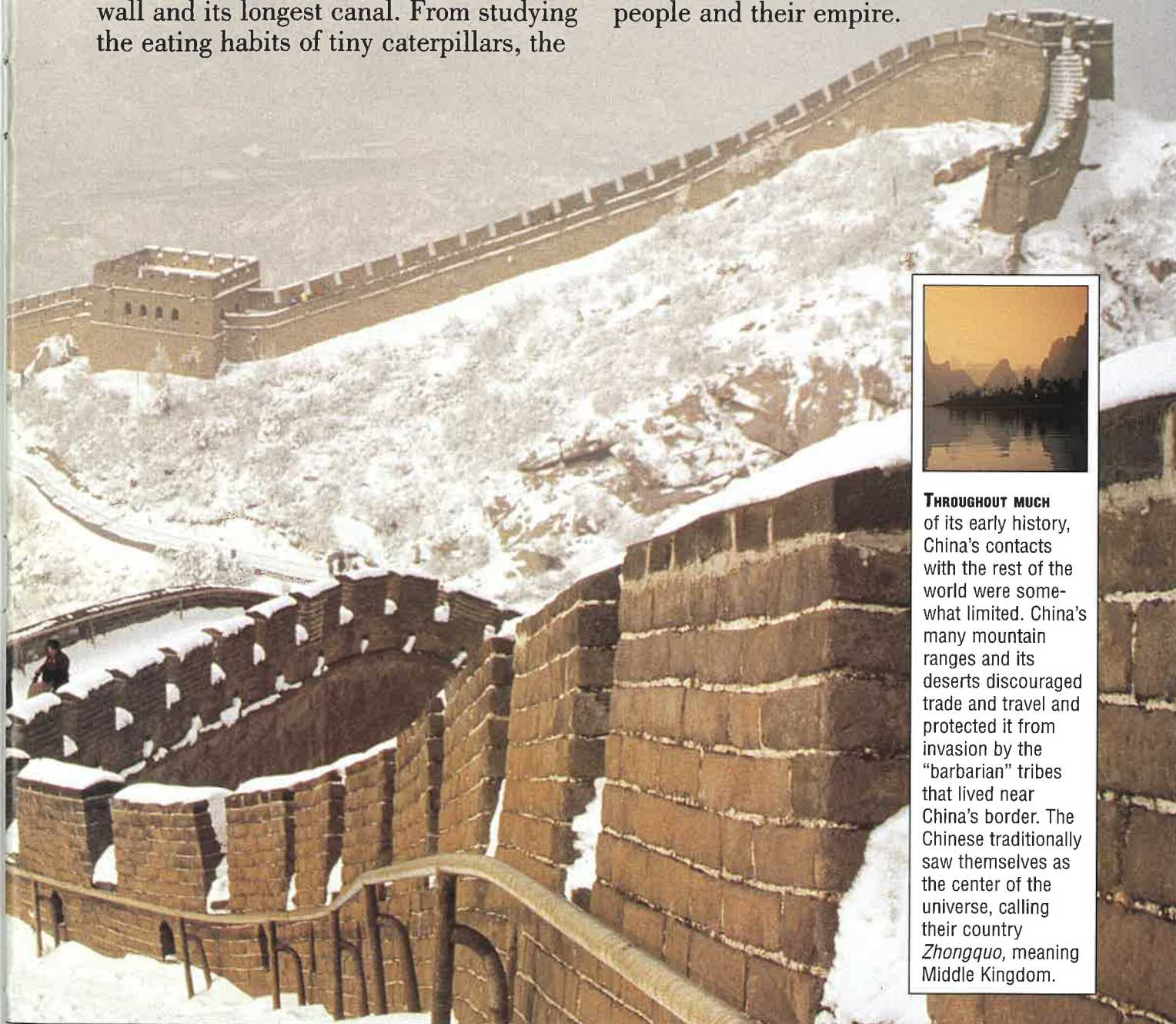
HAN 207 B.C.–A.D. 220



During the time of the empire, the people of China accomplished a great deal. They invented printing, gunpowder, fireworks, the compass, and kites. Chinese workers built the world's longest wall and its longest canal. From studying the eating habits of tiny caterpillars, the

Chinese discovered the secrets of silk-making. From a soggy mixture of old rags, bark, and bamboo, they created paper. The list of Chinese achievements is long.

Let's find out more about these people and their empire.



**THROUGHOUT MUCH** of its early history, China's contacts with the rest of the world were somewhat limited. China's many mountain ranges and its deserts discouraged trade and travel and protected it from invasion by the "barbarian" tribes that lived near China's border. The Chinese traditionally saw themselves as the center of the universe, calling their country *Zhongquo*, meaning Middle Kingdom.



**SUI 589–618**



**TANG 618–906**



**SONG 960–1279**



**YUAN 1279–1368**



**MING 1368–1644**



**QING 1644–1912**



# From Top to Bottom

Ancient Chinese society was like a ladder. On the very top step—the highest rank in society—stood the emperor and the royal family. They possessed the most power and wealth. Just below them stood civil servants. These government workers were highly respected because they served the royal family and because they could read and write. Below civil servants stood the peasants and the craftspeople. Although peasants were farmers and had little money, China depended on them to

produce food for everyone. Craftspeople made tools, weapons, furniture, and household goods for the upper classes. Near the bottom of the ladder stood the merchant class. Although many of this class were rich, such as traders and shopkeepers, they were looked down upon because they made their wealth from trading goods produced by others—not by their own hand. On the very bottom step of the ladder stood entertainers, soldiers, and servants. People on the bottom of the social ladder had little hope of climbing up, though a lucky few did.

◀ **CIVIL SERVANTS** played a key role in bringing order and stability to society. They collected taxes, enforced laws, organized workers for building projects, and judged court cases.

They also kept the official written records of the empire. In cities and towns, their jobs included registering births, deaths, marriages, and changes in land ownership.



▲ **STUDENTS WHO** hoped to join the civil service spent many hours studying the teachings of the philosopher Confucius. Most candidates came from rich, land-owning families. However, any male—rich or

poor—could take the civil-service exam, which was first given in the Song dynasty. Only about one percent of takers passed the exam. They were guaranteed jobs as court ministers and might marry into the royal family.




◀ **ARTISANS (PEOPLE** who worked with their hands), or craftspeople, held a respected place in society. They used their skills to make weapons, tools,

and cooking utensils. Craftspeople wove silk cloth or made bronze, jade, or clay into works of art and religious objects. Some worked in factories

owned by the government. Customers for their goods included the families of the emperor, civil servants, and wealthy merchants.





► **MANY MEMBERS** of the royal family owned large amounts of land, often in the countryside. They had few business worries, and they didn't have to work. Their wealth came from their landholdings.

▲ **THE HIGHEST-** ranking civil servants served the emperor in the royal court. These officials had spe-

cial privileges. By law, the very top officials could own a house with five columns and a gate three

columns wide. A third-level official was allowed a house with five columns, but not the wide gate.

▼ **MERCHANTS WERE** important for their role in trade. Until the Song dynasty, they were not allowed to become civil servants. However, some grew rich through their work. Those

who did often sent their sons to schools where they trained to become civil servants. Their daughters found husbands in the upper classes and moved up the social ladder.

► **A PEASANT'S LIFE** was hard. In addition to raising food for others, peasants served in the army and worked on government building projects. They built canals, roads, and the walls that protected many cities.



# How the Rich Lived

In ancient China, it was easy to tell who was rich. From head to toe, the wealthiest had the finest clothes. Members of the royal family and high-ranking officials dangled jade, gold, or silver bracelets from their arms. They ate more and bet-



▲ **THE PRACTICE OF** binding the feet of young girls with long strips of cloth began among the rich during the Song dynasty. Foot binding stopped the growth of the feet



▲ **DURING THE TANG** dynasty, the royals enjoyed playing polo on horseback on the palace grounds at Chang'an. Even women played. At home the rich amused themselves and their guests by inviting musicians, acrobats, and dancers to perform.

◀ **DURING SOME** dynasties, strict rules governed what materials could be used for jewelry. Royals, the wealthy, and civil servants could wear gold, silver, or jade, but those below them had to be content with copper or iron.

and was very painful. Tiny feet forced women to take small steps. Because small feet were admired, foot binding spread to other classes of society. However, farm girls, who were needed in the fields, escaped this torture. The custom died out in the early 1900s.



**EMPEROR'S THRONE**

▲ **THE EMPRESS'S** palace was called the Palace of Terrestrial Tranquility, while the emperor's was known as the Palace of Celestial Purity. No one could enter the Gate of Celestial Purity except the emperor. The empress, her female servants, and other members of her royal household lived in palaces behind the gate, but they couldn't enter or exit through the same gate as the emperor.

◀ **ALTHOUGH FASH-** ions in men's and women's clothes changed over time, the fabric they were made of did not. The rich wore silk. It was a status symbol and in some dynasties only the rich were

ter-tasting food and had more leisure time.

China's richest man was the emperor. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the emperor lived in an area that was off limits to ordinary people—the Forbidden City. None except the emperor could enter it at night. Today its many palaces are open to the public.



**THE FORBIDDEN CITY** contains 9,999 buildings! That number is a symbol for long life and long rule for the emperor. His

throne sits in the Hall of Supreme Harmony. Outside the hall, 25,000 officials often gathered in the courtyard for orders.

allowed to wear it. During the Qing dynasty, men and women wore robes tied at the waist with a large sash. Wealthy women wore silk slippers with wooden soles.

► **FEW WEALTHY** women were allowed to work outside the home, so they had much leisure time. They filled it by listening to music, writing poetry, weaving, embroidering, and sewing.





# The Peasant Poor

While the rich lived a life of ease, the poor worked very hard. Few could read or write. Most were farmers, living on small plots of land. Some owned their land, but others worked for rich landowners, giving them part of each harvest. Poor families

sometimes sold their daughters to be servants of the rich. Even in good times, farmers kept little of their crops. Their work helped feed everyone else in society. When crops failed because of drought or floods, farmers risked losing their land. The Yellow River overflowed so often that the poor called it "China's Curse."



▲ **IN NORTHERN** China, the poor ate wheat noodles, steamed bread, and bean curd. In the south, rice was the staple of the diet. Meals that included meat were rare. The poor ate their food in small bowls. Along with their meals they drank green tea. In the dry, colder north, the farmer's main crops were millet, wheat, and barley. In the warmer, wetter south, farmers grew rice in flooded fields called paddies. Water flowed into the fields through carefully constructed irrigation channels.



◀ **IN MANY PARTS** of China, good farmland is scarce. Mountains cover about four-fifths of the land. The remaining fifth is flat, but half of that level land is not good for farming either, due to poor soil and lack of rainfall. To make good use of every bit of land, farmers carved terraces—narrow, flat fields out of hills and mountainsides.

► **WHILE A RICH** person's house was often made of wood with a tiled roof, the poor made do with mud and straw. A sunken pit in the center of the house held a heating and cooking fire. Many built their houses partially underground to keep them warmer in the winter.



▲ **POOR FARMERS** kept few large farm animals. They did not want to take up any of their scarce land to grow food for livestock. This picture shows a man tilling, or plowing, with a water buffalo.

▲ **THESE WORKERS** didn't have to worry about getting enough exercise. With few tools to help them with their chores, they did most jobs by hand or foot. Some spent long hours pushing pedals which turned a large wheel that brought water up a wooden channel and into the fields.

◀ **WOMEN WORE** simple wool garments in winter and cotton in summer. They never wore silk. Peasant men wore baggy pants made of hemp with a

loose cotton shirt. Both wore shoes made of straw. Once children were old enough to walk, they wore child-size versions of their parents' clothes.

▲ **WHEN THE POOR** did have a little time to relax, they liked to play cards, gamble, watch plays, and listen to storytellers.





# Celebrating the Chinese Year

The Chinese calendar is rich in festivals that date back to ancient times. Festivals are times for families to come together to share food and fun. Here are a few of the special days in the Chinese year that have their roots in ancient China.

## Chinese New Year

The most important festival is the New Year, or Spring, Festival. Held on the first day of the first lunar month, it takes place at the end of January or the beginning of February and lasts for fifteen days. (The earliest Chinese calendar was based on the cycles of the moon. This moon, or lunar, calendar divided the year into thirteen months.) The celebration began as a spring festival before the spring planting. China's farmers gave thanks for the renewed fertility of the soil. Today, Spring Festival is a time to pay debts, settle quarrels, and make a fresh start to the new year.



▲ **SETTING OFF FIRE-**crackers to start the New Year is linked to a legend about a beast who

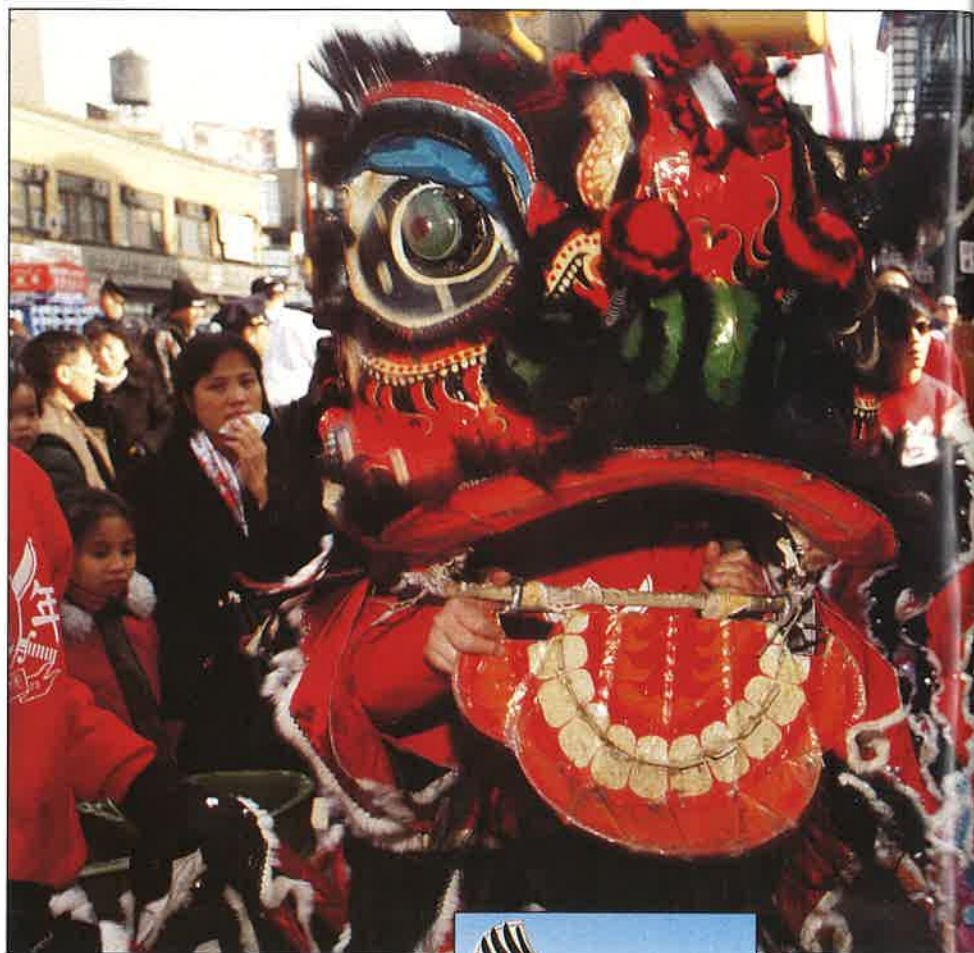
lived inside a mountain. At the end of each year, it came out to kill people. Knowing that it feared light and noise, people lit firecrackers to keep it away. Today firecrackers stand for good luck and success in business.

Spring of Good Luck,  
This Year, Every Year



▲ **RED IS A LUCKY** color that stands for joy and good fortune. During Spring Festival, friends exchange gifts wrapped in red paper and children get money in red packets from relatives.

▲ **TODAY, FOR THE** New Year, families hang banners on the front of their homes wishing the reader happiness and good fortune. This practice dates back over a thousand years. The rich would post wooden plates on their doors with verses such as: "Days of Peace, Year in, Year Out."



► **THE CLEAR AND** Bright Festival is a time for taking trips to the countryside to enjoy the scenery and for flying kites in the shape of butterflies, goldfish, eagles, frogs, and heroes from Chinese operas. The festival takes place in early April. Today, families celebrate by visiting the cemetery to honor ancestors. They sweep graves, pull up weeds, and

plant flowers. Originally, the festival honored the memory of Jie Zie Dui for his loyalty to his ruler, Chong Er, over 2,000 years ago.

► **THE DRAGON BOAT** Festival, which is in late May or early June, honors the poet Qu Yuan, who drowned himself after failing to overthrow a corrupt government nearly

► **EACH YEAR, ONE** night in September is moon-watching time, during the Mid-Autumn Festival. On that night, the Chinese say, the moon shines most brightly. The full

moon is a symbol for family reunion. Relatives gather for dinner. They eat round, sweet moon cakes. Moon cakes are served piled 13 high, one for every month of the lunar year.



2,300 years ago. As they looked for his body, people threw rice to distract the fish, fearing the fish might eat the body. Today the festival is a time for rowboat

races in dragon-shaped boats and for eating a sticky rice dumpling. The sweet is a reminder of the rice the people threw to the fish as they searched for Qu Yuan.







## Chinese Zodiac

► **IN ANCIENT CHINA**, astrologers taught that every twelve years, events on earth repeat themselves, and that a person's birth year influences one's success. Each year in the cycle is

named for an animal. People are assumed to have some qualities of the animal in the sign under which they were born. What is the animal sign for the year of your birth?

◀ **EVERY DAY OF THE** New Year's celebration has special activities. The first two days are times to put on new clothes and visit family and friends, exchanging gifts of cake, oranges, and candy. On the third day, people sweep their houses, clearing away the old to let in health and happiness. On the fourth day, daughters visit their parents. It is also the day for dragon and lion dancers to parade through the streets.

◀ **ON THE FIFTEENTH** day of the first month, the Chinese mark the end of the Spring Festival with the Lantern Festival. In ancient times, the festival celebrated the increasing daylight and warmth after the winter's cold. During the Han dynasty, the Lantern Festival celebrated the ouster of an unjust political leader and the coming to power of a new ruler.



▲ **TANG DYNASTY** emperors closed all government offices during the Lantern Festival. Tang emperor Xuan Zong put up a lantern wheel 200 feet high outside the gates of his palace. The wheel had 50,000 lanterns on it.



### **RAT—1984, 1996**

Honest, ambitious, and a big spender. Beware of horses.



### **Ox—1985, 1997**

Bright and patient. Inspiring to others. Marry a snake.



### **TIGER—1974, 1986**

Brave and sensitive. Look to the horse for happiness, but stay away from the monkey.



### **RABBIT—1975, 1987**

Luckiest of all. Talented and loving, yet shy. Marry a ram or boar.



### **DRAGON—1976, 1988**

Proud, energetic, and blessed with good health. Marry a monkey or rat, but avoid the dog.



### **SNAKE—1977, 1989**

Wise and good-looking, but hot-tempered. Beware of boars.



### **HORSE—1978, 1990**

Popular and good-looking, but impatient. Never marry a rat.



### **RAM—1979, 1991**

Elegant and creative, but shy. Marry a boar or rabbit, but not an ox.



### **MONKEY—1980, 1992**

Smart and funny, but easily confused. Avoid tigers.



### **ROOSTER—1981, 1993**

Honest and adventurous, but selfish. Seek snakes and oxen.



### **DOG—1982, 1994**

Loyal and honest, but stubborn and often selfish. Watch out for dragons.

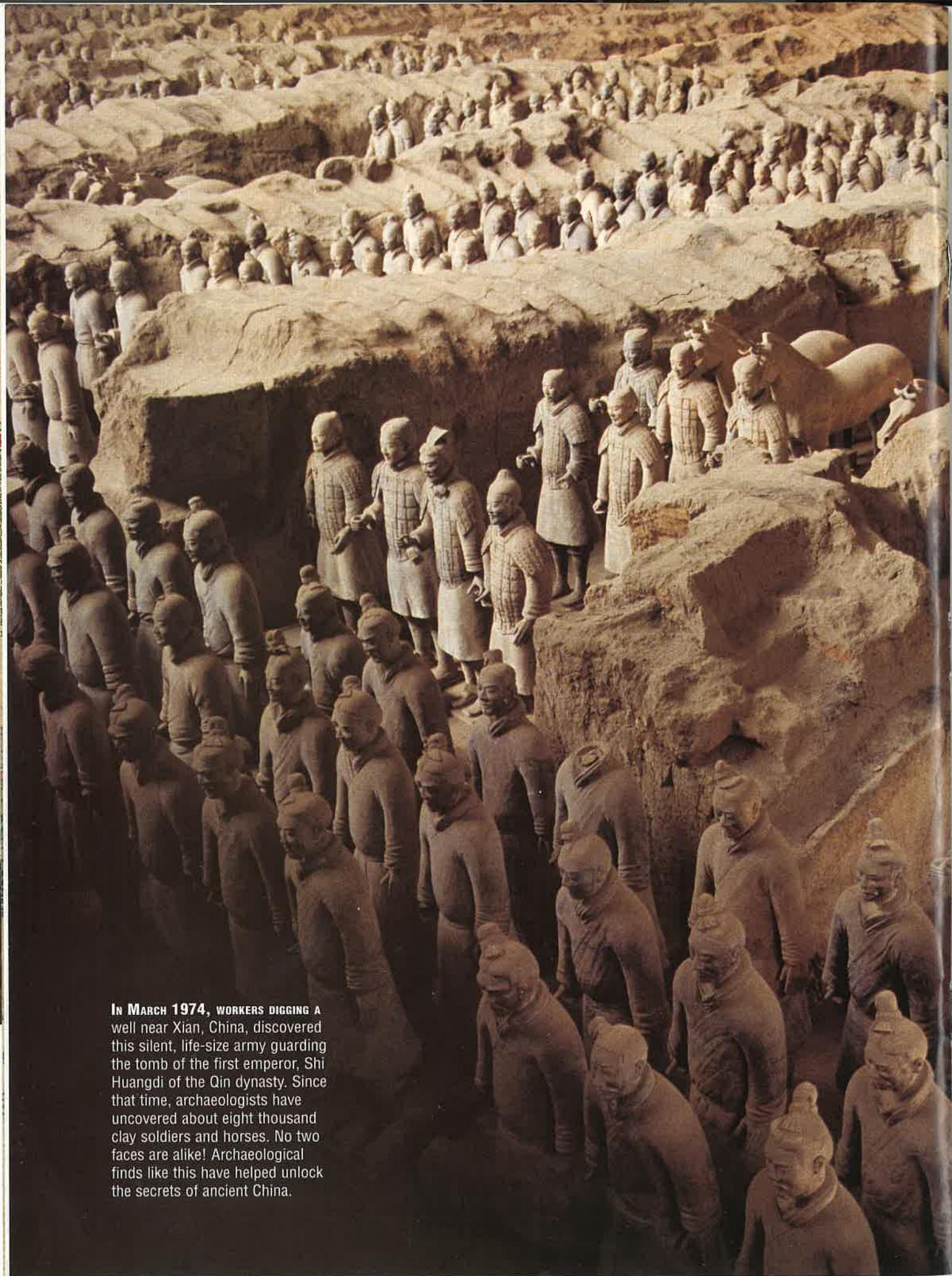


### **BOAR—1983, 1995**

Honorable and brave. Seek out a rabbit or ram but avoid other boars.

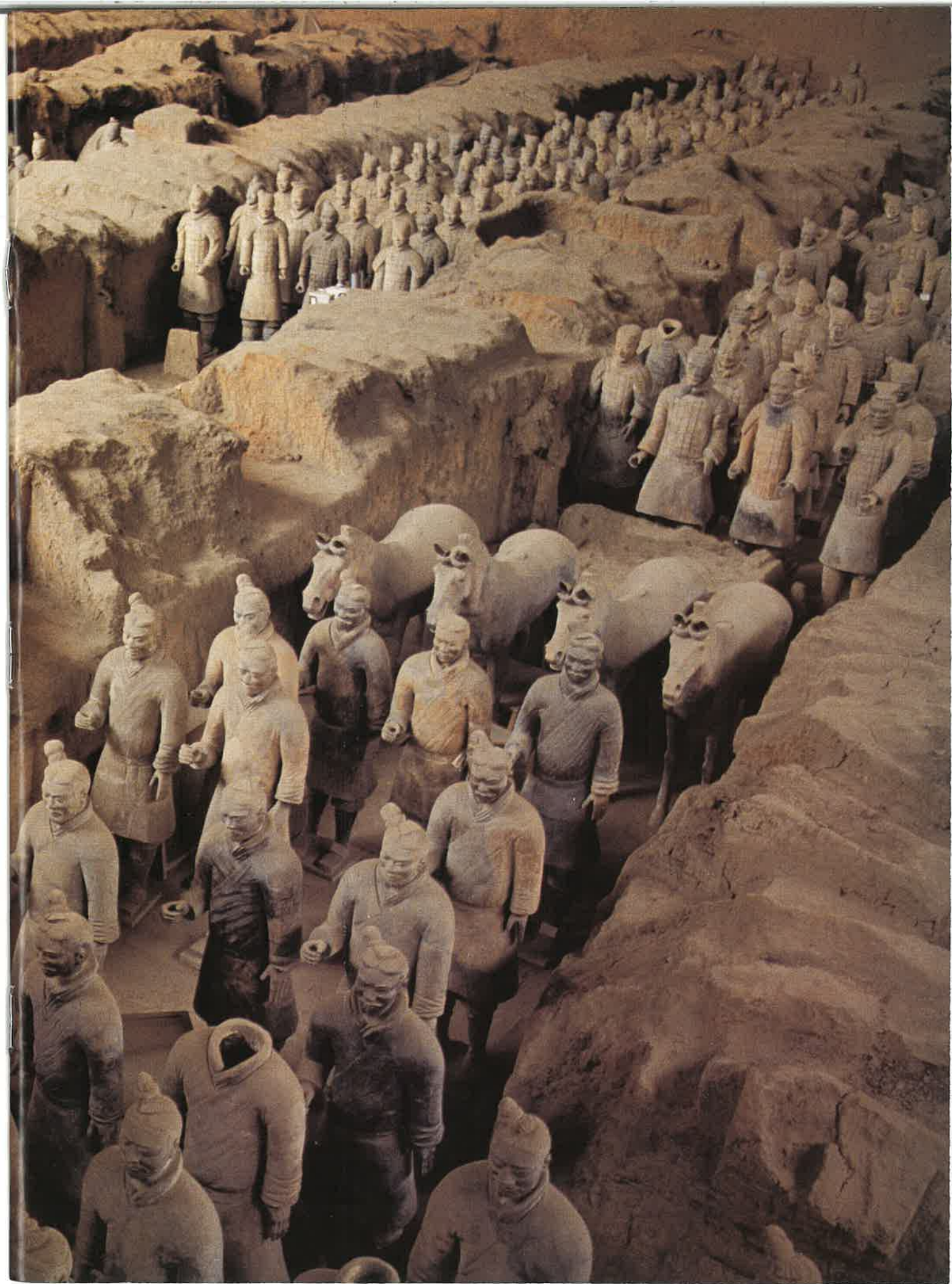






**IN MARCH 1974, WORKERS DIGGING A** well near Xian, China, discovered this silent, life-size army guarding the tomb of the first emperor, Shi Huangdi of the Qin dynasty. Since that time, archaeologists have uncovered about eight thousand clay soldiers and horses. No two faces are alike! Archaeological finds like this have helped unlock the secrets of ancient China.







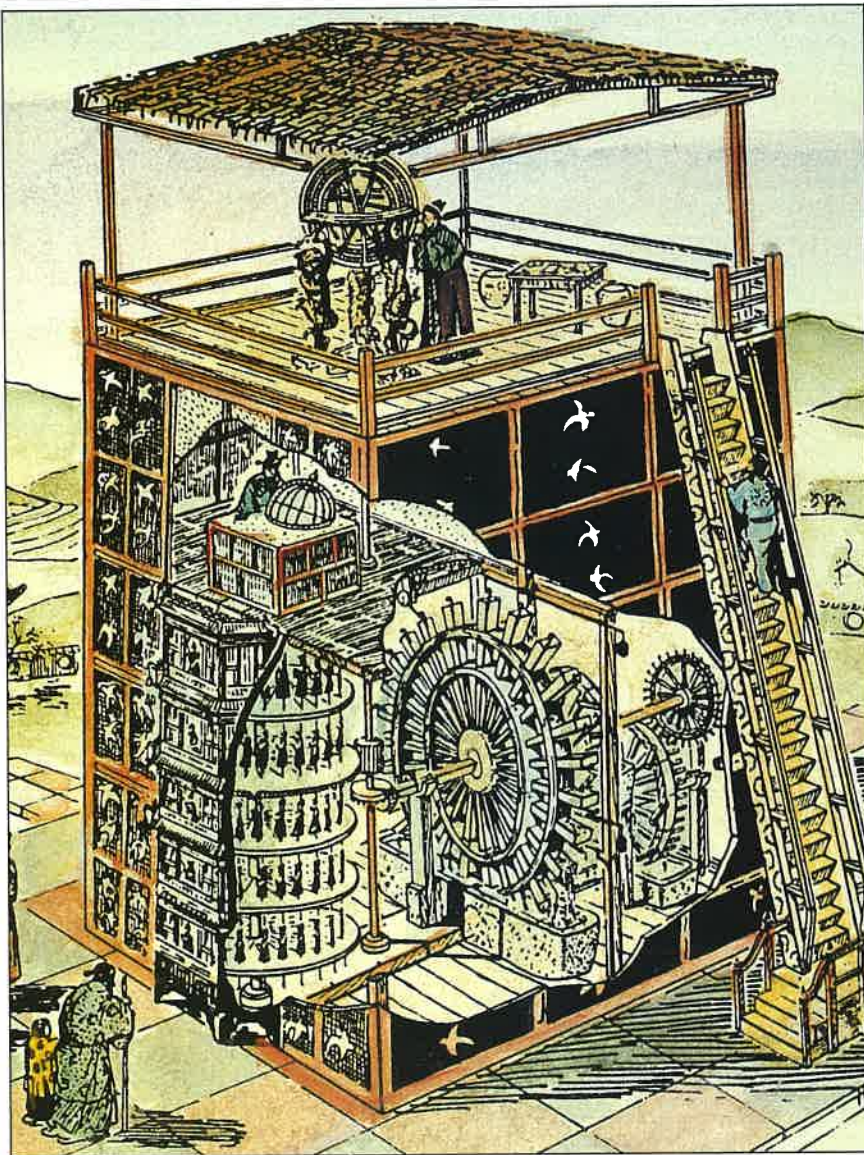
# Wheelbarrows, Fireworks, and Water Clocks

The next time you write on paper, use a compass on a hike, watch a fireworks display, carry a heavy load in a wheelbarrow, or play cards, thank the Chinese. The Chinese were the first to invent all of these items, and many more.



▲ **TODAY WE CALL IT** a compass, but the ancient Chinese knew this invention as a "south-pointing fish." The Chinese were the first to discover that a magnetic object could indicate direction. The "south-pointing fish" consisted of a wooden fish with a piece of metal floating in a bowl of water. It was used for overland and ocean voyages.

► **IN 1090 A CIVIL** servant named Su Song presented the first water clock to an emperor of the Song dynasty. It took Su Song four years to construct the 30-foot-high clock. Built in the shape of a tower, the clock's movements were driven by water flowing into buckets on a waterwheel inside the clock tower. As each bucket filled, a lever tilted, the wheel turned, and a new bucket was filled. The clock had bells and gongs that rang every 15 minutes. Revolving figures appeared at the



clock windows to chime the hours. Although Su Song's clock did not survive, he left such detailed plans of it that exact copies have been made from his original drawings.



◀ **CHINESE DOCTORS** may have accidentally discovered how to make gunpowder while searching for ways to cure illnesses. Made from potassium nitrate, sulfur, and charcoal, gunpowder explodes when lit.

In the 1100s, the Chinese began making fireworks from gunpowder by stuffing the powder into hollow sticks of bamboo and lighting them. Fireworks were believed to scare away evil spirits and ghosts.

▲ **THE CHINESE** have flown kites for at least 2,500 years. They were probably the first people to make kites, constructing them of silk and bamboo. After the invention of paper,

it became the favored material. Soldiers of the Han dynasty sailed kites to frighten their enemies. In ancient times, kites were a popular way to celebrate festivals.